

CINEMA OF DISLOCATION:
THE GEO-EMOTIONAL JOURNEYS OF THE
SUFFERING WOMEN IN 21ST CENTURY
CHINESE CINEMA

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DECLARATION

I, Nashuyuan Wang, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that there is a genre of film concerned with the travels of disenfranchised women in 21st century Chinese cinema. An identifiable set of film narratives have largely emerged in China's neoliberal moment since the 1980s; and especially after the 2000s when China has been more engaged with the processes of globalisation, modernisation, urbanisation (Rofel 2007; Ong and Zhang 2008). Such a socio-economic procedure has stimulated massive population flows, spatial transition and development-induced displacement, uprooting and destabilising identity and sense of belonging (Wagner et al. 2014; Chen and Yang 2013). These subjects are often dislocated physically and socially from the dreams of the nouveau-riche and older cosmopolitan subjectivities that surround them. Heroines in such a cinema are either the village/suburban indigenous whose intra-village travels define their status of marginalisation and resistance, the rural migrants who have worked or lived in the city and choose to return, or urban middle-class women who are troubled by urban lives and set off on journeys to remote regions for self-revival. I argue that, in the cinema of dislocation, on the one hand, heroines are all displaced to various degrees by their unique circumstances; on the other hand, the status of dislocation serves as the women's agency and empowers them, enabling them to seek for a new sense of location, belonging and identity during their travels and search for homecoming. Apart from contextual and thematic exploration, the challenges

for this thesis will be to identify the other qualities that will justify defining the Cinema of Dislocation definitively as a genre of Chinese film in its own right: the network of directors, a shared aesthetic, distinctive dislocation narratives and cinematographies, and a degree of flexibility that allows the genre to develop.

IMPACT STATEMENT

This research has investigated the shaping of the cinema of dislocation, an emerging genre in the 21st-century Chinese cinema in the country's neo-liberal movement. It has discussed cinematic representations of the disenfranchised women in rural and township areas in China, their geo-social and spiritual journeys, and the ways they have turned their displacement into an agency for empowerment.

Under globalisation and the rapid process of urbanisation, representations of marginal communities have been long overlooked by the mainstream narrative in China. Films have largely promoted urban lifestyles, commercial matters and nationalistic images. However, there is a group of filmmakers who have started to shift their interests, focusing on non-urban settings and anti-heroes from marginal or remote communities. Although there is a movement towards forming such a genre, there is a lack of awareness of the topic among the mass and a lack of research in academia.

This research has observed some of the least-examined issues in contemporary Chinese cinema: the formulation of distinctive Chinese film genres, rural cinemas, and dislocation-induced empowerment. Before the film textual analysis, the author has provided detailed contextualisation to ground the themes and significance regarding socio-historical, cultural and political

matters emphasised in the film case studies, aiming to introduce and unpack the key contextual ideas that lead the reader towards the film discussions. In the case studies, the author has analysed the films around different elements that define a genre. Through scrutinising contextual and textual aspects, the author has identified the key characteristics that construct the cinema of dislocation thematically and aesthetically.

Through applying socio-historical approaches and film theories and analysis, this research has conducted an interdisciplinary study that speaks to a diverse range of audiences, including fields of interest in history, social science, culture, media and film studies. This thesis contributes to the formation of a film genre that is critical to the current era and provides a particular methodology for genre studies in cinema. It draws connections between cinema and other Chinese art forms and frameworks, demonstrating the cultural specificity of this genre. Not only does this thesis show how the dislocation cinema is particular within Chinese contexts, but it also develops an intertextual research method of how distinct cultural characteristics could be applied and connected to films in other national cinemas. This project also addresses the audience outside academia who are interested in history, cinema, arts, aesthetics and China in general. The discussions are structured in chronological order and are easy to follow. Through historiographic structures, readers could see how films have been interwoven into history and provided either supplements or

counter-narratives to what has happened in reality. The project will stimulate the reader's interest and engagement in socio-cultural, historical and political matters through cinema, one of the most popular art forms for the mass while increasing the visibility of a powerfully emerging genre within the film industry. It aims to make an extensive and strong contribution to cultural life and public discourse.

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As a Chinese who has been living in the UK since the age of 14 in 2009, the idea of travelling, fluidity, location and dislocation has always been in my mind. Back in 2018, having a vague but proximate sense of this notion in Chinese cinema, I started my research. I still remembered my three-hour long conversation with my supervisor Vivienne in that sunny afternoon when I saw her for the first time. I would not have been able to reach the destination of this long voyage without the help of a profusion of kind people who supported me all the way through, led me the way when I felt confused and troubled. Below, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who acted as beacons during this journey and who lit up my path with invaluable insights and cherishable ideas:

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PREFACE

As a Chinese who is from the Bai ethnic minority and who has been living in the UK since the age of fourteen, I am set in multiple dislocations - ethnically, internationally, culturally, geographically and emotionally. Constant travels and reshaping of identity, customs and ways of living have stimulated my interest in the question of location and *dislocation*. I am not mainstream, yet what has put me in the “margins” is, to my understanding, not something negative. It allows me to see and consider images and narratives that are outside the more dominant discourses. This concept, the idea of dislocation, is not a narrow-focus subject. I would say dislocation, especially spiritual dislocation, is part of a modern illness, or dis-ease, which is visible in various cultures and societies. It speaks to both the particular and the universal. It does not merely speak for the people of marginal environments, but invites us to observe our own sense of being in the world.

Rather than embodying disengagement, vulnerability, disenfranchisement and left-behind bodies, dislocation is a ubiquitous mechanism for pragmatic and positive interpretations of people on the move. We are constantly shaping our identities; we embrace the power of displacement through which our sense of the self is able to encounter diverse geographical, cultural and spiritual realms. Stories about marginal spaces or travels might be different for everybody, yet the sense of journeying, searching, (re)/constructing and empowering draws

the itinerants towards a shared-self. We share such feelings through different stories, we are drawn together and correlate to each other. This research has allowed me to feel for the dislocating drifters, sensing their simultaneous sense of loss and sense of power, as if immersed as a participant in their journeys. In this sense, the audiences and researchers of the cinema of dislocation eventually become part of the process and the affective web of sensing the fluid world. We produce our responses to the films in relation to our own experiences; we see traces of ourselves in the characters; through the films we construct our reflections of being in the world. In this sense such a cinema allows us to be the *producers* of meaning for the concept of dislocation. It is our contemporary world and experience that make up the genre and our need to express our sense of dislocation drives the expressivity of the films.

INTRODUCTION

From the aerial photographs in *China: Beautiful Landscapes*, one can easily see that the majority of the terrain is dotted with agricultural fields, forests, mountains, and abandoned lands. We hardly see urban space and the only visible evidence of human occupation is the scattered rice terraces.¹ A change in usage of agrarian lands for industrial and urbanisation projects, however, started from the state-assigned collectivisation characterised by the Chinese Land Reform Movement and the Great Leap Forward 大跃进 (*dayuejin*, 1958-1962) in the Maoist regime (1947-1962) to the “agro-industrial conglomerates” of the Reform era (1978-1989) (Short 2000: 437-437). Profit-oriented goals during the Reform transformed the traditional livelihood spaces into arenas of “direct consumption” (Trappel 2015: 1), leaving farmers powerless, with no agency (Tanner 2015; DeMare 2019). Frequent land relocation, redistribution and long-term policies since the Reform (1976) restricted agricultural spaces (Zhu and Jiang 1993: 447; Ho 2001: 295; Guofa 2004; Hancock 2017; Phillips 2018), aggravating urban-rural conflicts. The urban developer became a spatial, physical and cultural usurper of homes and identities, dislocating rural dwellers. Some argue that post-socialist China displays a neoliberalist shift in its handling of problems such as poverty and inequality through its use of state-guided market principles and its participation in global economic systems (Ataçay 2021: 286; Hui 2003, 2004: 3). Others

¹ *China: Beautiful Landscapes*. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2006.

challenge China's neoliberal interpretation because of its "preoccupation with capital and class interests" and its failure to "capture the distinctive nature of entanglement of capital, state and society", suggesting that China assimilates neoliberal elements "interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control" by an "oligarchic" Party-state whose authority is challenged by disenfranchised classes (Zhou et al. 2018: 33; Nonini 2008: 145; Harvey 2005). Those disenfranchised classes hardly have a voice given by the power of the state and this thesis explores ways in which those voices are beginning to be heard.

"Now that we can move so quickly around the world, most of us don't actually travel anymore - we only arrive...if I'm not travelling slowly, I feel I'm not really travelling at all" (Kieran 2012: 19).

I consider the cinema of dislocation a global genre with Chinese dislocation cinema being a sub-genre and women's rural dislocations a sub-sub genre. I will simply sketch the contours of the global genre as it would take several theses to substantiate in detail. This thesis will deal with the sub and sub-sub genres as they relate to China. In social studies, dislocation and displacement has developed as a crucial global phenomenon since the turn of the century and stems from three major circumstances: modernisation/globalisation, natural disasters, and war/political struggles (Mooney 2005; Cernea 2006). Dislocated people, often addressed as "displacees" or "dislocatees", include a

mix of refugees, domestic and international displaced persons, returnees, migrants and host populations (Parkash 1990; Cernea and McDowell 2000; Cerna 2006; Cotula 2006; Mathur 2009; OECD 2017). They are not only defined as people who are removed, but also those who remain in their locations with invalid and unusable land and resources (Oliver-Smith 2010: 45). In cases of development-induced displacement, displacees also include people relocated to build developmental projects (Gellert 2003: 16). Some dislocatees are physically dispossessed of their homeland, others are further displaced as they are cast out of the welfare system, state development policies, risk measurements of development, compensations, and benefits from urban developments (Robinson 2003; Cernea 2003; 2006; Patel et al. 2015).

In a world overwhelmed by super-flow, we can easily get lost and confused. Slow and sensuous travel serve as ways to re-connect people to space, identity, emotion and belonging. For women in the cinema of dislocation, their identities or lives are visually destabilised, their bodies disenfranchised. Starting their journeys, they sense paths that empower them towards shaping a new self. The floating, transitional, journeying spaces construct a “contact zone” and a “social space of confrontation” where “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Kisiel 2019: 280-281; Pratt 1992: 4).

This thesis argues that there is a genre of film concerned with the travels of disenfranchised women in 21st century Chinese cinema. An identifiable set of film narratives has been reflecting China's market economy and increasing global awareness and visibility since the 1980s. This is especially apparent from the 2000s on as China engaged more with the processes of globalisation, modernisation, and urbanisation since joining the WTO (2001) opening a wider gate to China's global market and to foreign investment. These changes have created more opportunities for migrant workers in the city, integrating China into the global economy, making China globally competitive and transforming the financial system, investment performances, enterprise and household behaviour, especially in the context of a two-way flow of foreign direct investment (Rofel 2007; Ong and Zhang 2008; Ciuriak 2002; Xu 2011). The "socialist market economy (SME)" 社会主义市场经济, introduced by Jiang Zemin in 1992, was defined as a market economy with the predominance of public ownership and state-owned enterprises (Ding 2009). This suggests a SME with Chinese characteristics. Cultural particularities, Chinese philosophy and social sciences heighten a utilitarian approach and are applied to the shaping of new theories and ideas around China's socialist political economy. Xi developed this idea and called for China's stories to be recounted with cultural and theoretical confidence, his aim being to systematise a fundamentally Chinese framework and narrative from *within* the culture and

then to communicate it worldwide (Hong 2006; Xi 2017; Xinhua 2021; Guo 2018).

The films discussed in this thesis have been made at a time of massive population flows, spatial transition and development-induced displacement, destabilising identities and senses of belonging, as, for example, in the construction of the Three Gorges Dam (2003), the minority protests in Tibet (2008) and Xinjiang (2009), and rural protests in the southern fishing village of Wukan against land seizures by officials (2011) (Wagner et al. 2014; Chen and Yang 2013). Since the beginning of Xi's premiership numerous socio-political and economic policies have prioritised rural development, such as, the Anti-poverty Crusade (2017) which displaced rural residents from their original habitations and livelihoods with the space clearance required for economic uplifting, the Rural Revitalisation 乡村振兴 (2018) and the "Building a new socialist countryside" 社会主义新农村 (2019) programmes, the boosting of rural income initiative (2020), and Xi's declaration of China's complete victory in the effort to eradicate rural poverty in 2021 (Zheng 2022; Shen 2020; Hu et al. 2020). Furthermore, artists and filmmakers are "sent down" to the countryside to experience the true art of the people; the concept of village talent 乡贤 is foregrounded to encourage urban talent, graduates and cadres to go down to the village or to return to their rural homelands to help in the construction of the countryside (Wainwright 2014). Against these socio-political,

cultural and economic backdrops, attention has shifted from the urban-centric framework that had dominated the country since the market economy began, back to the rural areas. So, filmmakers have followed suit, exploring stories about people on the move, about individual lives and emotions in remote areas.

These film subjects are often dislocated physically and socially from the dreams of the nouveau-riche and older cosmopolitan subjectivities that surround them. Heroines in such a cinema are either the village/suburban indigenous women whose intra-village travels define their status of marginalisation and resistance, rural migrants who have worked or lived in the city and choose to return, or urban middle-class women who are troubled by urban lives and set off on journeys to remote regions for self-revival. On the one hand, in the cinema of dislocation, heroines are all displaced to various degrees by their unique circumstances; on the other hand, the status of dislocation serves as the women's agency and empowers them, enabling them to seek for a new sense of location, belonging and identity during their travels and search for homecoming.

Apart from contextual and thematic exploration, the challenges for this thesis concern identification of other qualities that could justify defining cinema of dislocation as firstly a cycle of films within an international context, and then

more definitively as a genre of Chinese film in its own right: the network of directors, a shared aesthetic, distinctive dislocation narratives and cinematographies, and a degree of flexibility that allows the genre to develop - there is a shared aesthetic across both independent and commercial films in the cinema of dislocation. There are a certain number of commercial films of dislocation, and the theme itself is increasingly being sought out by mainstream film production companies. For example, Han Jie 韩杰's *Mr. Tree* (Hello! 树先生, 2011) is produced and distributed by Bona Film Group 博纳影业, one of the leading commercial film production companies in China; the film also stars Wang Baoqiang 王宝强 - a male star who guarantees China's box office success. The dislocation theme also interweaves the comedy genre. Films like Huang Bo 黄渤's *The Island* (一出好戏, 2018) and Zhou Shen 周申 and Liu Lu 刘露's *Mr. Donkey* (驴得水, 2016) are produced by two star and box office engine crews - Huang Bo's team and Mahua FunAge 开心麻花, which has the best market appeal in comedy in China (Wang: 2015). Both films are set in remote areas with characters driven into gendered, moral and geographical displacements; the dislocation themes ground the films' social commentaries and satirical approaches. Turning to film adaptations, dislocation films like Zhang Ji 张骥's *Moses On The Plain* (平原上的火焰, 2021) casts two of the most popular idols as its protagonists and is produced by Maoyan Films 猫眼电影, the company that sponsors one of the most influential film ranking sites in China.

Cinematic genre is defined as a “category, kind, or form of film distinguished by subject matter, theme, or techniques” (Geduld and Gottesman 1973, 73). It is characterised by certain “production systems”, and “ingredient” narrative images (Schatz 2012, 110; Neale 2012, 181). However, generic conventions are developed from shifting socio-historical materials and are culturally-dependent (Tudor 2012; Grindon 2012). Genre is “thematically fertile” and shows a “flexible structure” and “story formula based upon a body of conventions intuitively shared by the audience and the filmmakers” (Kitses 1970, 19; Grindon 2012, 46). Therefore, it is a “volatile combination of disequilibrium (excess, difference) and equilibrium (containment, repetition)” (Klinger 2012, 109). Such flexibility within standardisation defines the nature of genre. Themes and cinematography of dislocation appears in various national cinemas. This section chooses a range of national cinemas of dislocation. It discusses what dislocation means in those cinemas through the themes expressed in them. The discussion sets the films within their historical narratives, shows what they are telling us and how such narratives represent those places in the world. The word “dislocation” gestures towards subversive films and subaltern stories and images. Further analysis of dislocation cinemas from these and other countries offers a preliminary foundation for extrapolating dislocation as it is narrated in the emergence of a genre and how it signifies in Chinese cinema.

Theme is the key to the shaping of a genre reflecting shared ingredients among certain films; on the other hand, as it fertilises distinct cultures, themes of dislocation vary under such mutuality. In films about dislocation, the “body of conventions intuitively shared by the audience” elicits a universal feeling of not belonging. However, this sense of non-belonging and elsewhere-ness differs in different national contexts. In terms of cinematography, cinema of dislocation stresses the “volatile combinations of disequilibrium and equilibrium” (Klinger 2012, 109). This means that it allows various forms of difference and display within a regulated narrative and thematic system, containing regulation and variety simultaneously (Neale 1980; Klinger 1986). Such a narrative starts from a systematic style and is developed into various branches that underpin and complement the general theme. All variations support the general theme of dislocation and add to its diversity, reinforcing the “economy of variation, rather than rupture” (Neale, 31). Themes and cinematography begin to crystallise but also become disrupted - they allow changes and development of the different elements of the developing genre.

Some might see dislocation as a film cycle in which the themes associated with marginal individuals constantly recur in different periods albeit with some variations. Film cycles are a series of films associated with each other through shared images, characters, settings, plots, or themes (Klein 2011). However,

what distinguishes cycles is that they involve films developed almost simultaneously in short time periods and which deal with specific themes or plots (Klein and Palmer 2016). While genres are defined by repeated themes, images and motifs, cycles stress how the shared ingredients are used - their formation is primarily based on the timely nature of their immediate financial viability (usually five to ten years), public trends and discourses, audience expectations, and their key roles in shaping commercial filmmaking and mass culture (Klein 2011; Gleich 2014).

One can argue that dislocation cinema may constitute a cycle of films recurring over different periods, but which forms a thematic thread which charts socio-political transformations. From Xie Jin's 谢晋 *Red Detachment of Women* (红色娘子军, 1961), to Li Yu's 李玉 *Lost in Beijing* (苹果, 2007) and Diao Yinan's 刁亦男 noir films set on the urban fringes and in townships, the epitome of commercial compromise in late 2010s, the theme of female dislocation has been both mainstream and commercially successful. However, because temporal limitation and cultural needs distinguish film cycles from genres, typically characterised by their timelessness, this thesis argues that the cinema of dislocation is a film genre: it spans a broader temporal frame and focuses on progressive shaping rather than on reflecting a sense of immediacy for consumption by mass/popular culture.

We can argue that there is a global genre of “cinema of dislocation”. It could be argued as a genre when applied to global cinemas. It documents and navigates changes in the field of human geography and a rapid increase in population movements. A universal feeling of not belonging resonates with the concept of dislocation and so films about migration find greater purchase with audiences beyond those that are represented. They reflect changes in the way we view community and individual identity in the twenty-first century and speak, particularly, to the issue of individual freedom of choice. The narratives of dislocation typically involve categories like transnational, migration and diasporic cinemas but also road movies adding social and individual to geographic displacement. The protagonists are from communities that are dislocated themselves, either disadvantaged rural dwellers or marginal urban individuals, suffering from physical or psychological dislocation in varying degrees. Not merely about border-crossing, road trips, or wild adventures,² they focus on the geo-emotional journeys of people who are naturally, socially and culturally marginalised and who inevitably feel alienated. While we are all dislocated, to greater or lesser degrees, there are very different experiences and expressions of that experience nationally and that inevitably reflects in images and narratives. The nations are representative of different types of dislocation sentiment set in their own socio-cultural and historical contexts, including nation-shaping dislocation in the US, the divided belonging that

² *My Little Sunshine* (2006, dir. Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris); *Wild* (2014, dir. Jean-Marc Vallée).

constructs the dislocation narrative in Cuba, hesitation and confusion attached to the dislocation nostalgia in Hong Kong, and the simultaneous division and integration in Turkish-German culture.

Hollywood cinema is very familiar to Chinese audiences and dislocation is at the heart of the making of America. America is a state of immigration, in which immigration itself is the most “common type of dislocation” (Kilbride et al. 1990). It disempowered its indigenous population through immigration, so that successive waves of immigration have become the defining feature of the culture itself. Female displacement is also fertile ground for what could be argued as a global genre of dislocation cinema. Classical Hollywood cinema graphically narrates the stories of marginal women. In *Stagecoach* (1939, dir. John Ford), the prostitute Dallas (Claire Trevor) is often framed as liminal, as apart from others. Even in her most powerful scene where she is inspired with motherly love for the new-born baby, she is visually separated from other people by a wall; as she walks towards the door in glorious light, she is still closely framed within the door. The fifties Western heroine Vienna (Joan Crawford) in *Johnny Guitar* (1954, dir. Nicholas Ray) has a stronger character with free, determined thought and movement (she is positioned in high-angle shots looking down on and shooting male gangsters; she defeats the men and throws tableware at the camera); yet, she is still filmed within visual barriers. Window and doors frame her image; she is blocked by iron railings, and the

lines and shadows of cupboards graphically split her apart from, or serve to squeeze her by, the men. The female drifters of 21st-century Hollywood cinema are filmed with minimalistic aesthetics, dim lighting, slow camera movements, low-saturated and framed with bleak hues. Deadly quiet villages/small-towns trap the heroines within the vast but hopeless landscapes as if, despite freedom of movement, there is no exit from dysfunctional lives and spaces.³ A few technicolour-like or warm hued moments, which evoke a sense of nostalgia and bygone eras, are inserted into the general coldness, giving a feeling that the small town does not belong to current temporality.

Cuba is a nation “defined by others” and consists of mixed cultures, ethnicities and cultural identification from the Spanish colonialism, dictatorship to its problematic relationship with the US (Garrett 2013, 1). Dislocation is a central theme in both Cuban culture and Cuban cinema as it reflects Cuba’s binary national ideology, triple national identity, and its “dislocation of the psyche”(Garrett *ibid*; Pérez-Firmat 1997; Peters 2012, 55).⁴⁵⁶ Such divided Cubanness shapes its distinct dislocation character. Socio-cultural studies, theatres and literature in and about Cuba have largely explored the feeling of

³ *Wendy and Lucy* (2008, dir. Kelly Reichardt); *Winter’s Bone* (2010, dir. Debra Granik); *Bluebird* (2013, dir. Lance Edmands).

⁴ Christabelle Peters used this term to describe the status of Cuban identity - different levels of physical and mental trauma resulted from history, racism, colonialism and related cross-boarder travels.

⁵ Mica Garrett discussed Cuba’s binary national imagination, one is the idealised view of the Revolution and the socialist pride framed by dictatorship; the other, the willingness to assimilate to capitalist cultures.

⁶ The notion of Cubanness is categorised in three levels by Pérez-Firmat: Cubanidad (the generic Cuban citizenship), Cubaneo (the mood and external national characters or performance associated with Cuban culture and customs), Cubania (the inner yearning for and the identification with national sentiments and spirits).

being displaced and unsituated and the simultaneous identification and rejection of homeland (Prizant 2009; McMahon 2012).

Hong Kong cinema since the hand-over in 1997 reflects three types of dislocation within its society). Spatial dislocation manifests in diasporic travels and unsituated feelings towards the socio-political transformations of the homeland (Abbas 2015, xix). A sense of nostalgia engenders temporal dislocation – of “something having been displaced in time” (Chow 1998, 47). Social dislocation evokes the insecure experience from “shrinking economic opportunities at home and the lure of upward mobility” somewhere else (Leung 2015, 273). The combination of these displacement sentiments results in “cultural and psychological dislocation” - the “fundamental cultural trope of the period” and “displacement of cultural critique” (Browne 1994, 6).

The sense of despair is further developed into the fear and terror projected onto female bodies in Latin American cinemas. *Rooms for Tourists* (2004, dir. Adrián García Bogliano) narrates five city girls’ overnight experience of extreme violence and horror in an isolated small town in Buenos Aires. *Cold Sweat* (2010, dir. Adrián García Bogliano) is a story of horror and vampirism which explores two friends’ suburban journey as they discover a perverse, bizarre site for female torture. Various forms of transcontinental migrations, including “Paleolithic first settlement, conquest and colonialism, slavery, free

mass movements, and mercantile diasporas” and their interactions with the hosting community, shape the “central process in the historical formation of Latin America” (Moya 2018, 24). The declining ethnic ties and diasporic constructions of identities engendered Latin America’s anxiety over a pan-national identity (Doortmont 1990). Such cultural assimilation and shared pan-identity make Latin America the most multi-racial and the most culturally homogeneous region in the world, albeit with the highest level of social inequality (Moya 2018). Using horror and vampirism as political commentary evokes the threat and fear aroused by a modern society structured through colonialism and immigration.

Some European cinemas about dislocation underline the idea of de-globalisation and the fear of transnational threats through women’s journeys. At the turn of the century, illegal immigrants in Italy exceeded one million and were constantly growing. Immigration control became the major concern for the government in 2001 (O’Healy 2019, 108). Italian cinema about dislocation manifests the “narratives of migration and displacement” with Italian’s uneasy attitudes towards transnational mobility (ibid, 3). Like some Latin American cinemas mentioned above, it also employs a noir-ish style and addresses violence, trauma and female displacement. From the Ukrainian female sex-dealer,⁷ the extreme exotic performances of African women,⁸ to

⁷ *The Unknown Woman* (2006, dir. Giuseppe Tornatore).

⁸ *South Side Story* (2000, dir. Roberta Torre).

the Albanian protagonist's doomed love affair entangled with crime, violence and trauma in his journey to Italy,⁹ we see transitional journeys through a dark, heavy-coloured mise-en-scene, troubled but guilty protagonists and female exploitation. The anxiety about becoming a multi-racial community is projected through threatening or tragic foreign lives.

Turkish-German cinema, since the 1990 German Unification and German nationality laws (1990), has largely explored the theme of dislocation through themes of integration (or lack thereof) and the kind of fluid identities migrants adopt to re-invent themselves in a globalised world (Koepnick and Schindler 2007; Hake and Mennel 2013; Naiboglu 2018). The state policy, their cultural assimilation and their role as the cultural transformer have shifted recent generations of Turkish-German's status from being foreigners to establishing their own voice and agency as uniquely German citizens. However, the sense of conflict that shadows all attempts at integration is still embedded in social critiques and art forms, shaping a binary character to Turkish-German dislocation. Turkish-German dislocation films use displaced female travelers to question how individuals recognise their status of being displaced in a hyper-connected and globalised world. The frequent use of visual restraint and graphic limitation imply women's oppressed status, while the frequent imagery of the women seeing themselves through reflections evokes their willingness

⁹ *The Italian* (2002, Ennio De Dominicis).

to view themselves in relation to the world and their transnational dilemma and patriarchal suppression (Chin 1999; Göktürk 2000).¹⁰

Other European dislocation cinemas focus on women's gender-writing and positive self-redefinition through female displacement. Some show the desire to "undo female migrants' invisibility" through women's positive contributions to diasporic and adopted communities (Ballesteros 2012, 143; *God Willing, It's Sunday*, 2001, dir. Yamina Benguigui; *Female Foreigners*, 2002, dir. Helena Taberna). Moving in another direction, *Take My Eyes* (2003, dir. Icíar Bollaín) depicts a housewife, Pilar (Laia Marull), who lacks a sense of home and belonging. She sees herself as the dislocated marginal in her physical home and explores an emotional home in artistic obsession. A symbolic, psychic home shapes her improvement of exile and dislocation.

As discussed above, the dislocation cinema has been developing as a global cinematic discourse. This thesis, which focuses on this genre in Chinese cinema asks how displaced women and their physical/spiritual journeys are visualised, physically, socio-culturally, and psychologically in the Chinese cinema of dislocation? Five sub-questions follow. What are the cinematographic phases of the 21st-century Chinese cinema of dislocation? To what extent does such a cinema reflect social reality? How do the films shape

¹⁰ *When We Leave* (2010, dir. Feo Aladag)

a journeying narrative and depict the relations and interactions between women and space? These are the geo-emotional journeys at the centre of the analysis.

“Rurality” provides a second anchor to the thesis. It is a concept linked to cultural geography where it has been used to examine conflicts of representation (Bell 1997; Hughes 1997; Bryant and Pini 2010; Halfacree 2006, 2007; Bosworth et al. 2013). It focuses attention on functional, political/economic, and social relations in order to analyse the urban phenomena and its impact on rural production and consumption, and lived experiences (Cloke 2006). In Chinese contexts, it embodies China’s agrarian past and troubled development simultaneously. The remote, primitive or dysfunctional milieu of rural and suburban settings serve as compelling but understudied cinematic scenarios for knowing “the other half” of the country. Research on rural womanhood focuses on female identity as defined by the rural community (Davidoff et al. 1976; Little 1987; Hughes 1997). This project, however, examines the contested relationship between women and rural spaces, women who have challenged rural communities and the definitions assigned to them. Overlooked by national advancement, viewed as the “othered other” at the bottom of the patriarchal order, women are double-dislocated subjects. Through the films analysed in this thesis they finally demand a voice.

This thesis aims to examine the relation between natural and psychological landscapes of the dislocatees. Landscape represents “validation, fabrication, recrimination and reconciliation” (Rayner 2007: 18-32), the significance of its representation lies in analysing underlying identities. Dislocated realms are “the natural, acquired or adopted home” or “a disparate conglomeration of imagined communities” for the displaced women (ibid: 17). Spatiality is not only formal, but also qualitative. Instead of merely illustrating the size and physical features of a space, spatiality involves definition, openness, visibility, expressivity (Ching 2007). In the following case discussions, dislocated spaces define, visualise, and express women’s status and journeys. Finally, this thesis disrupts a set of binaries: the definition and the experience of self and other, the marginal and the domain, the limitation and power of the dislocated, and their rejection and acceptance of cultures that destabilise their lives. Theoretical and contextual discussions of social and historical backgrounds locate the films’ theme and aesthetics. The two parts offer an integral and critical study of the cinema of dislocation that addresses “identity politics”, “social process” as well as the cinematic (Cloke and Little 2007: 8).

“Dislocation” is defined here as the states that have resulted as people, spaces and social spheres are excluded from China’s government-sponsored consumer-driven hyper-development of the last decades and the new class

systems geared around the market economy (Arrighi 2007; Yu 2015). Dislocation moves in different directions to these urban-centric spaces and its cinema reveals inhabitants being de-centred from more privileged, cosmopolitan lifestyles and cultural dominance, away from protection from sexual crime, physical and psycho-violence. The themes that arise across the genre are melancholia, geo-spatiality, inner home/intra home.

De-centring disrupts the sense of normality and belonging (Stevenson and Waite 2011: 412). It implies distance, disconnection, displacement, isolation, the traumatic status of loss, confusion, alienation, or other inexpressible feelings where “we cannot feel home at home; home loses its specificity, but by the same token homelessness loses its pathos” (Abbas 2015: viii). It implies a mode of analysis that problematises the concept of home when a sense of belonging is lost, removed, destroyed, or abandoned. This thesis textures dislocation as both an active conscious choice and an involuntary status, examining how people and spaces are displaced from, or disturb the “normal organisation” of the urban-normative core of contemporary China.

The Homecoming Quest

The concept of home in this thesis is characterised by its geo-emotional and fluid nature. Home is geo-emotional, that is, the geographical movement or locatability interweaves with a sense of spiritual settlement. The itinerant

characters' geo-emotional journeys illustrate their feelings and responses when they are on the move. Such a concept has become increasingly significant in studying human movement (Datta 2008; Espiritu 2003; Viruell-Fuentes 2006). The notion of home speaks to identity formation and manifests as more psychological than physical (Liu 2018: xviii, xxiii). Rey Chow's definition of home rests on a spiritual note rooted in the geographical identification. She argues that home performs a centripetal force and guiding agency that corrects the misled and confused individuals who are lured or misguided by outside influences that devastate their faith in their physical homeland (Chow 2007). For Chow, home is a "psychical" realm attached to the physical place of origin (Chow 2007: 33) and is grounded within the self no matter how far we travel geographically. This notion of intra-home characterises one group of heroines discussed in the thesis, the returnees, who always have a spiritually rooted origin in mind no matter where they go. There is a collective sentiment leading their home-coming to the countryside.

While the intra-home is one's rooted homeland deep in the heart that travels along with the subject, the inner-home does not necessarily imply a physical location - it is a psychological, subjective realm inhabited by desire and the sense of belonging. Existing scholarship largely defines the notion of home as an ongoing, variant process of constructing new social relations and emotional investments and of Self re-engagement and repositioning - even the sense of

roots can be shaped through mobility and extend beyond physical location, connecting us to different temporalities (Ahmed et al. 2003; Liu 2014; Lehmann 2014; Davidson 2008; Louie 2004). Thus, the concept of inner-home tends to shape multiple citizenships.

The process of home-coming or home-seeking becomes a “psycho-spiritual quest” through which people free themselves from the ego’s repressed identification and form a new set of relationships between the self and the world, thus constituting a “radical revisioning of what one considers oneself to be” (Sargar 2016: 625). In the world of super-fluid modernity, the concept of home-longing sometimes intertwines with that of homecoming as it goes beyond physical origins and embodies or is transformed into a mindset of seeking, the *feeling* of security and proximity. In this way, homecoming problematises and reconfigures the concept of nostalgia. It indicates a longing for a psycho-situatedness which is attached to a “primal” state and spiritual root untouched by the estranging flow of the world. Thus, homecoming epitomises a “never-ending process that perpetuates self” and a desire for “intra-uterine living of eternal longing” (Miao 2022: 80-84). A revisiting or reinterpretation of home becomes a “commitment to learn to dwell in self-reflection’ (Bida 2018: 63). A journey to home or within a homely space can be both geographical and emotional, physical and spiritual.

Geo-emotional travels tend to shape a trans-regional citizenship through which the feeling of identification and intimacy translocates the subject and shapes their emotional migration. Heroines set off on their dislocating home-coming journeys in search of the home they wish to return to. Their destinations are either the once familiar physical “home” that they revisit, or the intimate “homely” feeling that situates their emotional identification and imagination. In this thesis, heroines analysed in the case studies fall into different categories: some are disenfranchised rural dwellers who travel within village spaces and discover agency and power from their marginalisation; some return to their rural home from the city and encounter problematic feeling towards home; some are urbanities whose rural home-seeking reconfigure their location and definition of the self.

The Melancholy Wanderers

Melancholia appears to be a key feature of the cinema of dislocation. In contrast to mourning which is defined as the reaction to “the loss of a loved person, or ...[something] which has taken the place of one”, melancholia evokes:

“a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world...a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches...the disturbance of and an extraordinary diminution in

self-regard and an impoverished ego [that] is absent in mourning” (Freud 1917: 243-246).

For Freud, while mourning involves the emptiness of spaces and environments related to the physically dead, melancholia involves a loss within oneself which potentially fuels the subject with a sense of power that drives one into “narcissistic identification”, drawing to itself “sleepless”, “cathectic energies” (ibid: 250, 253). Applied to dislocation cinema, however, characters make something out of their initial loss and suffering. Their feeling of melancholia serves as an agency or driving force that stimulates their “self-reproaches” towards identity re-shaping. Unlike the work of mourning that is driven by external environments, melancholia engages with the self which grounds the heroines’ ongoing, “sleepless” journeys and “cathectic energies” around self-empowerment. Aligning with Freud, Hatch argues that melancholia plays a key role in the “formation” of the self and in “how subjectivity is produced” (2015: 242). It initially addresses a sense of alienation and gradually leads the subject towards observing the “interrelation” between the self and the (othered) world within “a broader investigation of liminality” (Mamula 2013: 55). In this sense, it is an “opportunity” that makes such emotion “effective and come into the open”, involving both “sickness and cure” (Freud 1917: 245, 251; Kilbourn 2013: 118). The heroines’ “sickness” or pain initiated by their displacement can eventually be “cured” during their journeys. While mourning is a finite process,

melancholia is a persistent state. I argue that the idea of melancholia as a persistent state is echoed in the protagonists' ongoing, persistent journeys. In this response to loss, a person feels his or her pain in an internal way. Even if there are many people experiencing a similar kind of pain at the same time, loss is still experienced as personal. Melancholia is particular to individuals and this is also the feature of the dislocation films. Characters all experience dislocation to various degrees, but their responses, reactions and solutions are particular to each of them. Therefore, melancholia is the catalyst for self-healing. Artistically, it evokes an "aesthetic sensibility, a way of experiencing time...a visionary condition and aesthetic experience" (Brereton 2015: 193). It requires a sense of process and time and the ways in which the notion of duration is visually sensed and depicted, echoing the concept of journeying and the travel narrative and cinematography in dislocation films.

Historiographical approaches

Early Chinese cinema (1920s-30s) used the nationalist symbolic of female bodies to educate women about their "social obligation" (Fan 2015). Women should not be corrupted by the cosmopolitan, capitalist pleasure; they should adopt "a modern consciousness [and] go through the ritual of sacrificing themselves by fulfilling their socially designate political and biological responsibilities" (Fan: 43-47). Socialist cinema (1940s-1970s) shaped a "state feminism" (Dai 2002: 8) and politicised pseudo-femalehood (Berry 2006).

Subsequently, the Fifth Generation's self-orientalised female depictions were personified in the bodies of rural women, evoking "allegorical primitive passions" and "poetic glorification" of Chineseness (Chow 1995: 22; Xiao 2017: 60). They re-situated a rapidly globalising China through the performance of power and modernity where the portrayal of exploitation and weakness was projected onto female bodies (Larson 2017). It could be said that recent Chinese cinema promotes a "new globalized form of commodity" through women in the new era (Xiao: 177).

Compared to representations of the new social class of wealthy, neoliberal citizens, little academic attention has been paid to how Chinese women inhabit rural cinema and, specifically, to representations of the experience of women in pain (Yu 2018; Liu 2018), and is even less likely to focus on the processes of dislocation. Yet filmic journeys in contemporary Chinese cinema, made by disenfranchised women when ejected from their social role, denied equality, access, and justice, are in search of healing and resolution have become a significant force. They are often apparently fruitless and, tend to lead them away from traditional gender roles and conventional urban-centric spaces and into these realms of dislocation. Voices of displaced women in marginal spaces are largely overlooked in other genres of representation and film makers are marking a re-evaluation of social mapping shifting our attention to neglected social realms. The project aims to contribute to the formulation of a

cinematic place-holder that is powerfully emerging in Chinese cinema with a strong socio-cultural and ideological significance.

Dislocation has been expressed in social, political, economic and cultural frames in cinema. What follows is a snapshot view of various approaches to women's cinematic dislocation in national cinemas which grounds our study in a cycle of films that we can identify globally. Dislocated women in Chinese cinema has aesthetic, thematic, and cinematographic roots in crime serial drama in the French silent cinema of the 1910s. Films such as *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* (1913-14; 1915-16, Louis Feuillade) depicted the mastering of the female body in disturbing narratives of control. They evoked gender crisis and foregrounded "cinematic and ideological subjectivity [that unveil] another layer of social, cultural, and aesthetic disturbance" (Callahan 2005: 14). In the hands of directors such as Feuillade and Burguet, cinema became a dislocated, illusory medium projecting cultural and ideological disturbance and penetrating towards reality through visual reenactments. Crime, disguise, and women in early French silent cinema shaped a "zone of anxiety" displaced from the stable masculinised socio-cultural realm (ibid: 34).

Filmic representations of dislocation were spatial and temporal, and also culturally specific. Various national cinemas give the theme of dislocation culturally-specific meanings. The geographic and temporal dislocation of

1950-60s Italian cinema, for example, *Red Desert* (1964, Michelangelo Antonioni), depicted women's urban estrangement and ennui (Restivo 2002; Minghelli 2013) or their dangerous journeys through urban hinterlands.¹¹ The post-Fascist period marked the nation's rapid socio-economic development into a global industrial power (Forgacs and Gundle 2007). However, the sense of dislocation in cinema reflected an "unprocessed affect" on those that had experienced the war (Minghelli: 10). Troubled and disturbed memories of trauma were displaced in a period of optimistic socio-economic advancement. Their displaced temporal relations to the world are frequently portrayed through delayed or frozen moments that make them fail to fit in with their community.

Beyond social disorientation, the notion of "cultural dislocation" plays a significant role in the globalised era of "coming-of-age", "colonial experience" in New Zealand cinema (Fore 2001: 134; Fox 2017: 68, 78). Post 1990s films focus on women's inter-colonial journeys and experiences. They stress the "historical and psychological web of political, sexual and economic connections" (Rueschmann 2007: 291) between the UK's past colonies. In women's self-reflexive or autobiographical narrative, traumatic experiences, memories, or feelings of relief are embedded within vast, wild landscapes, distant travels, and encounters with displaced communities.¹² The concept of

¹¹ See also *Blood and Black Lace* (1964, Mario Bava).

¹² See *An Angel at My Table* (1990, Jane Campion) and *Heavenly Creatures* (1994, Peter Jackson).

global migration and identity relocation in a cinema about dislocation produces an “uncanny feeling of being everywhere” (Avery 2014: 93). This echoes Naficy’s (2001) focus on a subject’s locatability and, conversely, a failed connection to home. Butler (2002) takes the theme of dislocation to women’s cinema in transnational and transcultural frames where women’s diasporic travels are represented through locational hybridity, cultural mobility, individual-community relations, and identity struggles.¹³

Displaced lives reflect social and ideological transformations in post-1990s Argentine cinema with the challenges to traditional masculinity during the shift to a market-driven economy (Rocha 2012). Films of this time focus on the un-situated and unbearable distress of middle-class Argentine men pushed towards the edge of the world. Strong professional women with strong personalities struggle to manage the burdens of life. All are dislocated from stable families and social lives.¹⁴

Cinematic dislocation in women’s stories has always been associated with a particular set of cinematographic forms and styles, cultural references, and spatio-psycho relations dictated by urban settings and transformations. This thesis takes dislocation from a counter-urban standpoint and utilises geo-emotional frames. Geo-emotional refers to the interdependence of

¹³ See *Daughters of the Dust* (1991, Julie Dash).

¹⁴ See *Ashes from Paradise* (1997, Marcelo Pineyro).

physical topography and spiritual-emotional experiences of being-in-the-world, as visualised in Halfacree's rural mapping which charts counter-urban psychology - an anxious experience of a compressed modernity which unsettles contemporary identities (Halfacree 1997). Emotive attachments to rural areas and the concomitant mistrust of the cities, will emerge in this thesis as either an involuntary decision of our film protagonists. More importantly, I also move to a different direction and explore how the women's countryside attachments and journeys epitomise an active search and celebration. Geo-emotional frames therefore serve to emphasise the problematic bonds between dislocated women and the spaces they inhabit.

Women's Cinema in China

Women's engagement in Chinese cinema has shifted according to the transformation of the country's socio-political landscape. In the late 1920s and 30s, although women's literary capacity had begun to grow, there were very few female directors in the male-centric film industry at a time when China thought of itself as having a semi-colonial status. Female filmmakers like Xie Caizhen 谢采贞 and Yin Hailing 尹海灵, who had performing and screenwriting backgrounds, focused on women's domestic suffering and the unfair treatment towards female workers in factories.

During the socialist era, the number of female directors increased due to the

state's revolutionary socio-political demands and women's cinema began to voice a socialist vision of female emancipation, displaying an, albeit institutionalized, boost in female authorship and voice. For example, Wang Shaoyan 王少岩's work recounts disenfranchised women's suffering in remote islands and villages and how they are saved by the Red Army.

China's socialist feminism played a key role during the period and is defined as a wave participating in the state's independence movement, the proletarian revolution, and various international socialist anti-imperialist drives, highlighting "the integrated and interdependent relationship between socialism and feminism in the Chinese socialist revolution and construction" (Gilmartin 1995; Wang 2021: 9). Tina-Mai Chen argues that "proletarianization" is the key to the particularity of Chinese socialist feminism (2003: 278). Women's liberation in a socialist way functions as an apparatus for the political emancipation that devastates the capitalist threat and feudal order that represent old China, and speaks to socio-cultural, economic and geopolitical potency.

Women's cinematic authorship has been transformed by and reflected in various different political ideologies in different historical periods in contemporary Chinese history. Female filmmakers configure their artistic ambitions and experimental tendencies according to contemporary

socio-cultural and political backdrops. Filmmakers like Wang Ping 王萍, manifest their experimental capacity in socialist mainstream culture, aesthetic innovation, and political commitment. Their heroines' gendered experience, as Wang Lingzhen argues, performs "strongly individual and shared negotiations" and demonstrates "another layer of embeddedness" of female agency in socialist mainstream narratives through articulating an active, proletarian, female self (Wang 2021: 81, 82). For example, Wang's interconnected objective of interweaving individual emotions and class struggle in *The Story of Liubao Village* (柳堡的故事, 1957) breaks away from the socialist view of romantic love seen as the threat from Western individualism and bourgeois invasion. The heroine is physically and emotionally centre-stage in the film compared to the male and revolution-led content of the original literature. Although limited by technologies and character development, the film shows a clear tendency towards the shaping of an innovative national cinematic style, reconfiguring the female role in both film narratives and film production/adaptation. Through groundbreaking narratives and aesthetics evoking individual emotions and female inner thoughts, filmmakers like Dong Kena 董克娜, also interweave pedagogical modes that feature the heroines' learning itinerary, but at the same time, gradually reveal women's suffering and yearning which in turn leads towards their internal wandering and subjective awakening. They inject aesthetic creativity into a blueprint of socialist values and explore the tensions and

negotiations between the individual and the collective, the male and the female as well as the women's hesitation towards the investigation of the past and their awakening self.

Post-Mao feminism features the need to further women's liberation after political and economic liberation from a self-focused perspective, foregrounding sexual difference and female self-consciousness (Wang 2021: 113). The 1970s was a time of global awareness of Chinese new wave cinema which foregrounded male auteurs on the international stage, and relatively diminished the voice of the female filmmaker. With the state's transformation into a market economy, Li Xiaojiang's concept of market feminism in the 1980s argues that women's liberation should start from but go beyond their self-consciousness in capitalist society - it is critical to devastate the phallogocentric power structure and to socialise women's domestic burden and construct a new socio-ethical order (Li 1983; Barlow 2004). Li opines that women's subjectivity was awakened and developed in parallel with marketisation and commercial consumption, "recover[ing] women's real, natural, feminine singularity...commercialis[ing] their form of self-expression" (Li 1988; Barlow 2004: 253-254). She suggests that the government should never fully represent or take the female position, voice, and perspective. Any authoritative identification should be disavowed and society should let women identify with themselves and not accept the state-established "differential

system” that teaches them to learn female characteristics through a state-assigned definition.

Zhong Xueping (2017) develops Li’s idea and calls for the depoliticisation of gender and feminism, which should be supplanted from class, politics and male contexts. From the 1980s, when Chinese women’s filmmaking reached its climax (Wang 2021: 118), female directors depart from the culturally self-reflexive Fifth Generation, focusing on autobiographical, subjective and personal styles. Experimental approaches involving the awareness of psycho-realism, first-person narration, multi-flashback narratives, non-linear fashions that generate “regressions, suspensions and repetitions” (ibid: 88), and the use of subjective camera, shot/reverse shot exploring gender difference in the post-Mao era, critique mainstream socio-cultural narratives and frame a socialist experimentalist style (both politically and artistically) that reconfigures cultural imaginations and aesthetics. Zhang Nuanxin's 张暖忻 film *Sacrificed Youth* (青春祭, 1985), and Hu Mei's 胡玫 *Army Nurse* (女儿楼, 1984) elicit female subjectivity with hesitation, ambiguity and uncertainty, or as Kaplan argued, a generalised problem about reasserting the collective for all Chinese as well as the dysfunctionality of being individual (1989: 47).

Post-Mao feminism and male-centered mainstream narratives developed Chinese women’s cinema into a universal feminist discourse in the early 1990s

when feminist scholars started to question the fundamental differences between Western and Chinese feminism and the credibility of women's liberation in China (Yuan 1990). The self-questioning of the parasitical nature of Chinese women's liberation asks if China has never had a feminist movement since any so-called feminist movement has always been defined through male-centred narratives that erase women's independent existence. Dai Jinhua's critiques of *Sacrificed Youth* and *Army Nurse* foreground the idea that the female gender is highly politicised and historicised and has been molded by external forces and "historical disasters" and that what represents women's self-recognition is described only as humiliation and despair (1994: 277). Even Huang Shuqin's 黄蜀芹 *Woman, Demon, Human* (人鬼情, 1987), which was seen as the milestone in Chinese feminist cinema, remains problematic regarding the ambivalent and controversial interpretation of the female self. The film epitomises the socialist *xieyi* 写意 (abstract and essentialist) aesthetic, fantasy-realism convergence, stylish manipulations of distancing and the central position of neo-traditionalism, engaging operatic narrative and aesthetics. Particularly, the film deals with sensibility and rationality and prioritises the heroine's individual feelings and struggles, complex human bonding and the heroine's intertwined external and internal battlefronts in a humanistic way: her bitter and traumatic feelings towards her immoral mother, her negative experiences with various men throughout her life, her determination to empower herself by playing male roles on stage, and her

suppressed desire to be recognised as being feminine by the man she admires in real life. Although the film foregrounds real and external female issues and makes internal female pain and consciousness visible, it can be argued that the heroine's subjective awakening is stimulated by her experiences with men and that what has empowered her is Zhong Kui - a fictional, male character in opera, which dislocates her from real femaleness; moreover, the fact that the heroine's physical and psychological attachment to Zhong Kui, who is a spectral figure, suggests further displacement and problematises the credibility of women's self-recognition. However, such ambiguity shapes a critical lens and a narrative of dislocation - through the frustration and confusion arising from their attempts to locate the female self, women constantly develop their responses and answers to the sense of disorientation and fragmentation. Therefore, such a narrative evokes a tendency towards the dislocation style - women are constantly searching on their quest for selfhood encountering both strength and empowerment as well as failure and melancholy.

The 1990s featured reduced institutional support for women's filmmaking largely due to the mainstreaming of the market economy. More women filmmakers turned to commercial cinema with constant shifts and twists between normative and non-standard female personae. Such developments brought new energy to the realm of woman's cinema in the lead up to the 2000s. The new-century Chinese women's cinema provides a means to

“express women’s desires and frustrations, their eagerness to fight for social change and their longing to carve out a space to stage their perceptions of and in the world” (Yu and Lebow 2020: 5). As China entered the WTO, the objective of crafting a “desired China” embodies both internal and external implications - a desire to embrace global interaction and communication as well as an ideological shift towards personal freedom and individuality domestically (Rofel 2007). Since Xi’s regime (2012), the “China Dream” concept has positioned women as significant contributors to the state’s new economy. Women filmmakers have inserted themselves into the “post-WTO desiring machine” domestically and internationally (Marchetti 2021: 125).

Moreover, Chinese female directors’ talent has become increasingly visible on the global stage. Filmmakers like Chloé Zhao and Ann Hui espouse their focus through transnational and diasporic journeys and experiences, international film festivals, and engagement with their global peers, addressing domestic themes as well as global concerns. In this way, their dislocating journeys become a positive agency that drives them towards embracing a broader global network geo-culturally and cinematically.

From Mao’s iconic iron woman and female victim enlightened and rescued by revolutionary male heroes to flawed, selfish urban ladies in Ning Ying’s 宁瀛 *Perpetual Motion* (无穷动, 2005) and to the self-centred, undutiful intellectual

heroine in Yang Lina's 杨荔钠 *Spring Tide* (春潮, 2019) who erases male presence, we see a constant re-discovery and re-interpretation of female desire that projects the journey of a new China.

Thus far I have explored dislocation as a recurrent theme throughout the history of Chinese women's cinema. Women directors' focus tends to shape various cycles according to China's shifting socio-political and cultural landscapes. The term 'cycle' appears to allow for films to be discussed in a nuanced way, particularly films that are intertwined with social, political, economic developments. Moreover, from the production side, past women's films about female displacement could be grouped by production mode, for example, state-sponsored socialist films made by women along with the increased number of independent women's films since the Reform. Marginal women's stories have always been depicted from the revolutionary models in *Red Detachment*, to the representative figure embodying female subjectivity, desire, suffering and confusion in *Pingguo*.

Methodology

The thesis contributes an analysis of the representation of women in 21st century Chinese cinema from the distinct perspective of narratives of dislocation. Recent portrayals of women-in-motion permit a new focus on

previously overlooked rural and marginalised settings. Through physical/spiritual journeys and geographical/gender mappings, their double otherness is made visible. Kaplan (1989) suggests that recent Chinese female cinema foregrounds an awareness of sexual difference by delineating a fragmented and more authentic female subjectivity. Incompleteness and flawed expressions ironically succeed in expressing something more complete “in addition to national allegory” (Kaplan: 43). Starting from Kaplan’s position, this thesis will argue that women’s individual sufferings project larger socio-cultural and political frustrations. Moreover, this research on rural female bodies and journeys is extrapolated into a discussion of an emerging sub-genre of Chinese rural cinema that has previously lacked academic attention. It looks not only at socio-geographical dislocation, but also at the spiritual realm as it is evoked in cultural, gender, and psychological dislocations.

This research discusses cinema of dislocation as a socio-aesthetic and interactive film category/sub-genre. Genre studies have been theorised in various approaches. It is defined as “category, kind, or form of film distinguished by subject matter, theme, or techniques” (Geduld and Gottesman 1973: 73). Some scholars stress its formulaic and systematic quality and indicate film genre as “a flexible story formula based upon a body of conventions intuitively shared by the audience and the filmmakers”, a

“conventionalized production system” and “an important ingredient in any film’s narrative image” (Grindon 2011: 46; Schatz [1981]2012: 110; Neale 2012: 181). They underline its flexible cross-fertilizing nature and potentials along with conventions and history (Kitses 1970; Neale 1980; Klinger 2012: 109). Others focus on socio-cultural dimensions, emphasising spectator response, ideological system and the intentionality in genre fabrications (Kaplan 1978; Tudor 1986: 3-10; Grindon; Neale; Grant; Sobchack and Klinger; 2012). Some scholars emphasis the shared socio-cultural experiences and ideologies among the filmmakers in genre construction. They argue that genre is not intentionally classified groupings and criteria, but “depend[ing] on the particular culture within which we are operating” with “a pronounced social element” and “external influences” regarding historical and aesthetic concerns. (Tudor 2012: 7; Grindon 2012: 57). Film genre shows variations under sets of themes, a “volatile combination of disequilibrium (excess, difference) and equilibrium (containment, repetition)” and different modes of “narrative system, regulated orders of its potentiality” (Klinger 2012: 109; Neale 1980: 20). Genre, therefore, deproblematizes cultural dominance and prioritises mutual recognition, filmmakers’ application and utility through form, style, and particular world views. It is charted by a fundamental familiarity and acquired iconography with genre characters having ordinary identities but unlimited power, inhabitability, and ability that highlight the genre’s ideology.

In using non-urban spaces as trope and visual motif, this thesis will draw on Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang's probing look at a wide range of marginalised subjects over the last two decades in China and the related anomie found in Chinese cinema. Pickowicz's notion of the post-socialist dystopian - the "alienated...mode of thought and behavior" in China's marketisation and in its film landscapes initiates the discussion of a widescale marginalisation stimulated by ruthless advancement (1994: 61-2). Yingjin Zhang indicates that marginality is an "emergent player" that "pursues reality" in Chinese cinema, cooperating with "art, politics, [and] capital", mapping marginality as a powerful prism for art and politics (2007: 70-71).

Women in rurality embody various forms of alterity, the "state or quality of being other, or of not being of the self" (Hazell 2009: xvii), measured around "nonself (world), oneself as Other, and Other self" (Zahavi 1999: 195). Their dislocated status is interdependent with and relational both to themselves and to the world around them. Dislocated women constantly adopt various forms of otherness. "The Other within" refers to the imagined identity that leads to self-denial, or the self-realisation of oneself being an individual developed from his/her interaction with the community (Alphen 1991: 1-18). "The veiled gendered Other" is defined as the physical and symbolic unveiling of women being a way of female agency and emancipation, but it also foregrounds the questions of the resistance of unveiling - the uneasiness, insecurity felt by the

long oppressed women who fear to reveal their true self to the world (Kapur 2018” 120-150). There are also the idealised “identical other” imagined by the disenfranchised body, the “vocal other” which demands voice and visibility, and the “central other” which adopts a hierarchal position among the marginal (Hazell: xviii). This thesis foregrounds the question of both the “recognition and discrimination of the categories of self and other” (ibid: xvii) regarding the displaced spaces, the inhabitants, and their identities.

My focus also constitutes a countervailing view that stands in opposition to the culturally dominant “Urban Generation” narrative espoused by Zhen Zhang ten years ago. He claimed that films made after the late 1990s portray “the rise of the new market economy and mass culture” in China which was at the threshold of the new century. The character of the new generation of Chinese cinema has been driven by the “intensity” of urbanisation (Zhang 2007: 1-2). As a means to broaden and reposition the mega-city focus, this project explores how counter-urban cinema also shaped a new cinematic generation. It will demonstrate how counter-urban spaces became a powerful territorial platform showing an alternative or complementary side to China’s hyper-development from the economic globalisation and liberalisation from the late 1990s to the recent “poverty crusade” scheme.¹⁵

¹⁵ The state started to encourage the privatisation of small-medium enterprises, setting up special economic zones for foreign market exchanges from the 1990s. In 2001 China joined the WTO which enabled it to embrace further international economic co-operations. “Poverty crusade”: one of the key themes of Xi Jinping’s second five-year term in 2017 resettled millions of marginalised rural dwellers in new, state-subsidised homes. See Minqi Li and Dale Wen, “China: Hyper-Development and

One of the unique aspects of this thesis is to argue that the journey narrative and aesthetics of dislocation cinema is grounded in Chinese arts and traditions, namely, ancient Chinese poetry and Chinese watercolour painting. Major themes involve individuals depicted against the vastness of nature in spiritual pursuit for inner satisfaction and nourishment obtained from nature, hometown laments, spatialised attachment and non-belonging in exile, frontier and homecoming poetry and landscape paintings. I explore how the theme of dislocation has been ever-present over time, connecting China's ancient arts and contemporary forms such as cinema.

Kiki Yu (2019) makes a compelling argument about the interconnection between Chinese cinema and China's literary tradition in her discussion of "image-writing", a style of sensing and writing through visuals as an aesthetic expression and as cultural innovation in contemporary Chinese documentary. Yu argues that existing scholarship around documentaries is mostly based on Western film theories and that "image-writing", or loose text (*san wen* 散文) aesthetics requires the use of a different research approach rooted in Chinese artistic and socio-cultural reality. In Yu's detailed analysis of Zhao Liang's 赵亮 *Behemoth* (悲兮魔兽, 2019), in the use of sound and visuals, parallelism and

Environmental Crisis." *Socialist Register 2007: Coming to Terms with Nature*, vol 43. 130-146. <https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5861/2757>; See Tom Phillips, "From shacks to des res: one village's great leap in China's march to the future," *The Guardian*, January 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/07/xi-jinping-eradicate-rural-poverty-china>.

juxtapositions, especially the impulse of the voiceless, we see strong associations between images and Chinese essay traditions, all of which contribute to the filmmaker's personal political expressiveness. The ways the dislocation filmmakers capture images parallels the way a loose text author shapes his or her voice and words - like the writers letting their brushes flow, the filmmakers use the camera to create a brush-stroke effect. Both the loose text authors and the image-writing filmmakers tend to shape an autonomous territory with their visuals or words.

This analysis is related also to my concept of docu-cinematic style where fiction filmmakers apply documentary styles and techniques for realistic inscription and a sense of participation while fusing theatricalised or surreal exposures in portrayals of the everyday. My concept of the journey narrative and cinematography are also closely associated with the conceptual backdrop of Chinese ancient poetry and watercolour paintings. Both Yu's and my positions expose how the characteristics of a particular genre or category in Chinese cinema are grounded in Chinese cultural particularity.

Interdisciplinarity

Being interdisciplinary is the key to my research and to the proposed genre of dislocation itself. Writing from a non-Film Studies perspective has brought about a different structuring and positioning of the ideas informing our

reception of the idea of dislocation: although film is not reality, it speaks or responds to reality. As the particular nature of the dislocation genre is one of transformation, movement and travel, it constantly varies and develops just as our world and society does.

Historical studies have allowed me to observe the flow and evolution of ideas, themes and styles that ground my argument which is closely links our current era with our past. Social studies, especially of contemporary events are interwoven with film analysis, strengthening the idea that dislocation cinema is the genre of our time which interconnects diverse fields, adding to its tangibility and practical value. While we are travelling with the protagonists diegetically, we are also moving along with our era and the world. This thesis examines ancient Chinese culture (poetry and art), develops an intertextual mode of analysis and contributes to the formation of a methodology for Chinese cinema that explores the original aesthetics and themes of a national cinema – shaping a national-as-method approach. We see how the profound ideas from our tradition and history have influenced and echo contemporary culture and society. Therefore, interdisciplinary research supports the meaning and intention of this project.

Thus far I have introduced the roots of the cinema of dislocation. However, the phrase “cinema of dislocation” itself first appeared in Lloyd’s (2001) work on

contemporary Australian cinema. In *The Castle* (1997, Rob Sitch) a suburban family lives in a self-built, temporary home, a great triumph of meticulousness, near the edge of Melbourne, by Australia's busy Tullamarine Airport. Lloyd defines it as a "cinematic backyard which includes the kind of architectural castoffs only visible at the very margins of suburbia, where the city meets a wasteland or a non-residential zone" (2001: 171). This concept articulates a friction between physical and the spiritual shelters as a moment of dislocation appears when the "overlap between the house and the home starts to slide apart" (ibid: 177). Therefore, the fluid quality, constant formation, and the inhabitants' actions are key to the shaping and definition of cinematic dislocation. The particular locality provides "an unusual moment of contemporary relevance [where everyday life is] made strange". Dislocated spaces are often "ignored in favour of downtowns and wide-open spaces by both film-makers and planners" (Lloyd 2002: 125-126). The status of being sidelined by the urban centre is the starting point of the thesis. The "castle" represents the only safe space for the "socially and economically marginal" when encountering the speed of modernisation (ibid: 127). This thesis maps Lloyd's analysis to the Chinese context foregrounding his notion of how people have created a defensive space in order to survive what would otherwise be bewildering levels of change in their lives.

Moving, then, to Chinese cinema, Yingjin Zhang's concept of polylocality in a

globalising China and the dialogue between Lloyd and Zhang's positions situate this thesis' starting point. Zhang (2010) argues that cinematic space is socially shaped in ever emergent processes, rather than naturally formed. This ever-emerging space continuously makes demands on, formulates, and transforms our experiences, requiring a human narrative to construct and shape it. The translocality embedded in Zhang's concept implies "multiple sites of identification" generated by the hyper-flow of people, information, and their relations with space (Zhang: 8). Polylocality indicates the experience of quotidian immediacy, that is "lived" and "improvised" (Wang 2005: 28-29). Dislocation therefore becomes a process of negotiation, either successful or failed, and not simply a refusal to engage or an involuntary transposition – and the journey's taken can be seen as physically and spiritually (re)claiming one's territorial ownership. What distinguishes Zhang and Lloyd's positions is the relationship between places and the inhabitants of those places: Lloyd argues for the dignified defence of and "passionate participation" in spatial belongings (2001: 127); Zhang looks at the "explored feelings of deprivation, disillusion, despair, disdain, and indignation" (2010: 13). This thesis develops from both sides of the argument, exploring both attachments and disengagements between the dislocated people and the spaces they associate with.

Past research on dislocation in Chinese cinema has mostly focused on Hong Kong cinema in which dislocation elicits melancholia driven by simultaneous

feelings of nostalgia and anxiety (Zhang 1997; Lai 2001; Lo 2001; Fore 2001; Abbas 1997, 2018; Alfaro 2018; Tong 2018; Li 2020). Geraldine Pratt (2014) suggests that in Hong Kong cinema, dislocation represents feelings within a consumer culture under turbulent political transformation, such as Hong Kong's history of colonialism, the handover to China in 1997, and the more recent Hong Kong-mainland migration. These changes generate different types of nostalgia-driven dislocation and deal with people's longing and desire for the past. Aligning with Pratt's idea, Jean Ma (2010) argues that diasporic Chinese cinema opens a different perspective on debates about memory and nostalgia. This thesis focuses on the mainland which has been studied less in existing scholarship.

The distinctions between Hong Kong and mainland dislocation films are as follows:

1. While HK films about dislocation often stress the drifters' aimless wandering and chance encounters as if people are thrown into vacuum spaces and "unrooted", detached from their homeland in the shade of globalization, mainland dislocation films tend to take the destabilised mentality as a starting point which stimulates the characters' search and journey into identity and place making, thus strengthening their sense of location and physical/spiritual attachment to space.

2. Dislocation means that we “cannot feel home at home; home loses its specificity, but by the same token homelessness loses its pathos” (Abbas 2010:

1). It is Hong Kong cinema’s evocation of this sense of dislocation that elicits an immediate intuitive response in other global cosmopolitans. Travels and spaces in Hong Kong cinema evoke a sense of everywhere-ness, a universal embodiment of spatial displacement. Mainland dislocation films place more emphasis on local and regional characteristics and their connections to the globalised, urbanised world while Hong Kong cinema heightens the aesthetics and concepts of disconnection and disappearance.

3. From an aesthetic point of view, filmmakers of diasporic dislocation largely insist on avant-garde, experimental narratives and cinematography to externalise people’s confusing, disorientating and uneasy states of mind. Characters’ ghost presence and performative styles are adopted to narrate historical/past times and entangling chronotopes and dramatic polarisation between narrative and visual speeds show a strong tendency of the indulgence in fantasy. Such a style blurs the boundary of fantasy and reality, heightening the effect that people are unplanted from current time and space and entangled by dreams and the vertiginous past in.

Mainland dislocation aesthetics underpin a sense of tangibility - a more “touchable” connection between people and space through the aesthetics of

inscriptive reality, observative documentary style and people's real-life dilemmas. They emphasise the physical relation between space and people. HK dislocation aesthetics, in contrast, imply the pessimistic feeling of being immersed and sunk into the temporariness of the alienating super-flow of the current era. The mainland aesthetic has a positive undertone through which characters turn out to be actively searching for a re-connection to space and a sense of belonging.

4. Coining Abbas's (1997) idea of "poetics of disappearance" in Hong Kong cinema, characters are dislocated by and within the mismatch of time, there is nothing representative of the current identity of the place, while in mainland dislocation films, displacement is an engine and has agency. Through re-memory of an imagined past with art and space-time reconfigurations, Hong Kongers in the films make sense of their post-colonial sentiments with a sense of mourning: they are *sunk into* time and search for their identity from the past. Meanwhile mainland dislocation films tend to focus on the subjects' mobility *along with* time - they are moving forward with time and as the world transforms.

Some might draw connections between Wong Kar-wai's narrative and style with Jia Zhangke as both deal with translocal displacement and fit into Yingjin Zhang's notion of polylocality where the national becomes the relational and

the local: the regional is transplanted into the global and these spaces eventually become fluctuating and productive. However, this is a point of distinction between Hong Kong and mainland cinematic dislocations. Wong's use of imagery evokes disappointment, missed encounters and the tantalising charge these experiences carry. Characters wander aimlessly as if they are floating in a vacuum detached from their space and time. Meanwhile, mainland directors tend to depict a more complex dislocation sentiment. For example, Jia Zhangke and Zhang Ming's work extensively use their own hometowns as the films' settings, stretching between people's destabilised mentality, their floating states and their determined passion or faith in their homeland - while being overwhelmed by a sense of loss, confusion and shock caused by globalisation and urbanization. The characters are not diasporic characters who are unable to sew up the broken pieces of time and space, they actively engage with the processes of displacement and seek their way out. And the docu-realism in mainland dislocation narratives contributes to the sense of tangibility in the characters' responses to the feeling of uncertainty and dispossession compared with the Hong Kong diasporic dislocation narratives in which highly dramatized and fantasied images, avant-garde and experimental narratives or explicit expressions of disorientated chronotopes dominate.

In my view, dislocation describes an inhabitants' physical belonging to a

location; it also spiritually represents their faith in this identity that refuses a colonialising modernisation where such globalisation becomes a process of spatial and identity devastation. Thus, any analysis of dislocated spaces is inevitably poly-sited. It has to acknowledge a person's attachment to, identification with and participation in a sense of home or its loss. At the same time while recognising spatial dysfunctionality due to people's blocked access to or failed negotiation with space. As discussed above, dislocation implies physical homes and spiritual settlements, so the site of dislocation functions as a sacred site modulating people's ownership of a specific identity and of attachments to places away from the invasive urban penetration.

Chapters about contexts and literature reviews will interweave general cinematic discussions with socio-historical contexts. It maps a broader picture of and the correlation between real-life events and films made in the eras. For the chapters about film case studies, I will first provide a director review, including their social and academic backgrounds, their thematic and aesthetic interests, and explore what has shaped their "dislocation" styles and their focuses on dislocation. The section will ask how the dislocation cinematography and the directors' backgrounds relate to each other and what academic and socio-cultural circumstances connect these directors. Then I will categorise and discuss the films by "theme and narrative", "cinematography" and "flexibility" which are the features that shape the formation of a film genre,

together with “network of production”, in the case of my thesis is, the connection between filmmakers. Each case study that I will present represents a distinct dislocated space that de-centres the urban-centric “leitmotif” (*zhuxuanlü* 主旋律) cinema, “a heavily state-sponsored film genre shaped by both the market and state mechanisms in the postsocialist reform” (Xiao 2011: 158). By focusing on representations of and relationships between humans and social spaces I will texture the definition of the cinema of dislocation with new and culturally different work: the derelict ruins of urban lives, remote rural locations, and the urban-rural middle-space (i.e. the township/suburbia) with specific Chinese characteristics. The project observes how socio-historical facts of dislocation are embedded in the physical, cultural, and spiritual geographies in contemporary Chinese cinema.

Sources

The main sources of the projects are films and secondary literature, along with other primary sources, such as newspaper articles and governmental statistics. The literature consists of academic journals, books, and papers, ranging from cinematic specificities to wider socio-cultural approaches. Each chapter will comprise a section contextualising the socio-historical foundations of the film narrative and film theories, locating them in wider frames. The project deploys film analysis to support my argument while applying secondary literature to it. It textures cinematographic traits, aesthetic interpretations, and narrative

structures of a Chinese cinema of dislocation. The relationship between space and women, the films' journeying and spatial narratives, and their correlations with different socio-historical contexts are the major focus for the film readings. This shapes the cinema of dislocation as a specific film category. Apart from drawing on existing scholarship in film analysis, the project also discusses how cinema reflects the real-life situations of dislocated Chinese women.

The cinema of dislocation tends to reflect on particular socio-cultural phenomena. Films cannot provide evidence for understanding reality, but it is vital to understand the contexts that they draw upon and that inspire them, to set out the social and historical issues for the analysis of the fictional sources. Cinema is a "slice of reality" that "imparts a realistic, [psychological] effect to its viewer" (Carroll 1996: 78). Therefore, I will use secondary literature in order to understand and interpret the films, exploring how far and with what purpose the director addresses real issues. I take film theories of, and film critics' views on, cinema and reality as the foundation of correlating the two types of sources. Aumont indicates that film analysis is not about cinematic materials alone (1992: 76). It "requires an in-depth preliminary study of social history itself...it is only by studying the connections, inversion, and disparities between these two realms that film analysis can be accomplished". Turner's (2006: 236) notion of cinema being a social practice suggests that cinema generates different meanings for different spectatorship. Spectators "decode" films through their

“competences and expectations”. As an academic researcher, my spectatorial position is to show the kind of issues that the director focuses on. Therefore, studying related contexts examines how cinema engenders socio-cultural meanings through its visuals.

The notion of distance is central to both the film texts/themes and the relation between textual and contextual sources. By investigating the distance, we observe what we desire and lack. Mikkel argues that reality in cinema is “based on the concept of observation” and “cannot be separated from the social reality” (2002: 117). In the case of film research, this implies the researcher’s distinct, unique critical reading stems from observing and analysing the distance and connection between fiction and reality.

Fan observes that “reconstruction” is central to the “understanding of the mode of temporality and life” in cinema (2015: 204). Studying socio-historical contexts alongside films makes the contexts into “primary sources” - the writer, director and camera man’s standpoints and the foundation of the film’s tone and narrative; while the film itself becomes the “secondary” that re-interprets reality and the director’s intention. As a film researcher, it is key to acknowledge the social issues behind a film. It allows film readings to reside in, be supported by, or have a relation with concrete social discourses. Its narrative, aesthetics, and tone cannot be viewed in two-dimensions or

evaluated in a vacuum. Therefore, the purpose the cinema of dislocation serves is, to ask how the subject matters are located within the public/social world, how far they are away from their desired reality, and how the real situations create such gaps. It is a way of exploring the re-presentation of life, drama, or the drama of life.

Pang opines that cinema is “a system that provides space for differences to play against each other and for new ideas to evolve” (2007: 216). “Difference” in my discussion implies the diegetic women’s dislocation to the dominant world and to what extent it reflects the parallel situations of the represented women in reality. Thus, cinema is not the absolute projection of reality, but the “optical necessity” of it (ibid: 215). Pang also argues that developing from the Chinese Left-wing cinema (1932-1937), Chinese cinema offers a critical distance for the evaluation of the relationship between on-screen and off-screen realities instead of creating an alluring on-screen reality that encourages escapism. It “solicits” rather than creates meanings (Pang 2002: 200). Therefore, acknowledging what happens in reality when examining films is the condition for my critical judgement.

Thus, dislocation engages both diegetic contents and contextual approaches in cinema. It asks how far fictional reality is dislocated from the physical one, how close they are associated with each other, and why such (dis)connections

or distances emerge in this particular type of cinema. If it is intentional, what purpose does it serve in different films' circumstances? This study will not go too far into sociological research. The films and the secondary sources will be made to work together to espouse a critical dislocation (between film and reality) in film texts - what is omitted, condensed, or reconstructed in films, and why such decisions are made. Through some director statements and secondary interview materials, I will trace the voice of the directors and to what extent they intended to present reality through their cinematography and narrative.

I have chosen a selection of filmmakers as the representative of the rest ones in this thesis. They conform to my definition of dislocation filmmakers, there is a diverse range, some are superstars; some are independent filmmakers who rarely make commercial or mainstream films or are active in international film festivals; some are new-comers in the industry. They speak very clearly to the film category. This allows us to see the range of various categories of directors working towards the shaping of the genre.

Most directors examined in the case studies in this thesis are male due to their larger proportion. As shown in the appendix, 12 out of the 78 dislocation directors in the table are female. This thesis analyses the work of some of the key female filmmakers such as Yang Lina 杨荔钠, Yang Rui 杨蕊, Zeng Zeng

曾贈, Chai Chunya 柴春芽, Teng Congcong 滕丛丛 and De Gena 德格娜. Furthermore, quite a few of the dislocation films made by female directors were released after 2020 after this thesis was completed. These directors include Niu Xiaoyu 牛小雨, Liu Juan 刘娟, and Min Jing 闵静. Sadly, much of the key female directors' work is not relevant to the rural setting and so cannot be included in the thesis. A renewed focus on female directors and an exploration of how dislocation shapes an alternative gendered subjectivity would allow me to develop some key areas in the future.

Thesis synopsis

Chapter 1 first historicises the concept of Chinese identity and its location which grounds the notion of *dislocation* and how the disengaged grouped have been dislocated. Then it provides an overview of the concept of cinematic dislocation through history. Through existing scholarship on spatial mapping and displacement, female imagery and embodiment, rural studies and rural cinema, I develop my position from past research and discuss the gaps in previous scholarship, the significance of the concept, and its uniqueness in Chinese cinema. Following the conceptualisation of the cinema of dislocation, the chapter will moves on to a brief historiography of cinematic dislocation in various national cinemas and in Chinese cinema. This chapter will finally discuss how cinematic representations of displaced women have changed over time. By looking at the early Chinese cinema of the 1930s to the most

contemporary period, the notion of dislocation as a process in Chinese cinema and culture will be made visible.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the category of “women’s dislocated cinematic journeys *within* remote areas”, the former focuses on socio-historical and cinematic contexts, the later the detailed case studies. As this thesis focuses on counter-urban dislocations and related films in the 21st century China (rural, township and minority dislocation), chapter 2 contextualises the three types of dislocation in the 21st century China and provides a chronological discussion of dislocation films made along with socio-historical changes, including political events, policies and socio-economic transformation.

Chapter 3 examines particular films about women’s internal dislocated journeys in remote areas. This section firstly provides director studies, then moves on to the case studies, discussing how the representation of regional cultures has shaped “primitive” zones that formulate and “pin” women into specific positions. Then it analyses the case studies regarding the elements that shape a film genre together with network of directors, that are, themes/narrative, cinematography and flexibility. Heroines in the films are all from and active in their native, displacing areas. Their travels are limited within those places, i.e. villages, townships and minority areas. This chapter finally evaluates the characteristics of such a film category.

Chapter 4 and 5 examine the theme of women *going to* or *move between* displaced areas. Subjects in those films are granted more freedom geographically and physically. The film analysis in chapter 5 lands on how the films aesthetically expose such contexts. Therefore, Chapter 4 firstly explores the association between Chinese exile, homecoming and frontier poetry. It draws out distinct parallels between the visualised language in poetry and the film language in the dislocation cinema to be discussed in the case studies in chapter 5. It then contextualises social, historical and aesthetic themes of this category and shows the chronology of the films and how they relate to changes in the environment. It provides a literature review of themes to be discussed in the films. A literature review of the concept of home and home-coming is crucial. It grounds the notion of dislocated journeys becoming the home-seeking journeys for the subjects. It discusses the problematic definition of and people's attachments to home and the flexible notion of home-coming. This chapter then contextualises Chinese internally reversed migration, especially the situations and problems of female migrant workers. The second section discusses middle-class urban women's circumstances in 21st century China and their problems, such as gender and sexuality, career and employment, family and mental health. It offers the foundation for approaching the films and discussing the meaning of the urban subjects' dislocating travels to the countrysides.

Chapter 5 firstly provides networks of the directors, then moves on to the analysis of the film case studies. Subjects consist of two categories. They are either the returnees from the city to their rural/township origins or the middle-class urban women who set off their journeys to remote regions. Following the same structure as in Chapter 3, this chapter is also divided by the network of production, theme and narrative, cinematography and flexibility. As most of the filmmakers came from fine arts background and the themes focus on travelling-in-between-ness, the travelling perspective in traditional Chinese landscape painting also becomes one of the distinctive features of the films. Along with the director studies, I draw comparisons between paintings and cinema and show how the painterly aesthetics have influenced the cinematic visuals. The films are also set in rural, township and minority settings. Subjects are either female migrant workers who travels between cities and remote areas, rural/township women who have been educated or dwelt in the city and finally return to their hometowns, or middle-class urban women whose journeys to the dislocated function as a way of re-searching for a sense of home and belonging.

The Epilogue concludes the project with a developed definition of the Chinese cinema of dislocation. It stresses the significance of cinematic dislocation, discusses the contribution of this project, how it challenges existing

scholarship on related area, and suggests a broader scope of this concept for future research. The networks of the directors and thematic elements build on the network of expertise and cultures. It will reach the point where the peculiar and unique cinematography about the dislocation cinema is crystalized and will clarify narratives and stories about dislocation that make a genre.

CHAPTER 1

Conceptualising and Historicising the Dislocated Cinema and Disenfranchised Women in Chinese Contexts

In this thesis, “rural” is a category which is defined in contradistinction to “urban” so that the concepts become part of a binary discourse that exists in mutual dependency. However, in the course of the thesis, we will look at the extremes of these binaries to find the liminal spaces which might, like Yin and Yang in their transitional phases, generate new possibilities for people as they move through or in between these spaces. This thesis interrogates the categories of rural and urban as the remote and civilised places that have been historically placed in contradistinction. Rural refers to domains that exist in geographical domains outside urban locations where people are engaged in the “sociological concerns of farming, development, community, [and] migration”, domains that are regularly marginalised politically and economically. Yet, since the late-2000s, and especially after the UN’s establishment of International Day of Rural Women (2008) there has been an increasing number of global forum discussions, research and projects about rural women’s socio-economic significance, all of which have become infused with new topics of changing patterns of “consumption”, “resources” and “the role(s) of women” (GFF 2010: Block 2010: 13-24; FAO 2011: 39-61; OECD 2011: 10-11; Bonnano et al. 2015: xviii-xiv; ILO 2019: 2-6).

Section 1: Dislocation in Chinese Cinema

1930s Shanghai, a vulnerable prostitute wandering through dangerous, luring streets, struggles to find a space to survive;¹⁶ 21st-century northern China village, a female victim of domestic abuse wanders around the village planning to murder her husband.¹⁷ Cinema in China tells us that the displacement of vulnerable women is always with us, and that there is no end to their journeys. Their search is for somewhere to stand and for a gender identity with practical solutions to social marginalisation. This chapter addresses the geo-emotional, physical, social and spiritual dislocations that have emerged as motifs in Chinese cinema of the twentieth-twenty-first centuries through an analysis of visual displacement and cinematic disorientation.

