



## Cinematic Representation of Ethnic Minorities in PRC and Postcolonialism

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the notions of "Sinophone" and "Chinese-language cinema" under the rubrics of postcolonialism in Chinese film studies both in China and elsewhere around the world. The paper argues that these postcolonial-inspired notions misconstrue Chinese national identity building as imperialist/colonialist endeavours, and dichotomize Han and Chinese ethnic minorities. The paper offers its counterargument by examining cinematic practices of people's cinema, minority nationality films and native-language films in the PRC.

**Xinyu LU**

## **Cinematic Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the PRC and Postcolonialism**

### **Introduction: Post-colonialism and the Paradigm of Chinese Film Research**

Chinese film studies outside the PRC fall into four paradigms: Chinese national cinema, transnational Chinese cinema, Chinese-language cinema, and Sinophone cinema (Lu, "Explorations" 4). "Chinese national cinema" refers to film studies in the PRC under the rubric of "nationalism." "Sinophone cinema" derives from the critique of "Chinese national cinema," or draws on the European colonialist/colonized relationship. Its other variations include "Chinese-language cinema" or "transnational Chinese cinema." One way or another, each camp seems to adopt postcolonial theory to describe the PRC's cinematic representation of ethnic minorities. This postcolonial position clashes head-on with the PRC's official cinematic historiography, inducing strong anxiety about the loss of subjectivity among Chinese scholars.

The theory of postcolonialism emerged in Europe and North America in the 1970s and 1980s. It promised the emancipatory function of breaking the hegemony of Eurocentrism in academic discourse. From a colonized, third-world perspective, postcolonial theory challenged the political and cultural legacy of Western imperialism and colonialism. Meanwhile, it opposed any totalizing or grand narratives, taking the demise of the union of the international proletariat for granted. Consequently, the argument goes, social classes are now subordinate to the nation-state, and class division obliterates internationalism, which is supplanted by ethnicity as the base of struggle. (Spivak and Yan 32). Postcolonialism therefore prioritizes cultural heterogeneity and differences. Cultural identity and multiculturalism serve their theoretical purposes. However, when Eurocentrism gave way to multiculturalism, the relationship between postcolonialism and ideologies of global capital became infinitely complex and ambiguous. Postcolonialism needs to reduce problems arising from capitalist globalization to localized empiricism---these problems otherwise should be explained in terms of both structure and space. Such a gesture not only exacerbates ideological divisions of race, but flattens out globalized differences in the name of local differences. In terms of methodology, postcolonialism is individualistic, as it "erased the early radical history that concentrated on groups and their overall liberation" (Dirlik 70). Treating difference in a non-societal manner cancels out the meaning of the history of difference and the totality of modern history. As Dirlik puts it, "(Postcolonialism) replaces not only the epistemology based on the difference between the colonizer and the colonized, or based on the third world thought, but also the revolutionary political movement inspired by these epistemologies" (Dirlik 68-69). It now seems that the most effective way to counter postcolonialism's nihilistic tendency as it self-proclaims meta-theory status is to re-historicize.

When Spivak was reconsidering her postcolonial theory writing in the 1980s, she admitted that this theory was based on limited South Asian experience. She also insisted that today's nationalism replicates hegemony: "If we do anything on the model of national sovereignty in the name of by now archaic nationalist struggles, we are going to get replicas of the global game" (Spivak and Yan 32-33). Even if this theory finds that the absence of the state will dissipate resistance, Spivak defines the state in a "postcolonial" manner. She realized that the countries where social responsibility is handed over to NGOs are often in the Southern hemisphere and controlled by USAID and the World Bank. Hence she reiterated the responsibility of the state: "The more geopolitical stuff can work only if in the global south, we reinvent the state as an abstract structure, as a porous abstract structure, so that states can combine against the deprivations of internationalization through economic restructuring" (Spivak and Yan 32).

When internationalism can only be built on the premise of dealing with the nation abstractly, it shows the inability of postcolonialism today to either avoid or deconstruct the totalizing narrative, regardless of whether its "abstract" universality and "porous" heterogeneity can be achieved politically, and whether such a statement contradicts the intrinsic logic of postcolonialism.

