The Chinese Combat Film Since 1949: Variants of ‘Regulation’, ‘Reform’ and ‘Renewal’

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University 2005
I declare that all the material contained within this thesis is my own research and contains as its main content work that has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

This thesis examines variations of the Chinese ‘combat film’, from its origins within cinema in 1949, through to the contemporary period. My argument transposes the critical approach of ‘genre’, as a popular style within conventional film criticism, to a specific Chinese form. In particular, this study investigates the ‘combat film’ as a prevailing mode in Chinese cinema, with a particular history, form of progression and set of aesthetics.

The argument initially applies the ‘war film’ and ‘combat genre’ categorisations to Chinese forms. Consequently three major variants emerge, manifest in the ‘regulated’ (1949-1966), ‘reformed’ (1980s) and ‘renewed’ (1990s) styles, respectively. These modes are subsequently examined in rigorous narratological and cinematic contexts, resulting in an expanded conception of the Chinese ‘combat’ film.

This thesis offers an integrative appreciation of variegations of the Chinese ‘combat film’ since 1949, sutured to wider discursive and socio-political changes within the country. Moreover, this argument produces a framework for a more expansive and complex comprehension of Chinese cinema, one undergoing continual modes of re-negotiation as the medium progresses into the Twenty First Century.
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Introduction

This thesis details the progressive development of the combat film in China, locating particular trends and establishments of ‘generic’ variation. Concentrating on projections since the implementation of Socialist rule in 1949, this study gravitates towards an appreciation of cinema as a specific medium in China, one whose signification is embedded within wider praxes of discursive imagining.

In order to facilitate an in-depth and impacting investigation into these themes however (to be enacted throughout the following chapters), some initial stipulations and conditions require consideration. In this manner, an account of foundational research elements is necessitated as an antecedent to my thesis argument. This chapter endeavours to address these queries, providing a framework to the critical and analytical examinations that follow. This includes, a brief historical description of the Chinese film industry with specific articulations of generic applicability; accounts of critical approaches to Chinese cinema and the location of my argument in reference to established research fields; a declaration of thesis questions, approaches and methodologies; as well as an overview of thesis structure and chapter delineations.

Progressions of the Chinese Film Industry and ‘Generic’ Potentialities

Since its commencement in China during the late Nineteenth Century, the cinematic industry has been engaged in a continual process of haphazard and often contrary development. As a parallel to the rapid social, political and
cultural transformations enacted within the nation since this period, the cinematic medium has endured continuous change and adaptation. \(^1\) To a large degree, it is precisely this tumultuous aspect of the industry that provides an excellent framework for a new style of ‘genre’ study, one that impacts on both the specific Chinese medium and genre criticism at large. Before this ‘generic’ form of approach can be applied however, a more progressive and intricate understanding of Chinese film history is required.

The preliminary period of Chinese film history from 1895-1930 was characterised by developments in commercial and metropolitan areas, primarily located in the bustling cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong. Predominantly frequented by foreign and affluent populations in its initiation, the industry correspondingly localised and by the 1920s was producing, distributing and exhibiting ‘national’ films. \(^2\) Chiefly regulated by mechanisms of commerce, finance and industry at the time, generic systematics emerged as an integral part of film categorisation and marketing. During this period the presence of martial arts, melodrama and comedy forms dominated film output. \(^3\) Thus, from this archetypal industrial era it is evident in terms of

\(^1\) As predominant theorist Dai Jinhua has summed up, “As a specific artistic medium with its own development, changes and evolution, Chinese film has its own peculiar history, and within that history, aesthetic concepts and creative principles of change”. To a greater extent it is precisely this element of continual change, occurring within a unique system that seems to be provoking such critical interest in Chinese cinema recently. Taken from an interview with Zhou Yaqin, ‘Rethinking the Cultural History of Chinese Film’, in Jing Wang & Tani Barlow (eds), *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Works of Dai Jinhua*. London & New York: Verso, 2002, p. 256.


production, distribution and exhibition that the Chinese system prescribed to an appropriated generic form. This premises the recognition of Western practices (in this case ‘genre’ differentiation) as an integral and embedded part of filmic discourse at the time.

Equally significant however, were the prevalence of local and nativist adaptations in identifying and categorising the filmic medium. From the viewpoint of cultural alteration, the origins of theatre and puppetry from which cinema took the name *dianying* (shadowplay) were highly significant, and similarly characterised by conventional forms and popular types. During this era, as detailed by Lin Niantong and Hu Jubin, film within China was steadily translated and adopted as a specific cultural medium. The industry in its primary origins thus emerged in a composite form, both adhering to trends of foreign cinematic projection, whilst similarly imbuing filmic discourse with a sense of native cultural specificity. This fusion was nowhere more evident than in the predominance of generic structures and outputs (i.e. martial arts, melodramas, comedies, operas), simultaneously impacted by foreign and local practices.

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The social and political climate of the 1930s however, motivated by the foreshadowing menace of war and national fragmentation, dealt a radical shift to the ways that cinema was perceived and appreciated within China. Expansions of audience scope (from affluent elites towards the popular mainstream) and the emergence of left-wing filmmakers drastically challenged regulated notions and practices of established cinema.\(^7\) It was during this phase that film surfaced as a site of political manifestation and symbolism, a pattern that would effectively dominate the industry into the contemporary era. Largely motivated by emergent political, social and national circumstances these filmmakers developed a specific mode of Socialist Realism that imbued sentiments of popular nationalism.\(^8\) Within this context the industrial mould was radically reshaped, whereby continuity with the previous era was largely divorced and re-integrated.

From an overarching standpoint, the discursive shifts in styles of filmmaking had a profound impact on continuity and development. The established rudiments of cinematic praxis (in terms of production, distribution and exhibition) were largely reconvened towards political necessitation. It is worth noting at this point however, that this left-wing style was the predominant but not the sole model of filmic discourse at the time. Rather, the 1930s was characterised by cinematic multiplicity and ideological competition. This

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\(^7\) Ma Ning has noted this specifically, whereby leftist filmmakers of the time actively sought to renovate models of film expression and spectatorship, targeting class expectations of the medium and its reception. To this degree, the left-wing form represented a mode of social address, one embedded in specific socio-political directives and praxes. Ma, ‘The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Reconstructing Chinese Leftist Films of the 1930s’, *Wide Angle* 11, 2, 1989, p. 23.

condition was particularly prevalent after the Japanese invasion in 1937, where at least three distinct streams could be identified (i.e. left-wing, Nationalist and Japanese types). Equivalently throughout the 1940s this variegation persisted, as cinema continued to function as a site of political meditation and determination. This progression was in fact sustained through until the Socialist Revolution in 1949, whereby the left-wing discipline was touted as the legitimate cinematic legacy and adapted to post-Revolution society.

Under Mao’s rule the machinations of the industry were centralised and rigidly regulated according to statist concerns. The 27-year period of these practices can be split into two distinct parts, separated into the initial revolutionary period (1949-1965) and the latter Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Arts and cultural production during the preliminary phase of Socialist rule was heavily dictated by orthodox Maoist praxes, in particular his renowned ‘Talks on Art and Literature’ given at Yan’an in 1942. Subsequently the emphasis on genre (in its conventional form) was effectively unrecognised in the pursuit of instituting a politically didactic and orthodox medium. As I shall argue later however, this did not mean that the discourse of ‘genre’ simply disappeared or was abolished during this period, quite the contrary, but simply that industrial practices and policy dictated its identification in alternative (i.e. Socialist) forms.

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9 For two detailed accounts of these varied production forms, see Leyda, Dianying, pp. 77-129. And Hu, Projecting a Nation, pp. 115-131.
10 As Paul Clark annotates of the specific adoption of cinema during this period, film was an easily accessible medium of regulation, one that could “reach audiences in an unadulterated form and was most readily controllable by Party censors”. Clark, Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 3.
To a similar extent the Cultural Revolution era was characterised by a regulated and centralised industry, but leaning towards an explicit and extremist bent, one that truly shattered the fundamentals of generic modelling.\textsuperscript{12} During this phase cultural and artistic policy shifted from productivity dictated by Maoist principles towards an obsessive and radical form of cultural totalitarianism. The very legacy and continuity of the cinematic medium itself (not just in terms of generic output) was devastated throughout this period as almost all previous films were banned and production was brought to a grinding halt.\textsuperscript{13} Under the rigid authorisation of Jiang Qing (Mao’s wife) as cultural arbiter, only an extraordinarily small number of feature films were produced during these ten years, making it almost a symbolic whitewash of industrial output.

Such was the upheaval and instability within the medium at the time, that this phase represented more of an anarchic interruption and disruption of cinematic development than an identifiable continuation or extension of any established forms. The impact of these above-mentioned factors surface as a major hindrance to any comprehensive genre criticism. The extremely limited number of texts produced during this period and their symbolic dissociation from established or structured norms (as feature films were replaced with theatrical-style revolutionary operas) emerge as an insurmountable obstacle to

\textsuperscript{12} Such was the impact of dissociation and disruption during this period that Tony Rayns and Scott Meeks noted that, “the Cultural Revolution did not merely interrupt this tradition (of film continuity and regulation); it sought to obliterate it in its entirety”. Rayns & Meeks, ‘Before the Cultural Revolution’, \textit{Sight and Sound} 49, 1980, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{13} As Paul Clark surmised, it wasn’t until 1974 that any ‘feature’ films were produced at all during this era. Rather, the limited numbers of texts made were actually \textit{yangbanxi} (model plays), politically didactic remakes and staged opera versions of pre-Cultural Revolution favourites. Clark, ‘The Film Industry in the 1970s’, in Bonnie McDougall (ed), \textit{Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979}. California: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 177-196.
providing competent critique. Therefore my argument will not detail the Cultural Revolution era specifically, but will rather account for its enormous impact as registered in its cinematic aftermath.

The downfall of Maoism and progression towards reform within China, initiated in 1976, prompted the development of a following period of film history. Impacted by a wide series of socio-political, economic and cultural re-orientations, cinema emerged in a largely reconstructed context. During the latter half of the 1980s in particular, the medium was emphatically reshaped and modified in parallel to the overarching reform process itself. Subsequently, the factors of production, distribution and exhibition within China were steadily adapted and configured to the requirements of an emerging market-based industry. Progressions within the industrial base were equally matched by textual and narrative adaptations, where emergent filmmakers expedited progressive innovations and expansions of conventional style and form.\(^\text{14}\) As with previous eras of production (before the Cultural Revolution) the figurations of genre emerged once again, but in highly reconstituted and reformed manners.

Following this preliminary stage of reform, China’s film history expanded further during the 1990s. Industrial advancements compounded by wider discursive endeavours provoked further renewal within the medium’s

\(^{14}\) As Esther Yau has remarked to this effect, at the same time that filmmakers were employing alternative practices within production, a new relationship between distribution and the commercial market was emerging throughout the Chinese industry. Yau, ‘China After the Revolution’, in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (ed), The Oxford History of World Cinema. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 699.
practices, specifically towards commercial and global thematics.\textsuperscript{15} This trend has continued steadily into the Twenty-First Century, where Chinese cinema has persisted in its propulsion toward market-based considerations. As the primary structures of production, distribution and exhibition have been redetermined towards figurative commerciality, the discursive elements of the industry have undergone considerable change.\textsuperscript{16} This adaptation is particularly evident when apprehended through the scope of genre, recurrently expanded from structured notions as a multifaceted space of ideological negotiation. The impact and significance of this development is yet to be fully contemplated, as the complex history of the Chinese cinematic medium continues unabated.

\textbf{Critical Approaches in Chinese Cinema}

As the profile of Chinese cinema has enlarged within film criticism in recent years, expanding research has been investigated and adapted in a variety of differing forms. Theorists have covered a wide range of topics, issues and eras, progressively locating the Chinese medium as one of growing critical interest. During this development researchers have continually challenged the fundamental conventions and perceptions of the industry itself, instituting alternative and progressive forms of analysis ranging from structuralism through postmodernism to transnationalism. Within this process of academic


\textsuperscript{16} These widespread adaptations within the medium can be effectively ascertained by looking at film criticism within recent years and its expansion into novel areas of modernity. This is especially prevalent in the \textit{Asian Cinema} journal, which has published articles on a number of issues symptomatic of these changes. See Kong Shuyu, ‘Big Shot From Beijing: Feng Xiaogang’s \textit{He Sui Pian} and Contemporary Chinese Commercial Film’, \textit{Asian Cinema} 14, 1, 2003, pp. 175-187. Bruce Robinson, ‘Chinese Mainland New Era Cinema and Tiananmen’, \textit{Asian Cinema} 10, 1, 1998, pp. 37-56. And Evans Chan, ‘Chinese Cinema at the Millennium’, \textit{Asian Cinema} 15, 1, 2004, pp. 90-115.
critique however, one of the fundamental methodologies of cinema has gone largely unexplored: the approach of genre.

The restrictive attention to generic styles of analysis within Chinese cinema research can be largely attributed to historical assumptions and approaches within the medium. The variegated nature of development throughout the industry, especially during the Maoist period, has seemingly ‘voided’ the facilitation of established genre approaches. Correspondingly, Chinese cinema has been articulated at large as a ‘nationalist’ system, one not applicable to or impacted by conventional generic trends.\(^{17}\) This is the result of intersecting discursive suppositions, including the nature of self-identification and marketing within the industry, whereby the prevalence of filmic ‘themes’ and ‘subjects’ have been correspondingly prefaced as key elements of cinematic classification. This is equivalently in contradistinction to established ‘generic’ approaches, which as I shall outline in the following chapter, have been identified by both native Chinese and Western critics alike.

This is not to suggest that genre has been simply ignored within critical matrices detailing Chinese cinema in English. Rather, attentions to particular generic structures (as noted in reference to the very origins of the medium itself) have been somewhat hermetic.\(^{18}\) In this manner where previous studies

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have by and large detailed ‘popular’ genres in China, they gravitate to a restrictive framework, delineating ‘opera’, ‘swordplay’ and ‘kung fu’ as ‘nativist’ modes. These forms tend toward assumptions of these elements as unique and exclusive to the Chinese industry, representing definitive generic styles. Consequently, this approach surfaces as somewhat limited in providing a comparative base for generic contrast and transparency to wider modes of cinematic analysis.