Cinematic representations of dislocation to some extent focus our attention on real socio-economic conditions and therefore take on a particular urgency in contemporary Chinese society. Over the past three decades since the Reform (1976), the urban population has increased by 32 percent; better living conditions and job opportunities, along with the state's economic and developmental urban prioritization, have drawn rural migrants to larger cities (Xing and Zhang 2013: 2). By 2015, the population of rural-to-urban relocation rate was at 54.8 percent, 50.9 percent of the migrants work in non-agricultural

¹⁶ *The Goddess*, (*nüshen* 神女 1934, Wu Yonggang 吴永刚).

¹⁷ *The Coffin in the Mountain*, (*xin mi gong* 心迷宫 2014, Xin Yukun 忻钰坤).

employment (Lam et al. 2015: 9-11). From the 1950s, the increase in the urban population has been especially affected by the establishment of the *hukou* 户口 system which has made it advantageous to live in the city: urban residency grants access to local public school and healthcare systems, increases legal rights and social protection (Xing and Zhang: 3). In the first few years, an urban *hukou* only promised better jobs, but now one even has to have a *hukou* in order to gain approval for property purchases in major cities. Therefore, *hukou* conversion for rural people signifies greater socio-economic security and higher social status.

However, despite an ongoing dissatisfaction with life in the countryside, a phenomenon of reversed migration has also become visible in recent years. Reversed migration creates contradictory rural experiences of dislocation. By 2014 declining job opportunities, low growth in low-skilled work wages during the economic downturns/slowdowns, exclusions from social welfare, and unsecured legal protection in employment have decelerated migrant flows, which are down by 3 percent since 2010 (Lam et al. 2005: 9-11). Migrant exclusion is reflected in a new social space, the “urban-villages”(*chenzhong cun* 城中村) - overcrowded, old urban residential units with outdated facilities specifically for migrant workers.

Concentrated socio-economic development has ushered in distinct changes in

the rural-social fabric. Chinese social dislocation manifests in a gap between the past and the present, the rural and the urban, as rural underdevelopment vulnerability, as the negative experiences and failed hopes, and of rural migrant frustration in cities. The discomfort of the floating populations lead to various states of dislocation in all these contexts. The “informal settlement” and “unregulated living and working space” in cities has triggered an increased number of returning/reverse migrants, the migrant workers who go back to their villages (Wu et al. 2013: 1919). From 1999 to 2015, 23.8% of the migrant workers returned to their homes, the percentage that they remained in the villages in 2015 (71.1%) was 14% higher than that in 1999 (57.1%) (Bai et al. 2015: 4153). However, once back home, they face the situation of double dislocation as village redevelopment has changed their familiar home environment (ibid). Thus, this double demolition of home and identity is highlighted by their status of being pushed behind from the central development process.

On the other hand, a sense of safety and stability in the country and an increased capacity to use natural resources for rural renovations (with the skills and expectations learned in their experience of urban employment), and the confidence and hierarchy of being returners motivate the rural homecomings. However, a crisis in agricultural livelihood, the lack of infrastructure and natural resources, unaffordable farming equipment,

increasing taxation and state quotas, widening income disparities, underdeveloped local business dynamics, and the misused state fiscal support still make Chinese rural populations and urban communities “two nations” - the “seudonyms for ‘successful’ and ‘failed’ ” (Murphy 2002; Song 2017; Unger 2016; Lu 2006; Bramall 2006: 324). For the returners an exaggerated feeling of being part of an under-represented and remote hinterland dislocated from the advancing, politically established, and dominant urban environment creates an alternative cultural realm, marked by lack of industry, underperforming economies and, more importantly, the difficulties of situating oneself and an acute awareness of fundamental gaps between what they have lost within such double-dislocation. All of these factors are made visible in the film texts in this thesis.

Cinematic dislocation as a particular category began to emerge in 1940s homecoming films which took as their subjects postwar Shanghai and the returning intellectuals who had contributed to the war effort in the countryside during the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945). Produced by the major Shanghai studios such as Wenhua and Kunlun, the films’ key themes involved the returners’ estrangement when denied access to their urban origins. Such physical and symbolic failures visualised in their “social and spatial dislocation” were depicted through various standard genres, including melodrama, comedy, and gothic horror (Bao 2012: 389). The remapping of socio-cultural

landscapes through theatricalised, dramatic, and contradictory spectacles evoked a medium-specific geopolitics, in reconfigured social spaces and filmic representations of cultural memory (ibid).

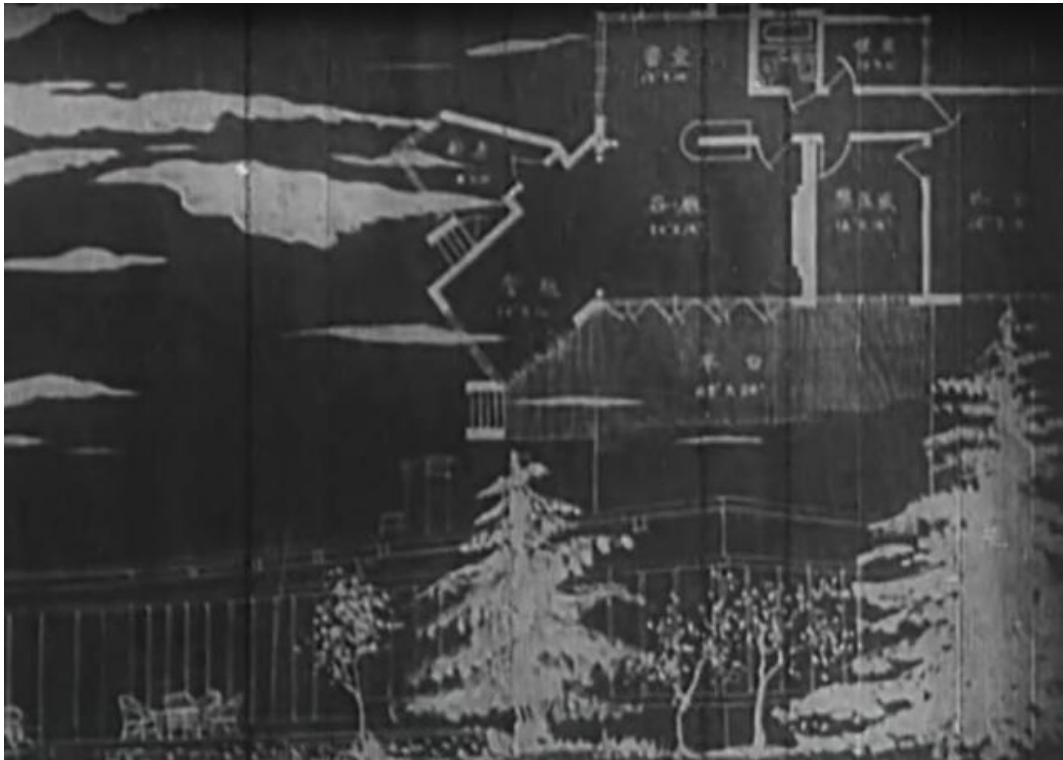
In this way, filmmakers began to focus on the “dislocated journeys” of the disempowered (ibid). This sub-genre focused on urban returners to Shanghai from the rural hinterlands. The rustication of intellectuals in the post-war period had helped with the state’s land reform as their residences and jobs were given to the rural and industrial proletariat who made up the majority of the country’s population (Pepper 1999). In this way a revolutionary ethos was formed through class struggle with the entire country “saved” through individual family sacrifices for the national aim of land reform (Hsia 1948). During the postwar period, the re-settlement of intellectuals in the cities encountered serious difficulties. Their homecoming was alienated by the culture shock of a transformed urban life, permeated with an estrangement from familiar “social spaces and cultural memory, [and] refigured in the housing problem” (Bao 2012: 389). Shock and alienation was followed by a feeling of encountering “a glamour that barely concealed a socioeconomic crisis” (ibid: 390). They were not only anxious about the unfamiliar outlook and experience of their home, but also threatened by “everyday problems of housing, unemployment, high inflation, and the invasion of American cultures” (ibid). Films espousing this theme illustrated an overwhelming sense of uneasiness

and unbelonging.

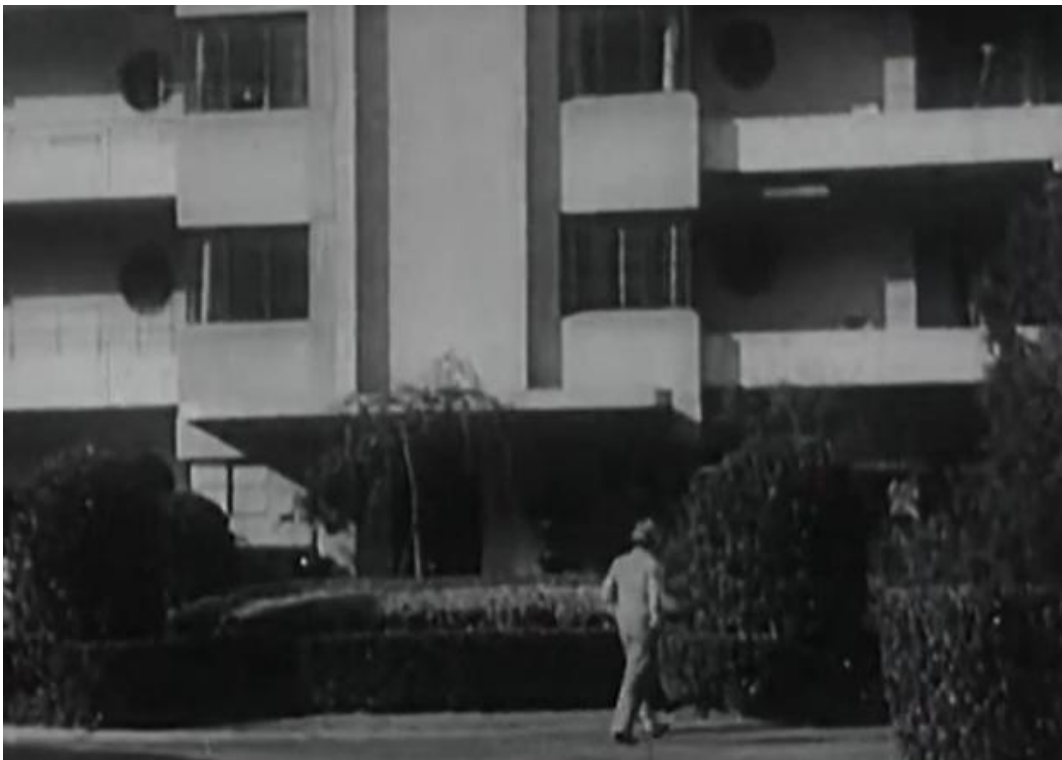
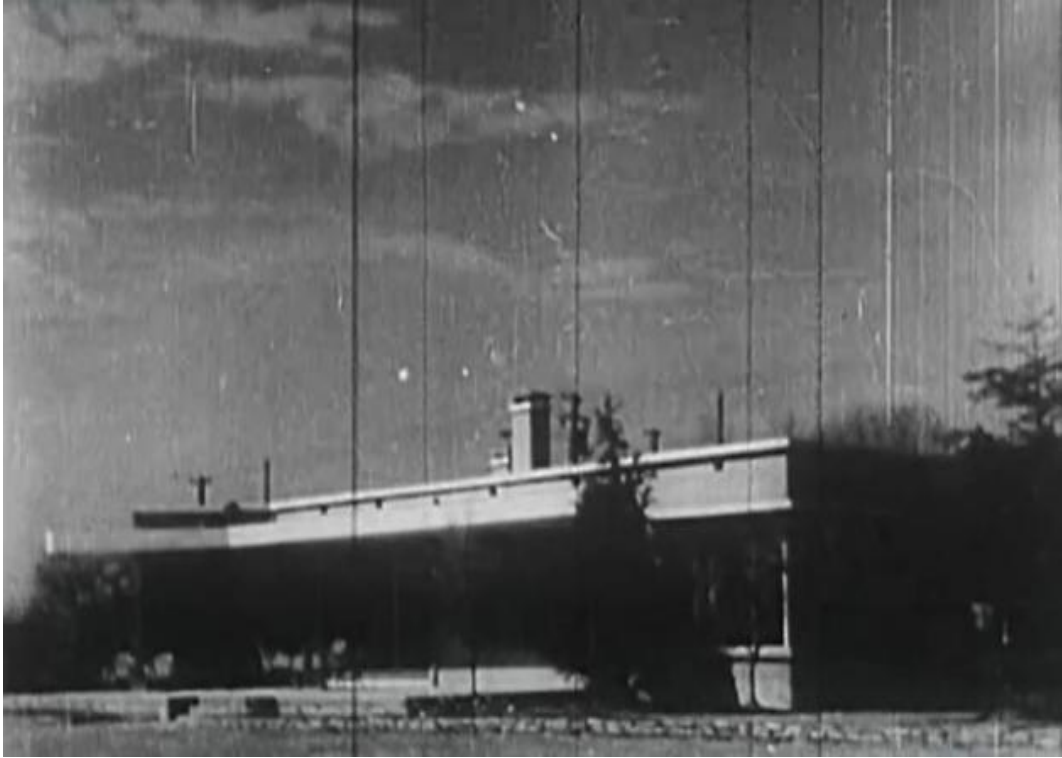
Dream in Paradise (*tiantang chunmeng* 天堂春梦 1947, Tang Xiaodan 汤晓丹) uses contrast between the indoor and outdoor settings of smart homes to intensify the urban returners' disorientation (Bao 2012). The film follows a bourgeois, architect couple, Ding (Shi Yu) and Shulan (Lu Ming), as they return to Shanghai after the Sino-Japanese war. The film is set at the time of the Japanese defeat when, the country was celebrating victory in a fever of optimism. Despite the fact that the urban intellectuals had contributed during the war on the rural frontiers, their homecoming is full of dreams soon to be smashed by reality, with their former identities erased in the post-war environment.

The Ding's social and financial displacements are highlighted through the visual representation of urban journeys. The opening aerial shot of cosmopolitan Shanghai signals the couple's shattered dreams through a sharp contrast with the interior of their friend's home where they settle temporarily. Both lavishly decorated, but shadowy and constrained in the chiaroscuro lighting, everything is cluttered and claustrophobic. This visual disorientation echoes the couple's feelings of estrangement and intensifies at the point when they are forced to move out. Now homeless, Ding heads off into the city only to find that he cannot afford to live in the iconic modern apartment building that

he had designed himself. The tilting-shot close-up of the top of the building from a worm's-eye view suddenly reveals Ding in a long shot, like a worm himself, standing in front of the building he designed. Losing his former calm, Ding hurries into the building where he discovers, to his dismay, that with the inflated cost of renting property - he has been priced out of the building of his own making. The contradictory status of the architect and the building he designed, the fast-paced shift between the building's "authorship" and the author's lack of access, is captured in a dramatic change in mood. His name honorifically labels the building, enhancing the satire and tragedy for the forgotten intellectuals. They are outcasts in post-war China.¹⁸



¹⁸ See also *Diary of a Homecoming* (*huanxiang riji* 还乡日记 1947, Zhang Junxiang 张骏祥), a comedic depiction of a returning artist couple Zhao (Geng Zhen) and Yu (Bai Yang), who cannot afford a proper living space. The film highlights the visual themes of ongoing urban journeys and the failure to find accommodations.





Figs. 1.1-1.4: The Ding's imagined house back in Shanghai, the house of their nouveau-riched Shanghai relatives, the house that Ding once designed, and the room they live in back to Shanghai.

Films about dislocation in this period largely stress the helplessness and vulnerability of intellectuals returning to their former hometowns, offering a poignant social critique through spatial and social dislocations. Such restrictions and exclusions are a premonition of Mao's warning that "the Party must keep its reservations about intellectuals within limits...[and] should adopt a careful attitude" towards them (Pepper 1999: 220).

During the Maoist Era (1949-1976), cinema started to emphasise collective revolutionary journeys with key figures in remote and arduous locations such as battlefields and frontiers. The protagonists always started from marginal, oppressed positions; their quests were not built around individual heroic or

personal journeys but represented a gradual expansion of the individual towards the embracing of the larger socialised-political self (Browne 1994). When these broader social themes dominated, the dislocations involved in class struggle outweighed narratives about sexual difference or individual heroism. Maoist Chinese melodrama recorded the battle between ethical and political systems. “Ethical”, here, refers to Confucianism, the strict social hierarchy determining filial and social relations, as a counterpoint to the “political” which refers to a socialist search for a greater level of justice based on ethics, education and reason.

Some Maoist melodrama depicted how people collectively defended the nation and embraced the dominant revolutionary ethos in harsh and physically displaced battlefields. Unlike Hollywood melodrama that is centred around the private, psychoanalytical structure of sexual difference, the Chinese anti-melodramatic mode adopts a political tone that reinforces the public-private correlation in a de-individualised sphere of human action (Zhang 2012: 25-41). Maoist melodramatic realism focused on national, authoritarian aesthetics, promoting heroic socialist images through stereotypical characters and plots representing conflict between specific classes (Berry and Farquhar 2006: 75-107). *Reconnaissance Across the Yangtze* (*dujiang zhen cha ji* 渡江侦察记 1954, Tang Xiaodan 汤晓丹) is an action-adventure film, based on the Yangtze River Crossing Campaign in 1949 (Brazinsky 2017: 140). It relates

how a small group of CCP reconnaissance troops inspect the spread of the GMD forces, leading to a CCP victory. It eulogises their heroic bravery and military tactics during the final stage of the Civil War. Between 20 April and 21 April, 300,000 men from the PLA crossed from the north to the south bank of the Yangtze River, penetrating the GMD's defence zone and establishing a Communist force in Nanjing, the threshold of southeast China (Lew 2009: 131).

The significant journey across the Yangtze river is glorified in various ways in the film. The sophisticated strategies of surveilling the enemy in the jungle, the fast-paced advance over the mountain, and the calm and triumphant boat crossing to the GMD side, all show how CCP warriors conquer seemingly insurmountable natural hardships under harsh conditions. The remoteness of the land (its jungles, mountains and grassfields) underlines the revolutionary masculinity with which the male fighters engage with the tough geography. The river journey is romanticised by the use of music, narrative rhythm and pace. The river landscape evokes a sublime and painterly tone, portraying the remote and arduous journey as full of hope and beauty, foreshadowing the victory and joy of the last battle.

By the 60s, apart from social dislocations in revolutionary cinema, emotional drama with poetic realism became another popular sub-genre, evoking

“political ambivalence, personal disappointment, [and] melodious sadness” (Berry and Farquhar 2006: 103). Stories about intellectuals’ geo-social and emotional journeys were now different from those in postwar Shanghai. The theme shifted from the failure of locating the physical self and settlement to that of establishing spiritual and personal identities. They depicted ordinary individuals’ stories of romance, trauma, suffering, loss, and emotional experiences in a sensuously appealing and engaging way. The films were always focused on individual passions as a response to oppressive community surveillance.

In *February* (*zaochun eryue* 早春二月 1963, Xie Tieli 谢铁骊), the protagonist Xiao (Sun Daolin), a young scholar, goes to a suburban town to pursue a teaching career. After going through love struggles and socio-moral entanglements with two women, he ends up leaving the town in despair. As with *Reconnaissance Across the Yangtze*, *February* involves river journeys, but with a different focus. With its groundbreaking cinematic style, the film begins with a tracking shot zooming in to the inside of the boat where Xiao sits by the window enjoying the landscape and interacting with the local passengers. The poetic natural imagery filmed from his perspective and his expressive postures set the film’s tone. Its theme plays out from a personal, phenomenological standpoint rather than from the kind of collective socialised ethos of *Reconnaissance Across the Yangtze*.

Xiao's joy is expressed through open-air spaces, as crossing a bridge he stretches his arms out wide and embraces a sense of freedom; his subtle excitement is felt through close-ups of his eyes and the sound of his footsteps as he walks through the plum blossoms with his love interest, Taolan (Xie Fang). As the film progresses, Xiao's growing trauma is visualised through the shifting tone of his journeys across town. The bridge, formerly associated with his personal freedom and joy now represents a restrictive sense of duty. He encounters Wensao (Shangguan Yunzhu), his dead colleague's widow, whom he has to take care of due to a heightened "brotherly duty" common to Chinese culture. Playing with Wensao's daughter, Xiao adopts a fatherly role. Moreover, Xiao's movements through the town become more nocturnal, evoking a heavy, dark, entangled sensation. Although the film is set in the 1920s, it echoes its own time of "Up to Mountains, Down to Villages" (*shangshan xiaxiang* 上山下乡) (1955-1970s), when urban intellectuals were sent to the countryside to join in with agricultural labour. The personal despair and hopelessness implicitly evokes the lives and expectations of educated youth, which were turned upside down by the political and social situation.





Figs. 1.5-1.8 Changes of Xiao's inner states associated with his journeys.

Films in the 70s returned to emphasising revolutionary ethics that reflected the rise of the “Gang of Four” (*sirenbang* 四人帮), the four CCP officials who came

to power during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), purging and executing intellectuals, artists, and suppressing capitalist ideologies and traditional Chinese cultures to shape a totalised Communist cultural sphere (Tsou 1986: 120-130). Propaganda films were used to promote Mao's absolute power and Communist authority. The cinematic themes echoed those of the early Maoist period depicting the Party as the saviour and spiritual leader of the ordinary people who travelled around on revolutionary quests in remote areas and in harsh conditions.¹⁹

The 1980s marked the age of Reform which followed the Cultural Revolution. 1980s filmmakers drew on their experiences during the "Ten Years of Turmoil" (*shinian dongluan* 十年动乱). The phrase is referred to the ten-year period during the Cultural Revolution when intellectuals were persecuted, tortured, and executed (Li 1995: 412). The difficulty of locating oneself between past trauma and a rapidly restructuring society was narrated through a large number of "scar films" with themes of travelling among marginalised youth becoming a motif of the period (Walsh 2001: 197).

Other themes involved trauma and oppression from the past, ideological liberation being the response to the present, and love and faith the resolution to social problems (Liu 2003). Scar films were influenced by "scar literature"

¹⁹ See *Sparkling Red Star* (*shanshan de hongxing* 闪闪的红星 1974, Li Ang and Li Jun 李昂, 李俊): through a group of teenagers' journeys in mountains, woods and rivers, the film portrays how the CCP approached the rural masses and the cooperation and harmony between the state and the people.

named after Lu Xinhua's 卢新华 novella, *The Scar* (*shanghen* 伤痕 1978) (Link 1984: 20). They aimed to restore and reinvent the nation's cultural atmosphere and look reflexively at the personal pain and trauma caused by the decade of social turbulence and its associated memories. Key films include *The Cradle* (*a! yaolan* 啊!摇篮 1979, Xie Jin 谢晋) and *The Herdsman* (*mu ma ren* 牧马人 1982, Xie Jin 谢晋). The sense of a problematic self trying to establish or re-establish a personal identity plays out through the frictional polarisation of yearning for and erasure of individual expression, of the searching and the sense of loss experienced in that process. Films of this period revealed a sensitivity to the ruptured chronology and broken experiences. These are the themes that shape the characteristics of the scar narrative.

Set at the end of the Cultural Revolution, *Evening Rain* (*bashan yeyu* 巴山夜雨 1980, Wu Yigong and Wu Yonggang 吴贻弓, 吴永刚) depicts a river voyage taken by newly released "criminal" Qiushi (Li Zhiyu), a poet who had been imprisoned for six years and whose family had been ruined by the Gang of Four. The film's river journey is a dislocated heterotopia with the boat being a "floating piece of place...without a place...[being] simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 1967). Borrowing from Foucault's concept of heterotopia, the ship functions as both physical and symbolic space, establishing representative relationships between the captive protagonists, in this case reflecting the realities of the Cultural Revolution. Such a "cinematic

heterotopia” does not only “allow components” to interact physically, but also permits a visual re-visitation of traumatic experiences and sensations that one wishes to erase yet linger with an uncanny persistence (Wang 2014: 36).

The film repeatedly evokes the ship as a displaced, anonymous, even autonomous space through binary contrasts. For example, the Party representative uses the word “vacuum”(*zhenkong* 真空) to describe the ship, comparing its calm inside with the “chaos” (*caoza* 嘈杂) in which all the passengers are cast as criminals, outcasts, left-behinds of one kind or another; the jump-cuts between the staccato, fragmented close-ups of tides on the river, the ship’s engine, and the ghostly panorama of passengers build an impression of an integrated and self-contained inner space-of-nowhere, ending up in a cabin which has no outside references.







Figs. 1.9-1.12 Ship as dislocated “vacuum space” away from reality, connecting Qiushi’s memories, trauma and fantasy.

As the film goes on, the daytime background with its natural landscape outside is gradually replaced by the claustrophobic cabin with its visual entanglement of walls, frames, and shadows, which encase the characters within spatial barriers. Night scenes also take up the majority of the second half of the film in which the dark galleys and decks take centre stage; the absence of a background and dark surroundings highlight the sense of *nowhereness*. Qiushi, as the “recorder” of the dislocated journey and its people, seems to lose all grounding and identity. An extreme sense of spectrality accompanies his interactions with two of the female characters: the girl who is finally revealed to be his daughter evokes a loss of past, of family, and an uncanny and sudden

encounter of the most personal relation; whereas, the prostitute who is saved from suicide by Qiushi echoes the fragility of everyone's future due to the unbearable history that they share. Qiushi himself constitutes a site of dislocation, the "Forsaken Generation", the self-conscious intellectual youth (born in 1960-70s) that were not recognised by the state and were abandoned by official history (Pickowicz and Zhang 2016: 7). This was the "marginalised", "anonymous" generation and socialist history's useless "appendix"; social "bastards", forsaken by history, obsessed with painful memories and "nurtured by suspicion" (Xu 2000; Zhang 2014; Cui 2014).

Apart from the scar films of the 1980s, films by the Fifth Generation signaled a cultural dislocation with a distinctive Chinese aroma. The Fifth Generation directors graduated from the Beijing Film Academy. Being born during, and as the first generation of graduates after, the Cultural Revolution, they sought to explore ordinary Chinese life, its social issues and intellectual struggles, with an emphasis on Chinese tradition and history. Some major themes in their films involved groups who were oppressed in the past, and particularly the rural farming people imprisoned within the boundless, primitive landscape, the blind faith in hysterical, or even life-threatening traditions.

Influential works from this period made the most of rural and primitive settings, configuring the cultural imagination with alluringly exotic locations, redolent

with poignantly shared memories: the high-saturated tie-dye textiles rotated with waterwheels and the iconic lanterns and ritual objects of the family temple in *Red Sorghum* (*hong gao liang* 红高粱 1987, Zhang Yimou 张艺谋) or the traditional wedding procession in the vast layered mountain-scape in *Yellow Earth* (*huang tudi* 黄土地 1985, Chen Kaige 陈凯歌). *Horse Thief* (*dao ma zei* 盗马贼 1986, Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮) focuses on the Zang minority's life in their remote locality in Tibet through expressive and sometimes surrealist depictions of their tradition, culture, and beliefs. We see ritual sites with piled Tibetan chimes, sublime landscapes of wriggling rivers, spectacular grasslands, and boundless snow mountains. Starting from the spatial remoteness of the Zang community, a sense of unlocatability then unfolds through the protagonist, Norbu's (Rigzin Tshang) life, which is interwoven with challenges to life in 20th century Tibet of religion, class, morality, and society.

Norbu's different journeys take place within landscapes on such a scale that they overwhelm the viewer with a menacing kind of beauty. Landscapes so grand and intimidating that they evoke geologic timescales, aeons against which the ineluctable rise and demise of the ancient Tibetan ways, and the lives of individuals, seem incidental. The film achieves this sense by portraying individual vulnerability in the face of the extreme environment, alongside heavily saturated visuals associated with Tibet's seemingly brutal traditions.

In the beginning of the film we see a montage of a grand ceremony: a ritual Buddhist flag in worm-eye's view against the bleak dawn, the juxtaposition between close-ups of brass sculptures of sacred animals and the image of huge tapestries full of colour recounting religious stories. There is no dialogue or character interaction, the scenes are accompanied by deep blasts on horns, and dissonant, sharp-toned instruments. This cacophony of sound and image overwhelms, but simultaneously enchants, setting the tone for the film. Various sacrificial rituals create the same sense of brutal enchantment, such as when animals are taken to the sacred well to be offered to the river-god and then buried alive in the grasslands. During the Sending River-Ghost Festival, Norbu works as the river-ghost standing in the river, being beaten by the villagers with stones. He bleeds heavily. The close-ups of the crowd and of Norbu's wounds are set against the aftermath scene where he is left alone in the deep countryside and wind-swept slopes of the mountains. His solitude and vulnerability contrast with the power of the villagers, as if his reduced circumstances make him no different from the sacrificial animals themselves.

A new level of transnational awareness permeated the Chinese cinema of dislocation of the 1990s. *Red Cherry* (*hong yingtao* 红樱桃 1995, Ye Daying 叶大鹰), for example, illustrates how two Chinese children become enslaved in foreign spaces by German Fascists when a summer camp in the Soviet Union

suddenly turns into a nightmarish experience. The protagonist Xiaoman (Zhang Xiaoli) is involved in multiple dislocations in the bleak rural Moscow. During the German invasion, the summer camp school is occupied by the Fascists. Xiaoman is firstly forced out of the safe, school community, then finds himself unable to go back to China. Finally, he escapes from the city occupied by the Germans and joins a group of homeless Russian children. They are harassed by Russian soldiers in the forest when collecting the left-over food from a previous battle. From a soldier's perspective, we see the gun pointing towards the children, who are running towards the military car in search of food. Their figures disappear into the grey, dusty, landscape full of mud, rocks, and barren hills. The fact that the colour and beauty of nature were destroyed by the war parallels with the children's own situation as their youth and liveliness are destroyed by Fascism. The heroine Chuchu (Guo Keyu), who was tattooed with a Nazi eagle by a Nazi officer, is abandoned in the Moscow winter forest. She is too weak to crawl. The heavily falling snow, the withered grass, the tomb-like straw-piles depict an unbounded rural landscape as an alternative prison to the Nazi camp from which she cannot escape. Ruins, prisons, sites of extreme physical and mental torture enacted against vast rural landscapes or suffocating urban jungles transform the naïve childhoods into a cinematic record of unbearable historical violence.

Although from the 2000s, many of the Sixth Generation directors shifted their

focus to commercial cinema, some new-generation independent directors departed from the leitmotif, seeking to explore more individualistic experiences against the backdrop of rapid social transformations. Films of this time depicted “disorientation” and “dissatisfaction with China’s contemporary social tensions”, alienation, and marginalisation (Teo 2003; Corliss 2001).

Jia Zhangke’s 贾樟柯 *Platform* (*zhan tai* 站台, 2000) and Zhang Yang’s 张扬 *Getting Home* (*luoye guigen* 落叶归根 2007) choose transportation as the central motif, focusing respectively on themes of searching and homecoming, and the inherent difficulties involved in both. *Platform* is a grassroots epic, focusing on a group of literary youths in an art troupe in a Shanxi county town in the 1980s. The film recounts their changing fates. The youthful protagonists’ rich spiritual world is set against both the mundane qualities of rural life and an awareness of new things, of self-awareness, and of the different paths of life brought by the Reform years, albeit as retrospective. However, their hopes and dreams are blocked by vulnerability and a struggle to discover a place in the new world that was undergoing the great social transformation.

During this time, the dream of the rural youth was “to leap from peasantry” into modern citizenship (Chang 2006: 139). Most migrant youths working in the cities were engaged in hard, tiring, dirty and dangerous jobs that urban people were unwilling to take on. They had temporary positions (working less than 8.1

months each year), suffered from discrimination, and earned some 3.23 times less than the urban population (Zhang 2006: 115-121). Moreover, lack of access to education also blocked their access to urban assimilation. As the state feared, an educated rural youth would become rebellious, schools in the countryside were closed down, and talent concentrated in the urban centres (Chang 2006).

The sense of having to struggle yet still being left-behind, of spatio-social confinement and of vulnerability, is visualised through a number of itinerant scenes: without having achieved anything positive or fulfilling their dreams, the characters give in to the pressure of life, money, and “normalised” life routines without either gaining hope or finding passion. In the final scene, the protagonist Cui (Wang Hongwei), who was once an energetic and rebellious young man with high hopes of the city, goes back to his village to get married. In the final scene he is seen shrinking against the grey wall of their rural compound under a tiny window, falling into an exhausted, emotionless sleep, while his wife plays with their child (fig. 1.13). The rural youth in the film do not realise that the pace of reform in the villages cannot keep up with that of the cities. When lack of material wealth restricts the fulfillment of their dreams and ambitions, their bottom line pursuit of money causes a collapse in their spiritual world. The transport platforms, a gateway to the fulfilment of what ultimately transpires as vacuous dreams, signal their psychological disconnect.



Fig. 1.13 Cui shrinking at the corner.

In contrast, *Getting Home* uses the theme of dislocation to frame an ongoing process of journeying. The film is a black comedy, a road film about migrant worker, Zhao's (Zhao Benshan) journey accompanying his friend's corpse back to his hometown for burial. Dislocation in the film occurs at three levels. Firstly, the fact that Zhao is travelling with a corpse forces him into disguising his identity in order to conceal his purpose from both fellow passengers and the police. Secondly, Zhao's perseverance in honouring his promise to take his friend home seems out-of-step with the self-centred vast majority of people we encounter; their selfishness contradicts the supposedly Chinese "uprightness" and "valuable spiritual heritage" (Li 2008: 88). Thirdly, when he finally gets home, Zhao finds that the house he grew up in has been demolished and that

the government has announced that bodies must now be cremated. At this point the whole journey is rendered pointless as the ineluctable progress of state policy eventually dislocates both him and his dead friend from their wish for a shared identity located in their place of origin.

Identity is not only a problem for those who consider themselves part of the majority ethnic Han identity (McKhann 1995: 61). In the 2010s, the journey of minority ethnic groups to, and within, dislocated homelands became a key theme.²⁰ The focus on national minorities, and their traditional customs, offer film production teams the beauty of remote landscapes and exotic local cultures to evoke dislocations of faith, home and origin.

In *River Road* (*jia zai shuicaofengmao de difang* 家在水草丰茂的地方 2014, Li Ruijun 李睿珺), two boys, whose grandfather dies, search for their parents on camelback. The poetic rural road movie follows the younger child's memory of the nomadic routes to the summer pastures. In the desert, they encounter ancestral history and explore cultural heritage through stone carvings about the Silk Road. They are overwhelmed by alienating and uncanny feelings when sleeping in caves. They express fear and curiosity about the mysterious, vast landscape when following a fantasy horse running into the wilderness. The film is full of adventure, fantasy, the jealousies of brotherhood, lifestyles

²⁰ See *Paths of the Soul* (*gang ren bo qi* 冈仁波齐 2015, Zhang Yang 张扬) and *Soul on a String* (*pisheng shang de hun* 皮绳上的魂 2016, Zhang Yang 张扬).

that are threatened with extinction, and abandoned religious institutions. Through the contrasting visuals of the vibrant colours of Buddhist temple rituals and the parched mountain riverbeds and wild, scary deserts, the film reveals, through the eyes of the children, the fragility of searching for a homeland and a cultural heritage in one's family, in religion or in ethnic traditions. The pathos and sorrow associated with grassland desertification and ethnic migration, the surreal beauty of the landscape and the survival of the children in such a harsh environment evoke the past glory of the Yugu minority, a nation on horseback, now in inexorable cultural decline.

The fact that, when the brothers finally find the summer pastures after a journey in which they survived hunger, thirst, estrangement, doubt and gnawing fear, their destination has already been replaced by parents who work on industrial sites and in factories, the sad ending of *Getting Home*. This ironically echoes the Chinese title of the film, "Home is where the lush green is", for as all the lush green vegetation has disappeared, there is nowhere that can be called a homeland for the Yugu. The minority's displaced residential areas, communities, and cultures, along with their devastated home and cultural heritage, question the sense of "home/origin", setting them in a double dislocation.

As discussed above, the Chinese cinema of dislocation portrays social

conditions and transformations through time, via rural-urban tensions and the problematic definition of and attachment to home, settlement, and identity. It depicts physically, culturally, and spiritually disenfranchised people who struggle to shelter themselves against the dominant social landscape. The focus stretches from the social phenomenon of the Republican era, the collectivist socialist spirit, individual subjectivity and trauma of the Cultural Revolution, national allegorical imaging of the Fifth Generation, to the diverse examination of emerging socio-cultural problems. Through cinematic dislocation, we see a panoramic, socio-historical picture of dispossessed people who have been long overlooked.

Section 2: Women's Dislocation in Chinese Cinema

The trope of displaced people has been a growing focus for directors of the 2000s, but there is also a special place to analyse how this trope can be understood in relation to women on the Chinese screen. Female visibility in 20th century China, so He (1907) and Liu (2013) argue, stemmed from an Europeanisation in the Republican era when male intellectuals “attempt[ed] to acquire distinction by promoting women’s liberation” and from gendered labour division and the female-as-body, male-as-mind **assumption embedded** in what has been perceived as a capitalist rational hierarchy structure (Liu: 2; Currie and Raoul 1992: 1-5). Harris, however, separates sexual hierarchies from class hierarchies, suggesting that if women’s participation in society and the

workplace is to be defined by their gender that is a kind of “cultural determinism” based on “species-specific anatomical and bio-psychological features, needs, and drives” (1988: 397; 1993: 57). In this way he problematises the definition of gender conventions as unthinking “vague, subjective, facile, and hypothetical sex differences” fostered through historical, intellectual, emotional, and genital dominance (Harris: 57).

Since the Republican period, from 1911 onwards, “gender and nation have often served as narrative subjects and visual tropes” (Cui 2003: 1). Female images are inseparable from the socio-political conditions and transformations within which they are produced. Cinematic portrayals of women in the 20s-30s reflected on nationalism with a gendered focus on social displacement. Early Chinese feminism was rooted in a global feminist movement that operated in the shadow of the capitalisation and modernisation that characterises the aftermath of empire in Asia (Liu et al. 2013). Male intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao 梁启超, Jin Tianhe 金天翮, and Hu Shi 胡适, were educated and influenced by Western and Japanese models and texts, such as *Discourse on the Method, Marriage and Morals* and Jane Addams’ thoughts on female suffrage (Schwarcz 1986: 118-119). In their work on Chinese feminist thoughts, such as Liang’s *On Women’s Education* (*Lun Nüxue* 论女学) and Jin’s *The Women’s Bell* (*Nüjiezhong* 女界钟), they started to raise the question of the liberation of the long-oppressed Chinese women believing that, through the

liberation of women, the nation could achieve modernity (Yuan 2005: 25). The intellectuals aimed to “transform themselves from followers into doubters...fighters against conventions” through this idea (Schwarcz 1986: 118).

Moral melodrama in the 1920s and 30s focused on the image of the New Woman and the rise of the Modern Girl both of which entailed a critical examination of the role of women in society in terms of their marriage choices, chastity, virtue, lifestyle, personhood and subjectivity (Cui 2003: 8-16; Sang 2008: 184-186). The New Woman concept started around the mid-1910s, challenging the Confucian ethics and provoking the moving towards modernity. The key ideas involved anti-female inequality movements, change of elite attitudes, increasing female education, the recognition of women’s literacy talent, criticism of extreme cult for chastity, and wider permission for women to enter public spheres (Zhu 2015: 103; Rankin 1975: 13-38). Political activists looked at revolutionary patriots like Qiu Jin 秋瑾 as the model and called for female participation in nation-building, especially the idea that women’s “heroic death” serves to shame present oppressors and inspire future admirers was not only a readily available model of behavior, but also a personal escape from the feelings of frustration” from the feudal order (Rankin: 65-66). Emerging journals, such as *The New Woman* (*Xinnüxing* 新女性) and *Chinese Ladies Journal Monthly* (*Nüziyuekan* 女子月刊) about the New Women discussed

“women’s questions - generalised emancipation or independence of the individual from traditional familial and societal restraints” (Croll 2013: 82).

In contrast, the Modern Girl phenomenon was seen by reformers as an obstruction of nation-building as it embodied a corruption caused by capitalism that symbolised the “luxurious, hygienic, and scientifically advanced lifestyle of the middle class” (Sang 2008: 185). The Modern Girl embodies the dangers of materialism and the impediment to morality of “ostentatiously refashioning her appearance and refining her body” (Zhu 2015: 103; Barlow et al. 2005: 249). The material and physical allure of the image highlighted a sense of indulgence, sexuality, and wealth (fig.1.14). Zhu (2015) and Liu (2002) discuss an awakening of self-consciousness, self-questioning, passion, and the rejection of traditional roles in the Modern-girl literature, one which expresses itself through an enchantment of the senses, such as Ailing Zhang’s 张爱玲 *Miss Sophia’s Diary* (*Suofeiya de riji* 索菲亚的日记). Those works tend to focus on the “conflict between marriage and self-fulfillment...love and independence”; they suggest that marriage and “the dominant ideology in which [the women’s] gender is inscribed” were often “rejected as a result of their quest for selfhood” (Liu 2003: 164-169). Thus, the New Woman and the Modern Girl are not only a contradictory ideological binary, but also imply different narratives about, and approaches to, the socio-cultural landscape and urban spaces of the 1930s. The former represents the political and intellectual in a rousing, collective

narrative; the later reflexive, subjective personal sentiments.

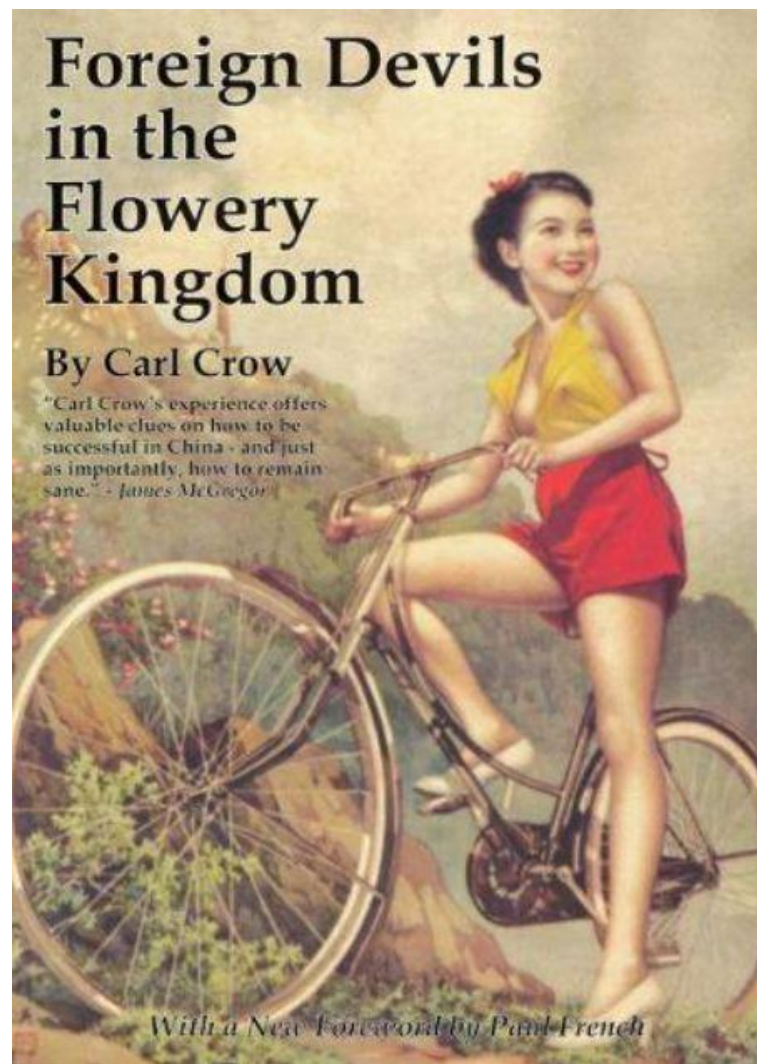


Fig. 1.14 The front cover of Carl Crow's *Foreign Devils in the Flowery Kingdom* (Hong Kong: Earnshaw Books, 2007). A Shanghai Modern Girl wears a low-chest top and a short, riding a bicycle.

At the other end of the scale, the fallen woman also became a popular image on the screen in the 1930s. She was often associated either with the perceived dangers of modernity or with the assumption that passive and vulnerable women, often mistreated by society, turned to prostitution to survive and to provide for their families. Prostitutes, of which the number grew tremendously in Shanghai during the 1920s to the 30s, were associated with “other’s

other...an emblem of a humiliated nation and oppressive society” by the modern reformers (Cui: 15-16). Over the two decades, the number of prostitutes in Shanghai grew from 15000 to 30000 approximately. During the 1920s, there was one prostitute per 28 woman; prostitutes took 2.3% to 3.6% of the female adult population from late-Qing to the pre-civil war period in the 1940s (Henriot 2001: 120). Therefore, the politicised depiction of their dual nature as both the fallen woman and the virtuous mother intends to open up socio-moral discussions in the national discourse. It underlines “culturally required self-sacrifice” (Chow 1991: 170) as the foundation of traditional Chinese culture, while reflecting the reformers’ belief that “a system which permitted the treatment of women as inferior human beings would inevitably give rise to a weak nation” (Hershatter 1997: 9).

Prostitute images evoke the failure of modern society and the iniquity of male desire and hypocrisy. The women in films like *Goddess* (*nüshen* 女神 1934, Wu Yonggang 吴永刚) are always portrayed as good-hearted fighters against male authority who sacrifice themselves for the family. The 1930s Cinema uses prostitution as a way of reflecting the social and moral crisis of the Republican era, portraying fortitude and kindness of the socially dislocated women. Through the virtuous and the fallen women with a heart of gold, women are imaged as selfless victims who are manipulated by social forces, giving them a particular moral screen persona.

Zhang argues that 1920s films have a “more experimental and plural nature for a society undergoing seismic transitions” whereas films after the mid-1930s, under the threat of Japanese invasion, reflect a more “tangible” concern with nation-building and strengthening (2012: 39). Through visualising women’s struggle against the old filial system and the exploitation of female labour within cosmopolitan society, 1920s cinema’s focus on female dislocation largely involved urban social alienation, broken families, “inhuman” and “oppressive” treatment that made the women “swallow every humiliation” (Zhang 1999: 131-163; Bi 1925: A2).²¹

The Divorcee (*qi fu* 弃妇 1924, Li Zeyuan and Hou Yao 李泽源、侯曜) depicts the tragic life journey of the heroine, Zhifang (Wang Hanlun). The story begins with her as middle-class housewife abandoned by her husband and charts the changes in her identity; a librarian sexually harassed by her male boss and discriminated against by her colleagues; a feminist activist persecuted by her ex-husband due to her independent mind-set; and finally, a lonely and secluded nun robbed by bandits. Through various transformative social positions and localities, Zhifang was first abandoned by family, then by society, and finally lost her life due to mental breakdown from her social insecurity and the feeling of alienation. As the forces of the filial and social order combine to

²¹ See *A Blind Orphan Girl* (*mang gunü* 盲孤女 1925, Zhang Shichuan 张石川).

persecute her, Zhifang's travels take us on a journey from the city to a rural temple, but despite becoming an independent, intellectual woman along the way, the film depicts her tragedy as inevitable and inescapable. Although the Republican government introduced laws for women to seek divorce, even in Shanghai, the divorce rate was relatively low, with approximately 24-31 divorces per 1000 persons during the 1920s and 1930s (Bernhardt 1994: 187-214). This was because "social stigma, expense, [and] economic concerns" remained the unbearable results of divorce (Mann 2001: 75).

Song of the Fishermen (*yu guang qu* 渔光曲 1934, Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生) allows us to take the theme of women and dislocation away from the cosmopolitan setting to rural coastal areas. Through its groundbreaking cinematic language, the film exposes social conflicts: the miseries of lower-class life and broken relationships, poverty and class oppression all laced with profound sorrow. This poignancy is evoked through contrasting montage. On one side of a window a poor fishing girl, Xiaomao (Wang Renmei), daubs her face with mud to disguise her hard labour; on the other side a rich officer's lover is applying luxurious blush; just as the close-ups of a commercial shipping haul contrast with Xiaomao's empty fishing net; and as Xiaomao's vulnerability in front of her dying mother-in-law is reflected in images of withered branches and bleak landscapes in the mirror. The film shows the "deep bonds of extended family broken by capitalism and modernity"

and the invading force of capitalist mechanisation (Zhang 2018: 94). The devastating and ever-worsening situation of the poor is narrated most poignantly through the doomed rural woman who is socially and spatially removed and excluded.

1940s Chinese cinema displayed “an unprecedented linking of national feeling and film art” through a new wave of social realism prevalent during the Japanese occupation (Clark 1987: 20; Pickowicz 2015). Social realism emphasises the collective identity of the present and the notion of presentness (*xian* 现) - the inscription of not only a picture of the present, but the ideology, attitude and the iconic hero or heroine. The focus on national, authoritarian aesthetics promoted heroic socialist images through stereotypical characters and plots representing conflict between specific classes, delivering the image of a nation in class struggle as reality to the mass (Berry and Farquhar 2006).

Spring in a Small Town (*xiaocheng zhi chun* 小城之春 1948, Fei Mu 费穆) evokes the sacrifice of women’s personal and feelings, passions and subjectivity under the moral constraints and oppression of family, economic, moral and personal burdens. In 1940s melodrama, women were portrayed as the bearers of and the projection of “the private effects of national crises and social turmoil” (Cui 2003: 26). They had to swallow bitterness while being dislocated from any benefits of the rapidly advancing world. The narrative tells

of a suburban housewife, Yuwen's (Wei Wei) struggle in a love-triangle with an unloving village cadre husband and an ex-lover returning from the city. After struggling between filial duty and personal passion, the awakening of Yuwen's subjectivity is fiercely attacked by feudal morality so that the burgeoning of Yuwen's selfhood is eternally absent/displaced.²²

The film's opening scene illustrates Yuwen's emotionless life in the small town. The long tracking shot captures the natural landscapes at the edge of the town, suggestively pausing at withered trees and ruined paths. The small town is located in a barren wasteland. As the camera gradually "discovers" Yuwen standing on the ruined, cliff-like city wall as if she is about to jump over, her tiny figure seems to disappear into the vast space (figs. 1.14-1.16). In a voice-over, she explains that her habit of walking along the ruins creates a sense of being out of the world, feeling and thinking nothing, so that the basket in her hand is the only thing that brings her back to being present. As she narrates her pessimistic story the background shifts from the ruins to a purely blank space. We know that it is the sky behind her, but it looks like she is cut off from the diegesis and placed nowhere; especially so since the voice-over to this shot tells us of her wish to be absent from home all day.

²² See also *The Spring River Flows East* (*yi jiang chunshui xiang dong liu* 一江春水向东流 1947, Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli 蔡楚生, 郑君里).





Figs. 1.15-1.17 Yuwen's walking.

1950-70s cinema reflected the Maoist ideal of a de-gendered female, a rejection of both feminism and femininity, where gender equality was deformed into gender rejection and erosion (Honig 2002). This cinema focused on rural women and their spatial and gender disorientations. Women are seen as cultural projectors, negotiators, and revolutionary fighters. They are portrayed in various dimensions: firstly, as patriotic revolutionaries, national minorities adopting model citizenship, fighters for the nation in strange and remote lands; and secondly, as sufferers of feudal oppression who are saved and can only be saved by the Party; and, finally, as the new nationals who use their intelligence to support the state and attack its enemies.

The first category focuses on women's social and spatial dislocation. Model plays shape, the officially sponsored cinematic productions of revolutionary theme-stories in operatic forms for propaganda purposes with "feudal content and regional diversity", expressed the Communist aesthetics of the oppressed, and the suffering of ordinary people under the old regime as they fought revolutionary battles (Berry and Farquhar 2006: 48). The directors intended to build a national image, and to fuse the Communist narrative into a nationalistic art form. Melodramatic portrayals of good and evil characters highlighted heroes and heroines who fought oppression in the old system, and would sacrifice themselves and be saved by the Party. Imagery associated with this genre emphasised the striking of revolutionary poses to dramatise characters' attitudes through stylised tableaux, facial expressions and gestures alongside rousing music and rhythm.

White-haired Girl (*bai mao nü* 白毛女 1951, Wang Bin and Shui Hua 王滨, 水华) is a model play about the rural lower-class girl, Xi'er (Tian Hua), who escaped to the mountains from a forced marriage with a landlord. Her hair goes white from hunger, but she is eventually saved by the Communist army. Rural landscapes become a projection of her sorrow and helplessness. The metaphors of her sorrow as the boundless sky and of her tears as the running river are visualised on her escaping journey; her determination to resist class enemies is inferred from courageous fights with wild animals battling with

extremely harsh weather conditions, snow and the storms. The grotesque, animalistic figuring of the woman against the vast rural landscape propagandises in multiple ways. It evokes the suffering of the people under feudal oppression, the bravery of the working classes, and the Communist enlightenment, through the portrayal of women as a deformed, dehumanised species. rather than as humans or gendered females, displacing them from humanity.²³

The second category of revolutionary cinema focuses on women's gender and subjective dislocation/erosion. Romance is always interwoven with collective, national responsibilities (Clark 2012). Films like *Diary of a Nurse* (*hushi riji* 护士日记 1957, Tao Jin 陶金) and *Story of Liubao Village* (*liubao de gushi* 柳堡的故事 1957, Wang Pin 王苹) promote the sacrifice of personal passions in order to contribute to the nation. In *Diary of a Nurse*, the heroine Suhua's (Wang Danfeng) boyfriend, Shen (Li Wei) embodies the urban middle-class and capitalist ethics. In the scenes where Shen tries to persuade Suhua to go to Shanghai with him, Suhua always appears to be worried, confused, and uneasy. Their conversations often take place at night when the dark room is dimly lit, with distorted shadows implying capitalist temptations and Suhua's disturbed mind. In contrast, Suhua's train journey to the far north as a construction volunteer is shot in bright daytime. It depicts the sublime,

²³ See also *Spring Comes to the Withered Tree* (*kumu fengchun* 枯木逢春 1961, Zheng Junli 郑君里) in which the heroine's bilharzia blocks her from her family, community, and husband, depicting the diseased female body as the site of displacement.

spectacular snow landscape, the rhythmic movement of the train alongside the volunteers' joyful songs. Contrasting to Shen's selfish, individual passion that attempts to mislead Suhua through their intimate, personal relationship, the male group leader, Gao (Tang Huada), guides her towards a collective identity of embracing the communal family.

Women with subjective feelings of love and affection are educated and corrected by male authorities; or, they learn from their experiences and realise that the greater mission is to serve the country participating in the war effort or in more impoverished zones. True womanhood can be regained only once a woman submits herself to the sexless, collective body. Women are depicted as politically awakening figures that put all their faith in the Party, sacrificing the "small self" for the "bigger self", the glory of the nation state.

Therefore, the state-mould, socialist femalehood is another way of imposing obedience and oppression paralleling that of the traditional patriarchy. This totalitarian approach born in traditional domestic patriarchy steps up into a revolutionary, political, sociocultural patriarchy that requires a similar level of personal subordination. Women are totalised and degendered, and made indistinguishable from men. They are politically assessed for their class identity; and therefore, by the grander patriarchal gaze, not just by the male gender, but also by a phallogocentric, institutional authority. Films such as *Youth*

In Flames of War (*zhanhuo zhong de qingchun* 战火中的青春 1959, Wang Yan 王炎) illustrate this double elimination through the image of women being controlled by a politically unstoppable and disempowering force. Only class enemies hold women as desired bodies in their sexualised gazes; whereas the class brothers are united and support women with their genderless inclusivity and proximity. Therefore, female sexuality and romance signal evil and corruption, tempting and destroying revolutionary ethics. Women in the films gradually lose their subjectivity to collective identity and become gender-neutral figures (Meng 1993).

During the Cultural Revolution, revolutionary model plays adopted a new wave of disciplined forms, styles, narrative, and character traits. *The Red Detachment of Women* (*hongse niangzijun* 红色娘子军 1960, Xie Jin 谢晋) promotes the image of women empowered by the socialist revolution in which female power is further politically and socially assigned and performed. The extreme polarisation between good and evil is heightened by lighting, framing, and character movement. Contrasting colour palettes like red-black and yellow-navy, low-key lighting, puppet-like body movements, and the emotionless eye-level static shots in shooting the feudal masters' enhance this effect. Contrast this with the fast zoom-ins on the face of the heroine, Qionghua's (Zhu Xijuan), in low-angle shots when she resists their plans for a forced marriage and later, when she expresses her faith to the Party. This is

intended to show the distinction between the lively human power of the Communist party machine and the deadly, fleshless mask of the feudal order. The heroine transforms from a female slave into a warrior in the women's army, showered in glory, through her journey from the landlord's home to the Hainan frontier. Her red dress and long hair transform into the standard short hair and grey uniform. The province in the far south grounds the idea that through war contributions in the harshest, displaced areas, women are spiritually liberated and potentially centralised/united.²⁴



²⁴ Similar theme and plot see *Haixia* (海霞 1975, Qian Jiang, Chen Huaikai, and Wang Daowei 钱江,陈怀皑,王好为,谢铁骊).



Figs. 1.18-1.20 *The Red Detachment of Women* (1960, Xie Jin): heroic angles and appearance transformation.

These films evoke a cultural atmosphere that molds women into an opposite

gender. Women physically, psychologically, and culturally abandon their female characteristics. They are masculinised in terms of physical appearance, social behaviour, and activities. Women are either hardly differentiated from men, or rendered as masculine (Wang 1997). Their initial social dislocation as oppressed slaves is removed by their emancipation in the broader space of the revolution. This homecoming to the Communist fold is manifested in the notion that “women’s emancipation in China is the direct product of social revolution and national salvation” (Li 1989: 157). For example, *Li Shuangshuang* (李双双 1962, Lu Ren 鲁 韧) promotes the idea of “socialist housewives” (Li 2000: 30-40). The film depicts a selfless female revolutionary and labour model who fights against the backward, selfish phenomenon of domesticity, and helps her husband to become morally uplifted.

Although the women live in remote rural areas, they have the most up-to-date revolutionary ethos. There is a contrast between rural women’s spatial displacements and their ideological unity, between feudal domesticity and women’s promotion of their equal status and political contributions. Thus, revolutionary cinema uses social dislocation as a starting point to show how it is transformed by the Party, and uses spatial dislocation as a site for spiritual enlightenment. It echoes the state’s promotion of women’s political, economic, and cultural rights, the abolishment of the feudal system that holds women in bondage (1949 Article 6), and of their contributions to the state’s economic

targets after the Great Leap Forward 大跃进 (*da yue jin*, 1952) (Li 2000).

After the Reform era, female questions became more widely and explicitly discussed, especially as regards the recovery of women's "real, natural, feminine singularity" through female self-improvement (Barlow 2004: 253). Cinema about female dislocation and marginalisation often focused on women's past traumas through their journeys to an unknown remote, on which they look back with a critical eye; or, through their journeys towards a better sense of self-identity.

Legend of Tianyun Mountain (*tianyunshan chuanqi* 天云山传奇 1981, Xie Jin 谢晋), a masterpiece of the scar narrative, features three intertwined female narrative voices and perspectives to restructure stories of a single male protagonist, Luo (Shi Weijian). Luo has been wrongly accused of being a rightist and counterrevolutionary in a series of political movements that run from the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1967). The characters revisit the past in fragmented subjective memories through "various degrees of knowledge and communicativeness...utiliz[ing] insider-outsider, moral-immoral divisions to subsume political and gender differences" (Ma 2008: 24). The narrative stresses a temporal dislocation of personal histories entangled with official political history.

Rural and mountain landscapes often appear in the female character's letters and cameras as sites for archiving personal histories. These landscapes are also stretched between the lyrical sublime of romance, the hope for the socialist future, and the later purgatory-like sites for the rightist protagonist living in extreme, harsh conditions. For example, the maze-like bamboo forest symbolising Luo's girlfriend's disturbed mind and her nervous but excited feelings of first love later also becomes the place where Luo announces his departure according to Party orders; the painterly mountain landscape echoes her romantic imagination and excitement when her meeting with Luo finally becomes the place of their last meeting. Later another heroine, who has also clandestinely been in love with Luo, discovers him dying in an abandoned shelter. The once lively, beautiful village becomes a snowy, barren, and desolate place where Luo has been purged during the Cultural Revolution. Through three women of different social, political and cultural backgrounds and subjectivities, and with remote Tianyun Mountain as the space signifying the traumatic past, the film exposes the historical tragedy of the intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. Their disorientated memories, sufferings during that period, and failed access to the past make their expected truth eternally absent.

Looking back to the Long March of the Maoist era, *Women on the Long March*

(*mati shengsui* 马蹄声碎 1987, Liu Miaomiao 刘苗苗) tells the story of eight female soldiers who are separated from the main troop and conquer the harshest conditions and hardship to reunite with the central force. At least 2000 women joined the Red Army on the Long March, but their role has practically been erased from history, which ignores their contribution and the great support they gave to the male soldiers (Young 2010: 3). The visualisation of the female soldiers struggling in cold rivers, being covered by mud, getting lost in uninhabited mountains gives voice to the women in this untold history. It does not only show how they survived on faith and bravery in remote and dreadful mountains, but also depicts how they are left behind by the male-dominated revolutionary force.

Apart from retrospectives on a collective history, some films looked at recent individual histories from a political and cultural perspective. Set in a minority area, *Sacrificed Youth* (*qingchun ji* 青春祭 1985, Zhang Nuanxin 张暖昕) focuses on the cultural clash between Han and Dai ethnic groups. The film follows the heroine, Li Chun (Li Fengxu)'s journey to a remote, primitive minority village in Yunnan during the Cultural Revolution when urban intellectual youth were sent to rural areas to join the agricultural labour in response to the Up to Mountains, Down to Countryside movement promoted by the CCP (1955-1970s). As the "lost generation" their cultural identity, belonging, and minds were "lost" to confusion, depression, and invisibility

(Bonnin 2013; Wu and Hong 2016). Li's initial cultural shock and her later assimilation are followed by an awakening subjectivity and passion which unfold through autobiographical narratives. She is inspired by the kindness, freedom, and natural beauty of the Dai community. Her sojourn amongst the Dai is portrayed as entering a dislocated utopia away from the dominant culture. However, this yearning for purity of life is gradually destroyed by natural disasters and human tragedies, as Li is forced back to the city.

Rural landscapes represent different stages of Li's psychological development. During her initial work carrying water and cutting bamboo, the shot composition often places her within spatio-visual restraints: she is seen framed within the rectangular fences by the river or physically blocked by the bamboo in the forest, looking at the Dai people in the distance. As she gradually discovers her desire for female beauty and the feeling of love and passion influenced by the Dai girls' daily dressing-up and other rituals, the riverside becomes an open, vast, but personal space without any visual barriers for her, allowing her to question and re-recognise herself alone. The labour formerly associated with the space is replaced by dragonflies and blooming flowers in her own subjective point-of-view. We hear her voice-over saying that she never thought about girls dressing up as she has been told that no beauty is true beauty. Li's dislocated experience deepens her confusion and scarring. She has been double-displaced/exiled, first from the urban world when she was

involuntarily sent to an alien remote land; then by the rural world that sparks a new-born subjectivity and self-identity, but this journey of encountering her true self is only a momentary aberration in an urban life.

Other films of this post-Reform period focused on marginal women, who attempt to centre themselves through journeys through the rapid socio-economic transformation of that time. The directors paid greater attention to the reshaping of the market and social structure by focusing on the growth of the national consumerist cultures and practices, and the social problems of those disenfranchised individuals in the new world.

Women's Story (*nüren de gushi* 女人的故事 1987, Peng Xiaolian 彭小莲) adopts a radically different tone from previous films that tended to look back to the sorrows of history. It depicts how three peasant women journey to the city and transcend the traditional gender limitations of arranged marriage, the dominant patriarchy, and women's financial dependence on men. The film focuses on women-in-transit, highlighting their business potential and newly defined personhood enabled by the economic reform. Director Peng used her own rural experience to create an objective, documentary tone about the space and the women. The high-saturated hues show the women's joy when trying on colourful clothes in the newly established village market; the walking-pace movement of the camera and the heroine's distinct red scarf set

against the grey village surroundings. The matched metric between the rhythm of the train's engine, the women's lingering gaze on the countryside, and the landscape itself reveal excitement and expectation. Peng stressed that women's cinema is not just about films made by or about women, but it should be "an expression of a woman's psychology" as female directors/women's cinema objectively enunciates female subjectivity with a unique fidelity which provides access to a woman's experience without beautifying, weakening or stereotyping (1988: 29).

The film echoes one of China's leading feminist thinkers, Li Xiaojiang's views on market feminism in the 80s. Li opines that women's subjectivity was awakened and developed in parallel to marketisation and commercialised consumption, "recover[ing] women's real, natural, feminine singularity...commericalis[ing] their form of self-expression" (Li 1988; Barlow 2004: 253-254). Li suggests that the government should never fully represent or take the female position, voice, and perspective. Any authoritative identification should be disavowed and society should let women identify with themselves and not accept the state-established "differential system" that teaches them to learn female characteristics through an state-assigned definition. *Women's Story* focuses on the stories of three independent women and resonates with Li's idea that female singularity should be given to women, and that women should not be collectively represented or represented as the

collective (Barlow 2004).

Despite a litany of extraordinarily powerful women Chinese history is characteristically represented as masculine and women in power as aberrant; Chinese women have characteristically been abandoned, ignored and presented by masculine history. Dai's psychoanalytical feminism argues that Chinese women were historically castrated (1989: 2002). Chinese women in history were symbolic of surplus - they function as structural and functional tools for the better shaping of patriarchal authority and order. The Fifth Generation portrayed women as desired, to-be-looked-at subjects in their work and exposed women as projections of self-orientalised cultural allegories. Chow argues that the woman-in-the-primitive makes women the exhibited objects, a living ethnographic museum, with Chineseness on display (1995: 47).

Raise the Red Lantern (*da hong denglong gao gao gua* 大红灯笼高高挂 1991, Zhang Yimou 张艺谋) depicts a frozen cultural temporality without origin or future, cause or resolution, as if the space created for the film is a rootless, timeless, episode. Neither does the film provide any exact locations. The heroine, travelling alone, through a withered forest, arrives at the grand, maze-like Chen Mansion. The Mansion is built with dusty, yellow stone, arranged with extreme symmetry, with endless frames one placed within

another. The fortress height of the walls, with their claustrophobic spatial design make the luxurious space oppressive, a timeless and eternal prison for the women that reside within. The generalised historical setting, in this way, creates a vacuous cultural artifact. The youthful urban intellectual woman's journey to the unnamed, remote province depicts her entering a museum of Chinese life, as sexualised property, in a timeless dislocation that operates both physically and psychologically.

Zhang's *Judou* (菊豆 1990) illustrates the female body as the projection of male desire and a site for displaced female subjectivity. Physically set in a primitive village, Judou (Gong Li), the only woman within the family, represents the objectified battle between different men. On the other hand, although Judou is seen as a passive possession by the men, she uses her sexuality, body, and gaze to adjust her power to a dominant, active one. Her perverse relationship with the nephew, Tianqing (Li Baotian) dislocates her from the normal gender/sexual position; however, such moral displacement empowers her. In a scene where Tianqing gazes at Judou through a peephole, Judou's corresponding gaze and her active confrontation evoke a balance, or a reversal of the power relationship (figs. 1.20-1.21). Contrary to Cui's view that "Judou fantasizes Tianqing to be a figure of salvation, saving her from another man's oppression", Judou acts as a transformative social rebel, utilising the space of confinement and restraint as her battlefield. Her sexuality is her

weapon, her husband and even her lover both enemies (1997: 318). She does not identify or attach herself to either of them: what we see is her “self-alliance”, her violent, rebellious revenge on the social order which has been destroying her true self for a long time. Thus, Judou’s moral and sexual displacement from the norm centres her subjectivity and power.





Figs. 1.21-1.22 Judou's gaze.

After the “watershed in the history of Chinese feminism” (Zheng and Zhang 2010: 40) which is attributed to the Fourth UN Conference on Women (1993), the treatment of women’s questions in social discussion become more diverse and hybrid. The new feminism focused on gender awareness as a type of human agency rather than as an institutional mechanism. This turn of events permitted gender equality to be embraced “outside the official system” and recognised gender equality as fundamental state policy (ibid: 49; Wang 2008). The gender training programme promoted by the collaboration between the state (the Women’s Federation) and NGOs raised gender awareness, transforming feminist consciousness from an artificial examination to a socio-scientifically justified awareness. The gender training studied and

analysed “deeper structural inequalities of various social groups that actively engage in transforming public policies and social practices...introduc[ing] feminist concepts to both the public and government officials in a persuasive manner” (Wang and Zhang 2010: 40-70). The overlap and cross-communication between the inside and the outside of female institutions “explore the most effective ways to generate social and political transformations in the local context” (ibid: 61). This shows the cooperation between the NGOs’ bottom-up effort and the Women’s Federation’s top-down attitude, which forms the public and institutional dialogue about feminism. There were repercussions for the representation of dislocated women in cinema.

Departing from the Fifth Generation’s self-orientalised, allegorical female representations, the Sixth Generation, especially the female directors’ work, shifted towards a close examination of marginal women’s social situations whose stories come much closer to the present. *Lost in Beijing* (*ping guo* 苹果 2007, Li Yu 李玉) tells the story of a young female migrant worker, Pingguo’s (Fan Bingbing) hopeless urban experience. Having been raped by her boss, exchanged for financial bargain by her husband, and forced into bearing an illegitimate child, Pingguo realises that she has to escape from patriarchal control. The film addresses the migrant’s *hukou* problems, rural-urban class distinctions, the double elimination first as a migrant worker then as a woman,

family and gendered power relations in Chinese society, a woman's significance to herself and to the men related to her, and women's personal and financial standing. Male surveillance, control over and commodification of the female body mark a blurred boundary between the personal and the political in contemporary Chinese society (Zuo 2018; Wang 2011).

Although female vulnerability seems to be its most straightforward theme, the film subtly "dismantles male dominance in society" (Stuckey 2018: 100). Pugsley (2016) argues that Pingguo's awareness of her own sexuality as a weapon for financial gain and career success echoes the shifts in the market environment and its connection with gender-appeal. Contract and negotiation are recurring themes in the film, not only between the men who exchange the woman for financial and sexual purposes, but also around Pingguo herself. Her pains and struggles shape her standing and independence and make her swallow the bitterness. The experience of being exploited and abandoned by the patriarchal order shapes her journey of self-strengthening and self-realisation.

The Women's Federation has historically focused on rural women. Their sphere of practice and that of the urban female feminist intellectuals are mutually exclusive. Some scholar-activists run workshops in educational institutions and in political committees. Their joint efforts mark a bilateral

communication between rural-urban feminist developments, highlighting the significance of the state and non-state cooperation. Their cooperation underlines the necessity for blurred boundaries when establishing a new framework for Chinese feminism. Increasing social attention moves female imaging towards a broader cultural landscape as Dai argues that the women's question is the question of futurity, that it is waiting for solutions to be able to reclaim female identity and position through women's own voice (2002: 235-265). Dai refers to female desire as a result of consumerist culture, and feminist questions as the fluid and unresolvable, she claims that feminism's concerns have arisen from state-controlled fertility policies (ibid: 184).

Legislation by the central government protecting women's rights does not fully counter social discrimination against women (Angeloff and Lieber 2012). The Women's Federation is not fully aware of the depth of socio-cultural feminist problems. It mostly focuses on what has been state-defined, the economics of female inequality such as female unemployment, and overlooks issues of personal development, self-bettering, the quality of women's careers, and the debate around traditional female roles, women's leadership and political participation, and the attention due to rural women (Wang and Zhang 2010).

Problems such as the "left-over women" (*shengnü* 剩女, single women older than 27, according to the state-run Xinhua News Agency, the official

mouthpiece of China's Communist Party), domestic violence, psychological abuse, social security, and property rights have been widely discussed on social media and have become popular subjects in recent films (Fincher 2014). Therefore, looking at a Chinese cinema of dislocation after the 2000s throughout the female spectrum marks a new era of reconfiguring gender landscapes and encourages more powerful discussions, debates, and attentions to female issues. It explores how cinema works with Chinese contextual and aesthetic specificities through the most immediate visual forms, social engagements, and psychological approaches.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that cinematographic phases of women's dislocation in Chinese cinema can be identified according to historical periods and socio-cultural transformations. Early cinema illustrated women's vulnerability and victimhood through the contrast between the luring visual erotica of cosmopolitan modernisation and female bodies in despair. During the civil-war period, women's burdens and their inner emptiness were interwoven visually with bleak natural landscapes. Socialist cinema deployed standardised postures and visual compositions to show how the physically or ideologically displaced women achieved spiritual enlightenment. During the reform era, women's self-discoveries through journeying were filmed in a more subjective and fluid style; they either travelled back to revisit the past, or

travelled forward to keep up with the nation's socio-economic advancement. Other films unfolded women's overlooked, painful histories through their struggles in primitive rural settings. The Fifth Generation depicted women as allegorical and desired objects and emphasised objectified corporeal beauty (usually fragmented) against a the primitive rurality, evoking both repressed passion and a repressed cultural imagination.

Cinematic dislocation in past research has always been associated with form, style, and socio-cultural references related to urban settings and transformations; or the symbolic/imagined revisiting of the past through rurality; women and their journeys tend to be the projection of their pain, marginalisation and victimisation. Neither of these approaches occupy the focus of this research. This thesis discusses this concept of dislocation, rather, from a counter-urban standpoint in a geo-emotional framework and argues that women in such a cinema are initially disadvantaged, yet they aim to seek alternative ways of empowerment and make their new identities - in this sense, dislocation becomes their agency and catalyses their autonomy and strength. The case studies represent various distinct dislocated spaces that decentre the urban-centric, leitmotif of commercial Chinese cinema. By focusing on representations of and relations between humans and social spaces, I will texture the definition of the cinema of dislocation with new and culturally different work: the derelict ruins of Chinese urban lives, remote rural locations,

and a weary, out-of-tempo “middle-space” between urban and rural communities, the township/suburban space with its specific Chinese character. Each of these examples will expose unique elements of the the socio-historical manifestation of dislocation embedded in the physical, cultural, and spiritual geography in contemporary Chinese history.

CHAPTER 2

Women's Dislocation and Dislocated Journeys *within* Displaced Areas:

Contexts and Literature Review

Chapter 2 and 3 will analyse women's dislocation and dislocated journeys within areas that are displaced within the context of the power relations of the urban-normative discourse. The former provides thematic backgrounds and theoretical frameworks as a context for the film case studies that follow; it examines the dislocation of Chinese ethnic minorities, and related rural and suburban realms within the dominant narrative. The settings of most of the film cases to be discussed in the next chapter will be either villages or townships; while some filmic representations of minority people far away from the centre counter the spaces that symbolise what we will describe as a Han hegemony.

The films selected for the category of the "rural within" are films about rural, township and minority dislocations set in non-urban areas. The physical settings first evoke a sense of distance; they block the people from privileged urban lives and from access to various resources, assets and cultures. Subjects involve people who naturally inhabit those areas. Although their movements are restricted to remote regions, their travels strive for transformation or their lives are disrupted or challenged by cultures or powers

emanating from the central dominance. As the next chapter will analyse specifically, women represented in the film case studies embody rural, township and minority dislocations, this chapter sets out a broad picture of the history of discourses of Chinese ethnicity and political and cultural centralism as it speaks to the nature of the dislocation and displacement that has occurred in the 21st century China.

Contextualising rural and minority population displacements of the 2000s provides a background against which to map out the fictionalised geographical, socio-cultural and psychological stories of the films' narratives. It grounds the films' themes and serves as the basis to draw out the differences between historical/social science and fictional narratives in cinematic representation. Thereafter, this chapter refines the concept of dislocation to the specifics of rural dislocation. It contributes to conversations about the imagination of remote and regional cultures as inhabiting "primitive", exotic spaces. These spaces particularly formulate a distinct realm for disenfranchised women. They "pin" women into, or force them into confrontation with, specific female roles as they were assigned by traditional values. Then, through examining Chinese townships and suburban developments, the chapter stresses how a grey area between urban and rural spaces has come to evoke a space where both desperation and hope can co-exist, a place grounded in moral ambiguity, a dangerous and threatening space where women simultaneously embody the

corrupting allure of modernity and the positive sides of human heartedness. This liminal space offers opportunities for inventing new and potentially individual identities.

Chapter 1 contextualised historically the theme of dislocation as it is manifested in Chinese cinema. This chapter analyses films made after the 2000s, the focus period of this thesis. This chapter contextualises the themes and different categories of dislocation in the film case studies to be discussed. The analysis in each section interweaves cinematic discussions, locating films in relation to the political events and socio-cultural conditions of the period in which they are set and made. By examining dislocations in non-urban settings I choose not to delve any further into the sub-categories of the broader theme of urban dislocations, nor diasporic dislocations that affect the lives of Chinese overseas and their geographical and socio-cultural displacement. These latter categories are not only too broad but also the diasporic cinemas are mostly made by international film companies, are better known and have already been widely discussed (Marchetti 2006; He 2013; Kuehn et al. 2013).

The focus of this thesis is placed firmly on mainland films and uniquely on mainland-made counter-urban films. Thus, from this chapter onwards, the analysis concentrates on rural and township displacements. Films are grouped geographically (urban, rural, township and minority areas) because dislocation

fundamentally deals with generic locations and spatial, physical displacement. As dislocation is a socio-cultural and political process, the films discussed fit into these categories which share a confluence with geographical dislocation films.

Some directors of rural dislocation films, such as Gan Xiao'er 甘小二, focus on the lives of rural Christians in China against backdrops of rural despair caused by poverty and social dislocation. Gan's films often simultaneously address faith and crime, such as child- trafficking, spousal murder and sexual scandals, showing how spiritual powers cannot solve the villagers' most tangible difficulties. Gan says of his style and intention that his lack of editing and use of long takes aim to contribute to the "authentic circumstances"; his themes explore "aspects that are not that good in our country's development" because he feels that under rapid socio-economic advancement, many rural dwellers, especially rural Christians, "might feel peaceful in their hearts, but they tremble physically" (Gan and Chen 2017). Starting from *Incense*, Ning Hao's 宁浩 films largely focuses on people's dislocating journeys, such as rural, diasporic, or even outer spaces. When he talks about his rural films about dislocation, Ning says, "I want to restore the real as far as I can [...] this era brings development and dislocation together, we live in a barren land without faith, so we are travelling and searching" (Ning et al. 2019).

Some filmmakers choose to employ period narratives to project contemporary rural reality. For example, Mei Feng 梅峰, whose films are set in the past, scrutinises current social problems as they emerge in individuals' stories. Mei states that, temporal and spatial dislocation "is still able to have a dialogue with contemporary Chinese society" (Mei and Chen 2018). While Han Jie 韩杰, who is interested in the psychological dislocation or madness of subjects living in remote areas, indicates that, "I want to express absurd reality in a free way, but this kind of freedom may have logical problems in [the audience's] opinion" (Han and Xie 2011).

Directors of township dislocation films always set their films in their own hometowns. Yang Heng 杨恒 (from *Tujia* ethnic minority 土家族) has made a number of films based in township or village settings. He says, "my work depicts my home, it is a real looking back...people are always on the search, they travel back home physically, but seek for something spiritually" (Yang 2017). Minimal dialogue and pure actions evoke a sense of the individual being (mis)placed or dislocated in an alienating world, wandering as a helpless stranger. Similarly, Liang Ming 梁鸣, who is from a northern township in Heilongjiang, explains his counter-urban interest, "We abandoned the Beijing, Shanghai cosmopolitans and turned back to my hometown. I was attracted by the relationship between people and society there, went for interviews and looked for reports in chronicle literature. Later, I discovered some other things:

incidents, such as marine pollution, the struggle for fishing rights in the coastal area, the pressure of fishermen to survive” (Liang et al. 2020).

With minority dislocation, Han filmmakers are fascinated by the real circumstances and by individual dilemmas often making their films after spending a large amount of time with ethnic groups, reinforcing what they may also have personally physically experienced. Yang Rui 杨蕊 is a Han director who spent three years in the mountains with the minorities, intending to explore “something deep in mind [where] disturbing visuals and sounds will bring new psychological feelings” (Yang and Ma 2010). Comparably, Wang Xuebo’s 王学博 *Knife in the Clear Water* (*qingshui li de daozi* 清水里的刀子 2016) employs dim lighting and colours with characters moving slowly in a controlled manner. After several screenings, many audiences questioned the Wang as to why he used a grey hue and “omitted” the spectacular landscape in the Hui 回 community. In Wang’s response he recalls “when I first went the Hui region in Gansu I said to the villagers, ‘It is spectacular’, but one of them simply replied, ‘there is nothing spectacular, all you can see is the barren land without crops...they yearn for death because life is bitter’. I was shocked and then realised” (Sohu 2018).

Filmmakers of ethnic minorities like Pema Tsenden adopt the role of authentic culture narrator through the lens of daily reality. A large number of them also

fuse fantasy and magic realist approaches in their work. As Tseden suggests, “The spiritual beliefs brought about by magical realist elements are similar to that in our religion and religion. Things like dreams and reincarnation are blended in our daily lives. It is impossible to say whether this thing is true or illusion, but it is a part of the reality of Tibetan culture for us” (Tseden et al. 2019; 2020).