Hence we may rethink postcolonialism's entry into China. Postcolonial discourse entered Chinese academia in the 1990s under the banner of anti-nationalism. At first it attempted to deconstruct, retroactively, the history, reality and state power of the PRC in terms of revolution and socialist reconstruction. Explicitly or implicitly, postcolonialism was complicitous with the market economy and capitalist globalization then raging over China. Such a historical displacement is shown in the disregard for the achievements of the New China and the Chinese nation, arising from the anti-imperialist, nationalist, and democratic movement. Postcolonialism labelled the New China

irresponsibly as the embodiment of Han imperialism. Under the guise of postcolonial theory, however, Eurocentrism attempts to colonize Chinese academia in such a manner that, by taking the deconstruction of the nation-state as its top priority, the immense complexity and differences within Chinese history are ignored, and everything, from the traditional empire to modern China to the so-called "new Chinese imperialism," is reduced to the dichotomy of the Han/ethnic minorities. Therefore, this kind of postcolonial theory maintains that the PRC state has reinforced Han-centrism through romanticizing, "Otherizing," objectifying, and ultimately domesticating ethnic minorities. As such, the differences and tensions among ethnicity, nation, class, gender, and regions are erased, the periphery repossessed. Its purpose is to construct an imaginary, homogeneous national identity—after all, it is a manifestation of internalized colonialism and Orientalism.

### **From "Sinophone" to "Chinese-language Cinema": A Critical Review of Minority Issues**

In overseas Chinese studies, these views are most clearly reflected in Shu-mei Shih's Sinophone studies (*huayu yuxi yanjiu*), which is considered to be "one of the most noted arguments since the start of the new millennium" (D. Wang 5-14). As David Wang puts it:

Influenced by postcolonialism and ethnic minority literature, Professor Shi interpreted China—from the Qing empire to the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China—as an extension of broad imperial colonialism. Thus, in her definition, the Sinophone resonates with the overseas literature of Francophone, Lusophone, Hispanophone, Anglophone, etc. She sympathized with the vulnerable minority nationalities living in China's periphery, and the diaspora living overseas. Her concept of Sinophone has strong counter-hegemonic intent; for her, the cultural policy of PRC is like a disguised colonial control towards its domestic minority nationalities and overseas Chinese diaspora (D. Wang 7).

When the overseas diaspora and the minority nationalities in the PRC are treated with the same measure, the underlying ideology of her methodology is self-evident. In Shih's *Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as the Places of Cultural Production*, "diaspora" is regarded as an interim existence. The purpose of the "diaspora" is termination, an inevitable result based on her logic:

By virtue of its residual nature, the Sinophone has largely confined to immigrant communities across all of the continents as well as those settler societies where the Han are the majority. As such, the "Sinophone" can only be a notion in the process of disappearance as soon as it undergoes the process of becoming... The "Sinophone" as an analytical and cognitive category is, therefore, both geographically and temporally specific (Shih 5-14).

Although David Wang admits that Shih unavoidably simplifies ethnic relations inside China since the Qing dynasty as interaction between the *colonizer and the colonized*, Wang's concept of "post-remnant" derives from this same premise. He argues that "the Sinophone literature I expect doesn't simply point out or eliminate differences, but identify écart, discover opportunities, and observe any growth and decline" (Wang, "The Root"). Wang, however, in fact merely replaces "difference" with "écart," and changes "elimination" to "trade-off" and "substitution." He also claims that "just because the history never happened does not mean it cannot possibly happen. The most unrealistic fiction may as well most accurately describe the reality." What exactly is the "reality" that is made to have "écart," be "accurately described," or "grow or decline"? It seems self-evident: "Speaking of modern and contemporary Chinese literature, one would immediately think of the literature produced in PRC. Whenever the literature is positively or negatively articulated to the 'grand narrative' of the 'People's Republic of China,' it would present its "propensity" to get rid of the positive or negative articulation—"the derivatives of China's rise.". Hence, the "grand narrative" of the "People's Republic of China" can be treated as a "periodical existence." Given the self-deceiving nature of the "de-Sinicization" propensity in Shih's concept of "Sinophone," whether from a historical or contemporary context, we need to seek other explanations. But how? Is the other explanation referring back to the same kind of propensity, or just another version of the "end of history" narrative that proliferates across the world? Wang states: "This propensity and momentum are closely related to the position or positionality with clear intent of spatial politics. Moreover, the "propensity" has always implied a sense of impulse and gesture, either moving forward or backward, tense or relaxed, leading toward what happened before or in-between, in a constant flux" (Wang, "The Root"). This vivid description nevertheless only invites multiple interpretations.