To this degree, the instigation and initiation of genre as a legitimate critical mode within the expanding scope of Chinese cinema requires further attention. The wholesale transposition of dominant Western approaches to the Chinese case would be a highly problematic and hazardous endeavour, as outlined by Zhang Yingjin, potentially leading to subjective or ‘exclusivist’ forms of criticism. However, the ignorance and absence of these elements within the corpus of critical investigation and advancement is similarly endangering. To this extent, a vigilant examination of genre (with the ‘combat’ film as the specific form) supplements the research conducted so far in Chinese cinema, whilst also expanding opportunities for further critical debate and inquiry.

This escalating development of critical research in Chinese cinema is largely analogous to the process of overarching reform itself throughout the nation.

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To this point, established perceptions and conventions within academic contexts have been continually questioned, negotiated and rewritten. The importance of this progression and expansion is similarly significant in terms of situating my own ‘genre’ argument and its contribution to the corpus of research conducted thus far within the arena. In order to shed better light on this, a brief account of existent film literature is necessary.

Due to the complex and multifarious nature of the industry itself throughout the Twentieth Century, it is difficult to provide an overarching or complete review of Chinese film literature. As outlined by Zhang Yingjin, the very process of historiography has only been applied somewhat recently to the medium and in highly regulated contexts. Furthermore the lack of English language materials and translations within the area provide a major deterrent towards all-inclusive accounts of the industry. Consequently, the impact of critical film literature did not truly manifest within China until the initiation of reform following the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the prolonged scope of investigation within this endeavour has been characterised by the international exposure of the medium itself, amounting to expanded critical attention from both Western and nativist commentators.

Perhaps one of the most prominent and augmented themes applied to Chinese cinema since this period has been the particular focus on gender representations and their underlying critical significance. Within this context predominant theorists including Rey Chow, Dai Jinhua and Esther Yau have

rigorously applied a critical matrix to the renderings of gender, and women in particular onscreen. The primary attention thus far has been on issues of subjectivity, with momentum towards negotiated political, social and cultural issues. Whilst the enormous impact of these studies on Chinese film criticism cannot be denied, these approaches tend to be somewhat self-enclosed and rigid in their application. The notion of gender and its representation is taken as an explicit and centralised norm within these analyses, where alternative themes are effectively marginalised or delimited. The re-apprehension of gender as a critical scope through an enlarged matrix however (in this case, the ‘combat’ film), provides an opportunity for integrative negotiation and critique.

Researches on minority and ethnicity figures in Chinese cinema have similarly been enlarged throughout this period. These examinations locate projections of these elements within the context of complex discursive hegemony and cultural negotiation. Evident in studies by Paul Clark, Zhang Yingjin and Dru Gladney, these critiques articulate and identify shifting ethnic representations through the scope of negotiated ideological norms. To this degree, marking changes in ethnic depiction emerges as a register of change within both the medium itself and cultural consciousness at large.

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Whilst these studies on minorities are critically enlightening and impacting, they are limited in accounting for the promulgation of the industry over an expanded scope and length of time. Rather, they tend to concentrate on particular themes and significances of ethnicity, projected in a somewhat hermetic frame. For instance, as Zhang Yingjin refers to minority discourse as ‘marginality’, it is subsequently divorced from established (or ‘central’) practice and placed within a dissociated frame. Similarly this form of approach (much like the above-mentioned issue of gender) fails to locate other modes of representational sublimation that are contemporaneous with the ethnic format.

The focus on cinema as a ‘national’ form is effectively where the origins of contemporary Chinese film criticism began. This method was primarily adopted by both Western and Chinese critics alike in the immediate post-Mao environment. Prominent critics including Chris Berry, Cui Shuqin and Paul Pickowicz have sought to investigate Chinese cinema as a specific national form, with particular modes of production, distribution and exhibition. The overarching tendency of these approaches provides a comparative account of the industry through a largely chronological module. This format correspondingly seeks to filter outcomes through an evaluative frame,

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attributing definitive themes to social, political and cultural conditions of production.

Although these studies have profoundly impacted on the ways Chinese cinema is critically perceived and received, their relevance remains somewhat foundational and elementary by today’s standards of research. Furthermore, the ‘national’ format carries specific connotations, what Stephen Crofts identifies as non-Hollywood ‘otherness’, tending towards exclusive and hermetic readings.\textsuperscript{26} This is not to devalue the significance of the national approach towards Chinese cinema, but simply to outline the need for augmentation and extension with other critical modes, in the case of this study, to that of genre.

The types of limitations within the ‘national’ mode of analysis have recently been addressed by a number of theorists including Sheldon Lu, Zhang Yingjin and Xu Ying, with precipitations towards a ‘transnational’ filmic form. Indicative of commercialised developments throughout the 1990s era in terms of both expanding cinematic themes and critical approaches, these configurations relocate industrial and discursive factors within emerging global contexts.\textsuperscript{27} Subsequently, the homogenous categorisation of Chinese film as a national form is progressively disrupted and redetermined in this mode. Instead, Zhang and Lu effectively project cinematic discourse as


embedded within market trends and exchanges of hybridity. In terms of systematic consequences, whilst this ‘transnational’ model certainly expands the scope of investigation in Chinese cinema, like the ‘national’ form it retains its own critical restrictions. This is primarily manifest in terms of chronology, as the ‘transnational’ mode is limited to contemporary texts, emergent only since the 1990s period.

The feature of cinematic landscape, and its specified role as an iconic cultural and collective signifier has similarly received amplified attention within recent studies focussing on the nationalised Chinese industry. Pre-eminent scholars breaching a multifarious range of disciplines including Stephanie Donald, Ni Zhen and Hao Dazheng, have distinctively encountered, examined and deliberated upon the projective significance of this element within the expanded corpus of Chinese film history.28 Equivalently, the focus on city/country and rural/urban splits has attracted considerable focus since the 1990s, culminating in researches examining configurations of centrality and periphery in cinematic contexts. Eve Gaberau, Harry Kuoshu and Zhang Yingjin have conducted expanded analysis in this arena, encountering geographical and topological regulations in context of wider ideological implications.29


Although these accounts have recognised the ‘iconic’ symbolism and construction of these landscapes, their contribution towards the corpus of Chinese research remains somewhat muffled and discordant. This is especially manifest in the arena of signification itself, failing to identify landscape as a system of verification, involving prerogatives of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, the established format fails to account for landscape as a variable cinematic entity, one susceptible to wider shifts in cultural consciousness and imagination over time. To this degree, the projected identification of the cinematic landscape within China requires further exploration.

Finally one of the most prominent manifestations of study into Chinese cinema within critical research has tended to be the ‘new wave’ stream of analysis. Utilised by theorists including Wimal Dissanayake, Sheila Cornelius and Nick Browne, the predominance of this categorical form has persisted throughout investigative models. Endeavours within this realm pivot upon identifying distinct adaptations of style, form and production throughout Chinese filmmaking as symptomatic of wider ideological changes and reforms. Analogous with Western critical methods (i.e. Italian or French ‘New Wave’ cinema), this model locates the development of cinematic trends


both according and in response to established conventions. Commonly associated with international or ‘art house’ spheres, this format provides an integral platform to an appreciation of Chinese cinema as an expanding and developing medium, one located within a global frame of reference.\footnote{31 This is merely the newest conflict to face Chinese filmmakers in an industry of continuous change and adaptation. As Zhu Ying has aptly remarked, “The politics of Chinese cinema is no longer the politics of generation but the politics of the market. As the Chinese film industry struggles to maintain its place in the global cinematic landscape, the livelihood of many filmmakers is on the line”. Zhu, \textit{Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform}, p. x.}

There are some potential hazards with this style of methodology however, located specifically in the scope of investigation and critical application. The ‘new wave’ model tends to focus on the most prominent textual forms and expectations, often through a Western critical matrix that is rendered simplistic and unambiguous. Furthermore, this approach tends to demonstrate an ignorance of negotiated or contrary figurations within the industry during this time, examining from a largely populist and assumptive viewpoint. Equally, the ‘new wave’ approach tends to be historically and temporally limited, providing a piecemeal appreciation of the vast industry as a whole and its wide scale development. Not surprisingly this ‘new wave’ model has been expanded upon and critiqued in academic circles throughout the last twenty years (with development into ‘post-new wave’ and ‘post-wave’ manifestations) amounting to equivocal renditions of the industry as a complex and multitudinal arena.\footnote{32 This tendency towards reconstituted ‘waves’ is a relatively recent endeavour within Chinese film criticism, only explored by a handful of researchers. See Zhu, \textit{Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform}, pp. 111-175. Dai Jinhua in Wang & Barlow (eds), \textit{Cinema and Desire}, pp. 49-70. And Chris Berry, \textit{Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution After the Cultural Revolution}. London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.}
The combined gravitation of this Chinese film literature review has identified and critiqued established approaches in English language studies of the industry thus far. It is worth noting at this point, that as I articulate the limitations of each particular mode above in reference to my ‘genre’ positioning, I similarly acknowledge the validity and impact of these studies within the expanding field of Chinese film criticism. As to be demonstrated throughout my argument, the diverse and variegated principles of these studies have been adapted as a progressive ‘framework’ for this investigation, whereby I ultimately seek to both critique and complement prevailing researches.

**Thesis Questions and Methodology**

Having detailed in the above sections the historical progression of the industry at large and the scope of academic criticism applied to Chinese cinema, it follows that an account of specific thesis questions and methodologies must be outlined. In this manner a clearer grounding for my argument can be established, providing a framework for critical and textual analysis throughout the following chapters.

In developing my research argument many diverse questions surfaced, ultimately informing the investigative thrust of this thesis. The foremost of these queries contemplates, *In what ways has Chinese cinema been approached thus far within critical research? What are the origins, conditions and constraints of these studies, and has there been a gap in the critical field?* In response to this I have noted that whilst a wide array of Western film
criticisms have been applied to China in recent years, the arena of ‘genre’ remains somewhat underplayed and limited. As to be detailed in the following chapter, the implications of this for Chinese film research are considerable, necessitating an in-depth and investigative mode of ‘genre’ analysis.

Correspondingly the query emerges of, *What is film ‘genre’ exactly, what are its key elements, themes and boundaries? Is the ‘genre’ approach limited to certain conditions and industries, or can it be applied in hitherto marginalised contexts?* As to be articulated in Chapter One, the significance of genre definition and classification is by no means a new query in academic criticism. Differing streams of research have methodologically examined this premise to considerable and recurrent degrees. Moreover, there is evidence of inquiries into the necessary conditions and elements constituting genre differentiation (What makes one genre similar/different from another?) as well as those considering progression and development (Do genres adapt over time? In what ways do they change?).

In terms correspondingly related to this argument, queries arise such as, *Can the ‘genre’ model be transposed to the Chinese film industry? If so, in what ways? What are the consequences of this in terms of critical and cinematic research?* This prompts me to examine emblematic generic modes in the Chinese industry, contemplating the ‘war film’ as a predominant base for investigation. In response to this a number of qualifying enquiries similarly emerge including, *What is the ‘war film’ exactly? What are the key*
characteristics of its origins, history and determination? Does the ‘war film’ exist in Chinese cinema and if so, in what particular manifestations?

Subsequently I resolve the need for further categorisation of the ‘war film’ itself (as to be detailed in the following chapter) in providing an impacting critique. In this manner I foster the presence of the ‘combat’ film as the cornerstone for my thesis argument, which provokes the query of, Has the combat film manifested thus far in Chinese cinema? If so, what are the conditions and characteristics determining its development and progression? This shall be answered throughout the thesis, tracing progressions of the Chinese combat film in context of wider discursive and socio-political contexts.

In formulating my specific thesis argument, I looked closely at the existing corpus of researches in Chinese cinema. Accordingly I noted limitations and gaps in critical accounts, in particular instituting modes of rigorous analysis that equivalently contemplated the progressive history of the Chinese medium at large. To this effect an integral query arises, Can the variegated nature of Chinese film history be accounted for in a critical study that is both general (covering numerous decades) and specific (detailing comparative and correlative factors/themes)? Throughout my thesis I aim to demonstrate that this mode of approach is possible, whereby investigations of the seminal ‘combat’ genre and its developments during Socialist rule prescribe to this form.
In developing a rigorous and informed critical argument, I followed a meticulous and appropriate research methodology. The first stage in this process focused upon suitable data collation and an extensive film literature review. Accordingly this provided the framework upon which to base and develop my thesis scope. Initially this relied on finding as many Chinese ‘war films’ as possible, upon which further deliberation (as detailed in Chapter One, due to the large number and range of texts available) was filtered to the specific ‘combat’ variant. In this manner I scrupulously reviewed and analysed over 100 films, noting key generic themes and characteristics that later became the corpus of my critical investigation. In the interest of producing clarity and depth, this range was further condensed to 55 emblematic texts in drafting and writing stages, all of which are referenced (most in detail forms) during this thesis.

Whilst data collation was engaged I similarly conducted an extensive review of academic literature branching into diverse arenas of film, cultural and media studies, history, literature, politics and nationalism. From this expansive viewpoint I subsequently breached into an in-depth critical account of Chinese film studies, film criticism at large and film genre criticism in particular. This became the effective framework upon which to instigate my theoretical argument and the structure for my initial (following) chapter.

As an accompaniment to these critical examinations I additionally sought to develop a chapter that provided correlation to adaptations within each variant, in the aim of producing an overall synthesis of the Chinese combat film. In
this manner, an appreciation of key elements and themes could be dually tied to predominant cinematic styles and wider discursive trends. This resulted in Chapter Five to be detailed below. Finally the development of an appropriate introduction and conclusion was enacted, effectively suturing and structuring my analysis of the Chinese combat film since 1949.

In the aim of producing a thesis argument that provides both general and specialised forms of critique I have chosen to employ a chronological mode. As shall be detailed and justified within the following chapter, this dates from the origins of the combat variant itself (after Socialist Revolution in 1949) through to the contemporary period. Consequently three distinct variants emerge, as shall be detailed throughout my argument, correlating to socio-political and discursive adaptations at large in China. These segregations correlatively serve as chapter divisions throughout this thesis, emphasising specific adaptations to the generic mode in context of overall progressions and negotiations.