Section 1:

Chinese Ethnic Minorities, Their Displacement and Cinematic Representations

In 1979 the Chinese government identified 56 formal ethnic groups (*minzu* 民族) (Hu and Zhang 2009: 9). Those citizens that identify themselves as Han (*hanzu* 汉族) make up 91.5 percent and the minorities account for 8.5 percent (NBS 2020). Ethnic minority studies have always been a key area in academia, in part spurred by the growing minority population (from 6% of the total population in the 1950s to 8.5% by 2019) (ibid). Moreover, China’s attitude towards its formal minorities parallels its own relation to the rest of the world (Mackerras 2003: 304; Zang 2016: 1).

The Chinese world view is grounded in an idea about “the organismic wholeness and interconnectedness of all being” (Mote 1989: 14). Everyone is an interactive participant in the organically whole cosmos. In Sinological

narratives, the universe is designed with clear boundaries, layers, corners and edges (Shaughnessy 2006: 14). Therefore, the notions of boundary and the question of what it is contained within this sinocentric boundary are critical to Chinese identity. One should be shaped around the ideology, traditions and mutual characteristics that belong to the cultural dominance to obtain their Chinese identity. The ruling elite adopts a position of cultural superiority. It casts the minorities who are physically and culturally outside of the sino-scope and who do not follow the centralised rules as barbarians, aiming to transform and regulate them. The Chinese sense of identity and continuity is therefore grounded in “racial distinction” and “cultural universalism” (Dikötter 2015: 2-3).

The marginalisation of minorities can be traced back to the Shang 商 Dynasty (1600-1046BCE). Keightley suggests that Chinese cultural complexes formed in the Shang categorised “other” people who live in the four directions: people of “Northwest China” and the “western part of the Central Plains” and that of the East Coast and the eastern part of the Central Plains” (1987: 94). The Shang referred the inferior and enemies as *fang* 方 (an enemy county) that would harm and attack the centre (Keightley 1999: 253). Later, the idea of asymmetrical dominant-minority relation with other people from the Spring and Autumn period (*chunqiu zhanguo* 春秋战国) (722-481BCE) still permeates China today. *Chunqiu* 春秋 and *Zuozhuan* 左传 (the chronology of the Spring and Autumn period) and *Liji* 礼记 recorded the prehistorical minority ethnics like

Yi 彝 and Di 狄. The minorities were seen as the savages inhabiting barren, desolate lands, hovering and threatening the central sphere (Meserve 1982: 57). They had different minds because of their distinct race; some had outrageous dietary and other behaviours that made them no different from animals. Their savageness meant they were physically deformed and ugly, and lacking any human virtue (Yang 1968: 20-33; Meserve 1982: 60). Their marginal minority status is reinforced throughout the classics by being identifying as “raw” through eating “uncooked” food, which signifies their uncivilised status (Fiskesjö 1999: 139-140).

In the Republican period, Sun Zhongshan 孙中山 (1866-1925) developed the concept of the “ethnic nation”: national identity through blood relationship (*xuetong* 血统), indicating race as the core of national identity (Sun 1927; Dikötter 1990: 429). Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石 (1887- 1975) also reinforced the idea of China being “one race” rather than one nation (Jiang 1947). The Maoist ruling ideology emphasised the notion of a “class nation”, categorising the nation by various classes and their identification with the Party (Assmann et al. 2008: 17).

Since the 1980s, with the rising awareness of cultural root-seeking, Chinese nationalism and de-politicised humanism in academic and cultural spheres, the state started to re-evaluate the cultural-political positions of minorities revisiting

Confucian “world harmony” (*tianxiadatong* 天下大同) ideology in its management of minorities (Meissner 2006). The strategy of modernising the nation involves “power relationships based on competing economic and social interests”, addressing both the cultural centre and the ruling of minorities (Tu 1991: 15). The state adopts the role of guardian and saviour and represents the moral standard and social order. It promotes the notion of all Chinese races belonging to the “Yellow Race” (*huangzhongren* 黄种人), saving and liberating the minorities from the old society, which is associated with primitiveness, backwardness, slavery etc.

Cinematic representations of ethnic minorities have been visible in Chinese cinema since the 1950s, the period after the foundation of the PRC (1949). Minority films were made for CCP’s political agenda promoting national unity. Some evoke collective memory during the Sino-Japanese or the civil war which represented minorities and a Han majority co-operating to defeat national enemies, for example, Feng Yifu 冯毅夫 and Jun Li’s 李俊 *The Ethnic Hui Detachment* (*huimin zhidui* 回民支队 1959) and Zhao Xinshui’s 赵心水 *Visitors On The Icy Mountain* (*bingshan shang de laike* 冰山上的来客 1963). Some adopted an internally orientalist style depicting minorities as colourful, exotic tribes from the Han perspective, such as Wang Jiayi’s 王家乙 *Five Golden Flowers* (*wuduo jinhua* 五朵金花 1959) and Liu Qiong’s 刘琼 *Ashima* (阿诗玛 1964). Some portrayed minorities as cultural primitives transformed by

the Party, for example, Wang Weiyi's 王为一 *Caravans with Ring* (*shanjian lingxiang mabang lai* 山间铃响马帮来 1954) and Lin Nong's 林农 *Absurd Marriage* (*qiyi de hunpei* 奇异的婚配 1981). Minority films in the socialist era had a "profound impact on notions of nationality in China" (Shaffer 2007: 165).

Things began to change in the 21st century. In 2003, the state authorised new regulations to liberalise and subsidise the film industry as part of the overall market economy reform, encouraging both global and domestic private investors to participate in China's film projects; moreover, mainstream Chinese society welcomed minority language and cultures due to the new century's "original ecology folk cultures" (*yuanshengtai minsu wenhua* 原生态民俗文化) fever that supports ethnic cultural heritage and authenticity to show the state's cultural (and potentially political) openness (Lo 2018). More and more minority films shot in native languages with distinct minority people's stories emerged. For example, the Tibetan filmmaker Pema Tseden's *Silent Holy Stone* (*jingjing de manishi* 静静的嘛呢石 2005) and Ning Jingwu's 宁敬武 *Lala's Gun* (*gunlala de qiang* 滚拉拉的枪 2008). The minority-language films are referred to as "ecocinema" (*yuanshengtai dianying* 原生态电影).

Furthermore, minority studies in China have been of significant value to government since the 2000s with various policies and ideologies under Jiang, Hu and Xi, aiming to reduce socio-economic disparities and to achieve

economic advancement and national unity. Policies included The Great Western Development Project (*xibu dakaifa* 西部大开发) (2000) and the Education Reform (*jiaoyu gaige* 教育改革) (2005). The input on minority regional development was raised significantly since the 2000s. There was 66.3 billion yuan more in 2002 than that in the late 1990s; 2.2 trillion yuan was used in mega infrastructure projects (Lai 2005: 138-164). Also from the 2000s, awareness of majority-minority relations has increased as a result of the increasing power of the Internet, international support and China's increasing global interaction that encourages global attention to ethnic issues in China and stimulates China's work on these issues (Williams 2008; Zang 2015; Bi 2011).

Since the 2000s, secularisation of minority religious regions has re-shaped their cultural landscape. For example, communist songs and images of CCP leaders are imposed on religious sites (Zhang 2012; Diao 2015: 264-268). Compulsory education about the CCP ethics and modern culture further casts the minorities into uncivilised and backward cultural positions. For example, the "cast off dross" campaign (*quchu zaopo* 去除糟粕) discourages wearing headscarves in Uyghur dress; media has often promoted the idea "leaving is better" for minority rural youth (Leibold and Gros 2016; Ma 2016). Although some education policies encourage native cultural practice and curriculum, these are only partially achieved with most being replaced by Chinese classes

and CCP education, for example, through the kind of Education Reform that reinforced the party ethics and reinforcing Mandarin the lingua franca (Wang and Phillion 2009: 6-9; Leibold 2019: 4-8).

There have been a growing number of minority films since 2007 paralleling the rise of inter-ethnic tensions. In 2007, the State Administration for Religious Affairs issued State Religious Affairs Bureau Order No. 5 (*guojia zongjiao shiwu tiaoli* 国家宗教事务条例), which required people in Xinjiang 新疆 to submit an application to the government before baptism; the 2008 Tibetan unrest involved a series of protests against the Chinese government for the persecution of Tibetans and of Tibetan Buddhists and the protesters tried to disrupt the torch relay progress for the Olympic Games; in 2009, the Uyghur riot involved ethnic violence against the Han in Ürümqi, six were sentenced to death; in 2011, police killed seven Uighur separatists suspected of planning serious attacks in Horan and Kashgar; in 2013, a Tibetan monk received a suspended death sentence for instigating eight followers to burn themselves to death (nearly 100 Tibetans have been involved in self-immolation since 2009, most protesting against Chinese rule); in the same year, two ethnic Uighurs were sentenced to death over the Xinjiang terrorist incident involving fourteen anti-Chinese religious extremists' for a terrorist attack in Bachu; later in the year, Uyghurs associated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and two pedestrians killed three people in a Tiananmen Square attack.

Rather than serving propagandist purposes in the socialist era, the 21st century minority films focus on minority individuals without exoticising them. They speak of their lives, faith, physical dilemmas and psychological conditions. For example, Yang Rui's 杨蕊 *Crossing the Mountain* (*fanshan* 翻山 2010) scrutinises the mountain community of the Wa minority 瓦 in the south-west. Combining together romance and thriller, the film exposes the inexpressible passion and yearning of a minority youth experiencing their lives as dull and slack. Using extremely long takes that makes the edges blurred, interweaving the boundaries of reality and fantasy with disjointed visuals and acoustics, Yang depicts a sense of the mangling of the characters' lives and minds. He describes the film as a physio-sensuous film in which we "will have more feelings about its colours, tastes, images, and sounds and form a conclusion in our heart" indicating that finally we will discover everything is about "despair and uneasiness" (Yang 2010). The film interrogates how people can reconcile with their ethnic customs, how they can settle the anxiety caused by conflicts and riots, how they can locate their inner desires, how they can reach and overcome their personal limits.

Since the 2010s, field work and narrative histories started to explore the psychological turmoil and suffering of minorities (Liu 2011; Sundararajan and Ting 2017). Minority peoples report that their suffering occurs in

physical/health, financial, environmental, social/cultural, and mental categories, such as the Yi minority's suffering narrative regarding physical, social, environmental and mental problems and the oxymoronic circumstances and spiritual unrest of the Tibetan herdsmen when facing the battle between slaughter for market goals promoted by the state's policies and the Tibetan Buddhist beliefs about the killing of wild lives (Sundarajan and Ting 2017; Yeh and Kabzung 2016).

Thus, the feeling of dislocation experienced by minorities comes from long-term socio-cultural and systematic marginalisation. The state's policy speeds up economic development but downplays the ethnic questions; it positions the Han in an ethnic, socio-cultural and value hierarchy. The so-called national harmony and fusion aims to achieve national unity via assimilation, but has largely muted minority cultures and stimulated conflict (Wong 2000: 68-69; He 2004: 108-120; Goodman 2004: 63). For example, the state's order of demolishing old towns and artifacts in minority regions makes the people feel "torn from their communities" (Mackerras 2016: 237). Income, education, social welfare, cultural/communicative barriers, and unbalanced opportunities in the labour market also drive the minorities further away (Hannum et al. 2008: 242-243; Bhalla and Qiu 2006: 95-110; Wang 2013: 134-142; Gustafsson and Ding 2014: 558-560). The state's putative support and ignorance of the actual will of the minorities are the major causes of

national conflicts, making the minorities feel disengaged and displaced physically and psychologically.

As the result of inter-ethnic conflicts, a “second generation of ethnic policies” was introduced in the 2010s with the aim of promoting a “melting pot” model to ease the sense of ethnic social dislocation. For example, the state provided more Mandarin language training enabling minorities to enter the labour market and encouraged ethnic amalgamation through intermarriage, residential intermixing, joint schooling and mobility (Lo 2018). Some minority films illustrate the government’s cultural integration tendency but from a different perspective: Emyr ap Richard, Erdenibulag Darhad’s *The Castle* (*Kchengbao* K 城堡 2015), Pema Tseden’s *Tharlo* (*taluo* 塔洛 2018) and He Jia’s *禾家* *Erdos Rider* (*e’erduosi qishi* 鄂尔多斯骑 2016) narrate minority-Han encounters and portray Han people and culture as embodying evil or destructive forces that threaten the safety of the minority protagonists’ lives and minds.

Most minority films are set in Tibet and Xinjiang, with themes that consider religion and spiritual pursuits, conflicts over traditions and a pervasive Han modernisation. As a leading figure among Tibetan filmmakers, Pema Tseden’s films stress Tibetan traditions, cultures and faith and how they are destabilised by the invasion of the modern. In a calm, distant manner, his *Old Dog* (*lao gou*

老狗 2011) powerfully articulates the Tibet-Han cultural conflict. In the film, an old Tibetan mastiff symbolises the backbone of Tibetan culture in the pastoral area. While the father desperately wants to keep it as the symbol of their pastoral tradition, the son plans to sell it to a Han customer at a high price. Modern civilisation and commercialisation fills the hearts of Tibetans with unease as their traditional culture faces unprecedented challenges: the dog becomes a victim of such a conflict. Wang Xuebo's 王学博 *Knife in the Clear Water* (*qingshui li de daozi* 清水里的刀子, 2016) focuses on the Chinese Muslim community's extreme poverty in Qinghai and how they stick to their faith when faced with extremely harsh conditions. In these films, religion supports the minority people in their communities when under duress.





Figs. 2.1-2.2 *Old Dog* (2011, Pema Tsenden)





Figs. 2.3-2.4 *Knife in the Clear Water* (2016, Wang Xuebo)

2018 was a turning point for minority policies and changes in China. The central government forced over one million Xinjiang Muslims into political, legalised education camps and consolidated regulations on religious freedom, escalating punishments for unsanctioned activities and expanding supervision of groups it saw as potential politically extremist and an internal threat to security. Supervisory actions included “demolishing churches and mosques, burning Qurans, persecuting worshippers and detaining imam” (Hutzler; Broadcast China 2018). Authorities have also implemented repression and systematic abuses against the 13 million Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, conducting mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment in detention facilities, and inflicting widespread controls on daily life. In August 2018, in the

Hui 回 Muslim Ningxia 宁夏 region, thousands of Huis protested against the demolition of the Grand Mosque and the removal of Islamic icons and Arabic signs from streets in Weizhou 韦州 (World Report 2019).

There has been a growing number of minority films since 2018 addressing tensions between the minority lifestyle and the Han influence. Lhupal Gyal's *Wangdrak's Rain Boots* (*wangzha de yuxue* 旺扎的雨靴 2018) projects a visual analysis of the influence of the pervasive Han urban culture through the eyes of Tibetan children. The overall national/ethnicity tension of the film is set against tension between Tibetan father and son: the father who wants to prevent rain for the sake of his crops, even turning to god for help, and the son who desperately wants it to rain so that he can wear his Western-style rain boots. Children in the film are attracted by modern fetish objects such as televisions, mechanical toys, modern boots and even plastic bags. As the filmmaker suggests, the craze for the products of modern industrialisation and commercialisation instigate cultural erosion (Houlang 2020). Similarly, Zhou Jun 周军 and Adixia Xiareheman's *Fade Away Pastoral* (*yuanqu de muge* 远去的牧歌 2018) is a mourning song for the fading of ethnic culture. The film repeatedly stresses long shots from the Inner Mongolian herders' perspective as they watch a travelling troop of jeeps crossing the grassland, contrasting their horses with the vehicles. Herdsmen communities are gradually being squeezed and shrunk by the inevitable urban invasion. Images of the Mongols'

silent witnessing of the urban comers accompanied by tragically solemn drum sounds demonstrate their heroic but hopeless confrontation with the cultural invader as if the grassland is turned into a battlefield. The characters' mad state when they chase the cars on horseback further evokes their new un-situatedness in their own ancestral homeland.





Figs. 2.5-2.7 *Fade Away Pastoral* (2018, Zhou Juan, Adixia Xiareheman)

Minority characters are often caught between real life events and spiritual/religious turmoil. In Sonthar Gyal's *Lhamo and Skalbe (lamu yu gabei*

拉姆与嘎贝 2019), the heroine adopts a double identity. In reality, she is a good mother and wife but has a complex relationship with her husband and her husband's ex-wife who has become a nun. As a Tibetan opera actress, she performs as a devilish woman in a traditional folktale. The theatrical identity dislocates the heroine from real life and makes her question her role as a good mother and faithful wife when facing her unreliable husband. Many films like Sonthar Gyal's *Ala Changso* (*alajiangse* 阿拉姜色 2018) and Pema Tseden's *Balloon* (*qiqiu* 气球 2019) (discussed in Chapter 3) are also centred around religious minority women whose faith conquers their real-life trauma. The women's spiritual and real-life journeys transform them, spark their desire and subjectivity and allow them eventually to challenge their traditional role and gender norm. However, these films controversially suggest religion is the last option or escape that saves the vulnerable characters from real life tragedies.

Section 2:

Rural Dislocation and Its Cinematic Representation

There have been two periods of the Chinese rural structuring since the foundation of the PRC: collectivised rural operative units (the 1950s to 1970s) and the reform towards family farming since the 1980s (Li 2015: 1). Agrarian de-collectivisation has sparked peasant awareness of an envisaged Democracy that is in conflict with state policies and the corruption that is eroding their rights. After the Reform, avaricious taxation, government failure to provide promised subsidies, forced land relocation, distribution and

production targets, rural commodification, and local corruption aroused resentment and discontent (Friedman et al. 2007). Besides, the Chinese household registration system ignores the social, legal and civil rights of rural citizens which causes dramatic urban-rural gulfs (Murphy 2002: 43, 183; Meng and Zhang 2001: 485). The top-down “production plans and the direction of knowledge flow” presume the ignorance of rural people and designate the social and economic participation and contribution of rural citizens who are deemed “distant from and in need of modernity, with the value of their local social networks and innovations often being overlooked and even stifled” (Murphy and Fong 2006: 24). Moreover, the failed promise of achieving equality shape the worsening rural marginality and “economic insecurities” (ibid).

Although rural China has experienced “universal and intense transformative development” since 2000 and rural net income per capita multiplied 7.34 times from 1978 to 2007, China has faced rural-urban socio-economic disparities and significant decline in “urban-rural coordination development” between 2000 and 2008. This was a result of the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation processes which began at the start of the 21st century (Long et al. 2011: 1094, 1104; Chen 2009: 17). Peasants and villagers also suffer from poor rural fiscal systems, unequal resource allocation, social exclusion and the unemployment of agricultural and migrant workers, forced tax collection, and farmers’

vulnerability due to the lack of official definition of any public benefits (Lewis and Xue 2003: 928; CCICED ARD 2005: 25, 49; Chen 2009: 29-40).

More recent attention has focused on provision for the dislocation faced by the rural population under the state's socio-economic advancement. The dislocated are left-behind by the state's rapid growth while their resources and spaces are invaded or seized for feeding urban development. Dams and hydropower in the Southwest China create displacement and destroy ecological and natural systems and rural settlements while The Great West Development (*xibu dakaifa* 西部大开发) scheme (2006) mandatorily removed minority villagers from their settlement (Tilt 2016: 87-108). Electricity generated by hydropower stations has been transferred to the coastal regions in Eastern China due to the "Western-electricity-to-the-East" (*dongdian xisong* 西电东送) policy (2001-2010). Submerging productive land and providing insufficient compensations has caused the loss of settlements, growing economic hardship and social disparities for the rural residents and affected minorities.

Feeding more developed areas with their own remote resources causes the physical, economic, and eventually psychological, dislocation of those who lose touch with the value of what they have produced. Rural communities are forced into an ultimate vulnerability and despair that shapes their

disempowerment: their land is overwhelmed, their livelihoods changed and their homes inundated. They are dispossessed of their material and cultural lives and customs, resulting in a complete erasure of their social landscape. However, they only have the government to rely on as they have nobody else to turn to. Although the state has provided increased compensation for some affected populations in recent years, it fails to realise the nature of people's real loss behind the monetary gain (Galipeau et al. 2013: 437). Thus, issues of ownership, of power and raw materials, are the subjects of a moral discourse that is being "constantly negotiated" under the nation's "far-reaching social and economic reforms – reforms that are pushing the boundaries of traditional forms of moral consensus"(Tilt 2016: 90-91, 104).

During the 2000s, the central government started to work on lessening social inequality and promoting social harmony and national socio-cultural and economic advancement; the state has also put effort into rural development. The joining of the WTO (2001) opened a wider gate to China's global market and to foreign investment, creating more opportunities for migrant workers in the city. Jiang Zemin's 江泽民 "Three Represents" (*sange daibiao* 三个代表), a theory declared at the Sixteenth Party Congress (2002), stressed the party's role of representing China's advancement in economic production, cultural development and political consensus, especially declaring the CCP's responsibility for developing rural education and economy (Jiang 2013: 519).

Rural development policies aimed at improving the land sale market and infrastructure and increasing state subsidies and rural employment.

However, problems arose along with socio-political events. The drastic implementation of the Three Represents led to “expanding various forms of private ownership, [...] income disparities [...] and) serious corruption” (Narayanan 2006: 336). The 2005 Jilin chemical plant explosions and the Songhua River 松花江 oil spill involved serious problems around local cadres’ corruption, disastrous pollution and hazards that frustrated the villagers (Usher 2005). Moreover, the controversial Three Gorges Dam project was finally completed in 2006 with over 18 million people affected negatively. There followed reports of critical environmental pollution and social and health threats (BBC 2019). Although the 2008 Olympics created more employment for rural migrants, most jobs were temporary or based on short term contracts and many migrant workers ended up unemployed and unable to survive in the cities.

The rural crisis is also economic. Rural villains extricate social resources from corrupted officials for commercial use, “endanger[ing] both [the] land and livelihood of smallholders”; moreover, smallholders are forced by the state to give up land ownership and private profit-making, resulting in low rental fees and harsh penalties for breach of contract (Trappel 2015: 10, 149). Once

evicted from their land, many former farmers evicted from their farms cannot enter the off-farm job market (industrial or technical positions) due to lack of the required skills. Moreover, inefficient land use due to unprotected land ownership and gruelling agricultural targets cause frustration among villagers (Ye 2015: 318; He and Luo 2016: 66). Land circulation and consolidation results in increasing land mechanisation which reduces farming jobs and makes it challenging for villagers to find permanent, non-farm jobs. Thus, a change in livelihood contributes to negative life satisfaction and the feeling of dislocation (Tong et al. 2020: 2).

By 2007, policies ensuring basic old-age and medical insurance, unemployment insurance, industrial injury insurance and maternity insurance, the minimum subsistence guarantee system reached 201.07 million, 220.51 million, 116.45 million, 121.55 million, 77.55 million people, respectively, with the new rural cooperative medical care system involving over 700 million people. However, the main targeted population for social security was within the “insider system”, and excluded floating populations, the unemployed and rural workers; moreover, there were about 150 million rural surplus labour workers under the category of hidden unemployment or half-employment during the 2000s (Chen 2009: 9-11).

From the 21st century the themes and cinematography of films shot in the

countryside started to shift: no longer the socialist propaganda of the Maoist regime nor the exoticising, self-orientalised national allegory of the Fifth Generation (1980s-90s). Entering the 2000s, films about villages explored rural individuals' lives and hardship. For example, Gan Xiao'er's 甘小二 *The Only Sons* (*shanqing shuixiu* 山清水秀 2003) adopts a calm, unobtrusive and introverted way of narrating a horrifying sequence of events. He tracks an honest, kind, but weak and humble farmer who attempts to bribe a lawyer to save his brother from the death sentence. The protagonist goes from selling blood, to selling children, and then to pushing his wife to suicide. Ning Hao's 宁浩 *Incense* (*xianghuo* 香火 2003) follows the story of a rural monk's failed petition to local cadres and governments to preserve his temple which was under threat of demolition due to rural resettlement and development.



Fig. 2.8 *The Only Sons* (2003, Gan Xiao'er)



Fig. 2.9 *Incense* (2003, Ning Hao)

Films made in the first decade of the new century largely reflect rural governments' blurred boundaries between developmental "participation and corruption" (Lewis and Xue 2003: 930). In 2002, Jiang Zemin 江泽民 defined "anti-corruption mechanisms" as a "major political task for the Party". Then Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 declared eradicating corruption as the government's objective, as corruption was threatening both economic development and the political and social stability of China (OECD 2005: 101). However, party leaders still had great power over local development planning, industrial construction or state-sponsored investments in the countryside; rural cadres and managers were perceived to be in maximizing self-interest and of power bargaining, forcing the under-represented villagers into compliance in the wake of their

single-minded pursuit of self interest (Du et al. 2004: 88-98). Rural films made during the time interrogated rural poverty and social insecurity and displacement. For example, the bitter romance between a migrant worker and a prostitute in Wang Liren's 王笠人 *Weed* (*caojie* 草芥 2006) is set against the themes of insignificance and marginalisation in rural exclusion while Wang Quan'an's 王全安 *The Story of Ermei* (*jingzhe* 惊蛰 2004) focuses on a rural woman's tragic life journey highlighting how she suffers from family financial burdens, patriarchal oppression and finally falls into despair as she submits to her destiny.

Since the 2010s, the central government started to work on rural land quality, scientific usage, rural ecology and to take measures to protect farmers' land rights (Li 2016: 1). In 2014, the government issued the "trifurcation of rights on contracted farmland" ensuring farmers' rights to land ownership, contract and management; the 2018 Rural Revitalization Strategy (*xiangcun zhenxing zhanlue* 乡村振兴战略) promoted the long-term lease of farmland to attract external investment; and the 2019 Rural Land Contract Law (*nongcun tudi chengbaofa* 农村土地承包) further stressed the legal process of land transfer to protect farmers' land rights (Wang and Zhang 2017: 111; Yang and Yan 2017: 101; Li et al. 2020: 60-72).

Moreover, Xi's regime further stresses rural revitalisation. Relocation and

displacement policies in China are concentrated in remote and mountainous townships and villages in the western provinces where the targeted population can be characterised by “low educational attainment, poor health, bad living and reproduction conditions, and marginalization” (Liu et al. 2019: 2609). In 2013 when Xi came to power, the state’s *dibao* 低保 (minimum livelihood guarantee) expenditure for the rural population reached 86.69 billion yuan, and over 10 billion a year more than that for city dwellers (Civil Affairs Yearbook). It was the first time that rural communities had received more funding than urban communities. The National People's Congress in 2015 announced the temporary-assistance scheme, “Targeted Poverty Alleviation” (*jingzhun fupin* 精准扶贫) nationwide where cadres are specifically paired with rural households to provide villagers with skills and knowledge (Li 2015: 2-6). Xi re-iterated the rural revitalisation strategy as “the leading agenda for government work on agriculture, rural areas, and rural residents”; projects included investments in “infrastructure, energy, irrigation and new technologies [...] to address the imbalance between rural and urban living standards” (Mulholland 2015).

In the 2010s, “an unequivocal bent to the countryside with the *dibao*” properly began (Solinger 2017: 56). However, problems have begun to appear as a result of the rural up-lift. With rapid urbanisation, more and more villagers moved to cities, abandoning land and agriculture and leaving productive and

financial burdens in the hands of the remaining villagers (Long et al. 2016: 392; Deng 2017: 5; Li et al. 2020: 9). Many rural migrants are still rejected by the urban labour market due to their age, illness, lack of qualifications or start-up money (Solinger 2017: 54). Moreover, the “Targeted Poverty Alleviation” (*jingzhun fupin* 精准扶贫) creates cadre-villager conflicts as in some areas this scheme is perceived to be merely funding food and indolence (Rogers et al. 2018: 551; Zhang et al. 2019: 149106). Li, a local cadre who works in the scheme in Dali, Yunnan said, “They know we will do everything for them anyway. We buy them televisions, we bring them money, we even mend the doors for them” (Li 2020).

Apart from poverty alleviation-related dislocation, commercialising and over exploiting historical villages causes “the dissimilation of original lifestyles” and “population displacement” (Zhang et al. 2017: 86). Displacement through population “refinement” replaces original villagers with developers, investors and workers from cities. Such a circumstance disfigures cultural spirits and practices such as, traditions, religion, and language. The degradation of both the cultural value of historical quarters and of their original residential functions, changes in social structure and the disappearance of traditional community life inevitably prompt social conflicts with those who are left behind and disenfranchised by the social changes (Wu 2008: 32-42).

The results of relocation stimulate social segregation and negative humanitarian impacts between rural re-settlers and host communities. More academic attention has been paid to this in recent studies (Wilmsen et al. 2011; Kassiola 2017; Feng and Squires 2019; Tong et al. 2020). Dislocated people face ambiguous property rights: land ownership for farmers comes under the official control of government economic schemes while the areas of their assigned new residences in towns always geographically and socially exclude the resettlers' engagement in and integration with the native communities (He and Wu, 2007: 194; Yep 2013: 281-288). As local governments are keen on working with developers, there are no official policies or contracts to secure the rural re-settlers' land compensations, or the conversion and redistribution of their land. The re-settlers therefore seek cheaper, illegal residences or rush into fragile new apartments. This adds further to their feeling of social exclusion. Moreover, they are frequently collectively allocated housing in commercial buildings and lack contact with the native community. Most of them are rejected by real estate developers because the rural re-settlers are seen as people who would bring the value and quality of property down (Song 2015: 133-134). This market dislocation further exacerbates the situation for rural re-settlers. Relocation overlooks the problem of relocation distance and its related social consequences, such as the break of kin ties, daily customs and activities (Liu et al. 2019: 699). This causes socio-cultural displacement among the relocated. Long relocation distances, broken social contacts, and

inappropriate service provision become the key drivers in the dissatisfaction and discomfort of rural re-settlers.

Responding to such feelings of anxiety, insecurity and turbulence, films about rural dislocation after the 2010s reflect these problems in the various types of madness or psychological disorder the characters display. Some films stress the consequences of rural-urban conflicts, rural people's social exclusion and their sense of loss. For example, in Han Jie's 韩杰 *Mr. Tree (hello shuxiansheng Hello! 树先生 2011)*, the protagonist had hoped to access a better life through the market economy but he falls into despair and is driven into madness. He cannot get used to his homelands being occupied and destroyed by the forces of urbanisation; he is eliminated from industrial job market due to his injuries; his land is grabbed by the village head but he cannot complain and even dreams about working in his factory; he is beaten up by his brother due to their financial burdens. The young man is a stereotype of young Chinese villagers who are left behind and disenfranchised by the country's advancement. They are confused losers who cannot locate themselves during the era of rapid transformation. Similarly, Zheng Dasheng's 郑大圣 *Bangzi Melody (cunxi 村戏 2017)* also addresses the villager's discomfort and disorientation when faced with the invasion of modernisation in which the old villager is driven mad by the local government's seizure of the village peanut fields for development projects.

Yang Heng's 杨恒 *Lake August* (*napian hushui* 那片湖水 2014) addresses the sense of emptiness, boredom and mundane quality of life for the rural youth in an anti-dramatic tone. Without any dramatic tension and climax, the film calmly records the lifelessness and laziness that characterizes the growing disenfranchised in rural communities. It controversially refers to rural people under the "Targeted Poverty Alleviation" (*jingzhun fupin* 精准扶贫) system as carefree and indolent. Films like Chai Chunyu's 柴春芽 *Four Ways to Die in My Hometown* (*wo guxiang de sizhong siwang fangshi* 我故乡的四种死亡方式 2012) and Gan Xiao'er's 甘小二 *Waiting for God* (*zai qidai zhizhong* 在期待之中 2012) both depict the state of sociocultural madness by bringing it to the religious and spiritual dimensions of rural life. In *Four Ways*, the father has been living in a coffin for seven years before his death as he is discontented with the social corruption he sees. One of his daughters turns to mediumship to comfort her father's soul and calm her own mind and his other daughter comes back from town and commits suicide after being exhausted by urban life. *Waiting* explores the spiritual crisis of a rural female Christian. She questions her faith as her religious discipline and ethics are disturbed by real life situations.



Figs. 2.10-2.11 *Four Ways to Die in My Hometown* (2012,Chai Chunya)

The past decade has also been a boom-time for academic and scientific research on rural development. Research and policies concerned

geographical-agricultural (water-soil relationship), systematic (land-human relationship) and socio-cultural factors (rural-urban relationship) (Liu et al. 2015: 1121-1124). The rising practical, academic and scientific supports for rural construction and development mark the countryside's increasing economic, ecological and social significance to the country. However, films about rural lives do not reflect such improvement; instead, we see either people-authority conflicts, failed communications, or villages in states of madness, living their lives in a sense of spiritual and geographical autonomy or even anarchism.

Discontent about local authorities overpricing necessities, purloining both villager income and production, as they raise fees for own benefits, arouses rural dissatisfaction and sometimes lead to crimes (Friedman et al. 2007: 262-286). A rising number of village protests occurred in China in 2011 and 2012 before Xi's regime. The Wukan 乌坎 protests (2011) in the Southern fishing village of Wukan drew global attention. Villagers violently protested against local officials' land seizures. In 2012, around 1000 villagers marched to Guangzhou City Council, demonstrating against Party Secretary, Li Zhihang's 李志航 land grabbing and corruption; villagers of Panhe 泮河 in Zhejiang protested against local officials over forced land requisitions. After a series of village protests, many rural authorities and police fled the villages (Greene 2012).

Rural corruption has continued to be a major problem amongst Chinese villages although Xi implemented a tougher anti-corruption campaign in 2012. Since 2012, numerous village heads have been prosecuted for corruption, including taking illegal benefits from village construction projects, forced land and money seizures, bribery, fraud, power bargaining, bullying and violence, resource monopoly, engaging in gangster activities. By the end of 2019, it was reported that the state had punished 42,700 village cadres who had received criminal penalties and had crime-related and village tyranny problems; from 2016 to 2019, a total of 1289 rural gang-related organisations and 14,027 rural criminal groups have been investigated across the country (Sina 2019). It is evident that village corruption and the omnipotent “rural emperors” (*tuhuangdi* 土皇帝) have driven villagers to extreme pain (China Youth 2020).

Such social circumstances, rural corruption and the conflict between authority and rural individuals, a key theme in the 2010s rural films, are expressed in the films through social satire or black comedy. Through the representation of miserable people in bleak rural landscapes, films like Xin Yukun’s 忻钰坤 *The Coffin in the Mountain* (*ximigong* 心迷宫 2015) and Zhang Yimou’s 张艺谋 *I Am Not Madame Bovary* (*wo bushi panjinlian* 我不是潘金莲 2016) explore social disorder, lawlessness, scandals and the evil side of humanity in the Chinese countryside. Some films focus on historical periods that are mimetic of

contemporary society. Zhou Shen 周申 and Liu Lu's 刘露 *Mr. Donkey* (*lüdeshui* 驴得水 2016) is set in the Republican era and is narrated in a farcical and absurd way. In this film in order to get state funding, a rural school has been cheating the local authority in their report and the beneficiary is finally revealed to be a donkey. Mei Feng's 梅峰 *Mr. No Problem* (*bucheng wenti de wenti* 不成问题的问题 2016) takes us back to the 1940s Sino-Japanese war period and interrogates the tradition-modernity tension in rural development. In a collective farm, an intelligent and hardworking new manager who has an overseas doctoral degree takes over from the lazy, crafty and snobbish old manager but is eventually kicked out by the old manager's tricks. The film exposes the phenomenon that Chinese society is based on human relationships, not on skills, capability, or effort; a person can only find a place in society if he is socially adept and well-connected.

Section 3:

Suburban/Township Dislocation and Its Cinematic Representation

The idea of planning new towns started in the 1950s in China; the towns were called "satellite towns" until the 1990s (Tan 2010: 53). Township development in the 21st century is referred to as the planning of an eco-city in the wake of a "central government initiative promoting urban-rural integration as a strategy to regain control over the governance of rural land" (Visser 2016: 57). Some townships function as part of the rehabilitation of existing towns. They are constructed as "bedroom communities" - the new-built townships are created

by the government as public goods and are used to disperse central cities' population, industrial and economic pressures, geographically satelliting around the central city as a property, with incomplete functionality as independent units (Visser: 49-51). Such construction for the sake of the city centre does not benefit the local residents; the continuously growing urban population exploits resources and takes up original residential space in the suburbs. The Chinese government has been using satellite townships to promote sustainable and transit-oriented developments since the mid-2000s; yet, the result was economic speculation and cosmetic make over rather than the original goal of social and ecological transformation for the people's sake (Duan and Yin 2011; Tang 2008: 67).

While some scholars emphasise urban-suburban interdependency in suburban development they often overlook the real impact on suburbs which can be negative; others argue that developing rural areas into townships is a process of forcible invasions with misleading goals. Zhou and Ma indicate that the driving force for suburban development is both centrifugal (originating from the central city and state's interest) and centripetal (from remote places with self-developing tendency owing to the attractiveness of the cities and its suburban areas) (2000: 206). Lefebvre suggests that urbanisation projects embody the "conquest of space" in an "urban illusion" that has "ultimately failed to meet their goals" (2003 155: 47). Visser develops this point and suggests

that “sustainability discourse, and policies of urban-rural integration and suburban land development increasingly benefit the few at the expense of the many” (2016: 60). As urban projects are being developed in suburban areas, these areas are being equipped with industrial and commercial sites to feed the city’s needs, making the suburbs materially parallel to the urban areas.

There are very few films about townships before the 2000s as suburbanisation in China only began to spread in the 1990s as a result of the housing reforms of 1994 and 1998. Suburbs and townships were rapidly developed into major industrial sites and, by 2000, almost 70% of the industrial land was located in inner suburban areas (Li 2017: 2; Zhang et al. 2018: 100). Since China joined the WTO (2001), more and more global retail companies have entered the Chinese market and most big retail markets have been located in suburbs with vast spaces (Feng et al. 2008: 94). The 2008 global economic recession “brought the export-driven economy of China to a vertex” and the export depression stimulated the acceleration of manufacture, mostly located in township areas, both nationally and globally (Wu et al. 2018: 187).

However, township films made in the 2000s did not depict the rapid development brought about by globalisation and modernisation; instead, they highlighted the social, cultural, and ideological restrictions of township people, especially of the township youth. For example, Jia Zhangke’s 贾樟柯 *Platform*

(*zhantai* 站台 2000) and Yang Heng's 杨恒 *Betelnut* (*binglang* 槟榔 2006) address the failed and forsaken dreams of the township youth. There are no physical indications of township urbanisation in the films, only cultural and political propaganda about modernisation through television and radio announcements. The sense of abstract and untouchable tints of the urban dream contrast with the bleak and grey-hued township locales stressing the gap between the country's ideology and its township reality. The characters in both films are initially the ambitious or rebel youth striving for a place in a fresh world, but they all end up either leaving their bitter township lives, or remaining in despair, shrinking into the corners at home. These films mostly portray inland rather than coastal townships, as socially and economically displaced from the country's modernising process of the 2000s.

Other films depict how the talented township youth who have advanced ideas are suppressed by backward, claustrophobic township cultures and communities. Gu Changwei's 顾长卫 *Peacock* (*kongque* 孔雀 2005) and *And the Spring Comes* (*lichun* 立春 2007) tell stories of the passion and dreams of heroines with artistic and musical talents being broken by township social norms. The characters have struggled for their dreams and demonstrated their talents publicly. However, during a time of collective effort and consciousness, any personal interests and pursuits are seen as incompatible with the community spirit. In the dull township environment, since the majority of the

locals lack dreams and yearning or any sense of individuality, the heroines' talents are looked down upon and scoffed at.

The films project that people's pursuit and quality of life cannot keep up with the material veneer. Suburbanites find themselves in a dislocated space of alienating uprootedness that fails to align any meaning with new styles of citizenship. Rural and suburban residents are employed as the industrial workers for the construction of the greater urban complex. New suburban commercial and residential areas become spaces with an urban reference point but being built within a socio-cultural vacuum. Therefore, the original residents feel alienated, with the sense that their own space is being invaded and turned into an unknown ghost town. Some suburbs are renovated into migrant towns closely attached to the city. Some old suburbs are demolished and re-built as completely new zones, showcasing the nation's modernisation. The residents are relocated in the new, rootless districts, evacuated from their tangible histories and livelihoods in the relocation of land and property rights through state-mandated dislocations.

The number of township films rose significantly after 2015. Since 2015, the central government confirmed the development of public services, health and industrial facilities in townships and announced that the scope of the projects was to make up for the shortcomings of township urbanisation along with a list

of targeted areas for township construction (NDRC 2020). China's suburbanisation is a feature of new town developments in which massive foreign investment and rapid urbanisation underpin each other (Shen and Wu 2016: 777). While the 2000s focused on township industrialisation, the 2010s concentrated on creating multifunctional new towns, referred to as polycentric "post-suburbia" (Wu and Phelps 2011: 410). Moreover, the 2010 Shanghai Expo also stimulated township and suburban development.

The manufacturing boom and reinforced township development in the 2010s sped up suburbanisation through rising employment; in 2011 China overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. However, health risks due to chemical and heavy manufacturing toxic environments have become the major threat to township populations (Wu et al. 2018: 187). In 2015, the Changzhou 常州 toxic event made about 500 students ill after moving to a new campus (ibid: 189). Moreover, ill-health has become a major problem among township populations.

Moreover, with more pressure on regional economies to diversify industrial scope and tighten finances, regional disparities in economic growth grew wider throughout 2019 (Koty 2019). As a result, there are fewer work opportunities for suburban workers who were previously seen as a flexible labour force (Fang et al. 2018: 7). These workers have become "temporary" and powerless

“institutionally, socio-economically, and culturally”: they participate in the state’s urbanisation but are cast out of urban access and benefits; they are insurance-less and on the outside of legal and organisational protection; they are marginalised and culturally “belittled” in contemporary Chinese society (Li 2017: 104). In addition, the feeling of being internally dislocated within a once familiar homeland further distresses township locals. Direct land sales between developers and local governments pass over the affected residents who are involuntarily forced into displacement and resettlement (Li 2017: 55). Many township sites emptied of original villagers for real estates construction remain as vacant spaces due to the housing market recession while the original residents are pushed into small, compound shelters (ibid: 137). Moreover, the local residents in these rural-urban fringe zones feel detached from their homeland. Since the 2010s many township and suburban areas have been demolished and constructed into commercial wholesale zones and locals find that they are merely living in a village nearby to massive wholesale markets (Li 2018: 139).

Township films after the mid-2010s depict northern industrial townships in decline as China’s economic growth stagnates. Zhou Zhou’s 周洲 *Meili* (美丽 2018) depicts the bitter life of a lesbian in a northern township near Changchun. The heroine, Meili (Chi Yun) has been abandoned by her parents in her childhood due to poverty and has to earn the living for her sister who is an

unemployed, mentally-ill single mother who has been raped by the child's father. After deciding to go to Shanghai with her girlfriend, Meili quits her current job as a laundry worker. However, her girlfriend leaves her on her own as she sees the non-qualified and less educated Meili as a stumbling block to her progress. After losing her job and breaking up with her girlfriend, Meili's life is made worse by her sister and brother-in-law as they turn to her for money and threaten to expose her lesbian identity. Township people's unease and life burdens due to social exclusion, poverty and unemployment are filmed through Meili's internal township journeys and her fraught and painful relationships with her family, lover and workmates, all of whom suffocate her in different ways.

Such social displacement is further developed into mental dislocation in Zhang Chong 张翀 and Zhang Bo's 张波 *The Fourth Wall* (*di si mian qiang* 第四面墙 2019). In this film, a depressed, withdrawn township woman absorbs herself in her mundane and hopeless life until her ex-lover comes back from the city and sparks something deep in her mind. Dull reality and her desire drive the heroine into a mad fantasy state and trap her in a disordered, confused state between dream and reality. Also rendering a psychological disorientation caused by hopeless and miserable reality, Liang Ming's 梁鸣 *Wisdom Tooth* (*ri guang zhi xia* 日光之下 2019) is set in a fishing township in Heilongjiang, China's northern border. Taboo affection between two siblings living in a

remote isolated area is set against the broader social backdrop of sea pollution due to the oil-spill. As the brother cannot go fishing anymore due to the sea pollution, he accepts his friend's deal that involves him in a government-business scandal; meanwhile the sister, who is a non-registered citizen working in a local hotel, is about to be fired due to the economic recession. The protagonists in the film live on the social fringe and experience glimpses of a tantalising and desirable modernity. For example, the siblings see the luxurious lifestyle and Westernised culture of the friends who plan to "help" them but who finally get them in trouble, and the sister encounters Christianity via her boss. However, the brother is killed by a local cadre to cover up the oil-spill scandal and the sister realises everything is meaningless after turning to Christianity as an escape. Township dislocation in recent films explicitly address township decline, unemployment, social corruption and alienation, environmental pollution and people's despair and misery.





Figs. 2.12-2.14 *Wisdom Tooth* (2019, Liang Ming)

Conclusion

This chapter has delineated the theoretical and contextual grounds for rural, township and minority dislocation in China. Dislocation, as I have defined it, entails a constant process of decomposing, deconstructing or restructuring one's identity. Shaping Chinese identity has therefore laid the groundwork for dislocation. The concept of movement and journeying is crucial in the cinema of dislocation as paradoxically and identity and the notion of being located rests on constant transformation. Therefore, geographical, socio-cultural and psychological travels comprise one's identity-shaping, which stresses one's location and dislocation.

The historical construction of Chinese identity leads to the geo-location of ethnic minorities in the “central” narrative. Chinese ethnic minority studies define and trace the structure and formation of Chinese identity. This section has historicised the minority’s socio-cultural positions within the Han domain and its functions in nation-building. The Han cultural and political dominance tailors the concept of a minority into a multicultural tool which deploys linguistic, territorial, economic and cultural methods to establish central power rather than valuing minority specificities. It propels minorities into a systematic disengagement and explains why Chinese ethnic minorities have been dislocated by and within the Han ideology and power system.

After setting out the dominance-minority binary, this chapter moves on to the broad conceptualisation of dislocation and displacement. It analyses the phenomenon of urbanisation, relocation and displacement in China specifically. By examining the focuses and limitations of existing scholarships and how 21st-century research opens up a new direction, this chapter discusses the binary position of China’s socio-economic advancement and displacement. This binary notion is also projected in the narrative and cinematography of dislocation films, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The section on China’s rural dislocation studies the history of rural construction in modern China and explores how it is shaped by the nation’s socio-historical

shifts. Failed mutual understanding between the state and rural communities, state policies, and the overlooked rural problems and mentality have caused rural dwellers' dilemma, conflicting circumstances and double dislocation. The rural crisis is stimulated by development-led rural exploitation and aggressive, unilateral and ignorant state directions.

In terms of suburban dislocation, this chapter studies the significance of China's township development and suburbanisation in the 21st century, the status and function of Chinese townships. By reconsidering existing literature's standpoints and limitations, the chapter points out the overlooked negative side of township development and the struggles of the affected population. New community constructions shape a form of spatial and cultural invasion. At the same time, township dwellers feel the simultaneous connection with the pseudo-urban modernity and the rural backwardness. It drives them even perplexed and frustrated, making them feel discarded and rejected by the fast-growing state.

The contextualisation of minority, rural and township dislocations interweave with cinematic discussion to show how the dislocation film categories have emerged along with socio-historical and political events. Moreover, the dislocation directors are connected by a shared interest in presenting authentic images of the displacement experienced on the other side of the nation's rapid

modernisation, imposed development and socio-cultural integration.

21st century Chinese dislocation films firstly evoke how displaced people are abandoned by the times and how they experience both physical and psychological alienation through a sense of aimlessness, emptiness and inner disorder. Filmmakers expose individual social dislocation and disenfranchisement brought about through the exploitation of their humanity and their socio-economic vulnerability, showing how they are under-represented in urban narratives, Han-centric advancement and disappointed by society and the government. However, dislocation is not an absolute concept in these films as such a cinema interrogates to what extent the powerless underclass strive for empowerment through faith, transitional physical mobility, ideological awakening and the search for authentic individual identity. The next chapter will scrutinise film case studies about characters' dislocating journeys *within* remote areas in detail, subjects include people of the rural, townships and minority regions.

CHAPTER 3

Women's Dislocation and Dislocated Journeys *within* Displaced Areas:

Constructing a Genre

Female protagonists in films of the 21st century who are set in displaced rural environments and in townships easily seem vulnerable and marginalised. In the cinema of dislocation, however, these women appear to be anti-heroines who lack conventional heroic qualities and attributes such as “nobility”, “courage” and “morality” or who disappoint the audience’s “expectations of heroic qualities” (Baldick 2001:112). These women evoke spatial or ethnic particularities that shape a kind of triple displacement (geographic, cultural and gendered) in their alienation from the hub of things. Ironically, their extreme dislocation and vulnerability can also serve to empower because it provides them with some freedom from the social constraints of normative behaviour. In that liminal space their freedom endows them with the ability to devise unusual solutions to problems and to set up a defensive zone with a sense of independence and autonomy.

Those female protagonists that constitute a critical part of the genre of the cinema of dislocation are almost always elicited as anti-heroines. Conventional heroines are not vulnerable and marginalised; they are brave, courageous, shining models that uphold accepted social values at any given time. The

antihero/antiheroine was first acknowledged in early 20th-century existentialist works such as Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), Jean-Paul Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938) (Nausea) and Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (1942) (The Stranger) (Barnhart 2015: 151; Asong 2012: 76; Gargett 2004: 198). The protagonists are ambiguous, unsettled drifters through life configured by ennui, angst and alienation (Brereton 1968: 254-255). Cinematic anti-heroines have been defined as women who do not balance "the day-to-day demands of marriage and family" but whose "interpersonal issues...come from" their families and work; they do not easily fit into conventional female roles and challenge the boundaries between "good (moral, well-intentioned, selfless)" and "evil (immoral, actively seeking to do harm, selfish)"; some resist traditional values and expectations of women, some are involved in crimes and scandals; some are unlikable, crazy or selfish (Brost 2020: 2; Tally 2016: 7).

However, although they are flawed and sometimes have controversial motives and actions, they "are not beyond redemption...often ultimately choose to do good" (Brost: 2). The portrayal of anti-heroines particularly addresses female "liminality", their "intervention into the dominant masculinity", or "anger as a legitimate female response to patriarchy, recession, racism and heteronormativity" (Negra and Lagerwey 2017: xi). Thus, an anti-heroine is characterised by a sense of transgression and moral ambiguity. A sympathetic character whose flaws stem from interpersonal struggles and socio-cultural

and gendered displacement. Nevertheless, their “negative” or “bad” actions always seek good, hidden purposes and fight for self-standing. These characteristics play a key role in their narratives.

This chapter first provides a general discussion of the films’ or filmmakers’ respective networks of production. As Neale, Tudor and Grindon have argued, a shared network of production is one of the features of a group of films that defines whether we can think of them as constituting a genre.²⁵ The filmmakers in question here are Liu Jie 刘杰, Pema Tseden 万玛才旦, Diao Yinan 刁亦男, Cai Chengjie 蔡成杰, Xin Yukun 忻钰坤 and Hu Bo 胡波. This section examines how the directors’ personal experiences, careers and styles have contributed to their collective innovations in designing a cinematography of dislocation. In this chapter, all the filmmakers profiled graduated from film schools, and mostly from the Beijing Film Academy, but not one of them originally worked as a director. Through a set of biographical studies and by analysing samples of their work, we will first explore how their early related careers have shaped their styles and points of view. Some of their early career are related to the film industry and other draw them into the filmic world.

Thereafter the following questions will offer both thematic and cinematographic responses to common themes identified in the directors’ work: are there

²⁵ See Introduction, pp.31-32.

identifiable dislocation themes, narratives and cinematographies? What is it that disempowers the anti-heroines? What defines the subjects' "membership" and participation, or lack thereof, in their communities? What are their responses to their situation? How do they define their identities through displacement? Is dislocation a destructive power or an agency through which one can redefine oneself drawing strength from adversity and alienation? How does such a cinema show its flexibility and variation within standard formulae?

In the films that have been analysed below, the visual impact of the journeys/movements embodied in the women's mobility counterintuitively draws a strength from the experience of being marginal. Our anti-heroines might be judged by the community on their ways of being, perhaps drawing criticism on account of their independent choices or bad luck in relation to rural marriage, relationships, family, and faith: choices and circumstances which distance them from being able to participate fully in their own rural communities. The subjects' displacing journeys are journeys of transformation wherein they embody binary powers: they are further disengaged yet simultaneously empowered by new hometown/identity-makings, that is to say they find a place to negotiate their loss and gain.

The dislocation cinematography visualises the themes mentioned above. It is narrated through static camera and images, long shots through which people

tend to speak in the distance or off-screen. Even the travelling shots following subjects' physical journeys are often shot distantly. Most heroines are obstructed by visual barriers, either concrete or fluid like windows and smoke. We might view them as diminutive figures lost in the vastness of a stunning landscape like ants, single birds, strangers or drifters through snowy fields and jagged cliffs, or against a wide-framed bleak suburbia; their spirit and emotions rendered hard to reach. Subjects may travel in painterly landscapes physically, but the bucolic beauty only serves to intensify inner disorientation. Depictions of the women's lives and living environments tend to be naturalist-realist in the sense that the camera always depicts the subjects' authentic lives and emotions as if we are around them in their company. The filmmakers tend to employ an observational and participatory way of shooting. However, in most of the films selected for analysis, fantasy or surrealist imagery is inserted through extreme, theatrical lighting and colours, adding to the flexible quality. The effect is that it disturbs, interjecting and intruding into realistic and natural surroundings, evoking states of disruption and elsewhere-ness visually and sensorially.

Although there is a general set of characteristics with which we can begin to define a cinema of dislocation, flexibility is also critical. Minority women, for example, face triple displacement (geographic, cultural and gendered) in Chinese society since they are first dislocated from the Han-dominated centre

and then marginalised by their gender in patriarchal communities. However, unlike most of the minority films that stress visual and cultural display with over-expressive images of landscape, rituals and romantic cultural symbols, in what I propose as the new genre of a cinema of dislocation, most minority films are shot using more documentary-style approaches. Cultural particularity is smoothly worked in the films. These techniques demystify minority distinctiveness and makes their specificity something ordinary in their lives, implying a sense of autonomy and triumph in the subjects' dislocation. Recent Chinese scholarship has started to explore the idea and style of demystification in minority films. Rather than stressing the sublime and magnificent landscapes and exotic cultural symbols of faraway people, the 21st century minority filmmakers tend to externalise characters' "internal emotions, lives of ordinary individuals from the people's perspective", shaping "demystifying and depoliticising" minority images (Bai 2019: 94). Instead of adopting propagandist modes of film-making, the films take a "humanity turn" and avoid cultural conflicts and the "othered" narrative, inscribing the "everyday-ness and detailed emotions of minority individuals" in their life drama and depicting a "humanity landscape" (Liu 2020: 189; Yang 2019: 38-39). Such films aim to reshape minority areas distancing utopian imagery, even distorting symbols that are fuelled by imperialist fantasy or socialistic narrative (Mi and Toncic 2014: 54-55). The films' inter-cultural approach is grounded in an "unpurposeful" style eschewing over-emphasising minority

cultural symbols like lavish religious settings, costumes and language (Chang 2019: 66). The stories are melodrama simply set in minority areas in which the depiction of humans and the their humanity (or lack thereof) is more important than their minority status.

Case studies:

| Title | Director | Year |
|---|-------------------|------|
| <i>Deep In The Clouds</i> (<i>biluo xueshan</i> 碧罗雪山) | Liu Jie 刘杰 | 2010 |
| <i>Coffin in the Mountain</i> (<i>xin mi gong</i> 心迷宫) | Xin Yukun 忻钰坤 | 2015 |
| <i>The Widowed Witch</i> (<i>beifang yi pian cangmang</i> 北方一片苍茫) | Cai Chengjie 蔡成杰 | 2017 |
| <i>Balloon</i> (<i>qiqiu</i> 气球) | Pema Tsenden 万玛才旦 | 2019 |
| <i>The Wild Goose Lake</i> (<i>nanfang chezhan de juhui</i> 南方车站的聚会) | Diao Yinan 刁亦男 | 2019 |
| <i>An Elephant Sitting Still</i> (<i>daxiang xi di er zuo</i> 大象席地而坐) | Hu Bo 胡波 | 2019 |

Section 1: Network of Production

This section offers a general study of the directors of this chapter's films and contributes to the understanding of the evolution of their style. Through looking at their background and stories, it draws connections between their lives and thematic foci and cinematographic characteristics. It answers the following questions: how are the directors related to each other in terms of academic and personal experiences? How far can they be considered creators of a distinctive dislocation cinema? What considerations inform the filmic choices they make and does this amount to something we can justifiably call a

cinematography of dislocation?

1.1 Grounding the “Docu-cinematic” Style of the Dislocation Filmmakers

1. 1.1 Cinematic realism and the New Wave Chinese Documentary

The dislocation directors tend to evoke authenticity in the subjects' lives and emotions, usually those in marginal environments, through approaches developed in cinematic realism, sometimes employing dramatic articulations and poetic senses (Li 2019: 1; Liang 2010: 4; Lan 2011: 15-27). Throughout the 20th and 21st century, cinematic realism has been defined by means of a variety of theoretical frameworks. Some of these pertain to the approaches of the dislocation directors. While Pomerance associated the representation of realistic-ness with strong affection and feelings regarding conventionalist and culturally established relations, some argue that cinema reflects intuitionist realism in that realism does not define the truth, it is experienced from our immediate sense; audiovisual elements shape the process and aspects that construct the realist experience for the spectator (Pomerance 2013: 3-5; Grodal in Jerslev 2002: 67). Intuitionist realism refers to a spectator's instant, broad and general identification or sense of familiarity to a cinematic subject. The response or knowledge generated from film viewing is not cognisable and veracious, spectators are engaged by “intellectually illuminating” from cinema, something *like* what they might have experienced in a broad sense of

indeterminacy, rather than precise facts or cognitive knowledge (Passmore 1991: 125).

Cinematic realism prioritises the “visual-auditory”, or the “sensuous-immediate”, rather than the conceptual; it indicates rather than conceptualises (Aitken 2012: 214). This approach echoes what Lukács calls “indefinite objectivity” through which filmic images and auditory elements elicit a unified “atmosphere”, guiding the audience’s experience and perceiving experience as “perpetual flux” and “movement” (Lukács, in Aitken 2012:102-103, 182-3; Kelemen 2014: 121-122). Bergson develops the idea of cinematic realism through techniques that create fluidity and stresses the concept of duration (*durée*). *Durée* is the experience of temporality, fusing past and present so the passage of time appears to be authentic (Russell 1965: 759; Bergson 2007: 216). Bazin argues that films and photographic images preserve temporal moments through twisting or interrupting the flow of temporality, making photographic reality “crystallised outside time” (Bazin 1967: 15). Thus, cinematic images, which are flux and mobile, “mummify” reality and the past in movement, “framing the fleeting crystallisation of a reality” in film sequences which create cinematic continuity as if they were representations of the passage of real time (Bazin 1967: 15; Andréw 1990: 21).

Concurring with Lukács, some film scholars develop the idea that cinematic

realism becomes alive when associated with audience-subject relations, human experience, and awareness of the contexts addressed. Such a realism draws out “the hidden harmonies of man and nature” and shows something general that parallels the viewer’s experience of reality; moreover, films display reality by inviting the spectator’s “attention” to and “consideration” of the subject matter from a particular perspective that maybe more real than offering precise assertions about verisimilitude of reality (Grierson, in Aitken 2013: 44; Beardsley 1981: 375; Passmore 1991: 125). Following such a thread, filmic realism is widely argued to be empirical representation. For Kracauer, realistic representations in cinema address the “harmony of the faculties of the Understanding and Imagination” and the “natural beauty” or the “beauty of nature” (Natureschöne) (Kracauer 1997 [1960]: 68). In this sense, human perception and nature interact, encounter and “correspond”; close observation of immediate experience “redeems” reality (ibid). Audio-visual elements allow our understanding and imagination to form a pattern that scrutinises nature.

Realism in film, thus, implies something that arouses individual or collective feeling or invites the viewer to grasp such emotions through personal relations with the subject, it has a transient and fluid quality. It stresses a sense of participation in the passage of time. Cinematic realism is a “higher articulation in which the chaos of daily event is beauty itself”; it is a “just-of-being”, nature-based experience and evokes the “liveliness of life...artistically

articulated" on-screen (Grierson, in Aitken [1990] 2013: 110). The key to realism is to represent the "encounter" of nature and human perceptual experiences (Lukács 1981, II: 473). This concept is paradoxical to "automatic world projections" (Cavell 1979: 72). Images are used to represent our real-life experience while the "arrangements of bodies and spaces" on-screen "radically separate" from our everyday life; therefore, such a paradox suggests that realism in cinema "produce[s] and communicate[s] new links between perceiving, sensing, thinking, and speaking in moving images" (Kappelhoff 2015: 24-25).

1. 1.2 The New Chinese Documentary Movement and "Docu-cinematics"

The realist mode of filmmaking discussed in the previous section is visible in the dislocation filmmakers' styles to various degrees, including the intuitionist and experiential modes, the way of contextualising and sharing the subjects' temporality through long takes and close character observation, the sense of flux and movement in terms of travel, the focus on the relation and interaction between people and "the beauty of nature", and the emphasis on drawing attention to the subjects' lives and responding to their experiences.

The new Chinese Documentary Movement in the 1990s marks the second stage of Chinese documentaries through which Chinese documentaries "move from public to private" (Chiu and Zhang 2015: 2; Robinson 2010: 177; Edwards

2015: 27).²⁶ The ontology of new documentaries includes “diversification of styles, de-politicization of narration, restoration of a plebeian (*pingmin*) attitude, individualization (*gerenhua*) of perspectives” (Zhang 2010: 140). Moving away from state-controlled and produced, educational or political subjects and “illustrious-lecture” styles, these films serve as the “alternative archive” (Berry and Rofel 2010: 135; Berry and Rofel 2010: 4). Chiu and Zhang argue that the films offer “the renegotiation of space, place, and locality in our current era of globalization” and of the “place-based, but not always place-bound identities, subjectivities” (Chiu and Zhang 2015: 6). They stress the significance of the space-identity correspondence and the fluidly defined individuality and identity based on geo-social mobility.

The new wave documentaries employ hand-held cameras, natural lighting, synch sound (often unclear), and “shot things as they happened” in a “raw” approach (Berry et al. 2015: 6). They shape a distinct style of “on-the-spot realism” (*jishi zhuyi* 纪实主义), distinguishing from the “highly orchestrated realism associated with socialist realism” (ibid). “On-the-spot” stresses a sense of presentness (*xianchang* 现场) which Robinson defines as “the scene or site of a film...considered to be intrinsically open-ended and indeterminate”, “apparently spontaneous...and unpredictable”; the *xianchang* aesthetics

²⁶ Wu Wenguang's 吴文光 (a former television station staff) *Bumming in Beijing* (*liulang Beijing* 流浪北京 1990), a no-budget piece filmed with borrowed equipment, was considered to be the first independent documentary in China (Berry et al. 2015: 5; Edwards 2015: 30). The film consists of interviews with young underground artists in Beijing after the Tiananmen Massacre (1989). Subjects talk about their sense of emptiness, depression in life, their dreams and current situations in a chatty and relaxing way.

“engage more directly with individual Chinese subjectivities” (Edwards 2015: 5-6, 33).

The rapid growth of the New Chinese Documentary Movement was stimulated by the country’s socio-political shifts, including the Tiananmen Massacre (1989), land de-collectivisation and partial de-centralisation of local governments and rural markets in the rural reform (1978-1984), corruption in resource transformation and power relocation, bankruptcy of state-owned enterprises, and unemployment and mass rural migration due to marketisation under the Reform (1978). Such a socio-political landscape stemmed social disparities, conflicts and discontent. It provided the “impetus and the rationale” for the New Documentary Movement (ibid: 8). The New Wave documentaries addressed new socio-political themes, explored subjects rejected by the mainstream, and offered powerful socio-political commentaries.²⁷ The filmmakers also used groundbreaking and counter-mainstream shooting styles, narratively distinguishing their work from the official media.

The new documentaries “unconsciously inherited” the Fourth Generation’s pursuit of “ethics and values”, was partially inspired by the Fifth Generation’s aesthetics, and tended to ally with the Sixth Generation in defining cinematic realism through manipulating points of views, camera positions, the “use of

²⁷ See Wu Wenguang’s 吴文光 *Jianghu: Life on the Road* (*jianghu* 江湖 1999), Ou Ning’s 欧宁 *San Yuan Li* (三元里 2003) and *Meishi Street* (*meishi jie* 煤市街 2006).

on-camera, in-person interviews, synchronized sound, and long takes” that “define the realist” and signal the gospel of new documentaries (ibid: 23). The films “giv[e] the floor to the subjects of investigation - allowing them to speak to the camera, in their own words and with their own voices”; in that way, communicativeness and the subject’s identity become central while the filmmaker’s voice and tone makes he/she “an outside other and one of them” (Reynaud 2015: 157). This has the effect of stressing “identification and alienation” simultaneously (ibid: 221-222). The filmmaker’s “participatory” quality is crucial and evokes the “artist’s subject, embodied experience” (Robinson 2013: 147; Pichowicz and Zhang 2016: 5) These documentaries derive from the directors’ “provocation of doubt and their contestation of power and knowledge” (Zhang 2016: 22). Moreover, their “performative” quality, visualised in the filmmaker-subject interaction, foregrounds “social conflict and repressed memory to the surface” (Robinson 2017: 1145). Themes of mobility, presentness, grassroots, alienation and personal/individualist approaches characterise new Chinese documentaries. These features are also visible in the work of the dislocation directors, the contemporaries of the Sixth Generation, some of whom also took part in the New Documentary Movement (Lu 2015: 60-75).

One might draw connections between the docu-cinematic and docudrama, but the definition of docudrama is a “journalistic reconstruction” and “unique blend

of fact and fiction which dramatizes events and historical personages from our recent history”; it stresses the admixture of fact, real events and history (Hoffer and Nelson 1978: 21; Woodhead 1981). Berry and Rofel relate the docudramatic approach to Chinese New Wave documentaries where the filmmakers abandoned propagandist purposes and started to focus on “people marginalized by the market economy” and the “underclass” created by globalisation in an “observational” mode with ambiguous and dramatic personal interactions; their work “disrupts popular common sense” about the state’s marketisation and modernisation (2010: 137, 146). Docudrama should be distinguished from the docu-cinematic in this thesis which is a style of fictional cinema.

The notion of docu-cinematic was defined as using “performative” qualities in realistic depictions in which “cinematic aesthetic” is cast onto subjects to form “organic shapes...in pairing real emotions with cinematic influences”; such a “stylish” approach captures “the genuine emotion of the human condition” and constructs an “uncanny moment of confluence” (Frackman 2018: 87; Gillett 2012: 319-320; Epping 2021; Candis 2017; Hynes 2013). In Chinese cinema, this concept is derived from Chris Berry’s categorisation of the style of Chinese documentary. Chinese documentaries have a long tradition of subjectivisation and dramatisation: while traditional Chinese documentary stresses didactic, “ideologically driven” realism, staged reality; whereas, New Chinese

documentary emphasised “on-the-spot” interaction and participation as if the film is an unstaged performance, recording authenticity by inscribing rather than describing (Voci 2010: 113). Chinese ideological or socialist realism had a great impact on the Fifth Generation in that it observed class struggle at a distance and explored the exotic other, in particular through romanticising women and rural people. On the other hand, the New Chinese Documentary Movement has influenced fictional filmmakers from the Sixth Generation, they tend to inscribe actuality while inserting avant-garde or performative approaches to draw the audience attention to the real experiences of the subjects (for example, Zhang Yuan’s 张元 *Mama* (妈妈 1990) (Berry and Rofel 2010: 7-8).

The cinematography of the new wave of minority rural and township films is less dramatic or melodramatic when compared to Han rural and township films. Although many mainstream and minority films employ dreamlike, surrealist images, the fantasy moments and the realistic depictions in minority films are configured with continuity to an unbroken narrative. Drama and tense thresholds that lead to climaxes or turning points in the narrative are fused more smoothly into realist depictions of people’s lives. It is what I call the “docu-cinematic” style. It heightens the sense of authenticity that is commonly attributed to minority cultures, a gesture towards humanity and human situations. The directors are not particular about subjects’ minority identities,

rather, they tend to depict national experience or national pain.

Because a lot of the cinematography is making what previous directors' exoticisation of the primitiveness of minority people, such ordinariness which the cinematography of these new directors are expressing the humanity of individuals rather the primariness of exotic cultures. The effect is that these directors are using the minority culture, but the familiarity with the developed characterisation in these cultures as a way of reflecting back on dealing with issues of the majority population. It is a kind of tool. There is no longer a exoticisation of rural minorities and these directors are doing better job expressing the individuality of these people rather than reflecting them as minority culture or the exotic other. The effect is that the directors can put issues concerned with the majority population into these narratives expressed through the minority people, therefore, being able to do political critique rather than making the characters representative of particular cultural-political positions or cultural specificities. It turns out to be easier to criticise national policies through minority peoples because it is more oblique. The narrative aims to capture a kind of authenticity through the way this wave of filmmakers' attempt to re-articulate the perceived simplicity and originality of minority lifestyles through not glamourising them. This de-glamourisation still portrays a sense of authenticity and originality but does not position the people and their lives as cultural display or a kind of visual artifact.

1. 2 The Director Studies

Liu Jie 刘杰 (born 1968):

Calm, realistic and artistic modes in observing deep emotions and struggles of people in marginal communities.

Liu studied painting before entering university and went to the countryside to work in the fields with his parents who, both professors, were sent down during the Cultural Revolution (Liu and Xu 2010: 34). Liu entered the Beijing Film Academy in 1987 to study Photography. After he graduated in 1992, he worked as a photo-journalist for *Women of China* (*zhongguo funü* 中国妇女), the English edition of the magazine (Zhang 2011). Thereafter, Liu worked as producer and director of photography for various films, including Wang Xiaoshuai's 王小帅 *Beijing Bicycle* (*shiqisui de danche* 十七岁的单车 2000), which won the Special Jury Award at the Berlin Film Festival.

His work is said to be “full of artistic taste and a sense of humanity” while “searching for truth and reflecting reality” (Pu 2013; Li 2017). Liu was inspired by Chen Kaige's 陈凯歌 *Yellow Earth* (*huang tudi* 黄土地 1984) to document people's lives in displaced areas (Li 2011). Chen is famous for his sensitive realism. He portrays Chinese life by sympathetically interweaving cultural symbols and history into his frames. He goes beyond the nostalgia for times passed when he uses this spatial luxation as a political critique. The

uninhabitable, windswept rural landscape and the distinct rural mass and individuals in his debut *Yellow Earth* illustrates the boundless but claustrophobic space, vivid but lifeless people. The visual-sensual oppression works through the simultaneity of these paradoxes illustrating the profound struggles of the pre-Mao era. Liu decided to give up painting and turn to filmmaking as he was fascinated by visual powers.

Rather than indulging in lavish visuals of cultural displacement, Liu's films focus on social reality and social problems in the lives of minority people and are narrated in a calm, seemingly objective, tone. His docu-cinematic style stresses long takes, long shots, minority language and music, fusing historical memory and real-life experiences (Zhang 2018). His work centres on the inevitable tensions between the universals of the rule of Chinese law and basic issues of humanity and human-heartedness, and narrates intense emotions with a cinematic sangfroid full of pathetic phallacy.

For example, *Courthouse on Horseback* (*mabei shang de fating* 马背上的法庭 2006) tells the story of a mobile court where a village lawyer has to travel on horseback to deal with villagers' cases in a remote village. The film makes extensive use of long shots to show the paring of pastoral beauty and people's life struggle, evoking the incompatibility of the world of human law with the world of nature as the beautiful southern village gradually turns into a space of

turmoil. A minority woman learns that her husband is about to divorce her. As she rolls on the ground repeating (“I cannot”), her colourful minority costume contrasts to the dark brown soil. The whole sequence is shot in an aerial shot lasting more than a minute. The landscape, the suffering woman, her endless and animalistic actions and her primal howl illustrate an overwhelming and heartbreaking emotion whilst the off-screen lawyer advises her that “you have to move out because the property belongs to him.” The clash contrasts raw human emotion with the cold legal solution.

Pema Tseden 万玛才旦 (born 1969):

Docu-fantasied visuals of minority people’s multiple displacement.

Pema was born into a pastoral family in Qinghai and was the only one who went to school in his family during the Cultural Revolution (Asian Society 2010a). After getting a BA in Tibetan Language and Literature from Northwest University for Nationalities, he pursued a degree in the Beijing Film Academy becoming its first-ever Tibetan student (Asian Society 2010b). Before becoming a filmmaker, Pema’s career as a writer was the context where he articulated narratives that were visual. He was later to develop his own detailed film language with the power to visualise intensified emotions. Tseden started to publish novels in 1991. *Excitement* (*youhuo* 诱惑 1997), *Station* (*gang* 岗 1999) and *The Beggar* (*qigai* 乞丐 2001) won various literary prizes, all of which aim to reflect aspects of the real life of Tibetans. In *Enticement:*

Stories of Tibet, he wrote about a young herdsman's afternoon:

“After his sleepiness passed, he looked far away, captivated. Although the scenery in front of him was always the same, he still loved to gaze at the distance, as if the view could change every day. The boy could hear the bleats of about a dozen sheep grazing in the distance. He looked far away, and his expression turned sad, in a way that was hard to describe. As the fall winds blew their desolation around, the grass nearby had already turned brown...Gyalo moved his body a little bit, and his expression changed. A trembling baby lamb, who was wandering in the meadow, looked at the boy several times and then ran back to the flock. An ewe, probably his mother, approached...” (Pema Tseden 2018: 61, originally published in 1997 in Chinese).

As in his films, Pema always observes landscapes through protagonists' shifting perspectives, allowing people to develop a personal relationship with nature. He consistently portrays humans as part of nature while underlining a subtle sense of distance. Animals, plants and surroundings appear to communicate with people with distinct emotions while sometimes they are used to project or overwhelm human feelings or build a unique connection with personal or collective memories.

Pema's films adopt neo-realist style with fantasy. His long shots, long takes,

static shots, which with this minimalistic style spark intense emotions (Chang 2018). He makes his images “calm, grim and bitter” “directly shocking the audience’s heart” (Ling 2016). As Pema was inspired by David Lynch and Kurosawa, his realistic approach always mingles dream and fantasy (Li and Wu 2019). This magical realistic style is combined with a recurring theme of the encounter between religion, the power of the saviour, life philosophy and reality.

For example, in *Jinpa* (*zhuangsi le yi zhi yang* 撞死了一只羊 2018), everything is doubled and appears in a binary form, including the two protagonists’ who share the same name, Jinpa, their encounters with the same women and their journeys involving two sheep which look the same. The film is about revenge, a saviour and religion, the two doubled but characteristically opposite protagonists’ parallel journeys and their encounters echo the notion of transmigration/samsara in Tibetan Buddhism. Their words and experiences appear to emulate one another with only subtle differences which blur spatio-temporal boundaries thus creating the sense of a dream fused with reality. One Jinpa wants to stop the other’s revenge and save him from becoming a killer. The scene where he fulfills his dream is narrated through his dream where he does the killing for his namesake. The sequence is shot in extremely high saturation and lighting, mimicking the sacred light around the Buddha. A huge sun is gradually made brighter and enlarged and we see an

eagle suddenly transforming into an airplane. The beauty and awe of death, the sacredness of killing and the relief from the counternormative during the isolated men's journeys heightens salvation and belief, making the sense of dislocation and loneliness "ritualized" in Pema's work.

Diao Yanan 刁亦男 (born 1969):

Inscribing but romanticising the lives in marginal environments.

Graduating from the Central Academy of Drama with a BA Literature degree in 1992, Diao worked as a screenwriter with directors Shi Runjiu 施润玖 in *All the Way* (*zou dao di* 走到底 2000) and Zhang Yang 张杨 in *Spicy Love Soup* (*aiqing malatang* 爱情麻辣烫 1997) and *Shower* (*xizao* 洗澡 1999). He started to make films in 2003. His work focuses on the complexity and paradoxes of humanity and are usually set in small towns and suburbs. Diao adopts an "industrial" style that employs cold hues, dark settings, rustic colour palettes and details of run-down and ruined spaces to illustrate suppressed emotions and confusion.

For example, *Uniform* (*zhifu* 制服 2003) is dominated by blackish green and a muddy hue, implying repression and a sense of decay in the northern industrial suburbs; the blue palette suffusing *Night Train* (*yeche* 夜车 2007), metaphorises the policewoman's misery and the trauma arising from her complex life decisions. *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (*bairi yanhuo* 白日焰火 2014) is

also a crime film set in a northern suburb. A yellow-green hue and the foggy vision of the town heightens the gloomy and mysterious atmosphere. Most of the film transpires at night and Diao employs all the details to create a sense of indescribable insecurity. Like Pema, Diao conveys human emotions through surreal and semi magical spaces and objects, the close-up of a dead ladybird on the bedsheet, the unknown horse appearing in the corridor in *Black*, the close-up of stitched threads on the train seat at the beginning and the whipped horse at the end of *Night Train* - all these scenes reference violence and death and conjure a social anxiety that lurks beneath the surface, intensifying people's feeling of non-belonging.

Diao's work often centres around displaced women who live with dual identities and are involved in crimes that create moral dilemmas. Switching between their double lives, the women pursue complex journeys of self-discovery through uncovering their disguised or complex identities for the sake of the men that they are in love with. As most of the heroines' love interests are middle-class men who work in legal systems, representing justice and law, themes which draw them into conflict with the women's communities, the heroines' pain and feeling of dissection emerge from their controlled realisation of subjectivity and of repressed desires. Diao's female protagonists are always on journeys which involve a moral ambiguity that exists between their subjectivity and their masked selves. They are constantly shaped by their

binary identities, such as the passionate woman who yearns for sexuality but is also a self-disciplined policewoman in *Night Train* and the shy laundry worker who is a murderer in *Black*.

Cai Chengjie 蔡成杰 (born 1980):

Minimalistic and surrealistic style enlarging the drama of ordinary, alienated lives.

Cai graduated from Shanxi Technology University, where he studied Art Design, and then worked as director for the Society and Law Channel at Chinese Central Television (IFFR 2021). Cai later resigned from CCTV to pursue his dream as a filmmaker. His work expresses his attitude towards this era focusing on people in remote villages and their struggles (Wengjun 2018). Instead of telling stories solely of alienation, Cai is keen on exploring how rural people use their status and spaces to find solutions to challenges they face in their lives. His mini drama series, *Hearing the Liangshan Mountain (tingjian liangshan 听见梁山 2013)*, tells of a group of young musicians from the Yi minority. The film delineates their struggles over desire, betrayal, temptation and how they find their way out; it stresses the significance of music to the Yi tradition and how it is both de-stabilised and maintained by the minority youth who move between the rural and urban environments, between old traditions and the modern world.

Cai's feature debut, *The Widowed Witch* (*beifang yipian cangmang* 北方一片苍茫 2018), won the Golden Tiger Award for best picture at the 47th Rotterdam International Film Festival. The film presents a social satire through a cursed widow and her apparent superstitious power in a remote village in northern China. The heroine, who lives a tragic life and who is segregated by the community, empowers herself through her isolation and vulnerability by masking herself as an all-knowing shamaness.

Cai's minimalist style and use of low saturated colour evoke the bleakness of the protagonist's spiritual and physical realms. Apart from long takes and long shots, his deep depth and static camera shots illustrate the connection between the passage of time and how people become lost in time and space; wide use of aerial shots depict the graphic nature of the rural land with its mysterious lines and marked boundaries, thus heightening the negligible status of each individual and imbuing them with a sense of entanglement and failure to feel attached to the space they inhabit.

For example, in *Widow*, the repetitive aerial shots of the winter fields and the heroine's endless, lonely journey is matched by the distorted unnatural landscape that towers over her worm-like homeless figure. Cai had been living in the rural north until high school and after working in Beijing, the city life made him take a dispassionate view of his rural homeland (Daoyanbang 2018).

His career as a producer for the Society and Law Channel at the Chinese Central Television offered him a better perspective on social issues. Once he was well-prepared for his first feature, Cai chose to film his rural hometown, where he had practised landscape sketching when he was studying painting. His aim was to tell the “human stories” which were the most familiar to him (Mai 2018). Therefore, his visual images frame a particular relationship between people and land in which the land grounds people’s journey whilst also bearing the weight of their dislocation and desperation.

Xin Yukun 忻钰坤 (born 1984):

Social observation that combines dislocating narrative elements and dislocating communities.

Xin worked as a column drama script writer for a local channel in Xi’an from 2005 to 2008 when he entered Beijing Film Academy to study Photography. Being inspired by Christopher Nolan and Bong Joon-ho, whose auteurist styles stress non-linear, multi-perspective and documentary narrative, elliptical editing, themes of causality, morality and subjective experience and memory, Xin is interested in psycho-drama, crime and thrillers which emerge in his work on Column drama (Morningan 2014). Column drama (*lanmuju* 栏目剧) is a unique form of teleplay or docudrama in China, that highlights social problems through dramatising real events or news about crimes, murders and moral struggles (Liu 2013: 119). Xin adopts a dark, controlled but striking style with

disordered spatio-temporal fragments. We find, in his work, a sense of cold and inexorable fate emerging from twisted storylines and narrative techniques in his work.