Compared with the concepts above, the concept of "Chinese-language cinema" was proposed by scholars from Taiwan and Hong Kong in the early 1990s and developed in the mid-1990s. The background was the emergence of co-produced films in the Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

After 2000, "Chinese-language cinema" gradually took the leading position in overseas film studies, and soon expanded its influence in film studies in the PRC (Lu, "Explorations" 4). "Chinese-language cinema" actually reflected the political, economic, and cultural changes in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong since the 1980s, and also reacted to the gradual industrialization and globalization of Chinese film production at that time. Hsiao-peng Lu, a Chinese American scholar and the leading advocate of "Chinese-language cinema," once sharply criticized the concept of "Sinophone" as "anti-China" in his book review of Shih. Ironically, however, "Chinese-language cinema" shares the same logical premise with the "Sinophone" in terms of deconstruction of both "nation" and "state." The study of Chinese-language cinema also dismantles the very idea of nation-state. "Nation-state" is sometimes translated as 民族国家 *minzu guojia* or 国族 *guozu* in Chinese, and the key point of Chinese-language cinema study is the national. What is a nation? A nation is a community of humans formed on the basis of a common language, history, memory and culture. What is the state? The state is a territory of sovereignty and polity. Territorial borders are fixed and sovereignty leaves little space for manoeuvres. However, the cross-regional nature of Chinese-language cinema itself defines its methodology.

This looks like Tu Weiming's concept of "Cultural China." The concept of "Cultural China" itself transcends territorial borders. Likewise, Taiwan scholars initiated "Chinese-language cinema" studies. There are many things in common: if we cannot talk about borders and states, we dismantle the nation and state, starting from ethnicity, language, memory and narrative, et cetera (Lu et al. 69).

While Sinophone studies is premised on oppositions to the Han language and the PRC, Chinese-language cinema takes Han language movies as the core of its "Cultural China" to distinguish itself from the national paradigm of Chinese national cinema. However, this argument is criticized for being unable to capture the complexities of Chinese movies in minority languages. Lu admits:

The expression of Chinese language bypasses the dilemma of national politics only to facilitate communication and exchanges in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Twenty years later, the concept of Chinese-language cinema has been widely recognized and adopted. Meanwhile, as times passes by, new problems have emerged, and the concept of Chinese language faces crises and challenges. The concept of Chinese language needs to be reassessed, developed, and revised (Lu, "The Question of Reception in Transnational Chinese-language Film Studies" 28).

The amendments he made include:

华 *hua* as in 华语电影 *Huayu Dianying* (Chinese-language cinema), means the same as 华 *Hua* in the 中华民族 *Zhonghua Minzu* (Chinese nation). China is a multilingual and multinational nation. It includes the Han nationality and Han languages, as well as minority nationalities and minority languages. The Sinophone in this sense should include all accents and dialects used by the cross-straits quad-regions (Mainland China and Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao). Naturally, it also includes Mandarin Chinese or "national Chinese" evolved from Beijing dialect. Chinese-language cinema includes the films made in Sinophone (Chinese, Chinese dialects and minority languages) in the cross-straits quad-regions. It also encompasses the films made in Chinese in other parts of the world. Some Chinese minority nationalities who live outside China, but if they identify with Chinese culture and language, films they made in Chinese can also fall within the scope of Chinese-language cinema, as long as they wish so. In the era of globalization and in certain regions (such as Singapore), sometimes several languages or dialects including Chinese are used in a film. Many parties involved in the production, investment and distribution of the film. Such films may be classified as "transnational Chinese-language cinema" or "multilingual cinema" (Lu, "Explorations of the Concept of Chinese-language Cinema" 6).