This parallels established modes of study within the film genre discipline, charting and investigating progressions according to sequential ordering. Accordingly, this style of segmentation effectively frames generic adaptation within wider socio-cultural and discursive developments during this time. As detailed in my critique of prevailing research focussed on the industry, an integrative chronological mode contributes to both overarching understandings of Chinese cinema history at large, and during specific periods of its development. Moreover, in appreciating styles of segmentation, features
of recurrent but changeable elements are similarly noted and charted. These characteristics promulgate the narratological analysis of my argument, as evident in each specific variant of the combat film. In complementing this mode of examination, specific case studies similarly emerge, whereby an emblematic film is thoroughly examined from a critical cinematic matrix.

Whilst this thesis is concerned with projections and representations of ‘combat’ on film, it excludes focus on other visual mediums that could be similarly explored, specifically that of television. The predominance of ‘war epics’, ‘historical recreations’ and ‘combat dramas’ persists throughout the history of Chinese televisional productions, particularly prevalent since the 1980s era. It is worth noting here, that many of these television serials are in fact popular remakes of combat films (often from the revolutionary era), effectively transferred to the ‘smaller’ screen as symptomatic of modernisation and reform. In this manner I qualify my thesis as being an investigation into representations of combat from a purely cinematic viewpoint, where other visual mediums could provide a complimentary analysis to my own.

Although my own position in approaching Chinese films may appear somewhat de-centred on initial examination, as neither a native speaker nor

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33 In addition to television, the ‘visual’ mediums of theatre, opera and painting could be equivalently investigated to this degree. Due to the restrictions of thesis form, I am unable to account for these entities within my study, but certainly recognise their legitimate potentiality as a complementary form of critique.

having grown up in a Chinese environment, my progressive exposure and rigorous examination over many years justifies the articulations of this study. This follows modes of other theorists in approaching Chinese research (such as Stephanie Donald and Ien Ang) who have similarly critiqued native authority and experience as a necessary characteristic of legitimate critical analysis. Accordingly, my argument provides an intersecting account of Chinese combat films from a Western-based investigative viewpoint (as opposed to subjective experiences), one that is informed by a specific critical framework.

**Thesis Structure and Chapter Outline**

This introduction provides a symptomatic template upon which key aspects of my thesis argument, detailing the Chinese combat film, can be ascertained and justified. This procession includes an elucidation of gaps in relevant research fields detailing critical studies of Chinese cinema thus far, an account for how my argument aims to remedy these modes of disparity, a compact declaration of thesis question and methodologies, as well as an apposite summary of the structures and approaches that inform this study. The gravitation of this Introduction is towards developing a vigilant, legitimate and appropriate groundwork for theoretical investigations of succeeding chapters to be enacted upon.

This following bulk of this thesis is structured into five major segments, surmounting to an in-depth theoretical and analytical investigation of the Chinese combat film since 1949. Chapter One provides an overarching conceptual framework for my argument, detailing the historical and practical applications of ‘genre’ to film criticism. Within this process it locates the established specificities of this modality and its limitations to particular cinematic industries, with the American Hollywood system as the predominant type. Correspondingly this chapter articulates the Chinese industry as a model for alternative examination and analysis of ‘generic’ variation. The ‘war film’ is consequently prefaced as the most appropriate ‘genre’ for this analysis, including detailed accounts of its critical development in both established and emerging modes of research. Within this articulation, the ‘combat’ film as an emblematic form is similarly detailed, whereby its predominance accounted for. Finally this chapter transposes the ‘war film’ and ‘combat’ model onto the particular Chinese industry, formulating specific variations as exemplified by the ‘Chinese combat film’ and the ‘resistance narrative’.

Chapter Two provides the first chronological examination and analysis of the Chinese combat film, focussing on its emergence as a generic variant in the aftermath of Socialist revolution. Dating from 1949 until the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, this segment concentrates on the development of the cinematic genre according to predominant discursive themes of regulation. This mode of investigation is split into two distinct segments. The former imparts a narratological examination of a number of revolutionary texts whilst
documenting prevalent representational themes, divided into key elements of heroes, enemies, collaborators, women, children, families, and landscape. Contrastingly the latter segment offers detailed and in-depth cinematic analysis of an emblematic case study. Throughout both these sections emphasis is placed on themes of institutional and discursive orthodoxy, articulating romanticised cinematic modes and styles. Although approaching the ‘revolutionary’ era of filmmaking in this segment, as detailed earlier in this chapter, I will not be concentrating on texts produced during the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) due to qualitative and quantitative limitations.

Chapter Three elucidates an investigation of the Chinese combat film in the initial period of post-Mao reform. Concentrating on the 1980s decade (and essentially its latter half, qualifying to ‘new wave’ articulations noted above), this section focuses on adaptations of generic variants within context of wider ideological restructures and negotiations. As with the second chapter, this form of analysis is segregated into two arenas. The first issues a narratological study of several 1980s combat films, attending to projected features of heroes, enemies, collaborators, children, families, and landscape. Correspondingly, the second segment provides textual analysis of a representative case study. In both these spheres prominence is placed on trends of generic restructure and negotiation, gravitating towards reformed and ‘new wave’ cinematic modes at large.

Chapter Four illuminates the Chinese combat film in the latter period of post-Mao reform. Attending to the 1990s decade, this segment details alterations of
the variant as framed by emerging themes of modernisation and globalisation.

In concurrence with preceding analytical chapters, this mode of investigation is divided into two major areas. The foremost involves a narratological analysis of various 1990s combat texts, paying particular attention to cinematic manifestations of heroes, enemies, collaborators, women, children, families, and landscape. The succeeding section similarly duplicates the preceding two chapters, presenting an in-depth cinematic case study of an emblematic text. In these dual arenas critical distinction is attributed to features of generic renewal and re-orientation throughout this chapter, mounting towards a reapprehension of cinematic forms at large.

Chapter Five operates as a synthesis of the investigations covered throughout the previous three chapters, charting developments of the Chinese combat film through specific periods of ‘regulation’ (1949-1966), ‘reformation’ (1980s) and ‘renewal’ (1990s). Of particular significance, this section conjunctures the prevalent themes and trends of generic variants, in a direct and comparative manner. Subsequently the key narratological features analysed during previous forms, those of heroes, enemies, traitors, women, children, families, and landscape are all re-examined in this manner.

The conclusion of this thesis provides a tightly compacted and abstractive account of critical trends and developments. In this manner the gravitations and negotiations detailed throughout my argument are effectively conglomerated in this section, into an overreaching comprehension of the Chinese combat film since 1949. Moreover, this segment addresses the major
inquiries and questions motivating this thesis during formative stages of development. In this sense the conclusion imparts a critical appreciation of the Chinese combat film (into the contemporary period and future) in context of wider discursive themes, overarching trends and prospective adaptations.
Chapter One
Genre, The ‘Combat’ Film and Chinese Cinema

In this chapter I set out to determine some of the primary theoretical elements and limits in approaching the Chinese combat film. This shall entail an outline and identification of ‘genre’ as a legitimate mode of cinematic analysis and signification. Moreover, this process undertakes a preliminary account of genre as a critical discourse, one with a recognisable and established form. In this, an elucidation of the complex and differing styles within the generic approach will be enacted, with attention to particular impacts and outcomes. Overarching generic modes shall be correspondingly curtailed towards the cinematic medium specifically, emergent within contexts of the ‘war film’ model. Once this is effectively outlined, the significance and legitimation of particular generic forms (in this case the ‘combat film’) will be facilitated.

This broad critical framework shall be then applied to the more than century-old Chinese film industry, with attention to specific socio-cultural nuances and discourses. This involves an account of established genre approaches within film criticism (locating the ‘war’ model in context), charting trends of development and their tendency towards emblematic and dominant industrial bases. Consequently, I shall outline the previously unrealised characteristics and significances of Chinese war-based cinema. This will ultimately breach into an appreciation of the ‘combat’ film as a dominant generic mode within the medium since 1949, identifying its primary format and characteristics as symbolised by the prevailing ‘resistance’ narrative.
Genre as a Critical Approach in Cinema

The primary starting point for this theoretical progression necessitates an appreciation of ‘genre’ as a critical mode of identification and investigation. This itself provokes a number of challenging broad questions: What is ‘genre’ exactly? How can it be defined? How is it useful within an academic matrix, especially in relation to film criticism? Whilst a wide range of disciplines and researchers have addressed these queries thus far, there is a need for significant summation and abridgement.36

Throughout this thesis I shall regard the concept of ‘genre’ itself as a loosely connected corpus of texts, where a series of decipherable qualities can be identified in spite of individual divergences. Moreover, in approaching differentiations and developments in genre I propose a steadily ‘de-regulated’ mode, where features of generic ‘constraints’ and ‘variants’ can be classified. The use of the former indicates determination of themes and elements as bound by generic framing, whereas the later highlights the non-fixed and adaptive nature of generic progressions through time.37 I preference the use of ‘variant’ over other alternative modes (such as ‘sub-genre’ or ‘type’) in order to stress the differing forms (categorised in temporal manners) within a

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36 The fundamental importance of these definitions and characterisations within film genre criticism is discernable in their prominence throughout research surveys. This is especially prevalent in the seminal early articles of the discipline, including those of Tom Ryall, Edward Buscombe and Raymond Durgnaut, who all use definition as a starting point for theoretical investigation. See Ryall, ‘The Notion of Genre’, Screen 11, 2, 1975, pp. 22-32. Buscombe, ‘The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema’, Screen 11, 2, 1975, pp. 33-45. And Durgnaut, ‘Genre: Populism and Social Realism’, Film Comment 11, 4, 1975, pp. 20-29.

developing system of identification. Correspondingly, my location of genre as a critical approach will be derived from an adaptation of conventional models, specifically those applied to cinematic modes.

This is not to ignore the importance of wider approaches towards genre within academic discourse, particularly the seminal formulations of literary theory, but rather to emphasise the significance of the medium itself as a distinct and established entity of critical ‘codification’ and praxis.³⁸ To this degree, I shall briefly outline the fundamental lineage of genre criticism, before breaching into manifestations within film criticism. Throughout the history of genre investigation at large, division is split into two primary arenas, focussing on ‘theoretical’ and ‘historical’ forms respectively.

Whereas the former details the basic ‘deduction’ of generic order and characteristics from artistic norms, the latter is more concerned with ‘observing’ actual literary trends and developments.³⁹ This dichotomy is apparent in the work of Tzvetan Todorov, prefacing a specifically ‘structural’ form of analysis. Detailing particular elements of genre within a literary framework, Todorov argues for an integrative critical approach to theory and

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³⁸ As renowned theorist Tzvetan Todorov has classically noted of genre in the literate form, “The recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalised, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification. A genre, whether literary or not, is nothing other than the codification of discursive properties”. Todorov, Genres in Discourse. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 17-18.
history, one that functions as “a continual oscillation between the description of phenomena and abstract theory”. 40

To this extent, the ‘structural’ model seeks to investigate genre as a highly negotiated, diverse and augmented entity. Accordingly my argument aligns in this manner with aspects of ‘family resemblance’ as outlined by Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophies. 41 Correspondingly, it is adequate to adopt notions of these loose relationships of criteria along a sufficient scale of resemblance to permit generic modes of recognition.

In transferring such concepts to the cinematic medium, the critical history and impact of ‘genre’ is somewhat more ambiguous and equivocal. Associated predominantly with the American Hollywood system, the ‘generic’ emerges in its primary identification as a seminal aspect of film classification and dissemination, rather than of critical praxis. 42 Accordingly, the film ‘genre’ label manifests as an inherently complex entity, mediating specific structures of cinematic production, marketing and consumption. 43 Moreover, on its basest level ‘genre’ is recognised as ‘static’ and ‘impure’, embedded in a continuous process of ideological negotiation and identification as beset by

41 As he theorises, “I can think of no better expression to characterise these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way”. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974, p. 32.
42 As Thomas Schatz notes of the specific Hollywood mode, the emergence of genre signification was ultimately tied to the development of a ‘studio system’ and implemented ‘formulas’ that dominated the foundation of the industry itself. Whilst Schatz’s orientation is somewhat outdated by present standards, his appreciation of these factors is significant in locating progressions of genre criticism in film studies. Schatz, Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking and the Studio System. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981, pp. 1-11.
43 For an impressively succinct account of this, and of film genre criticism at large, see Susan Hayward, Key Concepts in Cinema Studies. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 159-166.
these discursive structures. In this manner ‘genre’ surfaces as a seminal, but highly disputed aspect of film genre criticism, informed by a corpus of diverse definitions, approaches and characteristics.44

Since the 1960s, the imagination and signification of genre within the film medium has undergone considerable reformulation, as theorists have adapted its function towards critical investigation and analysis.45 Intercepting varied arenas of filmic discourse itself, genre examination has been applied to differing aspects of production, distribution and exhibition since this period in recurrent processes of debate and negotiation.46 Ultimately genre has emerged within film studies as an integral and popular framework of critical endeavour. Whereas other modes of cinematic analysis may be more historically acknowledged or developed (such as the auteur, psychoanalysis or feminist streams) the significance of film genre (especially within accounts of Hollywood) parallels the popular development of the medium itself throughout the Twentieth Century.47

44 ibid., p. 160.
45 Whilst the notion of genre had an established critical history within other cultural forms (i.e. poetry, theatre, literature) its adaptation to the cinematic medium was somewhat belated and protracted. Initially developed under the rubric of the Cahiers du cinéma style, by the 1970s it begun to be popularly adapted as a mainstream critical form. For a detailed account of this procession see Sarah Berry, ‘Genre’, in Toby Miller & Robert Stam (eds), A Companion Guide to Film Theory. Oxford & Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1999, pp. 25-44.
47 As Tom Ryall has ironically pointed out, despite Hollywood being identified as above all else “a cinema of genres”, the development of criticism within this arena has been overtly indirect and equivocal. Furthermore Ryall notes that the scope and framework of genre analysis (much like that of film criticism at large) has been involved in a process of continual negotiation and debate. Ryall, ‘Genre and Hollywood’, in Hill & Gibson (eds), The Oxford Guide to Film Studies, pp. 327-338.
Before enacting an extensive overview and critique of film genre criticism, some explicit definitions and characteristics must be initially addressed: What are the particular elements of genre within cinema? How are they specific and to what degree? What types of conclusions can be drawn from film genre criticism? These queries belie some of the fundamental ambivalences of this style of examination, as no exacting or ‘pure’ categories can be obtained.48 Whereas some theorists purport specific filmic themes, iconographies and conventions as the key elements of structured genre analysis, others argue it to be a specialized interrelation of cinematic audience, industry and text.49 These differing streams emphasise symptomatic patterns and forms according to these primary characteristics. What emerges as most impacting however, is an acknowledgement of genre as a complex and negotiated entity, one that can be applied to a range of inter and intra-textual forms.50

In absence of a universal notion and supplement of genre elements, what materialises as similarly significant is the impact and effect of genre itself within a critical film matrix. To this level the recognition of genre as ‘cyclical’, engaging in a continual process of development and change

48 The negotiated notion of ‘purity’ in film genre is tied to the development of the critical approach itself, whereby it has been recurrently debated and examined. For an emblematic account of this, one that identifies and critiques ‘purity’ accounts with considerable assurance see Janet Staiger, ‘Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Thesis and Hollywood Genre History’, Film Criticism 22, 1, 1997, pp. 5-20.