His experience in Column drama is also key to the formulation of Xin's style and themes. Xin's first two films *The Coffin in the Mountain* (*xin mi gong* 心迷宫 2015) and *Wrath of Silence* (*baolie wusheng* 暴裂无声 2017) are both based on real stories about the cover-up of village murders and cases of missing children in a northern township, respectively. Xin's work often involves a gallery of protagonists and their accidental and inevitable encounters and entanglement, depicting a panoramic view of Chinese society, especially within the regions that are overlooked in the legal system. His non-linear narrative exposes and maximises shocking details and trivialises the big picture, forcing the audience to revisit, restructure and make connections between seemingly irrelevant details and the various protagonists themselves. This centre-stages each "off-centred" or displaced individual and the twisted narratives allow us to pay attention to their hidden stories and the reasons why they have been made into cast outs.

Moreover, the use of silence is constantly employed in Xin's work. For example, in *Wrath*, the protagonists, who are related to a missing children case, are all "dumb" in different ways. The businessman is unwilling to talk, the lawyer is

unable or forbidden to talk, and the coal miner is physically dumb. Social ignorance and coldness are reflected through this kind of “social aphasia” (Xiao 2010; Su 2011). The whole situation and people’s attitudes start to change from the forest hunt scene which sparks primitive desires and an animalistic nature and order that humans have been long denied. The only witness to the missing child’s murder, a butcher’s little son is also dumb and has mental problems. He circumambulates the village appearing repeatedly at strategic points in the film. Nobody pays attention to this disabled child who lives on the edges of their community. However, like the fool who speaks the truth, his actions are ambiguous and eerie: he rolls on the floor with a mask, mimicking the murderer’s shooting posture and drawing the crime scene on the stone wall. Most of the film transpires in dark settings, such as the businessman (murderer)’s bar, the police investigation room, the decaying winter woods, the restaurant where the protagonists are repetitively juxtaposed with bloody raw meat. The scenes of the little witness are shot in daytime with bright natural lighting, seemingly offering a glimpse of hope in this gloomy and tragic world. However, the only character that represents hope, light and youth is permanently muted. Both his voice and the injustice and hope he symbolises are displaced in this remote, morally bankrupt village.

Hu Bo 胡波 (1988-2017):

Individual displacing journeys seeking solutions to collective social

pains.

Hu is a novelist, screenwriter and filmmaker. He graduated from the Department of Directing at Beijing Film Academy. In 2014, Hu began to publish his short stories. In 2015, he won the Best Director Award of the 5th Jinkora Film Festival for his short film *My Father Far Away* (*yuange de fuqin* 远方的父亲 2014, hereafter, *Father*); in the same year, he started to write the novel *Bullfrog* (*niuwa* 牛蛙 2017). In 2016, he won the First Prize of the 6th World Chinese Film and Novel Award in Taiwan with his short story *Big Crack* (*da lie* 大裂 2017) (Book iFeng 2017). Hu Bo hanged himself at the age of 29 in 2017 (Tencent 2017). In the following year, his only feature film, *An Elephant Sitting Still* (*daxiang xidi'erzuo* 大象席地而坐 2017) won the Best Feature Film Award and the Best Adapted Screenplay Award in the 55th Taiwan Film Golden Horse Award (Yin 2018).

In his short films, Hu focused on marginal people and their endless, searching, journeys. For example, in *Father*, the protagonist is a criminal who has just been released. His journey to become a singer is based on the idea that appearing on a TV show was the only way he could reach his father because he was too ashamed to go home. Shrouded in a grey hue, we see the hero travelling between various sites to perform: a rundown factory platform, a bleak wind power station, an abandoned, broken bus. This sense of decline and abandonment contrasts the protagonist's passion to fulfil his dreams to be a

singer and his desire for his father's attention. Through side and back shots, multiple framed and blocked character presence, we feel a sense of obstruction and incompleteness. Moreover, the protagonist's face is covered by a scarf throughout the film; even in the end when he finally gets to sing in a TV show, he can only reveal the tattoo on his shoulder with his face still covered. Hu is keen to explore the unspeakable pain of social outcasts through minimal dialogue and powerful actions.

Summary

“My time of youth in the late 1980s and my career development during the 2000s were times of turmoil; therefore, I developed my interests in depicting ‘dilemma’, socially, legally, morally and politically” (Liu and CDA 2018).

Liu Jie is not on his own. The feeling of anxiety and socio-political turmoil lingered over these group of directors and become a shared experience in the 1980s. Abrupt social changes during the Reform disturbed people's lives and caused social disparities and the feeling of unsituatedness that aroused discontent in terms of financial status, employment, land ownership and social security. The awakening sense of democracy was frustrated by official violence during the Tiananmen Massacre (1989) (Whyte 1993: 522-525, 2012: 231-234; Wang et al. 2016: 257-258; Lim 2014; Brook 1998). Entering the new century, intra-national conflicts, social corruption and the feeling of non-belonging

under globalisation brought a new wave of disturbance and the feeling of dispossession (Cao et al. 2018: 121; Chow 2005: 3-11; Ang 2020: 72-73; Fan and Chang 2015: 1-5).

The directors of the films discussed above were born either during the Cultural Revolution, or soon after the Reform (1978). The former group of directors saw a clear distinction between the Maoist cult for collectivisation and the tendency towards privatisation and marketisation during the Reform and visualised these distinctions in their work. It made them pay particular attention to the shifts that occur in people's lives and mentalities during social transformation. For example, Diao Yinan's 刁亦男 *Night Train* (*ye che* 夜车 2007) depicts the life of a widowed policewoman in the shifting social landscape after the Reform, stressing her dilemma between law, morality and passion. These directors were educated during the Reform era in the 80s. China's economic reform was implemented in 1980, with the first three years focusing on the countryside (Deng 1992). In 1984, the focus officially shifted to cities, including introducing more foreign investment, increasing self-employment, improving financial systems, and constructing a central-commanding economy; the whole process has increased urban living standards (Gao and Chi 1996; Jackson 1992). The implementation of the household registration guaranteed urban residents social security and welfare, which was not granted to rural people (Chen 1990). The Reform "widened disparities, accentuated a sense of unfairness and

sharpened social cleavages” in China; inequality has caused discontent and anger among the marginalised, including the impoverished, the disengaged and ethnic minorities (Zang 2016: 8).

The policy of the dissolution of collective farming (1982) and urban marketisation seemed to grant rural people more freedom in searching for employment.²⁸ However, without the commune system that had assigned and guaranteed their work previously, people in the country experienced difficulties in finding work for themselves; they struggled in a large marketised economy and lost a fundamental sense of community (Mohanty 2018: 253). Furthermore, the de-collectivisation of agriculture appeared to be an alternative way to centralise peasants’ power. Each rural household was re-distributed a small amount of land to cultivate under the new contract with the government (ibid: 50). Forceful intervention was also widespread in townships during the time. The state’s free manipulation of suburban territories created a new kind of instability and insecurity for township residents. Suburban dwellers’ pessimistic attitudes grew. Their original homelands became open-access backyards of cities for urbanising construction that demolished or altered their homes, sheltering urban strangers who came to invade and destabilise their spaces. Such “progressive urbanism” turned suburban prosperity into an “illusion” as original residents felt spiritually hollow (Visser 2016: 38). The growing

²⁸ See <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/zhzc/6/2/document/1075489/1075489.htm>, https://www.sohu.com/a/235257489_99943529, and Bi Haizhu’s “Five No. 1 Documents Concerning Rural Work” (2008) about related policies (1982-1986).

irrelevance between a space and its inhabitants fostered the feeling of non-belonging.

Since 1985, with the state's mandate to develop township and village enterprises, local governments and cadres have been granted more control over local firms and privatised state sectors (Brandt and Rawski 2008: 17-18; Brandt et al. 2008: 573). The Reform benefited some people but severely dispossessed others like people who lived in rural or urban marginal communities. The centralising economy brought huge financial power to local cadres who were able to distribute the State's subsidies, physical goods and managerial jobs to their followers, interweaving Party and government interests (Naughton 2008: 94-95). Collective grumbles like restricted political participation and freedom of speech, limited employment for graduates, inflation and corruption finally led to the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest (Brook 1998: 216; Nathan 2001; Lim 2014: 34-35). This era fused socio-political clashes, people's awakening subjectivity and sense of democracy, and the country's struggle towards modernisation. The dislocation directors, either educated or born during the time, were influenced and inspired by the state of turbulence.

Moreover, the 1980s was the time "when literary and artistic thoughts and atmosphere were very active and relaxing"; students from the Beijing Film

Academy and the Central Academy of Drama started to reject orthodox academic models and formed underground drama clubs under the influence of avant-garde theatre and modern literature which was increasingly available (Diao and Luo 2020). Diao Yinan 刁亦男, one of the filmmakers studied above, recalled his experience of screening Wong Kar-wai's 王家卫 *Days of Being Wild* (*A Fei zhengzhuan* 阿飞正传 1990) and Goddard's *À Bout de Souffle* (1960). These films abandon traditional narrative models seen in the domestic films they would have watched before. Diao said that, "I was so surprised, I have never imagined that a movie can be shot like this...they create a particular atmosphere"; he also watched Zhang Yimou 张艺谋 *The Story of Qiu Ju* (*Qiuju da guansi* 秋菊打官司 1992) that represents the other end of the spectrum, observing real social pains (ibid). Influenced by the Fifth Generation domestically and avant-garde abroad, these directors have been inspired by themes of remoteness and marginalisation while tending to adopt a more realistic and observational approach with unconventional twists.

The second group of filmmakers were born during the Reform and educated after the 2000s. They experienced the changes between the country's domestic reform and its globalisation. The 2000s were also a time when the first group of directors started to make their own films. As discussed in the previous chapter, the state provided more support to the film industry in the early 2000s as part of the economic reform; it encouraged minority-themed

filmmaking for political imaging. However, this was also a time when the Party increasingly implemented minority control to regulate minority people. Numerous recent studies have argued that the CCP plays a supermaschistic role and tries to Hanise minorities, ordering minority people to follow Han's rules and customs linguistically, culturally and politically, providing extra benefits and measures to strengthen the totalised unity (He 2005: 68-71; Pai 2012: 284; Dervin et al. 2020: 148). Pema's *The Silent Holy Stones* (*jingjing de manishi* 静静的嘛呢石 2006) explores a young monk's dilemma between faith, tradition and the urban allure and invasion. His *The Sacred Arrow* (*wucai shenjian* 五彩神剑 2014) mourns the dislocated Tibetan culture in which the traditionally religious Tibetan archery competition is turned into local government's tool for cultural display, commercial tourism and Tibetan youth's way of competing for wealth.²⁹

In the 21st century, although Jiang (1989-2002) and Hu's (2002-2012) regimes paid much attention to rural construction and anti-corruption, the problems in the countryside remained largely unresolved (Keliher and Wu 2016: 7-8, 18). As shown in the previous chapter, Xi's rural revitalisation programmes (from 2017) show widened gaps between the local authority and the targeted people who experienced anxiety and insecurity due to problems arising from re-settlement, their new social standing, financial status and corrupted

²⁹ See chapter 3 the discussion on Pema's *Old Dog* (*lao gou* 老狗 2011), pp.127-128.

authority. Liu's *Judge* (*tou xi* 透析 2010) addresses the Amendment to the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin gonghe guo xingfa xiuzheng'an* 中华人民共和国刑法修正案 1999) its impact on contemporary rural corruption.³⁰ It tells the story of a township judge's dilemma about the kidney of a death-row prisoner: a businessman had bribed a local cadre for the kidney to save his own life, while the criminal had already signed an agreement to donate his kidney to a dying patient.

The 2010s was when the state increasingly stressed national construction and paid particular attention to remote communities. The reinforcement of *dibao* 低保 (minimum livelihood guarantee 2013) and "Targeted Poverty Alleviation" (*jingzhun fupin* 精准扶贫 2015) brought the rural disadvantaged more in focus within society and solved the problems to a certain degree.³¹ However, local corruption, conflicts between authority and targeted groups, and problems of development and displacement remained as ongoing issues. Instead of explicitly addressing these problems, the directors who I argue are creating a new genre of dislocation focus on particular themes and genres and work their reflections and criticism in. For example, Xin's psycho thriller *Coffin In The Mountain* (*xin mi gong* 心迷宫 2015) underlines moral and legal corruption in countryside; Liu's thriller *Hide and Seek* (*zhuo mi cang* 捉迷藏 2016) explores the social and financial anxiety and insecurity of women living in urban fringes;

³⁰ The document see http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/gongbao/2000-12/05/content_5004760.htm.

³¹ See Chapter 2, pp.143-144.

his *Baby* (*bao bei* 宝贝 2018) tells the story of a female migrant worker, who was abandoned by her parents, helping a single father with an baby suffering from an imperfectly formed anus.

These filmmakers do not amplify or exaggerate the identities of their subjects as minorities, villagers, or people who have been marginalised in urban environments, but use individuals' stories to project social/national pain. For example, Cai's *Hearing The Liangshan Mountain* (*tingjian liangshan* 听见凉山 2013) sometimes blurs the identity of the Lisu minority, illustrating how a group of Lisu-minority youth is lost in their urban dreams. Pema's *The Search* (*xunzhao zhimeigengdeng* 寻找智美更登 2009) is a road movie about a film crew searching for an actress to perform the heroine from a Tibetan religious folk story. The heroine sacrifices herself to maintain the region's peace. Responding to the 2008 Tibetan unrest, the film projects the yearning for peace and humanity onto a dialogue between a woman and a sacred female goddess.

Characters in all the films described above are constantly searching and physically on the move. Fluidity becomes a central theme in their work. The directors collectively respond to China's ever-shifting socio-cultural and political landscapes since the Reform, particularly in the 21st century, as the country started to be a key player on the global stage. Such a feeling of floating

and seeking echoes a double-edged phenomena experienced at that time with the new levels of mobility afforded by greater prosperity and independence. Freedom to travel seemingly opened up more opportunities for marginalised communities, but at the same time disappointed rural people as they witnessed unfixable social gaps between the privileged and themselves. Poverty and rural revitalisation projects have relocated many villagers and minorities to better residences. However, the authorities largely overlooked issues that would be attendant upon demolishing people's culture, land seizures, relocatees' incompatibility and clashes with the host communities. Such unsituated feelings of belonging and locatedness ground the focus of the dislocation filmmakers. Through characters' ongoing journeys to or within social and geographical margins, people either remove or voluntarily exile themselves from places of struggle and start their journeys re-searching identities and pathways to a spiritual home-coming.

Not one of the filmmakers originally worked as a film director, but they have been driven by the circumstances described above towards collective interests in the experience of dislocation. Their careers as novelists, writers, journalists, or staff in TV stations forced them to make close observations of ordinary people's lives. Their careers and studies in photography, painting and literature added dramatic and artistic notes to realistic depictions, social critique and observations.

Moreover, the directors have experienced alienation to different levels. As a child, Liu was sent down to the countryside with his parents. Pema, the first minority student ever studying in the Beijing Film Academy, was first an “alien in college, then finding [himself] distanced from home” (Tseden and Li 2021). Diao was excluded from the feature film in-circle for a long time as he was a poor student working in documentary crews. He spent seven years between his second film and his kick-off feature, *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (*bairi yanhuo* 白日焰火 2014). At that time he was living in an industrial city border back home where he had more time to spend with the “off-centred” people living on the edges of society and legality (Diao and Tecent 2019). Cai and Xin initially worked for the state’s programmes about law and society, which brought them closer to making more authentic observations of those people marginalised by society. Xin failed the university entrance exam twice and worked among the cleaning staff of small film crews for a long time before entering the Beijing Film Academy (Morningan 2014). Hu, who committed suicide at the age of 29, had always defined himself as a loner. He failed the university entrance exam several times; after graduating from the Beijing Film Academy, Hu lived in a suburban basement room for many years without regular income. Financially, he relied on his parents because his work was constantly rejected.

The directors have in common their personal experience of alienation in both

upbringing and career. Together they lived through China's radical social transformation and watershed moments. They all had a pre-filmmaking career in other fields, and a later professional film training and influences in the film and drama academies. Either their subjects and particularly the female bodies in their work, are inscribed with gendered issues that represent national pain. That is not to say that the women's bodies they create are inscribed with the ills, challenges and hopes for society in general. They are not like the Communist films of Xie Jin 谢晋, for example, in *The Red Detachment of Women* (*hongse niang zi jun* 红色娘子军 1961), or recent leitmotif films like Li Gangren's 李仁港 *The Climbers* (*pan deng zhe* 攀登者 2019) which is a romanticised nationalist piece depicting the heroine as a beautiful, brave meteorologist climbing up Mount Everest. Rather, they direct films where individual women are given true agency, or where the heroines do represent a whole class of women – their films are truly gendered, and the women do not represent people or class struggle in general.

Moreover, these filmmakers stress the importance of achieving a sense of distance in their work, either between the so-called Han majority and minority, the central and the dispossessed, home and leave/return, social norm and social critique. Liu Jie states that tension and conflict come from poverty and ethnicity: "when filming minority-themed films, what interested me the most is the relationship between them and us" (Liu and Yang 2016: 22-23). Diao said

in an interview that “our society gradually turns away from collective struggles; individual rights, power and value become central, so we have to step out to criticise” (Diao and Luo 2020). Pema calls for establishing a sense of alienation from one’s familiar culture and jumping out to view it: “when I look back at my hometown, there is a sense of distance, so many things and views might be more novel, calm or objective” (Pema and Li 2021). They all value the power of stepping out and looking back with a distant, observational perspective. They tend to inscribe real life while “extracting the most dramatic from life” (Liu and Xu 2010: 34). The directors want to convey a sense of real experience of their subjects but also to extract the drama of everyday lives. They shock the audience into assuming directorial distance by emphasising narrative or cinematographic elements: their lingering emphasis turns what might have been unnoticed elements into something bizarre and surreal.

Section 2: Theme and Narrative

This section explores the theme of dislocation and the women's dislocating journeys, freedom and limitations. It discusses how the theme of dislocation is represented through different types of rural/township female displacement, including minority disengagement, socio-cultural and financial insecurity, community bullying, domestic conflicts, women's outcast position within patriarchy, and how they are disturbed and, in their disturbance, challenge the circumstances.

Deep In The Clouds (biluo xueshan 碧罗雪山 2010, Liu Jie 刘杰, hereafter, Deep)

The film is centred around themes of relocation and displacement and the tension between minorities and the central government. The key issue is not only a conflict between tradition and modernity, but also the liminal relation between them: bears, which are seen as the village's spiritual gods, physically harm the village; villagers are further thrown into crisis by a government order that prioritises the bears' livelihood over the lives of humans. All the themes and tensions are interwoven with the heroine Jini's (Nazhenye) shifting positions, attitudes and journeys within the village, and with how she situates her disadvantaged, gendered status in the village.

Liu's study in Photography at the Beijing Film Academy has shaped his attention to visuals and cinematographic design. In *Deep*, the use of colour and lighting evokes Jini's physical and mental status. After he graduated, Liu worked as a photo-journalist for *Women of China (zhongguo funü 中国妇女)* magazine.³² The magazine focuses on representative, "model" Chinese women, mostly from rural or minority backgrounds. It projects the country's development onto the women's lives and achievements. Such an experience allowed Liu's critical thinking. Departing from the focus of the magazine, which

³² Official websites, see <http://www.womenofchina.com/>, <https://www.womenvoice.cn/html/category/19124987-1.htm>.

channels national glory through the characterisation of individual women, Liu started to consider the other end of the spectrum by observing how the representations of women evoke national pain or social critique. Cinematically, Liu was first fascinated by the Fifth Generation director, especially Chen Kaige's 陈凯歌 "yellow-earth aesthetics" and later developed his interest in the humanity focus from working in the Sixth Generation director Wang Xiaoshuai's 王小帅 film crew.³³ The shaping of Liu's style and focus echoes that of the New Documentary Movement, which also fuses the characteristics of the two generations.

Deep is set in the 2010s, the time of the state's mass rural/minority area development and construction. Studies in the 2010s suggest that minorities are likely to be placed in oxymoronic situations during the process. Minority people are squeezed between the state's developmental policies which destroy their original customs and habitations, and the luring of modernised, "neo-liberal desires".³⁴ Such a problematic exacerbates a feeling of displacement. In *Deep*, the village faces trouble dealing with the state's modernisation progress and the Lisu's culture and tradition.

Deep takes place in a remote mountain village of the Lisu minority in Yunnan. The Lisu worships bears which are seen as its totem and are part of its

³³ See pp.182-183.

³⁴ See Chapter 2, pp.125-126.

ancestry (Harris and Ma 1997). However, lands, animals and people keep being attacked and harmed by bears. The older villagers believe that these are messages from the ancestors and although the younger generation are aware of the disastrous effect of the bears, they cannot disobey tradition. The government wants to relocate the villagers to protect the bears following the state's nature preservation strategies. The village starts questioning whether the god-like bears bless or harm them. The broad theme of tradition and relocation crisis intertwines with stories and connections between individual characters: Di Alu (Wangzepu), a young man who adopts modernist thoughts and hopes to solve the bear problem, is in love with Jini, Mupa's (Hu Chunhua) sister. Their love is disrupted by the Lisu tradition: Di Alu has to marry his sister-in-law as his emigrant brother has gone missing, while Jini is forced to marry a local businessman for money to save Mupa, who is imprisoned. The film ends with the village's relocation and with Jini going into the mountains to sacrifice herself to the bears.

Pratt argues that indoor scenes usually “carry the plot” and display the “staged” “dramatic actions” through which protagonists take their place in “the drama of heroic resistance” (2014: 39). This section discusses Jini's outdoor journeys in the film and the living room, the only indoor space associated with her, and how Jini's dislocation is projected through her physical and emotional paths. The film begins with Mupa's wedding. We see a montage of preparations of

the wedding banquet which is in line with the Fifth Generation's vision of exposing minority imagery for cultural display, such as the scarlet red cloth, burgundy smoked beef and the yellow soil. This is the first time we see Jini in the living room where she is watching the guests dancing. Her controlled happiness and excitement when she has eye contact with Di is disrupted at the moment she sees the bride and her mother crying. Their deep sorrow comes from the fact that the bride is being exchanged for cattle, but their grief goes unremarked by the overjoyed guests. This sense of sensorial disruption parallels that of the next scene where the sudden appearance of the bears ruins the banquet. In this pairing disruption, we see the hope for love disorientated by the truth of women's real fate and the veneering joy of the community threatened by physical danger from the bears.

This indoor scene is followed by and paired with Jini's first outdoor journey where she follows the crowd to send the bride to her husband's village. In contrast to her previous subjective shot showing the weeping mother and daughter embracing each other, this time she sees their separation. As the villages are split by a wide river, people have to travel on cableways. The distancing bride and the cableway is shot between two Lisu women's bellies, implying that women are only of use in their fertility. These pairing sequences of Jini's indoor and outdoor journeys illustrate how Jini feels dislocated as a woman for the first time.

The second indoor-outdoor pairing appears when we first see the bear. While the male villagers are all messing around and shouting, Jini is the only one who takes real actions by moving the sheep inside. As she hides in a random wooden hut, a bear climbs up to the window standing up as if human and seems to be looking for her in particular. We get a strong sense that the bear which symbolises an unshakable tradition is something that threatens Jini's life, foreshadowing Jini's tragedy caused by both the bears and the Lisu tradition. The binary domestic sequence to this is the one after the bear has killed a sheep belonging to Jini's family. Jini sees her father counting the government's compensation in a good mood. Realising the significance of money to her family, Jini offers to find a job in town but is rejected by her father as the function of a woman is that of "agricultural labour and child-bearing", otherwise she is as "useless" as her sister-in-law. In these pairing sequences, the threat (symbolised by the bear) from outside and repression at home makes Jini realise that there is nowhere to situate herself.

The film's turning point, Mupa's imprisonment, brings us to the next pairing scenes. Jini finally has the chance to go to the town, not for work, but for police information about her brother's crime, illegally cutting and selling Chinese yew. Failing to understand Mandarin, Jini feels uncomfortable and uneasy in the town she had been dreaming of escaping to. After arriving home, also in the

living room, her learns of her father's decision to exchange her for her brother's release. This pairing of scenes evokes Jini's double displacement. She is cut off from the dominant culture and society on the one hand and, on the other hand, she is detached from her family as she is merely used as property by them.

Jini's final (outdoor) journey is tragic, albeit with a certain sense of triumph, as Dunne suggests that female characters' increasing outdoor quests show their increasing sense of autonomy, agency and empowerment (2001: 102). After learning that killing by the bear could garner forty thousand yuan in compensation to the family, double the amount needed to save Mupa, Jini decides to make her final contribution to the family. Her decision of sacrificing to the bears also shows her loyalty to love because this is a way of rejecting her marriage with the businessman and keep her chastity for Di. This decision is further strengthened by Di's silent response to her final plea. The night before the intended wedding, we see Jini's first and last emotional outburst when she cries out to Di and begs for his marriage proposal. It is shocking to see such a repressed, minority village girl shouting "please marry me" to a man. Di remains silent in the whole scene, contrasting Jini's strong emotional impulse. Such silence is also repeated by her sister-in-law, when Jini seeks comfort from her after the forced marriage decision. The silence of the only two people who share Jini's feelings and sympathies pushes her further to the

edge. Both her yearning for passion and female subjectivity, her only sources of hope, have been vitiated.

Moreover, everything builds up to this moment when she realises that the bear crisis has to come to an end. Otherwise, his brother will commit crimes again due to the poverty caused by the bear-damaged land and animals; Di will still be criticised by the villagers because of his modernist solutions, and the village will be under constant life and livelihood threat. All this adds to the sense of solemnity and triumph at her death.

Jini's final appearance shocks but touches the audience when we see her calmly and carefully dressing up, walking into the mountains towards the bears in her wedding dress. The non-diegetic religious music, chiaroscuro lighting and extreme sunlight make the process sacred and ritualistic. Her "wedding" is neither with her love interest nor with the wealthy man, but with the beasts. This heartbreaking scene intensifies Jini's dislocation. It implies the failure of humanity and echoes the Lisu sad ideology of valuing women by animals early on where Jini and her in-law are repeatedly seen as equivalent to cattle by the men. However, apart from the symbol of ancestry, bears are also the symbol of fertility and reproduction, which is associated with Lisu women's key duty (Ma 2011). Therefore Jini's "marriage" with bears is ironised by her symbolic unity with her expected role.





Figs. 3.1-3.4 Jini's "marriage" in her final scene and the village's relocation scheme under the state's will after Jini's death.

Although most recent scholarship shows minority women's positive

engagement in state-sponsored cultural projects and regional development and shows that they are granted increasing rights and social participation, there are some overlooked communities where women are still dislocated (Tursun 2017; Shimbo 2017). Most media content, artworks or films depict minority women as “erotic, exotic and primitive”, as people who project their submissiveness and feed Han voyeurism. Alternatively, they are illustrated as sisters from backward cultures waiting to be saved (Wang 2013: 83; Gladney 2004).

Instead of adopting a hierarchal perspective and tone examining or empathising with the minority living under Han cultural dominance or following the exposure of minority women’s “sexual personae”, *Deep* “establishes an equilateral perspective” (Meng 2010: 153; Paglia 1990: 40). It focuses on the problem itself and intends to work towards a solution in the community being discussed. In its dual narrative layers, the film unfolds firstly realistic and dramatic conflict around characters’ tragic romance, and secondly the tragic ties between human and human (split views on the bear among the Lisu community) and human and bears (spiritual worship and disastrous reality).

Jini the Anti-heroine

The film offers a “map of spaces” (Orban 2021: 85). The relationship between Jini’s indoor and outdoor journeys highlights her dislocation-driven

empowerment. Jini's dislocation and her journeys in the village constitute the tragic paradox that drives the plot. Some might argue that the family crisis being resolved by a vulnerable, marginal woman's death is too melodramatic; her ending implies that reality is so problematic and unresolved that we have to resolve it through a melodramatic convention. Her real-life disengagement drives the plot inexorably towards her death. However, Jini eventually sees her socio-cultural dislocation as a medium of empowerment. Her "useless" status within the family enables her free travels, which involve saving livestock from bears and her own "undutiful" behaviour - expressing her passion to the man she wants as her lover after her father decided to exchange her for her brother with the businessman. Her death becomes the financial salvation of her family, her own spiritual salvation and eventually the event that saves the community from danger.

***Coffin in the Mountain* (xin mi gong 心迷宫 2015, Xin Yukun 忻钰坤, hereafter, *Coffin*)**

Dislocation-related themes in this film are female marginalisation, rural left-behind women, women's financial and social insecurity, and rural scandals and crimes. The women in *Coffin* use their dislocation to manipulate men and see it as a form of resistance, revenge and self-protection. However, such agency and empowerment also heighten their state of being displaced and victimised in the community.

Xin worked for the local authority's TV station as the director of *Column Drama* (*lanmuju* 栏目剧) that deals with social and legal issues.³⁵ *Coffin* addresses social problems still found in Chinese villages under the process of rural revitalisation in the 2010s. Issues around left-behind women, domestic abuse, rural unemployment, corruption and crime are underlined in the film. Xin tends to explore the hinterland of the seemingly all-positive landscape of rural transformation nationwide, as it has been foregrounded by mainstream media.

In contrast to *Deep*, the heroine, Liqin (Sun Li) and Huan (Luo Yun) in *Coffin* are not as vulnerable as Jini is. The film takes place in a northern Chinese village. The appearance of an unnamed corpse breaks the dawn tranquility of the community. Then a series of mysterious events from the night before are unfolded in disordered chronology and fragments. Huan, the girlfriend of the village head's son, has disappeared after meeting her boyfriend in the woods; Liqin, a beautiful left-behind woman is told that her husband, Chen (Cao Xi'an) is dead; a hooligan who returns to the village to escape from his creditors is confirmed by his brother to have been missing for six months.

Everyone has a secret related to the corpse. The coffin is constantly carried around, moved and removed by the villagers who use it to disguise their

³⁵ See Chapter 2, p.191.

scandals or evil thoughts. While the village falls into anxiety, the disciplined village head tries to solve the case, but no one imagines that he might be the murderer who has created a fake crime scene to cover up his son's scandal and to save his own reputation. The non-linear, multi-perspective whodunnit reveals connections between the protagonists and simultaneous events and stories related to the corpse in a series of chapters. Apart from complicating the narrative, highlighting dramatic tension, such a narrative structure also creates specifically character-centred experiences and agency (Carusi 2020: 146). Through superimposed revelations of the suspense, the villagers' trauma, hardship and disorientation caused by their particular social status and circumstance, is complicated by this unidentifiable death.

Unlike Jini whose travels establish her self-sacrifices for physical and spiritual salvation for either her family or her community, the heroine's journeys in *Coffin* serve as individual purposes and are associated with death in a different way. Liqin's death association is explicit. The first shot of the film pictures Liqin in her funeral gown with a calm demeanour and a scheming look on her face. Her tightening of her gown is interposed with a shot of an action of murder on a country road. This establishes her as a femme fatale character. Liqin's first full appearance brings us to a funeral of a villager who has been burned in a mountain fire. Liqin helps with the funeral banquet. We also see the two men who have relationships with her apart from her husband. These are Liqin's

lover, a married man, Wang (Shao Shengjie) and a store-keeper, Zhuang (Jia Zhigang) who is in love with Liqin. At the banquet, we see the other female character, Huan, who is blamed for causing a young man's death after she broke up with him and who later lies to her boyfriend about being pregnant. The two women are both associated with death and scandal and their portrayal contradicts most depictions of rural women who are usually seen as selfless, hard-working and kind. This sets a critical tone and encourages us to question its cause. Unlike other national cinemas in which female-revenge films mainly focus on rape revenge or aggressive, vengeful or violent women, for example, *MFA* (Natalia Leite, 2017), *Revenge* (Coralie Fargeat, 2018) and *Promising Young Woman* (Emerald Fennell, 2020), *Coffin* portrays "soft" female avengers. They are not implicitly associated with physical violence and fights; instead, they use their soft powers like sexuality and scheming or manipulative characteristics to achieve what they want.

Compared to Jini whose role and fate is strictly controlled by patriarchy and whose village journeys are mostly for agricultural purposes, domestic labour, or momentary escape, Liqin is more proactive. Liqin's journeys and narrative threads are more complicated. She plots her husband's murder with Wang due to her husband's unbearable domestic violence. She is crafty, manipulative and always keeps herself out of trouble. She constantly travels between her home and the village committee: she lies about Wang's alibi and makes him a

suspect, recognises Chen's body and pretends to be sad and helpless, and finally returns the coffin and appears to be vulnerable after confirming the corpse is in fact someone else. After Chen's death and betraying Wang, Liqin turns to Zhuang, showing her weakness to get his help. The two women use their sexuality and perform their marginalisation and dislocation as a vulnerable victim/left-behind in their interactions and on their journeys with men to illicit their admiration, sympathy and help and to cover up her scheming or evil thoughts.





Figs. 3.5-3.8 Liqin the rural femme fatale.

Liqin represents the desperation and resistance of rural left-behind women. Left-behind women emerged since the 80s reform and are defined as wives whose husbands migrate to work in the city and have been absent for at least half a year (Huang 2007: 14; Lin and Huang 2007: 163). It was estimated that the number of left-behind women in Chinese rural areas is 47 to 50 million (Liang and Mao 2007: 61-63). For rural women, to go outside is “daring” and requires “strength and courage” (Meng et al. 2016: 157). In China, domestic work often refers to work done inside and labour refers to work done outside, and the village is associated with inside and urban migration the outside (ibid). Such a structural system leaves rural left-behind women doubly dislocated and

enclosed. Some research focuses on the idea that rural women's empowerment comes from the absence of males: the feminisation of agriculture allows women greater autonomy in agriculture and and greater control over their income and resource ownership; they are granted increasing possibilities of making choices, more control over time management in both the domestic and labour spheres, all of which increases their participation and leadership in the community, empowering them and allowing them to challenge established power relations (Bossen 2002; Meng et al. 2015; Ren et al. 2011). However, this is not the case for women like Liqin, whose household is not agriculture-based.

The studies mentioned above overlook left-behind women's heavier burden back home. Socio-economic and demographic changes further disengage them due to their increased workload in domestic and arable labour and due to the physical and mental problems relating to this harsh circumstance (Zhou et al. 2007). 69.8% of rural left-behind women often feel mentally overwhelmed; 50.6% suffer from anxiety and 39% suffer from depression (Wu and Ye 2014: 142-162). While physical problems come from extreme work and occupational diseases, psychological problems stem from marital and family anxieties and sexual repression. In Liqin's case, the lack of security in marriage and marginalisation in the community, physical and sexual assaults are the main drivers of her criminal and manipulative behaviour. These circumstances,

together with robbery, are the main problems faced by, and displacing, rural left-behind women in China (Ding 2007: 156).

Liqin the Anti-heroine

In her backstory, Liqin and Wang's engagement was ruined by Wang's parents. This has made her a "valueless" and "disgraced" woman; moreover, the fact that she is not from the village makes her life even more difficult. She has to conceal her character, beauty and passion and has to put up with domestic violence, otherwise she will be accused of being a bad and corrupt woman. Forced self-protection and long-term repression and insecurity pushes her to plot Chen's murder, frame Wang and take advantage of Zhuang's kindness. The men who are plotted against by Liqin hold dominant hierarchal positions in the community. Wang's pregnant wife forgives him for having affairs with Liqin to secure her marriage and reputation, leaving Liqin abandoned again; while Zhuang, who is having an affair with another woman in town, constantly violently rejects Liqin's divorce proposal in order to establish his power and maintain his "face". The status of being a fallen woman initially displaces her but later stimulates her empowerment and agency. It drives her towards taking revenge on men and enhances her independent and strong character. Although she appears to be flawed, scheming and selfish, she has the power to challenge the unfair treatment of women in a patriarchal community. She also shows her kindness to Zhuang, who supports and cares for her after her

husband's death.

An Elephant Sitting Still (daxiang xi di er zuo 大象席地而坐 2018, Hu Bo 胡波, hereafter, *Elephant*)

The film's themes of dislocation and journeying indict social marginalisation, community scandals, unemployment and the lack of education, township depression, broken families, domestic violence, and township youth problems. They drive the protagonists' social and mental displacement and their travels as they leave their hometown.

Hu's negative school experience tends to be reflected in *Elephant*, in which Huang suffers from school bullying and gossiping. Hu first failed the high school entrance exam and went to a poor local school. After several failed attempts to the university entrance exam, Hu became the eldest student in the Beijing Film Academy. After graduation, Hu's scripts were repeatedly rejected for not being commercial enough. He remained unemployed for years and lived in a basement apartment in a poor district in an urban fringe of Beijing. From that vantage point he could observe and immerse himself in the marginal environment. After Hu completed the making of *Elephant*, which was funded by Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, Wang disapproved of Hu's editing; he insulted and attacked Hu online in order to force him to compromise, he threatened to deprive Hu's right to any attribution (Luola 2018). Hu's experience of

disappointment, depression and marginalisation is visualised in his *Elephant*: social outcasts aimlessly drift in and out of the frame and struggle to find somewhere to be situated. Such sentiments also echo contemporary social circumstances in the decline of industrial towns, including unemployment and township/rural depression due to the state's forced developmental projects and regional disparities.³⁶

The film brings us to a girl drifting in a bleak, northern industrial Chinese township. It tells the one-day journey of four protagonists: a local bully who causes his friend's suicide because he slept with the friend's wife; a widowed old man who is about to be forced into a run-down care-home by his children; a high-school boy, Wei Bu (Peng Yuchang) who kills his classmate by accident and who has a broken relationship with his emigrant parents; and the heroine, Huang Ling (Wang Yuewen), who is fed up with her single-mother's mistreatment of her and turns to an affair with her school administrator, finally becoming a victim of school bullying and a social-media scandal. All the characters are pushed towards the social edge and dislocated within a remote township. They finally decide to further displace themselves and set out on a journey to see an elephant sitting in a zoo in a far-north town, Manzhouli.

Rural and township populations in China, in comparison to other populations

³⁶ See pp.197-198.

face severe mental problems and depression (Ran et al. 2005; Yue et al. 2015; Yu 2017). In China, well-being for individuals living in townships is interchangeable with their “living standards” and “socioeconomic status”; township dwellers ill-being is caused by the material lack and socio-psychological drivers, that are connected to the mental health in inter-familial and inter-community relationships (Perkins 2002: 13; 98). Township people face a “less tangible type of institutional constraint” and key drivers include unsatisfying lifestyles and the lack of social support (Perkins 2002: 10; Feng et al. 2013). Among Chinese young people between 15 and 34, female rate of dissatisfaction is higher than the male (2.60% vs. 1.55%); and rural/township rates (2.24%) are three times higher than urban rates (Phillips et al., 2009: 2041-53).

Huang’s spaces and journeys project her depression and forced dislocation. Internal spaces associated with her are her home and school. The claustrophobic, dark and dirty domestic spaces unfold the household’s poverty, emotionlessness, Huang’s broken family and relationship with her mother, who is an alcoholic and who constantly has sexual affairs with men. At school, Huang seems to be much more mature than others and is not interested in what her peers are doing. The school is “the worst in the whole region” and is about to be demolished to make way for commercial properties. No one cares for study, including the teachers; bullying and violence is commonplace. The

only one who shares her sympathy is Wei, who also realises that life is a totally barren.

Her loveless and disgraceful mother and her violent and hopeless school-life stimulate Huang's external journeys, which are set as binary oppositions to her internal spaces mentioned above. Her first external journey is to the local zoo where Wei tells her about the idea of going to see the sitting elephant in Manzhouli. In contrast to her lifeless behaviour at school, mostly leaning against the wall, Huang's movements, actions and emotional expressions now become freer and more expansive. Although she laughs at Wei's idea, this is the first time she encounters the notion of a fantasy escape. Huang's journeys outside are also attached to a man associated with her.

When she is at the teacher's home, she enjoys its tidiness, brightness and spaciousness compared to her own home; as she sits in the cafe with him, eating the cake he buys her, she is flattered by the taste of a real cake, not the one from her mother, "broken, with the taste of cheap, oily take-away". Huang does not have sexual relations with the teacher, but enjoys "absorbing" material and emotional comfort and care from him. In rural/township China, "relative deprivation, unrealized aspiration, and lack of coping skills" are the main drivers of psychological strain when two contrasting stressors confront each other (Zhang et al. 2011: 2003). For Huang, her frustration at the lack of

family care and material insufficiency and of understanding at home is intensified by her experiences of the converse, that is, what she receives from the teacher.

Huang's dislocation and journeys within her community illustrate her lack of emotional security and her precarious social situation. In China, rural/township suicides and depressed people usually have poor family relationships and experience other problems in the family such as a previous suicide by a family member, gambling, drinking and/or crime" as well as a lack of social support (Zhang 2010: 317; Hou et al. 2015). Especially, women's depression in rural/township areas often stem from "internal or external social causes"; they "prefer not speaking with family members and friends", and try to resolve their illness by themselves and avoid their intimates (Qiu et. al 2018: 38; Chin et al. 2015; Kung and Lu 2008; Yang et al. 2015). Most rural youth's depression is caused by external social factors like material lack or displacement within the community (Qiu et. al 2018: 44). Huang's family problems and failed communication with others causes her self-dislocation and solitude.





Figs. 3.9-3.12 Huang's journeys through town, her escaping trip to the zoo, her bursting moment of beating the teacher, and her final journey to see the elephant.

The film's ending shows an unfinished journey to Manzhouli, where the

imaginary beast is. It ends in a town in Inner Mongolia, literally meaning “exuberant waterhead” and represents hope, the opposition of the bleak, lifeless township the characters inhabit (Chen 2019: 40). We do not see Huang reaching the destination, but rather traveling along the country road. The significance is not whether she sees the elephant, but her willingness to seek salvation. Her dislocating journey becomes a form of resistance, her final defence against the world. Instead of the endless arguments with her mother, her teacher and the frustrating noises at school, we see profound and spiritual silence and transcendence in Huang’s final journey. This journey is to somewhere further displaced, but which dislocates her from suffering and towards the rebirth of hope.

Huang the Anti-heroine

The fact that Huang finally becomes the blame-worthy sinner in the adult world pushes her to the journey to Manzhouli. After the media-scandal with her teacher, the teacher suddenly becomes hysterical and blames her for ruining his future and reputation; the teacher’s wife comes to ransack Huang’s house and curses her; her mother’s blame and school bullying intensify her depression. She is viewed by the community as a disgraceful troublemaker, but her good qualities are also visible in the film. Although she appears to be rebellious to her mother, she does the housework and bears her mother’s bad temper and alcoholism; she cares for her friend, Weibu, and an old man who is

abandoned by his family and who is also a member of their group outing to Manzhouli. Huang's journey to Manzhouli is a union with other dislocated people and a union with her true self as she fulfils a desire to break free from the restrictions of a repressive and bleak reality. The director Hu Bo's friends suggested, Hu "hated the world because he was so deeply in love with it" (Zhang 2018). Through Huang and other protagonists in the film, Hu portrays his anti-heroes/heroines' repulsion and disgust for the world; at the same time, they care for each other within their group and never give up searching for a place of hope and belonging.

Summary

Themes and the narrative in dislocation films elicit the subjects' triple dislocation (physical, cultural and gendered). The notion of doubling dominates most of the characters' lives. They are either entangled in paradoxical situations or decision-making, or they live a doubled life with binary identities. Thematically, dislocation is interwoven with the social and cultural problems faced by the heroines and projects their dilemma. The manipulative femme fatale women either lose everything or sacrifice themselves for men in the end. Some might argue that their female autonomy is still male-oriented. Moreover, the films in which the women empower themselves through dislocating, spiritual journeys away from their communities and domestic realms remain problematic in the end. They are either end in death, or turn to the very religion

that had oppressed them in the first place.

Nevertheless, the films stress that the women's dislocation-oriented empowerment evokes a more profound sense of displacement. The women are portrayed with the qualities of an anti-heroine. Some are excluded from society as social outcasts; some initially adopt the secondary role within patriarchy and are disengaged from financial gain and benefit; some yearn for passion or subjectivity that has long been absent from their lives. Unlike the fallen women in Western film noir who destabilise patriarchy, the dislocation anti-heroines are sexually, mentally and structurally passive. However, they use their femininity and other female powers to establish control of their own lives (Ma 2020). Their dislocated status drives their free travels, their eagerness and willingness to re-search for new identities. Although some are morally ambiguous, most of the women use their dislocation to help the innocent and to maintain the borderline of the law. They move in-between different sides. They appear to be the only ones with humanity, mercy and human emotions in the violent, corrupted male-dominant world. They each use their displaced status to defend their humanity in their own ways.

Section 3: Cinematography

This section scrutinises the cinematographic traits of films about women's dislocation within remote areas. Visual barriers and split, entangled frames

create an observative and first personal point-of-view perspective for us but give a sense that we never get close to the subjects, heightening their fluid, outlying status. The characters are dislocated from the viewer, intensifying the narrative of dislocation.

Remote cinematic settings have been argued as a site for human intimacy, relativity, situating solidarity that potentially allows alternative spaces for creating happiness and new communities and for seeking answers for big questions in life (Zhou 2021: 49; Esfandiary 2012: 136). Juxtapositions between vast and bleak landscapes, focused individuals and their paths and movement that we cannot identify with create a seeming incompatibility between spaces and emotions, indicating subjects' physical and spiritual dislocation. Nevertheless, remote spaces function as fertile grounds for their revival. The camera shifts between boundless settings and claustrophobic spaces in which the characters are visually and graphically framed as outsiders, whether indoors or outdoors.

Cinematic images of women pinned against walls often imply female vulnerability, isolation, male threat, or the state of being infantilised (Bulter 2009: 124; Bell-Metereau 2005: 93; Brunette 1998: 56). In the films, heroines are repeatedly positioned against walls or blank backgrounds at moments of trauma or danger; they appear in mirror/glass reflections that imply their

divided selves. Both the unknown outside and the impersonal/unfamiliar indoor evoke a sense of being nowhere to attach or belong to. Inserting fantasy images in naturalistic representations implies that the subjects are unable to grasp the tangible world around them or find a way to situate themselves; what seems natural is unrealistic for them. The fantasy associated with their yearnings is fragmented and never actualised, but is mixed up with a hopeless reality.

The Widowed Witch (beifang yi pian cangmang 北方一片苍茫 2017, Cai Chengjie 蔡成杰, hereafter, *Widow*)

The film tells the story of Erhao, a widow in a northern Chinese village and narrates a panoramic picture of a Chinese countryside from her perspective. The film's dislocation cinematography is employed through framing, colour and visual motifs around the heroine, Erhao's (Tian Tian) outdoor journeys and in the various indoor spaces she moves between. Erhao's indoor shifts are about her reaching-out-to-men journeys, as she looks for support with her problems of shelter, and as she becomes homeless and lives in a minibus once her last husband dies. In these journeys, Erhao is constantly blocked by visual barriers which emphasise her distance and vulnerability and echo her displacement in the patriarchy.

Like Xin Yukun, Cai also worked in the law and society sector for the state

media.³⁷ Legal issues are often visible in his work, which focuses on subjects outside the protection of the legal system. In *Widow*, Erhao is entangled by the lack of compensation for her husband's death in an industrial incident, the failure of local support for the homeless, illegal rural land development due to the government-business collusion. These issues ground Erhao's dispossession and criticise the failure of the state's policies of "Targeted Poverty Alleviation" (*jingzhun fupin* 精准扶贫), which aimed for helping all disadvantaged rural households.

The accidental death of Erhao's three husbands makes her a cursed woman who is segregated by and from the community. However, things dramatically change after Erhao cures an old man, also by accident. Since then she has been worshiped by the villagers as a "living goddess" who has transcendent powers. Erhao then starts to use her special position to help the villagers with love and kindness and tries to transform their humanity, encouraging them to abandon selfishness and greed. She ultimately fails in this endeavour.

The first reaching-out-to-men journey shows Erhao at her brother-in-law's home asking for help. The scene is shot in her point-of-view with static camera from which we know that Erhao is leaning against a wall sitting on a bed. She keeps talking to people in front of her, asking about her husband's death and

³⁷ See p.204.

for support from the in-law. However, from the fact that everyone constantly goes about their own business and ignores Erhao, who becomes more and more mute, we realise that nobody can hear her voice. Erhao's voice is blocked and we cannot even see her in the shot. It seems that Erhao is non-existent to her relatives until the moment her feet appear and are fetishized in the shot. Following this the in-law rapes her. This scene combines hallucinatory subjectivity which finally collides with base reality, setting a suppressed, cruel and yet magical tone. Erhao's subjective point-of-view with static camera stresses her vulnerability, her inability to escape.

Erhao's second reaching-out-to-men episode is when she asks the village head for help. He will only help her if she sleeps with him. Their conversation takes place in the man's claustrophobic bedroom. Erhao's body is obstructed by the smoke from a boiler while the village head stands at the centre of the room lit by the strong outside light. The scene symbolizes Erhao's status as a non-being in a patriarchy community. As she turns to her husband's friend who owes them money, the friend pretends to be friendly and refuses to return his debt. Erhao stands in front of the car window and is shot from the inside of the car. The friend's carefree manner and his free movement when speaking to Erhao contrasts to Erhao's helpless, static body which seems to be pinned within the window frame. This set of scenes demonstrates the powerlessness of a woman once her husband is dead.





Figs. 3.13-3.16 Visual barriers and frames.

The use of visual obstruction in cinema to reflect a sense of otherness, particularly, danger, limitation and wrongfulness associated with women

(Ginsberg 2007: 116; Hollvfield 2013: 77; Naficy 2012: 158). Erhao is constantly confined within or blurred by visual restrictions as if she is a piece of property or somebody who is not alive or truly existing. Her body is stuck within lines and edges and blocked by doors, windows and even “erased” by smoke. Such cinematography evokes that she is merely property, a commodity in the male community and is displaced outside existence, as not even blood and flesh.

The other two outdoor travels are fantasised. After Erhao is worshiped as the all-powerful shaman, she is asked by a girl to save her mother. However, as the girl leads Erhao to her “mother”, Erhao sees a bunch of dying trees and realises that she is hallucinating as the others have not seen the girl at all. This is the moment when she realises the villager’s greed is causing severe environmental damage. Later Erhao sees another female spirit which is that of a raped girl who has committed suicide. In these encounters, Erhao is wearing her shaman costume. The sequences are connected by the elaborate movements she makes in her shaman dance, the vast and boundless snowy fields and the forest. The camera shifts from the static, long shots into slow motion and tracking shots with a dream-like fluidity. This implies that she is empowered by her dislocation which, in turn, allows her to think more deeply about humanity. Her marginalisation before and god-like status now are two forms of displacement away from the tangible life of the community.

Erhao's final two outdoor journeys are tragic and ironic. Whilst she is looking for two trafficked girls, we first see her running across a bridge alone in a long shot while a group of women are dancing to joyful music below. This creates a sense that Erhao is the superior saviour and is morally superior to the ignorant villagers. However, after learning that the girls have gone missing and that there is no way finding them, Erhao collapses and sits on the ice where the women were dancing as the women themselves have now danced onto the bridge. Such a physical and positional shift shows the switch in power relations (Garnemark 2012: 60; Ellsworth 2008: 74). Erhao, the only one with humanity and morality, now becomes the powerless vulnerable one who is forced to submit to the majority who are cold and emotionless.

Erhao's despair in humanity is intensified in her final journey where she tries to stop the villagers from using explosives on the mountain for commercial ends by using her fortune-telling power. This time the villagers seize her and hunt her down, losing their faith in the "goddess". Then the women come to steal her talisman so they can bless their husbands who are about to set the explosives. As Erhao finally walks away from the crowd in despair, we see the forest in which the girl in Erhao's dream-state had asked Erhao to save her dying "mother". It is in this way that Erhao realises the inevitable failure of trying to dissuade humans from their greed. Erhao is firstly centred among the

crowd, trying to use her transcendent power for the final salvation; however, after being punished by the men who used to have faith in her, she actively removes herself and abandons her dominant position of power, leaving the group of women in frozen motion. As discussed above, both Erhao's attempts to rescue humanity and nature end in failure. Shot compositions and dramatic choreography of the crowds each time illustrate people's senselessness and ignorance, in contrast to Erhao, who is displaced because of her humanity, mercy and flesh-and-blood emotions.

Colour also plays a key role in the film's dislocation cinematography. Most of the film is shot in black-and-white, only the key moments are coloured in a magical realist manner. The effect of inserting colours in an otherwise black-and-white film, stressing the feeling of sensational attraction and emphasis in dramatic moments (Rødje 2016: 51-53). The first colour scene is where Erhao accidentally cures the old man and is seen as the all-knowing goddess. All the men who previously wanted to take advantage of her or who mistreated her gather together to offer their help and talk about her new shelter. While the men are still in black-and-white, we see Erhao dressed in vivid red and the colourful glass window behind her reminds us of a church window. Moreover, the positioning of the characters ironically echoes the Last Supper with Erhao taking the position of Jesus. This scene gives rise to bitter humour when we see the bizarre image and the dramatic shift in the men's attitudes. It

is the most dramatic and glorious moment for Erhao. The scene is almost like a sacred endorsement and this is where magical realistic episodes and fantasy start to be injected in the film to show a sense of irony and absurdity.



Figs. 3.17-3.18 Coloured sequences.

The second coloured moment is when Erhao is determined to use her dislocation, distant but transcendent power within the community, to make a change in the village. It is the moment she officially accepts her position as an all-knowing shaman. In this scene, Erhao sits on her bed in her new home with the burning stove as the only coloured object. It evokes her desire to transform the village and to gain respect. The burning fire implies her strong yearning and the renewal of her life. However, the stove looks ill-fitted to the room, a superficial object dislocated among the tangible surroundings, foreshadowing the eventual collapse of Erhao's dream and efforts. In the final coloured moment, we see Erhao in black-and-white, recalling her traumatic past in the desperate present. A colourful LED is blurry and twinkles in the background, suggesting that Erhao's wished for state is unreachable and unrealistic. The bold use of colour for a magical realistic effect illustrates the contrast between human warmth and compassion and coldness and ignorance. According to the director, Cai, the magical is "based on extreme reality as reality is sometimes much more magical than the magical" (Zhang 2018).

As in *Widow*, the quasi-fantasy scenes in which dramatic visuals are also depicted in a naturalistic and smooth way in *Elephant*. Night, lights, silenced characters and external sound sources shape the heroines' quasi-fantastical escape. At the end of *Elephant*, we find that the space attached to Huang dramatically shifts. Dusty corridors, claustrophobic elevators and the dirty

bathroom at home in which Huang is previously shot from the back or side in slow movement and deathly manner are transformed. The effect of wandering characters with the drifting camera highlights the immediate presence and characters' particular relationships with their associated spaces (Geuens 2000: 191; Ma 2010: 56). In most of the film, Huang drifts with the camera that floats around and follows her while avoiding her front, or showing her retreating, blurred, or filming her in close-ups creating a sense of claustrophobia and confinement as if she is squeezed in or pinned against spaces.

Such suggested, cinematographic dislocation and exclusion is transformed in the end. Huang kicks the shuttlecock while hearing the sound of an elephant from afar. We see her in frontal and long shots with full actions and free movement. The hue is transformed from the low-lit grey to high lighting, showing the orange, warm lighting source that breaks through the extreme dark night. Such cinematographic inclusion and visual extension engage in the character's transformation and imply a turning point in her emotions, contributing to the shift in effect and affect (Hansen and Waade 2017: 131). It is clear that the ending scene is composed in a highly theatrical way. The light that shines onto Huang from the side appears to be from the coach light; yet the way it is depicted is unnatural. Moreover, lights on the coach are also switched on simultaneously. Two sources of light echo each other in the extremely dark surroundings while the other passengers on the coach all

disappear. Such vacuum-like narrative space steps out of realistic depiction and blurs the boundary between reality and the character's dream state.

Erhao the Anti-heroine

As discussed above, the dislocation cinematography in *Widow* visualises our heroine's physical, social and spiritual displacement. Physically, we see Erhao's graphical presentations of her marginalisation, such as her minibus-shelter that separates her from the village residential areas and the visual barriers and restrictions in which she is positioned in discussed above. Socially, she is commodified by a patriarchal community either as sexual obsession or as a fetishised goddess for each individual's greedy purposes. Her distant and isolated status never changes. Furthermore, she is spiritually displaced in an inhuman community as she, exceptionally, feels love and compassion. She is able to cure people's diseases, but the cure for greed and inhumanity is eternally absent. Erhao's dislocation is interwoven with themes of patriarchy, child trafficking, rape, rural left-behind problems, superstition, exploitation of nature and rural commercialisation. Moreover, one of the keys to Chinese human relations is the importance of social "bond" and "continuity" social structures which Erhao lacks (Yuen et al. 2004: 8). She becomes an isolated drifter due to her detachment from the traditional sense of Chinese community. Apart from her social alienation, Erhao's anti-heroic qualities are defined by her kindness and humanity. She uses her "special power" to punish

the misbehaviour of men and helps their mistreated wives. She tries her best to look for the trafficked girl, looks after her mentally impaired brother-in-law, and provokes the protection of the natural environment. Her good side accompanies her more controversial characteristics, including coldness and arrogance to some villagers, her enjoyment in being isolated, and her attacks on the men she hates.

The Wild Goose Lake (nanfang chezhan de juhui 南方车站的聚会 2019, Diao Yinan 刁亦男, hereafter, *Wild*)

As in *Widow*, the dislocation cinematography in *Wild* is also heightened through framing, colour and the heroine's pairing journeys. Slightly differently to Erhao's lonely travels, some of Liu Aiai's (Gui Lunmei) journeys are accompanied by the male protagonist. Like Erhao, Liu is always shot with physical barriers that imply her marginal status and mysterious identity. They are also symbolic of the social barriers. Her displacement is reinforced by her geographical dislocation and travels, the distant quality in mise-en-scene, and the contrast between momentary fantasy, and theatrical visuals reflecting her wished-for states and the dullness and darkness in reality.

In the late 80s, Diao lived in the urban fringe of Xi'an. He witnessed the lawless, criminal underworld and travelled in rural areas or border zones of cities, becoming overwhelmed and fascinated by industrial ruins and chaotic

spectacles (Diao 2019). In the 90s, Diao worked in Wang Zhengrui's 王正瑞 crew as "cheap labour", shooting landscape documentaries. He went down to the most "uncivilised and rough" rural/township areas and spent time with hooligans, prostitutes and gangsters (Haitunzhizui 2019). These experiences contributed to Diao's interest in the social margins, the people living in marginal environments, and spectacles of ruins and decay.

The story of *Wild* is set in a township/urban village area in Wuhan. The leader of a gang of criminals, Zhou Zenong (Hu Ge), has accidentally killed a policeman and is on the run. Zhou is wanted by the police, and by his rivals and a treacherous friend for getting the bounty. He encounters a mysterious prostitute, Liu Aiai, who has been sent by a rival to get close to Zhou. As a localised film noir piece, the film depicts a non-urban setting with regional characteristics and a perverse representation of the femme fatale, Liu (Ma, Zhang 2020). Unlike conventional noir heroines who are cruel, scheming and who exert great power over men, Liu is passive, compassionate and drifts along on the borders of society. She has been appointed by Zhou's gangster rival to take Zhou to the police to get part of the bounty. However, as the film proceeds, we see Liu falling for Zhou and discovering her humanity and compassion which has been long absent in her life as a prostitute who is on the edge of society. She uses her dislocated position and drifting nature as a disguise to protect Zhou and Zhou's wife, Yang Shujun (Wan Qian).





Figs. 3.19-3.22 Liu confined within visual barriers.

Shapes and graphical dissections in cinema always imply metaphorical or

suggestive meanings (Goodwin 1993: 137; Isaacs 2020: 127-163). In most of her scenes, Liu is positioned in blocks, boxed shapes or split by lines and edges into a separate plane; together with the run-down setting, it heightens Liu's marginal position in this marginal space and sets her character as a displaced drifter. In her meetings with Zhou, either to disguise Zhou or to tell him about the plan at the station or restaurants, Liu is physically close, yet separated from him by the lines of walls and windows. Slanted lines and shapes that are visually associated with her presence, segment the screen and her spaces and arousing anxiety and uneasiness in the viewer.

Pointy and irregular shapes and angles in *Widow* show Erhao's inability to become involved with or to be understood by the community. In comparison, *Wild* also shows the heroine's distant relationship to the world. In Liu's initial meetings with Zhou and later on in the film when Liu goes to lead the police away to save Zhou, slashes created by staircases are highlighted by the high-key lighting in chiaroscuro as if the space is dissected, pointing towards and leading her to an unknown danger. On her journey of guarding Zhou's wife, lines and sharps are less extensive and become more enclosing, entangling and confining her in a claustrophobic space. The narrow, coffin-like shelves, doors and entrances along alleyways shift her towards positions of danger. Instead of being the symbol of danger, Liu's journey alone or with other women makes her passive and seemingly under threat. Thus, shot composition and

framing evoke a sense of danger and suffocation in a sensual way and illustrate Liu's position as both the threatening and threatened: to Zhou and his wife, she is the unknown woman attached to the gangster, coming to offer help; to herself, her shifting attitude towards Zhou and her awakening compassion will potentially get her into trouble. Her presence displaces Zhou from his rivals and the police, and also displaces her from safety.

Colour and lighting are also key to Liu's dislocation, adding to a theatrical and magical realist quality. As eighty-five percent of the film transpires at night, the twinkling neon on the run-down streets, rustic and dusty yellow-green hues, shadows on mottled walls, ruined or unfinished construction sites, together with the wet, rainy township and urban village, create a sense of mystery. Cinematic ruins are often associated with characters' identity, depicting a sense of decay, danger and sometimes a violent spectacle (Ravetto-Biagioli 2017; Carréra 2021). Such decline and incompleteness also evoke a sense of unfinished transformation or evolution with a primitive, animalistic or even monstrous quality, a form of violent, gloomy and bloody beauty. Moreover, the flamingos, penguins and other animals' unexpected appearance in the film's crime scenes, and the cross-cutting between the eyes of humans, tigers and owls before the gunshots add a surrealist quality to the film. The human world is depicted as a jungle in which human relations are not different from that between animals. The use of animal/beast imagery in cinema tends to

enhance the dangerous, threatening or bloody atmosphere and mood, arousing more emotional response from the audience (Kolker 2011: 81-85; Wheatley 2011: 97-101). Such dehumanisation shows people's cruelty, a wildness in their way of fighting for power and wealth in such a space that is dislocated from law, order and humanity.

In a world like this, Liu's awakened compassion and sympathy which is displaced from her surrounding world is heightened by extreme colours. In guarding Yang, we see Liu's subjective shots of street vendor carts decorated by neon lights and the square dancers' LED shoes. In such a tense moment where the rival gangsters and the police scatter around, Liu bends down to pick up the shining LED lights sold on the street (reminding us of the quasi-fantasied, coloured scenes of Erhao in *Widow*). Their superficial, fake shape of flowers and plants attract her. They are spread out in front of her in a close-up as if Liu is surrounded by colourful fireworks. This is the point where Liu starts to show her sympathy and secretly helps Zhou and his wife. Such human feelings are new to a marginal woman who has been attached to prostitution and the gangster world. All the vibrant and vivid colours from various lights seem to be ill-fitting in this dark, wet and dirty space of violence and blood. Such fantasied visual disorientation and incompatibility implies Liu's problematic status. She is shocked by the discovery of her humanity which has been long absent, but also has the bitter awareness that her social and power

dislocation means that she cannot live as a normal, good person. Therefore, this dream-like scene is Liu's momentary escape from evil.





Figs. 3.23-3.25 Fantasy and theatricalised moments of colour and lighting.

Liu's travels with Zhou are more theatricalised in terms of colour and lighting. The circus scene in a huge tent is one of the most dramatic moments in the film in which the two accidentally step into a circus to hide from the police. This space of performance, drama and disguise, echoes their own situation. This place of fantasy and romance is also somehow estranged from and dislocated from the deadly town. Theatre space in cinema has significant meanings. It projects characters' extreme emotions, role complexity and acts out their internal struggle and "dilemma of how to act or to manipulate another's behaviour"; it can "renegotiate possibilities for human connections" in a form of double-dramatised space (Toles 2021: 7). The wall of the circus covers Liu and sketches her silhouette of struggling but failing to escape. High-key lighting

inside the circus highlights her panicked movements and silhouettes her figure in continuous visual blocks as if trapped in prison-like boxes. Such use of German expressionist lighting and imaging of ragged and harsh shapes and unnatural colours evokes Liu's subjective emotions and combines fantasy with horror. Her dislocation is depicted in an expressive and theatrical way. It shows her disorientation, the inescapable nature of her situation, her vulnerability and weakness and contributes to her status as a marginal woman who is constantly on the run, being hunted and controlled by the men.

In contrast, Liu's daytime travels transpire in natural mise-en-scene; instead of being located in the central town where violence and conflicts take place, her journeys are mostly located around the Wild Goose Lake, an abandoned town border area consisting of a floating population and criminality. The first time we see Liu at the lake is when she is accompanied by her clients and is teased by her friends about her job and her name Aiai 爱爱, which is a local slang for having sex, both associated with sexuality. She wears a white hat that matches her erotic, working-girl clothes. The lake initially shows her self-realisation as an emotionless sex machine and her outcast identity as it is geographically a suburban fringe and is also a place where she is used to spend her time with her clients.

However, as the film proceeds, the scenes by the lake begin to document a

transformation. As she wanders alone on the beach, trying to find Zhou and get him out of police custody, we see her standing still and facing the lake with nobody around her. She later floats in the lake, still like a corpse. Her hat is the symbol of Liu's changing identity. On her journey protecting Zhou, her hat becomes dislodged, suggesting a special attitude towards Zhou and her destabilised soulless, robotic, money-obsession. After her final visit to the lake, and making love with Zhou, she throws her hat into the water. The hat evokes her subjectivity as a person with flesh and blood, but also marks her realisation that she is experiencing emotional or affectionate dislocation. As her passion is being awakened, she also starts to believe that a woman like her does not deserve a proper relationship and a sense of belonging.

Liu's other daytime travels also involve her in being the rescuer of the couple. When she goes to a factory to look for Yang, she is constantly shot within the circles of fans and pillars in the factory under the gaze of unknown men outside.³⁸ The image of a woman being gazed by an unknown man positions women at the bottom in a perspectival, then symbolic hierarchy regarding their race and gender (Kim 2019: 480; Kurian 2012: 129). Then, on leading Zhou on his escape route, she walks past a plastic urban planning advert, showing splendid buildings and urban sites quite opposite to the real world she lives in. Thus, contributing to her night travels of threat and danger, Liu's daytime

³⁸ Similar images see Tsai Ming-Liang's 蔡明亮 *What Time Is It There? (ni na bian ji dian?)*, 2011), Kim Kyung-Mook's *Stateless Things* (2011).

journeys involve her bitter realisation of passion and subjectivity, ongoing male surveillance and her unattainable dream space. All push her further away into the disorienting and hopeless community of gangsters and underworld criminals.

Physical settings play a key role in the film's dislocation. The lake area shelters the town's marginal and illegitimate community, the township border is where the gangster's meeting and crimes take place, and the rundown station marks the escaping journeys of the protagonists. Key moments take place either at night or in the rain, providing a constant sense of temporal dislocation. Our heroine travels between industrial sites, incomplete, mottled construction blocks and buildings, wet and dirty streets or alleyways, or the border lake, narrating her social displacement within the community and her emotional displacement from her love interest. Obscured visuals like umbrellas, plastic cloth and walls evoke Liu's outcast position. Her covered, blurred or confined presence constructs a visual anonymity that erases Liu's identity and subjectivity; on the other hand, they evoke a sense of mystery, the ambiguity of her character and identity which allows her to shift between different worlds. Finally, she successfully disguises her shifted attitudes towards humanity from the gangster group, protecting and guarding Zhou's wife with compassion and warmth.

Liu the Anti-heroine

Liu is displaced in multiple ways as a woman. She is excluded in society as a prostitute, disengaged from the financial gain and benefit in the whole narrative as Zhou and Yang's guardian and messenger, and is displaced in her unfeasible relationship with Zhou. Her dislocated status enables her free travels, disguise and in-between-ness. Liu's moral ambiguity defines her as an anti-heroine. On the one hand, she is a member of an underground gangsters group, working with criminals; on the other hand, she shows her warmth, kindness and sense of justice in protecting and defending Zhou and his wife.

Summary

The dislocation cinematography is characterised by visual barriers. Mirror reflections are used to split the subjects from others by constructing an alternative, enclosed angle for the gaze. Lacan's notion of "mirror phase" (screen as mirror) suggests that the acting of watching film offers a split subjectivity; female spectators would see their own lack when watching a disenfranchised heroine (Lacan 1982; 1998). In most of the dislocation films, heroines watch themselves through a physical mirror, examining their lack and alienation in a self-reflexive manner. It arouses a sense of double mirroring reflecting among the audience, thus stressing a deeper sense of displacement. In *Widow*, Erhao's face is constantly captured by broken mirrors, echoing the villagers view of her: she is a doomed and destructive women who has cursed

and caused the death of three husbands. In *Wild*, Liu is framed in multiple mirrors in the theatre, then Zhou's figure appears in the entangling mirror images. The images bitterly emphasise that, although Liu has manipulated and seduced men around her to protect herself, she has fallen for a man and experienced real humanity intimacy and connection and that she cannot escape being betrayed or sacrificing herself. The mirrored Liu provides an alternative form of self-gaze and intensifies the moment of her realisation of being dislocated from her yearning.

The use of colours and lighting marks the subjects' turning points and their momentary dislocation from the hopeless mundane world that represses them. In *Deep*, the bright landscape in which the heroine spends a short time with her love interest is distinguished from the dim and dark domestic space and the outdoor spaces of domestic work. The final sacrifice scene is narrated in a fantasy manner. It uses chiaroscuro effects to make the surroundings extremely dark, highlighting the glorious lighting illuminating the girl and heightening her lustrous garments and decorations. This creates a sense that she is stepping outside of reality and embracing spiritual fulfillment. Such a design is even more powerful when we see that this moment of glory and joy actually signals death.

Similarly, in *Widow* and *Wild*, extreme, bright and vivid colours are applied in

the episodes where the women are immersed in momentary subjective feelings of happiness or in ephemeral positions of power. We see extreme lighting and warm illuminations in *Coffin* and *Elephant* where the heroines are determined upon their revenge and resistance. This is distinct from the grey hue and gloomy visuals in the rest of the films. However, both films depict these moments of autonomy and hope at night without a visible end or resolution, indicating that their yearnings are unobtainable. They heighten the moments of fugitive escape and contrast to the dull and miserable images of the subjects' everyday lives, implying that joy and entitlement are never actualised.

Section 4: Flexibility

This section analyses a minority-themed film. It discusses the flexible and particular themes, narrative and cinematography in the depictions of minority women, how it is compared to non-minority films and other minority films with different contexts, and the shared characteristics among the films with various cultural specificities.

***Balloon* (qiqiu 气球 2019, Pema Tseden 万玛才旦)**

Pema was the only one who went to school in his family during the Cultural Revolution and entered the Beijing Film Academy, becoming its first-ever

Tibetan student.³⁹ During the Cultural Revolution, pan-Tibetan areas were suffering cultural suppression. Local schools were closed down; the state instructed local communes to establish schools that taught in Chinese only (Kolas and Thowsen 2005: 14). These schools were often poorly equipped with insufficient teaching resources, making it difficult for minority students to compete with the majority who identify themselves as Han (ibid: 105). In the 1980s, few minority students pursued higher education in Beijing; most had problems with required academic levels, especially in learning English (Tsong 2014:174). Some felt embarrassed and changed their habits because they are not the same as majority students (Chen 2014:212). However, Pema's experience of constantly being educated in and influenced by mainstream cultures allowed him to make use of such dislocation. The fusion of urban Han modernity in minority lives is distinct in his work. Moreover, the 2010s, where *Balloon* was set, was the era of the "second generation of ethnic policies" that provoked cultural integrity and a "melting pot" ideology, which intended to fuse the Chinese population and to draw minorities into the dominant community linguistically, culturally and economically. However, some actions involved the central government's implementation of education camps and the demolition of minority landmarks.⁴⁰ Pema's heroine Drolka's alignment with modern cultures and technologies problematises the political phenomenon and questions the feasibility of totalitarian unification, a total and centralised

³⁹ See p.184.

⁴⁰ See p.130-131.

integration of language culture and economy.

The film manifests the tension between the real and the spiritual. Having given birth to three children, Drolkar (Sonam Wangmo) wants to have an abortion after her unplanned pregnancy. Since the policy of family planning (1950s) and the One Child Policy (1980s), male-biased gender ratio has been increased significantly in Chinese rural areas, especially around 2000 (Zhang and Kanbur 2005; Bulte et al. 2010). Since the 1980s, three children are allowed in rural areas, but it cannot go beyond; the control of rural fertility has been used to retard the fast rate of population growth and high birth rate in minority groups indicates their level of backwardness (Wang and You 2006; Banister and Harbaugh 1994). Moreover, the lack of antenatal care for ethnic minority women is also a factor blocking women from childbearing (Liu et al. 2019). Drolkar's decision is based on financial hardship, her healthcare problems, the state's laws on birth control, and her own subjective will. However, her pious and conservative husband, Darje (Jinpa), believes that the baby is the reincarnation of his dead father. Such pressure and problems in reality destroy the family harmony.

Tibet has been long been portrayed as a counter-space of modernity or somewhere to be conquered viewed in an elite, superior or othered perspective (Hedin 1934; Jiang 2018). However, *Balloon* is narrated through

the de-symbolisation and de-mystification of the minority, emphasising the authenticity of minority lives. It does not take the minority as cultural display or allegory, exposing the expressive landscape and cultural images as fetish. Instead, it focuses on the individual stories and emotions and the tangible aspects of daily life.

Like other dislocated women in previous case studies, the heroine, Drolkar, also faces multiple displacements. Living in an enclosed Tibetan village, the community's life is centred around religion and faith, and women are still valued for their reproductive function by the patriarchal community. This automatically sets Drolkar in a geographical and positional displacement. Moreover, her unconventional wish for contraception and her respect for law situates her at the centre of the family crisis and dislocates her from the filial norm.

The theme of dislocation is further complicated by the question of religion in Tibetan culture, taking it beyond the merely physical and social. Like Jini in *Deep*, modernity is also embedded in Drolka's life and sets her apart from the image of a fringe, purely traditional minority woman. She rides a motorbike, goes to the township clinic for condoms, and is fascinated by English programmes. Narratively, Drolma seems more allied with modern and scientific ideas. However, her limitation is cinematographically depicted through

paradox.

In the scene where Drolkar travels to the township clinic for condoms, she parks her motorbike in front of a billboard promoting eugenics and birth-control. The shot positions Drolkar in the centre, spatially clarifying her as surrounded by modern products and ideology. However, we note that the board and the motorbike are both in shallow, low-saturated and faded colours, the high-key sunlight making them blur. Drolkar's traditional red-and-blue garment, meanwhile, stands out in the frame, the deep, contrasting colours visually highlighting her difference from her surroundings, implying her non-belonging and disengagement from her wished-for freedom and modernity. Moreover, her covered head placed against the birth-planning slogan suggests that she can never fully embrace such ideas. The face-covering at this point implies the erosion of individual identity and subjectivity, illustrating a collective image of the Tibetan woman.

Cinematic representations of veiled or silenced women do not only imply female submissiveness, "politicized or aestheticized signs", they are powerful presence, active persons that use their distinct figure to step in various social circumstances (Naficy 2011: 489). In *Balloon*, The image of a masked and anonymous traditional woman encountering modernity also appears when the family are sitting around and watching an English programme about test-tube

babies. While her father-in-law and husband are shocked and furious about the idea, Drolkar appears to be interested. She leans forward and constantly glances at the television. In this scene, Drolka adopts a higher physical position. She stands up to serve the table and watches the programme while others remain seated. This echoes her distinct attitude and her willingness to approach science. However, such attachment is disrupted again by the image of female anonymity. Unlike the men who face the front and comment on the programme, we never see Drolka's entire face. She is either presented on her side or blocked by her son. We know it is Drolka, but we only see a distant figure of a typical domestic woman. Here, Drolka is not covered by her headwear, but "masked" by men and her secondary female status. Although her red dress, which contrasts to the men's dark clothes, highlights her special position and attachment to the modern idea in the programme, she remains in the background, physically distant from the television.

As discussed above, images of female anonymity and masking depict another layer of Drolkar's dislocation. She yearns for free will and is open to modernity, yet she can never be fully engaged due to her structural role as a Tibetan wife. The film goes beyond the tension between tradition and modernity and depicts Drolkar's disengagement between religion and science. It questions how, when science disrupts faith, people can locate a space for their dislocated senses of humanity and subjectivity.





Figs. 3.26-3.29 Different spaces attached to Drolkar - vulnerability through domestic visual barriers, her disengagement associated with the veiled image, and her active interaction with modern ideas.

Sharing cinematographic traits with other dislocation films, the use of visual

barrier also characterises *Balloon*. In the scene where Darje talks about selling one of their ewes as it is no longer fertile, Drolkar is completely obstructed by a tower positioned in the middle of the frame. She is not off-screen, but is abruptly erased in it. In their conversation, Darje is the one who speaks while Drolkar replies with minimal responses. While Darje talks about the uselessness of the ewe because it cannot reproduce, and can therefore be taken out from the family, the visual omission of Drolkar symbolically parallels such a situation that if a woman loses her fertile “function” she will be as useless as the ewe.

As Darje violently drags the ewe out, Drolkar stands aside and identifies herself with the ewe, being empathetic but unable to save it. She is spatially framed and cast out by the fence as she witnesses such violence and her vulnerability, powerlessness, her submissive position and disengagement are thus visualised on screen. After confirming her pregnancy from the doctor, Drolkar encounters Darje in front of their house and asks her where she has been. The couple confront each other outside while we see the two through a broken window from inside the room. Darje aggressively questions Drolkar, who remains in the distance with her face half covered. Drolkar’s face is framed within a triangular corner where a slice of glass is broken from the window and her body is doubly confined by the window frame. She is squeezed in, edged and graphically separated from her husband. The graphic

design indicates Drolkar's powerless position and marks the moment of her spiritual and ideological displacement from her husband.

Visual obstruction and splitting is used as a motif throughout the film to suggest the couple's conflict and Drolkar's powerlessness. Such effects in cinema tend to elicit "oppressive" female circumstance in the "transverse" space of "threat" (Ginsberg 2007: 116; Fujiwara 2015: 74). When Drolkar tells Darje that she wants to have an abortion, we only see Drolkar sitting still while Darje lies down. Drolkar is sandwiched between two rectangular shapes of the wall carpet and the table at the front while a glimpse of outside lighting shines from the off-screen window, making her extremely bright while the surroundings remain in darkness. It marks the moment of Drolkar's bravery and awakening subjectivity, implying that this is a significant moment for her. However, her hope is ruined as Darje fiercely gets up and slaps her face. Darje wears a black vest in the dark atmosphere, while Drolkar is lit and dressed in bright purple, appearing to be incompatible with the room. Moreover, the harsh, straight lines and shapes and the side lighting construct a sense of segmentation as if they are cutting Drolkar and her final struggle for hope into pieces.

Colour, lighting and shot composition cinematographically dislocate Drolkar from her normal world as if she does not belong to it, highlighting the

impossibility of her wish. In the following scene where Darje apologises to Drolkar and persuades her to bear the baby, piles of wool carpet hanging on the strings also split them into different spaces and block Drolkar's presence. The thick white carpets remind us of the white tower that obstructs Drolkar earlier on. Both scenes involve Darje's view on fertility, either of ewes or women, putting women and animals in the same category. White is also the colour of the condom that repeatedly appears in the film as the children's misused "balloon", another means of blocking Drolkar's access to contraception. These visual connections heighten the feeling that Drolkar is dispossessed of free will and alienated from Darje.

Balloon adopts a cold hue in general, echoing the conflicts and dilemma under its tranquil veneer. This makes the vibrant and strong colours in the surrealist episodes stand out, intensifying Drolkar's struggle with reality. Moreover, red and blue are highlighted among the low-saturated surroundings. Red represents fertility. We see it on the breeding goat's cloth, Drolkar's garment, the red jacket tied around Darje's waist, and the red balloon blowing into the sky in the film's ending after Drolkar leaves home to become a nun. As a sign of female reproduction, red appears to be the sign of authority and warning that disorientates Drolkar and pushes her away. In contrast, blue symbolises death. A blue hue dominates the Drolkar's son's dream after the death of his grandfather, in the abortion scene, the blue surgical gown signals the death of

the baby. More shockingly, Drolkar wears a blue kerchief throughout the film, contrasting to the red top that highlights her belly. On the one hand, this shows her struggle between abortion and childbearing; on the other hand, it hints at the coming termination of her domestic or earthly life.