In this comprehensive revision, 华语电影 *huayu dianying* (Chinese-language cinema) developed from 文化中国 *wenhua zhongguo* (Cultural China) is already premised on China's national identity. This revision should be welcomed. In fact, if there is no Chinese identity as a premise, any 文化中国 *wenhua zhongguo* (Cultural China) can only be reduced to the "post-remnant" written by David Wang. Perhaps that is why Hsiao-peng Lu does not accept the charge that he is "American-centered" levelled by Li Daoxin. In fact, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, a Japanese Canadian scholar, criticizes Lu's Chinese-language cinema concept as being pan-Chinese, ethnocentric, and Chinese imperialist (Lu, The Question 29). This is taken as the postcolonial perspective of the "Sinophone."

However, Lu's revision is somewhat expedient, neither being refined as a viable historical method of "Chinese-language cinema," nor receiving adequate attention. This is especially true when the history of left-wing cinema and PRC cinema is concerned, as "Chinese-language cinema" adopts in effect the same kind of standpoint as Sinophone studies. In Li Daoxin's view, Lu believes that China's

dual process of domestic hegemony and resistance to the outside world has limited the direction and function of Chinese national cinema. Under such rubrics, China's national cinema, as the myth-maker of the state from the Shanghai left-wing cinema of the 1930s to the PRC film industry after 1949, has lost its historical meaning, for it, by imaginary and homologous identification with the state, has divorced itself from the historical context of transnational cinema, becoming only a negative footnote of that context (Li 56). I agree with this criticism. This is what Lu says about ethnic minority films:

In the formation of a homogenous national identity, cinematic narrative could obtain the function of creating a national myth and the function of justifying a national identity by narrowing the cultural differences among each minority nationality in China. The unification of the state and the nation is one of the crucial tasks for the new regime. In the late 1950s and 1960s minority nationality films appeared as an essential cinema genre. By romanticizing and othering minority nationalities, this genre consolidated the centrality of the Han in the Chinese nation (Lu, "One Hundred Years" 68-69).

This argument is basically the consensus of film studies abroad, from "Sinophone" to "Chinese-language cinema." If "Sinophone cinema" constructs the binary opposition of the Chinese colonizer/the overseas Chinese (ethnic minorities home and abroad) from the outside referring to the approach of the colonizer/the colonized, the narrative of "Chinese-language cinema" replicates the binary opposition of the Han/minority domestically. Han represents the dominant state power from the feudal dynasties to the People's Republic of China, hence the dichotomy is the master/slave structure. As the dichotomies home and abroad resonate with each other, these references are not for postcolonialism to resist the grand-narrative of Eurocentrism, but rather, to surrender to the long-standing argument of Oriental Despotism under the framework of Eurocentrism, a narrative that was reversed by the Sino-Russian revolution in the twentieth century and comes back in the post-revolutionary era with a new face.

Today's overseas Chinese cinema studies have evolved from the much-criticized "Chinese national cinema" to the "Sinophone cinema," intent on excluding the PRC, and then to "Chinese-language cinema" embracing globalization. Reading them against the background of the last four decades of China's reform and opening up, mysteries surrounding these academic inquiries may be dispelled. The key is precisely ethnic minority films. While the "Sinophone" dichotomizes minorities and their languages vis-à-vis the Chinese nation, "Chinese-language cinema" excludes minority language movies under the rubrics of globalization. Such a "Chinese-language cinema" concept embodies the idea of pan-nationalism that deconstructs the state. It differs from "Sinophone" studies, as the latter first pre-emptively designates China as an autocratic "empire," nothing less than a derivative of Eurocentrism. Chinese language cinema, on the other hand, effectively de-politicizes China, deferring, or glossing over China's revolution and nation-building during the course of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. Thus the discourse of Chinese-language cinema first gained popularity in the post-cold war western academic studies of China, and then entered the PRC, becoming the most authoritative "name" of Chinese cinema studies today. Moreover, Chinese language cinema and Sinophone cinema overlap significantly in terms of how to tell the story of Chinese cinema. A flurry of terminology such as "transnational," "trans-regional," "trans-territorial," and so forth, have emerged and gained a good deal of traction in China. Nonetheless, we should note that all of these "hybrid" and various "trans-" terms are meant to reaffirm transnational capital as the underwriter of Chinese cinema in the age of globalization at the expense of critique.