49 Although the initial stages of criticism appeared irreconcilably split by these differing approaches, the interrelation and co-joining of these models was effectively resolved by the end of the 1980s. Since this period many theorists have purported mixed and integrative studies, as shall be discussed later. For emblematic accounts of the former approach see Buscombe, Screen, pp. 33-45, and for the later, Ryall, ‘Teaching Through Genre’, Screen Education 17, 1975, pp. 27-33.

50 Edward Buscombe relates this as central to the very structure of film genre identification and analytical criticism, contemplating fundamental aspects of ‘inner’ and ‘outer forms’. In this manner, an overlapping of textuality can be effectively discerned. Buscombe, Screen, p. 36.
requires acknowledgment. Similarly genre must not be interpreted as a fundamentally homogeneous or discrete entity, whereby interactions of textual and discursive elements carry persistent significances. Thus each film genre contains its own particular ‘history’, whereby negotiations of its specific rudiments are framed by overarching ideological trends. This is principally demonstrated throughout ‘popular’ film industries (like the forebear of Hollywood) where particular genres (and their symptomatic texts) are intertwined in complex industrial trends and expansions.

Looking closely at the development of film genre criticism in this context, a similar history of progression can be ascertained. This impacts not only on contemporary forms of analysis, but similarly on the corpus of genre criticism itself as a negotiable and re-determinable corpus. Many of the early critics in film genre research tend toward ‘morphological’ or ‘evolutionary’ approaches, charting particular progressions in stylistic terms. As emblematised by Edward Buscombe and Lawrence Alloway, this method regulates specific


52 As renowned film critic Christine Gledhill has remarked, “genres are not discrete phenomena, contained within mutually exclusive boundaries…rather they hang together as an integrated system of intersecting fictional worlds. In this perspective, boundary crossings and disputes become sites of productive cultural activity”. Gledhill, ‘Rethinking Genre’, in Christine Gledhill & Linda Williams (eds), *Reinventing Film Studies*. New York: Arnold, 2000, pp. 223-224.

53 Tom Ryall has specifically accounted for this relationship in articulating the Hollywood system, as he notes interaction on three structural filtered levels. These are divided into the ‘generic system’ itself, the ‘individual genre’ and the ‘individual film’. Ryall, *Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, p. 328.
changes in generic ‘cycles’ as symptomatic of shifts in audience projection. This format however, is limited in accounting for wider adaptations and developments in the industry, adopting a somewhat rigid and inflexible approach to the interpretation of meaning itself as determinately audience-based. To this degree, the morphological approach gravitates towards a self-enclosed examination of film genre, one requiring further attention to the factors informing textual perception and production.

Following these preliminary notions of genre, alternative forms emerge challenging the simplicity of the ‘morphological’ view. As outlined by the structuralist modes of Will Wright and Thomas Schatz, these approaches seek to reconsider the symbolism of the medium within models of social myth, ritual and reflection. Of specific significance, the semiotic recognition of meaning in genre explores the relationship between industry and audience in a more didactic context than its predecessors. To this level the structural mode provides an interpretive framework for which to engage with specific film genres (and particular films), attributing social significance to these characteristics. Unfortunately the formulation of textual meaning in this context is somewhat limited, failing to fully take account of wider discursive impacts on industrial developments and negotiations. Similarly the structural model, adapted from literary forms requires more specification towards

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cinema as a distinct medium, one informed by particular socio-cultural practices.

The conflict raised by these critical forms was effectively countered by the 1990s era as a new series of film theorists, primarily led by Rick Altman and Steve Neale, sought to propose an integrative and complex understanding of film genre. Aligned with a rigorous and negotiated appreciation of cinematic criticism, this approach configures meaning and interpretation into a more comparative sense, one that acknowledges the importance and impact of industrial, socio-cultural and historical figurations. Perhaps the most popular and useful manifestation of this methodology is Altman’s ‘semantic/syntactic’ model, which seeks to provide a complementary critical approach to any film genre analysis. Accordingly, Altman’s model highlights the necessity of an integrative and overreaching methodology in examining the intricate characterisations of any particular genre.

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58 This complexity relies upon an integration of the notion of semantic rudiments (primary elements of all film texts, its ‘building blocks’) and syntactic figurations (textual meaning provoked through specific interaction of these elements, ‘how the blocks are arranged’). Altman, ‘A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre’, in Barry Keith Grant (ed), *Film Genre Reader III*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003, pp. 27-41.
Despite the multitude of differing schematics and scopes in film genre criticism, studies and investigations have continued unabated creating a heady corpus of research findings. To this degree, it becomes clear that there is a sense of continuity and regulation within the film genre portfolio. Whilst other disciplines criticise the generic format on a number of diverse levels, the popularity of the configuration itself highlights the applicability of the model as a primary framework for modern cinematic analysis. It is to this degree that genre will be primarily adapted within my thesis, using the ‘combat’ film as an enigmatic case, transposed onto an alternative cinematic history (that of China) with significant consequences. In order to facilitate this however, derivations of the generic approach in dominant and established forms, as emphasised in this study by ‘war’ and ‘combat’ films respectively, must be initially interrogated.

Critical Approaches to the ‘War’ Film and ‘Combat’ Film

Whilst the origins of the ‘war film’ itself and its delineation within critical contexts dates back to the early Twentieth Century and World War One (1914-1918) in particular, popular theoretical investigations tend to focus on World War Two (1939-1945) as the seminal instigator of the genre. This

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particularly manifests in dominant cinematic industries (primarily Hollywood) with a predominant impact in the immediate 1950s period.61 Originating within distinctly political and propaganda based contexts (i.e. to promote morale and wartime causes) the popularity and prominence of the war film continued well after the battles had finished in 1945. To this degree, the war mode by its very nature emerges as a ‘retrospective’ generic form, one whose ideological and discursive themes are engaged in a continual interplay and negotiation through time.62

Looking closely at the Hollywood system, this generic development and adaptation of the war film is clearly marked. As detailed by Thomas Doherty and Edward Dolan, the war continued to surface as a subject and backdrop of significance during this era, effectively ‘projecting’ renewed discursive and ideological themes of post-War American modernity.63

As similarly evidenced in the work of Lawrence Suid, Frank Wetta and Stephen Curley, the war theme has continued its prevalence within cinematic structures through to the contemporary period, broadly adapted and adopted as

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62 An account of this modality in the American war film is effectively traced by Thomas Schatz in, ‘World War II and the Hollywood “War Film”’, in Nick Browne (ed), *Refiguring American Film Genres*, pp. 89-128.
a frame of textual significance. Whilst these accounts have investigated and expanded the scope of the war film genre as a whole, they are somewhat restrictive in critical potency and effectiveness. They take for granted the notion that the ‘war film’ is itself a universal entity, one where time and space are simply condensed into a particular war setting, without accounting for more complex issues of differentiation.

Military movies and those with associations (i.e. ‘homefront’ dramas and comedies, the ‘Prisoner of War’ model, ‘army training’ stories and films with ‘nuclear and apocalyptic’ themes), are thus conglomerated into the same category according to this mode. Whilst this approach is useful in gaining cumulative postulations of military based films (as opposed to a ‘war film genre’) it is too broad for an impacting qualitative rendition. From an analytical viewpoint, this format fails to take account of generic nuances and interstices, which provide the primary framework for detailed critical analysis.

The response to this dilemma of classification emerges in the form of the ‘combat’ film, a dominant stream of the ‘war film’ that directly details the

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65 This is specifically the case for critiques of World War II films, not taking into account the multitude of studies focussed in recent years on the Vietnam War conflict. As with the World War I variants noted above, it is not possible to provide an intricate account of these studies within this thesis, but suffice it to note the major representative researches; Michael Anderegg (ed), *Inventing Vietnam: Film and Television Constructions of the U.S.-Vietnam War*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991. Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (eds), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. New Brunswick: N.J. Rutgers University Press, 1991. And Michael Selig, ‘Genre, Gender and the Discourse of War: The A/historical and Vietnam Films’, *Screen* 34, 1 1993, pp. 1-18.
preparation and endeavours of battle within a particular environment of militant conflict. As detailed by Kathryn Kane, Jeanine Basinger and Delia Konzett this ‘combat’ style figured as a distinct and dynamic element of Hollywood filmmaking in the 1950s and 60s, surfacing as a parallel to wider ideological shifts and negotiations in the post-war era. Accordingly, these theorists have critically investigated the ‘combat’ variant of the war film as the predominant generic ‘form’ in order to chart the negotiation of discursive norms and popular trends within America at the time. In particular they have analysed the framework of the generic form and style (in terms of ethnicity, politics, nationhood, etc) in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Hollywood as a system of cinematic signification during this era.

The identification and analysis of the ‘combat’ film as projected through a generic matrix, therefore provides an opportunity to explore overt and underlying themes of significance throughout Hollywood cinematic discourses. This style of analysis has not been so rigorously applied to alternative war variants (i.e. ‘homefront’, ‘Prisoner of War’ or ‘military training’ styles) thus indicating the status of the ‘combat’ model as the critical par excellence, the one didactically projecting established and politicised ideologies. Furthermore as Konzett specifically notes, the combat variant


67 See Kane, *Visions of War*, pp. 10-12.
projects military conflict within the frame of an emergent nationalist culture, one that delves further than merely a discursive war setting or background.\textsuperscript{68}

Although it is evident that this model of investigation contributes to the scope of ‘war film’ theory, it too is somewhat limited in its provision of highly specialised critique. The transposition of this model onto non-Hollywood cinematic systems (in the case of this study, China) reveals the equivocal and inflexible nature of this approach. Accordingly, applying the conventional ‘combat’ mode directly to the Chinese industry would fail to take into account the intricate and complex factors informing the genre’s particular origins, determination and adaptation. In this manner the established exploration of the ‘combat’ form as investigated by Kane and Basinger, is symptomatic of a somewhat narrowed and exclusive critique. Using these studies as a framework for investigation into cinematic ‘combat’ however, this thesis aims to contribute to the corpus of ‘war film’ research whilst also expanding the range of recognized criticism.

This study seeks to articulate a more expansive notion of the ‘combat’ film itself, one that breaches into a contrary industrial base. Critical investigations thus far have failed to account for the existence of ‘combat’ films within non-dominant cinemas, despite the popularity of the war variant across global industries. Furthermore the accessibility of the ‘combat’ form itself (as with that of genre criticism commonly) tends to be applied exclusively to dominant cinematic industries. In addressing these matters this study will emphasise a

\textsuperscript{68} Konzett, \textit{Quarterly Review of Film and Video}, p. 327.
reconfigured form of the ‘combat’ film, informed by and representative of an alternative set of ideological factors.

In order to facilitate this style of analysis, a re-determined generic framework, one incorporating and integrating Chinese variants of the ‘combat’ film is required. The primary characteristics of the ‘combat’ mode as identified by Kane and Basinger (i.e. theme, setting, plot and character) thus necessitate moulding towards re-integrated cultural, political, economic and historical circumstances. In this manner, these conventional ‘combat’ studies provide an inlet into my own argument, whereby these features have been progressively transposed and adapted to the Chinese case. As detailed in my Introduction, this manifests in a complementary set of ‘combat film’ elements, segregated into themes of heroes, enemies, collaborators, women, children and families as well as landscape.

Articulations and postulations of the combat film as a definitive genre variant must be concurrently located within the wider scope of research conducted so far on Chinese cinema. Moreover, a historical account of the war film itself (its origins and developments) in China must be enacted, one that facilitates the identification of the ‘combat’ variant as the indicative generic type.

**Origins of the Chinese ‘War’ Film and ‘Combat’ Film**

The overwhelming majority of research conducted within film genre literature is confined to developed or ‘first-world’ cinematic industries and their popular
forms. The fundamental principles of generic approaches however are universal and should be applicable to almost any system imaginable. Whilst this is undoubtedly the case, in transposing the generic method to Chinese cinema, certain problematics must be initially identified and countered.

Although genre analysis transpires as a prominent and effective framework for criticism within dominant cinematic industries (i.e. Hollywood, Britain, Australia), its transplantation into alternate models proves a somewhat fragmented and fractured undertaking. This is particularly prevalent when applied to cinematic mediums that have undergone vast industrial changes and practices (as will be shown later with China). Film genre criticism thus emerges as much as a register of intra-industrial practices (i.e. distribution, exhibition and production) as a set of inter-industrial activities (i.e. film as global commodity, values, exchanges). Thus far within the research community there has been limited attention given to the interaction of these practices and their symbolism, an area that I aim to review and critique throughout my thesis.