Like other minority-themed dislocation films, the film uses natural lighting and naturalistic cinematography to create fantasy visuals at dramatic/climatic moments. The night of the father-in-law's death offers a surrealist approach with naturalistic features. The scene begins with the fire from the outdoor fire lantern, the only lighting source in the extreme dark. It shifts from a subtly lit point to a flame-like, sparkling fire ball, mimicking the struggle of the old man over death. After Darje and his son rush into the living room, we see the men's silent eye contact with Drolkar, who is the only one fully lit in the room. The physical positioning of Drolkar at the centre of the room, standing while others remaining seated or out of focus, and the direct lighting from the top depicts her as a sacred figure. It reminds the viewer of the famous scene in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1940) where Dallas (Claire Trevor), the prostitute, holds the new-born baby in her arms and is spatially centralised among the men, being lit in a glorious way. Here, it creates a similar effect as if this is Drolkar's moment of glory. She is shockingly shot as a goddess-like, auspicious figure in a death ritual. This foreshadows her sacred function or "mission": to give birth to the baby who is believed to be the father-in-law's reincarnation.

Apart from fire and light, water is another motif that shapes the fantasy episodes describing Drolma's trauma and related dislocation. The notion of dream is ambiguously connected to water in two subsequent scenes. After the father-in-law's death, there is a dream sequence in which Drolma's son runs along the muddy, wet lakeside searching for his grandfather. This two-minute take tracks the son's running path. The whole sequence is shot in slow motion out of focus, creating a sense of vertigo. The image of the grandson searching for his dead grandfather, combined with the same vision and colour of the sky in the night death scene discussed above, heightens the extensive significance of patriarchal bonds. More importantly, the sequence is suddenly transferred into the next scene where Drolkar tells Draje of her dream about a wet ewe giving birth to a wet lamb, where it becomes apparent that Drolkar is now pregnant. Dream-states in cinema sometimes imply a sense of entrapment (Walters 2008: 62). Water imagery often connotes to life-giving/taking and ghost presence (Urios-Aparisi 2015: 76; Teo 2013: 103). The "wet" sense of fantasy state here evoke that Drolkar is entangled by the net of patriarchy, beliefs about immortality in Tibetan culture and ghosts of the dead.



Figs. 3.30-3.31 Fantasy scenes of water and fire.

Although the two consecutive scenes seems irrelevant, they are potentially connected by water and the sensation of wetness. The son's fantasised and

failed search for his grandfather is resolved in reality by his mother's pregnancy. Such cinematography and narrative design inseparably link the physical and the spiritual and the blurred boundary between life and death in Tibetan Buddhist culture. It adds to Drolkar's vulnerability in her choice-making as the men are the absolute decision-makers who live upon their faith and spiritual beliefs.

The ambiguity and blurred boundary between life and death in Tibetan culture are not only reflected in the dream sequences in the film, but also in the profound influence of the concept of reincarnation. In Drolkar family, the eldest son is believed to be the reincarnation of his grandmother, and Drolkar's unexpected pregnancy is also considered to be the reincarnation of his grandfather, who has just passed away. The new family member is considered to be the returning dead relative. Both death and new life press on the women who give birth. Just as the poster of "balloon" shows, the female owner wears a blue turban (death) and carries a red balloon (life). The belief in reincarnation "challenges biological imperatives" and makes presence and being not limited to human beings, but to extensive space and time (Zivkovic 2013: 1; Chitkara 1998). Such transcendent spatio-temporal arrangements are projected onto and have power over corporeal compositions (Latour 2004). Therefore, Drolkar's attachment to science, the state's policy and promotion, and considerations of real needs dislocates her from her community and her

cultural/belief system.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the reincarnation of the soul exists at a doctrinal level and abortion is not allowed; however, the heroine's dislocation not only articulates her absolute vulnerability, but also empowers her in some way. Her repeated visits to the township clinic, her communication with the doctor about contraception, her direct statements regarding the law and abortion illustrate her subjective freedom. Even so, the moment she says that "the reincarnation of living Buddha may make mistakes" is shocking and unexpected. From obedience to hesitation, from awakening to action, Drolkar steps out of her house into herself.

Drolkar the Anti-heroine

Balloon adopts a distinctly feminist narrative and Drolkar's resolution to her problems problematizes the notion of displacement. Drolkar is fascinated by modern sciences; she questions and challenges the power of her religion, defends her sister's female standing and independence in front of the man who has wronged her, and fights for her own will and interest with condoms, contraception and abortion. Tibetan Buddhist culture deems her behaviours selfish, sacrilegious, unacceptable and evil. The most aggressive oppression is not from patriarchy, but from the "dead" or from religion, shaping a sense of irresistible helplessness. For Drolkar, the only way to escape from all this is to

leave the world like her sister who is a nun. Drolkar eventually leaves with Ani and becomes a nun. The scene towards the end shows the sisters in a truck on their way to the temple. Drolkar stands up and looks down at her sons and her husband, visually adopting the position of power. We see the joy on her face and the front shot of her entire figure and face which had been absent up to this point in the film. Some might argue that her physical dislocation from her home and community empowers her and illustrates her freedom of choice. On the other hand, though, she makes of religion a form of escape. In this sense, ironically, her previous challenges and active displacement to the spiritual, the source of her dilemma and pain, eventually become her salvation.

Summary

Compared to other case studies above, *Balloon* shares similar dislocation cinematography and narrative; however, some characteristics evoke flexible applications. Surrealist moments and cinematographic techniques are worked more smoothly in than non-minority films; yet the dream-like qualities are more obvious and enhanced through the film's extensive time scope. Comparing to the other minority film, unlike the fantasy episodes which most transpire at night and dawn in *Deep*, *Balloon* manipulates daytime, dawn and night and their natural features to compose a more extensive dream vision. Under shared thematic and artistic traits, the emphasis does vary in each case as individual stories respond to unique circumstances and contexts in terms of

narratives, plots and aesthetic choices. Thus, flexibility is grounded in culturally specific, intra-national concepts and issues. The dislocation films share common cinematic features while addressing and speaking to contextual and textual variations.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the network of the directors, themes and narratives about the subjects' dispossession, and dislocation cinematography, the characteristics of inter-rural/township dislocation films emerge. It examines films about dislocated women who inhabit remote villages or townships and whose journeys are relatively limited. Their physical displacement echoes and stimulates their socio-cultural and mental dislocation.

The section on the network of production builds the connection between the contexts discussed in the previous chapter and the film cases. It examines the connections between and the characteristics of the filmmakers of the following chapter's films. The dislocation directors are connected through their academic and personal backgrounds, career development and socio-cultural circumstances. All of them had rural experiences to various degrees. Most of them came from rural backgrounds, with the rest spending certain amounts of time living in villages. Their rural focuses reflect their memories or homeland sentiments. Unlike the Fifth Generation's cultural imagination and

over-dramatic display of the Chinese rural, these directors develop their rural vision from their real-life experiences, intending to inscribe rather than to imagine. They move away from the Fifth Generation's over-elaborate style drawing on Chinese allegories; yet, there is still a sense of yearning for Chinese roots and traditions in their work. They avoid over-exaggerated cultural imagery and work these elements into their films smoothly and naturally.

None of the filmmakers adopt either an absolutely realistic or solely art-house style. They employ a "docu-cinematic" manner that combines a neo-realistic, sometimes documentary approach, observing spaces and characters with theatrical or fantasy imagery and tendencies, intensifying the correlation between the magical and the real (Gillette 2012: 319-320; Frackman 2018: 87; Lo and Wang 2019: 121). This partially stems from their pre-filmmaking careers. The directors come from fine arts, photography or literary backgrounds, and are, therefore, interested in fusing visual language with other art forms. They intend to narrate the real lives of the dislocated, but also insert romanticised fragments. Through seemingly illusive or imagined episodes, they stress a sense of narrative dislocation: to what extent do the apparently displaced visuals in realistic depictions evoke the characters' physical and psychological dislocation from reality? Unlike paintings, photographs or novels, art forms with which they have long familiarity, cinema

enables more dimensions that allow flat images and words to be visualised.

Thematically, the women are disengaged by patriarchy to different extents. Firstly, some are forced into certain female roles, such as the forced marriage in *Deep*, and with fertility being the structural function of women in *Balloon*. Some are further marginalised because of the lack of men in their households. We see the left-behind, widowed, single women in *Coffin*, *Elephant*, *Widow* and *Wild*. Apart from financial insecurity, they are unsafe and mistreated socially. These are the ones who perpetually drift and search, trying to find a resolution, but always eventually fail. They bear segregation and bullying by mainstream society whilst still being desired and objectified by men. Moreover, especially in the minority-themed films, culture and religion are other key drivers for women's displacement. Encountering both ethnic traditions and influences from a modernised world, the women are caught between the faith that their community live upon, and their own awakening subjectivities.

However, dislocation films are not just about women's outcast status and vulnerability. On the one hand, the subjects' displacement pushes them further towards the edge of society but on the other hand, their displacement becomes the agent of their empowerment. The protagonists in *Coffin* and *Wild* are aware of their marginalisation and use their sexual power and drifting quality as a means for vengeance or to get what they want by manipulating

men. Furthermore, the fallen women in *Widow* and *Wild* regain their consciousness of humanity and compassion on their dislocating journeys, becoming the saviours of men.

Others experience their dislocating journeys as spiritual fulfilment or as a way of excising their current trauma. It echoes the notion of the interdependence between female trauma and empowerment; social factors and various social spheres enable women's trauma-healing, empowerment and reaffirmation of identity, either individually, collectively or organisationally (Budryte et al. 2009). In *Elephant*, the female protagonist gradually realises that there is no way out for her through her endless intra-township wanderings and eventually sets off on a journey to somewhere further displaced where she hopes to abandon her hometown which has made her feel suffocated and desperate. In *Deep*, and *Balloon*, the heroines all leave their homes on spiritual journeys. One sacrifices herself for her love and the peace of the community, one fulfils her final wish and pursues her yearning for passion before death, one turns to religion and abandons the disorientation caused by family conflicts due to attitudes to pregnancy and women's duty.

Most films depict women with animal references, creating a sense that they are displaced from the human norm which is controlled by men and referencing the idea that women being viewed as the secondary human and

primitive beings connoted to adultery and sexual desire and instinct when associated with animals in ancient Chinese culture (Chang 2009: 268). In *Deep*, Jini's forced marriage for financial exchange is stimulated by the bears that are destroying the village farmland. Her final sacrifice, her "wedding" with the bear is ritualised and beautified in a cruel and shocking way. She saves the family and shows her faith in love by identifying herself with the animal world. Erhao's fox association in *Widow* firstly suggests how she is viewed by the community as a *huli jing* 狐狸精 (the fox-woman in Chinese folktale who seduces men and leads them to disaster) (Huntington 2003: 171-223). The fox motif is repeated throughout the film and is often positioned against the vast snow-scape, echoing Erhao's alienation and how she is structurally set against the normative world. *Hu lijing* is also a fairy figure in Chinese traditions. Therefore, the fox in the film also parallels later on with Erhao when she is believed to be the goddess who is all-knowing and who is able to cure any disease. The fox symbolically representing Erhao's status is transformed from a dangerous and cursed figure into a supernatural deity. However, both sides of the polarity suggest that Erhao has never belonged to or been accepted by the community.

In *Balloon*, there is a corresponding relationship between Drolkar and the ewes. The film starts with Darje bringing home a ram to fertilise the ewes and then she is seen violently dragging a ewe out for sale because it has lost its fertility

and is therefore is “useless”. Drolkar’s empathy contrasts with Darje’s aggressive attitude towards the ewe and the cross cuttings between Drolkar and the helpless ewe create a parallel between her and the ewe. Later when Drolkar goes to the clinic for condoms, the female doctor jokes about Darje being a “ram”, implying Drolkar’s position as the ewe. The comparison between women and vulnerable animals set Drolkar in a secondary position to human beings as if she is a merely a reproduction tool which does not deserve any rights.

The elephant in *Elephant* is slightly more problematic. It is what the protagonists desire to see but the elephant does not appear in the film. The despairing and hopeless teenage girl who cannot see any glimpses of light in her life sets off on her journey to the far north to find an elephant. The elephant is symbolic. On the one hand, it parallels the character’s situation. It makes us question what has happened to it, how it has come to be sitting on the ground in a rundown zoo and accepting such an existence. We are invited to imagine that the elephant may have resisted and struggled, or it had once been lively, but to no avail. It is still in the cage without freedom, happiness, only endless despair and helplessness, just as the girl experiences her life. So, they can both only choose to sit as any actions and thoughts are futile, and disillusionment and despair are the only resolution. On the other hand, the elephant represents something positive. The girl’s elephant-seeking journey

and her decision and courage to leave home suggest that the imagined elephant empowers her. In this sense, the elephant indicates self-preservation and struggle against life's troubles.

The surrealistic and seemingly random appearance of the terrifying and bizarre wild animals in *Wild* evokes a sense of danger in the male world surrounding the heroines. The unnatural form of animals heightens a sense of profound threat and signals human desires which parallel animal instincts.

Dislocation cinematography is mainly characterised by framing, colours, and how mise-en-scene is designed to depict the subjects' binary journeys or multiple disengagement that involve their travels alone or encounters with others, their outdoor mobility or domestic movement. The filmmakers adopt a calm and observative tone and try to be inscriptive in their realistic narrative; their subjective views and attitudes appear when fantasy or magical realistic episodes or elements are inserted. No matter what degree of saturation or hue they use, deep and contrasting colours are always set off against slow movement and minimalistic narrative.

The filmmakers employ a sense of distance and absence in their cinematography through sound, long or aerial shots, long takes and static camera, or visual barriers. This contributes to the narrative dislocation

mentioned above and adds to the sensorial disengagement of the audience, mimicking the characters' physical displacement and marginalisation. Visual barriers are one of the key traits. Through mirror images (sometimes blurred and broken mirrors), double or even multiple frames, smokes, doors, windows and other objects that block the women's presence, shapes that segment the on-screen spaces, and the bold use of lines dissecting and splitting the subjects from their inhabited realms, we feel a sense of disruption, obstruction, and alienation.

Surrealist images are inserted smoothly and continuously in realistic cinematography and narrative. Rather than being self-reflexive or disruptive in the narrative flow, the non-realistic moments emphasise the drama of ordinary lives and arouse the spectator's "attention" and "consideration" to the subject. They invite the viewer to sense the relationship/interaction between people's actions, emotions and natural beauty (the events they are involved in). Such an effect is one of the characteristics of cinematic realism analysed earlier in this chapter.

Melancholia and the Dislocation Cinema

In *Melancholy Drift*, Jean Ma connects cinematic journeying with melancholy. She argues that cinematic drifts are grounded in "the cinema of time" which shows characters' "deferred desire" as "representative politics" responding to

China's modernising process and the sense of speed (Ma 2010: 4). Ma focuses on temporal suspension, disjoints and frozen times to stress how cinematic drifting restructures nostalgia and the present time, converging spectrality and reality. Taking this idea to a different angle, the cinema of dislocation observes the spatial sense of drifting and travel through narrative, visual and geo-emotional disconnections and fluidity. Ma's focus on melancholy is grounded in a sense of loss, disappearance and *déjà disparu*, as if the characters yearn for the return of the past to haunt the hopeless and empty present. However, the cinema of dislocation takes a more optimistic tone. Through characters' initial loss or disappointment, their journeys tend to re-situate them and re-evaluate their sense of belonging rather than drive them into diminishing, shrinking states. Instead of repleting solely with non-synchronicities and dysfunctionality as in Ma's argument (Ma 2010: 11), the dislocating subjects' travels are largely defined by a sense of fluidity and freedom. What connects Ma's melancholy drift and the dislocation cinema is the fantasy association.

However, Ma's notion of fantasy in cinematic melancholy stresses "prosthetic memories" and nostalgia with political emphasis that explores the "indeterminacy as a basis for the disarticulation of processes of identity and social order", depicting people's pessimistic dissociation with the world, their frozen time and uncured sadness (Ma 2010: 15-21). Whereas in the

dislocation cinema, fantasy is not only used in a temporal way, it is a visual and spatial device that projects subjects' physical circumstances and thoughts, their association (although sometimes failed) to the world. Instead of echoing the spectrality and ghostliness of the threatening era associated with time (horizontal), fantasy here is used in a vertical way. It allows subjects to make investigations into the situations that have driven them away from certain communities. They are not completely abandoned, but actively engage themselves in negotiations and conversations around their displacement.

Melancholia in cinema invites the viewer to “face uncanny sensations without providing [them] with responses to counter these sad passions” (Sticchi 2019: 6). Cinematic aesthetics “poignantly” conveys such a “contemplative experience” (Çağlayan 2018: 177-186). Spinoza argues that internal suffering and “traumatic sensations” stimulate our desire to “improve our knowledge of ourselves in the world, and our power to act”; the feeling of disengagement and negativity acts as a sad passion which features a key part of melancholy, generating new possibilities and personal capabilities towards self-standing and empowerment (Spinoza 2002: Macherey 2011: 184). Following this framework, melancholia facilitates subjects' identity-making and self-revival in the cinema of dislocation. Departing from Sticchi's (2019) observation that characters associated with cinematic melancholy are often entrapped in uncertain, unfruitful situations, our dislocated heroines face these

circumstances, but are on their way to solving their problems. The failure/collapse of social/cultural systems that disappoint the heroines' yearnings or displace their identity enable them to gain a sense of power from their seemingly derailed journeys and searches. Taking the opposite direction to Gorfinkel's (2015: 123) observation that focuses on the "socially displaced" cinematic drifters' "slackness", "stuckness", "inability to progress within the harsh demands of an exhausting, social, material world", and "frayed bonds" between landscape and subjects, the dislocation heroines challenge the communities or norms that have long circumscribed them. In this sense, dislocation serves as a heuristic device, enabling the disenfranchised women to discover or learn something for and about themselves.

As discussed above and in the Introduction (Freud's conceptualisation of melancholia), the melancholia subjects are characterised by three features - ongoing journeys, self-reapproaches and energy and ambiguous resolutions. Applied to the films, through the heroines' constant travels, they obtain a sense of empowerment and strength while often leaving themselves and the audience with open or unresolved endings. Aesthetically, melancholia is visualised through visuals of decay, corporeal movement and positioning within visual obstruction, and fantasy moments and images. The table below evaluates how the heroines in the case studies are fitted into the features of melancholia.

| Dislocation and Melancholi a (Narrative) | Ongoing journeys | Self-reapproach/ energy | Ambiguous resolution |
|---|--|--|---|
| <i>Deep</i> | Within the village and up to the mountain for agricultural work and the family's financial crisis. | Jini gradually understanding how rural women are propertised by the patriarch; awakening subjectivity; finally fulfilling her spiritual self with a sense of wonder. | Jini's "marriage" with wild animals: embracing her faith in the spiritual god (the bears); silent rebellion against her father's will of exchanging her body for her brother's jail release; or saving the family from financial crisis through her death compensation? |
| <i>Coffin</i> | Journeys within the village, related to Liqin's extra-marital | Revenging on men; self-empowerment through manipulating | Planned to murder her husband who eventually died by |

| | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| | <p>affair, crime and her husband's death.</p> | <p>the men who have wronged her or attracted by her.</p> | <p>accident; punished her lover by ruining his fame; left alone again - is the result what she wants? Or is it pushing her into further marginalisation and vulnerability?</p> |
| <p><i>Elephant</i></p> | <p>Huang's wanderings in the township; final journey to see the elephant in the far north.</p> | <p>Actively getting herself out of chaotic and loveless family life, material and emotional lacking; finally setting off to her spiritual destination.</p> | <p>Ended up on her way to see the elephant - has she reached the destination? Is it a real or satisfactory destination?</p> |
| <p><i>Widow</i></p> | <p>Erhao's researching-out journeys to men; constant travels to solve the villagers'</p> | <p>Using her displacement and "absurd" supernatural power to take revenge on men/help</p> | <p>Being the only one with kindness and mercy in her community; her humanity and good</p> |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---|--|
| | problems. | the troubled women. | qualities eventually turning into something meaningless? |
| <i>Balloon</i> | Drolma's village/township mobility. | Challenging traditional gender, cultural and religious norms; shaping a state of autonomy physically and ideologically. | Eventually leaving home to become a nun - a greater sense of freedom/relief or a way of escaping the unsolvable life dilemma? |
| <i>Wild</i> | Aiai's endless travels within the township to complete assigned missions. | Gradually being conscious of the desire for love, friendship and humanity. | Ended up with unfinished, long walk on the street - has the social underworld collapsed in the township? Has she been guaranteed with legal protections? |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|----------------|
| Dislocation and | Visuals of decay | Bodily movement and positioning | Fantasy |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|----------------|

| Melancholia (Aesthetics) | | within visual obstruction | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Deep</i> | Ruin-like family interior; dangerous and threatening village landscapes. | Visual blocks constraining Jini's movement and presence. | Imagined romance with love interest implying the impossibility in real situation; final moment of the solemn death. |
| <i>Coffin</i> | Bleak village settings; noir-ish nights; withered wintry woods. | Broken narratives; fragmented body parts and visual barriers. | Imagined action of murdering husband with surreal lighting and fetishised weapons (mirror, knife, bottle). |
| <i>Elephant</i> | Township industrial wasteland and ruins; grey-scale outdoor and domestic settings. | Broken narratives; obscured frontal shots; visual barriers and distance. | Surreal moments of drowning in the water basin projecting real-life despair; fantasy environment on the way to the elephant. |

| | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| <i>Widow</i> | Barren village, snowy and harsh environments. | Visual barriers and confining frames; broken windows, mirrors reflecting human figures. | Two coloured scenes mocking black-and-white scenes of real life moral corruption; dreamed shaman dance scenes performing supernatural power to save the village contrasting to the opposite in reality. |
| <i>Balloon</i> | Desolate mountain-scapes, quasi-ruined interiors. | Visual dissection of the body; frames and block. | Surreal and dreamlike scenes reflecting Drolma's real-life struggle. |
| <i>Wild</i> | Rundown township. | Visual barriers, dissection and entrapment. | Surreal imagery of random and threatening animals, warning lighting and out-of-place carnivalesque visuals |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>showing Aiai's distance to normal ways of life.</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

As discussed in this chapter, dislocation films about women who are restricted in remote village/township areas are connected by their production networks, themes and cinematography with flexible features. The directors' personal, professional and academic backgrounds, their careers and interests before starting filmmaking, shape their thematic and aesthetic focuses. The films show women's displacement and dislocated journeys firstly as a projection of their marginalised status, then as an agent of empowerment, a way of self-protection and salvation, or the awakening of autonomy and subjectivity. However, in some cases, such empowerment pushes them into further alienation because their mobility does not help solve their real problems. Thus, the notions of freedom and autonomy remain problematic and prone to unresolved contradictions for the characters. This leads to the focus of the following chapters which will look at women's dislocating travels to displaced areas searching for identity and location through more flexible movements, such as self-exile, escape or adventure.

CHAPTER 4

Women and Dislocated Journeys to Remote Areas: Contexts and Literature Review

Chapter 4 and 5 will focus on the main subjects' journeys *to* remote areas. Chapter 4 provides thematic backgrounds and theoretical frameworks as a context for the film case studies that follow. This chapter first examines dislocation in the Chinese literary tradition, a particular aesthetic mode that potentially influences the style of cinematic dislocation. The poetic genres discussed highlight themes of displacement, journeying, exile and home-coming with visual implications which are visible in the cinema of dislocation. Then it examines heroines' travels to rural/suburban/minority realms and scrutinises the circumstances that ground or stimulate people's motivation. The settings of most of the film cases to be discussed in the next chapter will be either villages, townships or minority areas far away from the dominant cultural centre.

However, unlike characters who play the natives of the regions they inhabit such as in the previous two chapters, the subjects discussed here are either home-comers or new-comers to the displaced realms. Therefore, the concept of population flow and migration, journeys in-between places are crucial. This chapter contextualises internal and reverse migration in China firstly from an

historical perspective and then discusses internal migration in the 21st century when the reverse migrants started to play a key role in China's rural development and revitalisation and in national integration. Then the discussion moves on to the marginalisation of urban middle-class women in China as this group constitutes the second area of discussion in these films. This section articulates the problems faced by Chinese urban women, which include socio-cultural stereotypes, domestic and public pressures and tensions between gender norms and subjectivity. It is important to understand why these women are likely to turn to displacing journeys to remote areas far away from urban centres. The section that follows contextualises how remote minority areas have become critical sites for returnees and new-comers according to the state's policies and developmental plans.

Characters in this category either go back home or set off searching for a new home. In this sense, home-coming is the key to their travels; therefore, the notion of home grounds their home-returning or home-seeking journeys and thus this idea needs to be defined and clarified. "Home" is defined as "the place where you live or feel you belong" (IDM 2007: 343). It stresses both the physical and the emotional, which are examined together in this thesis, formulating dislocation cinema's geo-emotional narrative.

The notion of home in this thesis has two characteristics. Firstly, home is

geo-emotional, that is, the geographical traveling or locatability is intertwined with its symbolic meaning and people's spiritual inhabitant. The geo-emotional travels of the migrants depict their feelings and responses when they are on the move. Symbolic and emotional migration and mobility are becoming increasingly significant in studying human movement (Datta 2008; Espiritu 2003; Viruell-Fuentes 2006). Liu argues that the notion of home is key to migrants because of its "centrality in identity construction and formulation of the sense of belonging"; while migrants' idea of home is more attached to belonging to that identity, it is more psychological than physical (2018: xviii, xxiii).

Chow indicates that home resides wherever one has faith in its existence; and defines it against any "seduction" that is a "leading astray", where people determine an incorrect, confusing or troubling path or direction (2007: 36). Her notion of emotional home involves people's centripetal journeys in which they leave a physical home, but are always attached to a "psychical" one (ibid: 33). This concept of intra-home can be applied to the first group of filmic subjects, the returnees, who always have a spiritually rooted origin in mind no matter where they go. There is a collective sentiment leading their home-coming from the city. Following the other direction indicated in Chow's analysis, centripetal travels also shape the displacing realms as the inner-home for the urban home-seekers. While the intra-home is one's rooted homeland deep in the

heart that travels along with the subject, the inner-home is not necessarily the physical place of origin, it is a psychological, subjective place where one's yearning, fulfilment and sense of belonging reside: it might locate what the person wishes to pursue. Unlike the communal feeling in the intra-home, the inner home is more personal and subjective. These two chapters explore the subjects' migration and dislocating journeys to both notions of home.

The second key idea to home is its fluid, flexible and proceeding nature. Existing scholarship largely describes the notion of home as a continuous, shifting practice of "uprooting/re-grounding" enacted by migration that constantly "loads new meanings onto [home] centered on family, social relations, and emotional attachment and investment" (Ahmed et al. 2003: 1; Liu 2014: 24-25). Home in this sense is "multi-tiered" and not limited by particular locations; it is constantly "reconsidered and re-engaged" and is the process of "repositioning the self" in a collectively imagined order and structure (Lehmann 2014: 134). Davidson suggests that, home is slippery, "unfixed, contested and multiple" and that people are associated with home through "variant social relations". This is especially so for the migrants, who "condense" the notion of home, identity and belonging and whose identity (re)construction engages the "interplay of narratives of belonging and feelings of home" (2008: 18). While Davidson's definition of home is interpreted by shifting relations that shape various identifications to home, Louie argues that the sense of roots can

be “produced through mobility” and can refer to “attachments to multiples places” (2004: 190). He emphasises that the varying geographical, cultural and social contexts keep constructing people’s definition of roots and that home is “multilocal and multidimensional”; it “extends beyond the physical location” and may occupy us “at any particular time” (ibid: 189). Therefore, home can be open and permeable and reside in constant travels and movement to a certain degree.

In discussing home and migration, Liu states that “home” and “citizenship” are key to emotional mobility. While the notion of home involves “emotional construction”, citizenship marks something “rational” (2018: xiii). For her, when discussing transnational movement, citizenship signals one’s national identity. This thesis develops her idea and narrows down the focus to domestic rather than national citizenship, which marks one’s regional and cultural identity in the subjects’ internal dislocating journeys and migration. The dual-citizenship here complicates the returnees or the rural-goers’ simultaneous rural and urban attachments.

Dislocation in these two chapters involves home-coming and home-seeking as it relates to geo-emotional mobility. As the home for the films’ subjects is stretching, elastic, adjusting, it is seen more as a relationship rather than a physical realm not bonded by space and time. A subject’s journeys of

home-searching is where “natural embeddedness and unthinking attachment” is destabilised, challenged and collapsed. Displacement is the individual’s response to social and communal disjunction. Therefore, home-coming in this sense is the return to one’s state of belonging and security and not necessarily to a physical location. Both the returnees and the rural newcomers adopt a trans-regional citizenship in which migration becomes home-coming, arrival implies return, and home represents psychological and subjective familiarity. The feeling of home and belonging thus translocates the subjects and shapes their emotional migration. The women set off on their dislocating home-coming journeys in search of the home they wish to return to. Their destinations are either the once familiar “home” that they revisit, or the intimate “homely” feeling that situates their emotional identification, fulfilment or imagined space of belonging.

Section 1:

Dislocation and Chinese Literary Traditions

This chapter’s dislocation is about subjects’ journeys to remote regions. Some subjects return to their rural homes, some depart from their original urban homes. There is a sense of either rural home-coming or of exile to remote regions. When examining home-coming, border-crossing and exile in a Chinese context, the historical approach of literary traditions is crucial. Xiaoxiang poetry 潇湘诗 (*xiaoxiang shi*), exile poetry 流亡诗 (*liuwang shi*) and

fortress frontier poetry 边塞诗 (*biānsai shī*) are the three main poetic genres that historically and culturally locate these concepts and they have a profound impact on later art forms. The themes, sentiments and the visualising expressions of displaced realms in these poetic genres have significantly influenced the aesthetics of the cinema of dislocation.

1.1 The Exile Poetics 流亡诗意

Exile is a “timeless concept” in Chinese anthropology and the common destiny for early Chinese poets whose loyalty and sense of justice has always been wronged or ignored by the sovereignty (Xiong 2003a: 77). Exile shows the omnipotent power of the central authority who can erase any opposing voice. Exile poetry always conveys forsaken yearnings for political contribution and the unrecognised talent of officials and scholars. Exile poetics embodies a sense of imaginary boundary-lessness. As the poets are physically banished to bleak and remote areas and politically cast out of the centre-stage, they yearn and search for a sense of reincarnated spiritual evolution in the displaced realm away from spiritual and physical chaos and dirt. In this sense, exile is a means of alternative freedom.

Exile poets project their inner journeys in physical landscapes (Xiong 2003b: 70). Major themes involve home/country-sickness, patriotism and concerns for the current political plight through historical references. Exile poetry projects a

sense of nature-worship. It depicts humans living in the feminised beauty of nature as it is associated with virtue; following this idea, poets draw parallels between monarch-minister relations and romantic relationships (Xiong 2003b). Moreover, fantasy journeys and world and dream states frequently appear in exile poetry.⁴¹ Such narratives manifest the hope of escaping from hopeless, worldly chaos and turbulence. It goes beyond mortal boundaries and evokes a sense of corporeal, or, worldly relief, illustrating a just, innocent and spiritually cultivated self. Exile poetry communicates the feeling that there is nowhere to be situated in the corrupt human world, therefore, subjects entrust their loyalty, ambition and innocence to the vastness of nature, turning physical banishment into a “spiritual exile” (Ma 1996: 36).

1.2 Xiaoxiang Poetry 潇湘诗

Xiaoxiang poetry is a sub-genre of exile poetry and specifies distinct exile sentiments. From 3rd century BCE, the Xiaoxiang region in southern China (now Hunan Province) became a realm for banishment, mostly for unjustly accused political exiles and military refugees. Xiaoxiang poetry is not only about a place of displacement, it has also historically embodied melancholy and discontent (Murck 2000). Topographically, it is characterised by long journeys, deep water, the union of hundreds of rivers and mountain streams accompanied by red cliffs and white sand. Symbolically, it connotes a “national

⁴¹ See Li Bai's (701-762) 李白《梦游天姥吟留别》(A Dreaming Tour of Tianmu Mountain) and 《庐山谣》(Song of Lushan Mountain) in which he travels in a fantasy, dream-like universe.

culture about mental structure...a product of sediment”, implying the sense of sinking into the deep bottom far away from the top realm representing the central region (Li 2008: 26). Xiaoxiang region is geographically desolate, bleak and vast, therefore, Xiaoxiang poetry’s “melancholic vibes are more in line with the geographical culture” (Mo 2018: 105).

Although associated with disempowerment and remoteness, such displacement was historically imbued with romantic imagination. The Xiaoxiang narrative can be traced back to the pre-Qin period from the Chu Kingdom 楚(?-223 BCE). Although it is remote, the region remained as the only location for the kingdom’s ritual practices inherited from the ancients, embodying the heart of the cultural roots and the sacred land in national allegory and imagination (Li 2008). Xiaoxiang is a spatio-temporal allegory representing the distant but deeply rooted national symbolic. The Xiaoxiang River is historically associated with Emperor Shun 舜 (2294 and 2184 BCE) and his faithful concubines and with the great patriotic poet and politician, Qu Yuan’s 屈原 (340-278 BCE) loyalty to Emperor Huai 楚怀王 (329-299 BCE) in the Chu Kingdom. Shun’s concubines and Qu all committed suicide in the Xiaoxiang River region to show their faithfulness. They see death as a reunion with nature that nourishes the monarch (Davis 1962).

Early Xiaoxiang poetry evokes a sense of violent aesthetics. Due to the

region's geographical features, it inspires a sense of danger, lengthy and tough journeys, harsh conditions and the rejected contact with the prosperous, advantaged central terrain and subjects' past urban lives and careers. In Xiaoxiang poetry, the displaced nature embodies a menacing and engulfing persona with spectacular visuals. Another great Chu poet, Song Yu's 宋玉 (298-264 BCE) ostentatious style mourns for autumn in Xiaoxiang which connotes to decline in both the seasonal cycle and in his career depicted through an "atmosphere of melancholy grandeur" (Murck 2000: 39). Bleak and dangerous nature is personified as a body that threatens human beings. For example, the harsh lines and mountain paths and the coldness of the deep rivers "draw on and strike into" man 薄寒之中人. Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581), an aristocratic official and poet in the Liang Dynasty 梁 (502-557), witnessed the nation and his homeland's destruction in war. His poems are imbued with glorious and spectacular landscapes that evoke a sense of torment and despair. He draws on the sense of the overwhelming power of nature whose abnormal phenomena represent the disordered and collapsed nation. For example, "The wronged summer is frosted, furious spring water boiled in the autumn (metaphors for injustice and wrong treatment)...Concubine Xiaoxiang's tears splashed on the bamboo" 冤霜夏零, 愤泉秋沸...竹染湘妃之泪.

Xiaoxiang poetry was more thematically and stylistically elaborate from the Tang Dynasty 唐 on and it developed into two strands (Murck 2000). The

concept of Xiaoxiang since then not only represents banishment and remote, rural realms, but also it represents a homeland as there is a group of poets who originated from the Xiaoxiang region who are also referred to as Xiaoxiang poets. One strand develops from exile sentiments and political yearnings and laments. The notion of drifting is emphasised in this genre by the early Tang poet Shen Quanqi 沈佺期 (656-729), who was ordered to commit suicide and was banished to a distant area near the south of Vietnam when the rebellious minister, Zhang Yizhi 张易之 (?-705) came to power: he used the word *liu* 流 (flow, drifting, a current) to pun with its alternative meaning, *liufang* 流放(exile) in the verse “Encountering pitfalls, I ride with the current, reaching the southwest of the flaming territory” 遇坎即承流，西南到火洲.

Along with the exile sentiment, Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712-770) Xiaoxiang poems address his deep concern for the state. For example, when describing his exile experience, Du writes “The terrace submerged sun and moon, I share the shelter with the rural, mountain people of the Five Streams”三峡楼台淹日月，五溪衣服共云山, expressing the state of being suppressed in the wild and remote place. Slightly different from Du who explicitly expresses his despair and lament, Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819) uses Xiaoxiang’s dangerous, steep landscape to externalise his inner landscape after being wronged by sovereign in “The Convergence of Two Streams at the Xiangkou Pavilion in

Xiaoxiang”(湘口馆潇湘二水所会). Through the description of the magnificent beauty of the mountains and rivers, Liu focuses on the situation of a small boat. It offers a sense of precariousness that is not about the danger of the boat, but of the poet's difficult plight during political turmoil. For example, he depicts the states of river flow in two extremes through simultaneous paradox, evoking a sense of unsettling experience of the boat traveller - 潇水奔腾出九疑，临源湘水透迤行...更有危楼倚山隈(The dashing waters of the Xiaoxiang River rushes out of the heaven-sky, the Linyuan River soothes its way...but a dangerous tower is shivering against the mountain). Then we see the extreme tranquility of the landscape encountered by the disturbing sound of wild geese - 江天一色无纤尘...忽听羈鸿哀声鸣(The river and sky are clear of dust...suddenly I hear the wild geese mourning). Liu draws upon the dangerous and hideous nature of the displaced and the co-existing beauty and threat of nature. His work always shows a feeling of being frightened by the ferociously glorious spectacle; however, the gloomy and ghastly landscape is attractive and admirable in an uncanny way.⁴² Metaphors about dislocated landscape involve mountains as swords and halberds, woods as the prison, reflecting humans in a state of fright (Kawasaki 2007).

There is much symbolic imagery associated with Xiaoxiang, such as night, rain, bells, clouds and mists. These have various emblematic implications and

⁴² See 《寄韦琦》(Letter to Wei Qi) and 《岭南江行》(Journey in Lingnanjiang).

signify the “earth’s vitality (*qi* 气), the breath of the mountain, the vehicle for auspicious rains which are absent, a symbol of the wandering scholar, free and aloof” and the Confucian idea of the insignificance of worldly seductions, that “wealth and fame were no more than floating clouds” (Murck 2000: 44). Such images are accompanied by bleak weather and the sound of bells, implying a sense of decline, gloom, termination and the subjects’ unfulfilled career ambitions.

The second strand involves the poems by Xiaoxiang-based poets whose work involves their Xiaoxiang home-coming. Hu Zeng 胡曾 (839-?) employs historical references in his Xiaoxiang poems while using vivid and striking images like flower-like floating clouds and swimming fishes. His style shows his historical awareness and nostalgia. Therefore, there is a sense of temporal home-coming in his work, reflecting that history and tradition is one’s spiritual home. Returning to his Xiaoxiang homeland stimulates his thoughts about the place’s historical past as well and make it a return to history as well. Li Qunyu 李群玉(808-862) is also a well-known Tang poet who came from the Xiaoxiang region. His work about his Xiaoxiang homeland always evokes a sense of mental refreshment and his home-coming journeys have a light-hearted tone. The use of bright colours such as emerald green sky, silvery tides, shiny ice, colourful boats and rainbows, embroidered valleys (澄碧,碧霄,银浪,白虹,练彩,冰晖,彩舟,绣毂) depict a vibrant and picturesque view of his remote journeys.

In this sense, Xiaoxiang is not only a remote place, but a sentimental realm attached to one's roots. It is both a physical and a symbolic homeland and also embodies a metaphorical home-coming for the travelers and the exiled.

1.3 Frontier Fortress Poetry 边塞诗

Frontier fortress poetry, or frontier poetry depicts the life and experience of living on the border of the nation (Yan Fuling 1999; Xu et al. 2018). The “frontier” normally referred to the west regions of China (*xiyu* 西域). As the political and cultural domain is centred on the central plain, the western border is the setting for the dislocation narrative in the Chinese literary tradition (Chan 2015). Frontier poetry contains obvious frontier regional characteristics and also deals with the distinct cultural elements of the border realms in grand aesthetic pictures (Zhao 2015: 1971).

The frontier regions are the battlefields outside of China's central authoritative territory. Frontier poetry has three main characteristics. Firstly, it is always featured as having dreadful weather, harsh conditions, dangerous topography and vast and spectacular scenery. Secondly, it is dominated by political characteristics. Finally, it has a “spirit of temporality”, that is, time, geographical boundaries and “social customs” which represent then-contemporary cultures shift along with each other (Zhao 2015: 2). Therefore, frontier poetry has a fluid quality. The scenery visualised in the poems is lively, vibrant and immediate,

echoing the movement and rapid changes in wars and battles.

Frontier poetry was established as a genre in the Southern Dynasties (420-589) and the Tang Dynasty is when the genre was significantly shaped and developed (Chan ; Jin 1985; Zhou 1988). Gao Shi 高适 (704-765) and Cen Shen 岑参 (718?-769?) were said to be the most influential frontier poets regarding themes, style and aesthetic expression and their major thematic focus is departure (SATDFPR 1988: 357). Some scholars discuss the spatio-temporal metaphor in Tang frontier poetry, especially poems related to the Silk Road regions in the west of China (Qiu 2015; Xie 2019). The notion of Han 汉 attached to the geographical boundary of the dominant power is frequently addressed in the poems along with historical sites in the ancient Qin-Han period and the Han being a collective ethnic imagination representing the dominant culture. For example, Wang Changling 王昌龄 (698-757) draws references to the Qin-Han history in “The Moonlight of Qin shines over the fortification of Han” 秦时明月汉时关 in *Beyond The Border* 出塞. Gao Shi 高适 uses “the Han court” 汉家 and “Han soldiers” 汉将 to address the Tang Dynasty and Tang soldiers in the war with Khitans (730-734) in *A Song from Yan* 燕歌行. The interchangeable Han-Tang court reference is also visible in Cen Shen’s 岑参 *Accompanying General Feng to the West Battlefield* 走马川行奉送封大夫出师西征. Historical references to the Han race and the Qin 秦 origin establish the Sino-centric ethos and the power of the Tang Dynasty at

the time. The prosperity and the shifting socio-cultural landscape during the Tang Dynasty is projected through frontier poetry.

On the one hand, frontier poets were keen to depict journeys in-between China and foreign regions with a sense of excitement, images of urban prosperity and lively rural landscapes.⁴³ In this sense, the frontier is not necessarily the battlefield, but the frontier of the showcasing of the nation's affluence, openness, strength and liveliness. On the other hand, the other side of such prosperity is also illustrated. Apart from the widely represented frontier soldiers, officials, scenery and related sentiments, other travelers or home-leavers due to the war are also the subjects of the poems. Various groups of travelers are attached to different landscapes and images, such as moon nights, city gates, the sea borders.⁴⁴

“Fictionality”, “imagination” and the “shifting boundary of fantasy and reality”, combined with “real use of real landscape” are the fundamental aesthetics of frontier poetry (Wang 2008). For example, Luobin Wang 骆宾王 (640-674) who had frontier military experience was keen to illustrate the harsh geography and a sense of distinct boundary-ness between the central and the “boreal”, “frontier”, “northern” regions. He depicts a vivid and intense vision of the

⁴³ See 张籍 (766-830) 《凉州词其一》 (Liangzhou Verse No.1). 边城暮雨雁飞低，芦笋初生渐欲齐。无数铃声遥过碛，应驮白练到安西。(Low-flying geese appear in the evening at the border towns, where the reeds are thriving to grow. A herd of camels, laden with goods, moves slowly with tinkling camel bells. The westward camel caravan should be carrying silk to Anxi (border zones in Xinjiang).

⁴⁴ See 王维 (701-761) 《陇头吟》 (Longtou Song).

frontier through the movement of fires, moonlight, stars and wind.⁴⁵ Gao Shi's 高适 (704-765) focus is mainly on the magnificent landscape and the character's responses to it. For example, he uses montage-like parallelism to illustrate vast deserts, withered grass, empty towns and sunsets to set out the tragic backdrop for the soldiers' heroic and solemn manner.⁴⁶ In his "Farewell to Dongda" (别董大), Gao portrays yellow clouds, distant sun, and the image of the northern wind welcoming the heavy snow after bidding farewell to the wild geese -千里黄云白日曛，北风吹雁雪纷纷, expressing the plight of his friend Dong Tinglan, who is a talented but unrecognised musician through the imagery of coming and going in the dislocated western realm.

Since the mid-late Tang, frontier poetry adopted a bleaker tone due to the dynasty's decline. Poetic images largely involve the binary depiction of the vast, stark and solemnly tragic battle field and the fantasied dream scenes back home.⁴⁷ Such spatio-temporal fragmentation creates a montage-like effect showing people's disoriented minds and unfulfilled yearnings for a unified and peaceful state. After the peak era of the genre in Tang Dynasty, characteristics and development of the poetry also becomes more diverse, such as with the focus on minority frontiers in the Yuan Dynasty, and colourful, striking or exotic

⁴⁵ See 《夕次蒲类津》(Stopping by Barkul Ford at Night) and 《久戍边城有怀京邑》(Thinking of the Capital after Long Service at a Frontier Garrison).

⁴⁶ See 《燕歌行》(A Song From Yan).山川萧条极边土，胡骑凭陵杂风雨...大漠穷秋塞草腓，孤城落日斗兵稀。(The mountains and rivers are barren and full of desolation, sound of wind and rain inserted into our enemies' powerful weapons...The grass is withering in the autumn desert, the sun is setting on the lonely city where our soldiers are getting scarce.)

⁴⁷ See Chen Tao's 陈陶 (812-885) 《陇西行》(Journey to Longxi). 可怜无定河边骨，犹是春闺梦里人 (I pity the shimmering white bones abandoned by the River Wuding, they are the ones in young ladies' boudoirs-dreams back home).

images in the west frontiers in Ming and Qing frontier poetry (Zeng 1997; Yan 1998; Yang 1995; Huang 1996).

Section 2: Dislocation in Journeys To Villages/Townships

2.1 Internal and Reverse Migration in China

With the rapid urbanisation of the 2000s worldwide, rural decline has arisen from the increase of population migration from countrysides to cities (Bai et al. 2014: 158; Christiaensen and Kanbur 2016: 2; OECD 2015: 20). In response, particularly in China, settlement relocation has become one of the measures for rural revitalisation (Long et al. 2012: 11; Long and Liu 2015: 1279; Zhang et al. 2016: 552; Liu and Li 2017: 275). Population resettlement throughout Chinese history has been mainly due to socio-political, military and economic reasons; military colonies and previously abandoned border areas were repopulated by state-sponsored resettlers (Zhang 1997: 86; Roberts 1999: 183). For example, in the early Han 汉, Liu Bang 刘邦 commanded forced immigration from Guandong 关东 to Guanzhong 关中 on a large scale in order to “actualise Guanzhong”, the country’s cultural and political centre, with more than 300,000 northern Han people (Zhang 2010: 15). After the Western Jin Dynasty 西晋 (265-316) fell to the Huns who conquered the capital at Luoyang 洛阳, aristocrats and the court were forced to move south to Jiankang 建康 under Sima Rui’s 司马睿 (276-323) order (317); large numbers of northern elites could not bear foreign rule and moved south (Wu 2009: 49;

Ebrey and Liu 2010: 86).

China now is translocal. The term emphasises “mobilities and localities [...] the multiplying forms of mobility in China without losing sight of the importance of localities in people’s lives,” geographical, cultural, anthropological and historical. (Oakes and Schein 2006: 1; Clifford 1997; Massey 1999; Cartier 2001:26; Katz 2001; Castree 2004; Escobar 2001:147; Eriksen 2003; Peleikis 2003; Rafael 1995; Dirlik 1999; Wigen 1999). Translocality is characterised by the circulation of people as well as “capital, ideas, images, goods, styles, and services”; the notion of linkage, “flows, networks, decenteredness and deterritorialization” stimulated particularly by China’s spatial and socio-cultural “unevenness”; “revitalization” and “differentiation” of place-making (Oakes and Schein 2006: 1-2); and finally internal migration providing a “state of in-between-ness” which confuses but potentially empowers the migrants (Lawson 2000: 174).

China has experienced massive population movement from rural to urban areas since the Reform (1978) when *hukou* 户口 (household registration) was relaxed for rural-urban mobility to allow for more rural labourers to meet urban industrial needs (Dong 2011; Gu 2014). China’s development strategy at that time shifted the function of the cities from production to entrepreneurial activities: agricultural sites were taken for industrial and commercial uses; rural

enterprise could not compete with state-owned ones in rural areas due to lack of subsidies and welfare (Solinger 1993; Gao 1999: 203–6; Granick 1990).

Although the *hukou* system encourages more population flow, its regulations “explicitly stipulate the procedures” for and involves urban access and related qualifications for migrants in terms of resource, finance, identity, settlement, welfare and legal protection, placing them in a secondary status position in the labour market; physical hardship and mental problems like depression are caused by the lack of social support and negative experiences (Chan and Zhang 1999: 829; Li and Liang 2016; Nyíri 2010; Mou et al. 2011). In mid-2000s, migrant workers’ incomes were between 50 and 70 percent of that of urban workers (Li 2000:157; Lu 2002; H. X. Zhang 2006; Smart and Lin 2007). Some migrants facedd extra financial burden as some companies and local governments charged them management fees (Pun 2005). Since the reform (1978), propaganda and state policies promoted the free mobility of professionals and intellectuals but excluded rural migrants from over one hundred types of low-skilled jobs that demand urban residency as an employment requirement (Wang Jiayan et al. 1996).

Hukou problems cast out the migrants from urban citizenship as they have to buy properties, pay a certain amount of taxes, be employed in the city for at least a set period of time, marry before a certain age, or meet high intellectual

or professional criteria which are hard to obtain by the migrants (Wang Wenlu 2003; Yao Wen 2003; Ji and Xing 2004; Zhang Xiaodong 2003). The non-hukou workers are treated as an inferior class in the job market as the cheap, permit-less and illegitimate slaves (Wang 2003). *Hukou's* function has shifted from controlling population movement, to blocking migrants' access to urban society. Migrant workers are not only treated with prejudice by urban residents but are also looked down upon by urban workers. Moreover, regional employment gaps complicate the choices of destination for migration, stipulating further mobility, uncertainty and instability (Gries et al. 2015).

Apart from the legitimate membership, the concept of "human quality", or civilising poverty, is another factor driving migrants into an inferior class status. Migrants in China have always been referred to as the low-quality, "blind drifters" and "errant waters" 盲流 (*mang liu*) that require social control (Solinger 1999: 1; Anagnost 1995). Rural migrants seem to become the strangers to modernity, especially since the reform. They suffer anxiety over their position among the urban people; they are uprooted and their competitiveness is disadvantaged in the global economy.

Entering the 2000s, the government started to pay attention to rural-urban integration; its willingness to blur the rural-urban barrier is based on the idea of humanitarianism and the protection of community promoted in the new century

(Froissart 2005). However, such ideas reinforce the rural-urban gap. The migrants are referred to as the outside populations and emphasis is placed on the integration between the locals and the outsiders (Rose 1999). It systematically divides the urban population into two tiers .

The mobility of people, especially their return movement, is less studied in early scholarship and is now receiving attention in migration research (Small 2005). Return migration has profound implications for individuals, communities and societies with demographic socio-cultural, and economic significance. Return migration does not close but stimulates/restarts the migration circle (Ammassari and Black 2001; Ding 2014). Existing scholarship looks at both the micro and macro reasons for returning due to either individual and family situations, or national policies encouraging returning or the moves to eliminate the migrants from the host communities (Dustmann and Weiss 2007; King 2000; Hugo 2003; Tsay 2002).

Reverse and turnaround migration in other nations such as the US and Germany is stimulated by shifting political landscapes and economic transformation. Most studies define such reversal as the counter-urbanising, urban-to-rural flow applied to movement to rural destinations in general (Chalmers and Greenwood 1980; Agresta 1985; Champion 1988; Guzzetta 2004; Stawarz et al. 2020). They overlook the home-coming of the rural

migrants which is central in China's concept of reverse migration.

Scholarship on global migration return has focused on the situation of returning from abroad. Reasons for return include family obligation at "critical life stages", the return to family ties, economic decline, low employment rate and social status, social segregation in host communities, and economic growth and increasing labour demand back home (Borjas and Bratsberg 1994; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011; Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994; Constant and Massey 2002; Gmelch 1980; Dustmann 2001; Lindstrom 1996). Since the 2000s, with global mobility, circular migration has drawn growing sociological and academic attention; it is believed that reverse migration stimulates development of the home regions (Zhao 2014). Research since the 2000s that starts to emphasise that return is not marked by conditions of failure and looks at positive motivations (Newbold and Bell 2001; Newbold 2001).

Under China's rapid industrialisation and rural construction, migration is no longer a one-way process (Miao et al. 2013). Around the 2000s, there was an increase in migrants' educational level and in the number of return migrants who were likely to engage in non-agricultural work, opposing the previous pattern (ibid). On the urban side, returning to rural homes is due to low life satisfaction and stress due to problems of income, settlement, restricted social ties around *hukou*, negative integration experiences, and lack of job, health

care, resources and mental supports, social (De Jong et al. 2002; Kuo 2014; Noh and Kasper 2003; Wimmer and Soehl 2014; Yue et al. 2019). Moreover, urban anti-migrant ethos pushes the migrants to the edge due to the negative images of them in the media. Migrants are seen socially as transients who do not belong to the urban worlds and will eventually go back home. They are not granted physical, social, legitimate and ideological urban membership. Simultaneously, pressures from home are also main drivers of return, including land responsibility, family obligations and rural ageing problems which force female migrants to go back (Murphy 2002, 2008; Ma 2001; Pun 2005). For many labor migrants, their rural homes function as a “last base for the retreat of bodies injured, souls trampled, and hopes lost in the city”; the countryside becomes more of a “refuge from the painful class position that many see as overdetermined for them in the city” (Yan 2008: 227).

While some studies have focused on the negative motivation for reverse migration, such as the slow-down of urban economic growth and labour surplus in industrial sectors and settlement anxiety in the city (Chan 2010; Zhu 2007; Wang et al. 2002), others look at the positive or personal motivations and outcomes of reverse migration, such as familial demands, home sentiments and rural development (Zhao 2001; Wang and Fan 2006; Tang and Hao 2019). Rural economic conditions and living standards have improved since the 21st century, encouraging reverse migration (Long 2016: 8). Rural

growth stimulates more job opportunities and demands back home (Démurger and Xu 2011: 1847). The “new-type urbanisation and suburbanisation” 新型城镇化 (*xinxing chengzhenhua*) policy proposed by the state in 2014 granted more rural benefits and property rights to rural migrants and highlights township developments (General Office of the CCP Central Committee and General Office of the State Council of PRC 2015; The State Council of PRC 2014).

Since the 2000s, Chinese rural returnees have been seen as the educators for the countryside. Return migrants are about 6.3% of the whole rural labour force and 28.5% of the total migrant population in early 2000s when the increasing trend started (Gao and Jia 2007). They helped the rural population develop “qualities compatible with the principles of market economy, such as competitiveness” and played a significant role in rural reconstruction in professional, technological and entrepreneurial terms as well as in their human capital, such as management skills, innovation, knowledge of education and healthcare (Jacka 2006: 52; Démurger and Xu 2011: 1858; Wang and Xu 2015: 150-179). Their experience is viewed as an “inexpensive substitute for education” that contributes to rural development and the construction of modern countryside areas (Murphy 2002:45; Zhao 2001; Ma 2001, 2002; Démurge and Xu 2011). Scholarship on Chinese return migrants has been largely focused on their professional and economic, entrepreneurial

contribution back home (Ma 2001, 2002; Murphy 2002; Lin 2009; Wang and Bao 2015). Some returns are sought by commercial developers and through state propaganda regarding the desirability of the return migration to develop the countryside and the desirability of a rooted sense of nostalgia and belonging (Miller 2012; Jacka 2006).

Economic disparities have continuously decreased since 2004 and internal migration has significantly dropped since 2010 due to the shrinking regional economic gaps (Wu et al. 2018). There have been about 4.5 million rural migrants who have returned to their rural origins; the “golden era” for returnees is being welcomed in as the state increases subsidies on returnees’ employment and investment and is encouraging returnee entrepreneurship and the shaping of new peasant occupations increasing skills, processes and management experience in agricultural development (Shen 2015; Chinese Agricultural Material 2016; Long 2016; Ning 2020). The state has trained about 2000 tutors for peasant entrepreneurship and innovation, 10000 rural entrepreneurship and innovation leaders, carried out specialised training for 13000 modern young farmers and practical courses for 17700 leaders’ rural talents (Fang 2016). The reverse migration phenomenon is referred to as the village-returning fever (*fanxiang re* 返乡热) and the returnees are addressed as the back-from-city clan (*cheng gui zu* 城归族) (Shen and Xu 2011; Wan 2017).

However, films made after the 2000s seem to depict the darker side of the country's promotion of rural development; they tend to portray returnees as strangers back in their hometowns, which have been restructured or demolished under the force of urbanisation. For example, in Zhang Yang's 张杨 *Getting Home* (*luoye guigen* 落叶归根 2007), as the migrant-worker protagonist finally arrives home after going through unthinkable difficulties, the home village in his memories has completely changed. Development and displacement projects have demolished his original home and scenic landscapes have been damaged by industrial waste.

Earlier films about rural-going/returning since the 2010s have focused on the home-coming of rural youth who had been living in cities, exploring their feelings of estrangement, despair and alienation in their hometown that have now become hollowed, decayed villages; or, on urban youths who set off on trips to remote areas seeking a sense of escape. Based on a true story, Gao Zipeng's 高子鹏 *Lost in the Mountain* (*kongshan yi* 空山轶 2011) follows two young urban men's journey from Beijing to a mountain village to find their friend who has gone back to his home village but has since been missing for months. The pair's search turns into an adventure that interrogates the meaning of locating oneself. They have dreamed of the countryside as a utopia away from urban frustrations. However, things appear to be the opposite. As a result of coal mining and industrialisation, the village has been

ruined and has a damaged environment, devastated residential areas and just a few villagers drifting around. The film adopts a grey hue and a low saturation, together with a snowy, dusty landscape to depict the ghostly bleakness. The protagonists' constant walking and searching through empty sites and ruins are filmed in jump cuts in long or medium long shots. This evokes a sense of distance, dispossession and of being hopeless and lost in the wastelands. Things are disjointed, incomplete, or broken into pieces. Physical and visual dislocations arouse a sense of sensual and psychological displacement. Characters are always blocked or entangled by the shapes and lines of demolished stone houses or withered trees as if they are thrown into a dystopia. Such hellish and menacing spaces confuse and disturb the urban youths as the once dreamed of community turns out to be a living hell.

Similarly, Wang Xiaozhen's 王晓振 *Around That Winter* (*tianyuan jiangwu* 田园将芜 2013) depicts a migrant worker couple's return to their village. The ill-mannered, quasi-uncivilised boy, the dull-witted, listless girl, the aimless, unemployed young man wander around, and the amnesic old woman lives in extreme poverty. Everyone back in their homeland seems to form a death-like community, disappointing and terrifying the protagonists. As discussed above, films around the 2010s about going or returning to the remote regions depict a spiritless, ghostly and bleak landscape far away from the dominant realm both physically and psychologically.

The number of rural-going or rural-returning films has risen significantly since 2017. The central government announced that the Ministry of Agriculture would “focus on supporting the entrepreneurship and innovation of returned workers (MARA of PRC 2017a). The state promoted the idea of *xiangxian* 乡贤 (hometown talents), who were defined as the rural people who had lived or been educated in cities and had gone back to home villages, or urban residents or cadres who had gone to work in the countryside, for rural development and construction (MARA of PRC 2017b). From 2017, college graduates who planned to go back to work in rural hometowns were allowed to transfer their *hukou* back; rural migrants with urban *hukou* were allowed to move back to rural areas once they reached to retirement age, were unemployed in the city, or if one of the spouses had the rural *hukou*, as the state were keen allow the migrants to enjoy their allocated rural welfare and to stimulate rural construction (Gao 2017). Many college students, migrant workers, including scientific and technological personnel, ex-service men and some urban people have returned/gone to the countryside to work on entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas, which has become a new trend involving more than 7.4 million people by 2017; in 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Areas reiterated this phenomenon and introduced the promotion of the integration of primary, secondary and tertiary industries in rural areas to boost Rural Revitalisation 乡村振兴 (*xiangcun zhenxing*) (China

News 2018).

Furthermore, in 2018, the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conferences 两会 (*lianghui*) stressed the idea of releasing urban talent and cadres from the “top” or encouraging talent-going-to-the-countryside 人才下乡 (*rencai xiaxiang*) responding to Xi's Rural Revitalisation 乡村振兴 (*xiangcun zhenxing*) and five-year strategy devised in 2018 on solving rural poverty and promoting rural development (NPC and CPPCC 2018; Wang 2018: 46; Liao 2018: 17; State Council of PRC 2018). The Eight Model 八型模式 (*ba xing moshi*) (2018) was introduced by the CCP to speed up the construction of talent teams and the socio-economic development of rural areas through policy guidance, directional training, appointing professionals, rural network building, rural-urban co-construction, college-local cooperation, market allocation and activity assistance (Yu 2019). The New Countryside Construction 新农村建设 (*xinnongcun jianshe*) policy (2018) has worked on constructing rural waterways, roads and power grids, calling for an increasing number of members of the workforce to move to the countryside (Sina 2018).

In 2019, the state introduced “Key Tasks of New Urbanisation Construction” 新型城镇化建设重点任务 (*xinxing chengzhenhua jianshe zhongdian renwu*). It emphasises the policies of supporting township/rural development connected

with regional characteristics, such as tourism, manufacture and cultural production, enhancing rural/township economy through market-oriented operations, developing transportation networks and infrastructure in villages and townships, attracting urban talents to return to the countryside to start businesses, standardising equal rural-urban human resource markets for fair competition, and promoting the sustained growth of farmers' incomes (State Council of PRC 2019). The countryside is becoming more attractive because of “improved infrastructure, investment environment, and employment opportunities and relatively low living costs” and so is attracting migrant workers to return home from “the highly exploitative grind of the ‘world’s factory’ ” (Tang and Hao 2019: 368; Chan 2012: 199).

According to the proposal on further eliminating institutional barriers and better promoting rural construction put forward by the third session of the 13th National People's Congress 全国人民代表大会 (*quanguo renmin daibiao dahui*, 2020), China should place great value on returning to the countryside, the returnees’ starting businesses and improving living conditions and allowing rural dwellers and returnees to make full use of idle resources, improving rural per capita income and development (NPC 2020).

Although there have been a growing number of laws and policies introduced and implemented since 2017, aiming to develop rural/township areas and

encourage urban talent and professionals to go “down” to the countryside, contributing to the country’s prosperity, films made during this time seem to reflect the opposite or alternative sentiments. The first category of films about going to the remote regions depicts the home-coming of rural youth from cities. In Gan Xiaoe’s 甘小二 *Country Far Away* (sunmao 樺卯 2017), a young engineer, Chen (Ma Yue) resigns from his urban career and goes back to his home village to rebuild the village’s ancestral hall which is ordered to be relocated miles away from home as the original site has been bought and demolished by real estate developers. Chen doubts and resists urbanisation and modernity, trying to restore and reshape the ancient spiritual and material civilisation at a time when the Chinese context is dying out, and as he yearns for the rural life of his hometown. Chen on the one hand is in conflict with his wife who is an architect of commercial buildings and who has just returned from abroad, disagreeing with his idea of going back home. On the other hand Chen is viewed by his father, who is a close-minded villager and who has never left the village for his whole life, as the urban “rival”, who wants to commercialise the village culture. Most of the film transpires in the construction site in which Chen is often shot in Dutch angles, entangled with wooden frames. Like the films discussed above, visual and physical dislocations constitute the film. We see disassembled pieces and components from the ancient hall, the once grand and sacred site is now in ruins. Most of the film takes place at night when Chen seems to be submerged in the disarrayed,

nightmarish space, trying to find a way to save the hall, the symbol of his roots.

In comparison, Yang Heng's 杨恒 *Ghost in the Mountains* (*kongshan yike* 空山异客 2017) narrates a prisoner's home-coming journey after being released. The protagonist is portrayed as an outsider back home and fails to re-connect with his village. As in *Country*, subtle camera movements through tracking and dolly shots enhance to present the symbolic meaning of the fusion of people and landscape. This not only retains the objective and calm observation of people and space, but also adds discovery and retrospective details. For example, the scene of the dialogue between the protagonists by the river is a parody of ancient classical love scenes; it theatricalises the human relationship and makes it distant from real life. In contrast to the messy, damaged, abandoned classroom, a group of peacocks flashes by on the platform above the heads of the protagonists, momentarily recalling their lost youth. Contrasting to the protagonist's distant brotherhood with friends, the camera shows two trees in strange forms, each leaning on the fog cliffs and echoing each other in a state of lonesomeness. The film depicts an idle drunkard and stranger roaming in his unfamiliar hometown. The people that he encounters are inlaid with the blurred landscape, like a group of wandering ghosts in an empty valley, telling the visitor about their meaningless lives. The characters always show their backs to us; they remain distant from one another in vast, empty open-air spaces. As the protagonist talks with various people, he is

visually and physically blocked or split from the other. He often sits on the ground and shrinks, rolls up or leans in a corner as if he is about to diminish. Sharp lines and the shapes of mountains, rivers and trees are threatening and overwhelming as if the landscape is about to swallow the lonely home visitor.







Figs. 4.1-4.4 *Ghost in the Mountains* (2017, Yang Heng)





Figs. 4.5-4.7 *The Reunions* (2020, Da Peng)

Such feelings of alienation, estrangement and incompatibility are also visible in Da Peng's 大鵬 *The Reunions* (*jixiang ruyi* 吉祥如意 2020). In a framed

narrative, the film is about the filming of a home-coming film. In the double-narrated film, the heroine goes back to her village to attend her grandmother's funeral while the second half of the film shows the director's own returning story paralleled with that of the heroine. Both protagonists feel extreme alienation back home and are unfamiliar to or distanced by rural traditions and human relations within the village community. The dull and mundane snow-scape heightens the countryside's impoverishment and bleakness. The protagonists always travel in slow movement, or shrinking by the window, or against the door frames. They fail to re-attach to the villagers and their families. We see domestic spaces and village landscapes from their distant perspectives. Everything they see is visually framed at a distance as if they are in an auditorium watching things happening in the village. For example, the heroine stares at the fight between the older family members who are framed within a door frame which splits the group from the heroine; she visits her uncle and listens to the family talking, leaning against the wall where the lines shape a distinct space for her; the director watches his grandmother's funeral ritual behind the camera in a fraught mood. Both protagonists have adopted successful urban identities and find themselves in a difficult situation when re-encountering their poor rural homes.

The other category depicts urbanites' journeys to villages, somewhere completely new and unfamiliar to them. Yang Pingdao's 杨平道 *My Dear*

Friends (haoyou 好友 2018) follows the rural journey of a young urban woman, Qingqing (Su Ziqing) who intends to search for her boyfriend in the village. However, the boyfriend does not appear throughout the film, but Qingqing encounters two old men on her journey and starts to time-travel with them revisiting their teenage years. Qingqing takes a witness point-of-view and observes the transformation of village male-bonding from the past; finally, she is inspired by them and re-considers the value of human relations. As the film is mixture of reality and quasi-fantasy (scenes about the two men's youth) and is about the urban heroine's rural exploration, the village settings are significant. The film adopts a low-saturated, dim hue, evoking the rural protagonists' inner tranquility and profound depth of history. We see various large-framed backdrops or landscapes in long, aerial shots. For example, the distant and grand view of the foggy woods and grassland where the trees and grass always form particular shapes, circling a point in the centre, sometimes the protagonists' truck, sometimes the blurred stone that visually parallels the road that they travel on, implying a sense of length, distance and the searching into the distant past. We also see disjointed or unexpected shapes disrupting the smoothness of the natural landscape, such as the extremely straight and thick lines of the grey stone bridge breaking the symmetrical sky, mountain and the lake; the extending visual of the mountain-scape at the end of the tunnel is disrupted by handrails; there is an unknown and ill-fitted static frame appearing to be industrial waste plunged into the still lake; massive, mottled and

abandoned buildings tower over the landscape and look very alien to the environment. Everything that the heroine sees arouses a sense of mystery that leads her to explore the two old villagers' past as well as the definition of human-space bonding.





Figs. 4.8-4.10 *My Dear Friends* (2018, Yang Pingdao)

Comparably, Zeng Zeng's 曾贈 *Sea Above, Cloud Blow* (*yun shui* 云水 2018) explores various characters' journeys to rural areas, including a criminal who

becomes a monk, his twin brother who wants to find him as the brother was just released from jail after being imprisoned as his disguised brother, a couple who desperately want a child and therefore live frugally, and a father who leaves his loveless marriage but is misunderstood and abandoned by his son. Everyone is searching or escaping. As in *Friends*, the film employs a similar visual design, such as dim and cold hues, entanglement between humans and their physical surroundings, metaphorical, threatening and somehow personified settings and landscapes. However, unlike Qingqing's chance encounter and journey of adventure, the people in *Sea* are eager or desperate to find out the solution to their life dilemma, succumbing to a certain hysteria. Finally, the powerful businessman, the playful middle-aged man who has been messing about, and the monk, all connected in various ways, try to achieve self-salvation in their rural trip. Accompanied by tranquil and sacred natural environments, they wander through their spiritual pilgrimages.

2.2 Dislocation of Urban Chinese Woman

Another group of subjects who go to rural places in the films studied in Chapter 5 are middle-class urban women. The middle-class has been expanding rapidly in China since the reform. Gender equality in China is different from that in the so-called global North. Since the 1950s, women's emancipation and liberation is seen as a state project where women achieve their selfhood, financial and social liberation through state support (Zheng 2016). After the

reform, Chinese women have had more access to education and social resources as China has integrated capitalist modes into its economy. Women have started to have opportunities in enterprise or to move more freely in the labour market.

At present, women owners of small and medium-sized enterprises account for about 20 percent of the national total number of entrepreneurs, and 60 percent of them have emerged in the past decade. By the end of 2004, women accounted for 43.6 percent of the total number of professionals and technicians in state-owned enterprises and institutions nationwide, up 6.3 percentage points over that of 1995, among whom, the number of senior and intermediate-level women professionals and technicians rose 13.3 percent and 11.5 percent more than in the 1990s, respectively (PMPPCUN 2004). In 2013, middle-ranking and senior female professional and technical employees, occupied 44.1 percent of the population in this category, reaching 6.61 million. Among Chinese entrepreneurs, one quarter are women and the number is still rising. In 2014, 52.1 percent of undergraduate students were female, as were 51.6 percent of postgraduate, and 36.9 percent of doctoral candidates (SCIOPRC 2015).

Under the shades of globalisation, individualism, marketisation, traditional gender norms are reshaped according to the shifting socio-economic

landscape. However, urban women's psychological needs have increased and remain unmet as the gender landscape is still one of separation, indicating that women are restricted by the market-oriented socialist social organisation (Guan et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2008). We will see this brought in the films *Clouds* and *Pluto* in the next chapter. They get more educated or more wealth, but they are not happy. China's market reform, global capitalism, education and a state-driven meritocracy lubricates the emergence of urban professionals (Cao 2004; Goodman and Zang 2008).

Professional or career women are also referred to as the "three highs": high education, high income, and high professional achievement (Batts 2019: 2). Women comprise 51.7% of professionals and technicians in 2020 (Global Gender Gap Report 2020). Urban women, especially the ones born after the one-child policy, have enjoyed greater career mobility compared with previous generations; however, their career aspirations are diminished and disrupted by occupational patriarchy (Liu 2017). Under the reform, China has opened to global capitalism, privatisation, market efficiency, and the Maoist state-family ideology has been destabilised and as the function of family is rewritten work-family conflicts have emerged. (Lin 2006). Films like *Life Show* (*shenghuo xiu* 生活秀, Huo Jianqi 霍建起 2002), *Dumplings* (*jiaozi* 饺子, Fruit Chan, 2004), depict urban middle-class women's struggle in dealing with their dysfunctional families and relationships.

Women in China are less favoured and treated unequally in the labour market. 13 percent of recruitment advertisements in China contain explicit discrimination based on gender (UN Human Rights Council 2014). More than 90 percent of female students experience gender discrimination by employers and more than 72% of women undergo a clear impression of “not being hired or promoted because of their gender” discrimination. (Branigan 2014; Zhang 2018: 1). Moreover, most private companies do not cover women’s benefits, such as pregnancy insurance previously provided by state-own work units (Zuo 2016). Such circumstances have remapped the sociological gender relationship in urban China as women are seen as the secondary and weaker workforce that cannot commit fully to their work and maximise profits. Therefore, their labour status and income are structurally lower than those of men. Moreover, the wage gap is caused by issues around age, marital status, physical capability, women’s average wage being 22.5 percent lower than men’s (Zhang et al. 2008; Ng 2007; Shi et al. 2011; Xiu and Gunderson 2013; Xinhua News 2020).

Thus, urban career women are caught in paradox. Mason uses “chrono-socialism with Chinese characteristics (chrono-SWCC)” to define the construction and performance of urban Chinese women (2020: 852). Deng Xiaoping defined SWCC as opening to the capitalist and market economy

while maintaining socialist principles, such as following the Party's control and the state's command (Deng 1984). Borrowing from Deng's ideology, Mason reframes SWCC according to urban women's circumstances. Chinese urban women are required to commit to the traditional (socialist) family role as well as to obtain their professional, modern identity (capitalist) fitting into the nation's vision of advancement towards modernity and globalisation. Such a combination formulates chrono-SWCC that orders urban Chinese women to plan, balance, save, manage and share their time in self-construction and child education (Cheung 2012: 212-213). Chinese urban middle class today commit themselves to individualism and self-cultivation (Greenhalgh 2008; Yan 2008; Zhang 2010).

Middle-class urban women also embody cosmopolitan consumers as well as objects of desire. An idealised female body for Chinese white-collar women is projected through physical beauty and fitness which indicates a modern, self-disciplined, "productive, hard-working body" (Peng 2020: 6). Middle-class career women's body valuation stems from their anxiety over a female body and gender problematically positioned in China's modern ethos that requires women occupy multiple roles. The modern female body and image is political, economic and socio-cultural. Female presence and situatedness is "contextual". Films like *Perpetual Motion* (*wu qiong dong* 无穷动, Ning Ying 宁瀛 2005) and *Double Xposure* (*erci baoguang* 二次曝光, Li Yu 李玉 2012)

illustrate urban career women's beauty anxiety and how they are objectified by patriarchal perspective even if they succeed through their professions.

Since the 2000s, there has been a return to an emphasis on women's traditional family role; women with career aspirations are criticised as being irresponsible and selfish which is the major cause of marital conflicts (Zuo and Bian 2001). Chinese women born under the one-child policy embody gender flexibility along with China's rapid modernisation and economic transformation that "restructures family and labour market conditions" (Kim et al. 2018: 996). Women adopt various gendered identities ranging from that of the "autonomous modern female" to that of the "dependent modern female", combining "feminine and masculine qualities" (Liu 2014). Xi Jinping reinforced women's central role in the family as taking active responsibility to "provide for elders, educate children, and shape family values" in his speech at a meeting at the All-China Women's Federation in 2013 (Gui 2020: 1957). Women are asked to balance incompatible financial and domestic responsibilities, career aspirations with filial commitment and obedience. According to the statistics of the All China Women's Federation in 2010, Chinese women allotted 46 more minutes to work (both domestic and public) than men per day on average (Song 2013). Long working hours at home and in the workplace stem from women's double burden (Stone 2007; Ferree 2010).

Chinese urban women embody a sense of paradox and are forced into multi-rolling. Although they show greater awareness of individualistic notion of selfhood and subjectivity; they are sometimes automatically set and measure their success, happiness and morality based on traditional or patriarchal norm. Zhou points out the problems of “moralization of maternal employment” (Zhou 2020: 659). Moreover, some Chinese urban women view successful combination of motherhood and employment as good moral value and criteria. However, men’s balance between domestic sphere and career is not taken into account for the moralisation of gender performance.

Although women potentially are able to choose their marriage state and childbirth to some extent, many urban women in China see having a child as a special “filial commitments” to their mothers particularly as it “repays” their mothers’ past sacrifice and selfless care (Evans 2008: 29-30). Young women’s subjectivity is still bound by and cannot be separated from the traditional norm and the lingering notion of Chinese motherhood. Chinese urban women’s happiness is measure by both spousal social status as well as their personal career achievement (Wu, Wang, and Huang 2016; Chen 2018). It constructs a paradoxical nexus in which the two seem to be incompatible in the current society in China. Films like *Spring Tide* (*chun chao* 春潮, Yang Lina 杨荔钠 2019) and *Beloved* (*qin ai* 亲爱, Li Xinman 李欣蔓 2013) foreground urban professional women’s dilemma around balancing their career ambitions and

family duties.

The “leftover women” phenomenon is another key issue concerning urban middle-class women in China. The term first appeared in 2001, addressing well-educated, career women who remain single in their late 20s (Liu 2010). It was officially recognised by China’s Ministry of Education in 2006 and started to be discussed in newspapers, mass media and films. The state’s media and propaganda outlets describe the counter-image of the stereotypical miserable, single professional urban woman, the leftovers, as picky, self-absorbed, unrealistic women who do not accept the practicalities of life. In cultural productions like cartoons, novels and films: they are portrayed sarcastically as the warriors defending for their abnormal dignity; aging for leftover women is depicted as a source of embarrassment, depression and anxiety. They are also portrayed as naive, unpractical, immature women, living in vacuum, who dream of an illusory romantic utopia. Women are caught in the trap of asymmetric gender norms, relationships and judgements.

Professional middle-class women’s increasing choice to remain single is driven by both internal and external forces. On the one hand, they remain single or delay marriage due to their career aspirations and social, financial autonomy; on the other hand, they expect a more emotion-driven marriage than a socioeconomic one (Gui 2020). However, films about the left-overs tend

to portray the women as determined, strong characters with talents and wealth and are somehow proud of their singlehood, such as, *Go Lala Go II (du lala zhui hun ji 杜拉拉追婚记 2, An Zhujian 安竹间, 2015)* and *The Last Woman Standing (sheng zhe wei wang 剩者为王, Luo Luo 落落, 2015)*.

Gender discrimination in the job and marriage market double displaces urban leftovers who are threatened by the idea of being too old or too intellectual to find a husband. Their financial, career and educational advantages are seen as destabilising of the husband's power and as a threat to men's self-esteem, confidence or public image, making men frightened and repressed. It particularly categorises female PhDs as the sexless "third gender" (Kuo 2014; Ni 2019). We see match-making corners, dating TV shows that aim to foster the desire for and the urgency of marriage. However, there is a growing number of urban women who take pride in their single status, which is a sign of power, independence and the capability (Cerchiaro 2010; To 2015; Lake 2018).

While the public and media discussed women's value, the marriage issue and stereotypes, the state introduced the Guideline for Women's Development in China 2001-2010 (*zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao 中国妇女发展纲要*), endorsing women's equal educational, economic, social and political status and women's health and social security (SCPRC 2001). However, films about

urban women in the 2000s portray career women as disadvantaged. The three heroines in Xu Ke's 徐克 *All About Women* (*nüren bu huai* 女人不坏 2008) are successful career women at first glance, but all embody a certain sense of "disability." The female clinician has a phobia against touching men, the attractive and proud businesswoman is impetuous and quick-tempered, and the boxer who is also a novelist suffers from a delusional disorder. In Xu Jinglei's 徐静蕾 *Go LaLa Go!* (*du lala sheng zhi ji* 杜拉拉升职记 2010), the heroine suffers from sexual harassment and gender discrimination at work. Both films' happy endings involve the women's romantic relationship with men who appear to be their saviours and who support and develop the women through romance and marriage.

Problems like work-family conflicts, limited rights and social pressures traumatise urban Chinese women and cause their physical and mental ill-health. The Guideline for Women's Development in China 2010-2020 (*zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao* 中国妇女发展纲要) confirmed Chinese women's ongoing problems with gender discrimination at work, lower wages, lower levels of education and less access to social resources than men, and that problems in women's health and a healthier social environment for women still remain unresolved (SCPRC 2011, 2016). In 2019, Over 80% of Chinese career women reported that they experience anxiety or depression symptoms caused by work-family conflicts, a "serious and invisible issue"; 67.9 percent of

them have pregnancy-related depression (Blackmores 2019; Wang and Peng 2017; Ma 2020). Work pressure, lack of sleep and rest, working overtime, an irregular eating routine and lack of healthcare guidance are the main drivers for career women's health problems; depression, isolation and anxiety are also becoming major concerns (GPHCCW 2018). Social debate around the appropriateness of women's accessing to certain places is also one of the major factors affecting women's stress and anxiety. Issues around women's dress, night life and social networking within the workplace and personal life are widely criticised.

Films after 2010 responded to such issues. They are unlike the films in the previous decade: the pre-2010 films had started to stress career women's individuality and independence. Importantly films after 2010 do not fall into the fairy-tale cliché but examine subjects' suffering in a realistic way. Chen Kaige's 陈凯歌 *Caught in the Web* (*sou suo* 搜索 2012) focuses on dual female protagonists. One dies of cyber witch-hunting stemming from public criticism of women's behaviour, the other is a female journalist who loses her job for reporting the truth and who finally realises that she cannot help stop the mistreatment of women and becomes disenchanted with the social environment. Yang Lina's 杨荔钠 *Spring Tide* (*chun chao* 春潮 2019) explores the turbulence in an all-female household in which the three generations face distinct dilemmas and hardship in obtaining their female positions in society.