While Chinese-language cinema studies dominate today, film criticism is almost completely silenced by capital. It may not be accidental that these two situations coexist. In this respect, the "politicizing tendency" of Sinophone studies and the "depoliticizing" tendency in "Chinese-language cinema" studies, though seemingly opposed to each other, are but the two sides of the same coin. This has resonated in China in recent years when "depoliticised" politics have prevailed to some degree. Therefore, these problems are not only problems of overseas academics, but also, more importantly, the problems of Chinese academics.

### **Minority Nationality Films, "Mother-Tongue Films" or People's Cinema**

*The Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* approved by the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in September 1949 was the provisional constitution of the PRC, which established the principles of equality, solidarity and mutual assistance, promoting the shared prosperity of all ethnic groups within the PRC. It opposed imperialism as the public enemy of all peoples, opposed chauvinism and narrow nationalism, and prohibited discrimination, oppression, and division among ethnic groups. In brief, it set up "class",



rather than "ethnicity", as the new policy benchmark. As such, it became the guideline for the Chinese ethnic minority film industry.

With regard to the history of Chinese ethnic minority films, we may take the movie 农奴 *Serfs* as a case in point. The question is: how does one evaluate the political imperative of turning serfs into new social subjects? Based on the collection of a large number of materials, *Serfs* used a large number of cast members who were non-professional actors/actresses and were actual former serfs. They played the roles of protagonists, integrating their real identities with their cinematic roles. What does the pursuit of "realism" precisely mean here? Yingjin Zhang argues that 五朵金花 *Five Golden Flowers*, which has a similar theme to that of *Serfs*, has the "spectacle" of Han centralism by comparing it to *Serfs*, admitting that the latter has some "realistic elements" but "there is no difference between them in terms of the construction of ideology and cultural politics" (Zhang 191). But Zhang here actually ignores the mechanism of producing the "realistic" aesthetic effect, hence his analysis is devoid of historical context. Here the question becomes about how to understand the dynamic relationship between the camera, the cinematographer and the actors/actresses through western cinematic theories. Integrating the cinematographer and the acting subject in order to construct a political subject is at the same time a process of emotive and visionary empathy. It is a process by which the "Subject" is reconstituted at the expense of the "object." It is a Subject enunciating itself directly in the plural form of "we." The cinematic theory premised on such a notion of subjectivity can comprehend and explain cinematic practice of revolutionary realism, or the People's Cinema.

If the claim of "suppressing the dissident and potentially subversive factors in the periphery areas" is somewhat true, the "other" to be "suppressed" in this film is a manifest political enemy of the PRC that must be eliminated: imperialism, feudalism, narrow-minded nationalism, or Han chauvinism. Do we need to reverse our verdicts for these various "dissident" and "subversive factors" today, or re-evaluate serfdom? Or support the British colonialists that coveted and invaded Tibet? Or justify Tibetan separatism? Does this set of theoretical claims belong to colonialism or anti-colonialism? Have these extensions from "postcolonial" theory reached the opposite of the "justice" that they advocated? If we push these questions to the extreme, as listed above, we expose the historical conundrum embedded in such claims that can hardly be resolved.

First of all, unlike the ideas of Western ethnonationalism, since the 1911 Republican Revolution, from the slogan of 反清复明 "topple the Qing Dynasty (Machū ethnic Empire) and restore the Ming Dynasty (Han ethnic empire)," to the 五族共和 "Five Ethnicities Under One Union," to the new regional ethnic autonomy of the PRC, it has been a long political process of building the multi-ethnic Chinese nation. To this day, the task is still ongoing and endless, facing unsurmountable challenges. The most powerful driving force of this process is nothing less than the national democratic liberation movement that has been detonated by the aggression and oppression of imperialist powers in modern times. There is a flesh-and-blood relationship between the forging of the Chinese nation, the birth of the PRC, and the national democratic liberation movements of the third world. The question is: Can such a narrative be effectively deconstructed by the postcolonial theory that emerged in the Western context after the 1970s? In fact, since the 1990s, the widespread popularity of postcolonial theory in China resulted from the desire to debunk the legacy of the national democratic liberation movement.

Secondly, it was during the Mao era that ethnic minority cinema flourished and moved to the center stage of the PRC cinema scene. This contrasts sharply with today's China, where, driven by the market, ethnic minority cinema is marginalized, giving way to Hollywood-style "spectacle" cinema featuring ethnic minorities mainly as exotic Others. In retrospect, the cinematic representation of ethnic minorities in the early PRC period corresponded to the modernization project, promoting coeval developments of all regions and ethnicities across China. Theories of identity politics stemming from the western context thus cannot grasp the historical gravity of China's imperative of "modernization for all," and thus are unable to reflect the value of PRC ethnic minority cinema.