This reluctance to transpose the ‘genre’ model onto alternative cinematic systems or to identify the implications of this avoidance is somewhat alarming in an arena of expanding critical attention. One researcher that has identified this issue is Alan Williams, who in 1984 affirmed, “Contrary to the impression given by books like (Thomas) Schatz’s, ‘genre’ is not exclusively or even primarily a Hollywood phenomena. A cross-cultural approach to the topic might help loosen the current critical logjam”. Since this time few critics seem to have taken up this venture and protracted the scope of conventional criticism to non-Hollywood industries. Williams, ‘Is A Radical Genre Criticism Possible’, Quarterly Review of Film Studies 9, 2, 1984, p. 124.
In order to ideally demonstrate this relationship I shall further investigate and adapt the notion of ‘first’ and ‘third’ world cinematic trends as a derivative theme in my argument. As detailed by Roy Armes, Teshome Gabriel and Stephen Crofts, differing cinematic institutions and practices are readily appreciated on a global level according to notions of ‘development’ or ‘emergence’.71 Determined primarily by ideological factors (i.e. politics, technology and economics in particular) characteristics of a specific cinematic industry can be charted, investigated and compared. Whereas commercially established variants (such as Hollywood, Britain, Australia) are symptomatic of ‘first world’ mediums, ‘third world’ models are characterised by ‘phasing’ of the progressive industrial base.72 Whilst this format provides a functional bracket in order to examine and compare different cinemas, it can also be a potentially exclusive and aggrandising endeavour. In terms of my thesis argument however, the ‘first-third’ dichotomy provides a useful inlet towards an extended appreciation of film genre and its re-orientation.

From an expanded viewpoint, whilst genre has been progressively identified and applied within investigations of these dominant or ‘first world’ systems (i.e. Hollywood, Britain, Australia), this has been achieved largely to the exclusion and ignorance of ‘third world’ variants (i.e. Cuba, Brazil, China). Accordingly, in the aspiration of developing a more critical appreciation of film genre analysis and its particular constraints, the application of this primary form needs to be augmented to alternative and non-dominant

72 Hayward, Key Concepts in Cinema Studies, p. 183.
industries. This is an especially prescient task within an era of escalating global exchanges and interactions, whereby the notion of the ‘generic’ and its signification is being recurrently questioned and challenged within research contexts.\footnote{Whereas prevailing critical academics including Masao Miyoshi and Frederic Jameson have outlined the complexity and instability of emerging global contexts (and ‘genre’ in particular), within film criticism Rick Altman identifies a contrary approach, noting genre as a potential ‘placebo’ to trends of alienation and marginality. See Altman, \textit{Film/Genre}, p. 194.}

Having noted these above premises, an expansive examination of the Chinese ‘war film’ is required. Throughout the hundred-year-plus history of the industry an infinite number of films have been based within ‘war settings’, where their generic form could be indicative of melodrama, romance or even comedy.\footnote{This argument is implemented in correlation with Kathryn Kane’s studies, particularly her outline of the ‘combat’ variant as a specific cinematic mode. Kane, \textit{Visions of War}, pp. 12-14.} The Chinese ‘war film’ thus requires specific categorisation in order to provoke a coherent and articulate analysis. The classification and examination of the ‘war film’ for my argument intersects with established genre criticism that specifically focuses on the Hollywood ‘combat’ film.

The emergence of the ‘combat’ film within China is heavily intertwined with dual developments of the cinematic industry and nationalist identities during the 1930s and 40s period, culminating in the success of the Socialist revolution in 1949. As expressive mediums of the time were popularly adapted towards explicitly political and ideological debates, the focus on national defence and resistance permeated dominant film culture, where the war surfaced as a popular background and framework for narrative
Within the Chinese imaginary of the 1930s, films with ‘war settings’ like *Da lü/Big Road* (1934, dir. Sun Yu) and *Ba bai zhuang shi/Eight Hundred Brave Soldiers* (1938, dir. Ying Yunwei) brought issues of emerging imperialism and national weakness to the forefront of popular consciousness. In terms of a generic methodology however, these texts do not adhere to the characteristics of the ‘war film’ mode. Rather they emerge as war-based ‘dramas’, effectively dislocated from the actual battlefield, focussed instead on the ideological motivations and personal impacts of war itself. This was continuant through to the 1940s era where these ‘war dramas’ expanded in their popular appeal, as films including *Yi jiang chun shui xiang dong liü/Spring River Flows East* (1947, dir. Cai Chusheng) and *Ba qian li lü yun he yue/Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (1947, dir. Shi Dongshan) achieved legendary status.

Whilst the contribution of these films towards the development of a ‘combat’ variant is undeniable, their classification and adherence to the generic model is highly problematic. This is highlighted by a number of factors in form and content, whereby the spectre of war itself emerges more as a frame of action or backdrop than as a central ingredient of textual significance. Similarly in terms of narrative enactment, these films adhere more to modes of war-based

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75 As Chris Berry has noted however, this projection of nationalism was supplemented by the civic popularity of these films at the time, whereby large audiences and profits similarly embedded these films within the industry’s commercial spectre. Berry, ‘China Before 1949’, in Nowell-Smith (ed), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, p. 411.

76 Paul Pickowicz has effectively surmised that these narratives were more concerned with projecting the social issues and impacts of war than detailing battlefield endeavours or proceedings. As such he labels them generic ‘dramas’ rather than ‘war films’, where the fundamental function of war is as backdrop for political, social and ideological negotiation. Pickowicz, ‘Victory as Defeat: Postwar Visualisations of China’s War of Resistance’, in Yeh Wen-Ihsin (ed), *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 298-341.
dramas, dominated by personal conflicts and crises rather than detailing battlefield manoeuvres or strategies. Although these narratives were progressively embraced and immortalised within the national imaginary of the time, from a generic viewpoint they conform more to dominant styles of melodrama and social allegory than to that of the war model. Furthermore as I shall argue later, the ‘combat’ variant as an industrial form had not manifest in China by this time, and did not in fact emerge until centralised Socialist practices were enforced in 1949.

In her examination of the Hollywood World War II film, Kathryn Kane argues the ‘combat’ form to be a definitive generic variant, separate and distinct from other war-based models and following a specific mode of occurrence. Unlike other styles (i.e. ‘Prisoner of War’, ‘homefront’ or ‘military training’ films), the ‘combat’ narrative is centrally occupied with the preparation, development and enactment of battle itself, ultimately culminating in a final assault between military forces. As Kane ascertains, the combat film thus surfaces as a distinctly constrained form, where certain characteristics are symptomatic of themes and modes of production. Furthermore, in accounting for the variety of American war-based films set during World War Two, Kane accentuates

77 This has been verified throughout dominant reviews of the industry within this period, where issues of social, political and national significance progressively garnished the cinematic form. For a couple of detailed accounts of this see Ma Ning, *Wide Angle*, pp. 25-30. And Paul Pickowicz, ‘The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Cinema of the 1930s’, *Modern China* 17, 1, 1991, pp. 38-75.

78 Kane focuses on predominant and recurrent elements within this process, divided explicitly into themes, setting, character and plot. To this degree she emphasises a regulated and conventionalised generic format. For an abbreviated development of this see Kane, ‘The World War II Combat Film’, in Wes Gehring (ed), *Handbook of American Film Genres*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988, pp. 84-102.
the predominance of the combat variant and its critical significance (in terms of both popularity and quantity).  

Adopting a similar approach towards the Chinese framework, I propose that the ‘combat’ form emerges as a similarly dominant and significant entity. In the same manner that Kane has employed it, I adopt the ‘combat’ mode as a base for integrative cinematic analysis, ultimately charting industrial and discursive factors informing the genre’s origins, determination and development. The Chinese ‘war genre’ label will thus be explicitly applied to the ‘combat’ variant throughout my argument, concentrating on texts that directly detail military action and battle enactments.

**The Chinese ‘Resistance’ Narrative as Generic Form**

To straightforwardly transpose this established ‘combat’ classification onto the Chinese film industry however, would fundamentally reduce it to an essentialist and compromising endeavour. The ideological aspects of the protracted war period within China (as the culmination of a near century of expanding foreign imperialism within the nation) were filtered in an entirely contrasting manner to Hollywood perceptions and expressions that centred on World War Two. The Chinese variant and model of the ‘combat’ film was translated into a distinctly localised and nationalised form, one that was identified at large as the ‘resistance’ narrative.

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79 *ibid.*, pp. 84-94.
This specifically relates to the historical ‘War of Resistance’ fought to repel Japanese imperialists throughout China from 1937 until 1945.\footnote{Surfacing as an ideological response to expanding Japanese imperialism during the 1930s, ‘resistance’ emerged as a popular form of action that encouraged national defence and preservation. Manifest in a wide range of social, political and economic spheres, it was similarly adopted and expressed within cultural narratives of the time. The most thorough account of this process (although unfortunately it does not detail the cinematic medium) is given by Chang Hung-tai, who investigates the parallel developments of cultural resistance and Socialist populism during the war period. Chang, \textit{War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945}. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.} Whilst the origins of ‘resistance’ discourse, detailing ideological struggle against the Japanese forces was a prevailing cinematic theme during this period, the ‘combat’ manifestation of the war text did not emerge until after 1949. To this magnitude the history of the combat film as a dominant mode within China, is dated by (and in fact parallel to) the institution of Socialist practices since this period.\footnote{Moreover, as Zhang Yingjin remarked upon the political origins and popularity of the ‘combat’ mode since 1949, “Among other things, war films like these (have) continued to serve the function of sublimation and intensified the myths of the revolutionary past”. Zhang, \textit{Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema}. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 184.} The genre thus exhibits certain conventions and characteristics, which will be identified and critiqued throughout my argument. In order to frame this however, further attention needs to be paid to elements of \textit{kangri} (‘resistance’, or literally ‘resisting the Japanese’) narratives and their particular significance.

As prefaced above, the ‘resistance’ narrative was adopted from 1937-1945 as a specific ideological response to Japanese imperialism within China at the time. In the realms of cultural consciousness, as detailed by Chang Hung-tai, ‘resistive discourse’ was promoted as a distinctly nationalist and didactic strategy. Commonly associated with left-wing artists and intellectuals the ‘resistance’ narrative flourished in a wide range of cultural mediums including
print, theatre and cinema. As Chang notes, its popular embracement at a time of critical importance was an integral part of its overarching success and transference into the political sphere.\textsuperscript{82} This was especially relevant to the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party at the time and its eventual ascension to power in 1949 as detailed by Chalmers Johnson.\textsuperscript{83}

The importance of resistance as a discursive and ideological platform is central to an understanding of the ‘combat’ film itself and its manifestation within China. The adaptation of the ‘resistance’ narrative towards a revolutionary combat spectacle throughout the post-1949 period was inevitably linked to this progression, whereby the emergence and development of a cinematic genre was distinctly marked. The didacticism of resistive discourse was effectively shrouded in a complex system of signification, whereby the invocation of struggle and self-defence was firmly embedded within the nationalist agenda.

From a historic viewpoint the cultural re-enactment of this prolonged period of conflict, from oppression, to resistance and finally revolution was a culmination of varied factors and symbolisms that profoundly effected China at the time, and still impacts upon the national imaginary today.\textsuperscript{84} The development, embracement and ultimate success of resistance discourse

\textsuperscript{82} Chang, War and Popular Culture, pp. 270-285.
\textsuperscript{83} Johnson specifically points out that the war itself and ‘resistance’ in particular provided the discursive platform for Socialism’s ideological ascension and legitimation within China. Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: Emergence of a Revolutionary China, 1937-1945. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{84} As Chris Berry has observed of this period’s overarching impact on the cinematic institution, “the revolution’s dual emphasis on the nation and socialism had a mutually transforming effect in both matters of policy and cinematic aesthetics over the years”. Berry, ‘If China Can Say No, Can China Make Movies? Or, Do Movies Make China? Rethinking National Cinemas and National Agency’, boundary 2 25, 3, 1998, p. 139.
overhauled more than a century of foreign imperialism and cessation in China, dating back to the Opium Wars of the 1840s.\textsuperscript{85} Accordingly, resistive discourse since the 1930s was couched heavily within notions of nationalist independence, self-defence and reliance. In a country dominated by historical fragmentation and diversity, nationalism in this mode emerged as an indicative form of identification and ideological unity.\textsuperscript{86} Resistive discourse thus manifest as a seminal characteristic in the development and institution of a modern unified state, facilitated by Socialism after 1949.

The importance of resistive symbolism and nationalism throughout Chinese film history since 1949 is integral to an appreciation of the war genre, its adaptation and signification. Therefore it is the ‘combat’ mode, and the ‘resistance’ narrative specifically that provide an appropriate foundation to examine wider trends and developments within Chinese cinema since 1949. A systematic genre approach to the ‘war film’ is thus symptomatic of a fundamental negotiation of Chinese identity and nationhood throughout these chronological periods, progressing from rigid models of orthodoxy through to contemporary projections of modernity.

In looking closely at the types of ‘combat’ variants within China since 1949, there are films centred on alternative clashes to those detailing the War of Resistance. These correlate to historical conflicts, largely Civil War with the

\textsuperscript{85} For a detailed and meticulous account of foreign intervention in China and its specific impacts throughout this era see Liao Kuang-sheng, \textit{Anti-Foreignism and Modernisation in China}. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990.

\textsuperscript{86} Chang Hung-tai verifies this in examining the didactic significance of resistive success itself, commenting that, “China’s victory in the war would not just signify the triumph of order over chaos; it would mean a long-divided country had again found its soul”. Chang, \textit{War and Popular Culture}, p. 273.
Nationalists (1945-1949), the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Sino-Vietnamese Conflict (1978). Subsequently some of China’s most popularly critiqued films do fall outside the scope of ‘resistance’ narratives. These include well-known texts like; _Shang gan ling/Battle of Sankumryung_ (1956, dir. Sha Meng), _Nan zheng bei zhan/Fighting North and South_ (1952, dirs. Cheng Yin & Tang Xiaodan) and _Gao shan xia de hua huan/Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain_ (1984, dir. Xie Jin). Although these ‘combat’ films are similarly enlightening in projections of a Chinese nationalist imaginary, they are comparatively lacking in quantitative scope and critical symbolism in contrast to ‘resistance’ narratives. The ‘resistance’ narrative thus clearly surfaces as the predominant and emblematic combat form. Therefore, I will not be detailing non-resistance narratives within my argument, although I recognise that they are equally valid representatives of the cinematic imaginary.