Figs. 4.11-4.13 *Spring Tide* (2019, Yang Lina)

Fincher goes further and suggests that Chinese women are caught in the “web of abuse (2014: 143)”. Physical and sexual violence against urban women has become a key phenomenon both regionally and globally (WHO 2005). In 2010, 24.7 percent of women aged between 24 and 60 experienced domestic violence, the number rising by 8.7 percent from that of 2000 (Pi 2017; U.S. Department of State 2007), the ACWF receiving between 40,000 - 50,000 complaints of domestic abuse (U.S. Department of State 2007).

Women’s physical and psychological domestic abuse from their partners lies outside the systematic protection of the law. Besides, domestic violence is seen by the patriarchal web as the scandal, or “family ugliness”家丑 (*jia chou*)

which has to be covered up for the face and appearance of the family. Legally, domestic violence is defined as “physical, mental and other violations among family members by means of beating, binding, maiming, restricting personal freedom, frequent abuse and intimidation” (The State Council of the PRC 2015). It ignores the causes of abuse and other factors, such as psychological abuse and sexual violence within marriage, which can be much more serious. Moreover, reports and information about domestic violence are very limited from local governments and state departments (Xia et al. 2020).

Apart from domestic abuse, other forms of abuse also occur in the public realm for Chinese women. Workplace physical and sexual harassment towards women is a continuous and increasingly severe problem in China (Liu 2007; Zuo 2018; CMS 2020). Laws against workplace harassment were set out for the first time in China in 2005 in the Women’s Rights Law (Zhao 2005). However, there is no clear definition of harassment and a lack of regulation and direction in dealing with the cases, which effectively still leaves female victims outside of legal protection (Brown 2010; Freehills 2019; Cobb 2020).

The urban dislocation of Chinese middle-class or professional women is another theme of dislocation in cinema; yet, it is not a focus in this thesis which examines dislocation in remote areas. However, in some films, urban women’s feelings of dislocation and marginalisation stimulate their journeys to remote

areas. The discussion on urban women's circumstances is key because it grounds the reason why they tend to move to countrysides. In the case studies, the second category of heroines are urban middle-class women who face the issues mentioned in this section.

Section 3:

Dislocation in Journeys To Minority Areas

The number of films about returning minorities to their home villages has also risen in the 21st century, especially since 2006 when The Development of the Western Region in China Programme was implemented by the central government and when China partnered with the UNDP introducing Culture-based Development for Ethnic Minorities in China aiming for poverty reduction in minority areas. Various national and international schemes for minority development have improved the quality of life in minority areas in terms of infrastructure, business, transportation, education, ecology and investment.⁴⁸

More employment is available and more state subsidies are provided in those areas, and the state also promotes the return of educated minority youth to go back for home development and encourages rural talent to help with minority development by introducing various schemes, also delivering them through

⁴⁸ For example, the programme partnered with the UNDP was led by China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Wuzhishan Municipal Government, and Yunnan Women's Federation with a budget of 3,750,000 USD (UNDP). See https://www.cn.undp.org/content/china/en/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/culture-based-development-for-ethnic-minorities-in-china-.html.

local events. For example, the Huadong Normal University organised university students from Xinjiang going back to their hometown for volunteering teaching (Huang 2018). The Henan University of Foreign Language held meetings promoting minority students to re-settle and work in their hometowns and introducing related state benefits and welfare (Tang 2019). the 19th People's Congress introduced the Rural Revitalisation Strategy 2018-2022 (2018), promoting minority talents going back for hometown development (SCPRC 2018; Ma and Yang 2020). Some argue that the development and revitalisation of minority areas has reduced the pressure on urban employment, improved the minority and rural economy and therefore elevating the domestic economy generally, easing social problems, stimulating national unity and strengthening social cohesiveness (Liu et al. 2017: 239; Leibold 2013: 50). Yet some suggest that the unbalanced implementation of such programmes and actions widens regional inequality and that the aim of development projects and policies is more about strengthening central control than providing particular assistance (Lipes 2012; Jeong 2015: 13).

Films about people travelling between urban and minority areas in the 21st century have to some extent reflected sociopolitical circumstances, but most have gone further to explore the returnees' or the travellers' internal paradoxes and dilemmas when facing their homes after experiencing a more modern lifestyle. Apart from films that show urban volunteers' lives in minority areas,

such as Pan Anzi's 潘安子 *The Volunteer* (*zhiyuanzhe* 志愿者 2007) and Bai Haibin's 白海滨 *A Horse with Hope* (*shan na bian you pi ma* 山那边有匹马 2015), most films made about going back to or travelling between minority and urban areas focus on how minority characters are caught in between or negotiating traditions/modernity, rural/urban, staying/leaving binaries.

He Jia's 禾家 *Erdos Rider* (*e'erduosi qishi* 鄂尔多斯骑士 2014) narrates three parallel protagonists' back-and-forth travels between Beijing and Erdos, Inner Mongolia. The Inner Mongolian young man who comes back home after a short period of time in Beijing sees Beijing as his holy land, his urban dream of becoming a rock musician. The Beijing man, in contrast, comes back to Erdos after doing a tour there as he finds that the remote, natural and even primitive place is his spiritual home. The Beijing female archaeologist also comes back to Erdos after her field work in Erdos because she feels a special connection between herself and Erdos desert. All three are lost in Erdos and represent various types of modern trauma. They finally turn their travels into meaningless journeys. The Mongolian man is rejected by the city due to his cultural background and financial status, yet he is dislocated back home as he is seen as the lunatic urban crazy who is looked down upon by the locals. The failed communication and understanding between him and the locals places him as the local outsider. The two Beijingers, as the physical outsiders, eventually find that their dream trips to their spiritual home are not what they expected. They

cannot verbally communicate with the locals and fail to find an emotional connection with the people there. The film's cinematography shifts between vast, distant landscapes of bleak deserts, withered grassland and close-ups of the wandering souls. The real always goes together with the surreal. For example, when the Mongolian young man is beaten up by the locals, the montage of overly artificial blood, the close-up of a random hunter's tip of a gun, a boy and menacing shapes of barren rocks create a mundane but threatening environment where the young man's dream is disrupted by his dystopic homeland.

Pema Tsenden's 万玛才旦 *Tharlo* (*ta lu* 塔洛 2018) takes the issues of minority people's encounter with urban modernity even further. The protagonist Tharlo (Shide Nyima) is a simple, happy Tibetan herdsman who has never left the mountains and who seems to still live by the Maoist ethics. The film explores how Tharlo's journey to town almost destroys his life. During his travels, Tharlo encounters selfish and corrupt policemen, rock musicians whose behaviour shocks Tharlo, and the female barber staff Yang (Yang Xiucuo), with whom Tharlo falls deeply in love and who scams him for his money. The contrasts between the different spaces of the film are illustrated by simple camera work. When Tharlo is in the mountains, we see the boundless, vast landscape in which he is often positioned in the middle, enjoying a sense of dislocation yet being at the centre of the world. While in his urban travels,

Tharlo is squeezed into corners or we see him in the mirror, visually losing his entire figure and presence. Though the dazzling lights in the KTV, city streets, the live-house and the billboards on the high-rises have a visual allure for him, everything in the city disorients Tharlo and destroys his urban dreams. He finally returns to his herdsman life in the mountain. Both films show that the characters' returns are due to various extents of blocked urban access. One is rejected by his material and cultural lack, the other upset by his experience and by his devastated dreams.

Unlike the minority protagonists, who return home after discovering their incompatibility with urban or modern lives in the two films above, the heroine in Degen Yun's 德格娜 *A Simple Goodbye* (*gao bie* 告别 2015) takes another path. Shanshan (Degen Yun) studies abroad and comes back for a holiday. Her long overseas sojourn makes her feel distinct and uncomfortable in her Mongolian household and most of the time there is silence between her and her parents. Visual barriers are also employed in the film to show Shanshan's distance from her family. Each family member always adopts a stance in a separate block-like window and door frame, when talking to each other.

Different to the settings in other minority-returning films, most of the film transpires indoors as Shanshan's father is seriously ill. Nevertheless, fantasy visuals are constantly interwoven with the minimalistic modern and colourless

hospital setting. We see Mongolian horse-riding, deserts and grassland through other mediums, such as the massive paintings of horses and landscapes at father's home, the yellow-tinted video clips about horse-riding in the deserts that the father watches in a dark room. The shift between Shanshan's later family life after marriage and the dreamlike grassland and horses are fused into a clip from Saifu and Lisi Mai's 塞夫, 麦丽丝 *The Sorrow of Brook Steppe* (*beiqing bu lu ke* 悲情布鲁克 1995), a film made by the director's parents about Inner Mongols' tragic fight against the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. Shanshan finally leaves home after her father's death and returns to the urban life that she has become used to. Such fantasy scenes and their contrast to urban environments suggest that although Shanshan chooses to be displaced from and cannot fit in her rural, minority home, her home sentiments, although fragmented, still hold a place deep in her heart and in her in-between travels, Shanshan re-collects her home with nostalgia.

Conclusion

This chapter elaborates on the contexts for the themes represented in films examined in the next chapter. It first examines the notion of home that governs the concepts of the dislocated home and of home-dislocation pairing. On the one hand, home is associated with "a sense of protection, comfort, joy or positivity" and involves seeking personal security and emotional commitment and/or self-discovery (Liu 2014: 19; Brown, 2000: 50; Valentine, 2001: 73). On

the other hand, there are negative and alienating experiences associated with home which act as a “potential site of emotional struggle, ambivalence, violence, fear or conflict”, especially when associated with migration experiences (Brickell 2012; Liu 2014: 19). When returned migrants go back home, some become the fringe outsiders who are displaced by the communal practice and are no longer share a sense of location. Such home-comings manifest tension between the value of individualism and communal expectations, thus driving the returnees into vulnerability (Hindman 2008).

The second group of subjects represented in the films are urban women who go to the displaced to seek a new, spiritual home. In this sense, home-leaving becomes the condition for finding a real home; dislocating oneself from the original home potentially locates the subject in a real home. And the process of moving and self-dislocating establishes a distinction between the “initial site of estrangement - home as not-home - and home as a new site of possibility (Fortier 2003: 8).

This chapter scrutinises the aesthetic contexts by looking at Chinese literary traditions that ground the themes, narratives and aesthetics of dislocation and dislocating travels. Exile poetry is initiated by a sense of banishment and estrangement (Cutter 1986). However, the concept of exile in such genre is diverse. On the one hand, exile poetry renders a sense of lack of fulfilment,

alienation, and pessimism, depicting bleak visuals; on the other hand, it offers an alternative freedom and romanticises the dislocating, exile experience.

Particularly looking at Xiaoxiang poetry, this chapter discusses both dislocation and home-coming as themes of this genre. The Xiaoxiang region is symbolic in Chinese culture. It embodies both the great Chinese literary tradition from Qu Yuan 屈原 and the “threatening, marginal zone beyond the borders of the civilised world” (Wang and Williams 2015: 1). It stresses native-exile, poet-courtier tensions. It expresses discontent, desolation and despair and the state of disengagement and alienation from the central domain as well as symbolising a secluded paradise away from the turbulent urban world. Slightly different from exile poetry, frontier poetry manifests both realistic depictions of dislocated realms and imagery visuals about the fascination with all that is far-off. It portrays real magnificent border landscapes as well as expressive, fantasy scenery.

Exile, Xiaoxiang and frontier poetry all adopt dislocation poetics. Dislocation poetics intensifies human-nature relations and employs visual spectacles of striking, majestic and even engulfing landscapes, simultaneously attracting and threatening humans. It stresses the themes and images of journeying, distance and the notion of fluidity and focuses on expressive colours, personification of natural scenery and the moving and travelling nature of

landscape. Developing from dislocation poetics, the film analysis in the next chapter will explore how the displacing journeys of home-coming, self-exile and distant travels portray visuals of scenic wonders and drifting and the striving for a sense of spatio-temporal extension through whereby the subjects try to transcend their worldly mentality and reside in their spiritual yearning.

In discussing migration and reverse migration, this chapter argues that migration provides rural/township people with new possibilities, agency or capacity for self-determination, as well as challenges. Migrants constantly reframe their identity and sense of belonging in different places. The state of urban-rural in-between-ness offers a distinct space and position for them to reshape, maintain, modify or reject their identities. Their displacing travels and feelings of disengagement are interwoven with a sense of temporariness.

This section offers film discussions along with the periods. It focuses on state policies, events and social transformations in the 21st century and draws connections between films made during the era and what happened in real life. Such comparisons observe that films about rural/township going/returning largely reflect the negative side of state's development strategies and promotions and scrutinise individual in-between drifters' suffering. It then moves on to Chinese urban/middle-class career women who are the subjects of the second focused group in the next chapter's case studies. It examines

urban Chinese women's status of dislocation from various perspectives, setting up a broader picture for their socio-cultural marginalisation and alienation. This clarifies and grounds the reasons for their physical, dislocating rural journeys which function as either escape, self-seeking or a way of revival, which is one of the main background themes in the next chapter's films.

The other dislocation category in this chapter is travelling/returning to minority areas. This section looks at population flow to minority areas in the 21st century China as influenced by the state's policies and socio-economic circumstances. It studies related films made during the period. Films about going to minority areas made by Han directors depict minority areas as fantasy lands where the dreams of urban people reside who are disoriented by urban life or who are urban marginals. Meanwhile films made by minority directors highlight cultural conflicts involving Han-minority, tradition-modernity, village-city binaries. They do not make black-and-white statements about such clashes, but portray the troubled characters' travels as a process of ongoing negotiation, challenge and survival in liminal spaces.

CHAPTER 5

Women's Dislocation and Dislocated Journeys to Displaced Areas:

Constructing a Genre

Chapter 5 moves on to the film cases and analyses heroines' journeys to, and experiences in, the countryside and townships. The film analysis in this chapter extrapolates on how the films are an aesthetically distinct *exposé* of the contexts discussed in the previous chapter. Women in these films fit into two categories. They are either returnees from the city to their rural/township origins or middle-class urban women who set off on their journeys to rural areas.

Following the same structure as Chapter 3, this chapter is also divided by the key characteristics that define a genre: network of production, theme and narrative, cinematography and flexibility. The films are also set in rural, township and minority areas. Subjects are either female migrant workers who go back to countryside homes, rural/township women who have been educated or lived in the city and finally return to their hometowns, or middle-class urban women whose journeys to into the countryside function as a way of re-searching for a new sense of home and belonging.

Cerase (1974) defines four types of return migration: the return from failure, the return of conversation between cities and countrysides, the return of innovation, and the return of retirement. The returnee-heroines in the thesis blend these four types. Their in-between or return journeys are driven by sentiment and nostalgia for their homeland: family duty, frustration caused by urban lives, or sufficient achievements and success in their urban career. Mirroring films in the the category of the “rural within” (Chapter 2 and 3) which selected rural, township and minority dislocations, the heroines examined here also encounter marginalisation and vulnerability due to social, cultural and gender issues. Although physically restricted to remote areas, the heroines discussed here are movers in-between cities and villages/townships. Yet, in these cases, their displacing journeys and force of will represent a degree of empowerment of each of them and thus create an autonomous realm where they can potentially flourish.

Thematically, the travelling narrative reflects the causes of the women’s journeys. This chapter then interrogates how their travels project or transform their displacement. It also problematises the concept of home-coming observing how a once familiar space can become estranged and difficult to re-connect with. The section on theme and narrative also discusses whether the subjects can regain a sense of homely identity or whether they are are pushed further away by the gulf that has been created by their absence. For

some of the urban dwellers who set off to the countryside, their far-off destinations become spiritual homes. This chapter articulates how inhabiting dislocated spaces, themselves, can become a kind of spiritual home-coming where the production of an inner home accommodates non-conformist subjectivity and yearnings. To what extent do the returnees and the newcomers regain a sense of power? Are the returned rural women empowered by their re-attachment to the homeland and original identity? Do the urban women discover a source of agency in the act of leaving their physical homes in the city?

Cinematographically, journeying and mobility are captured through distinctive visuals. We see the subjects disappear into insignificance as they are positioned against vast landscapes that threaten to swallow them up. At the same time that the loss of boundaries and the colossal depth of the images challenge fixed identities these shots are inter-laced with close-ups that observe more focused and intense emotions or the characters' changing psychological states. The visual shifts intensify the theme of movement and flow, and stress inner turbulence, instability and the perils of un-situatedness. Travelling between locations, the women in transit take various forms of transportation: trains, cars, coaches and boat trips. Woman-in-the-frame, lost in the nature, and the shifting landscapes between objective perspectives and the women's points of view are the main cinematic characteristics here. This

chapter discusses how the journeying narrative amalgamates spaces, movement, pathetic fallacy, and female dislocation. It explores how dislocation cinematography is associated with the poetic and painterly visuals derived from early Chinese experiences of exile, and homecoming as they were preceded by the genre of frontier poetry. It draws out distinct parallels between the visualised language in poetry and the film language in dislocation cinema.

Case studies:

| Title | Director | Year |
|--|-------------------|------|
| <i>Weekend Plot</i> (<i>mi yu shiqi xiaoshi</i> 密语十七小时) | Zhang Ming 章明 | 2002 |
| <i>Mountains May Depart</i> (<i>shanhe guren</i> 山河故人) | Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯 | 2015 |
| <i>The Taste of Rice Flower</i> (<i>mi hua zhi wei</i> 米花之味) | Peng Fei 鹏飞 | 2017 |
| <i>The Pluto Moment</i> (<i>ming wang xing shike</i> 冥王星时刻) | Zhang Ming 章明 | 2018 |
| <i>Send Me To the Clouds</i> (<i>song wo shang qing yun</i> 送我上青云) | Teng Congcong 滕丛丛 | 2019 |
| <i>Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains</i> (<i>chun jiang shui nuan</i> 春江水暖) | Gu Xiaogang 顾晓刚 | 2019 |
| <i>Chaogtu with Sarula</i> (<i>bai yun zhi xia</i> 白云之下) | Wang Rui 王瑞 | 2019 |

Section 1: Network of Production

1.1 Director Studies

This section offers a general study of the directors of this chapter's films in order to trace the evolution of their dislocation style. By analysing their background and stories, it draws connections between their lives, thematic focuses and cinematographic traits. It answers the following questions: how

are the directors related to each other in terms of academic and personal experiences? How far can they be considered creators of dislocation cinema? What considerations inform the filmic choices they make in relation to dislocation?

Zhang Ming 章明 (born 1961):

People's floating travels and a sense of loss in extended space and time with poetic, painterly aesthetics.

Zhang Ming was born in 1961 in the Chengkou township in Chongqing. After graduating from the Southwest University in Fine Arts, he studied for his Masters in Directing at the Beijing Film Academy, then becoming a lecturer in the department. Zhang's "psychological realistic" style with a "high artistic level" is shown in works such as *In Expectation* (*wushan yunyu* 巫山云雨, 1996), *Weekend Plot* (*miyu shiqi xiaoshi* 秘语十七小时, 2002) and *Before Born* (*jie guo* 结果, 2006), all of which involve river journeys, boat trips, psychological confusion and a sense of emptiness and loss in life. This earned him the nickname of "China's Antonioni" (iFeng 2011; Sohu 2020). His work explores rural and township women's journeys or connections to the city and human-space relations, especially through examining attachment to and detachment from one's hometown.⁴⁹ After *Folk* won the Best Actress and Best Screenplay Award at Shanghai International Film Festival, Zhang was referred

⁴⁹ See *Folk Songs Singing* (*lang zai duimen chang shange* 郎在对门唱山歌, 2011), *Cherry Goddess* (*jiuhao nüshen* 九号女神, 2013) and *China Affair* (*tamen de mingzi jiao hong* 她们的名字叫红, 2013).

to as the “King of City Promos” as he presents the beauty of his hometown landscapes with promotional style (Sohu 2020).

Zhang’s cinematic world juxtaposes chaos and infinity. It shifts between the poetic and the real, rational thought and sensual perception, hidden meaning and the straightforward message. It makes the audience feel that “a sense of coldness is also burning” (Zhang and Wu 2017). His reality and fantasy echo each other, almost becoming interchangeable.

Since time has neither beginning nor end, Zhang is keen to explore extended temporal duration. He sees time as meaningful only in so far as it affects human perception of it. His bachelor degrees in painting and his interest in traditional Chinese painting have influenced his aesthetic choices. Landscapes are not just landscapes, they contain narratives which unravel along the long scrolls; he also applies a painter’s aesthetics in his work (examples see analysis in Summary below) (Zhou 2018). People are searching and travelling between spaces and unfamiliar landscapes, but finally fail to obtain what they want. His recurring theme of the dislocated locale makes him the most mysterious director in contemporary China (Wunian 2018). Whether it is the misty Three Gorges scenery or sparsely populated seaside townships, the landscapes displayed under Zhang’s lens are distinctive. Settings are far away from the city with characters full of damp, hazy, lonely and drifting feelings.

Zhang portrays a feeling of dislocation with a sense of vanishing and wetness. *In Expectation* is set on a Yangtze River cruise. With the cloudy, rainy-day time and blue and grey scaled nights, Zhang imbues the river journey with loneliness, ennui and a cold excitement. Mai Qiang (Zhang Xianming) is a lonely middle-aged single man living on the banks of the Yangtze River. He is used to his mundane and passionless life until one day he meets a widow, Chen Qing (Zhong Ping), who is the receptionist of a small inn destined to be flooded by the Three Gorges Dam project. Mai realises that Chen is the unknown woman who appears in his dream every night. The journeying narrative illustrates the floating visuals of the lines of mountains, the river tides, and the blurry villages in the background constantly being obstructed by the fog. Everybody on the ship wanders off aimlessly, their actions and daily routines accompanied by the dissonant, cracking sound of the construction on the banks of the river. Characters are often shot in canted angles against the mountain and river landscapes; we see recurring images of them holding bloody, dying fishes, and of incomplete drawings of tree branches in Chinese watercolour accompanied by the sound of flowing water. Such aural-visual compositions intensify the sense of threat to existence, the floating, drifting and instability as if everything is likely to be flooded, vaporised or washed away.

Comparably, in *China Affair*, which is about a Western male tourist searching

for a Chinese girl that he met on a Yangtze River cruise, we see the man's endless travels between the cities and the girl's rural hometown. We see the girl's distinctive dual urban and rural identities. We see images of the characters finding themselves lost in mountain and river landscapes. Everything dissolves in mists, fog and the soundscapes of the river. The characters in Zhang's work wander without purpose, finding passionate or dramatic chance encounters, but end up returning back to their mundane and miserable life routines. They are psychologically and culturally displaced in their geographical journeys.

Wang Rui 王瑞 (born 1962):

Women's socio-gendered and geographical displacement against urban-rural tension.

Wang studied for his BA in the Directing Department of the Beijing Film Academy in 1989 and stayed on as a lecturer. As a commercial filmmaker who makes both feature films and TV drama, Wang explores a wide range of themes in his work, including broken relationships and corruption in contemporary Chinese society, period drama and village-based drama.

Social and geographical dislocations are a major theme in Wang's work. His interests revolve around the problematic situations common to urban women and the lives of marginal characters' in villages or small towns. *Distressed*

Women (*xinteng nüren* 心疼女人, 2001) depicts social dislocations and the difficulties urban women encounter in reconciling relationships, career aspirations and financial status. In *Saving Love* (*zhengjiu ai* 拯救爱, 2008), the protagonist flees to a coastal township and takes on a new identity in order to evade a money-lender. In *The Peach Blossom* (*yi shu taohua kai* 一树桃花开, 2017), family tension is illustrated around the conflicts between a migrant-worker couple and their village-based parents. The ideological and social gulf is narrated through rural-urban tensions with the rural mother-in-law picking on and judging the urban daughter-in-law with reference to traditional patriarchal criteria.

Wang uses the far-north regions to portray geographical displacement. In *Northern Stories* (*beifang gushi* 北方故事, 1997), Wang films a widow's family conflicts in a wild wasteland, in Hunlunbeier, Inner Mongolia. He largely employs khaki, terracotta and rustic colours and focuses on images of people being buried in the soil in their everyday lives. Contrasts between dark insides and the extreme sunlight and outside lighting, between the heroine's scarlet clothes, the cramped, dark wooden shelter and the expansive mountain and grassland highlight the threat of the vastness of the wilderness which is also constantly disrupted by male invaders and the widow's restricted and impoverished domestic realm.

Wang is also the director of the Inner Mongolian part of an historical fantasy, *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (*she diao yingxiong zhuan* 射雕英雄传, 2003). Shot mainly in Xilin Gol, Wang portrays a bleak but magnificent grassland spectacle. He makes use of slow tracking shots to show images of billowing dust and yellow sand obscuring the sky. As in *Northern*, Wang employs canted angles to show the geometrical visuals of the lines of mountains and of light and shadow segmenting the mountain-scapes and grassland, evoking the threatening character of nature. It illustrates the character and manner of the dislocated community adopting the land; they are bellicose, aggressive and powerful, willing to fight against the central authority echoing precisely the nature of the landscape they inhabit.

In his most recent film, *Chaogtu* (discussed in this chapter), Wang also turns to a Mongolian setting. As in his other films he presents a beautiful, poetic landscape; Wang states that he sets this story in “a picturesque place where we all want to spend money to travel, but the protagonist still wants to leave” (Rui 2020). The film is about a couple’s conflict about whether to stay in their home village or to go to the city to experience a different life. The hero does not want to go to the city because of poverty, his travel is more about a spiritual yearning; while the heroine desperately wishes to stay in the rural world after her experience in the city.

Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯 (born 1970):

Depicting straying contemporary lives in a magical but realistic scenario.

Jia Zhangke was born in Fenyang Town, Shanxi Province. He graduated from the Literature Department of the Beijing Film Academy. Before becoming a director, Jia published novels when he was in secondary school and founded a poetry club in high school. Later, the Shanxi Writers Association was willing to have him as a member even if he did not go to college. During high school, Jia was sent by his parents to study painting due to his low academic grades; in village art programmes, he learned painting from fine-art professionals and developed his interest in traditional Chinese painting (Tencent 2014). Poetic and painterly qualities therefore contribute to his cinematic style. This influence is particularly employed in his work involving landscapes, journeys, or even ruins, for example, in *Still Life* (*sanxia haoren* 三峡好人, 2006) and *Mountains May Depart* (*shanhe guren* 山河故人, 2015, discussed in the thesis).

Jia is a director who “deal[s] with time and space the most after Antonioni”, his films represent contemporary social issues attendant on China’s rapid economic transformation (Wang 2015). During the huge social transformations around the turn of the century when ordinary people were overwhelmed by urban dreams and the possibilities opened up by urbanisation and globalisation. Jia’s film language observes the cost to and destiny of ordinary people, especially the displaced and the marginal. His films are generally

described as realist, but surrealist elements have also been added to certain works (CCTV 6: 2019). These surrealist elements open the audience to multiple possible interpretations. For example, in *Still and Ash Is The Purest White* (*jianghu ernü* 江湖儿女, 2018), people seem to travel to abandoned, displaced rural spaces or ruined sites and encounter seemingly random appearances of UFOs. The UFO symbolises the possibility of the human body and soul travelling through time and the universe and is also represented as the ultimate solution for humans to solve the dilemma of survival - when people are dislocated from and cannot break through the predicament of their current environment, they yearn for escape and access to another realm.

Compared with modern nihilism, Jia has never been cryptic, but devotes himself to the detail and trivia of socio-historical transformation and its left-behinds. His work depicts people's core crisis in a turbulent and changing reality and translates individual and private experiences into collective memory and characteristics of the times. Jia also captures the decisive moment of the present, placing it under the prism of history (*Xiao Wu* 小武, 1998). He takes dislocation to be the relationship between the world and social marginals and "translate[s] a corner into the world or the world into a corner" (Tencent 2015). For example, *The World* (*shi jie* 世界 2004) focuses on rural migrant workers' urban imaginations and observes their lives in an international theme park that mimics the globalised, spectacular world. The contrast between the workers'

dim, claustrophobic, rough shelters and the vibrant, vast and grand theme park they work in configures dislocation as a merging of dream and reality. The floating, dream-like camerawork shooting the copycat landmarks shows the sense of artificiality and fantasied pastiche that attaches to the workers' illusive dreams and bleak reality. When depicting their off-work lives, the camera adopts a realistic, documentary style, stressing the subjects' displacement from the world they have long desired.

Peng Fei 鹏飞 (born 1982):

In-between journeys: problematic emotions of wandering outcasts.

Peng Fei was born in Beijing in 1982. He graduated from the Directing department at La FEMIS in Paris. In 2015, Peng's feature debut *Underground Fragrance* (*di xia xiang* 地下香) won Best Film at the 72nd Venice Film Festival and the Golden Hugo Award in the Emerging Director competition of the Chicago Film Festival. As a left-behind child himself, Peng has been interested in exploring rural areas (Wang 2018: 20). In 2016, he spent a year in Cangyuan, Yunnan, the border villages between China and Myanmar and made his feature *The Taste of Rice Flower* (*mi hua zhi wei* 米花之味, discussed in this chapter). It was shortlisted for the "Venice Day" section of the 74th Venice Film Festival in 2017.

Peng's work is introverted, delicate and portrays the displaced population in

contemporary Chinese society with subtlety and sensitivity; in this way he cleverly and poignantly represents stories of the vulnerable in modern Chinese society (Tencent, Xinhua 2015). In his early career as a screenwriter, Peng wrote the script for Cai Ming-liang's *Stray Dog* (*jiao you* 郊游, 2013) which is the story of an unemployed man's meaningless life as a stray human. From then on, Peng has been interested in exploring dislocated lives in contemporary Chinese society. In *Rice*, Peng examines a returned female migrant worker's alienated life and world view after she goes back to her rural home. In *Fragrance*, Peng focuses on Beijing's floating population who reside in underground apartments. The film intentionally avoids eye-level angles and observes the marginal who are often positioned against incomplete or ruined construction sites or in underground, claustrophobic spaces filmed from canted, high and low angles. The cinematography evokes a sense that these driftors cannot properly find their own space in the urban landscape, a challenge which is the cause of their anxiety and misery.

Like Zhang Ming, Peng also uses characters' travels and mobility to create a sense of flow, but Peng tends to show their insignificance and invisibility in the crowd. Peng also illustrates a sense of "wetness" in portraying characters' dislocation as in Zhang's work. In *Fragrance*, he contrasts a bright, scenic lake designed to enhance the luxurious residence with the protagonists' flooded underground apartment, its broken pipes and the ceaseless sound of dripping

tap water. This creates a chilling sense of decadence when the wealth is set against decaying urban environments and the misery of poverty. The migrants' apartments are set in subterranean labyrinths with entangled wires and cables. These are cramped spaces constructed between two-dimensional squared blocks where life is constrained between flat surfaces and straight lines. The contrast between the upper and lower highlights a distinct social stratification where underground the characters' mental state and their unobtainable urban dreams seem destined to obscurity.

Teng Congcong 腾丛丛 (born 1985):

People on the margins: hopes, struggles, solutions

Born in 1985, Teng Congcong studied Editing at the Beijing Film Academy. In 2019, she wrote and directed her first feature film, *Send Me to the Clouds* (*song wo shang qing yun* 送我上青云, discussed in this chapter), which was nominated for the Best Director's Debut of the 32nd China Film Golden Rooster Awards. With this film, she was nominated for the Best Director Award for Asian Newcomers in the 22nd Shanghai International Film Festival.

Before making her own film, she worked as the editor for *Wangdrak's Rain Boots* (*wangzha de yu xue* 旺扎的雨靴 2018, Lhapal Gya 拉华加) and *The Orchid Season* (*lan cao shi jie* 兰草时节 2016, Du Jinsui 杜金穗). Both films focus on the dreams and struggles of people in marginal communities. The

former tells the story of a rural Tibetan boy's dream of getting a pair of rain boots; the latter focuses on an elderly female brain specialist after she learns about her own onset of Alzheimer's; she knows the result of the disease but still struggles against her fate.

Teng is keen on investigating people's hopes and struggles through the tensions between individuals, family and social relations. His characters tend to be on a path which involves rethinking their positions within society and in their relationships with their families. In exploring modern people's stresses, their state of being set adrift and how they face their loneliness by displacing themselves from the fast-moving urban world (DayDay News 2019). Her previous career in dislocation-themed films and her hopes of speaking out for the disadvantaged led her to her production of *Clouds*, a film about a female journalist's journey of self-discovery to the countryside after she is diagnosed with ovarian cancer. The film also involves themes of broken family relations, gender segregation and sexual harassment at work, and the problems of being ageing and left-over, all of which are key phenomena for contemporary urban Chinese women.

Gu Xiaogang 顾晓刚 (born 1988):

Home-town sentiments and disorientation in poetic, painterly visuals.

Born in Fuyang Township, Zhejiang in 1988, Gu graduated from Zhejiang

University of Science Technology with a major in fashion design and marketing. He became obsessed with cinema from his third year and began to teach himself. In 2012, he shot his first short documentary *Natural Farmer Old Jia* (*ziran nongren lao jia* 自然农人老贾). In 2015, his documentary feature *Planting Life* (*zhong zhi rensheng* 种植人生) won the Best Documentary Feature Award at the 9th FIRST Youth Film Festival. He entered the Director Training class at Beijing Film Academy in the same year. In 2017, he directed his first feature film *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains* (*chun jiang shui nuan* 春江水暖 discussed in this chapter). The film became the closing film of Critics Week at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2019. In the same year, Gu won the best director award of the 13th FIRST Youth Film Festival with this film.

Gu comes from a small Southern, mountain township in China; he is referred to as the “mountain youth” and has always been interested in “telling everyone the story of his hometown” and rural lives (Yangguang 2020). Through exploring the stages of people returning to the rural life from Shanghai, Gu’s short documentary and documentary feature *Planting* and *Natural Farmer*, filmed before his feature debut, provide in-depth discussions of the concept of farming and the problem of rural resettling of the urban returnees.

Gu’s focus on dislocation draws on the tension between returnees’ homeland

attachment and their simultaneous alienation from their roots. In *Dwelling*, the heroine goes back to her township hometown after graduating from an urban university; her hometown sentiments and intimacy with the town of her birth are interwoven with a sense of estrangement. In *Planting*, the returning urban couple initially plan for a utopian pastoral life but end up with family collapse and vanished affections due to the mundane and seemingly robotic routines of rural life.

Gu's style is developed from Chinese landscape painting, mountain and water landscapes tend to be in water colours (detail analysed in the Summary and Cinematography sections). His use of long shots and long takes echoes long scrolls in Chinese painting, which is what he has been interested in since his undergraduate, mimics the flow of the circulation of time and life and the eternal extension of temporality and space as if people are dislocated from the current space-time through their wanderings (Gu and Su 2020: 101). For example, in *Dwelling*, we repeatedly see characters walking along the riverbank in extreme long takes with the camera following their steps up and down. In *Planting*, Gu's camera follows the protagonists entering into the vast, wet, rice field in the distance. In the seed planting scenes, the characters' footsteps and their actions of planting are shot through the reflection in the water; while in the harvest scene, we see close-ups of people washing the crops from a direct shot from above, then the camera pans gradually in a

circular motion. There is a clear dramatic and fictional style in Gu's documentary. He extends and disrupts time and space congruities to contrast people's idealisation of countryside living and the harsh tedium of its realities. Such attention to the tension between the imagined and the real and related dislocations of the senses set a preliminary foundation for the dislocation narrative in his feature.

1.2 Dislocation filmmakers and the painterly aesthetics

Many of the filmmakers cited in this thesis have studied the arts or interested in Chinese painting. The pursuit of blandness, the bare natural world, the themes of ruins, journeying, and spiritual fulfilment in nature in Chinese landscape painting (hereafter, CLP) permeate their films. The idea of the "geo-narrative" through which topography and specific locations guide the viewer's experience is key to Chinese landscape painting; it is an engaging and "dynamic player" (Kindall 2016: 6). Geo-narrative involves "naturalistic immediacy", the ability to locate the viewer and "the active re-experiencing of the topographic narrative" (ibid: 11). It parallels the core of this thesis in which directors evoke their characters' dislocation and empowerment through their geo-emotional travels. In traditional Chinese landscape painting, human figures "travel, dwell or ramble" in nature (Hearn 2008: 20).

The visuals in CLP craft the scenography. They are concerned with the

“brushstroke, line, inkwash, colour, shape...space, time, motion, rhymes” that contribute to the notion of *qiyun* 气韵 - the “expressive quality of the work beyond formal representation”, offering “spiritual communion between artist, object, work, and audience” (Duan 2018: 219). It is rooted in the concept of the “wandering of the spirit” and reaching satisfaction within the self through travelling (Jullien 2012: 165). Similarly, in what I argue are a genre of dislocation films, filmmakers’ painterly styles communicate how human emotions are delivered through the spaces characters travel in, sometimes immersing the viewer, making landscape a “living and dynamic entity” through *qiyun* (Egan 2016: 283). The wandering spirits of the characters in their travels will finally result in a more complete and revived self.

The emergence of CLP as a distinctive genre can be traced to the Six Dynasties 六朝 (*liuchao*) (220-618) (Shao 1988: 183). It evolved through the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907) into an independent genre that conveys multiple convictions and a refined scholarly taste, representing “a peak of the Chinese artistic genius” (Jiang and Zhu 2018: 296; Briessen 1998: 48). The Song Dynasty 宋 (960–1279) reached a peak in landscape painting (Bush 2012: 94; Hu 2021: 2). Therefore, most of the paintings examined here are from those periods.

Travelling in nature is a key characteristic that links painterly style to

dislocation cinema in which filmic visual representations adopt certain qualities from paintings. Wilderness not only refers to desolate spaces, but also represents the transcendent “natural/ecological law” and “vitality” in Chinese philosophy and art (Chen and Chen 2020: 253). Derived from Daoist idea that “social frameworks” involve the “corruption” of humans; in this context, journeys to nature are a source of “spiritual cultivation” (Shaw 1988: 185). Mountains became the “staple” of CLP as Buddhists and Daoists searched for mountain temples where they could “cleanse the mind of worldly thoughts and cravings through communion with [a] nature” which embodied the “truth” (Diep 80-81; Sullivan 1979: 26). In the dislocation films CLP meditates the illusory nature of the real 幻 (*huan*) and echoes characters’ dream-states in nature (Ortiz 1999: 28). During the Southern Song 南宋 (1127-1279), the image of eremitism was highly praised; it was often imagined as a pastoral utopia, a home-coming after retirement, or retreating from busy urban life. As represented by philosopher Zhu Xi’s 朱熹 (1130-1200) enchantment of “disinterested cultivation” the Southern Song bucolic fantasy rejected official appointments and went down to rural temples (Ortiz 1999: 21-22). For others it might be the “harsher reality of political exile”, yet some of them chose to embrace spiritual nourishment in nature by romanticising and glorifying exile landscapes where one could be “unfettered” by brutal and turbulent reality (Sturman 2016: 186). Rural-going marks “the opposite of the life of privilege that came with service in the capital” (ibid).

Just like the ancient spiritual quests, our film characters' distant travels also aim for inner refreshment or revival -- but in a secular and subjective. Painters like Li Cheng 李成 (919-967) and Fan Kuan 范宽(950-1032) paid attention to details and distance to portray the monumental landscape with the shifting weight of colour and strokes, immersing the viewer in profound wilderness (cinematic parallel see Wang Rui's cinematography in which expressive lines and changing colour depth break the dullness of the barren land).



Fig. 5.1 Li Cheng, *Fog in the Distant Forest* (茂林远岫图), ink on silk, (Shenyang: Liaoning Provincial Museum, 1050).



Fig. 5.2 *Northern Story* (1997, Wang Rui)

Nature-as-shelter imagery and images of caves also link CLP and cinema. For example, the image of a smiley man in a hollow trunk in Shitao's 石涛 (1642-1707) work suggests human's spiritual fulfilment and a sense of security in nature. It reminds us of the Holly Mountain scene in Zhang Ming's *The Pluto Moments* (2018) where the heroine feels spiritually inspired and fulfilled in a mountain cave (discussed in detail in the Theme/Narrative section).



Fig. 5.3 Shitao, *Portrait of Blind Saint* (瞎尊者像), ink and colour on paper, (Beijing: the Palace Museum, 1696).



Fig. 5.4 Lu Shiren, detail, leaf from *Famous Sites of Southern Jiangsu* (江南名胜图), ink and colour on paper, (Nanjing: Nanjing Museum, early 17th century).





Figs. 5.5-5.7 *The Pluto Moments* (2018, Zhang Ming): Duchun in the cave.

In CLP, the painter's vision is "a mental image" portrayed through expressive and fluid "control of brush and ink" according to his "mind", not imitating the actual appearance of the landscape (Vanderstappen 2014: 21). The "one-stroke" style usually externalises the painter's "mental state" to the "limitless" in that everything is woven into a single flow (Hu 2021: 134-157). The sense of journeying is visible in the free flow of stroke that elicits the "extension of [painters'] own body and capture their "physical movements" (Bush 2012: 216-217; Fong 1992: 5). Wu Daozi's 吴道子 (681-759) expressivity was shown through visuals that "broke up and left spaces between dots and strokes" (Bush 2012: 61). In cinema, this sense of perspectival travel or travelling view that visually follows linear fluidity is visible in the one-stroke or extensive brushwork. In the examples below, single lines imply spatial extension and the characters' travelling point-of-view.



Fig. 5.8 Wu Daozi, *Jialing River Landscape* (嘉陵江山水三百里图), detail, ink on paper, (London: British Museum, 742-755).



Fig. 5.9 *China Affair* (2013, Zhang Ming)

Wu Zhen's 吴镇 (1280–1354) work reinforces the subject's isolation through the empty foreground and the unnatural, dissonant shapes of leaves which is viewed by the subject and which projects his disturbed mind. Comparably, in Zhang Ming's *In Expectation* (1996), a boat seems to be placed in the middle of nowhere in minimalistic shape whereas its surroundings constitute complex, piled patterns, intensifying the lonesomeness of the boat. It also seems that it

has been inspired by Wu's wet stroke for the watery quality and the hemp-fibre style to show the clear texture of loaded lines surrounding the isolated subject.



Fig. 5.10 Wu Zhen, *Fisherman* (渔父图), ink on paper, (Beijing: Palace Museum, 1350).



Fig. 5.11 Qiu Ying, *Red Cliff* (赤壁图), ink and colour on paper, (Shanghai: Shanghai Museum, 1500–50).



Fig. 5.12 *In Expectation* (1996, Zhang Ming)

Emptiness is a “particular concept” and “images of ruins never disappeared in traditional China” (Wu 2013: 35). For Jullien, CLP emphasises the constant alternation and travel through “there is/not”, “going in/coming out”, “emerging/submerging”, “half-light/half-dark” through which binary visuals and emotions “communicate with each other” (2012: 1-14). “Blandness” became the “standard characteristic” in CLP; the highest requirement became the “faint”, “remote and bland” scenes of “bleak winter trees or wide-open undefined spaces” because it is difficult to capture the emotion (Li 2010: 179).

The idea of meaningfulness in seeming nothingness is referred to as “still points” and echoes Laozi’s idea that “great fullness seems empty, but the function is limitless” (Li 2020: 284; 1999: 139; Cheng 1994).

Mei Qing 梅清 (1624-1697) painted rocks and mountains in rounded shape, suggesting distance through a sense of vagueness and roundness. Lush trees afar contrast with withered ones where the subject is positioned as if the distant land appears in his imagination. It evokes the subject’s tangible circumstance which is fuelled by a sense of lonesomeness and barrenness: he is looking at his distant destination in his potential journey. The painting is largely occupied by empty space, yet such nothingness and distance evokes the extension of landscape, echoing the Daoist idea of the “ultimate void” (Wong 1986: 144). Comparably in the films, distance or empty space unites the “perception and imagination” and transcends “the finite to the infinite”; it allows the travelers to feel and to actualise the sublime of the wholly other (Hsu 345-346; Otto 1969: 69). Such void-scapes “assist the viewer in recognizing emptiness” that is displaced from urban chaos and its meaning for the characters (Macree 2013: 37). The axes of distance in Chinese landscape not only suggest “the depth of a pictorial space”, but a “visual-mental or ‘meditative’ journey from the centrality of the viewer to a ‘distant’ land” beyond the scene; such landscapes are “invested, with a human meaning” (Jiang and Zhu 2018: 295).



5.13 Mei Qing, *Landscape after Guoxi* (仿郭熙山水), ink and colour on paper, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1693).



5.14 *Still Life* (2006, Jia Zhangke): silhouetted character sharply split from the airy void of nature



Fig. 5.15 *China Affair* (2013, Zhang Ming): character positioned on a nearby island looking at the quasi-wishful, blurry and illusive landscape afar.

In characters' remote cinematic journeys, the sense of incompleteness in landscape, therefore, evokes their quest for spiritual fulfilment. Blandness implies a state of equilibrium/harmony without excess and disturbance which characterises urban lives; therefore, through travelling in the bland rural land, adventurers can reach the "root and pursuit of human actings" (Chu 2015: 112). It is a way to find inner nourishment in "the miracle (of presence)" and "the pathos (of absence)" (Jullien 2009: 7). CLP stresses the interdependent and structural correlation between the polarities of "high and low, vertical and horizontal, compact (massive) and fluid, opaque and transparent, motionless and moving" through which "fullness...is opened wide by the void" (Jullien 2009: 84). Painting styles such as *liukong* 留空 (leaving blanks) and *bubai* 布白

(arranging whiteness) suggest that emptiness and fullness are “mutually generating” (Fan and Sullivan 2015: 566). Therefore, it symbolises the “dualities that hold the world in tension” and their “infinite exchanges” (Jullien 2009: 122). This idea is paralleled in cinematic landscapes of dislocation films where the travelling characters are bounded between extremes in terms of life, space, culture, emotion and psychology; yet their constant searching and journeys between the boundaries of excess and lack will eventually help to achieve their internal “fullness”.



Fig. 5.16 Dong Yuan, *The Rivers Xiao and Xiang* (潇湘图), ink and colour on silk, (Beijing: Palace Museum, 907-960).

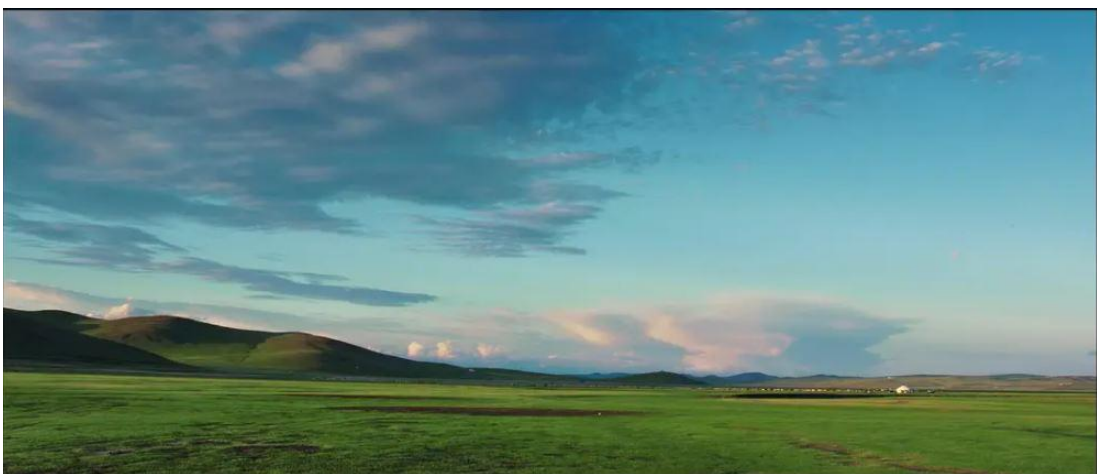


Fig. 5.17 *Chaogtu with Sarula* (Wang Rui, 2019)

CLP stresses the sense of visual depth, distance and profundity. The cinematography of dislocation films seems to be inspired by CLP's Three Distance aesthetics - high distance (looking up to a mountain from its foot), deep distance (looking into the space beyond a mountain from its front), and level distance (gaze from a mountain nearby) (Murashige 1995: 342). Such shifting perspectives in cinema direct our gaze and lead the viewer and characters' journeys. Deep focus in landscape shots "open[s] a third dimension" and reveals "complex relationship" of visual elements (Andrew 2010: 75; Byrnes 2012: 66). Foreground, middle ground, and background unfold simultaneously and scrutinise the deep and intimate attachments between the human and the natural through this visual triad.



Fig. 5.18 Wang Meng, *Zhilan Room* (芝兰室图), detail, ink on paper, (Taipei: Palace Museum, date unknown).



Figs. 5.19-5.20 *In Expectation* (1996, Zhang Ming)



Fig. 5.21 *Still Life* (2006, Jia Zhang)

In painting, we are invited to “join the travelling artist”; in cinema, we accompany the character’s immediate movement of “searching” and “experiencing” (Duan 2018: 50). This enhances the wandering-spirit concept through a sense of ongoing alternation, arousing “spiritual solace and refreshment” - the feeling generated from travelling in nature in Chinese culture (Sullivan 1961: 145). For example, Wang Meng 王蒙 (1308-1385) and Guo Xi’s 郭熙 (1000-1090) work expresses a “vivid sense of recession” in terms of pattern, blurring the boundary of rivers and clouds and evokes a sense of dream-walking in a distance-levelled “dramatic composition” (Hearn 2000: 88). Comparably, in Gu Xiaogang’s *Planting Life* (2015), as the urban couple arrive in their dream village, the camera follows their travel in a

dream-like, “cloudy” manner, implying their utopian imagination of the countryside.



Fig. 5.22 Guo Xi, *Clearing Autumn Skies over Mountains and Valleys* (溪山秋霁图), ink and light colour on silk, (Washington, DC: The Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1072).



Fig. 5.23 *Planting Life* (2015, Gu Xianggang)

One can also observe the surreal quality in CLP. For example, in Emperor Huizong's 宋徽宗 (1082-1136) the unconventional use of dazzling green appears to be incoherent with the hue of the rest of painting; the birds seem to

be responding to the leaves with “drops of lacquer added to their eyes [to] give the lifelike touch” (Hearn 2008: 35). In dislocation films, bizarre colours and characters’ responses to them also suggest particular emotions.



Fig. 5.24 Emperor Huizong, *Finches and Bamboo* (竹禽图), ink and colour on silk, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, early 12th century)

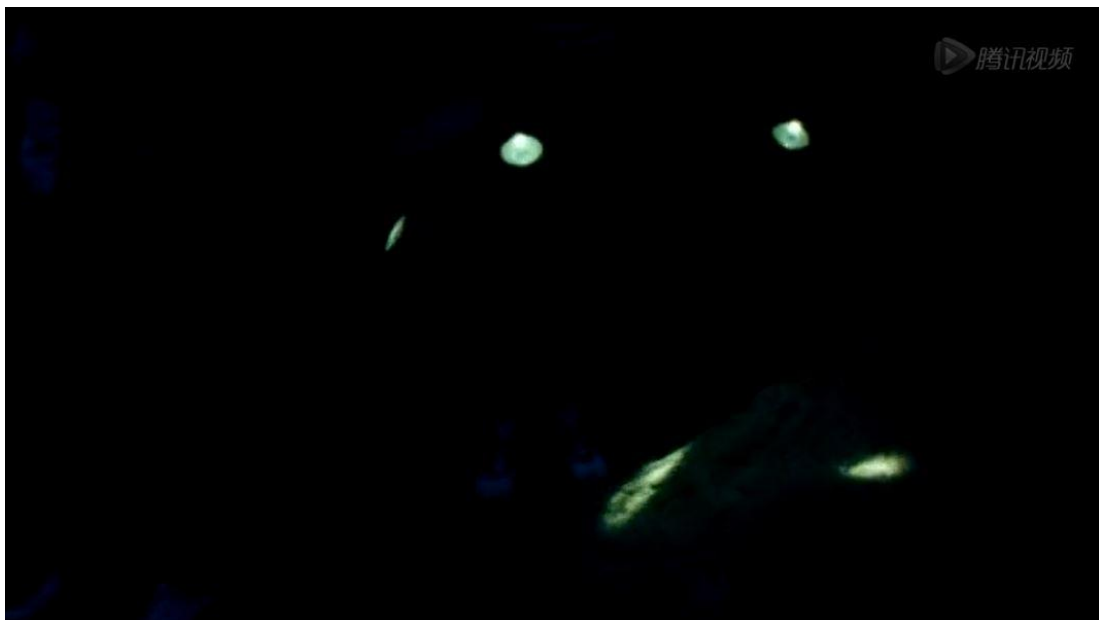


Fig. 5.25 *Weekend Plot* (2002, Zhang Ming)



Fig. 5.26 *Chaogtu with Sarula* (2019, Wang Rui)

Disproportional and slanted angles also add to surreal touches in some paintings, illustrating images of threatening nature, as if landscape is swallowing humans, magnifying the danger and overwhelming feeling of trembling that nature brings.

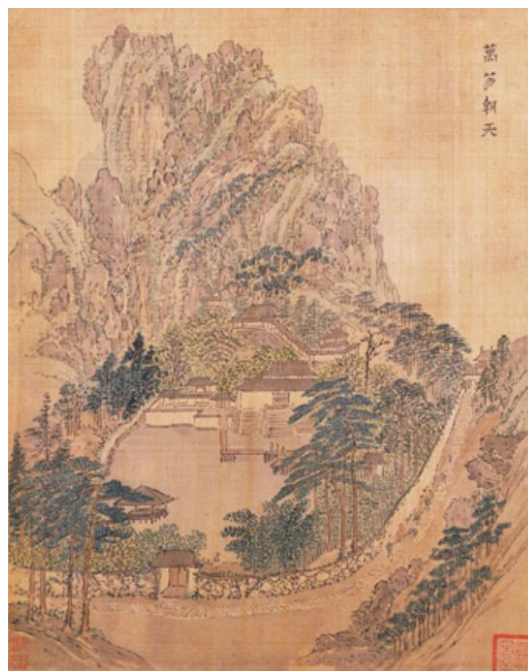


Fig. 5.27 Zhang Hong, Leaf from *Twelve Views of Sutai* (苏台十二景), ink and

colour on paper, (Beijing: Palace Museum, 1638).



Fig. 5.28 Huang Xiangjian, *Malongzhou Road*. Leaf from *Ten-Thousand Li in Search of My Parents* (万里寻亲图), nine-leaf album, ink and colour on paper, (Nanjing: Nanjing Museum, 1656).



Fig. 5.29 *In Expectation* (1996, Zhang Ming)



Fig. 5.30 *Weekend Plot* (2002, Zhang Ming)



Fig. 5.31 *Planting Life* (Gu Xiaogang, 2015).

In some paintings, we see human spaces engulfed and enveloped by nature at a high angle. Similarly in cinema, high-angle shots of distanced characters or human constructions enfolded in the landscape convey a sense of the detachment of human spaces. Huang applies dry, thick and lapping brushwork to illustrate the enfolding nature of landscape, neglecting human spaces. The

image of a “dangerous journey of a solitary man through a foreign land” composes “envelop[ing]” landscape to intensify “desperate loneliness” and to capture the “physical and emotional isolation” (Kindall 2016: 158-159).



Fig. 5.32 Huang Xiangjian. Leaf from *Ten-Thousand Li in Search of My Parents* (万里寻亲图), nine-leaf album, ink on paper, (Beijing: National Museum of China, 1696).



Fig. 5.33 Huang Xiangjian. Leaf from *Ten-Thousand Li in Search of My Parents* (万里寻亲图), ink and colour on paper, (Nanjing: Nanjing Museum, 1658).



Fig. 5.34 *Chaogtu with Sarula* (Wang Rui, 2019).



Fig. 5.35 *The Pluto Moments* (Zhang Ming, 2017).



Fig. 5.36 *China Affair* (Zhang Ming, 2013).

Chinese ruin-aesthetics is derived from *huagu* 怀古 (“lamenting/mediating” on the past) poetry and paintings in which poets, painters or subjects are in front of historical ruins or “ruined entrenchment” (Wu 2013: 23). For example, Shitao’s 石涛 (1642-1707) *Flower-Rain Terrace* shows that the subject is standing in a desolate platform away from human communities. The single, lonesome figure, and empty space and the distant human construction parallel

the images in Jia Zhangke and Peng Fei's cinematography.



Fig. 5.37 Shitao, *Flower-Rain Terrace*, from *Eight Views of the South* (溪南八景图册), album of 8 leaves, ink and light colour on paper, (Nanjing: Terrace in Nanjing, late 1690s).



Fig. 5.38 *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006): migrant workers in demolished building

watching skyscrapers afar.



Fig. 5.39 *Still Life* (Jia Zhangke, 2006): a tightrope walker balancing on the wire connecting two hollowed-out buildings against the mountain behind.





Figs. 5.40-5.41 *Underground Fragrance* (Peng Feng, 2015).

Shitao's *An Overgrown Hillock* depicts a ruined Ming mansion after the Ming's surrender to the Qing. The painting is constituted of spots, dotted pattern, mists and zigzagged layers; long dots and scratched river lines mimic live, destructive movement heading towards the building. Deep focus leads us in a vertical visual trajectory, observing the distant ruins. Such spatial composition and visuals are visible in Peng Fei's *Underground Fragrance*.



Fig. 5.42 Shitao, *An Overgrown Hillock*, from *Reminiscences of Qinhuai River* (秦淮忆旧), album of 8 leaves, ink and light colour on paper, (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1695–6).

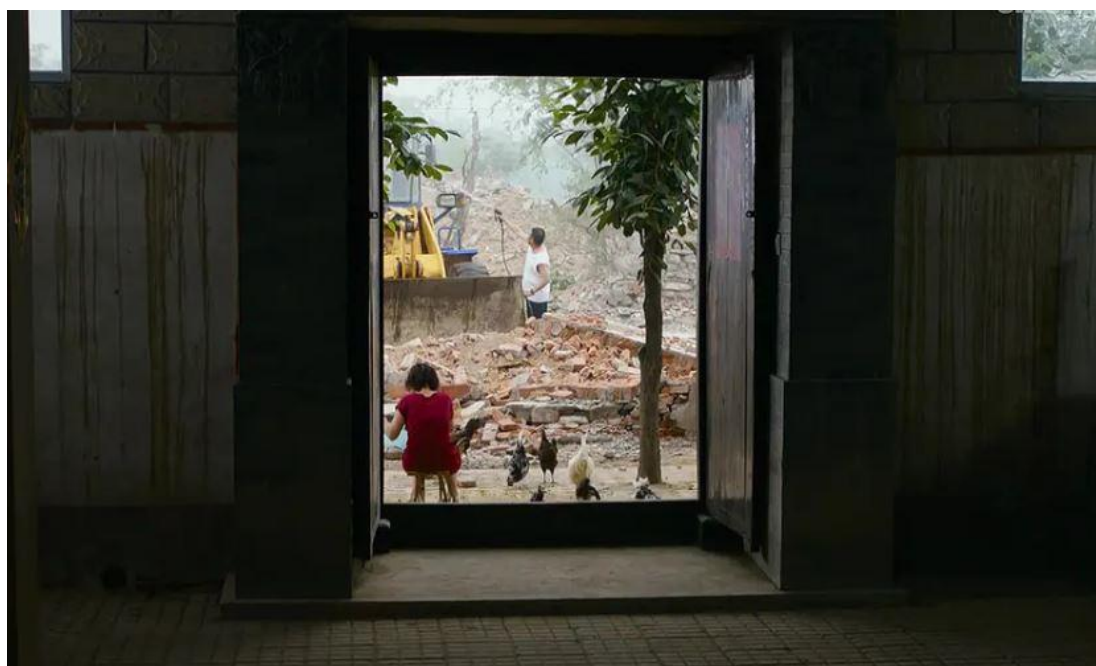


Fig. 5.43 *Underground Fragrance* (Peng Fei, 2015).

In Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2009), we view the immediate action of demolishing, or the ruins-in-motion from a distance, feeling a sense of displacement in

space and time. The hurricane-like force of destruction also appears in Su Shi's 苏轼(1037-1101) painting in which viewers are forced to confront a space vanishing in front of them.



Fig. 5.44 Su Shi, *Withered Tree and Strange Rock* 枯木怪石图, ink on paper, (Hong Kong, 11th century).



Fig. 5.45 *24 City* (Jia Zhangke, 2009).

Ruins in nature are also a common theme in CLP. Li Cheng's 李成 (919-967) rounded strokes with "dragon claw-like" trees offer a surrealist sense of

momentum and the sudden image of decay instead of depicting the natural rhythm of steady life cycles (Wu 2013: 42). Like in the films, such techniques create a “space of fantasy”, estranged from both space and time (Schultz 2016: 456). A decaying nature heightens the sense of devastation, disturbance and a potential threat. The painters did not portray landscapes as real. As possible rural worlds, rather, they show us a magical realist tendency as if rocks and trees are struggling and suffering; they speak to the viewer/traveler in a physically threatening way. In dislocation films, such transcendent power of decay is also common in the depiction of trees, woods or vertical shapes.



Fig. 5.46 Li Cheng, *Reading the Stele* (读碑窠石图), ink on silk, (Osaka: Osaka City Museum of Fine Art, 13th-14st century).



Fig. 5.47 *Northern Stories* (Wang Rui, 1997).



Fig. 5.48 *Underground Fragrance* (Peng Fei, 2015).



Fig. 5.49 *Planting Life* (Gu Xiaogang, 2015).

Summary

As with the filmmakers in Chapter 3, the directors discussed above were born either during the Cultural Revolution, or soon after the Reform (1978). Beginning their career in the 90s or after the 2000s, they experienced a wave of Reform that stimulated massive rural-urban migration. This period of floating populations and great socio-geographical transition has tended to shape the filmmakers' focus on themes of mobility, journeying and its effects on individuals.

Most of the featured filmmakers studied at Beijing Film Academy from 1985 to the 1990s or after the 2000s. After the Reform, the Academy focused on both practical and theoretical education. It restored the Academic Committee, founded the Journal of the Beijing Film Academy, and established the Film Theory Research Office in 1982. In the same year, the school leaders went to

Australia to attend the International Federation of Film and Television Institutions of Higher Education, then the Academy sent a group of visiting scholars abroad to study Western cinematic ideas. From 1991 onwards, the BFA opened to more international collaborations. For example, the Asia Pacific Film and Television Training Seminar was held at the BFA in 1991. The BFA's international presence was further expanded with its increasing Sino-foreign co-productions, such as Mu Duyuan's 穆德远 *The Chinese* 中国人 (*zhongguoren*, 1992). Directors like Zhang Ming and Wang Rui (analysed above) who studied at the BFA during the 80s and the 90s studied film theory and practice and were influenced by cinemas from the West. For example, Zhang's Wushan trilogy shows a huge influence from Michelangelo Antonioni's style. For example, elliptical, open-ended plots, characters' constant drifting and the sense of exile, surreal or random images elicit characters' disorientation and estrangement; seemingly meaningless or absurd moments convey subjects' anomie and disconnection to the real world.⁵⁰

In the new millennium, China entered a new period of rapid development in film education and the film industry. In 2002, the BFA stated its goal of building a world-class film academy. It then established the Institute of Chinese Film Industry Research and the Chinese Film Culture Research Institute, focusing

⁵⁰ Parallels see Zhang's *In Expectation* 巫山云雨 (*wushan yunyu* 1996), *Weekend Plot* (2001), *Hot Soup* 热汤 (*re tang* 2021) and Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) and *L'Eclisse* (1962).

on both Chinese film culture and global cinema studies. It has influenced young filmmakers such as Gu Xianggao and Teng Congcong's interests both in local/traditional Chinese cultural concepts and the ways in which their work speaks to the global auditorium. The Academy has created various platforms and set up film exhibitions and awards, such as the International Student Film and Video Festival, the Golden Word Award, the Director's Award, and the New Force Award. It invites influential filmmakers from home and abroad as guest professors/speakers, such as Ang Lee, Wong Kar Wai and Luc Besson (BFA 2021; Wang 2018).

BFA is also one of the key co-organisers of the Beijing International Film Festival - one of the "most influential annual cultural festival[s] around the globe and plays an irreplaceable role in the development of China's film industry" (Netfest 2021). BFA is also in charge of the festival's core reviewing and judging process and offers opportunities and funding for filmmakers (BFA 2019; Wu 2018). Apart from the filmmakers who have studied in the BFA, those who have not studied there have also brought their work to the festival, such as Peng Fei and they have also been invited to speak in masterclasses and panel discussions (Sina 2018; Jilin Daily 2020).

During the 80s-90s market economy when the first group of directors who were born in the 60s and the 70s started their careers, Chinese people's

concept of home began to be challenged and destabilised, and the unbalanced development between the north and the south, the difference between urban and rural areas, intensified population movement. As a result, the traditional family structure gradually underwent structural changes; the new economic situation and the traditional notion of family came into conflict. This set of economic and social patterns spawned an increasing number of films.⁵¹

Travelling in-between spaces does not only represent the pain of the era and of society, but also implies a family-state metaphor. Apart from broken ties within individual families and filial bonds, we see the demolished or unfamiliar hometowns as the projection of an alienating urban-rural dichotomy, or homeland. For example, Zhang Yuan's 张元 *Seventeen Years* (*guo nian hui jia* 过年回家 1999) shows a female prisoner's unbearable home-coming experience in which the town has become an unfamiliar place in the seventeen-year social transformation. Comparably, Jia Zhangke's 贾樟柯 *Still Life* (*san xia haoren* 三峡好人) captures the disorientation of the fluid and ever-shifting world. In the protagonists' search for their respective partners, the film unfolds dramatic changes that have occurred in the external world that shatter people both emotionally and psychologically.

⁵¹ For example, Huang Jianzhong's 黄健中 *The Spring Festival* (*guo nian* 过年 1991) illustrates the demise of traditional family ethics during the period of change around the conflicts of five siblings and the parents, who are all part of the migrant population to varying degrees. The broken family and clashes stem from the incompatible old and new ideologies, and the family members' various material desires and their urban experiences.

During this era, most of the dislocation filmmakers identified above left their rural/township hometowns for Beijing to study film and arts. Zhang Ming, who went to the Beijing Film Academy from Wushan township, first failed the entrance exam twice and was then looked down upon by the city film students who had hand-on experience (Zhang and Zhou: 2017). He always privileges his hometown and the sense of travelling back in his film ethics, “Home is a traditional Chinese concept...I work in Beijing, grew up in Wushan, Wushan is my home and arouses my sympathy” (ibid). Instead of stressing rural-urban, tradition-modernity, minority-dominance tensions, Wang Rui positions the concept of travelling in-between as a universal moral question about one’s individual desire and social role. Going out/leaving the family is both a positive pursuit for oneself and an irresponsible act as regards the family, as Wang states, “I am not taking a particular position, there is no right and wrong in such travels” (Wang and Pao Kai 2019).

The other group of filmmakers were born in the 80s and started their careers in the 2010s when China’s social landscapes and policies were starting to shift back towards prioritising the countryside as a result of the concepts of the new socialist countryside, the moderately prosperous countryside and rural poverty alleviation (Ahlers 2014; CDRF 2017; Meyer-Clement and Zeuthen 2020; Xue et al. 2021: 514). In 2017, Xi’s speech to the 19th National Congress stated that “lucid water and lush mountains are invaluable assets” (*lǚshuǐqǐngshān*

jiushi jinshanyinshan 绿水青山就是金山银山). This idea gave rise to the state's "ecological civilisation" which combines rural ecology, sustainability and healthy economic development from a well-preserved and nourished nature (CBCBSC 2017; Lo 2020: 1029). In 2018, China released the Strategic Plan of Rural Revitalisation (2018–2022) (*xiangcun zhenxing zhenlue guihua* 乡村振兴战略战略规划) which also prioritises rural development over cities (SCPRC 2018, 2019c).

As a result, the wave of positive reverse migration, including "rural talents' return' and urbanites' exploring life in the countryside, started to serve the aim of rural revitalisation.⁵² This tended to shape the filmmakers' focus on rural home-coming, city-to-village travels and related experiences. Gu Xiaogang, who has been living and working in the city since his higher education, always hopes to film "local records or a factbook about his hometown" to capture the transformation of Fuyang village (which has now become a district of Hangzhou) and to show how urban transformation has had a huge impact on local villages and townships (Daoyanbang and Gu 2019).⁵³ Gu associates home-coming with a panoramic view of travel and change (Piaoshen and Gu 2019).

Taking a different position, Peng Fei is a Beijinger who has a passion for the

⁵² See Chapter 4, pp.14, 17-20.

⁵³ In Fuyang's case, its development has been "sped up" by the G20 Summit, the 2020 Asian Olympic and the rapid urbanisation of Hangzhou.

countryside and for marginal environments. His notion of dislocation and journeying is not only about individual issues, but “universal problems and a general social commentary about our environment and nature, our relations to contemporary society and history, and how people inhabit their spaces” (Chu and Peng 2017). By shifting his perspective to non-urban-dominant communities or environments, he is able to observe the problems that people encounter in common and how they respond to them.

Apart from the people who make their journeys back to their countryside homes, the other category of travel is of urban middle-class women’s forays out of town. Instead of portraying the middle-class as the epitome of socio-economic success, the filmmakers interrogate the self-indulgence, desolation and disorientation of materialist lives.

The number of films made about urban middle-class women have increased since the 2000s. They can be contextualised within the “postsocialist prioritization of economic globalization and urban consumerism” that glamourises white collar beauties or professional women and projects them as the desired subjects of cosmopolitanism and modernity (Li 2017: 87-88). Scholarship has been widely focused on the glamourisation of such female images in chick-flicks (Berg and Leung 2012; Cai 2014; Fumian 2016; Yang 2020). These films overlook the negative experiences and critical problems

faced by urban middle-class Chinese women.

Since Xi's regime, women's domestic role has been reinforced; Chinese women are being squeezed out of the workplace by employers who penalise them if they have children, and by party officials urging them to focus on domestic life, family education and value (Sullivan and Liu-Sullivan 2021: 177; Wang 2017: 8). At the same time, those who have managed to keep working are increasingly earning less relative to men. By 2010, according to the latest official data, the average income of women in Chinese cities had fallen to 67 percent of that of men, and in the countryside to 56 percent. In 2017, approximately 54 percent of women said they had been asked about their marriage and childbearing status in job interviews (Qin 2019).

Zhang Ming and Teng Congcong take a sharp look at urban women's frustrations and dissatisfaction and at how they choose to revive themselves in remote countryside. Zhang hopes to show people's "dilemma and struggles with desire generally and the different mindsets of male and female" (Pengpai 2018). The female filmmaker, Teng, however, take a bold female perspective and show her sympathy for women's dilemma in contemporary Chinese society. Teng says that *Clouds* is a "brave film that exposes how difficult women's circumstances are in our society"; yet she rejects a feminist approach and hopes to "advocate mutual respect between male and female" (Qiaoke

and Teng 2019).

The directors studied above came from strong film and art backgrounds; some have also studied or worked in the fields of literature and the arts. Therefore, they adopt poetic and painterly styles in their films. Just like the filmmakers studied in Chapter 3 such as Liu Jie and Pema Tseden, they have all had rural experiences, either growing up in villages or townships, or having experience of living in the countryside. They are keen on scrutinising lives in rural environments; yet, they extend the scope of their settings, looking at rural-urban tensions, particularly their characters' journeys and transits between the two realms. The two categories of countryside travels are the home-returns of the rural heroines and the travels of urbanities who go on their rural "adventure". The filmmakers' work asks: to what extent are people's dislocating journeys the means of home-coming?

Section 2: Theme and Narrative

"The wanderer's separation from home interrupts the community of space and time in that 'both sides, instead, build up a system of pseudo-types of the other which is hard to remove and never can be removed entirely because the home-comer, as well as the welcomer, has changed' (Schuetz 1945:369). The home-comer, ironically, suffers a form of culture shock on his return: home means one thing to the stayer, another thing to the leaver, and still another to the home-comer" (Chan 2005: 10).

This section focuses on the theme and narrative of the dislocations involved in home-coming. In each case study, the female characters' displacement is different: an urban professional women's marginalisation due to gender and societal perspectives or a rural woman's return to her hometown experiencing alienation after working in the city. This section then explores the narrative features that shape representations of journeys to/back to rural spaces.

***Mountains May Depart* (*shanhe guren* 山河故人 2015, Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, hereafter, *Mountains*)**

The film's themes of travel, transit, loss and displacement play out against a narrative that emphasises physical and emotional distance and dislocation. Set in a Chinese township, Fengyang, the film follows a woman, Tao (Zhao Tao), on her life journey and observes her growing isolation from those close to her. Tao's problematic relation to home emerges in three separate time segments: 1999, 2014 and 2025. Her dislocation is geographical, cultural and emotional and is represented by her own sense of lacking love, family and friendship. Tao is the only one obsessed with the hometown, Fengyang. When she finally goes back home after running business in the city, her old friends, her husband and her family have all left her

Jia films the three separate time segments in three different aspect ratios,

each change signaling a transformation in time (Cai 2016: 56). Each stage is marked by a life transition, but it also marks a change in the way time is viewed. The 1999 segment is in a 4:3 “squarish aspect ratio, with a narrow depth of field” in which the camera is “restless” (Douglas 2016: 84). Tao, the town beauty with positive, enthusiastic attitudes towards life, is entangled in a love triangle with Jinsheng (Zhang Yi) and Liangzi (Liangjindong) who are close friends with Tao. Township life is simple and sometimes loud, sometimes enclosed, like the scenes in the Disco room. Images of disco rooms, Lion Dances and people’s prior intimacy shrink on the screen in the narrow aspect ratio. The first segment is full of crowds and panoramic images of people in the close, almost enclosed community. Tao feels close to Liangzi, but finally chooses the wealthier Jinsheng.

From the sixth minute into the film, Jia inserts documentary footage with mixed shooting lengths showing the lively atmosphere of the festival taking place. But the footage becomes blurred, the characters distorted, light and shadow mottled, and camera movements slowed. When Tao and Liangzi ride through the crowd, only they are in focus. The surroundings are blurry and diffused, making the pair stand out from the crowd. This image reminds the audience not to indulge in this moment, it is the moment where she gets detached from her former life. Everything thereafter is one of detachment and desolation.

The crowd is a crucial element in the narrative. The shots are filled with people's faces, composing a human flow that parallels the flow of the river beside which Tao and the two young men frequently meet. The depiction of crowds, alternating with the linear movement of the flowing river, evoke China's collective forward movement in the direction opened up by the Reform.

Tao flows along the river of time towards an unknown and estranged future. The dream-like passage also marks a divide between the first and the two following parts and seems to suggest that the actual film starts with the second part, Tao's journey back. Between the first and second segments, we see a reminiscent dream-like scene of burnt trees and farms while an off-screen announcement claims that forests are being destroyed in order to produce coal. This reference to Chinese environmental degradation foregrounds China's fast-paced development, which is the backdrop of the following two segments. Memories in cinema imply a site for personal "struggle" and "resistance" regarding "formation of identity and operations of power" (Foucault 1975: 28; Grainge 2018: 2). For Tao, her memories and nostalgia are "washed away" by the shifting time and narratively by the way she is positioned in our viewing of time. She is forcibly dragged out of her more comfortable past into the alienation of the present.



Figs. 5.50-5.51 Dream-like crowds, Tao's bygone days, time flow and her sense of loss back home.

In the second part, after divorce, Tao gets rich and we find her living in a luxury

home through the proceeds of managing gas stations; but there is only her dying father, dying dog and herself in her house and her son Daole (Dong Zijian) who has been living with his father in Australia since he was little. Tao's happy collective movements with her old friends of section one give way to sequences about individuals with a growing sense of distance from each other, particularly within family and social relations.

By 2025, Tao, in her fifties, is surrounded by no relatives, accompanied by no friends, and lives in an empty house. Jia widens the aspect ratio respectively - the urban China and developed townships in 2014 16: 9 and 2.35: 1 in the futuristic Australia and cosmopolitan China in 2025, evoking character development with extended views, freer mobility and increased material gain. However, human distance is also widened both geographically and emotionally. The widening spatial trajectories introduced in 2014 and 2025 consist of a remote connectivity represented by smart phone and plane motifs: broad networks of transitions, fluidity and speed. Ironically, these two points of reference feel much more lonely and empty as the extended spaces lack human connections.

The use of different screen formats parallels the multi-temporal structure of the film. It turns the visual and narrative dislocation into an experiential one. Contrasting to others who physically move away and adopt the identity of

“unrooted” people, Tao is the only one of her family, friends and past lovers who goes back home and strives hopelessly for a real attachment to the homeland, but eventually sinks into a state of eternal detachment from a present dominated by a super-flow of people, space and rapid social transformation (Pollacchi 2017: 219).

Dislocation in *Mountains* is driven by three factors: geographical distance, emotional alienation and cultural rootlessness. The physical (geographic) is associated with a notion of dystopia. For Deleuze, dystopia consists of immanence and transcendence, implying diversity, mobility and fluidity and “infinite movement or the movement of the infinite” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 37). It refers to a processes and the outcomes of desire-driven, individualistic, capitalist de-territorialisation or re-territorialisation that removes or restructures any “table reference point to reside on, any destination to arrive at and any roots to refer to” (Nebioğlu 2018: 6). Applying this notion to the film, dystopia is constructed through constant socioeconomic spatial variations which fly under the market economy. Cosmopolitan cities like Handan, Shanghai and Sydney, contrasted to Fenyang, mark the male characters’ ambition for re-territorialising in places which are stripped of any association with their actual homes, whereas the lost hometown of Fenyang has become a symbolic or allegorical home associated only with the heroine, Tao.

Emotional alienation and cultural rootlessness are intricately linked. Rapid social change might mark the loss of physical and spiritual connections to home, but there are complex and different motivations for severing one's roots. For Liangzi, leaving his rural home to the city is the only way to embody his new wealth and the dignity it should bring; Jinsheng needs to forget his hometown along with his unsuccessful marriage and financial losses. For this reason, Jingsheng even takes a foreign name "Peter" and settles in Australia. As for Daole, he may never have a hometown. He keeps his mother's keys, but could never find his way home. Interestingly, all male protagonists leave their hometown Fengyang forever and migrate to new places with fresh identities; while the heroine, Tao, experiences constant life changes and travels which do not block her decision to go back eventually. However, Fengyang has become just a place on the map, and the spiritual home has vanished together with her memories, family and the once familiar surroundings. The "spatial-visual" and "internal-psychological" qualities of Tao's hometown memories are disrupted by their "dependency on absence and deferral over the presence" (Jay 1994: 493-523; Kilbourn 2013: 4).

Moreover, Tao is a dislocated subject to her son Daole. Daole has been growing up abroad, forgetting his mother tongue. He even communicates with his father in English. This represents the cultural anxiety and identity crisis of migrating peoples under the influences of globalisation. The lack of the mother

symbolises the dual absence of his biological mother, Tao and his cultural mother, China. Tao has a double displacement. She is first displaced by the socioeconomic aspects of her era, and then is viewed as a distant entity by her son, a remote mother both biologically and culturally.

“Out-of-tune” images evoke narrative disconnection, arousing particular emotions that make us wonder why the filmmaker has introduced this sense of disturbance (Casetti 1999: 64). Towards the end of segment one where Tao and Jinsheng are about to get married, they stand by an icy river seen with layers of frozen mud and dust like a futuristic painting. Then we see a sudden explosion, leaving the two in silence with the explosion reverberating to the barking of a dog off-screen. This scene is both irrelevant to the narrative, and visually incompatible with 1999 Fengyang, it foreshadows the unknown change and the explosion of the world into a globalisation that Tao cannot keep up with. As Tao rides along the motorway, she accidentally witnesses and is shocked by an aircraft crash. This appears to be an impossible event for that time and place. Again, we are taken out of the narrative thread into a surrealist realm.



Figs. 5.52-5.53 Surreal images.

Such a surrealist fantasy echoes the aesthetics of early Chinese travel poetry discussed in Chapter 4. For example, in Li Bai's 李白 *A Dreaming Tour of*

Tianmu Mountain 梦游天姥吟留别, images of threatening nature, the feeling of sudden encounter out of nowhere, and visuals of booms and explosions parallel what Tao sees in the film: “Countless rocks overlap, the paths twist and bend... The bears roar, the dragons cry out, the springs in the rocks shake, making the forests tremble and the mountains quake. The clouds were dark and heavy... Lightning flashed and thunder roared as if the mountains were about to crumble” 千岩万转路不定...熊咆龙吟殷岩泉,栗深林兮惊层巅...云青青兮欲雨...列缺霹雳,丘峦崩摧. Li uses surrealist, unexpected images of fear, threat and the violence of nature to metaphorise his feeling during the An-Shi Rebellion 安史之乱 (755-753) when the country experienced great political shifts and was driven into turmoil led by the war between the generals An Lushan 安禄山(703-757) and Shi Siming 史思明(703-361), who betrayed the Tang court. It was a civil war for the ruling elite, signaling the turning point in the decline of the dynasty (Cui 2001: 20-29).

The sudden introduction of bizarre and fantasy images echoes the character's state of mind and the feeling of the dispossession of the self (Botz-Bornstein 2007: 44). Similarly, Tao's shock and fear of the crash parallels her feelings about the rapid transformation of a world that astounds and imperils her. People's response of inexpressible panic, fear and disorientation to the shifting world is actualised by surreal imagery like explosion and crash.