One way to break through the national cinematic hegemony is to return to multiculturalism and the auteurism. A case in point is Wang Zhimin's 1996 attempt to redefine ethnic minority cinema, which still resonates today. Wang maintains that ethnic minority cinema must conform to a basic cultural rule and two derivatives about the author and the subject matter. He proposes a rigorous scrutiny of ethnic minority cinema in terms of cultural identity and author's identity (Wang 161-171). By so doing, Wang hopes to rebuke the accusations that ethnic minority cinema is not as much the self-expression of ethnic minorities as the domination, imagination and consumption of ethnic minorities by the Han majority. Ironically, very few ethnic minority films can fit this rigid definition (Cheng Y. 114-139; Hu 102-113). Simply put, such a notion does little explanatory work, instead denying the vastly complex cinematic practice in the PRC dealing with the subject matter of ethnic equality.

Ethnic minority cinema as a genre emerged during the Reform era. In other words, the concept of "ethnic minority cinema" as an exploration of "others" did not exist during the Mao era, where the prevailing genre had been the "people's cinema," which included ethnic minority cinema as an integral part of New China's cinema. Almost every single issue of the magazine 大众电影 *Popular Cinema*, arguably with the largest nation-wide circulation during the Mao era and parts of the Reform era, featured ethnic minority films. Now the question is: how do we re-evaluate the legacy of New China cinema? Will the label of Chinese national cinema cause critics to dismiss its value altogether? From what perspectives do we rewrite Chinese cinematic history? Since the 1990s, the genre of ethnic minority cinema has broken away from the political framework of New China cinema. China's ethnic minority cinema jumped onto the bandwagon of the "cinema of the spectacle," starting from the Hollywoodization of Tibet as subject matter. When the market aligns with "political correctness," the spectacle of ethnic minority cinema is inevitable. In fact, the market of global capitalism is transforming the history and culture of all (including minority) nations into a spectacle. When so-called fifth-generation Chinese-language cinema led by Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and others turned the revolutionary color of red to that of folklore, the time was ripe for Chinese cinema to rewrite history. However, when "Chinese-language cinema" underwritten by global capital prevails, nobody can reject the legitimacy of the "orientalist gaze" buttressed by the box office. For not only Hollywood-like movies such as 狼图腾 *Wolf Totem*, but also ethnic minority films produced by ethnic minorities themselves, forging tradition has become a common practice. Whether undertaken consciously or unconsciously, catering to the Orientalist perspective becomes a road of no return for most ethnic minority films. In this respect, there is no pure 原生态 (*yuanshengtai*, pristine) ethnic minority cinema. By the same token, postcolonialism not only loses its critical edge, but it is itself becoming a part of this Orientalizing process.

On the other hand, the "author" is committed to the "self" expression of minority cultures. The theoretical basis of this self-identification or self "othering" is Multiculturalism. It creates a new film genre: 母语电影 *Mother Tongue Film*. The notion of 原生态 (*yuanshengtai*, pristine) replaced the theme of social development and becoming a new cinematic utopia (Hu 56-57). However, such "identity" itself is constructed at the beginning when the "self" uses so-called "Chineseness" as the capitalized "Other." Such Sinocentrism or Chinese essentialism, just like the "原生态 (*yuanshengtai* pristine) of ethnic minority culture," are imagined by postcolonial theory. The historical fact is that the "mother tongues" and the cultures of ethnic minorities have largely benefited from the large-scale ethnic identification and investigation project begun by the PRC in the 1950s with the intention of preserving and developing local cultures. In this respect, the legitimacy of the Chinese nation of the PRC is based on ethnic and linguistic diversity. One should revisit this part of recent history in order to unveil the ahistorical myth of deconstructing China in "Sinophone" studies. Today, ethnic auteur movies largely fade away at the box office, and the only possible way for them to gain visibility is to copy Hollywood. The concepts of Auteur and Sinophone seem to be at odds with each other, but they all aim at dismantling China as a nation-state. In contrast, the state stands out as the only socialist practice for ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. However, for some time such practice have been questioned on the ground of depoliticizing the state, and, consequently, the policy of ethnic autonomy was under fire (Cheng H.).