To a similarly critical extent these variants do not qualify to the same degree of generic development as the ‘resistance’ narrative itself, whereby there are numerous gaps and fissures since 1949 (i.e. As the Sino-Vietnamese conflict did not occur until 1978, these narratives are naturally absent in the period before the conflict itself). As a response to this, in order to provide the most comprehensive and attenuated account of the ‘combat’ film throughout the prolonged history of Chinese cinema, I will be focussing on ‘resistance’ narratives as the symptomatic type.
The recurrent feature, impact and register of war itself manifests as a predominant theme throughout the history of Chinese cinema, apparent in the period since 1949 and Socialist revolution. This is largely linked to the fact that the emergence of the medium as a site of national imagination was complemented by a period of heady foreign imperialism and a crisis of identity. As sketched out earlier, the ‘enigmatisation’ of the industry itself was characterised by the development of a resistive nationalist identity. This procession climaxed in the 1940s period, as left-wing productions surfaced as emblematic national signifiers and political statements.

In the immediate aftermath of Communist revolution in 1949, cultural policy and practices were centralised and regulated. This adjustment manifest within the cinematic industry, where statist directives of production, distribution and exhibition were rigidly enforced. In an indicative and predominant turn of events, filmic narratives were unequivocally directed and instructed towards the valorisation of Socialist origins, praxes and legitimacies. This was similarly prevalent in other cultural forms of the time (literature, theatre, art) whereby the endeavour and ultimate success of proletarian struggle was continuously re-enacted and celebrated. The sustained predominance of this nostalgic narrative form was highly significant, not only in affirming the importance of statist cultural practice, but its institution in a regulated Maoist

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87 References and analogies of ‘battle’ have been applied and directed to developments of the Chinese film industry itself since 1949. As indicated by studies of both Paul Clark and Zhang Yingjin, this symbolises an appreciation of film as a medium of discursive potency and control. See Clark, Chinese Cinema, p. 87. And Zhang, Screening China, p. 183.

88 In a representative manner, films strictly and openly adhered to political orthodoxy as prescribed by Socialist authority. As Zhou Enlai instructed on the regulation of cultural narratives, “revolutionary art and literature should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward, so as to reach the goal of serving politics”. Zhou, from a speech given in 1961, ‘On Questions Related to Art and Literature’, printed in Chinese Literature 6, 1979, p. 91.
format. As detailed earlier, this was largely derived from orthodox policies on Art and Literature devised during the Yan’an era, adapted to suit post-revolutionary circumstances. Grounded in a somewhat archaic oeuvre these infamous ‘Talks’ were informed and propelled by the fundamentals of resistive discourse itself. To this point the impact of resistance as both a political and cultural legacy was established and reaffirmed through this process.

Since 1949 the re-enactment of resistive discourse (deeply embedded within didactic themes of political and national emancipation) has been a primary characteristic of the Chinese narrative form, and of cinema in particular. To this level, an appreciation of the seminal status of the resistive mode within cultural narratives must not be underestimated in generic analysis. Informed by the dual political and cultural impact of resistance on Chinese consciousness, the continual reproduction of the narrative itself (as symptomatic of generic form) has persistently functioned to reaffirm, rewrite and renegotiate Chinese identity.

Whilst the resistance narrative thus emerges as a diffuse and variegated element, there are certain emblematic characteristics of its format. As I shall demonstrate throughout my thesis, the recurrent and persistent feature of these

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89 As Zhang Yingjin notes of narrative symbolism and allegory, “The battlefield became an indispensable stage on which to celebrate the Communist victory and to re-enact heroic sacrifices, both ‘performances’ readily incorporated into the project of nation-building launched by the government”. Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 183.

90 The enactment and transmission of these ‘Talks’ emerged retrospectively as seminal factors in the development and regulation of Maoist cultural policy during this period, and leading up until the Cultural Revolution of 1966. For the most extensive account of this progression and its impacts, see David Apter & Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
rudiments within the narrative functions to emphasise its presence as a generic form. The initial theme identified to this degree is the prevalence of military or martial factionalism. Conflict between differing forces is thus regulated by ideological factors, largely denominated into arenas of race, politics and nationhood. To this point the overarching resistive narrative features three major factions; the resistors (symbolic ‘heroes’ and national defenders), the invaders (imperialist ‘enemies’ violating and menacing the nation) and traitors (native ‘collaborators’ allied with enemy forces to promote submission and capitulation). The propulsion of the resistive narrative is inevitably informed by overarching conflict between these elements and the location of specific characters within this frame.

The nature of the resistance narrative is more complex and equivocal than this institutional modelling suggests, where within there exists a continual flow of sub-textual conflict. To this level the resistance battle itself is informed by the negotiation of non-military themes, emphasising civic ideologies including key elements of politics, gender, and community. In the history of resistive ‘imagination’ and identification, conflicts surrounding these issues have been recurrently debated and redetermined. The presence of these components is emblematic of a generic form itself, one that requires expanded degrees of examination and analysis.

91 As Steve Neale has noted of the established war film genre, this central progression of narrative commonly relies upon aspects of interplay between ‘masculine’ institutional forces, where elements of discursive ‘disparity and difference’ are emblematic. Neale, ‘Aspects of Ideology and Narrative in the American War Film’, Screen 32, 1, 1991, pp. 35-57.
The specific manifestation of the resistance narrative within cinema, in terms of both consistency and negotiation is highly symbolic. In the immediate post-1949 period the Chinese ‘combat’ film dominated cinematic production, where both the quantity and popularity of the genre was predominant over most other forms.\footnote{Such was the dominance of the military format that Hong Junhao has noted during this period (the 1950s and 60s), combat and war-based films may have accounted for up to half of the 200 feature films produced in China. Of this number the resistance form as identified by Chen Yating at the time, were certainly the most vivid and popular. See Hong, ‘The Evolution of China’s War Movie in Five Decades: Factors Contributing to Changes, Limits and Implications’, \textit{Asian Cinema} 10, 1, 1998, p. 94. And Chen, ‘Films on War Themes’, \textit{Chinese Literature} 11, 1965, pp. 115-118.} The prevalence of military and war themes was not only evident in narrative terms, but similarly in production itself with the prominent rise of the army-run ‘August First’ studio. Many of the seminal cinematic productions completed throughout this revolutionary period, including the first to be released by this studio, \textit{Zhong hua nü er/Daughters of China} (1949, dir. Ling Zifeng), were resistance narratives prescribing to the generic mode.\footnote{Daughter of China represents one of the first Chinese feature productions of the Maoist era. Completed just months after the October Revolution, it details the combat activities and ultimate sacrifice of a group of female guerrillas in Northeast China. A seminal text in Chinese film history, it highlights the centrality of the resistance narrative within the regulation and development of the medium. See Zhang Yingjin, \textit{Screening China}, p. 182. And Esther Yau, \textit{The Oxford History of World Cinema}, p. 694.} The overwhelming signification of the war period itself, and in particular the discursive legacy of resistance, was thus registered in the modes in which it was re-envisioned and re-imagined throughout this period and its continual presence to the current day.

Despite the industry having undergone considerable change and reconstitution since this period of Maoist origination, the prominence of the resistance model has continued unabated. Even in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, as the cinematic industry was gradually rehabilitated and
restructured, the resistance variant of the combat film remained a central theme of cultural and national consciousness. Emerging in both invigorated and reconstituted manners, the format surfaced in 1980s China as a distinctive theme in articulating reformed issues and identities. 94 As documented by critics including Zhang Yingjin and Dai Jinhua, the seminal innovative texts of this period were in fact re-interpretations of established revolutionary forms (of which the resistance narrative was paramount), signifying a wholesale re-determination of cinematic conventions in China at the time. 95

Similarly, the following period of expanded ‘open door’ reform within China, instigated in the early 1990s provoked further renewal and redeployment of the resistance norm itself. Framed by wider discursive adaptations in Chinese cultural consciousness, the narrative was additionally re-oriented and rewritten in a process of continued negotiation and modernity. As evident during the initial era of reform, alteration and modifications of narrative norms through this progression highlighted further developments and re-constitutions of cinematic discourse within China.

Conclusion

This chapter has clarified and formulated the primary theoretical framework for approaching the Chinese combat film. It has conducted an initial

94 Chen Xiaoming has expressly identified this within cinematic circles as a process of ‘rewriting’, whereby the fundamental characteristics of the revolutionary narrative were disrupted and transformed, relegating established political forms to the periphery. Chen, ‘The Mysterious Other: Postpolitics in Chinese Film’, boundary 2 24, 3, 1997, pp. 121-141.

This chapter has similarly investigated figurations of the ‘war’ film as a specific generic mode. In this manner I have identified prevailing notions of ‘war-based’ cinemas (primarily in the Hollywood mode) and prefaced the ‘combat’ variant as the predominant form. Furthermore, I have analysed the critical framework for previous studies (of both ‘film genre’ and the ‘combat film’) and their limitations in accounting for alternative or non-dominant industries.

Subsequently this chapter has outlined the origins and conditions of the Chinese ‘combat film’, noting its specific location in an alternative or ‘third’ world system, one where genre dissemination is not commonly identified. The ‘war’ model and ‘combat’ form have been correspondingly transposed onto the Chinese model, locating potential instances of both congruence and difference. In applying this format to the Chinese industry a specific mode of ‘combat’ film has been prefaced, the ‘resistance’ narrative, informed by particular social, cultural and political figurations.

This section thus outlines a theoretical grounding upon which to clarify and locate the Chinese ‘combat’ film within critically discursive contexts, serving as an effective framework for analysis and investigations throughout later chapters. This process will involve an in-depth examination of textual forms, tracking the dissemination and negotiation of the ‘combat’ film since 1949.
Within the succeeding chapter specifically, my argument will investigate the regulated origins of the combat film genre, accounting for the initial period of Maoist rule in China (1949-1966) and its representational forms.
Chapter Two
1949-1966: The ‘Regulated’ Combat Film

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the basic premise of my argument and detailed the theoretical framework that substantiates this study. Of particular note, I summarised the corpus of genre approaches in film criticism and their widespread absence throughout (English language) researches of Chinese cinema. Furthermore, the preceding chapter located and prefaced the ‘combat film’ and ‘resistance narrative’ as most appropriate avenues for generic analysis and investigation in this study. This chapter will thus chart the development of the Chinese combat film during the preliminary years of Communist rule, specifically from the revolution in 1949 through until the initiation of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. From a genre-based standpoint this segment shall therefore explore the emergence and institution of a distinct ‘combat’ mode, symptomatic of a state-centred and politically regulated cinematic industry.

In focussing on the initial period of the Maoist era (1949-66), the following segments will denote the development of a distinct generic style, fundamentally tied to perceptions and projections of cultural policy at Socialist behest. Progressively identified as a medium of ideological influence and potential deviance, the film industry during this time was effectively centralised and standardised as a nationalized mode, imposing orthodox Maoist discourses. Moreover, the notion of ‘revolutionary romanticism’ as a specific cultural form and practice was prefaced throughout this phase of
cinematic development, a stylistic mode of adaptation I shall argue as fundamental to the regulation of the combat genre form. Identified as an amalgamation of orthodox Socialist Realism (which arguably reached its height in ‘resistance’ and ‘war based’ dramas of the 1930s) with politically didactic sensibilities, ‘romanticism’ emerged during this era as the predominant style of cinematic orthodoxy.96

96 Identified by Paul Clark as a cultural policy “more indigenous” to China than established forms of Socialist Realism, the emergence of ‘revolutionary romanticism’ characterises dominant desires to expand the range of subjects and styles within Chinese cinema. See Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, pp. 63-70. For an account of the specific instruction and implementation of this enacted cultural policy see Guo Morou, ‘Romanticism and Realism’, *Peking Review* 20, 1958, pp. 7-11.
Narratological Analysis of the Regulated Combat Film

This chapter will thus explore the establishment of the combat film from 1949 until 1966, noting particular themes of ‘regulation’ and ‘romanticism’ throughout the variant. This includes an investigation into narrative forms, character types, gendered themes, and visual iconographies. Moreover, I shall examine the underlying significance of this period, both within the context of the film industry itself and of wider Socialist developments. This will entail an account of specific representations and cinematic constructions focussing on: projections of institutional factions segmented into romanticised categories of heroes; enemies and traitors; depictions of women and their particular roles in resistive effort; allegories of children and families within the genre; as well as an account for cinematic landscape as a regulated and legitimating force.

Heroes, Enemies and Traitors in the Regulated Combat Variant

As indicated throughout the previous chapter, the emergence of a definitive ‘combat’ mode and ‘resistance’ narrative was correlative to the deployment of revolutionary nationalism and determinism within the Chinese national imaginary. This was particularly prescient in the immediate post-1949 environment of Socialist China, where cultural narratives were steadily reconfigured towards statist and orthodox dictates. Through this procedure, the progression and determination of the ‘resistance’ narrative not only sought to re-create and re-present the act of revolution itself, but to do so in a distinctively politicised and regulated manner. Accordingly, the
‘romanticised’ combat film functioned to celebrate hegemonic patriarchal norms as much as themes of military success and national emancipation.97

In accounting for the differing depictions of institutional and discursive factions throughout this period centring on images of heroes, enemies and traitors, the relationship between cinematic representation and ideological discourse demands further examination. Moreover, particular attention towards regulated character types and narrative presence is required (in terms of cinematic body, speech and action) as specific symbols of national and political negotiation.

Regulated Heroes

Within established models of the combat film, heroic characters traditionally fulfil the most central and detailed protagonist roles. It is the hero that figuratively achieves penultimate status through militated action in narrative, whether resulting in either victorious deliverance or sacrificing defeat.98 Commonly located as a figure cast in a definitive location and particular set of circumstances, the hero features to organise the text to a large degree, providing coherence and guidance throughout. As a narrative and generic register therefore, the representation and development of the heroic form within models of the combat film requires considerable investigation.