Tao the Anti-heroine

Tao is not a conventionally caring and lovable heroine. She manipulates men according to her own “selfish” will; she is sometimes aggressive and displays unattractive masculine qualities; she is not a traditional family woman and is always in search of fun. She still remains an anti-heroine at the end of the film. The film ends with a sequence of an even lonelier Tao, continuing her life in Fengyang with only the company of her dog. She is pursuing her daily routine when, for a moment, she mistakenly believes that she is hearing her son’s voice. Then a song comes into her mind and she goes out into the empty snowy landscape. She starts dancing as she used to in her younger years, just as in the opening sequence. The music is that of an old tune which also serves as a leitmotif in the film, the 1993 song by British pop band Pet Shop Boys, significantly entitled “Go West.”



Fig. 5.54 Tao dancing alone back home at the end of the film.

Such aphasia-driven dislocation leads to the film’s “cacotopia” conjured up by “emotional dystopia”, a place of widespread unpleasant feelings (Zhang 2019:

341; Vieira, 2010: 4). Claeys describes dystopia as “negative pasts and places we reject as deeply inhuman and oppressive, and projects negative futures we do not want but may get anyway” (2017: 498). He interweaves the spiritual and physical associations to place and stresses flight and return, familiarity and estrangement, all of which are co-existing binary sensations that Tao feels for Fengyang, the hometown that gradually disengages and “betrays” her and yet is somewhere she cannot live without. Such uncanny, disturbing and paradoxical engagements formulate Tao’s dislocation. However, in the final dance, Tao seems to enjoy the silence and has been muted by the world. As her loved ones gradually leave her, she firstly becomes the only member in her family, then experiences “cultural aphasia” due to the linguistic, cultural and emotional barrier with her son (Stoler 2011). On the one hand, Tao is dislocated from social communication and remains as a figure lost in time; on the other hand, the joyfulness of the song, her light-hearted mood, her sense of enjoyment and relief, and the “purity” of her hometown landscape construct a sense that Tao has eventually re-claimed her sense of belonging and empowered her home space, away from the ever-shifting urban threat and the men who have wronged her and who have now become modern citizens.

The Taste of Rice Flower (mi hua zhi wei 米花之味, Peng Fei 鹏飞, 2017, hereafter, Flower)

Our heroine Ye Nan (Yang Ze) is set in multiple displacements: she is a Dai

minority 傣 single mother who returns to her tiny village after working in Shanghai to support her once left-behind father and daughter. The film explores minority-Han, tradition-modernity, gender and generational tensions in Ye's returning journey and directs us towards understanding her way of finding her solutions. Dressed in neat and modern clothes with Danish shortbread at her side, she drives back in her car and expects a welcoming and warm home community that she has been missing so badly. However, things are not the way she expects. Apart from the village rumour that her migrant work has consisted of "shameful acts", she finds herself in the position of a "transgressor" who has "transgressed the sphere of local patriarchy and thus raised anxiety about their gendered personhood" (Yan 2008: 34). Her rebellious and cold daughter, Nan Hang (Ye Bule) refuses to communicate with her due to their long separation, thus making Ye experience "a weakening of emotional ties and guilt" (Ma 2001: 242).⁵⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, what makes Ye uncomfortable and disappointed is the unchangeable gender bias.

Ye's return traps her in cultural and emotional alienation through the themes of reverse-migration experience, left-behind children and family crisis, and the battle of tradition and modernity in the minority village community. Research has found that young minority villagers in China are more keen to work in

⁵⁴ Left-behind children and adolescents have "substantial unmet mental health and nutritional needs" with "a 52% increased risk of depression, 70% increased risk of suicidal ideation, and an 85% increased risk of anxiety". See Fellmeth et al. "Health impacts of parental migration on left-behind children and adolescents." *Lancet* 392, (2018): 2574-2578.

⁵⁵ For minority children's representations in Chinese cinema, see Yan Zhenhui's *Ethnic Minority Children in Post-Socialist Chinese Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2019.

towns, and that such “one-way social mobility” results in a lack of cultural carriers who are referred to as the rural migrants who settle down in cities thus are not contributing to urban-rural communications (Xi et al. 2012: 233). Furthermore, women and those who have lived or are living in the urban world are less likely to identify themselves as ethnic minorities so that they can become “active performers of modernity”, making visible their “big changes” and no longer feeling they fit into the “old circle” back home (Francis- Tan and Mu 2019: 750; Zhang 2014: 21-22). Ye falls into this category and is therefore viewed as the displaced figure when she is back.

However, while Ye is a stranger to her village, the village has also changed into an confusing and troubling place. On the one hand, the village streets are full of Internet cafes where the students who sneak out of school surf the Internet; the airport is about to open, and villagers who want to run mass tourism are about to fill their first bucket with gold; and the young people who hold weddings in temples wear Western style wedding gowns. Even the rice noodles that Ye has been missing so badly taste “different and strange”. The other end of the spectrum also disorientates. Villagers still participate in traditional village performances and reject the connection with cities and commercialisation; women are still not allowed in Buddhist temples; parents are still obsessed with divine power and shamans to cure children’s diseases and refuse to send them to the hospital. Ye is caught between two stalls in a

village that is falling apart. Her feelings project many of the frustrations experienced by migrant workers as they return home in today's China. Such frustration is caused by their repulsion towards their disjointed, barren and underdeveloped homeland; and they see the villagers' behavioural and ideological rural problems as "sickness and malady" (Yan 2008: 226).

Narratively, Ye's journey towards reconciling with her daughter parallels the process of reconciling with the village, formulating a dual and echoing narrative thread. When Ye comes back, at first we do not see her being positioned on the same side of the shots which she shares with the villagers who she is in conversation with. We follow Ye's point-of-view, observing the unfamiliar home in distant perspective. For example, when she bumps into the old women carrying two babies in baskets, we see the women's backs, hearing their enthusiastic conversation while Ye faces us but looks away unresponsively; when her dad's friends come to visit, we see the silent frontal shot again while hearing the villagers' buzz of conversation from off-screen. Spatial, perspectival and communicative misalignment visually literalise Ye's displacement from and repulsion of her village.

At this stage, Ye and Nan are also visually and spatially blocked from each other by duvets, curtains and window frames. As she gradually starts to observe Nan's life and understand and sympathise with her, mother and

daughter get closer. We see them frying rice flower together in the same pot and sleeping on the same bed. At the same time, Ye's attitude towards the village also shifts. She takes off her shoes in the temple and shows her respect to the Dai Buddha. This show of conformity contrasts to an earlier incident where she had run around the looking for her daughter completely ignoring the temple discipline. Ye also starts to join in with the village dances and rituals clad in traditional Dai garments. Now we do not see the responding or frontal shots only from her point of view; instead, long shots of collective activities position Ye and the villagers on the same visual plane.





Figs. 5.55-5.56 Ye's graphical and emotional distance/split.

The film employs a forbearing and controlled narrative in a way that the filmmaker uses silence to express dramatic tension and adopts an anti-climatic tone. In the most intense scenes of conflict and struggle in which the audience expects to see Ye's emotional outbursts and disorientation, we see minimal dialogue, a soothing mood, and calm character responses.

When Ye finds Nan stealing money to play in the Internet cafe all night, she does not punish her or even show her anger. Instead, she sleeps in the car outside all night, until the next morning Nan sees her outside the window and is touched and feels guilty. The conflict transpires in a muffled kind of way and, rather, shows the process of self-reflection that Ye experiences through

several confrontations with her daughter. Unlike a traditional Chinese parent, Ye does not take a violent approach because she feels guilty about not having been able to look after her child: the two peek at each other in silence and reach a moment of mutual understanding. This cinematic aphasia internalises characters' external conflict through silence, evoking a deeper understanding and a more powerful inner engagement.

Such mutual mutation is constantly used in the film. When Ye finds Nan repeatedly playing on her mobile phone at night not doing homework, Ye does not criticise Nan but turns away deep in thought; towards the end, when Ye sees Nan apologising to the villagers for her wrong doings and when Nan sees Ye dancing with the villagers, neither verbally expresses their sense of being touched or their joy, but just look at each other in relief. The traditional or stereotypical Chinese mother-daughter relationship is removed through a sense of withdrawal, implying deeper emotional engagement and allowing space for elaborating inner expression.

The film's remarkable ending illustrates the reconciliation between Ye, her daughter and her mother culture through dislocation narratives. The film shifts from the buzzing, vibrant village ritual to surrealist scenes of Ye and Nan alone in a cave. A fantasy-like light source shines from the side, the turquoise and yellow light matching the colours on the subjects' dresses. The theatrical

lighting of the natural cave, the slow-motion dripping of water from the stones, the extremely deep focus, the montage of the stone Buddha and Ye touching the stone, and the oil-painting colours together construct a unique space and time for them, removing them from the outside real world. Then the two start to dance and pray in silence. Ye's initial repulsion towards religion and conflict with her daughter now disappeared. Not only with her daughter, but with her mother culture, Ye reaches an internal reconciliation. Their pious expressions and dances seem to inspire a feeling of the power of faith in the audience. Language is powerless at this moment but body language, lights and shadows show great vitality. The feelings between mother and daughter seem to have gained a Zen-style sublimation in this particular sphere. In this physically and narratively sealed space, Ye re-locates herself within the meaning of family and identity.





Figs. 5.57-5.58 The dance in the cave.

Ye the Anti-heroine

Although the film reaches the point of reunion and reconciliation at the end, Ye is still out of the norm. She is a strong woman who is confident about her singlehood; she challenges her father, the tribal leader in a patriarchal village culture; she is somehow “selfish” and seen as unfilial as she does not want to return to the traditional, country lifestyle and customs because she knows which kind of life and attitudes suit her and her daughter’s upbringing.

Send Me To the Clouds (song wo shang qing yun 送我上青云, 2017, Teng Congcong 滕丛丛, hereafter, Clouds)

“The wind with good fortune, will send me to the clouds” is a poem about catkins written by an ambitious, intellectual female character, Xue Baochai 薛

宝钗 in *A Dream of Red Mansions* (*hong lou meng* 红楼梦). The catkins are drifting, soaring up to the blue clouds because of the power of the wind, but can fall to the ground suddenly because of the lack of wind. The pressure of survival makes people abandon the way they used to be.

Our heroine Shengnan is also an intellectual woman with career and life ambition; yet she lacks the “wind”, which implies fair social judgement and treatment, female standing and good health in the film, to send her to the “clouds”. The film is centred around the problematic circumstances experienced by urban professional women, including “left-over women”, gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, family relation crises, pressure, sexual and mental repression and the desires of urban middle-class women, as conceptualised in the previous chapter.

The heroine Shengnan (Yao Chen) is a female journalist. One day she learns that she has ovarian cancer and that her father's factory is about to close down. As a proud, independent and strong professional woman, she now has to tend to her physical needs, behaving in a commercial way she hates -- to earn money for her ovarian cancer treatment. The 300,000 *yuan* surgery fee gets her into trouble. In order to stay alive, she accepts the job of writing a flattering and glorified personal biography for a rich businessman's father, Li, who is a witty, saint-like man living in a utopian mountain village. Her trip to the remote

mountain displaces her from the cosmopolitan world she has become accustomed to, and makes her re-consider the meaning of life.

The trip starts from Shengnan's perspective, observing a gallery of people she encounters in her village-journey, from the rich boss to an old woman who is too poor to afford a coffin. Everyone is later revealed as the opposite to what they appear to be: Shengnan finds that her once simple and hardworking colleague, Mao (Li Jiuxiao), has become a greasy and money-crazed hypocrite; the artistic, intellectual and naive man, Guangming (Yuan Hong) that Shengnan falls in love with on her way is ultimately to marry a vulgar rich woman for a better-off life; while Shengnan's mother starts an extra-marital relationship with Li to avenge Shengnan's father who has an affair with Shengnan's former classmate. Shengnan is a spectator as well as a participant in various types of dislocation in this world of temptation and greed. These people used to be the ones that Shengnan hated and looked down on; however, by the end, Shengnan feels for them and understands them.

Shengnan's situation represents that of many career women in China. Women make up a key part in China's labour force with a higher working rate than other global economies like USA, Japan and India (World Bank 2015). Marketisation since the reform, China's rapid socio-economic transformation and increasing global participation since the 21st century, and parents'

educational investment in their children under the One Child Policy make more Chinese women work in professional, high value-added industries, such as finance, insurance, technologies, education and media (Fong 2004: 140; Liu 2007: 1-13; Cao 2004: 435; Goodman and Zang 2008: 1-21; Liu 2017: 13-14). Since the 2000s, women have taken up 52% of the professional labour market (Hausmann et al. 2011: 46).

White-collar beauties have become an emerging, distinct social group in post-2000 China; they are characterised as professional urban women from the one child generation with individual ideas, above-average incomes and high-quality lifestyles, strong material, financial and career ambitions and desires, and high career-driven pressure and anxiety (Baiké 2014). Although enjoying more opportunities and access to social assets than their rural counterparts, urban women are also a disadvantaged group. In 2010, there were twice as many women who declared themselves as being, or having been, victims of discrimination in the workplace and gender discrimination is a key factor in the gender earning difference (Shu and Bian 2003: 1107). For 70 percent of the affected women, unfair discharge due to marriage or pregnancy, lack of promotion related to gender, lower incomes than that of men for the same work, and the disdain shown towards them in the workplace cause female employees' insecurity (ACWF 2010; Attané 2012: 8).

Women's deficits, their yearning and repression is thematically and narratively highlighted in the film. Female sexual and subjective desire and repression is articulated in the film in a bold way. Shengnan's passion is suppressed by the traditional education that shaped her into a calm, sensible professional woman. The ovarian cancer suddenly awakens her and makes her realise that she has to enjoy her sexuality before she loses the ability to do so. Shengnan's character and some over-explicit lines would shock some as she breaks the stereotype of a modern Chinese heroine. She explicitly expresses her sexual desire, requests sexuality from men, acts aggressively when she needs to gain control over the men, violently hits her boss and seems to reject her filial duty. This is the only way she can resolve her fear and despair in the face of her disease and life trauma.

The film manifests the journeying narrative to mark different stages of Shengnan's dislocation. The village that Shengnan arrives in is picturesque and tranquil. Trips and journeying are a key narrative device. The first-person point-of-view takes up most of her first boat trip. We see a panoramic view of the village port and a crowd of villagers who Shengnan dislikes.⁵⁶ This is where Shengnan meets Guangming, who is the only person who offers money to an old woman, who is obviously a cheater, so that she can buy a coffin. Guangming's kindness, his passion for art and literature and his artistic taste

⁵⁶ For first-person journey films and subjectivity travelling perspectives, see Alisa Lebow's *The Cinema of Me*, London and New York: Wallflowers Press, 2012.

and ambition are revealed and attract Shengnan during the boat trip. This is where Shengnan starts to change her attitude towards the village.

The boat trip towards the end leads to the film's climax: Shengnan is invited to a village banquet to take profile photos for Li and discovers that the talented and seemingly flawless Guangming is revealed to be the money-crazed, snobbish and gutless man that he is underneath. In this scene, Shengnan is strategically positioned apart from the others. She is the only one standing against a wall when everyone else is sitting down in the lavish hall; when Guangming's wife and father-in-law insult Guangming by asking him to recite pi as a "performance" of his intellectual prowess. We see Shengnan's face in close-up in despair, and hear hearing Guangming's echoing voice off-screen. Shengnan's visual and acoustic state is split from the space as her final hope and her dream of love is destroyed. She realises that she has to be "sent to the clouds", away from the earthly hunger for wealth, fame and power.

As in *Mountains*, the sense of dislocation is also evoked through surrealist visual motifs. The coffin imagery, which often implies "multiple entrapment" in cinema, recurs in the film at different points (Serrano 2019: 84). The first time is when Shengnan meets Guangming for the first time. They talk about their dreams, art and ambitions as Shengnan falls in love with him on the boat. However, at this point, the eye level view of the pair is shifted to an aerial shot

of a coffin floating on the river under the bright sunlight. It then dissolves into a similar shape that is later revealed to be their boat also in aerial shot. Such a surrealist symbol connects the “vehicle” of the dead and the living, heightening the theme, which is also articulated by Shengnan later, “although I am trying so hard, I am on my way to death”.



Figs. 5.59-5.60 Coffin-ship parallel.

Towards the end of the film, Li dies of illness. Shockingly, after his funeral, the coffin floats on the river again and Li is waiting for it by the river as if he is about to get on a boat that will take him on the final journey. In the next scene, Guangming commits suicide as his greed and humiliation is revealed in front of Shengnan. Shengnan finally collapses because Li, the spiritual guide that she

has just encountered and Guangming, the ideal lover that she has been dreaming of, both die. The ritualised moments of death and the fragmented, disturbing but interconnected death narratives and motifs disrupt the linear form and remove all hope in life for Shengnan.

Another motif is the image of dystopia. Scholarship on cinematic dystopia has been largely focused on two categories: firstly, disaster, environmental, or sci-fi films about catastrophic futures; secondly, industrialised dystopian urban visions of distress, depression, ennui, and other modern crises that externalise the dysfunctional in society and make ironic comment on utopian ideas (Kaplan 2016; Ritzenhoff and Krewani 2016; Almeida 2018; Toderici 2015). We often see modern dystopia that “imagine[s] a world so devoid of natural fulfilment for ordinary people”; or subjects who feel dislocated from “perceived reality and actual objectives”; dystopian experiences of otherness come from both being different from the surrounding society and from the “unverifiable” authenticity they experience (Nicholls 1984: 118; Barton 2016: 11-12). Such spaces function as “reality tunnels” that project what we are nervous and anxious about in reality (Wheeler 2005: 4; Leary 2006: 93). Some scholars focus on the image of the woman-in-dystopia in cinema. Talking of urban cinemas, Minico states that Female figures are often imprisoned and disempowered by patriarchal oppressors who “deprive them of their beauty, freedom and consciousness, and impose maternity or sexuality upon them”

(2019: 38). However, existing literature lacks the research on rural cinematic dystopia coined in *Clouds*.



Figs. 5.61-5.62 Dystopian environments.

The rural dystopia projects Shengnan's mood. The film begins with an aerial shot of a burning, barren mountain full of hard rocks and dead grasses. Then we see Shengnan climbing up the mountain for a news report and being interrupted by an unknown lunatic who kicks her in her belly. This is what leads her to do the hospital check and find out about her cancer. Here, the ruined, barren mountain is connected to Shengnan's unfulfilled career and her physical illness. Similar visuals are also visible in early Chinese poetry. For example, Luo Binwang's 骆宾王 *Thinking of the Capital after Long Service at a*

Frontier Garrison 久戍边城有怀京邑 in which Luo also expresses his unfulfilled career ambition in exile through images of the ugliness of the desolate land and the dystopian landscape: “The grass in the border pavilions withered early in the season. Layering shades entrap dying trees, lifeless landscape turns into coldness and desolation. The cranes in the sea cry out loud and clear...”
季月炎初尽，边亭草早枯。层阴笼古木，穷色变寒芜。海鹤声嘹唳...

In the middle of the film, Shengnan offends both Li's son and some other businessmen who were on vacation in the village. Two businessmen have harassed Shengnan sexually. Shengnan goes out to climb a mountain. Although the location is different to the one at the beginning, the shape and the patterns of rocks are similar. Both mountains are layered with monstrous shapes of dark grey rocks, constructed by stone boulders that seem to want to swallow or trap humans. Ferocious human faces are engraved in the rocks. This sense of threat and terror echoes through Shengnan's situation as she has just been threatened by the upper-class patriarchy. She decides to leave and take a walk on the mountain, but cannot find her way home. She pauses and leans against the rock, starting to realise there is no solution. Later she climbs up another similar mountain where the rocks are sharp and visually menacing. She spreads her arms while the camera shows her shaky, subjective point-of-view looking down as if she is about to jump off. We also see earth-cracking images in Du Fu's 杜甫 poem, *Meditation on Antiquity in*

Qutang 瞿塘怀古: “The earth splits away from the roots of the mountains, forming a river valley in a gorge, the great river rushes in from a crack in the sky” 地与山根裂,江从月窟来. The magnificent beauty of nature in Du’s view seems to engulf humanity and suggests a poet’s response to the turbulent times of the An-Shi Rebellion (Lu 2006: 428-430). Such catastrophic and menacing images from Shengnan’s perspective in the film parallel this effect in poetry and project her unrest onto the screen.

The film’s rural dystopia visualises Shengnan’s double displacement. Firstly, the unfamiliar village distances her from her comfortable urban realm. Physically uncomfortable and estranged, she is forced to confront the fact that her world is collapsing. Dystopia in the film involves mist-swathed barren spaces, picturesque vacuums, but menacing landscapes. It does not simply depict the conventional cinematic dystopia of “oppressive or unfavourable settings” (Klonowska 2018: 18). Instead, it uses a painterly dystopia to externalise and contradict the subject’s own feeling of oppression. It highlights the dislocation or incompatibility between the reality-echoing dystopia and the utopia Shengnan once dreamed of, evoking her final mistrust of the utopia that fails and fails. Such devastation and reconstruction of mind stimulates Shengnan’s final realisation of how life should go.

Towards the end of the film, after experiencing all the deaths, revelations and

drama in the village, Shengnan runs off into a barren grassland similar to the mountain space at the beginning, gradually walking into a vacuum, foggy space. This is her momentary escape before returning to the city for her surgery. It is not clear that if it is a fantasy space as the shapes and lines of this space re-emerge at the films' end as Shengnan climbs a ruined wall and bumps into the lunatic she met at the beginning of the film. She shouts out three times in the end. It is a sign of her embracing hope and of her willingness to restart her life in a positive way. Shengnan has been transformed by the end, although it is a bitter relief and painful acceptance of the way the world works. She starts to negotiate with the world as she realises that dreams do not exist and that what she needs to do is to accept and even to co-exist with trauma because there is no other resolution.

Shengnan the Anti-heroine

In this sense, Shengnan's character is displaced from the conventional Chinese heroine who is programmed to self surrender. She is open to talk about female sexuality and freely expresses her discontents and emotions. She uses swear words and smokes, she does not care about beauty and her appearance, she lives a life devoid of friendship and family support and then develops cancer. She does not show her full respect to her parents and does not intend to "pay back" as a filial daughter. She is always rebuffed by life and cannot get her hoped-for career, wealth or relationships. Although it is a

female-centred film, the director does not portray an empathetic and tender heroine. Instead, Shengnan is flawed, cynical, forceful and sometimes extremely weak which lends her character a certain stereoscopic depth. Shengnan is more interested in personal desires, breaking with kinship and patriarchal control, and is less restricted by “filial piety and self-restraint for the greater good” (Tsang 2014: 50).

The Pluto Moment (mingwangxing shi ke 冥王星时刻, 2018, Zhang Ming 章明, hereafter, *Pluto*)

Pluto deals with the same themes of alienation, disconnection, confusion, loss and the entangling relationships, but this time with urban protagonists on their rural journey. Women in the film are stuck in problems revolving around career, gender and subjectivity. The film is about loneliness, desire, and hard self-seeking. The special geographical environment of the Bayu area conceives the film’s mood, where dark, wet, and rainy days are wrapped in mists that seem to express loneliness and confusion. We expect that in such a wild and remote environment without modern technologies and urban chaos, the distance between people can be closer; however, a sense of displacement, alienation and despair pervades this place.

The film traces an independent film crew on a difficult field research trip in rural Southwest China. The self-absorbed filmmaker, Wang (Wang Xuebing), is

obsessed with his artistic approach to the film, *The Tale of Darkness*, an ancient mourning ode narrating the creation of the cosmos by the ancient Chinese gods. He is also scheming and duplicitous appearing to be serious and moral in public, while flirting with Duchun and simultaneously having an affair with a village widow.

Wang's shrewd middle-aged female producer, Ding (Liu Dan), keeps track of the whole project and struggles to find funding from local businessmen and cadres. Duchun (Li Xinran) is a young camerawoman who initially has a crush on Wang but who also has an ambiguous relationship with Bai, the young actor who is eager to prove himself and earn Duchun's love. Their lonely adventures into the wilderness expose individual frustrations, confusions about life and existential anxieties, including Wang's creative block, Ding being mired in the need to find investment, Duchun's career uncertainties and Bai's self-questioning, all this under the veneer of their seemingly successful urban identities.

Women's gender and structural displacement is one of the key themes of the film. The drinking scene is significant in showing women's vulnerability in their careers. Every crew member has to flatter and negotiate with the local government officials for funding and support. They cannot do this without drinking hard a common ritual in Chinese business entertainment. Even

though Duchun is unwell, she is forced to drink strong spirits. This business drinking phenomenon is particularly current in today's society. In this scene, the two intellectual and professional women act in a submissive manner. They are pushed to the "front" and forced to get drunk while Wang, the director and the male leader of the crew, does not drink a single drop simply because he thinks "there is no need". The film's director Zhang Ming says, "all of these are stories that really happened to us. My crew had experienced this and I filmed our reality...it is really difficult as a woman, no matter which country or industry, it will be harder than men (Mtime and Zhang 2018)". Duchun's initial vulnerability is also depicted through the fact that she is physically and verbally sexualised. Apart from suggestive body contacts and male gazes from the local cadres; in the scene where Bai makes a joke about the local sexual worker's age, Wang compares her to Duchun. Wang's shift between his flirtatious attitude and his appearance as a well-behaved and sensible leader puts Duchun in both the state of being sexually objectified and of potentially being accused of sexualising her professional relationships.

Duchun's dislocation is both active and passive. Early on in the film, she cannot stand the harsh village conditions and the pressure from the men. Duchun leaves the crew and goes to find Soul Mountain alone. As an intellectual young woman, she is rebellious and is fed up of the mundane work, the apparently savage local people and the dirty village. She is ambitious but

also highly uncertain about her career. Research suggests that urban professional women express uncertainty about their career development in the rapidly growing economy and that the situation is becoming particularly difficult for university graduates (Zheng 2016: 83). Duchun is certainly one of these women. Soul Mountain is a symbol in her mind through which she hopes to get a solution for her troubled mind. She actively displaces herself from the crew and the village, entering into the deep mountain.

On Soul Mountain Duchun encounters physical danger in the elements and harsh environment: both bad weather and strangers. She explores it in silence, overwhelmed by the power of the elements. In early Chinese poetry, mountain travels alone are also a key theme of self-discovery. Xie Daoyun's 谢道韞 *Ode To Taishan Mountain* 泰山吟 depicts how the poet is immersed in profound grandness and picturesque danger in the mountain that stirs up his mind: "Rocky caves seem like naturally built houses and yards, lonely and silent, deep and quiet... What is it about the unpredictable stormy weather that makes my mind fluctuate in this way?" 岩中间虚宇，寂寞幽以玄... 器象尔何物？遂令我屡迁。

In terms of active displacement, the crew's remote journey *locates* Duchun's sense of self. Duchun's initial faithfulness and feeling of love is disappointed by Wang's egomania and lack of concern as Duchun she reveals a more

knowledgeable and sensible side than we have previously encountered. With her independent thinking, her knowledge of literature, philosophy and life, she “rescues” herself from her initial idol. Through getting to know Wang, she becomes able to make her own judgements and even shows her toughness and rejects Wang’s advances later in the film.

Moreover, instead of cautiously following Wang and obeying his orders as in the beginning of the film, Duchun later gets control of the camera and films what she thinks is valuable. The first time she films her own content is when she confidently talks about her ambition and her passion for cinema, stepping out of Wang’s shadow and starting to think independently. Towards the end, the crew finally reach their destination and seem to get what they want. Duchun films an old man singing the *Tale of Darkness* with a sense of relief - she gets the material for the film as well as the meaning of her journey. She rejects Wang’s flirting and uncovers his hypocrisy with equanimity. Their power relationship is reversed. Wang’s mood is weakened and he does not know what to do next both either with the *Tale* or with Duchun. He shrinks in the crowd while Duchun confidently films the performance and walks towards the performer.

Sleep is a key motif in the film’s dislocation narrative and develops the core of the directorial strategy which is to observe the invisible (Mtime and Zhang

2018). The camera simply records the characters' sleep but often goes beyond the boundaries of real life and enters the characters' subconsciousness. In Duchun's sleep after the drinking scene, she shares a room with Ding, but we feel Duchun's shallow sleep from the sound of Ding's snoring, breathing and turning-over. Such sensory and acoustic register is narrated from Duchun's side. It reveals that Duchun is uneasy and not used to this rural space and the male-dominated working environment from the previous scene, leading to her "escape" to the Soul Mountain.

During Duchun's disappointing conversation with Wang, we constantly see Bai napping on the stone in the foreground while the talking bodies are out of focus, suggesting Duchun's floating mind is identified with a dream state. Different registers of consciousness about sleep in the same space imply spatial, communicative and mental barriers among the characters. Especially Duchun who, while apparently focused on the conversation with Wang, fixes her stare at Bai as if she is more attached to his sleep state than her conversation with Wang. Through sleep motifs, Duchun gradually turns away from male control. We do not see "external conflicts" but "characters' inner disorientation and responses" (Wei 2019: 147).

Duchun the Anti-heroine

Although appearing to be weak, vulnerable and sexually attractive, Duchun is

not a conventionally victimised or objectified female figure. She initially flatters male staff and expresses her weakness to the men to get a privileged position in the crew with her beauty and femininity - the “enactment of erotic capital” (Liu 2017: 120). As the film goes on, Duchun gradually transforms on her journey and finally reaches a moment of enlightenment. She knows what she is yearning for spiritually and makes sense of how to strengthen herself. After visiting the Holly Mountain and re-considering the meaning of the sense of the self, she departs from male protection and goes on an individual quest refusing what men either offer or command. In Duchun’s physical displacing journey, she gradually recognises that the mentor that she admires is a sexist, selfish and phallogocentric man. She therefore steps out from a dependent role and takes control of herself.

Summary

This section has dealt with how the themes and stories about the kinds of dislocation identified in this thesis are evoked in a selection of films. The films have been chosen because they comply with the characteristics of the sub-category of the travelling them in this genre in terms of the filmmakers’ experiences, interests, styles, the films’ form and aesthetics, and they ways in which they respond to social circumstances at the moment. In the heroines’ travels, they tend to reconstruct their identity and power from their initial vulnerability.

Mountains employs “a mobile spectatorship in a specific type of China’s urban imaginaries” - through the characters’ moves between townships and cities we adopt shifting perspectives following Tao’s geo-emotional journeys (Zhang 2019: 334). Such mobile spectatorship enables Jia to explore China through the uniquely Chinese aesthetics that are brought to the themes of floating and travelling; and to position township within a counter-urban narrative. The township is a transitional space that counters China’s urban imaginaries in a globalising era. Geographical dislocations centring on township construct an ambiguity, “a meeting place for all kinds of forces and currents, whether contemporary or anachronistic” “with no clear-cut boundaries or sharp distinctions between rural and urban...between high and low cultures” (Zhang 2010: 77). Thus, township embodies spatio-temporal liminality. Its slippery quality makes it somehow incorporeal, being “both here and elsewhere, both present and absent, both grounded in the past and yearning for the future” (ibid).

Like Tao, in Ye’s return in *Flower* she also experiences estrangement and alienation which distances her from her hoped-for hometown. The film employs a complex dislocation narrative. The returned heroine’s initial cultural and emotional dislocation is twisted into understanding, sympathy and re-integration in her home village. By the end, Ye also decides not to go back

to the city and displaces herself from the urban life that she has been used to and had admired. The film deals with the problem of left-behind children, the gap between urban and rural areas, and the gradual variation and disappearance of minority culture with the invasion of modern urban civilisation. The rhythm of the film is gentle, sincere and calm, quiet and restrained.

Dislocation narratives are shaped by the subjects' physical and mental dreamland depictions. Dystopian visions in *Clouds* express Shengnan's real world disengagement and function as sites of "desire, failure and fear" (Klonowska 2018: 11). Kinkley suggests that contemporary dystopian imagery in China is rooted in Chinese period/historical novels that project the dystopian state as a fear of Western incursion, social criticism using historical backdrops, or the fight back against social and military turbulence through yearning for past glories (2015: 14-18). However, the film's dystopia shifts to another direction by focusing on desire as well as fear and failure. Such displacing, remote dystopian sites are so scenic that they do not make us feel repulsed or uncomfortable. Shengnan seems to enjoy being there and uses these places for escape or for freeing herself from the suffocating reality that she finds herself in.

Pluto explores double dislocation: firstly, the jungle and countrysides against the Shanghai cosmopolitan world, then sensory consciousness dislocated

from physical existence. It detects a certain degree of subconsciousness under consciousness, or the arc of perception swinging between the waking and sleeping states. This is not a dream though it is more mysterious than a dream. We feel that unexplainable desires suppressed at the bottom of consciousness are simulated through the camera. As in *Mountains and Clouds*, dystopian imagery also appears in *Pluto* in Duchun's journey alone to Soul Mountain where she sees menacing mountain and caves with a group of unknown pilgrims. Dystopian images here echo those in *Clouds*, both heroines tend to seek self-revival in their spiritual quest in such threatening, remote and alienating spaces. This scene is sandwiched between her initial passive (gender) disengagement mastered by the male world and her later active persona that represents her awakening self-consciousness and self-discovery. Such an apparently out-of-space realm functions as a space away from reality that makes Duchun step back and think.

Similar estranging and menacing visuals also occur in *Flower* where Ye immerses herself in the visually deep and terrifying cave away from human communities, seeming to be swallowing her. However, it is where she senses the profound attachment between herself and her culture and hometown. In *Mountains*, striking and frantic moments like the sudden explosion on Tao's way back home make Tao pause and think about this sense of fear, estrangement and randomness. They are also the qualities that characterise

the rapidly transforming era that makes her uncomfortable, leading her towards her final physical and spiritual reunion with her hometown, away from the velocity of the outside world.







Figs. 5.63-5.68 Dystopian or threatening visuals in *Pluto*, *Clouds*, *Flower* and *Mountains*.

Thus, narrative dislocation in the films bring together the heroine's physical, cultural and mental displacement. Notions of location and home are no longer confined to their geographical meanings but enter into a more problematic level (Li and Ding 2018: 80-81). The films produce a "cognitive mapping" and distinct typology that "capture[s] a reality that is simultaneously slipping away from experience and coming back to...overwhelm it at an abstract, mythological level" (Zhang 2010: 76). In the heroines' home-coming or village-going journeys that are initially disappointing, but gradually engaging, subjects are empowered through identity-making and their strengthened inner selves that overwhelm themselves and their past negative experiences.

Section 3: Cinematography

This section examines the cinematographic characteristics of films about women's dislocation to remote areas. Directors tend to apply painterly and poetic visuals depicting characters' physical and internal states related to their environments, techniques found in early Chinese poetry and traditional Chinese painting. For example, shifts between close-ups on characters and extreme angles that neglect the characters stretch our view between scrutinizing characters' individual thoughts and subjectivity and their tension in the general environment that they might be disengaged from; contrasting colours or hues within the same shot emphasise characters' particular emotion attached to specific visual motifs. We also see the travelling view derived from Chinese poetry and painting in which the audience has a travelling experience with the author's journeying visual and verbal narrative. In the dislocation cinema, characters and their positions in or attachment to their surroundings are constantly blocked, separated and reunited by visual barriers from landscapes such as trees, water and lines of rivers and mountains, filmed in tracking shots following characters' physical paths. This allows us to sense the way they perceive the spaces around them thus following their emotional journeys. Such a cinematography stresses a sense of distant attachment or intimate alienation as the feeling of constant interruption and re-connection registers various level of distance and engagement.

***Dwelling On the Fuchun Mountains* (*chun jiang shui nuan* 春江水暖, 2019,**

Gu Xiaogang 顾晓刚, hereafter, *Dwelling*)

The film's dislocation themes involve the geographical (township-urbanisation tension), the socio-cultural (tradition-modernity tension between generations) and the emotional (the heroine's inner states that split her from her hometown environment). The cinematography uses poetic visuals such as constantly shifting points-of-views, travelling perspectives, and the use of blank spaces to evoke a sense of floating, dissolving and distance which echo the heroine's layers of alienation and disturbance once back home from the city.

In a slow-paced and anti-climactic tone, the film tells a story of a township family by the Fuchun River in Fuyang, Hangzhou. To welcome the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, Fuyang, a township nearby is being re-constructed in full swing. In this context and narrated in four seasons, the film shows four brothers taking turns to take care of their mother who has suffered dementia after a stroke. Unfolding slowly in the form of scroll landscape painting, we see the life tests of three generations of the Gu's family. When the scroll painting is unfolded, the sceneries and events are also unfolded by layers. Starting from the enthusiasm of "summer", experiencing family conflicts during autumn and winter, and finally "spring" river warms, echoing the literal translation of the film title, *The Spring River Warms*. From the family matriarch's grand birthday

banquet, to the sudden turn of the situation, the family experiences life changes. After getting through conflicts, dilemma and misunderstandings, they finally support and negotiate with each other and overcome the hardship.

The film is a panorama of contemporary Chinese cultural life that traps the heroine, Guxi (Peng Luqi), the daughter of the third son. Guxi graduated from an urban university and comes back to Fuyang working as a school teacher at her parents' will regarding her familial responsibilities and career stability due to the fact that from the 2000s, the state cancelled the work distribution system for rural college graduates (Hoffman 2005; Lu and Zong 2016).

One of the film's main conflicts is centred around Guxi's marriage. She is in love with her colleague, Jiang (Zhuang Yi), who is a fisherman's son and whose social and financial status is not approved of by Guxi's mother. In the context of displacement and relocation problems of townships due to new town redevelopments, one of the major drivers of the family's conflict is due to the rising living costs and housing tension among the brothers who shift the duty to take care of their ill mother. Moreover, Guxi's parents' restaurant is closed down due to relocation projects. Therefore, financial burden, along with the traditional ideology of parents intervening in their children's marriages give rise to the conflicts. Guxi, a returned township young woman is dislocated as she is caught between tradition, filial duty and her free will.

Dwelling On the Fuchun Mountains: the original painting

The film's cinematographic traits are closely associated with traditional Chinese painting that echoes the poetic visuals discussed in Chapter 4. The filmmaker borrows the title from a 1350 painting by Huang Gongwang 黄公望, *Dwelling on the Fuchun Mountain*, one of the Ten Famous Paintings handed down in China. With the Fuchun River in Zhejiang as the background, the arrangement of mountains and water in the painting shifts between dense and thin focuses and the ink colours vary between light and heavy, wet and dry. Huang did not conceive the structure according to the size, length and width of each piece of paper (Qu 2012: 54). Instead, he made the mountains and rivers viewed from a distance or as close-up. This kind of travelling, overlapping viewpoints, shift between wide-angles, far-reaching, or close-ups in the browsing process make the viewer's observation free and unrestrained.



Fig. 5.69 Huang Gongwang, *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (富春山居图), ink on paper, (the *Remaining Mountain* in Zhejiang: Zhejiang Provincial Museum, 1348-1350).

Chinese scroll painting is not simply a depiction of natural scenery, but the appeal and expression of the painter's spirit and pursuit of life (Jiang 2013). The painting *Dwelling* depicts a long river flowing through shallows, torrents, and peaks in Hangzhou and also in the river of time. The sections are divided by seasons as in the film, paralleling the seasonal segments in the film and highlighting time flow. Huang chooses to focus on remote landscapes and secluded people like woodsmen, fishermen and intellectuals living by the river. He expressed his deep attachment to a life away from the chaotic urban and a society of political turbulent, expressing the mountain-river-scapes as the ideal home (ibid).

The painting uses various techniques to show spatial extension and varied perspectives, creating an effect of the viewer moving along with the scenery. It adopts a horizontal scrolling method, constructing the scenery in an eye-level point-of-view and continuously extending from the plane. In its distinct visual gradation, the front and back of the mountains are arranged from near to far, providing a floating linkage between spaces. Huang left blanks between the sky and the ground, adding to spatial integrity which is "meaningful for aesthetic perception" through intentional "lack of meaning", inviting the viewer's imagination, interpretation and a broader thinking space (Fan et al.

2015: 1).

Huang applied the “dry-moist” colouring (*ku run mofa* 枯润墨法) and “dry-pen” inking (*gan bi mofa* 干笔墨法) for a “one-stop” effect (Wang 2014: 125-126). We cannot see large-scale thick inking, but feel the taste of autumn in his elegant brushwork. Most of the expressions are drawn through simple, dry and plain lines apart from wet and dense ink for highlighted objects and perspective variations as applied to trees. The lines freely flow in one stroke, inking dry, from light to heavy and finally finishing with thick-inking for emphasis.

Huang used “hemp-fiber” stroke (*pi ma cunfa* 披麻皴法) to connect mountains and rivers (Chen 2005: 112). Hemp-fibre is “used to describe the gentle slopes of rock formations” (Wang and Shih 2001: 2). Huang extended it to depict ripples on the river and used long lines to wipe out the points where shallow water meets the mountain. He shifted the boundaries between land and water, altered the thickness of space and combined gathering and scattering, various depths, dry and wet, creating a sense of vast expanse.

Another feature in the film borrowed from Chinese landscape painting is “scattered perspective” (*san dian tou shi* 散点透视) and “travelling view” (*you guan* 游观), a typical narrative method in Chinese mountain-river painting.

Different from montage or various cutting methods in Western cinemas, the film's perspective alters along with each different season while the story is constantly proceeding. For example, we first encounter the young couple in summer in the fourth son's perspective. As the film goes on, we continue to see the couple's development in autumn now in the second son's point-of-view, and we see them again through the third son's eyes in winter. This creates a sense that the subject, Guxi in this case, is constantly drifting after her return as if she is chasing after time, trying to search for something that she cannot obtain, that is, her negotiation with family, township tradition, and her filial duty versus her personal yearning.

The Film and Painterly and Poetic Visuals

We follow Guxi's journey and wandering in Fuyang in a painterly floating perspective as used in the painting. However, the film's painterly aesthetics do not only show homely attachment, but the simultaneous displacement.

In terms of the travelling view, the most memorable part of the film is a ten-minute long shot in one take. The shot follows Guxi and Jiang walking along the Fuchun River. They slowly move across the river, taking us in and out of the frame. Guxi is the only one in the family who has lived and been educated in the urban world and one of the few in the township, and Jiang is the one who has the same experience. The couple talk about their childhoods,

their returns to Fuyang and their dreams. When Guxi tells Jiang that she was not allowed to swim in the river when she was little, Jiang jumps into the river and swims along. The camera seems to follow Jiang's path in Guxi's perspective and makes Jiang guide Guxi and the viewer through a panorama of people's lives by the river. However, as we expect Guxi watches Jiang from our side, she enters the frame on the other side of the river. Such a perspectival shift marks that Guxi alters between the observer and the subject in this homely but estranging hometown space.





Figs. 5.70-5.71 Guxi's subjective POV and her being the subject in the painterly and travelling view.

In cinema, travelling perspectives “converg[e] lines of forces impacting upon characters and link them”, drawing “contrasting points of view” and establish “anticipatory actions...sustain[ing] an uncommonly high degree of tension” in longer duration (Prince 2017: 198). In such travelling shots we note that Guxi is neither like the riverside local residents who seem to be submerged and become a whole with the space, nor she is the mere onlooker who does not interact at all. Travelling subjectivity evokes characters’ “intrapsychic journeys” and registers a different level of “identification” (Curtis and Pajaczkowska 1994: 211). This swinging sense of dislocation signifies her relationship with Fuyang, she feel a simultaneous attachment and displacement.

Such constant shifts of perspective also appear in Luo Binwang’s 骆宾王 poem *Stopping by Barkul Ford at Night* 夕次蒲类津: “The road under my feet in

the mountains still stretches intermittently to the south, and I see the source of the Yellow River flows from the north afar”山路犹南属,河源自北流. Such spatial stretches/extension literalise the notion that the poet is unsatisfied with the place that restricts his talent and that he yearns for further travel to fulfil his ambition (Lin and Xiao 1999: 34). Such sense of perspectival-emotional swing echoes Guxi's desire to exceed her physical limitations.

The dislocation cinematography parallels the techniques in the original painting. The couple's walk adopts a three-layer composition. They are sandwiched by the river and willows, moving along the water and the extensive greenery. Tints of white of the sky constantly appear at the top of the frame or emerge between the gaps between willows and the riverbank, reminding us of the blank space in the painting suggesting the space left for the subjects or the viewer's imagination or own interpretation. Poetry about Xiaoxiang paintings also stresses the sense of visual/perspectival layering and its impact on the viewer. For example, Su Shi's 苏轼 wrote “Before one's eyes cloudy mountains emerged/In emptiness floating long wilderness waters”照野云山出, 浮空野水长 and such boundless emptiness and profoundness will invite the viewer “come to see the painter's misty conception”来看意渺茫 or “meticulously search for the subtle concept”知君有幽意, 细细为寻看.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See *Song Vintage Painting Evening In Xiaoxiang River Trilogy* No.1 and 2 宋复古画潇湘晚景图三首其一其二.

As they go on a deck, the blank sky space dramatically extends. Empty/blank spaces in cinema often imply people's "disconnection" and how they are "lost, vanished and recede" from their communities (Gertz 2016: 368). Here, the space of emptiness signifies Guxi's empty memories of her childhood hometown and the potential gap between herself, an intellectual woman with urban education, and Fuyang, the township where people's manner and mindset remain unchanged. This scene ends with a dissolve into an aerial shot of the river-scape with mountains in a warm orange hue contrasted to that of the previous shots full of green and blue. Besides, a rainbow and fog suddenly emerge above the land where the couple travels, visually distinguishing the deck that Guxi stands on from the rest of the town. Such dramatic visual distinction between the dream-like, almost surreal visuals afar and where Guxi physically stands project Guxi's alienated state. It implies that her thoughts and yearnings are illusive dreams that counter the reality of the township life.

Guxi's second journey is a mountain trip accompanied by Jiang and Guxi's senile grandmother (Du Hongjun) who constantly mis-recognises Guxi as the grandma's dead husband. The camera shoots from above in a slow, spiral move as Grandma talks about her past. As the willows and river waves in the scene mentioned above, the trees, branches and stone steps here are filmed as the dry-moist and hemp-fiber strokes in the painting. Characters are constantly obstructed by lines, scattering and reuniting. Guxi's mind echoes

the visual composition as she is entangled by her parents' demand that she marries a local official's son and Grandma's advice to marry the one she loves. She enjoys this quasi-seclusive experience in the mountain just as the subjects in Huang's painting. On the one hand, such a distant, seclusive experience implies the "denial of life"; yet it enables characters to discover the "valuable treasure" within (Atam 2014: 71). Her mountain journey creates a space away, displaced from the earthly township and home. She momentarily locates herself in Grandma's disordered, bygone space and time and finalises her "wedding" with Jiang in a simple traditional ritual in the mountain, witnessed and directed by Grandma.

However, it seems to be a fantasy realm for her. The hue of the scene is generally cold and almost in black-and-white, with dead branches and withered trees stretching out. The colours and graphic qualities distinguish the space from Guxi's everyday real-life experiences, evoking a visual de-familiarisation and the images of decay and spidery lines construct a dystopian visual as in the films discussed above. Nevertheless, like Shengnan, Duchun and Tao, Guxi also finds a feeling of belonging and spiritual attachment in such a space away from everyday reality.

Guxi the Anti-heroine

Guxi appears to be a traditional family girl back home, concerned for her

parents, helping with housework and flattering other family members. However, she is rather rebellious in character. She criticises her father for being idle and speaks up for her mother who takes all the family burden; she challenges her parents' demand for a "good marriage" and is determined about her relationship with Jiang, who is from a lower background; she even holds the "wedding" in secret with Jiang in the mountain. All these individualistic and self-pursuing characteristics portray Guxi as an unfilial and inconsiderate daughter in a township household and contribute to her anti-heroic quality.

Weekend Plot (mi yu shiqi xiaoshi 密语十七小时, 2002, Zhang Ming 章明, hereafter, *Weekend*)

The film addresses the psychological loss and confusion of China's emerging middle-class youth disorientated by uncertainties, social alienation and confusions about life. The film's setting of a river journey, its disassociated cinematography and the focus on seemingly meaningless moments recall Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960). Except for the uncovered mystery that seemingly dominates the plot initially, there are no other actions that can influence how the plot develops. There are only "meaningless" moments, only the constant repetition of daily routines, without any dramatic situations. They intentionally elicit the characters' motivations and psychologies as vague and ambiguous. In the scene where the protagonists hang around on the beach, the physical environment of the rocky shore echoes that of the island in

L'Avventura. People are constantly on an aimless search in such an exilic environment.

Five old urban schoolmates set off to their township home for summer vacation, joined by a local cop friend, Yu (Guo Xiaodong), who is the heroine Jin's (Zhang Yalin) school-time lover. The gang fall apart as the cruise trip proceeds. After a threatening and intriguing note saying "I love you to death" appears, the friends start to be suspicious of one another and distance themselves from each other. Their expected light-hearted holiday is turning into a bizarre and thrilling one. Each of them plans to escape from the stressful and chaotic urban world into the displacing river-mountain idyll; however, their ennui, solitude and mistrust shape their mutual dislocation and barriers. The story ends with Yu's suicide and Jin going missing.

The film has no vibrant colours, no powerful visual impact, no strong dramatic conflict, no melodramatic music, such intentional mundaneness and seeming meaninglessness reveals people's true mentality and emotions hidden deep in their hearts. The mysterious note and the Chinese title, *Secret Words of Seventeen Hours*, arouse suspense and tension.

After filming *In Expectation* (*wushan yunyu* 巫山云雨 1996), Zhang filmed the next two features in his Wushan Trilogy, *Weekend* and *China Affair* (*tamen de*

mingzi jiao hong 他们的名字叫红, 2013). In these three films, the image of Wushan township has a sense of heterogeneity in geographical space, while the mental space of township people evokes people's anxiety, depression and aphasia.

The township space is significant to the film. The township in China is an unfinished form of the city. It contains more entanglements, anxiety and changes that occur as a result of the impact of transformation. Therefore, townships are full of a "vulgar sense of counterfeit" that imitates the city; such feelings reflect the "chaotic mixture and patches of globalisation and surviving traditions" and marks "shockingly unbalanced development in the township that is rapidly and compressively modernised, and is in line with international capitalisation"(Wang 2006: 185).

Zhang Ming states that "township has an irreplaceable role; the story must unfold in a specific locale because such specificity brings a distinct breath" of the difference in breath brought about by the difference in space (Zhang and Zhang 2002: 53-55). Zhang said that after the 2000s, the mindset of urban youth changed significantly - they could enjoy their vacations, exile themselves from the city and their modes of expression also shifted because of unbearable stress from urban lives (Zhang and Zhu 2001: 31). In the film, Yu's suicide and Jin's disappearance evoke such incompatibility and non-negotiability between

people and their urban experiences that stimulate their return or adventures in the countryside.

The psychological space of Wushan people is depressive and nihilistic. The commonality of township people's state in the Wushan Trilogy is reflected through their dull, silent and confused look. For example, in *In Expectation*, the protagonist Mai (Zhang Xianmin) lives alone on the river signal station far away from the city, he has minimal and dull response to his friends; even when he is accused of rape in the interrogation, he is in a state of aphasia. As a township widow living alone, Chen (Zhong Ping) has to maintain a sensual relationship with the hotel manager to earn her living. Although she looks forward to getting rid of this situation, she has no way out, so she often looks as if she is in a trance and melancholy.

Similarly, In *Weekend*, as the heroine Jin goes back to Wushan, she fails to respond to her hometown sentiment and is disturbed by the sense of stagnation there. Jin is a middle-class career woman who came from Wushan and lives in Beijing. She hoped that this weekend hometown trip would be a momentary escape from the city; however, things are not as she expected. Zhang uses distanced visuals and intriguing cinematography to illustrate Jin's physical, emotional and psychological dislocation back home through different visual motifs and to show how Jin is cinematographically associated with them.

It adds to a noir-ish style underlines the sense of “loss of home, and a felicitous, carefree ahistoricity...the inability to imagine being at home” (Sobchack 1998: 166).

As discussed in the previous chapter, Chinese exile and home-coming poetry evokes dislocation visuals.⁵⁸ Jin’s river vacation, representing home-coming and a simultaneous sense of exile, is filmed in dislocation poetics. The use of seemingly random and meaningless motifs stresses a sense of displacement and mutual irrelevance between the characters. The recurring motifs evoke a sense of suspense, terror and threat.

Guns and a female manikin floating on the river constantly appear in the film. We first see them in the beginning of the film where the gang hang around on the beach in a carefree and light-hearted manner. Jin is the only woman who shoots a can on the river among the men. She is the only one who takes the gun seriously and shoots as if she is in a gun fight. The gun imagery in cinema often has “phallic” connotations and shows the character’s yearning for sexual power (Sipiora 2012: 260). When the group sees the manikin, everyone else sees it as random waste while Jin appears to be uneasy and seems to be fascinated by it. Recurring surreal images of death often evoke a sense of threat and haunting, underlining people’s dissatisfaction of current life

⁵⁸ See Chapter 4, pp. 6-7.

(Eberwein 2009: 17). The manikin appears at moments when Jin remains silent, alone in a state of emptiness, such as when she ignores her husband's repetitive call and where she walks along the river. When Jin has eventually gone missing, we see the flowing manikin again. The artificiality of the manikin and Jin's flesh and blood seem to be integrated. This implies the disjointedness of Jin's body and mind as if she is no different from the plastic body.



Figs. 5.72 The floating manikin.

Variations of guns and fire also recur in the film, in the forms of fireworks and a mysterious sound of gunshots which later turn into a thunderstorm. Such unknown threat is only possible in a remote river-mountain locale like Wushan. The shifts between the characters' real experiences and surrealist images questions the state of being and stresses a sense of dislocation between the physical presence and the mental state of the characters. Such blurred

boundaries between the real and the fantastic also parallel the poetic visuals in ancient Chinese poetry.⁵⁹

Another recurring and ambiguous motif is a white ship. We see it first in the early beach scene when the group discovers the manikin that metaphorises Jin's deadliness and foreshadows her suicide. The ship quickly travels through at an unnatural speed. However, as the rest do not feel there is anything wrong with it and appear to be excited, screaming and chasing after the ship, Jin remains silent and appears to be troubled. The second half of the film turns more into a thriller when the groups start to collapse and is overwhelmed by broken relations and suspicion due to the mysterious note. The fireworks in the township festive performance suddenly turn into a thunderstorm. The group hurries back in a mess. Bombing sounds, people's screams and the sound of chaotic footsteps and torch lights shape a sensual turbulence and disturbance. However, we see the same ship floating at an extremely slow speed from Jin's perspective. Contrasting motions between "sensations of action, excitement", "spectacle of violence" and Jin's state of diminish outlines her sense of disturbance and of being away from the tangible world (Mason 2002: 36; Silverblatt et al. 2014: 453).

Jin can always identify herself to out-of-space and abnormal subjects. This

⁵⁹ See Li Bai's 李白《梦游天姥吟留别》(A Dreaming Tour of Tianmu Mountain) in which the poet interacts with the personified nature in fantasy state: "Rainbows for clothes and wind for horses" 霓为衣兮风为马.

implies her dissociation from the world around her. In Qin Guan's 秦观 poem, *Rouged Lips: Land of Peach Blossoms* 点绛唇·桃源, the ship motif also evokes the poet's active disengagement from the world which is full of earthly stress and burden about fame, wealth and career: "When I was drunk I set up my boat and swung it in the lake, listening to the flowing water pushing it deeper into the flowers and plants/ The fame and fortune of the real world haunts me and cannot be relieved... Cluttering falling flowers are like rain, I don't remember the path that took me here" 醉漾轻舟,信流引到花深处/尘缘相误...乱红如雨/不记来时路. In the film, the final appearance of the ship is in the film's ending where the ship appears again travelling at normal speed. Jin, now exhausted in broken friendships, fights, arguments and her dead-end relationship with her husband, slowly chases along the river after the ship.

Jin's physical disengagement evokes her mental state. She constantly leaves the group or remains still while the rest move around. In the gunshot scene, she is sandwiched between rocks on both sides of the river, graphically squeezed by sharp shapes from above and beneath; when she stares at the manikin, she is visually trapped by rocks from her right and left. She is the only one constantly facing the river as if it is her destination and belonging. Furthermore, Jin always walks away from the group searching for the note. She either walks or sits against encroaching, pointed, sharp rocks that "fold" her . The visually unpleasant shapes and the engulfing sense of the rocks

evoke a sense of suffocation and threat, the feeling aroused from her tense urban life, loveless marriage and confusion about life.

As seen in both the exile and home-coming poetry and cinema, landscape functions as visual metaphors, illustrating the character's "desire", "fragility", disorientation, lack or the "moral void in which humanity finds itself" (Gerrard 2018: 65; Hope 2005: 239). The rock setting recalls the similar space in *Clouds* in which Shengnan is always placed in visually dangerous scenarios where rocks and mountains appear to be menacing. Such a sense of dystopia in nature is a distinct feature in displacing, remote spaces. It heightens characters' trauma and paradox. On the one hand, subjects seek a way of escape in remote realms; on the other hand, once there, they encounter a different sense of danger and threat.





Fig. 5.73-5.74 The Rocky dystopian visuals.

Jin the Anti-heroine

Jin is a middle-class urbanite who fails to re-connect to her rural home and does not hope to do so. The pressure, stress and relationship associated with the urban life make her breathless. Unlike her female friends, Jin is flirtatious, adventurous, carefree and aimless. She also signals danger, death and crime in the film, making her character noir-ish.

Summary

Dwelling manifests Chinese painterly aesthetics to visualise the character's drifting, dislocation and self-relocation. Apart from the dream-like, floating cinematography that illustrates Guxi's dilemma and her tension with her home community, her personal drama is interrupted by various images about

displacement of the broader social picture. We see the juxtapositions of the forceful demolition of old residential buildings and her family's relocated shelter on the boat; the image of the single boat floating on the vast river against the backdrop of modern high-rises; and cross-cuttings between the real estate mimesis of traditional mountain-river landscapes and the real landscape and environment is polluted and damaged due to urbanization. The film uses painterly and poetic cinematography to beautify the images of destruction and despair, evoking a sense of forced negotiation between people and their inevitably devastated homeland. It stretches between personal and social dislocation in a romanticised manner.

In *Weekend*, Jin's failed rural escape ends up with her emotional collapse and despair in her hometown. Zhang's cinematography stretches the boundary between the real and fantasy. Such realistic sense of hallucination or dream states reinforces the character's dislocated spirits. As Zhang states that, "the film is about neither morality nor love. It is not so much about the choice of reality, but rather about the people's fantasy and imagination of reality, about how people want to live their spiritual lives" (Zhang 2002: 83). Surrealist images are set against the typical Chinese landscape in Three Gorges Dam, evoking death connotations like the corpse-like manikin, skulls of a dead couple in the cave, washing bleeding hands in the river. This particular setting that marks the most remarkable displacement, relocation and destruction of

space in China sets a distinct tone for the film. Zhang suggests that “many things in China are very surreal. Just because you don't find a native surrealist approach, you cannot completely borrow Western themes and expressions” (ibid: 84). These ghostly images in Chinese contexts and the heroine's constant spiritual-less state intensifies a sense of mutual displacement between people, space and their minds. Through these empty and meaningless images and actions, people's spiritual emptiness, alienation and the purposelessness of life aroused by the pace of modernity is powerfully visualised.

Jin faces multiple disorientation in terms of family, friendship, social stress and psychology. She is caught in marital struggles; the group of friends she has gathered gradually falls apart; her old lover who represents her last hope in bygone times commits suicide; she finds her life to be dysfunctional due to the pressures of urban life. Echoing traces of Antonioni's work about aimless protagonists, meaningless actions, constant wanderings and disappearances and deadly space and time, Zhang responds that, “this is a problem of modernity, because China has just started its transitional era and we are starting to face a universal modern dilemma” (ibid).

Apart from Shengnan's positional dislocation away from traditional Chinese womanhood in *Clouds*, the film cinematographically reinforces this sense of

dispossession. Zhang Yingjin suggests that there are three phases of cinematic space: “space as product; space as process; space as productive” (2009: 1). Through this lens, translated into cinematography, Shengnan’s spiritual quest for healing becomes a productive emotional space that frames the far-reaching space of rural displacement, and the dystopian space simultaneously frames the gap between her ideal and reality which she has eventually negotiated with. Through intersecting Shengnan’s psychopathology, her disturbing fantasies, with the refreshing and challenging rural realm the film makes a retort to the dissatisfying urban experiences that Shengnan finds herself in. The dislocation between urban lives and rural journeys comment on the disconnect between China’s supersonic economic and political rise onto the global stage and those lost in the spiritual maze of its urban underbelly.

All the films start off with the heroine’s self-discovered lack and yearning from their urban lives. Their remote journeys function as spiritual quests for revival, shaping an uncanny sense of intimacy between them and the spaces they travel to, thus leading to a new-found self. The directors blend realistic and fantasy aesthetics, cinematographically implying the women’s physical circumstances and their spiritual travels and solutions. Such a cinematic combination resides on traditional Chinese painterly and poetic traditions in which the home-coming, exile and travelling visuals literalise and romanticise people’s self-alienation, exploratory quest and spiritual home-coming.

Section 4: Flexibility

Other than films about the women's travels between cities and villages as being a result of rural-urban migration or dissatisfied modern urban life, the flexible nature of dislocation films under this category takes us to the in-between travel of an ethnic minority woman. In the film discussed below, the heroine's particular ethnic identity broadens the contextual scope of this genre and invites us to consider why the heroine has made a striking decision in the end.

Chaogtu with Sarula (bai yun zhi xia 白云之下, 2019, Wang Rui 王瑞, hereafter, *Chaogtu*)

The film illustrates the theme of displacement in multiple layers, including minority-dominant cultures, rural/pastoral-urban lives and gender and social norms interwoven with a minority's woman's individual desire. The film tells the story about the conflict between an ordinary Inner Mongolian (hereafter, Mongolian) herdsman couple due to their different attitudes towards life. The wife, Sarula (Ta Na), believes that the best life is to work with her husband on the grassland, while her husband, Chaogtu (Jiri Mutu), is tired of the monotonous pastoral life. He thinks that a better life awaits them in the distant city. The gap between the couple gets more and more wide due to their opposite attitudes to home. Early representations of minority in postsocialist

Chinese cinema is “fundamentally Han-centered” and targets Han rather than minority audience, such as *Horse Thief* (*dao ma zei* 盗马贼, 1986, Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮) (Zhang 1997: 90-92). However, recent Chinese cinema about minority has shifted its style and focus and tends to depict individual problems and social issues. Residing in such family conflicts, *Chaogtu* explores the situation of people wandering between their homeland and afar, between tradition and modernity under the impact of urbanisation and informatisation.

The state initiated a resettlement policy in Mongolia in 2001 (US Embassy 2001; PRC 2002). It aimed to achieve poverty-alleviation and ecological protection by resettling pastoral inhabitants in new villages and offering new education, service and work opportunities (Gu 2018). However, market-oriented resettlements disillusion many herdsmen due to the increasing financial burden and market competition. They are resettled in non-agricultural land and therefore, have to purchase goods that they used to produce themselves. Moreover, most villagers feel cast off due to limited opportunities and difficult access to the urban market due to geographical remoteness and they are generally discontent with marketisation (Dickinson and Webb 2007: 550). Resettlement and market-driven urban migration are seen as the loss of autonomy of their life by some Inner Mongolian villagers (ibid: 554). Since the 2000s, the state has implemented privatised household

enclosures and community-based grazing practices in Mongolia (GEEPDP 2003). Thus, there are increased social disparities and damaged grasslands due to overgrazing.

Many Mongolian herders feel “lost in transition” in post-socialist China. On the one hand, some feel that they are physically displaced from the socio-economic centre and cannot keep up with the state’s advancement, therefore, seeking chances to embrace an urban modernity. On the other hand, some experience a sense of “soul loss” and the “inability to plan ahead” (Pederson and Højer 2008: 73). They reject mobility and the coming of modernity and live by an analogy between property (homeland) and spirit, viewing land as a metaphysical representation of self (ibid: 88; Humphrey 1996:213). Moreover, “lack of requisite skills, educational backwardness”, “cultural preservation”, socio-cultural bonding and the anxiety over vanishing traditional cultures are also the main factors influencing traditionalist Mongolians who do not want to migrate to the city (Ding et al. 2018: 14; Patience 2014).

The spectacular landscape is used as a narrative device shifting along the different dramatic points that mark Sarula’s state of mind in the film. Before Chaogtu goes to town, we see the midsummer evening breeze. After his first comeback, bright sunny days are turned into rains and tempests and this is the

point where the film's colour palette shifts to grey and dim colours representing the tension between the couple and Sarula's emotions. After Chaogtu's second return, the grassland is covered with heavy snow. We see the landscape from Sarula's perspective as she stares at the sky and the mountains. This stresses the correlation between the temper of the scenery and that of Sarula's emotions. She is disorientated by Chaogtu's growing enchantment with the city. In early Chinese poetry, colours in nature are also used as the projection of human emotion. For example, Li Bai 李白 employs the shifting colours of mountain landscapes as a metaphor for how he struggles against political corruptions and his mistreatment in the court in *Song of Lushan Mountain* 庐山谣: "Thousands of miles of yellow clouds shifted the mood; wind, rushing rivers become white waves as if a snowy mountain is bursting" 黄云万里动风色，白波九道流雪山.



Figs. 5.75-5.76 Landscape reflecting Sarula's emotional shifts.

Not only the landscape outside, but also the hue of the domestic spaces, are turned into a blue-ish cold hue. The seasonal changes and the shift in colours implies the mobile nature of both the husband and the world. It sets a sharp contrast between Sarula's deep attachment to homeland, her determination to stay and the rest of the world, marking her stillness as dislocated from the inexorably shifting world. It is not just a couple's problem, but the common struggle of the herdsmen's households in Hulunbuir (Tie 2020). The push-pull dilemma between urban dreams and pastoral nostalgia lies at the heart of the film.

The binary spaces that Salura occupies imply her dislocation. As the heroines in the previous category, women's dislocation *within* remote areas, Salura is also presented in pairing shots of contested spaces through which a "binary spatial paradigm" shows a "metaphorical" "conscious duality" encountered by the character (Newland 2009: 139; Batori 2018: 181; Sitney 2000: 331). Our first encounter with Salura is in her walk home after agricultural work. The camera is positioned inside her house, and we see her through a window walking towards us. Limited domesticity is soon shifted to its paired scene where Salura sits on the motorway, silhouetted against the sunset and the vast open-air space waiting for her husband who disappears towards the end of the road on a motor bicycle. On the one hand, Sarula is somehow entrapped by the home space; on the other hand, she is disturbed by the outside space full of uncertainty. Moreover, when she is in her Mongolian garments, Sarula moves freely on the grasslands; she runs, wanders and milks the cow. Yet as she is changed into modern clothes brought by Chaogtu, she takes on a different manner. In the scene when she is in a pink vest and jeans serving the wine for Chaogtu and his friend at home, Sarula appears to be physically uneasy. She is squeezed between the two men, either kneeling down or lowering her head.

Binary friction narrates a sense of incompatibility and "to impose criticism" (Leung 2002: 239). After Chaogtu sells the sheep for a jeep car, he checks the

car in a distant garage. In cross-cuttings, we see juxtapositions of blue and grey-scaled, mechanical space of the garage and Sarula being alone at home where she shrinks in a colourful fur blanket. However, it is the only warm-coloured area in the room while the rest of the room is not lit. The majority of the room is in a dark, cold hue associated with the garage where Chaogtu parks the car and also with that of the bedroom where they argue over their contradictory beliefs. It highlights Sarula's small sofa space as if it is a lonely island. It makes the only space alive for Sarula unreal as if the actual colour of life is dream-like. The radio, the only sound source, is reporting news and Sarula's sleep suggests her detachment from modern life. In the paired scene coming next, Sarula wakes up and rushes out to the garage and smashes the car window. Cold and dark colours and the sound of radio and of car smashing evoke a sense of threat from modernity; while the tiny home space surrounding Sarula embodies her wish for peace.

The final pairing scenes involves modern technology more explicitly. Both Chaogtu and Sarula are at home, they make a video call in two separate rooms. The split spaces in the same home suggests their failed compatibility and conciliation. It is very touching when Sarula reminds Chaogtu of his promise not to leave her anymore. However, in the next scene Sarula finds the note that Chaogtu has left. He has gone to the city again. This is the last time we see Sarula in the film. She smashes the phone onto the floor.

The mobile phone appears three times in the film, it suggests their emotional tie. In the beginning of the film it is a gift that Chaogtu brings Sarula and it is the first time Sarula encounters such a technology. She sees the phone as the symbol of Chaogtu's love rather than being flattered by the modern device. In the video call scene, the mobile phone is the only medium that allows Sarula to communicate her true self to her husband as they cannot talk face to face anymore due to their incompatible ideology. Eventually when Sarula smashes the phone, she realises that love and family bonds can be destroyed by urban seduction and that it is the allure of modernity that displaces her from her ideal home.

Above shows Sarula's emotional journeys between the traditional rural home and the "destructive" urban force. Sarula's physical journeys in-between also imply a sense of disengagement. The first time she goes to the city, she goes back home on the same day, leaving Chaogtu with his friends in a bar. After knowing that the gang of men were drunk and fought with her people, she gets furious and beats Chaogtu with a rope. Going to hospital sets Sarula off on her second urban journey. She lost her baby as she went to find Chaogtu on a snowy night. Both urban journeys are associated with negative or tragic experiences. This finally leads us to the film's unexpected ending, her final journey to the town from which she never comes back. As Chaogtu goes back

to the village after a long time in town, he finds his home empty and learns that Sarula has left to go to the city with their new-born child without telling him that she got pregnant again.

The surprising ending and Sarula's final decision interrogate the question of an unconventional rural female image and suggests her complex sense of belonging. We ask why the woman who hates the city so much ends up going there alone. The film's scriptwriter, Chen Ping suggests that "Sarula embodies a typical grassland female image. The women have a strong maternal instinct and determination" (Chen 2020). We know that Sarula gives up the grassland that she is in deep love with for her child's better life. Chen believes that Sarula's final decision is the compromise that reflects the glory of womanhood.

However, such an approach is problematic. If compromise and sacrifice imply a woman's "glory", her quality and personhood is still judged by her submission to domestic restriction, social norms and potentially, male hierarchy. Sarula has long been a determined and strong woman who criticises, challenges her husband's will, and insists on her belief in homeland. However, in the end, such strength, power and pride are diminished by the financial, social and psychological burden of "a single mother with sheep". Towards the end, the cloudy sky becomes grey and takes up most of the frame, squeezing the land and people to the very bottom as if it is swallowing people's habitation,

reflecting Sarula's status. Sarula is caught between polarities. She is the "grassland" that is almost swallowed by the modern invasion (the threatening sky). Her deep homeland sentiment distances her from the increasing number of herders who choose to embrace urban modernity. At the same time, her bitter urban-going decision separates her from her once strong faith in her homeland.

Sarula the Anti-heroine

Sarula is not an anti-heroine until the end where we are surprised or shocked by her decision. She enjoys the feeling of isolation in the grassland and emotionally supports herself with hometown indulgence; she is furious about Chaogtu's endless urban craze and beats Chaogtu off. Finally, she abandons her identity as a dutiful wife and her faith in family and homeland and chooses to give birth to her child and leave the village alone without telling anyone, even Chaogtu. Her purpose remains ambiguous towards the end.

Our heroine here sets off an alternative journey in the end. Most of the film shows Salura in pastoral environments and although the film is based in the village, she is constantly forced to confront urban, modern influences from Chaogtu, who is an urban fan always travelling in-between. Having experienced urban lives on several occasions, Salura always goes back home. However, what distinguishes her from other heroines is that, unexpectedly, she

finally chooses to go to the city alone. Unlike other heroines who either *go to* or *go back to remote areas*, Sarula makes her reverse journey *to the city*, which is the remote realm for her. The distant urban is something that has been luring her husband away from home and the experience in the dysfunctional rural home sparks her decision to follow the city adventure - she is forced into the city as she hopes to find out what has changed her husband so thoroughly. She finally gives up her faith in the homeland and is ready to start a new life and identity with a clean slate. The heroine's reverse travel and its meaning, which is distinct to other heroines' journeys, shape one of the key features, "flexibility", in film genre studies and in the cinema of dislocation. Flexible circumstances under shared themes and aesthetics invites us to consider what leads to the heroines' various decisions on their destinations and how it projects their disengagement and empowerment in the various films.

Conclusion

This chapter has scrutinised women's cinematic dislocating journeys to remote areas through studying the network of the directors and examining themes and narratives about dislocation and the genre's cinematographic features.

The section on the network of production explores their cinematic interests and styles related to their backgrounds and past careers and experiences. Most of the directors involved graduated from the Beijing Film Academy. This group of

filmmakers share common interests in terms of journeys in-between, marginal environments, rural-urban tension due to their personal or career experiences. Subjects are often disengaged or remain desolate due to their estrangement in or contradiction to the fast-shifting world. Protagonists are troubled by cultural incompatibility, gender crisis, pressures from urban modern worlds, all of which lead the subjects towards psycho-dislocation.

The filmmakers draw extensively upon landscape and nature, questioning subjects' situation and un-situatedness within it. In portraying the connection between remote places and subjects' internal realms, they often combine realistic styles with fantasy episodes or even surrealist imagery, offering a "penetrating layer...mov[ing] towards the interior" (Elder 2006: 350). Such fantasy spaces allow characters to "retreat when the world around them is no longer enough" (Armstrong 2012: 142). This is to simultaneously present the unbearable (urban) reality and malaise in real life and the desired, yet unreachable solution that they see in their dislocating journey. Furthermore, water is a recurring motif in the directors' work. Images of rivers, lakes, seas, streams or even tap waters or broken pipes are repeated used in their films. Such images have both artistic and thematic significance. They contribute to a floating and journeying narrative and enable subjects' as they drift and search in their travels; in some instances, they also externalise the characters' sorrow and emotional outbursts as the movement of water mimics subjects' tears that

cry their inner pain. Water imagery in cinema evokes the sense of confronting one's own feeling or the wish to wash away (Sato 1994: 169). It also implies a sense of threat and instability in their work as it constantly flows away and sometimes floods subjects' shelters. It heightens the feeling of dislocation as water evokes constant mobility, resettlement or even destruction, displacing and destabilising people from their current situations.

Thematically, the films focus on the subjects' varying degrees of initial disengagement and their later empowerment. In films about urban women's rural quests, we encounter urban career women's dilemmas and troubles, including gender segregation and sexual harassment in work, personal problems like mental/physical illness, the left-behind women crisis and career anxieties. For the returned rural women, the films highlight the incompatibility, conflict and gap between them and their original communities. Their returning journeys are that of negotiation or reconciliation. All women are dislocated from female conventions in Chinese culture. They are open to challenge tradition and male authority, being independent in self-determined manners. Tao becomes a powerful businesswoman after divorce; Ye works hard in the city alone and is strong enough to question village traditions after going back; Shengnan openly expresses her sexual desire and defends herself against sexual harassment; Duchun criticises her male boss's hypocrisy and holds her strong attitude against his sexual suggestions.

Narratively, visual and spatial distance “exacerbate[s] uneasiness” and sometimes implies “absence”; it is used to reinforce the subjects’ alienation to their arrived spaces and communities (Marr 2013: 44; Ebrahimian 2004: 4). This is bilateral: while the subjects feel their displacement and adaptability, they are also the displaced and alien subjects for the communities. Recurring motifs attached to the subjects at different stages highlight their displacement and their transformation along with time and space, such as, Tao’s dumplings and keys in various time segments in *Mountain*, coffins and boats associated with Shengnan’s painful realisation of people’s hypocrisy in *Clouds*, and Duchun’s different controls of the camera in *Pluto*. Silence is also a key in the films’ narrative, the acoustic dislocation like the “aphasia” between Tao and Daole, Ye and Nan, Duchun and Wang implies failed communication and understanding. The rural setting becomes a significant space to observe and problematise human contact and connection as it is away from urban technologies and networks and modern interventions.

Moreover, the films are narrated in binary structures in different ways. In *Mountains*, visual and spatial narratives parallel the heroine’s shifting physical situations and inner states through time; Ye’s changing relationship with her home village pairs with that of her daughter in *Flower*; for the urban heroines, their geographical and spiritual displacements interweave with each other

during their journey.

The films share common cinematographic traits. Their cinematic visuals echo the literary visuals in Chinese exile and frontier poetry. Firstly, we see the mixture of reality and fantasy largely through the use of surrealist images. They add to the dislocation narrated, evoking a sense of being displaced from their physical environment, such as the random explosion, out-of-place, oil-painting-like landscapes and the decelerated dance scene in the snow in *Mountain*, the dream-like misty and burning spaces that gradually dissolve in the reality of *Clouds*, the cave where time is suspended and the colours more painterly in *Flower*; the jungle wild-man and the wet, dark cave in *Pluto*, the muddled appearance of the ship, the manikin and the visual split of the heroine alone moving against the threatening rocks in *Weekend*. They often reflect the subjects' repressed desires, dilemmas and inner states which are dislocated in real life suppression and expression. Such spaces are more associated with dystopian visuals and threatening or dangerous beauty and spectacle. Such a cinematographic oxymoron structures the binary sentiments. On the one hand, these connoted emotions are suppressed; on the other hand, they are being somehow opened up or awakened during the dislocating travels.

Bringing characteristics from Chinese scroll paintings, the sense of floating and blank-leaving in travelling views “translate spatial distance into temporal

duration” (Truniger 2020: 61). In the river trips in *Clouds* and *Weekend*, we see nothing but the verdant mountains on both sides of the strait and a small boat in the valley. Such images set a strong distinction from the previous barren mountains and ridges and the noise of the bustling city. The sketchy composition of landscapes, the largely blank space of sky and water evokes a sense of primitive and simple beauty and of returning to nature. It relieves the heroine of her urban disorientation and slows her down to perceive inner tranquility and to think about the questions that have been confusing herself. For Jin and Ye in *Dwell* and *Flower*, such blank spaces have different meanings for them as returnees. First, images like empty spaces between the vast fields and skylines, between willows and clouds emotionally metaphorise the gap between subjects and their long-detached hometowns; however, this alienation potentially suggests a possibility or opportunity to re-explore their positions and to re-locate themselves through dislocation. Such “incomplete” environments and visuals open up spaces for subjects’ fresh self-seeking, quests or their re-association to their once familiar home.

Dwelling manifests Chinese painterly aesthetics to visualise the character’s drifting, dislocation and self-relocation. Apart from the dream-like, floating cinematography that illustrates Guxi’s dilemma and her tension with her home community, her personal drama is interrupted by various images of displacement in the broader social picture. The film uses painterly

cinematography to beautify the images of destruction and despair, evoking a sense of forced negotiation between people and their inevitably devastated homeland. It connects personal and social dislocation in a romantic manner.

In drawing upon spatial distance in remote locations, the films stress a sense of temporal and structural gap. They document a “complex network of personally experienced displacement through distance and duration” (Zhang 2007: 99). Some heroines cannot overcome the disturbance from the ever-shifting present and the future that make them anxious. Some cannot bear burdens and clashes caused by binary cultures and communities attached to them simultaneously. However, all of them tend to find a way out by leaving the current space of entanglement and immersing themselves into somewhere distant; a migration that holds the potential for catalysing a renewed self and a new sense of home.