Some critics have pointed out that the United States and India seem to adopt the "de-political" models in which the state was "liberalized." The status of ethnic minorities there has deteriorated steadily (Sautman 27-35; 5-15; 15-27). If we remember that multiculturalism and postcolonial theory arise precisely from these two countries, we would come to understand that state liberalization is not really depoliticization, but another kind of politicization, a statism disguised as universalism. It is also manifestation of nationalism, of which national cinema is but an expression. Therefore, I prefer the term New China Cinema rather than national cinema, not only because the latter has been replaced by "Chinese-language cinema" and dismissed as a negative concept, but also because the concept of Western ethnonationalism underlying the notion of "national cinema" fails to encompass the vast and complex internal differences and diversity in China. Chinese-language cinema caters to Hong Kong and Taiwan and so-called "diasporic" cinema, rather than ethnic minority cinema in the PRC. Moreover, the concept of national cinema collapses all socialist practice of the PRC under the rubrics of nationalism, which is itself a de-historicizing and de-politicizing move. In the end, it smacks of Han chauvinism in renouncing the sovereignty of the state. Ethnocentrism or Han chauvinism revives at the time when exclusionary nationalism prevails.



The historical study of Chinese cinema should at the same time address the PRC's political practice and policies with regard to ethnic minorities, and missing such a critical perspective, ethnic minorities' objectification to cinematic spectacles cannot be adequately understood. The objectification, of course, includes peasants, migrant laborers, and other underprivileged classes. The Chinese New Documentary Movement of the 1990s attempted to resuscitate the traumatic experiences of individual underdogs in lieu of the grand narratives of New China socialism, capturing the real crisis we all face. However, the New Documentary Movement was short-lived, unable to survive the market waves. This, like the current political situation, is a compelling issue we need to explore. I would add that important trends in Chinese cinema over the last decades such as the New Documentary Movement deserve serious attention, and postcolonial-inspired notions such as the Sinophone and Chinese-language cinema most likely miss the mark.

### **Conclusion: "China" as a Political "Field"**

For decades, global capital and neoliberal culture have worked in tandem to deny political possibilities of pursuing justice through the state. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey contends that "Neoliberal rhetoric, with its foundational emphasis upon individual freedoms, has the power to split off libertarianism, identity politics, multiculturalism, and eventually narcissistic consumerism from the social forces ranged in pursuit of social justice through the conquest of state power." This is because the value of individual freedom and social justice are not necessarily compatible; the pursuit of social justice presupposes social solidarity and the following premise: given some of the more important struggles for social equality and environmental justice, it is necessary to suppress individual needs and desires. This paves the way for neoliberal culture (Harvey 48-50). Undoubtedly, the worldwide Hollywoodization of the film industry epitomizes such a neoliberal culture. Postcolonialism and multiculturalism, likewise, by upholding anti-authoritarian and anti-repressive politics, dovetail with China's market reform.

With respect to these currents, we therefore need to review "China" as a political "field." Today, the socialist function of the state must be reaffirmed unwaveringly in order to ensure the democratic participation of the working class and to ensure the transformation of procedural equality to substantive equality, particularly the equality of the right to work and the equality of distribution of wealth. Cinematic democracy is part and parcel of such a democracy. Lenin insisted that the disappearance of the state can only be the result of socialism, and thus only "socialism" can surpass "nationalism" (Lenin 247-249). That China is viewed as a nation-state in general reminds us as much of the political struggle of reforming the state machinery in China as of the current condition of existence in the world, from Occupy Wall Street to the rise of the Islamic State. Rather than a new wave of social movements, what one witnesses in today's world is sanguinary warfare over the power of the state by new class formations, races, ethnicities, and religious sects, which very much resembles the barbarism of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Today, world peace is in jeopardy when globalization in effect crushes all heterogeneity in the name of homogeneity. And, in consequence, the nation-state once again assumes the last-ditch trench, and the old twins of nationalism and imperialism are resurging across the world as a response to globalization. Perhaps we are still faced with the aftermath of the twentieth century revolution, which the twenty-first century is predestined to confront.

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