97 Hong Junhao suggests that events depicted in these revolutionary films are not so much the ‘subject’ of each text, as the ‘background’, secondary to the focus on ideological and Maoist norms. To this extent, he characterises combat narratives of this era as “political movies rather than military movies”. Hong Junhao, Asian Cinema, pp. 93-106.

98 As Kathryn Kane notes of the Hollywood combat film, the focus of action is largely organised according to ‘axes’ of victory and defeat. This focus is centred more on character integration and myth (notions of honour, co-operation and sacrifice) rather than an outright military result. Kane, Handbook of American Film Genres, pp. 84-102.
Throughout Chinese cinematic projections of the Maoist era, heroic protagonist manifest in distinctly orthodox and regulated forms, adhering strictly to overriding ideological expectations and prescriptions of the time. Whilst heroes surface as textually definitive figures (i.e. with individual names and backgrounds), personal identities and motivations are largely subsumed into overarching political agendas. This is symptomatic of wider cultural and artistic delineations throughout this period and is clearly discernible in other narrative forms, especially those focussed on worker and peasant types. In the combat film generally and the resistance narrative explicitly, mythical and romantic imaginations of the hero persevere, progressively couched within the development and regulation of a Socialist cinematic aesthetic.

In order to appreciate heroic figurations throughout the ‘revolutionary’ combat film it is beneficial to segregate recurrent characteristics into three primary arenas, focussing on elements of appearance, speech and action. The depiction of these features and their interaction with other textual figures is central to an understanding of the resistance narrative itself in this variant and its particular role in legitimating socio-political ideologies. Furthermore, what emerges as significant in terms of heroic projection is the manner in which these elements are romanticised according to politicised and patriarchal

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99 The importance of these three artistic subjects (workers, peasants and soldiers) symbolically dominated filmmaking in China during the Maoist era. Identified by the Chinese term gongnongbing (literally worker, peasant, soldier) these differing subjects exemplified cultural policies aimed at addressing, identifying and educating the ‘masses’. See Clark, Chinese Cinema, pp. 77-79.
norms. To this extent, the nature of emblematic yingxiong (heroic) appearance, speech and action within the resistance narrative deserves further attention and investigation.

**Heroic Appearance**

Diversified ranges of political and class-based signifiers, expressed in romanticised and regulated representational forms, inevitably mark resistance heroes of the revolutionary era. Surfacing from the verified pool of the ‘masses’ (facilitated by tutelage of village or guerrilla forces) they materialise as projections of explicit ideological conditioning and emancipation. To this point the hero adheres to a generalised form, dually registering foreign imperialism as illegitimate whilst developing resistive sentiments into regulated activation.

One of the primary manifestations of this regulated mode is implied through characteristics of dress and costume. The resistance hero consistently appears in a class distinctive uniform (be it that of the ‘Eighth Route Army’ or local guerrilla forces) immediately categorising and marking their presence within orthodox socio-political contexts. Similarly, this prescribed dress manifests as wholly de-gendered (worn by both male and female characters alike),

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100 This manifested in Party figures relations with peasants, a key developmental theme throughout revolutionary narratives. The romanticised re-visioning of mass-Party origins within these texts served to reinvigorate Maoist origins and reassure its legacy in the post-1949 cultural imaginary.

substituting traditional signifiers of yingxiong proliferation (i.e. masculine overtones) in favour of more politically progressive forms.\textsuperscript{102}

It is this uniform itself, continuously reproduced as an icon of nostalgic revolutionary struggle, that initially marks heroes as central protagonists and forces of legitimacy within text. As the narrative develops and resistive action mounts (orchestrated by the heroic agents, sanctioned by Socialist forces), this uniform is re-inscribed as a prominent and elegiac signifier. Subsequently, the hero as an orthodox representative type, one regulated and activated through Socialist didacticism, is recurrently invoked throughout revolutionary combat films.

This association of Socialist heroism and uniform is best illustrated with reference to \textit{Di lei zhan/War of Mines} (1962, dir. Tang Yingqi), through the authoritative character of Commander Lei.\textsuperscript{103} As he first appears in the village (just after it has been rampaged by enemy forces) the officer is depicted in profile where a badge labelling him as an Eighth Route Army member (\textit{ba lu jun}) is prominently displayed. At this point he is seen fanning himself with his hat, where around his waist a holstered gun is clearly identified. The badge, gun and the hat (along with the class-distinctive uniform) are archetypal icons

\textsuperscript{102} Grounded in contexts of cultural emancipation, substitutions of established clothing (gender based) for Socialist styles (class distinctive, proletarian) throughout the Maoist era, carried overarching political implications in terms of symbolic sublimation and differentiation. As Harriet Evans has detailed, “‘Socialist androgyne’ homogenised women and men as the uniformed cohorts of the faithful”. Evans, \textit{Women and Sexuality in China: Dominant Discourses of Female Sexuality and Gender Since 1949}. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997, p. 135.

\textsuperscript{103} For a brief review of this film see the section ‘Plot Summaries’ in my appendix.
of resistive appearance and Socialist orthodoxy, located within the text as regulated symbols of activation, strength and inevitable victory.\textsuperscript{104}

At the narrative climax of \textit{War of Mines} as Lei leads the villagers to a final assault on the enemy, he is again correlated with these icons, but in a more didactic manifestation. Framed in a low-angled frontal shot, Lei is posited as an enigmatic force of agency in directing the resistive attack, where his hat (firmly placed on his head) and gun (resolutely in hand) verify and endorse this potency. The affirmation of these visual signifiers (uniform, hat, gun) as icons of Socialist resistance romantically emphasise the capacity of these forces and their organising ideology.

Whilst this emerges as the dominant norm for heroic visualisation in this variant, resistance narratives similarly provide opportunities for alternative forms of livery, where adaptation is ultimately sutured into orthodox imaginings. During both \textit{Ping yuan you ji dui/Guerrillas on the Plane} (1955, dirs. Su Li & Wu Zhaoti) and \textit{Tie dao you ji dui/Guerrillas on the Railroad} (1956, dir. Zhao Ming), resistance figures adopt enemy uniforms for purposes of strategic spying, diversion and infiltration.\textsuperscript{105} Regulated heroic appearance is thus provisionally abandoned in each text, but not to a subversive or deviant level, rather couched within the capacity of resistive adaptability and prowess.

\textsuperscript{104} The presence and signification of these war motifs recurrently feature throughout Chinese combat films into the contemporary era. The establishment and repetition of these elements testifies to the significance of their visualisation and iconography within the genre specifically, and in Chinese films at large.

\textsuperscript{105} See ‘Plot summaries’ section in my appendix for an outline of each text.
In *Guerrillas on the Plane* this adaptation is explicitly projected, as a group of resistive guerrillas adorn Imperial army fatigues when stranded in enemy territory. Upon apprehending these uniforms (by killing enemy operatives) they utilise them in order to lure the Japanese into a series of strategic ambushes, thus facilitating a passage to safety and further resistive enactment. A similar scenario is developed and enacted in *Guerrillas on the Railroad*, where heroic protagonists temporarily adopt enemy garb to infiltrate and ultimately conquer the local railway system.

In both these narratives the appropriation of enemy uniform is depicted as dually provisional and strategic, marked and justified within the context of resistive activity. As these protagonists progressively delimit enemy potency and rejoin their wider Eighth Route Detachments, they symbolically (and enigmatically) cast-off these disguises in favour of orthodox variants. It is only after this point in each narrative that strategic success is confirmed and celebrated by Socialist sources. To this level, heroic appearance is reinforced as a romanticised, dogmatic and regulated discursive signifier.

*Heroic Speech*

Whilst appearances are fundamental characteristics in affirming the presence and status of heroic figures within Maoist regulated narratives, the rudiments and discourses of dialogic speech are similarly integral. The prevalence of revolutionary oration and delivery throughout combat variants is symptomatic not only of the resistance narrative and its generic style, but equally of
creating a corpus of protagonists whose primary function is to romanticise and re-affirm Socialist legacies in the post-1949 environment.\textsuperscript{106}

Throughout Maoist films generally and the resistance narrative specifically, recurrent enunciations of rhetoric conveyed in romantic forms pervade dominant cultural styles. The vocabulary used and its expression in didactic manners serves to frame narrative action within the context of Socialist orthodoxy. As such, heroic verbalisations in combination with physical manifestations (i.e. action, resistance, liberation) function as self-enclosed systems of signification, emphasising tenets of orthodox cultural, national and political policy. Thus throughout revolutionary variants the hero dually achieves and reinforces dominant authority through verbalising, emphasising and repeating official rhetoric.

In segments from \textit{Di dao zhan/Tunnel Warfare} (1965, dir. Ren Xudong) the intensity and assertion of this espoused authority is especially prevalent.\textsuperscript{107} This is affirmed by the regular recitation and idealisation of portions from Mao’s treatises \textit{On Protracted War} within the text.\textsuperscript{108} Throughout the narrative the handbook is intermittently cited as a tool of practical stratagem, a treatise of ideological practice and a guide of communal rejuvenation. Furthermore, the monograph is explicitly mediated within the film by heroic

\textsuperscript{106} Ann Anagnost has detailed the importance of subjective speech within Chinese national and historical discourse. In particular she has noted how enunciating subjects had the potential to “speak with the force of history”. To this extent, heroic characters re-enforced the primacy and legacy of Socialist revolution through spoken rhetoric in narratives of orthodoxy. Anagnost, \textit{National Past-times: Narrative, Representation and Power in Modern China}. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{107} See my ‘Plot Summaries’ section for a short review of \textit{Tunnel Warfare}.

protagonist Chuan-bao, inheriting the tract and position of village elder from his dead father, who sacrifices his own life to protect the community. Initially unsure of how to institute resistance on a practical level, Chuan-bao is shown actively referencing the text itself. Moreover, he is depicted reading aloud from Mao’s commentary as he formulates the paramount resistive strategy, one that proves successful at narrative climax.\footnote{The specific section read aloud that motivates this change is as follows; “Destruction of the enemy is the primary object of war and self-preservation is secondary. Only by destroying the enemy in large numbers can one effectively preserve oneself”. The symbolism of this segment (endorsing activity over passivity) reifies Maoist nationalism and its particular application.}

The direct and elegiac articulation of Maoist praxis throughout narrative, enunciated and informed through heroic speech, thus frames resistive didacticism within a prescriptive and orthodox context. To this degree, heroic speech is directly regulated and sublimated toward mythical affirmations of Socialist discourse.\footnote{Ci Jiwei argues that the development of a ‘heavily politicised language’ steeped within a ‘heavily politicised way of life’, functioned to re-inscribe the Socialist vision and its Maoist legacy during this period. See Ci, \textit{Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism}. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. p. 73.} Whilst the above noted Chuan-bao example articulates enunciated legitimation and verification, heroic speech correlatively surfaces within revolutionary narratives as a device of romantic dissociation and rejection. This predominantly manifests in heroic interactions with the enemy, where verbalisation registers and reaffirms regulated ideological binaries.

This trend is enigmatically demonstrated with reference to \textit{Xiao bing Zhang-ga}/\textit{Little Soldier Zhang-ga} (1963, dir. Cui Wei), primarily through the figure of resistive spy Chung.\footnote{See ‘Plot Summaries’ section for summation of this text.} As the Japanese forces menacingly interrogate and intimidate the local villagers in the narrative, Chung willingly surrenders in
order to prevent a communal massacre. In response to the enemy Commander’s attempts to entice Chung’s capitulation, he rebuffs Kameda by contemptuously labelling him a ‘Japanese dog’ and a ‘devil’. Furthermore, as a Chinese collaborator appeals to Chung, the resistive agent subsequently brands him a ‘traitorous dog’. The didactic and explicit use of labels within this context serves to romanticise Chung’s ‘heroic’ stance, whilst re-affirming projections of the enemy as degenerate and illegitimate.¹¹²

The heroic protagonist of this variant is thus idealised through implementation and enunciation of resistive hegemony. Chung is consequently rewarded for his loyalty to the Socialist effort when rescued by his comrades at the narrative climax. Once again speech emerges as a site of regulation (and sublimation) at this point, where authorial espousals are directed towards orthodoxy. As Chung is effectively welcomed back to divisional headquarters in celebratory fashion, he romantically and benevolently enunciates the potency of Maoist ideology.

*Heroic Activity*

The final element I contend as central to the cinematic construction of the regulated yingxiong figure (and perhaps the one that is most visibly apparent) is that of action. As romantic signifiers of resistive discourse and its potency, heroic protagonists are projected in recurrent enactments of physical exertion and interaction throughout Maoist variants. Subsequently, the heroic body

¹¹² This was indicative of the idealised and didactic revolutionary figure at the time. As outlined by Chen Yating, “These magnificent characters exemplify the resolute spirit of the Chinese people and typify the new heroes tempered in the fiery crucible of war. They surpass all earlier heroes because they have noble revolutionary ideals, dare to fight to the death and do not hesitate to give up their own lives”. Chen, *Chinese Literature*, p. 118.
functions as a plane of action upon which national politics are steadily enacted, negotiated and ultimately reinforced. Moreover, heroic corporeality surfaces during this period as an iconographic allegory, romanticising productivities of orthodox Maoism and revolutionary modes. This is pronounced within the regulated projection of the body itself, primarily tied to a cycle of suffering, self-denial and sublimation.