Melancholia and the Dislocation Cinema

As discussed in Chapter 3, melancholia features as a part of the dislocation narrative and aesthetics. The main characteristics that make up the melancholia feature in dislocation films are characters’ ongoing journeys, self-reproach and empowerment, and their ambiguous resolutions. Aesthetically, it is characterised by visuals of decay, corporeal movement and positioning in visual barriers or fragmentation, fantasy/surreal visuals. The

tables below evaluates how these traits become visible in the films.

| Dislocation and Melancholia (Narrative) | Ongoing journeys | Self-reapproach/ energy | Ambiguous resolution |
|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Mountains</i> | Zhao's departures from, and returns to, her hometown village. | Gaining material wealth and strengthening the sense of roots. | Appearing to be the only one with a perseverance to return to a homeland and attachment as she goes back home dancing alone in snow. Has she achieved spiritual fulfilment and enjoyed a sense of strength from alienation? Or is she left behind or abandoned by the advancing world? |

| | | | |
|---------------|--|---|--|
| <i>Flower</i> | Returning to hometown village from the city. | Initial feeling of alienation stimulating Ye's hometown observation - she tries to re-establish her identity and position within the community through negotiation. | Although Ye seems to find a way to re-situate herself, we do not see how she is going to make her living back in the village. |
| <i>Pluto</i> | Camerawoman's rural adventure from the city. | Claiming a sense of personal standing, becoming more determined, independent and getting out of male control and objectification. | Although it seems that there is shift in power relation between Duchun and her male boss, there is no concrete resolution to her career dilemma. |
| <i>Clouds</i> | Urban career woman's rural journey. | Feeling a sense of relief and spiritual revival away from suffocating urban environments. | Shengnan finally has to go back to the city to face her cancer, tense family relations and |

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|---|--|
| | | | ongoing problems in her career. |
| <i>Weekend</i> | Urbanities' rural home-coming vocation. | Intending to get rid of urban pressure; re-claiming an intimate hometown attachment. | Haunted memories and interpersonal crisis among the gang making the expected hometown familiarity uncanny and threatening. |
| <i>Dwelling</i> | Rural graduate's home-coming. | Hoping for a more comfortable, relaxing life back home; experiencing, then resisting, the traditional gender expectation back home; striving for career and marriage freedom. | Heroine always on her way (drifting); no clear indications of the solution to her problems; the denouncement shows family reconciliation, not particularly to what extent she has gained autonomy. |
| <i>Chaogtu</i> | Rural woman's travels between her | Actively solving problems about her | Heroine finally leaves her |

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|
| | village and the city. | relationship; criticising husband's urban craze; learning to be independent and strong. | deep-loved village and goes to the city alone with her baby, abandoning her husband. Is it her triumphant rebellion in the celebration of her empowerment and autonomy, or the result of unbearable financial burden as a quasi-single mother in a poor village? |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|

| Dislocation and Melancholia (Aesthetics) | Visuals of decay | Bodily movement and positioning | Fantasy |
|---|---|--|---|
| <i>Mountains</i> | Industrial ruins, vast, isolating barren lands. | Visual distance, spatial alienation, isolating figure in the | Surreal, dystopian visuals; dreamlike visions of memories |

| | | | |
|---------------|--|--|---|
| | | vast landscape. | |
| <i>Flower</i> | Ruin-like home interior. | Spatial dissection and block; heroine visually positioned against family and community. | Solitary dancing in the cave with out-of-place surroundings and visuals, extensive duration. |
| <i>Pluto</i> | Rundown villages and primitive forests. | Heroine's journey alone, away from the group; her uncanny attachment to the unfamiliar jungle space. | Dream states suggesting her desire for breaking from real-life circumstances that constrain and oppress her. |
| <i>Clouds</i> | Barren mountain-scapes, demolished rock architectures. | Lonely drifts in menacing and desolate landscapes; heroine visually swallowed, engulfed or obstructed by surroundings. | Fusion of imagined and real spaces; a sense of searching-in-vacuum ; surreal depictions of landscapes projecting heroine's state of mind. |

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Weekend</i> | Overwhelming feelings of disrepair, decay and dysfunctionality in the township. | Heroine visually squeezed, displaced or detached in landscapes or physical surroundings, or immersed in darkness. | Heroine's eccentric behaviours and states of mind in bizarre moments that provide a sense of spectrality. |
| <i>Dwelling</i> | Township reconstruction against the isolating, cloistered shelter of the heroine's old-fashioned family residence. | Visual distance and spatial detachment; constant shifts between heroine's ornamental sense of presence submerged in landscape and her subjective, observative point-of-view. | Subject immersed in the interchangeable physical environment and the space in paintings, implying a sense of seclusion and utopia space away from real-life dilemma and pressure. |
| <i>Chaogtu</i> | Decayed village and residences; deadly winter landscapes. | Visual obstruction; heroine's detached figure against the vast void of | Homeland scenery in heroine's point-of-view depicted in |

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|---|
| | | grassland/snowy spaces. | dream-like visuals as if her hometown sentiments and attachment are merely illusory under permeable urbanisation. |
|--|--|-------------------------|---|

EPILOGUE

This thesis has traced diverse stories of women's displacement and their journeys to remote areas in 21st century Chinese cinema and has argued that the cinema of dislocation is a powerfully emerging genre. It has critiqued binary categories such as the urban-rural, tradition-modernity, minority-dominance, marginalisation-power, and examined the places in between in which people move in and out, blurring and destabilising such cliched sharp distinctions.

This thesis contributes to the formation of a film genre that is critical to the current era and provides a particular methodology for genre studies in Chinese cinema. It draws connections between cinema, history, socio-political transformation and other Chinese art forms, demonstrating the cultural specificity of this genre. Not only does this thesis show how dislocation cinema displays specific characteristics within Chinese contexts, but it also develops an intertextual research method that shows how distinct cultural characteristics could be applied and connected to the studies of other national cinemas. It develops a mode of analysis which allows the study of cinema to speak to multiple-disciplines and interconnects cinema to and within the culture itself. This vertical approach situates cinema in a more dimensional ground, which is a step forward.

However, this does not mean that dislocation cinema is a narrowly focused genre only looking at the films within their particular culture. It is grounded in the trajectory of the nation in a super-fluid, globalised era. The characters have all been affected by our current social, cultural, economic situation under the constraints of a globalised discourse. For example, our Tibetan heroine watches an English documentary on contraception in Pema Tsden's *Balloon* (气球, 2019), the village widow from northern China confronts the consequences of migration labour in Xin Yukun's *A Coffin in the Mountain* (心迷宫, 2015), the female migrant worker returns to her village with Belgium shortbread in Peng Fei's *The Taste of Rice Flower* (米花之味, 2017) and the township family's domestic burden is set against the rapid processes of globalisation and urbanisation in their region in preparation for the Asian Olympics in Gu Xiaogang's *Dwelling on the Fuchun Mountain* (春江水暖, 2019). Fundamentally, the sense of journey, transit, and encountering and responding to transformation is a universal topic. Therefore, I would like to say the cinema of dislocation is a cultural see-saw, it is particular to regional/local and national cultures as well as appealing to a global auditorium. My expertise is in Chinese cinema, but my research and methodology can open up new possibilities for researchers in other national cinemas. It potentially broadens the research scope onto local cinema, rural cinema, hometown cinema, translocal cinematic journeys, and onto as focus on the concepts of dislocation and how travel shapes distinct styles and aesthetics.

The study provides a perspective in film analysis that considers a sense of art-in-motion, that is, the fluid quality of the diegesis, the character development, as well as that of our current world. How the real-life social journey marries the ongoing filmic journeys of the characters, stories, filmmakers as well as the viewers' is also a question that such a cinema hopes to propose. The sense of travelling steps in and out of the films and builds a dialogue between the *reel* and the *real*.

Demonstrating Dislocation as A Genre

This thesis has argued the cinema of dislocation as a genre according to the four generic features of film genre - network of directors, themes and narrative, cinematography and aesthetics, and flexibility. Starting out with the network of directors dealing with subjects about dislocation, I came to the conclusion that all these people are in some kind of inclusive network dealing with a collective issue. Among the 76 filmmakers surveyed in this thesis who focus on dislocation themes and aesthetics, 78% have studied in the BFA or have been engaged in programmes and activities held by the Academy; 70% come from rural backgrounds or have had rural experiences (see table in Appendix 2). Films of the dislocation cinema appear to come from a certain group of people who have been trained in a certain way (mostly graduating from the Beijing Film Academy, or trained in other film institutions). They have all had

experiences of dislocation. Some have come from remote, marginal environments or communities, some have experienced social segregation, and some have travelled in-between places and developed a particular interest in movement and displacement. Their similar academic backgrounds in film, their early careers in arts, literature and television and, more importantly, their experiences of being displaced in their early lives shape their dislocation themes, narrative and cinematography.

Thematically and narratively, as the filmmakers all studied during or after the Reform, a period of great socio-cultural transformation in China, they are keen to explore the theme of journeying with a specific focus on the rural marginal and urban outcasts who reflect an alternative view of the country's rapid advancement. By examining the lives of dislocated women, they challenge, question, critique and raise awareness of women's socio-cultural status in this new era. The characters' journeys are either transitional or searching, implying the complex nexus between people's confusion and lostness in the country's inexorable advance. Such a journeying narrative explores the correlation between people's geographical and psychological movements through which they seek solutions to their dislocation in their dislocated status.

There are certain characteristics that make the cinema of dislocation particularly Chinese. Cinematic representations in this genre have been

influenced by literary visualisation of the travelling aesthetics that encompasses narratives from exile, home-coming and frontier poetry in ancient Chinese literature. We also see in this genre themes and styles about personal laments or spiritual pursuits in rural travels, human-nature relations, images of ruins in nature, and aesthetics of emptiness found in Chinese painting traditions. The emphasis of subjects' positioning and travelling in particular landscapes are significant. Characters' travels within nature are often depicted through painterly and poetic visuals that make up specific styles of Chinese creativity, stressing a sense of self-discovery and nourishment in distant journeys.

The parallel and echo between characters and spaces, either in outdoor nature or domestic settings, underlines the women's ill-suited, un-situated states; they fail to feel attached to or welcomed by their original environments or communities. The heroines are often placed in visual barriers, blocked or segmented by objects and lines. Such visual fragmentation and the feeling of dissection elicit a sensory pain and a graphical and suggestive sense of disjuncture, enhancing the feeling of dislocation. They are reflected through mirrors or pinned against blank or seemingly nowhere backgrounds, suggesting a feeling of incompleteness, lack and non-belonging as such visual compositions distance them from the tangible world.

Fantasy or surreal moments are often inserted into realistic depictions and the cinematographic discussion overlaps with the final generic feature, flexibility. Some are dream-like, offering an illusory state and reflecting the subjects' unobtainable yearnings; some have a plastic, artificial quality as if the heroines are lifted out of reality into a hyper-real, polystyrene perfection; some appear to be random and involve the heroines in extreme or bizarre situations which in turn imply the characters' internal states as echoing their physical circumstances and troubles. Although styles and depictions of fantasy and surreal scenes are flexible and vary in each film, they evoke something mutual. Most of the scenes visualise a violent spectacle that affords a strong emotional response dictated by the visuals, colour, lighting and mood.

We often see dystopian imagery in such depictions. Some are ruined and ugly industrial rural/township wastelands; some are bleak and barren countryside settings; some are threatening and sharp-edged rocks and mountains. The heroines are travelling, they are the migrants between spaces. Therefore, dystopian spaces conjure up "phantom spirits", that is, the "migrant's experience of liminality [that] represents a kind of ghostliness" (Wagner 2013: 361-377; Lovatt, 2012: 423). Such scenes set some episodes apart from the rest of the film both narratively and aesthetically, contributing to a distinct sense of dislocation in which space and time become either non-linear, broken, dysfunctional, disjointed or disrupted. The women occupy a "space of

liminality”, where their experiences are “fractured, nonsynchronous and discordant.” (Lovatt 2012: 377, 435).

The notion of melancholia is also key to the dislocation cinema. As discussed in the Introduction, the heroines’ pain from their initial displacements eventually turns into “energies” through their “ongoing journeys” of “self-reapproaches” and “investigation of liminality” (Freud 2015: 242; Mamula 2013: 55). Melancholia does not evoke an absolute sense of loss and sorrow, it involves subjects’ self-cure and provides an opportunity for healing from one’s initial grief. Artistically, it is associated with depictions of aesthetic sensibility through duration and experience. In a general mood of sorrow and melancholy, narrative melancholia in dislocation films addresses heroines’ quests for self-healing or self-empowerment stimulated from their initial despair or displacement. Rather than shrinking into hopeless, frozen time and space, our heroines explore the functionality of dislocation in their geo-emotional itineraries.

Cinematographically, the aesthetics of decay - moribund, threatening physical settings characterise cinematic melancholy. Such environments are the stimuli to the subjects’ journeys. Their corporeal movements in physical environments illustrate their various (dis)/engagements with the world. The counter-velocity aesthetics elicits the counter-urban narrative in this genre by which velocity,

speediness and social fluidity feature an urban-centric impulse of contemporary China. Such “film disappearance”, the “delayed narrative style” and suggestive uses of duration that “exploit its spectator’s boredom” do not only set a distinct feature aesthetically but, criticise the overwhelming speed of the country’s advancement towards urbanisation (Mello 2015: 137-138; Schoonover 2012: 66). Subjects maintain their own pace, space and temporality against the “normative” velocity of the cultural dominance. Visual barriers, fragmented images/narratives enhance the sense that the characters and the viewer feel the connections between the broken, gloomy images or symbols but, cannot integrate them into a single/complete resolution. Besides, ambiguous or apparently unsettling scenes or denouements disentangle the viewer from expecting or searching for a conventionally absolute happy ending. It offers both the subjects and us a means to challenge or resist the structural archetypes that the women have been long associated with in cinema. The beauty of incompleteness echoes the sense of ongoing journeying expressed through the travelling narrative and aesthetics. Such “amorphous sentiments” also imply the quality of fluidity and “open-ended thoughts” (Pipolo 2021: 3, 43).

The 21st Century Cinema of Dislocation

The cinema of dislocation is both a historical and contemporary discourse regarding Chinese socio-cultural specificities. It has temporal particularity and

amalgamations. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the theme of dislocating travels in Chinese cinema emerged during the post-Sino-Japanese war period in the 1940s and that of female social displacement appeared in the 1920s. The dislocation cinema in the new century takes on the themes from the pre-1949 work such as urban-rural tensions, questions of belonging and identity, social marginalisation. It transforms them, making them fused into 21st-century concerns.

There is something aesthetically and thematically different between pre-1949 and the new century dislocation films. Thematically, the pre-1949 dislocation films largely stress the subjects' helplessness and vulnerability. They tend to depict characters' tragedy as inevitable and inescapable. The disenfranchised subjects appear to face absolute social removal or exclusion, or they are incapable of solving their dilemma or unbearable pain. These ideas are visualised through film language such as juxtapositions between contradictory social circumstances, and the graphical positioning of subjects in visual entrapment, low-angle shots, or against bland and flat backgrounds. We often see characters' journeys and movements from a certain distance in long shots through which we are forced to observe their relationships with their surroundings. They tend to be portrayed as part of the environment or community. In this way, characters are depicted as socially dependent bodies constantly viewed and judged by collective/communal norms and criteria that

potentially contribute to their exclusion.

21st-century dislocation films take a striking turn in portraying the subjects and their travels. Thematically, the theme of displacement has been broadened, taking contemporary phenomena into account. They include development-displacement projects and constructions, reversed migration to countrysides, influences from globalisation, urbanisation and marketisation, urban anomie, problems that occurred under rural/township revitalisation, the raising awareness of female issues like left-behind, left-over women, female subjectivity and women's situations at the workplace. Cinematographically, both landscapes and characters have been treated with more individualistic approaches. For example, tracking shots with a handheld camera directly follow character movement from multiple angles and perspectives; subjective shots, surreal and fantasy moments stress relationships between subjects' desires, their inner states and the tangible world that entraps them; characters' travels in long takes emphasis the passage of time and real-time observation of the surrounding world during the quests; visuals of dystopia, emotionalised landscapes and melancholia not only adumbrate the subjects' disengagement, disorientation and pain, but also ground their active, observative attitudes and their journeys towards empowerment and self-revival.

The transformed narrative and visual language in contemporary dislocation

films epitomise the shifting attitudes and responses towards the status of dislocation which has emerged to be an agency for identity re-shaping, self-healing and awakened self-awareness. Unlike their previous counterparts, our new wave dislocation protagonists start to defeat and resist against the power and circumstances that have enmeshed and circumscribed them. Their journeys do not enhance their vulnerability but provide solutions for them.

Not only does this study contribute to the construction of a new genre and a distinct perspective in evaluating a powerfully emerging group of filmmakers and their subjects set against the current socio-cultural backdrop in China, it challenges existing scholarship on Chinese minority and feminist cinemas. Frangville suggests that minority film after the 2000s falls into two categories: one is the cultural display and political propagandist work projecting the power of nation-state and the other adopts a hierarchal narrative and portrays the minority subjects as inferior through the representation of conflict (2012: 68). Lu argues that after the 1990s, the genre of ethnic minority cinema has broken away from the political framework and jumped onto the campaign for the “cinema of the spectacle” (2020: 7). However, this thesis has demonstrated that, Chinese minority films belonging to the cinema of dislocation move away from those intentions and narratives. We see apolitical, autonomous and non-stereotypical minority heroines who do not reject urban/modern forces. They re-negotiate their positions, actively find alternative ways of situating

themselves, project the current circumstance of national integrity and offer a reflection.

Existing research on recent films about women in Chinese cinema has largely focused on “gender crises through the criterion of class” and subjects whose life trajectories are “triangulated by the intersections between urbanity and rurality, globalization and tradition, and desire and crisis, [where] most have sunk to anonymity” due to the “incomplete development of modernisation in the countryside” (Grossman 2009: 146; Li 2017: 90-91; McGrath 2018: 116). Such studies and films, like *Pretty Big Feet* (美丽的大脚, Yang Yazhou 杨亚洲, 2002), *Nuan* (暖, Huo Jianqi 霍建起, 2002), *Warm Spring* (暖春, Wulan Tana 乌兰塔娜, 2004), *The Women Who Are Waiting* (守望女, Xiao Long 萧龙, 2013) critique the uneven socio-cultural and productive force driven by the state’s urban-centric narrative that shapes a space of friction. The films, it is argued, have the features of “-style realism” in Chinese independent cinema and foreground the “unadorned truth” of rural heroines’ struggles, desires, and dilemma as they encounter “post-socialist changes to their country in their interactions with urbanites” (Li 2017: 105).

However, this thesis has argued that the cinema of dislocation on the one hand, portrays women as individual icons of distinct social problems and pains who arouse spectatorial sympathy and thoughts. More importantly, women’s pursuit

of subjectivity, individual yearnings and their agency as dislocated women, elucidates the threshold and the moving trend that women desire: they are making changes in their identity-shaping, spiritual/emotional belonging and self-empowerment. Dislocation is a distinct socio-cultural and political factor and indicator of such a movement. Although subjects travel between cities and countryside places, they are not necessarily rural/township women. They also include reverse rural migrants and urban women, which challenges the collective cult of urban-centrism. Such a cinema not only provides a socio-cultural and political significance that is reflexive, representative and evaluative of our current society, it also foregrounds a particular style of aesthetics for this emerging cinematic archetype.

The countryside arenas in the cinema of dislocation not only function as the physical homeland of rural women, but also a spiritual one for frustrated urban women's self-discovery. Through a gendered lens, women do not benefit from urban prosperity (Bradshaw 2002). With the market economy and the shifting socio-economic landscape in China, women are troubled by reconsidering their role, by family-work reconciliation (Song 2005). Although urban women generally enjoy some advantages over their rural counterparts, a range of gender inequalities and injustices persist in urban areas that constrain their engagement in the labour market and in informal enterprises and that inhibit the development of capabilities among younger women (Chant 2011). These

include limited human capital, financial and physical assets, personal safety and security as well as occupational discrimination, social representation and visibility, work-family conflict, social segregation and disengagement (Chen and Hamori 2013; Chang et al. 2011). Urban Chinese women's rights and status are hindered by issues around property ownership, social and professional identity, financial condition and cultural norms. By examining urban women's journeys in the various countrysides, this research has led the way for prospective studies on this theme, opening up a new perspective on the urban-rural narrative, not through conflicts and frustration in urban environments, but through the soothing sense of re-located journeying.

Thus, "alternate axes of Otherness", including gender, sexuality, class and socio-cultural spaces, have been "salient in Chinese discourses; specifically, rural, minority, primitive" came to be "verbally and visually aligned with the feminine-as-subordinate" (Schein and Luo 2016: 288). In the cinema of dislocation, however, the starting point for the women is their position of alterity, yet what is more important and potentially makes the unique standpoint of this research is, the re-search, the identity re-making and empowerment of the once disengaged other, that is, their spiritual re-location through physical dislocation.

Limitations and Future Trajectories

Heroines discussed in this thesis fall into two categories. Firstly, the disenfranchised female villagers whose intra-village travels on the one hand underline their marginal status, but which, on the other hand, offer the opportunity of self-empowerment. The second group of heroines are the rural-goers who are either rural migrants who have lived or worked in cities and have decided to go back home, or urban middle-class women who cannot bear the burdens of city life and go to the countryside for self-revival. In this case, both groups embody a sense of home-coming, the former physically and the later spiritually. This study has not dealt with urban dislocation or migration to urban areas. Films about urban dislocation deal with urbanities who are marginalised or on the edge of urban modernity and development and of cosmopolitan lifestyles, or with rural/township people's city lives as migrants. Because the countryside or remote settings are not the subjects' space of activity; they do not travel in/to remote areas, or they are merely restricted within urban settings without travelling or being on a quest at all. Therefore, this project, for example, does not examine films about marginal environments and communities in cities, such as the left-behind elderly in Xing Xiao's 邢潇 *A Loner* (大雪冬至, 2017), or the young autistic character in Xue Xiaolu's 薛晓路 *Ocean Heaven* (海洋天堂, 2010).

To specify and narrow the scope into a particular focus within the narrative genre of dislocation cinema, this study has focused on a sub-category of a

genre of cinematic dislocation, that is, counter-urban dislocations. To demonstrate that this constitutes a genre or a film movement that has a coherence of countryside spaces and townships, this thesis has argued that the wider genre of dislocation exists before venturing into the sub-genre of rural dislocation.

Dislocation cinema emerged a global genre around the turn of the century when global displacement started to become a key concept socially and academically. Feldman et al. indicate that the displacees' new place-making "employ spatial metaphors, based on new as well as long-standing claims to territory, to explore questions about national sovereignty, and population movements across national borders, between local communities, and within social groups" (2003: 7). They argue that dislocation redefines space and people's relation to space. The original dwellers become outcasts and experience material and intangible loss; they are not forced into nowhere, but rather are pushed into a dysfunctional environment where they have to find a new way out. De Wet develops this further suggesting that the displacees are "dis-emplaced, and have to reconstitute, i.e. re-emplace, themselves socially, politically and economically in a new environment" (2015: 86). This feature of dislocation cinema in the context of China emerged when the country started to encounter rapid processes of urbanisation and globalisation in the 21st century. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, before the

socio-political watershed in 2001 when China joined the WTO, there had been a long history of the theme of dislocation in Chinese cinema. Dislocation is a process of both dismantling and empowerment. On the one hand, it disrupts the social structure, causing gulfs between communities; on the other hand, it provides an alternative space for the marginal to strive for their living, identity and hopes.

Due to the emerging status of such a cinema along with our particular era, some might argue that dislocation cinema is a film cycle. A cycle of films responds to specific places and historic circumstances – like gang crime films about Prohibition in the US in the late 1920s – and if it continues to be popular it solidifies into a genre that film producers/makers purposively imitate to make money (Altman 1999). The term ‘cycle’ seems often to be a sign of a nuanced and precise way of talking about film, particularly films that are intertwined with particular socio-political and economic developments. However, cycles function as “proprietary brand names owned, developed and exploited” by particular companies and production modes (Hungtings 2014: 16; Altman 1999: 113-121). This characteristic dissociates dislocation cinema as a film cycle as it has not been shaped by particular production modes or companies and its themes and aesthetics are visible in both commercial and independent films.

Dislocation may be considered to be a broad genre associated with different

socio-cultural and geo-political spaces, genders and forms. In my view, it is a genre rather than a cycle as it is not attached to specific historical periods, particular locations and production companies as stressed in the definition of genre (Altman 1999; Hungtings 2014). The cinema of dislocation tends to narrate our current era and a world that is constantly progressing. Moreover, it is not geographically limited. It speaks to the universal phenomenon of travel, transformation, place-making and identity-reshaping.

As mentioned in the Introduction, most filmmakers examined in this research are male due to their larger proportion, although there were quite a few dislocation films made by female directors released during “the lockdown years” after 2020 when the main body of the thesis was already completed. Some key female filmmakers’ work is also not relevant to rural settings therefore has not been included in the thesis. These limitations open new research directions about women for Chinese dislocation cinema. Future research trajectories include more dislocation films made by female filmmakers, examining how their gendered experience helps to formulate a different perspective both from a diegetic perspective and in the process of film production.

In my future research, I would also like to examine themes of male dislocation (physical travels, gender crisis, or the problematic masculinity that displaces

them)⁶⁰ and urban dislocation (urban fringes, the urban villages 城中村 phenomena,⁶¹ mental displacement stemming from urban/cosmopolitan experiences)⁶². Also, related to my personal experience, diasporic dislocation in Chinese cinema is a key category that I wish to explore. I would investigate how overseas Chinese and their transnational journeys are portrayed in Chinese cinema and in global (co-)productions and explore their narrative and aesthetic features, the differences between various modes of production and styles, and what might have stimulated such differences.⁶³

Documentaries are also key to cinematic dislocation research, especially regarding its theme, style and production. Chinese female documentarians have always striven to explore female displacement and empowerment, struggle and response to struggle. They fight for a place for female status and voice, speaking to the Chinese socio-cultural landscape as well as projecting their thoughts onto a global platform and addressing universal concerns. For example, Ji Dan's 季丹 *Spiral Staircase of Harbin* (哈尔滨·回旋阶梯, 2008) unfolds different family struggles, inter-generational problems and the anomie of township youth in the filmmaker's hometown; Kiki Yu's 余天琦 *Chinese Van Gogh* (中国梵高, 2016) presents a position that China hopes to adopt globally as well as the individual pursuit of life, morality and art through the emotional

⁶⁰ Diao Yinan's 刁亦男 *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (白日焰火, 2014).

⁶¹ Lou Ye's 娄烨 *The Shadow Play* (风中有朵雨做的云, 2016).

⁶² Han Xu's 韩旭 *Into the Night* (茫茫黑夜漫游, 2021).

⁶³ Wang Ziyi's 王子逸 *The Farewell* (别告诉她, 2019).

and geographical journeys of a Chinese copy-painter between the “oil-painting village” in Shenzhen and Amsterdam; Feng Yan’s 冯艳 *Daughter of the River* (长江边的女人们, 2019) narrates four women’s entwined lives, their confusion and transformation over eighteen years against the backdrop of the Three Gorges Dam project; Angie Chen’s 陈安琪 *I’ve Got the Blues* (水底行走的人, 2018) shows us the filmmaker’s shifting perspectives observing the life of a marginal, impoverished, but great artist in an era of regional/global tension.

Male documentary filmmakers have also made valuable contributions to the theme of dislocation. Back in 2019, I was lucky to see Wu Wenguang’s 吴文光 *Investigating My Father* (调查父亲, 2016), a part of his Memory Project, in the Asian Film Festival at King’s College London, followed by Wu and Dr. Victor Fan’s panel discussion. The film is about a son (Wu himself) investigating his father’s history: how the father changed from a man of the “old society” to a man of the “new society” after 1949. We are presented with an actual archive stating the film’s title right on the front cover at the beginning of the film. We see the real archives, the physical investigation and search and Wu displacing himself from the current time and digging into the absent and unexpected past. We feel the process of tangible movement, some materials without voice-over or music, images and episodes unfolding in silence. We experience this history as Wu did - in mute, frozen images and delayed words, some images and archives are projected in framed-screens in a powerpoint in front of an

audience in the film. Such a style stresses simultaneously the notion of realism as well as performative quality problematising the narrative boundary, thus creating narrative and sensorial dislocation while evoking the feeling of temporal displacement from the theme of absent time and memories that keep haunting the present.

Looking in a different direction, Wang Jiuliang's 王久良 environmental documentary *Plastic China* (塑料王国, 2016) evokes multiple displacements. The heroine's rural-urban migration displaces her from home and heightens her spatialised dispossession as a migrant child; although the male protagonist is a native of the town where the processing plant stands, he experiences displacement without moving, as his hometown has been ecologically damaged and therefore has become inhabitable because of the third layer of displacement - the importation of Western trash. As discussed above, the concept of dislocation is becoming increasingly diverse and reflexive and is becoming a strong place-holder for future research.

The cinema of dislocation serves as the anti-text of urban dreams. Yet the notion of place for these women is multi-layered. It signifies not only a geographical sense of a physical location but also a psychological sense of belonging, of feeling comfortable in, or being part of, a community. The dislocated female body on the one hand, is inscribed with ungendered issues

of national pain or social phenomena; on the other hand, women's dislocation starts out with images of gender disengagement but serves as the critique and challenge to such a position and potentially represents a way of self-recentring. Through distinct narrative, themes and cinematography about the feeling of displacement and re-location, the cinema centre-stages and celebrates the strength of the off-centred dislocated characters. The reflexive dislocation styles, such as visual barriers and distance, fragmented narrative, eccentric and suggestive surreal images in realistic depictions, setting characters' pain or alienation against painterly and beautiful environments, invite us to think about what had made them disenfranchised and powerless and in what ways they empower themselves to sew the broken pieces of themselves together and move on in new directions.

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<https://w.mgtv.com/b/318758/4177138.html?cxid=95kqkw8n6>.

Seventy-Seven Days (*qi shi qi tian* 七十七天), Zhao Hantang 赵汉唐, Beijing: Juhe yinglian, 2017.

http://v.pptv.com/show/DIsenQVr2xl8ibgY.html?rcc_id=baiduchuisou.

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Country Far Away (*sunmao* 榉卯), Gan Xiaoe 甘小二, Guangzhou: Qifengyin, 2017. Film.

Ghost in the Mountains (*kongshan yike* 空山异客), Yang Heng 杨恒, Beijing: Yiti Films, 2017. Film.

A Loner (*daxue dongzhi* 大雪冬至), Xing Xiao 邢潇, Beijing: Youchong Films, 2017.

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MFA, Natalia Leite, Orland Park: MPI Films, 2017. Film.

Revenge, Coralie Fargeat, Paris: Rézo Films, 2018. Film.

The Widowed Witch (*Beifangyipiancangmang* 北方一片苍茫), Cai Chengjie, Shanghai: Aiqiyi; Beijing: Liulixingkong, 2018, Film.

Wangdrak's Rain Boots (*wangzha de yuxue* 旺扎的雨靴), Lhupal Gyal 拉华加, Beijing: Beijing Youth Film Studio, 2018.

http://v.pptv.com/show/JicB9ibmLIOHbZV5s.html?rcc_id=baiduchuisou.

The Pluto Moment (*ming wang xing shike* 冥王星时刻), Zhang Ming 章明, Shanghai: Weige Films, 2018.

<http://www.chnaus.com/vodplay/5v5mu-1-1.html>.

An Elephant Sitting Still (*daxiang xi di er zuo* 大象席地而坐), Hu Bo 胡波, Taipei: Fansheng Visuals, 2018.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Nam_XEA6cU.

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Ash Is Purest White (jianghu ernü 江湖儿女), Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, Beijing: H Brothers; Tianjin: Huace Films, 2018. <https://www.mgtv.com/h/324299.html>.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRn8-Ga8Ix8>.

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Meili (美丽), Zhou Zhou 周洲, Beijing: Wanshuiguilai Films, 2018. Film.

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https://www.ixigua.com/6830993382077104653?utm_source=baidu_lvideo&wid_try=1.

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Sea Above, Cloud Blow (yun shui 云水), Zeng Zeng 曾赠, Beijing: Juke Films, 2018. Film.

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Balloon (qiqiu 气球), Pema Tseden 万玛才旦, Beijing: Shengtangshidai, Jiuzhouzhongyuan Digital, Tianjin: Gongchangdamen, Qinghai: Mani Stones, 2019.
https://www.iq.com/play/17hhafksp8?_from=iqiyi&vfm=2008_aldbd&fc=828fb30b722f3164&fv=p_02_01.

Spring Tide (chun chao 春潮), Yang Lina 杨荔钠, Shanghai: Aimeiling Films, 2019.
https://www.iq.com/play/19rrcuwotc?_from=iqiyi&vfm=2008_aldbd&fc=828fb30b722f3164&fv=p_02_01.

The Fourth Wall (*di si mian qiang* 第四面墙), Zhang Chong and Zhang Bo 张翀、张波, Beijing: Hehe Films, Shanghai: Chongjili, 2019. Film.

Wisdom Tooth (*ri guang zhi xia* 日光之下), Liang Ming 梁鸣, Shanghai: Taopiaopiao Films, 2019.

https://v.pptv.com/show/AvZq6VG3J2XIRoo.html?rcc_id=baiduchisou.

The Climbers (*pan deng zhe* 攀登者), Li Gangren 李仁港, Shanghai: Shanghai Film Co., 2019.

http://v.pptv.com/show/YGrjYMguntwicvUE.html?rcc_id=baiduchisou.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_5Hy9MicpU.

Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains (*chun jiang shui nuan* 春江水暖), 顾晓刚 Gu Xiaogang, Beijing: Dadishidai, Gongchang damen, 2019. Film.

Chaogtu with Sarula (*bai yun zhi xia* 白云之下), Wang Rui 王瑞, Shanghai: Qizhi Films, Beijing: Beijing Youth Film Studio, Wuxi: Chaodao Production, 2019.

<https://tv.sohu.com/s/sohuplayer/iplay.html?vid=6446387&autoplay=true&disablePlaylist=true>.

The Reunions (*jixiang ruyi* 吉祥如意), Da Peng 大鹏, Beijing: Ruyi Films, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGodFdCevew>.

Promising Young Woman, Emerald Fennell, California: Universal Pictures, Focus Features, 2020. Film.

Hot Soup (*re tang* 热汤), Zhang Ming 章明, Shanghai: Mancao Film Studio, 2021. Film.

APPENDIX 1: Historicising The Concept of Chinese Identity

This is a supplementary material about the conceptualisation and the historicisation of the *location* of Chinese identity, offering a foundation for the investigation of *dislocation*. By looking at the history, the construction and the definition of Chinese identity, it tackles the situational quality of identity by revisiting theoretical frameworks on national/imperial identity and historicising the shaping of Chinese identity from pre-modern periods to the 21st century. The notion of a centre, and a centrifugal force, has been associated with the Chinese polity which deploys socio-historical and ideological fabrications to legitimate the unification of a Chinese identity. This section argues that being Chinese interrogates the concept of cultural entitlement; the definition and the formation of identity is a constant process rather than a fixed status.

I examine the concept of Chinese identity and historicises it from the mythical Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors (*sanhuang wudi* 三皇五帝) period (2852-2070 BCE). The sections interrogates why Chinese people have been identifying themselves as Han 汉, the principle ethnicity in contemporary China that continues to shape a distinct centralised cultural narrative. Analysing the ethnocentric narrative of Han identity provides a critical discussion of the sociopolitical and cultural displacement of those who are then “othered” as non-Han people, ethnic minorities many of whom have been embraced within

China's polity for thousands of years. As the thesis is about dislocation, the concept of location as it relates to identity across all these domains is significant, and the thesis therefore contributes to a critical understanding of, and disruption of, the location-dislocation binary.

Heidegger refers to national identity as a mutual belonging (1969: 25). National identity has been construed as a top-down initiative shaped by "a policy-making elite's" consideration of "the essence of their nation in relation to others"; the definition of that essence will be established "by the group's subordination to sovereign authority", and by a "set of individuals who fall within the decision-making scope of the state" based on a culture's own realisation of its sameness and difference to others (Scalapino 1993: 25; Dittmer and Kim 1993: 6; Verba 1971: 293-316; Erikson 1960: 57). Therefore, the formulation of national identity is the "psychological foundation for the roles and behaviour patterns of a country in the international arena" (Scalapino 1993: 215). Dittmer and Kim develop this idea illustrating it as the "experienced reality in [people's] psychocultural consciousness and historical time" (1993: 272).

National identity is situational, defined through one's culture, psychological development and the relationship between self and others. It stresses the boundaries of the collective, and its degree of inclusivity. The shape of that

identity involves individual participation in “a nationwide system of political, social, religious, and symbolic relationships, with even localisms being transformed into statements of such relationships” (Cohen 1991: 123). Therefore, national identity should be defined as “an ongoing process” rather than as a “fixed set of boundaries, a relationship rather than a free-standing entity or attribute” (Dittmer and Kim 1993: 13). It involves both the state’s mission at different moments and any individual’s identification with or against such authoritative shaping. The fluid, transformative and journeying nature of identity formation parallels and is a key subject for cinematic journeys. It offers creative potential for filmmakers.

Chinese people refer themselves to as *yanhuang zisun* 炎黄子孙 (the posterity of Emperors Yan 炎帝 and Huang 黄帝, who are the prehistorical, legendary warrior-emperors who defended the Chinese land against enemies and introduced civilisation to it) (Birrell 1993: 300; Wang 2018: 218). Yan and Huang are believed to be the culture bringers, inventors, and the symbol of China’s cultural and political nucleus (Wienen 2002; Yeo 2008). Furthermore, *huang* 黄 (yellow), represents the Centre surrounded by other inhabitable lands, *sihai* 四海 (the Four Sea). Following the colour symbolism, the Chinese also refer themselves to *huangzhongren* 黄种人 (the yellow race).

According to Sima Qian 司马迁 (145-86 BCE), the geographical origins of

China were to be located in the Wei River Valley (*weihe* 渭河), a tributary of the Yellow River (*huanghe* 黄河), the cradle of Chinese civilisation starting from the legendary regime of the Yellow Emperor (*huangdi* 黄帝, 2697-2597 or 2698-2598 BCE) (Sima c. 100BCE), The Yellow River later “encompass[ed] parts of the Yangtze River” (*Yangzi jiang* 扬子江) (Tu 1991: 3). References to a centre consistent with the administrative source of China vary, but it has been widely recognised as “north near the Yellow River” (Tu 1991: 146; Chang 1986: 53). The *huaxia* 华夏 culture associated with the mythical Xia 夏 Dynasty (2070-1600 BCE) is believed to be the origin of Chinese civilisation. Huaxia is the initial alliance of agricultural tribes living along the Yellow River (Asiapac 2003: 12). The Xia people are said to have established their territory in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River which they believed to be the centre (*zhong* 中) of the world with a flourishing, flowery culture (the literal meaning of *hua* which has a semantic range that includes images of splendour (KCCTA 2015). *Hua* 华 evokes a sense of power, plenitude and prosperity which survives in China today, capturing something of the root identity and belonging even for Chinese today. The term distinguishes a civilised Chinese ethnicity from the barbarian races around them (Wilkinson 2015: 95-123, 709). Another word for the geopolitical aspects of the central realm, *zhongyuan* (中原 the central terrain) established the central power zone initially as the Yellow River valley with an investment in a ruling polity that dated to the mythical Xia 夏 and passed to the Shang 商 (1600-1046 BCE) at Anyang 安阳 and

thereafter to Zhou 周 (1046-256 BCE), before China was actually militarily unified in 221 BCE. Loyalty to the centre came to demand “the performance of appropriate duties from those of lower status” (Wilson 1993: 118).

Chinese identity in premodern China was a “collective” consciousness, an affective and psychological bond and “behaviour for cultural compatibility” aimed at “psychological unity” through role fulfilment and enactment (Ng-Quinn 1993: 34; Munro 1985: 4; Bary 1970: 145-247). For example, rituals from the Shang 商 Dynasty (1600-1046 BCE) performed a sense of collective, centralised identity and ideology through blood relation, kinship difference, ancestor worship and the value of offspring, signifying the extension of life and universe (Ge 2001: 24-26). The Zhou 周 (1046-249 BCE) bronzeware inscriptions thereafter show a sense of “iconographic coherence” of anonymous individuals wearing the same uniform in mass activities, fighting for the collective honour of a coherent polity (Keightley 1990: 18). Therefore, the culture of ritual, sacrifice and the ancestral temple integrated and created some continuity that we can identify retrospectively through the practice and symbolism of worship. People are identified as Chinese only if they “exist within the chain that unifies national and cultural blood ties” (ibid: 24).

The idea of the state being at the centre of the world can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (*chunqiu zhanguo* 春秋战国)

(771-476 BCE) when the literal translation of China, “Middle Kingdom” (*zhongguo* 中国) first appeared and referred to a normative centre of civilisation and the core cultural area at the centre of a greater “all-under-heaven” state (*tianxia* 天下) (Shan 2009: 20; Wang 2012: 338). An egalitarian idea of “the Grand coordinating unity”, or the all-under-heaven “great community”/“One Community” (*tianxiadatong* 天下大同) “in the service of a better world” recorded in *Liji* 礼记 (a collection of texts explaining social systems, administration, ceremonial rites, and educational, institutional, political and aesthetic thoughts of the Zhou 周 dynasty) dominated a ruling ideology that can be detected in ideas attributed to Confucius and his followers (*Liji* n.d.; Loewe 1974: 28; Dikötter 1990: 421; 2015: 2; Needham 1969: 160-162; Lo 2020: 59). It defined expansionist politics and the unification of the Warring States as the Heaven appointed monarch’s faith and mission. The Sino-centric ideology of gathering towards the centre therefore permeates an enduring Chinese identity.

The sixth King of the Qin State 秦 (770-207 BCE), Ying Zheng 嬴政 (259 - 210 BCE), unified the Warring States (771-476 BCE) proclaiming himself as the first Emperor of China Qin Shihuang 秦始皇. He took firm control of the central terrain and introduced script totalitarianism. The Qin Great Wall was built as a defence against invasion by non-Han tribes and automatically set Chinese culture against the alterity of the minorities. Minorities have long been cast as

opposite to the centre and as savages who can only be appeased and suppressed through invasion and conquest (Chen 1941: 642). Such controlled classification makes a totalitarian Chineseness that appears “to have little to do with beliefs, attitudes, or a shared creed” (Hunt 1993: 86).

Geographically, the following ruling house of Han 汉 (206 BCE-220) was associated with Hanzhong 汉中, a city during the Han period in the southwest of Shaanxi province, bordering Sichuan to the south and Gansu to the west. The political narrative is based on its geographical significance. Hanzhong was a military threshold with strategic advantage. It is located in China’s geometric centre, a critical site along the path an army would occupy from the central plain to the Sichuan Basin (Guo 2005). It became the fortress of the first Emperor of Qin to guard the central terrain. Moreover, Liu Bang 刘邦 (256-195 BCE), the founder of the Han Dynasty, was granted enfeoffment as the Lord of Hanzhong (*wanwang* 汉王); it is thus where the name of the dynasty came from.

Han is associated with a political identity established during the Han period. The Han rulers adopted a strong sense of centralised authority, civil service and meritocracy (Hulsewé 1986: 522-540). Their administration represents the first amalgamation of imperial power in China. As the first golden age in Chinese history, the Han Dynasty established powerful cultural and

administrative institutions, the origin of civil service, the Confucian literary traditions and guidance for ruling the country. During the period of Han rule the dynastic presence also had great impact on its neighbours through foreign affairs, trade, and various cultural and political reach (Csikszentmihalyi 2006: 192; Walker 2012: 8). Arts and education also flourished at the time. Under the name of the principle and the ruling ethnicity of the first regime to consolidate political rule of the territory that approximates to what we know as China today, modern Chinese self-identification to Han represents their cultural and political participation in the central regime. This meta-category of the Chinese “race” is rather selective and obliterates the heterogeneity of the larger part of the people that have inhabited the geographical and political boundaries of the state. It was established upon a winner’s narrative that pitted the socio-cultural and political identity of the small elite ruling class who lived in the Yellow River valley against the majority dispossessed people who lived both within and outside of the geographical and political domain identified as *zhongguo* 中国 (Central States).

The period after the fall of the Han Dynasty is known as the Period of Disunion (220-589) which is divided up into three different periods: the Three Kingdoms (220-280), the Jin Dynasty (266-420), and the Southern and Northern Kingdoms (420-589) (*sanguo*, *liangjin*, *nanbeichao* 三国两晋南北朝) (Steinhardt 1990: 72; Morris 2013: 126). Power was dispersed among

warlords and leading families that destabilised the ruling of the government. Moreover, it was a time of vast population movement and resettlement to the south with the capitals at Jiankang 建康 where various regimes centred their power (Tuan 2008: 88).

Between the end of Han and Tang, nomadic tribes ruled in China. Even the Sui 隋 (581-618) and Tang 唐 (618-908) rulers had northern blood (Ao and Li 2000: 133; Lewis 2009: 200-201). Furthermore, Turkic and Tibetan people were incorporated into the Chinese empire, such as the Qiang 羌, the Xiongnu 匈奴 and the Tuoba 拓跋 who did not speak Chinese (Pan 1992: 41). Thus the myth of cultural unity was perpetrated top down in China, even by non-Chinese rulers, and it was also in the interest of the majority to perpetuate it, buying in to the Chinese dream in the pursuit of political stability. Some Chinese also address themselves as *tangren* 唐人 (the Tang Chinese) as the Tang 唐 Dynasty represents a second golden age after Han and mirrors the Han prosperity through high cosmopolitan culture, political power and openness to the world (Zhou 2013: 7; Zhang 2015: 49-78).

The concept of foreign rule problematises the notion of Han centrism. In the Yuan Dynasty 元 (1279-1368), Kublai Khan classified the imperial population into four categories through political/racial hierarchy: *mengren* 蒙人 (Mongols), *semuren* 色目人 (people with colored eyes), *hanren* 汉人

(northern Chinese), and *nanren* 南人 (southerners) (Crossley 1983: 21-42). Besides, the government documented those frontier populations with a “settled lifestyle”, including non-Mongol ethnic tribes like the Kitan 契丹 and Bohai 渤海, as Han (Crossley 1990: 5). Han was an official category in Yuan; however, it was loosely defined. Since 1601, the Qing 清(1636-1912) government’s Eight Banner system (*baqi* 八旗) divided the imperial population into Manchurians 满族人, Mongols 蒙古人 and Han 汉人 according to the political privileges on offer, and that made Han the lowest ethnic and social class. Classifying cultural and political identity was to provoke the establishment of the Manchu 满族 culture and stabilise the “minority” ruling of the Qing court (Elliot 2001: 1-4).

In the late-Qing 晚清, the patriotic Ming Restoration movement (*fanqing fuming* 反清复明) provoked anti-Qing sentiments as the Qing was accused of destroying Han culture. Patriotic resistance, uprisings and organisations against the Qing at the end of imperial rule included the Taiping Rebellion (*Taiping tianguo qiyi* 太平天国起义, 1850-1864) and crowning of the Marquis of Zhu (1912), Zhu Yuxun 朱煜勋 (1882-?), the descendant of the imperial Ming family (Müller 2007: 186).

During the Republican era (around the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century), the patriotic saw their own role as “servitors and saviours of the state” and

positioned “state building at the very centre of the nationalist agenda” (Hunt 1993: 62). Key priorities were being critical and the promise of national salvation were prioritised as the cornerstones of national identity construction at the time. To uproot meant to destroy parts of the tradition, to transform the established order, to spark individual consciousness, to revitalize a collective identity, hence to reshape what people ideologically share. Nationalist organisations included the Revive China Society (*xingzhonghui* 兴中会, 1894) and the Chinese United League (*tongmenghui* 同盟会, 1905).

The central narrative of Han has shaped Chinese identity since the Republican era. The Han self-identification was raised along with the emergence of the concept of *zhonghua minzu* 中华民族 (the Chinese Race) and nation-state. The term implies “China the nation-state, Chinese the race, and China the geographic location”; “Han” formed a unity - “an undifferentiated race originating in North China...in the process of becoming a modern republic” (Wu 1991: 161). Nationalist intellectuals like Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) and Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) promoted the idea that the nation belonged to a “common ethnicity... a larger Chinese corporate body” (Goodman 1995: 387). They aroused collective national sentiments against the danger of Western annihilation. This idea was first proposed by Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936) and supported by a large number of intellectuals.

Therefore, Han is an “umbrella term” bounding cultural, linguistic and ethnic plurality and situating tension between its “putative unity and empirical diversity” (Mullaney 2012: 2). Such political promotion built upon the power of Han as a unifying and homogeneous force that defined *the race* of China ethnically, culturally and geographically. As Gladney suggested that, the “widespread definition and representation of the ‘minority’ as exotic, colorful, and ‘primitive’ homogenizes the undefined majority as united, monoethnic, and modern” (1994: 93).

While in the Maoist period (1949-1976), individual identity was subordinated to a Communist identity and could become “indistinguishable from the state”, national identity since the Reform has broken from the past (Goldman et al. 1993: 125). Starting from intellectuals’ call for a return to the nation’s cultural roots and the researching of history and traditions, society began to draw distinctions between “party”, “state”, and “nation” (or “people”).⁶⁴ This split definition of identity was fostered by the subjective need to “preserve patriotism while rejecting a government”, paralleling the legend of the loyal minister Qu Yuan 屈原 whose devotion to king and country, his banishment and eventual suicide, was expressed through a love of the state but hatred towards the corrupt authorities who wronged him (ibid: 153).

⁶⁴ The root-searching campaign was referred to as “cultural fever” (*wenhuare* 文化热) or “searching-for-roots fever” (*xungenre* 寻根热) in Chinese. Chinese publications of the 1980s started to draw attention to “identity crisis” (*rentong weiji* 认同危机), literally translated as “recognition crisis”.

By identifying themselves as Han, modern Chinese people distinguish themselves from the remote minority peoples. Such identical differentiation may subdue and assimilate political and socio-cultural diversity for unified benefits from the authoritative perspective. The imagination of a unitary Han identity is the dominant self-identifying ethnicity in China today and consists of 92 percent of the population who thereby associate themselves with the central power (CIA 2019). Various facets shape the cultural dominance of Han: the naming of China and of the imagination of a principle ethnicity, the geo-political territory and the locations where people who identify as Han people came from, the temporal scope of the empire, racial discourses and the alterity of the Other who inhabit in and outside the central boundary, the agrarian culture attached to the Yellow River Valley, the diverse food culture, and religious humanism (Castoriadis 1997: 184; Bulag 2012: 93; Tapp 2012: 167; Schein and Yu 2016: 286).

Publications about regional cultures and identities before the 2000s were largely concerned with cultural purity, regional enclosure and with a distinct sense of exclusivity (Xin et al 1996; Jiang and Li 1997; Chen 1998). Oakes observes that since the 2000s, although the government values minority/regional cultural diversity, all is in the interest of a “pan-local identity” in which distinct cultural identities are “cobbled” or “erased together” (2000: 669). A totalising national subjectivity is injected by the centre. The state

“reconstitute[s] local subjectivity”, leaving it “vulnerable to another kind of colonization” through central dominated fiscal and political relations (ibid: 676; Bell et al. 1993: 48). For disadvantaged or local regions, Chineseness involves the negotiation between the local and the central and more importantly, the uplift of the local (Zhou and Tan 2017: 45; Yang 2017: 76-104; Jiang 2017: 38-41).

APPENDIX 2: Terms, Characters and Historical Names In Chinese

| Chinese and <i>Pinyin</i> | English Translation |
|---|---|
| 大跃进 <i>Dayuejin</i> | The Great Leap Forward |
| 主旋律电影 <i>Zhuxuelü dianying</i> | Leitmotif cinema |
| 城中村 <i>Chenzhong cun</i> | Urban-villages |
| 户口 <i>Hukou</i> | The household registration system |
| 四人帮 <i>Sirenbang</i> | Gang of Four |
| 十年动乱 <i>Shinian dongluan</i> | The Ten Years of Turmoil” |
| 真空 <i>Zhenkong</i> | Vacuum |
| 嘈杂 <i>Caoza</i> | Chaos |
| 新女性 <i>Xinnüxing</i> | <i>The New Woman</i> |
| 土家族 <i>Tujiazu</i> | The Tujia minority |
| 方 <i>Fang</i> | An enemy county |
| <i>Chunqiu Zuozhuan</i> 春秋左传 | The chronology of the Spring and Autumn period |
| <i>Liji</i> 礼记 | A collection of texts explaining social systems, administration, ceremonial rites, and educational, institutional, political and aesthetic thoughts of the Zhou 周 dynasty |
| 彝 <i>Yi</i> | Historical people inhabiting the border of China |
| 狄 <i>Di</i> | Historical people inhabiting the border of China |
| 孙中山 Sun Zhongshan (1866-1925) | Chinese Republican politician |
| 血统 <i>Xuetong</i> | Blood relationship |
| 蒋介石 Jiang Jieshi (1887- 1975) | Chinese Nationalist politician |
| 天下大同 <i>Tianxiadatong</i> | The all-under-heaven “great community”/“One Community” |
| 黄种人 <i>Huangzhongren</i> | The Yellow Race |
| 原生态民俗文化 <i>yuanshengtai minsu wenhua</i> | Original ecology folk cultures |
| 原生态电影 | Ecocinema |

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>Yuanshengtai dianying</i> | |
| 西部大开发 <i>Xibu dakaifa</i> (2000) | The Great Western Development Project |
| 教育改革 <i>Jiaoyu gaige</i> (2005) | The Education Reform |
| 去除糟粕 <i>Quchu zaopo</i> | The “cast off dross” campaign |
| 国家宗教事务条例 <i>Guojia zongjiao shiwu tiaoli</i> (2017) | The State Administration for Religious Affairs issued State Religious Affairs Bureau Order No. 5 |
| 瓦 <i>Wa</i> | The Wa Minority |
| 韦州 <i>Weizhou</i> | A county in Ningxia |
| 西电东送 <i>Dongdian xisong</i> (2001-2010) | The Western-electricity-to-the-East policy |
| 三个代表 <i>Sange daibiao</i> | Jiang Zemin’s “Three Represents” Statement |
| 松花江 <i>Songhua jiang</i> | Songhua River |
| 乡村振兴战略 <i>Xiangcun zhenxing zhanlue</i> (2018) | The Rural Revitalization Strategy |
| 农村土地承包 <i>Nongcun tudi chengbaofa</i> (2019) | The Rural Land Contract Law |
| 低保 <i>Dibao</i> | Minimum livelihood guarantee |
| 精准扶贫 <i>Jingzhun fupin</i> (2015) | Targeted Poverty Alleviation |
| 乌坎 <i>Wukan</i> | A village in Guangdong |
| 泮河 <i>Panhe</i> | Panhe River |
| 土皇帝 <i>Tu Huangdi</i> | Rural emperors |
| 纪实主义 <i>Jishi zhuyi</i> | On-the-spot realism |
| 现场 <i>Xianchang</i> | Presentness |
| 栏目剧 <i>Lanmuju</i> | Column drama |
| <i>Zhonghua renmin gonghe guo xingfa xiuzheng’an</i> (1999) | The Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China |
| 狐狸精 <i>Huli jing</i> | The fox-woman in Chinese folktale who seduces men and leads them to disaster |
| 潇湘诗 <i>Xiaoxiang shi</i> | Xiaoxiang poetry |
| 流亡诗 <i>Liuwang shi</i> | Exile poetry |
| 边塞诗 <i>Biansai shi</i> | Fortress frontier poetry |
| 流亡诗意 <i>Liuwang shiyi</i> | The exile poetics |

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|--|---|
| 楚 Chu (?-223BC) | The Chu Kingdom |
| 楚怀王 <i>Chu huai wang</i> (329-299 BC) | Emperor Huai of Chu |
| 屈原 Qu Yuan | Chu Poet |
| 庾信 Yu Xin (513-581) | Tang poet |
| 梁 <i>Liang</i> (502-557) | The Liang Dynasty |
| 沈佺期 Shen Quanqi (656-729) | Tang poet |
| 张易之 Zhang Yizhi (?-705) | Tang minister |
| 流 <i>Liu</i> | Flow, drifting, a current |
| 流放 <i>Liufang</i> | Exile |
| 杜甫 Du Fu (712-770) | Tang poet |
| 柳宗元 Liu Zongyuan (773-819) | Tang poet |
| 气 <i>Qi</i> | Earth's vitality |
| 胡曾 Hu Zeng (839-?) | Tang poet |
| 李群玉 Li Qunyu (808-862) | Tang poet |
| 澄碧, 碧霄 <i>Chengbi, bixiao</i> | Emerald green sky |
| 银浪, 白虹 <i>Yinlang</i> | Silvery tides |
| 冰晖 <i>Binghui</i> | Shiny ice |
| 练彩, 彩舟 <i>Liancai, caizhou</i> | Colourful boats and rainbows |
| 绣毂 <i>Xiugu</i> | Embroidered valleys |
| 西域 <i>Xiyu</i> | The west regions of China |
| 高适 Gao Shi (704-765) | Tang poet |
| 岑参 Cen Shen (718?-769?) | Tang poet |
| 王昌龄 Wang Changling (698-757) | Tang poet |
| 出塞 <i>Chu Sai</i> | <i>Beyond The Border</i> |
| 汉家 <i>Hanjia</i> | The Han court |
| 汉将 <i>Hanjiang</i> | Han soldiers |
| 张籍 Zhang Ji (766-830) | Tang poet |
| 王维 Wang Wei (701-761) | Tang poet |
| 骆宾王 Luobin Wang (640-674) | Tang poet |
| 陈陶 Chen Tao (812-885) | Tang poet |
| 关东 <i>Guandong</i> | A region historically called as Guandong in Northeastern China |
| 关中 <i>Guanzhong</i> | A historical region of China corresponding to the crescentic graben basin within present-day central Shaanxi. |
| 西汉 <i>Xi Han</i> (202BC-8 CE) | The mid-Western Han Dynasty |
| 汉武帝 Han Wu Di | Emperor Wu |

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|---|--|
| 匈奴 <i>Xiongnu</i> | The Huns |
| 西晋 <i>Xi Jin</i> (265-316 CE) | The Western Jin Dynasty |
| 洛阳 <i>Luoyang</i> | A city located in the confluence area of Luo River and Yellow River in the west of Henan province. |
| 司马睿 <i>Sima Rui</i> (276-323) | An emperor of the Jin dynasty and the first of the Eastern Jin |
| 盲流 <i>Mang liu</i> | Errant waters |
| 返乡热 <i>Fanxiang re</i> | The village-returning fever |
| 城归族 <i>Cheng gui zu</i> | The back-from-city clan |
| 乡贤 <i>Xiangxian</i> | Hometown talents |
| 乡村振兴 <i>Xiangcun zhenxing</i> | Rural Revitalisation |
| 两会 <i>Lianghui</i> | The Chinese Political Consultative Conferences |
| 人才下乡 <i>Rencai xiexiang</i> | Talent-going-to-the-countryside |
| 八型模式 <i>Ba xing moshi</i> (2018) | The Eight Model |
| 新农村建设 <i>Xinnongcun jianshe</i> policy (2018) | The New Countryside Construction |
| 新型城镇化建设重点任务 <i>Xinxing chengzhenhua jianshe zhongdian renwu</i> (2019) | Key Tasks of New Urbanization Construction |
| 全国人民代表大会 <i>Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui</i> | the National People's Congress |
| 中国妇女发展纲要 <i>Zhongguo funü fazhan gangyao</i> (2001-2010) | The Guideline for Women's Development in China 2001-2010 |
| 家丑 <i>Jia chou</i> | Family ugliness/scandal |
| 绿水青山就是金山银山 <i>Lüshuiqingshan jiushi jinshanyinshan</i> | Lucid water and lush mountains are invaluable assets |
| 气韵 <i>qiyun</i> | The expressive quality of the work beyond formal representation |
| 六朝 <i>liuchao</i> | The Six Dynasties (220-618) |
| 唐 <i>Tang</i> | The Tang Dynasty (618–907) |
| 宋 <i>Song</i> | The Song Dynasty (960–1279) |
| 幻 <i>huan</i> | The illusory nature of the real |
| 朱熹 <i>Zhu Xi</i> (1130-1200) | Chinese Confucian scholar |

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| | philosopher and government official of Song dynasty China |
| 李成 Li Cheng (919-967) | Chinese painter of the Song dynasty |
| 范宽 Fan Kuan (950-1032) | Chinese painter of the Song dynasty |
| 石涛 Shitao (1642-1707) | Chinese Buddhist monk, calligrapher, and landscape painter during the early Qing Dynasty |
| 吴道子 Wu Daozi (681-759) | Chinese painter of the Tang dynasty |
| 吴镇 Wu Zhen (1280–1354) | Chinese painter during the Yuan Dynasty |
| 梅清 Mei Qing (1624-1697) | Chinese landscape painter, calligrapher and poet of the Qing Dynasty |
| 留空 <i>liukong</i> | Leaving blanks |
| 布白 <i>bubai</i> | Arranging whiteness |
| 王蒙 Wang Meng (1308-1385) | Chinese painter of the Yuan Dynasty |
| 郭熙 Guo Xi (1000-1090) | Chinese painter during of the Northern Song Dynasty |
| 宋徽宗 Emperor Huizong (1082-1136) | The eighth emperor of the Northern Song dynasty of China |
| 怀古 <i>huagu</i> | Lamenting/mediating on the past |
| 苏轼 Su Shi (1037-1101) | Chinese poet and painter of the Song Dynasty |
| 安史之乱 <i>An Shi zhi luan</i> (755-753) | The An-Shi Rebellion |
| 安禄山 An Lushan (703-757) | Tang general |
| 史思明 Shi Siming (703-761) | Tang general |
| 薛宝钗 Xue Baochai | Fictional character in <i>A Dream of Red Mansions</i> |
| 红楼梦 <i>Hong Lou Meng</i> | <i>A Dream of Red Mansions</i> |
| 谢道韞 Xie Daoyun (349-?) | Chinese poet, writer, scholar, calligrapher and debater of the Eastern Jin Dynasty |
| 黄公望 Huang Gongwang (1269-1354) | Chinese painter of the Yuan Dynasty |
| 枯润墨法 <i>Ku run mofa</i> | The dry-moist colouring |
| 干笔墨法 <i>Gan bi mofa</i> | The dry-pen inking |
| 披麻皴法 <i>Pi ma cunfa</i> | The hemp-fiber stroke |

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|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 散点透视 <i>San dian tou shi</i> | The scattered perspective |
| 游观 <i>You guan</i> | Travelling view |
| 秦观 Qin Guan (1049-1100) | Song poet |

APPENDIX 3: A Table of Typical Dislocation Directors in China

| Director | Education Institution/engagement with BFA | Rural/urban-rural Transition Experience |
|----------|---|---|
| 郭大群 | Central Drama Academy | Yes |
| 塞夫 | BFA | Yes |
| 麦丽丝 | BFA | Yes |
| 章家瑞 | BFA | Yes |

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|------|--|-----|
| 宁才 | BFA | Yes |
| 金丽妮 | N/A | Yes |
| 万玛才旦 | BFA | Yes |
| 王全安 | BFA | Yes |
| 胡庶 | Fudan University | No |
| 宁敬武 | BFA | Yes |
| 韩万峰 | BFA | No |
| 赵焯 | BFA | No |
| 彭臣 | BFA | Yes |
| 彭家煌 | BFA | Yes |
| 杨蕊 | BFA | No |
| 高峰 | North-west University (invited in panel discussions and lectures at BFA) | No |
| 松太加 | BFA | Yes |
| 贾小铁 | BFA | No |
| 李睿珺 | Shanxi Academy of Media (Chairman of the BFA Golden Word Award Committee) | Yes |
| 卓格赫 | BFA | Yes |
| 王学博 | Northeast Normal University (interviewed by BFA academics) | No |
| 张扬 | BFA | No |
| 张鑫 | BFA | Yes |
| 丑丑 | BFA | Yes |
| 王丽娜 | Communication University Of China | Yes |
| 拉华加 | BFA | Yes |
| 周军 | BFA | No |
| 洛旦 | BFA | Yes |
| 甘小二 | BFA | Yes |
| 宁浩 | BFA | Yes |
| 杨瑾 | Shanxi College of Arts | No |
| 吕乐 | BFA | Yes |
| 郑克洪 | BFA | Yes |
| 王笠人 | BFA | No |
| 易寒 | Central academy of Drama | No |
| 张跃东 | BFA | Yes |
| 牛乐 | N/A | Yes |
| 韩杰 | Beijing Normal University | Yes |

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|-----|--|-----|
| 柴春芽 | Northwest Normal University | Yes |
| 原雅轩 | Henan University | Yes |
| 李彦廷 | BFA | No |
| 吴天明 | BFA | Yes |
| 杨恒 | BFA | Yes |
| 忻钰坤 | BFA | Yes |
| 张涛 | Central Academy of Drama (panel discussion and film screening at BIFF co-organised by BFA) | Yes |
| 梅峰 | BFA | Yes |
| 郑大圣 | Central Academy of Drama | No |
| 蔡成杰 | Shanxi University of Science and Technology | No |
| 孙傲谦 | Communication University Of China | Yes |
| 贾樟柯 | BFA | Yes |
| 刁亦男 | BFA | Yes |
| 顾长卫 | BFA | No |
| 王小帅 | BFA | Yes |
| 张跃东 | BFA | Yes |
| 章明 | BFA | Yes |
| 李红旗 | Central Academy of Arts | Yes |
| 李玉 | East China University of Science and Technology (involved in BFA New Force Award of Photography) | No |
| 杨平道 | BFA | Yes |
| 张翀 | BFA | No |
| 张波 | BFA | No |
| 胡波 | BFA | Yes |
| 梁鸣 | Communication University Of China | Yes |
| 孙周 | BFA | Yes |
| 苗月 | BFA | |
| 张次禹 | BFA | No |
| 霍猛 | Communication University Of China (interviewed by BFA) | Yes |
| 曾赠 | BFA | No |
| 仇晟 | Tsinghua University | No |

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|------|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 毕赣 | Communication University of Shanxi | Yes |
| 顾晓刚 | BFA | Yes |
| 腾丛丛 | BFA | No |
| 卓·格赫 | BFA | Yes |
| 才旺璁乳 | BFA | Yes |
| 禾家 | University of Sunderland | No |
| 德格娜 | BFA | Yes |
| 鹏飞 | La FEMIS | Yes |
| 久美成列 | BFA | Yes |

APPENDIX 4: Films about Dislocation in 21st-century Chinese Cinema

The 21st Century Chinese Films about Minority Dislocation:

Binzika de nianqingren 毕兹卡的年轻人 (*The Bizka Youth*), Guo Daqun 郭大群, 2001.

Tianshang caoyuan 天上草原 (*Heavenly Grassland*), Lisi Mai 麦丽丝, Saifu 塞夫, 2002.

Ruoma de shiqisui 妮玛的十七岁 (*When Ruoma Was Seventeen*), Zhang Jiarui 章家瑞, 2003.

Jifeng zhong de ma 季风中的马 (*Season of the Horse*), Ning Cai 宁才, 2005.

Huayao xinniàng 花腰新娘 (*Huayao Bride In Shangri-la*), Zhang Jiarui 章家瑞, 2005.

Tulufan qingge 吐鲁番情歌 (*The Turpan Love Song*), Jin Lini 金丽妮, Xirzat

Yahup, 2006.

Jingjing de manishi 静静的嘛呢石 (*The Silent Holy Stones*), Pema Tesden 万玛才旦, 2006.

Tuya de hunshi 图雅的婚事 (*Tuya's Marriage*), Wang Quan'an 王全安, 2007.

Kaishui yao tang, guniang yao zhuang 开水要烫, 姑娘要壮 (*I Want to Dance*), Hu Shu 胡庶, 2007.

Gulala de qiang 滚拉拉的枪 (*Lala's Gun*), Ning Jingwu 宁敬武, 2008.

Erma de hunli 尔玛的婚礼 (*Erma's Wedding*), Han Wanfeng 韩万峰, 2008.

Jalainur 扎赉诺尔, Zhao Ye 赵焯, 2008.

Zoulu shangxue 走路上学 (*Walking To School*), Peng Jiahuang 彭家煌, Peng Chen 彭臣, 2009.

Xianhua 鲜花 (*Flower*), Xirzat Yahup, 2009.

Fanshan 翻山 (*Crossing the Mountain*), Yang Rui 杨蕊, 2010.

Qiaoli zoumingqu 锹里奏鸣曲 (*Qiaoli's Song*), Han Wanfeng 韩万峰, 2010.

Yongsheng yang 永生羊 (*An Eternal Lamb*), Gao Feng 高峰, 2010.

Taiyang zong zai zuobian 太阳总在左边 (*The Sun Beaten Path*), Sonthar Gyal 松太加, 2011.

Laogou 老狗 (*Old Dog*), Pema Tsenden, 2011.

Zoushanren 走山人 (*Guardians of the Mountain*), Jia Xiaotie 贾小铁, 2012.

Jiazai shuicao fengmao de difang 家在水草丰茂的地方 (*River Road*), Li Ruijun 李睿珺, 2014.

Wucai shenjian 五彩神箭 (*The Sacred Arrow*), Pema Tsenden, 2014.

Dejide 德吉德, Zhuo Gehe 卓格赫, 2014.

He 河 (*River*), Sonthar Gyal 松太加, 2015.

Chengbao K 城堡K (*The Castle*), Emyr ap Richard, Erdenibulag Darhad, 2015.

Qingshui li de daozi 清水里的刀子 (*Knife in the Clear Water*), Wang Xuebo 王学博, 2016.

Pisheng shang de hun 皮绳上的魂 (*Soul on a String*), Zhang Yang 张扬, 2016.

Wo de shengtutu 我的圣途 (*Looking For The Holy Land*), Zhang Li 张鑫, 2016.

Gang ren po qi 冈仁波齐 (*Path of the Soul*), Zhang Yang 张杨, 2017.

Dongzu dage 侗族大歌 (*The Grand Song*), Chou Chou 丑丑, 2017.

Diyici de libie 第一次的离别 (*A First Farewell*), Lina Wang 王丽娜, 2018.

Wangzha de yuxue 旺扎的雨靴 (*Wangdrak's Rain Boots*), Lhapal Gyal 拉华加, 2018.

Yuanqu de muge 远去的牧歌 (*Fade Away Pastoral*), Zhou Jun 周军, Adixia Xiareheman, 2018.

Ala Jiangse 阿拉姜色 (*Ala Changso*), Sonthar Gyal 松太加, 2018.

Lamu yu Gabei 拉姆与嘎贝 (*Lhamo and Skalbe*, Sonthar Gyal), 松太加, 2019.

Baiyun zhixia 白云之下 (*Chaogtu with Sarula*), Wang Rui 王瑞, 2019.

Qiqiu 气球 (*Balloon*), Pema Tsenden 万玛才旦, 2019.

Milu 迷路 (*Lost*), Loden 洛旦, 2021.

The 21st Century Chinese Films about Rural Dislocation:

Shanqing shuixiu 山清水秀 (*The Only Sons*), Gan Xiao'er 甘小二, 2003.

Xianghuo 香火 (*Incense*), Ning Hao 宁浩, 2003.
Jingzhe 惊蛰 (*The Story of Ermei*), Wang Quan'an 王全安, 2004.
Yi zhi huanainiu 一只花奶牛 (*The Black and White Milk Cow*), Yang Jin 杨瑾, 2004.
Meiren cao 美人草 (*The Foliage*), Lü Le 吕乐, 2004.
Chenmo de yuanshan 沉默的远山 (*Silent Mountains*), Zheng Kehong 郑克洪, 2005.
Caojie 草芥 (*Weed*), Wang Liren 王笠人, 2006.
Juzi chentu 举自尘土 (*Raised from Dust*), Gan Xiao'er 甘小二, 2006.
Yaowang nanfang de tongnian 遥望南方的童年 (*The Rising Star Kindergarten*), Yi Han 易寒, 2007.
Xiawu goujiao 下午狗叫 (*Mid-afternoon Barks*), Zhang Yuedong 张跃东, 2007.
Er Dong 二冬, Yang Jin 杨瑾, 2008.
Lao lü tou 老驴头 (*The Old Donkey*), Li Ruijun 李睿珺, 2010.
Liuzhu taohuayuan 留驻桃花源 (*Love In Eden*), Niu Le 牛乐, 2011.
Hello! Shu xiansheng Hello! 树先生 (*Mr. Tree*), Han Jie 韩杰, 2011.
Gaosu tamen, wo cheng baihe qule 告诉他们，我乘白鹤去了 (*Fly With the Crane*), Li Ruijun 李睿珺, 2012.
Wo guxiang de xizhong siwang fangshi 我故乡的四种死亡方式 (*Four Ways to Die in My Hometown*), Chai Chunyu 柴春芽, 2012.
Zai qidai zhizhong 在期待之中 (*Waiting for God*), Gan Xiao'er 甘小二, 2012.
Nianshu de haizi 念书的孩子 (*A Reading Boy*), Yuan Yauan 原雅轩, 2012.
Han shan 喊山 (*Out in the Silence*), Li Yanting 李彦廷, 2013.
Bainiao chaofeng 百鸟朝凤 (*Song of the Phoenix*), Wu Tianming 吴天明, 2013.
Jiazai shuicao fengmao de difang 家在水草丰茂的地方 (*River Road*), Li Ruijun 李睿珺, 2014.
Na pian hushui 那片湖水 (*Lake August*), Yang Heng 杨恒, 2014.
Yige shaozi 一个勺子 (*A Fool*), Chen Jianbin 陈建斌, 2014.
Xin migong 心迷宫 (*The Coffin in the Mountain*), Xin Yukun 忻钰坤, 2015.
Xisang 喜丧 (*Laughing to Die*), Zhang Tao 张涛, 2015.
Wo bushi panjinlian 我不是潘金莲 (*I Am Not Madame Bovary*), Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 2016.
Lü deshui 驴得水 (*Mr. Donkey*), Zhou Shen 周申, Liu Lu 刘露, 2016.
Bucheng wenti de wenti 不成问题的问题 (*Mr. No Problem*), Mei Feng 梅峰, 2016.
Cunxi 村戏 (*Bangzi Melody*), Zheng Dasheng 郑大圣, 2017.
Liu xia 留夏 (*The Summer Still On*), Zhang Haifeng 张海峰, 2017.
The Widowed Witch 北方一片苍茫, Cai Chengjie 蔡成杰, 2018
Nanian basui 那年八岁 (*When I Was Eight Years Old*), Yang Jin 杨瑾, 2017.
Wu shen 吾神 (*Resurrection*), Liu Dongxue 刘东学, 2018.
Zhuang si le yi zhi yang 撞死了一只羊 (*Jinpa*), Pema Tseden 万玛才旦, 2019.
Shaonian yu hai 少年与海 (*Over The Sea*), Sun Aoquan 孙傲谦, 2019.

The 21st Century Chinese Films about Township Dislocation:

Zhantai 站台 (*Platform*), Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, 2000.
Zhifu 制服 (*Uniform*), Diao Yinan 刁亦男, 2003.
Kongque 孔雀 (*Peacock*), Gu Changwei 顾长卫, 2005.
Qing hong 青红 (*Shanghai Dreams*), Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, 2005.
Binglang 槟榔 (*Betelnut*), Yang Heng 杨恒, 2006.
Xiawu goujiao 下午狗叫 (*Mid-afternoon Barks*), Zhang Yuedong 张跃东, 2007.
Lichun 立春 (*And the Spring Comes*), Gu Changwei 顾长卫, 2007.
Qingnian 青年 (*Youth*), Geng Jun 葛军, 2008.
Xinniàng 新娘 (*The Bride*), Zhang Ming 章明, 2009.
Women tianshang jian 我们天上见 (*Lan*), Jiang Wenli 蒋雯丽, 2009.
Zhuomuniao 啄木鸟 (*Woodpecker*), Zheng Yi 郑毅, 2009.
Hanjia 寒假 (*Winter Vacation*), Li Qihong 李红旗, 2010.
Guanyin shan 观音山 (*Buddha Mountain*), Li Yu 李玉, 2010.
Ehuangzhang yishi 鹅凰嶂逸事 (*E Huang Mountain*), Yang Pingdao 杨平道, 2013.
Bairi yanhuo 白日焰火 (*Black Coal, Thin Ice*), Diao Yinan 刁亦男, 2014.
Meili 美丽, Zhou Zhou 周洲, 2018.
Di si mian qiang 第四面墙 (*The Fourth Wall*), Zhang Chong 张翀, Zhang Bo 张波, 2019.
Nanfang chezhan de juhui 南方车站的聚会 (*The Wild Goose Lake*), Diao Yinan 刁亦男, 2019.
Daxiang xidierzuo 大象席地而坐 (*An Elephant Sitting Still*), Hu Bo 胡波, 2018.
Chang feng zhen 长风镇 (*Changfeng Town*), Wang Jing 王晶, 2019.
Ri guang zhi xia 日光之下 (*Wisdom Tooth*), Liang Ming 梁鸣, 2019.

21st Century Chinese Films about village/township dislocating journeys:

Zhou Yu de huoche 周渔的火车 (*Zhou Yu's Train*), Sun Zhou 孙周, 2002.
Haoduo dami 好多大米 (*So Much Rice*), Li Hongqi 李红旗, 2005.
Sanxia haoren 三峡好人 (*Still Life*), Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯, 2006.
Xingfu de xiaohe 幸福的小河 (*The Little Happy River*), Miao Yue 苗月, 2006.
Luoye guigen 落叶归根 (*Getting Home*), Zhang Yang 张杨, 2007.
Mang shan 盲山 (*Blind Mountain*), Li Yang, 2007.
Huangjinzhou 黄金周 (*Routine Holiday*), Li Hongqi 李红旗, 2008.
Li 梨 (*Pear*), Zhang Ciyu 张次禹, 2010.
Xin lai de li laoshi 新来的李老师 (*New Coming Teacher Lee*), Wang Li 王莉, 2010.
Huan huan 欢欢 (*Huan Huan*), Song Chuan 宋川, 2011.
Kong shan yi 空山轶 (*Lost in the Mountain*), Gao Zipeng 高子鹏, 2011.
Tian yuan jiang wu 田园将芜 (*Around That Winter*), Wang Xiaozhen 王晓振, 2013.
Lubian yecan 路边野餐 (*Kaili Blues*), Bi Gan 毕赣, 2015.
Changjiang tu 长江图 (*Crosscurrent*), Yang Chao 杨超, 2016.
Manbu guilai 漫步归来 (*Middle*), Wang Xide 王曦德, 2017.
Sun mao 樨卯 (*Country Far Away*), Gan Xiaoer 甘小二, 2017.

Kongshan yike 空山异客 (*Ghost in the Mountains*), Yang Heng 杨恒, 2017.
Yi chu haoxi 一出好戏 (*The Island*), Huang Bo 黄渤, 2018.
Haoyou 好友 (*My Dear Friends*), Yang Pingdao 杨平道, 2018.
A lang de yuanyang 阿浪的远方 (*A Lang's Journey Afar*), Song Mei 宋媚, 2018.
Mingwangxing shike 冥王星时刻 (*The Pluto Moment*), Zhang Ming 章明, 2018.
Guo zhaoguan 过昭关 (*Crossing The Border-Zhaoguan*), Huo Meng 霍猛, 2018.
Yun shui 云水 (*Sea Above, Cloud Blow*), Zeng Zeng 曾赠, 2018.
Zaofang 造访 (*The Return*), Fang Liang 方亮, 2018.
Jiaoqu de niao 郊区的鸟 (*Suburban Birds*), Qiu Sheng 仇晟, 2018.
Diqiu zuihou de yewan 地球最后的夜晚 (*Long Day's Journey Into Night*), Bi Gan 毕赣, 2018.
Chun jiang shui nuan 春江水暖 (*Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*), Gu Xiaogang 顾晓刚, 2019.
Song wo shang qingyun 送我上青云 (*Send Me to the Clouds*), Teng Congcong 滕丛丛, 2019.
Jixiang ruyi 吉祥如意 (*The Reunions*), Da Peng 大鹏, 2020.
Chuzou de mati 出走的马蹄 (*The Running Horseshoe*), Deng Li 邓莉, 2020.
Tuzi baoli 兔子暴力 (*The Old Town Girls*), Shen Yu 申瑜, 2020.
Huang yuan 荒原 (*Waste Land*), Hu Zhaoxiang 胡兆祥, 2020.
Shanhe xiaoxu 山河小叙 (*A Chat*), Wang Xide 王曦德, 2021.
Pingyuan shang de mosi 平原上的摩西 (*Moses On The Plain*), Zhang Ji 张骥, 2021.
Shui dong you 水东游 (*Like Father, Like River*), Hu Zhaoxiang 胡兆祥, 2021.
Qidai 脐带 (*Birth*), Qiao Sixue 乔思雪, 2021.
Mang mang heiyeye manyou 茫茫黑夜漫游 (*The Long Night Drifting*), Han Xu 韩旭, 2021.
Zhi shi yi ci ou ran de lüxing 只是一次偶然的旅行 (*Bipolar*), Li Mengqiao 李孟桥, 2021.

21st Century Chinese Films about Dislocating Journeys to Minority Areas:

Suomiya de xuanze 索密娅的抉择 (*Suomiya's Choice*), Zhuo Gehe 卓·格赫, 2003.
Kekexili 可可西里 (*Kekexili: Mountain Patrol*), Lu Chuan 陆川, 2004.
Qianli zou danqi 千里走单骑 (*Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*), Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, 2005.
Jing jing de manishi 静静的嘛呢石 (*The Silent Holy Stones*), Pema Tsenden 万玛才旦, 2005.
Nima jia de nürenmen 尼玛家的女人们 (*Nima's Women*), Zhuo Gehe 卓·格赫, 2007.
Zhiyuanzhe 志愿者 (*The Volunteer*), Pan Anzi 潘安子, 2007.
Xunzhao zhimeigengdeng 寻找智美更登 (*The Search*), Pema Tsenden 万玛才旦, 2009.

Tawazhen shang de deji 塔瓦镇上的德吉 (*Deji From the Town of Tawa*), Caiwang Ziru 才旺瑙乳, 2010.

Eji 额吉 (*My Mongolian Mother*), Ning Cai 宁才, 2010.

Yun shang taiyang 云上太阳 (*Close to the Sun*), Chou Chou 丑丑, 2012.

E'erdusi qishi 鄂尔多斯骑士(*Erdos Rider*), He Jia 禾家, 2014.

Shan na bian you pi ma 山那边有匹马 (*A Horse with Hope*), Bai Haibin 白海滨, 2015.

Gao bie 告别 (*A Simple Goodbye*), Degen Yun 德格娜, 2015.

Mihua zhi wei 米花之味 (*The Taste of Rice Flower*), Peng Fei 鹏飞, 2017.

Ta luo 塔洛 (*Tharlo*), Pema Tsenden 万玛才旦, 2018.

Baiyun zhixia 白云之下 (*Chaogtu with Sarula*), Wang Rui 王瑞, 2019.

Yige he sige 一个和四个 (*One And Four*), Jigme Trinley 久美成列, 2020.

Feng ma de tiankong 风马的天空 (*Stay with Wild Horse*), Zhang Dayong 张大勇, 2020.