The notion of the suffering heroic body, one ultimately yielding to overarching political discourse, is characteristic of popular revolutionary narratives. Articulating the affliction of individual bodies, regulated in processes of emphatic revolution serves to dually deify previous suffering whilst re-enforcing the sublime legitimisation of the act itself. The feature of unquestioning heroism in face of adversity for the sake of ideological fulfilment, similarly glorifies revolutionary effort and sublimations of individual will towards collective action

This is dually illustrated in Guerrillas on the Railroad, where heroic protagonists subjugate their physical wellbeing to collective action and endeavour. The initial instance of this is visualised as guerrilla leader Liu is ambushed and shot by a group of enemy soldiers. Falling sideways to protect a fellow comrade, Liu proceeds to return fire despite grimacing in pain and bleeding from his injured arm. At a later point in the film, Commander Li

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113 This manifests in dominant imaginings of the heroic body itself throughout the Maoist era, which Zhong Xueping identifies as ultimately ‘bodyless’ and ‘selfless’ (wusi and wangwo). This is fundamentally adopted from Russian literary forms, especially notions of ‘steel and iron’, (gangtie), transmuted towards Chinese styles. Zhong, Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 45.
similarly suffers an enemy bullet whilst attempting to protect Liu. As the guerrilla leader tumbles to his comrade’s side, he assuredly instructs him to retreat and protect the division. Subsequently Li is forced to leave the battlefield for hospitalisation and treatment. As the narrative reaches its climax however, these two figures are emphatically reunited in the combat zone, whereby on noting their respective rehabilitations they re-direct their bodies once again towards the resistive effort. In this combat variant, heroic bodies are thus projected as objects of Socialist deification, romantically proffered and sublimated to dominant discursive norms.

Projected to similar effect throughout revolutionary combat variants, notions of self-sacrifice and heroic immolation function to reaffirm the altruistic and overarching legitimacy of Maoist discourse. This itself is strongly linked to the depiction of Socialist character types, whose burden and suffering appears to both redeem and motivate resistive endeavour. Within Tunnel Warfare this manifests through Old Kao (Chuan-bao’s father), who sacrifices his own life in order to alert the village of a secret Japanese attack. As Kao is captured whilst ringing the alarm bell and subsequently shot by officer Yamada, he enigmatically opts to blow himself up with a hand grenade (thus killing a number of the enemy) rather than dying slowly of a bullet wound. The emphasis on this sacrificing action operates as a romantic endorsement of resistive activity, one that motivates the villagers (Chuan-bao in particular) to overcome the Japanese and avenge sufferance by the film’s conclusion.

114 This re-union consists of briefly and warmly shaking hands, quickly interrupted by the need to set off with their respective units to battle. It is only after the emphatic extermination of the enemy that Li and Liu are properly re-allied, symbolically enacted and framed within the rubric of revolutionary determinism.
Self-denial and abstinence of heroic protagonists manifests as another principal characteristic of revolutionary modes throughout this period. The selfless fervour and willingness demonstrated by these figures towards resistive effort serves to reinscribe and regulate mythical notions of mass-Party relations. Moreover, this denial functions as a romantic testimony to the redemptive power of Socialism itself and its legacy as a legitimate ideology. Most commonly these styles of abstinence revolve around familial and personal relations, which are effectively subsumed into the enormity of national and collective concerns.

Romantic idealisations of personal denial are illustrated in a number of resistance films throughout this era, with *Ye lin qu/Coconut Tree Song* (1957, dir. Wang Weiyi) and *Nan dao feng yun/Battle of Nan Island* (1955, dir. Bai Cheng) indicative of this mode. In both narratives this is demonstrated through the temporary dissociation of the family unit as actively endorsed by heroic protagonists, framed by the overwhelming primacy and predominance of resistive endeavour.

The central heroines of each film respectively (Xiu-mei in the former, Luo-hua of the latter) are separated from their husbands when they join the Eighth Route Army at textual initiation. These figures willingly and benevolently encourage their spouses towards resistance, despite its disruption of the

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115 As Joe Huang contemplates of the altruistic hero-type in Maoist narratives, “There is no greater reward than the satisfaction of making things easier for ones comrades through self-denial”. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel As a Reflection of Life*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1973, p. 306.

116 See ‘Plot Summaries’ in appendix for more detailed accounts of *Coconut Tree Song* and *Battle of Nan Island*. 
domestic sphere, the dangers of warfare itself and the personal impacts of their absence. The emphasis on individual self-denial and abstinence here is ultimately identified as heroic, enforced by their initial support (for husbands) and subsequent participation (themselves) in resistive enactment.

In accordance with a regulated revolutionary legacy and projected subjectivity, these idealised characters willingly relinquish and submit their personal desires to Socialist organs in order to preserve and enhance the orthodox collective. In progression towards narrative conclusion these protagonists attain a heroic status (as noted above, through initial support and subsequent subscription to resistive effort) and are enigmatically rewarded with the safe return of their husbands. This is configured to an especially romantic degree in *Coconut Tree Song* (which I shall discuss further in a later segment), where Xiu-mei is not only reunited with her husband but also her long-lost father under the watchful eye of the Party itself.

Regulated notions and conceptions of resistive heroism are steadily romanticised and prefaced throughout revolutionary combat variants. The rendering and projection of this heroic form manifests in specific themes of appearance, speech and activity, symptomatic of wider discursive orthodoxy and centralisation. Moreover, the romanticised resistive format gravitates towards specifically Maoist structures of collective imagining and identification, steeped in explicit and dominant notions of political nationalism. To this degree, these combat representations steadily filter the development of a regulated generic form.
Regulated Enemies

Whilst heroic characters occupy a romantically centralised status in Chinese combat films of this period, their signification is similarly informed by their representational binaries, the enemy forces. Throughout conventional and established variants, it has been the inevitable presence and threat of these enemy entities that mark and motivate heroic action. Concurrently, enemy characters as representational forms fulfil equivalently regulated roles in revolutionary narratives. The presence of dialectics and polarities between heroes-enemies within combat films of this variant thus adheres to romanticised systems of identification, projecting re-inscriptions and regulations of Maoist orthodoxy.

During the period immediately following the 1949 Revolution in China the focus on representational binaries is especially prevalent, whereby themes and characteristics of resistance narrative follow a steadily structured and determined mode. The Japanese enemy correspondingly manifests in antithetical proportion to heroic figurations, in manners that ultimately preface and reaffirm centralised orthodoxy. Functioning on recurrent patterns of discernible illegitimacy, depictions of enemy protagonists romanticise resistive discourse whilst asserting its envisioning from a distinctly Maoist perspective. Narrative progression thus operates upon initially registering the impact of foreign armies on the projective Chinese nation, marking them as

subsequently threatening and destructive, before finally overcoming and disposing of them.

The Japanese enemy features as an overwhelming entity of threat, violation and menace in this variant of the combat film. Classified and marginalised throughout resistance narratives by the terms *guizi* (‘devils’) or *riben guizi* (‘Japanese devils’), the contextual implications of these depictions exacerbate qualities of national, moral and ideological difference.\(^\text{119}\) Looking through a specifically cinematic matrix, the development of *guizi* characteristics, progressively marked by symbolic marginality and a regulated romantic style, is indicative of the orthodox cultural and political nationalism pronounced throughout this period.

The following section aims to interrogate conditioned enemy representations throughout combat films of this variant, identifying and scrutinizing overarching themes of signification. In particular, this segment shall investigate the cinematic construction of the Japanese military and its contribution towards romanticised modes of filmmaking. This will be further expanded towards an appreciation of orthodox ideologies and regulation through *guizi* types. Within this process, specific attention will be paid to the characteristic appearance, speech and action of enemy figures.

\(^\text{119}\) The term *guizi*, which translates roughly as ‘devil son’ or ‘ghost son’ was popularised within resistive discourse as a label to categorically mark, deny and dismiss imperialist forces within China and subsequently promote resistive nationalism. For more detailed accounts of this see Chang Hung-tai, *War and Popular Culture*, p. 283. And Ci Jiwei, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution*, p. 71.
**Enemy Appearance**

Enemy figurations throughout combat films of the Maoist era are primarily marked and differentiated in text through bodily and material appearances. Habitually presented as threatening and deviant entities, Japanese soldiers (and officers in particular) feature as awkward and deformed in contrast to resistive counterparts. Furthermore, specific iconographical attributes are developed during this period that clearly mark and affirm *guizi* characteristics, relying heavily upon stereotype and generalisation to invoke both parody and illegitimacy.120

In representing Japanese officers during the Maoist era there is an overarching tendency to portray them as physically deformed, appearing morose and debased. Whereas resistive counterparts are seemingly naturalised and legitimated in uniform, these figures appear discomfited and unsuited to their Imperial attire. Equivalently, enemy officers are recurrently characterised by emblematic eccentricities and ascriptions, predominantly through features of jutting teeth, petite moustaches and round-rimmed eyeglasses. Whilst these icons principally invoke parody and impotency, they simultaneously identify agents of menace and threat, whereby the presence of thick black boots, large samurai swords and pantaloons are similarly emphasised.121

With reference to both *War of Mines* and *Little Soldier Zhang-ga* these dualities of *guizi* attribution are clearly demonstrated. Captain Matsuda, the

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120 For contrary instances of enemy ‘typing’ and signification within the Hollywood combat film see Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War*, pp. 13-23.

121 The emphasis on Japanese black boots, white gloves and samurai swords are predominant enemy signifiers within a number of resistance texts throughout this phase; including *Tunnel Warfare, War of Mines, Little Soldier Zhang-ga* and *Guerrillas on the Plane*. 
commanding Japanese officer in the former text for example is a squat man with sullen features, framed by archetypal eyeglasses and a rotund physique. As Matsuda wreaks havoc on the community however, the prevalence of menacing icons (sword, boots, gloves) affirms his presence as threatening and dangerous. Similarly Officer Kameda of Little Soldier Zhang-ga is physically parodied and caricatured throughout the film, sporting a miniature moustache and ‘wading about’ in oversized pantaloons. Kameda is framed and armed by threatening signifiers in the text (rifle, sword, whip) that are equally indicative of an ominous and serious threat. To this degree, a complexly maligned form of the enemy manifests, one that ‘appears’ to be inherently inferior to resistive counterparts, but potent enough to warrant destruction and obliteration. This distinctly satirical and deviant depiction of the enemy is in regulated polarity to material manifestations of the hero as a didactic and legitimate force.

*Enemy Speech*

Another central theme of guizi regulation as projected throughout Maoist resistance narratives, surrounds elements of dialogic speech and verbalisation. As with heroic protagonists, the function and tone utilised by enemy characters carries distinct discursive symbolism in text. The tendency to feature Japanese officers using fractured and hybrid enunciations within this variant effectively reinforces representational binaries whilst correlative enhancing satire and provoking marginalisation. This specifically manifests as
enemy officers recurrently utilise broken and bastardised forms of Mandarin when communicating with local Chinese communities.122

In the orthodox Maoist variant, Japanese officers tend to vocalise in a fractured and barely comprehensible language, frequently reverting back to their native tongue (especially when ordering attacks on guerrilla forces). The hybrid and jarring nature of this verbalisation not only marks and classifies the enemy as marginal (through audible signifiers) but it similarly invokes them as a menace to national cultures and traditions. The significance of this speech in the context of Socialist forms of identification implies a distinct threat to the purity of the Chinese nation and its continuity.123

Enemy articulations are inevitably delivered in haphazard, bullying and inconsistent manners throughout these texts, directly contrasted to the refined and benevolent enunciations of resistive heroes. This situation is expertly demonstrated within Guerrillas on the Plane as enemy Commander Matsui is shown continuously berating heroic protagonists, fellow soldiers and his collaborative underlings. As an Imperial ‘officer’ he is attributed a degree of authority and agency in the text, yet his obsessive and aggressive enunciations serve only to re-affirm menacing guizi characteristics and to legitimate his eventual overthrow (where he is shot and literally ‘silenced’). Consequently,

122 This bastardised Chinese form translates awkwardly, emphasised by its staccato style and menacing content. A distinct example of this is prevalent within Little Soldier Zhang-ga, as Officer Kameda intimidates Grandma to reveal Eighth Route Army operatives. “Old woman, talkee”, “Hey, talkee, you! No talk killum dead” and “So! Talkee chop-chop!”. This dialogue is suggestive of an inherently infantile and marginalised force.
123 The ‘monopolisation’ of written and spoken word within Maoist China as investigated by Ci Jiwei is symptomatic of this reaffirmation of statlist discourses. Ci, Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution, pp. 62-101.
the enemy is projected as an inherently illegitimate authority throughout revolutionary variants, one whose enunciated deviance surfaces as abomination and threat. In regulated narrative progressions of this period, enemy speech is thus recurrently silenced and de-legitimated, ultimately replaced by espousals of Socialist orthodoxy.

The other seminal signification of enemy verbalisation in Maoist variants manifests during sequences of imprisonment and interrogation, occurring throughout the majority of combat films. In general these scenes provide the only opportunity for heroes and enemies to speak directly to one another, where subtexts of menace and discursive polarity are heavily enforced. Within these segments the Japanese army utilise verbal threat in order to unveil the location and identities of wider resistance operatives.

Here the significance of speech itself is effectively deified, whereby the actions of those who suffer silently and under duress are glorified. The previously detailed section of interrogation in *Little Soldier Zhang-ga* highlights this mode. As Officer Kameda confronts Chung, he initially begins by coaxing and coercing the prisoner, telling him how ‘good’ he thinks the Eighth Route Army are. As Chung refuses to either respond or capitulate to this, the officer proceeds to threaten him. This sharp contrast in erratic behaviour from enticement to menace is symptomatic of the *guizi* stereotype, following a suggestively unstable and incoherent method as strategy.


**Enemy Activity**

The impact of satirising Japanese officers and objectifying their activation throughout combat films of this variant serves to further emphasise polarity between factional forces and their subsequent ideologies. In constructing a range of enemy figures characterised by abstract motives and efficacies, regulated narratives seek to re-centralise the Socialist body as an agent of legitimacy. Japanese entities are therefore marked as suggestively subversive, deviant and threatening, elements realised through physical action within narrative. Moreover, the regulated and romanticised nature of these stereotypes signifies the development of an iconographical corpus that provokes marginality and polarity.

Just as the activity of the resistance hero is characterised by determined self-sacrifice, suffering and denial, enemy forces are contrastingly depicted as deviant and ultimately impotent throughout revolutionary variants. Intent on crushing resistance and eliminating subversion, *guizi* figures are articulated as recurrently aggressive, threatening and excessive. At the same time however, upon engaging resistive machinations and strategy, Japanese activity is progressively nullified to a state of incapacity and inconsequence. This is exhibitive of equivocal *guizi* projections developed throughout the Maoist variant, ultimately contributing to a regulated narrative form that celebrates the romantic capacity of Socialist agency and praxis.

One narrative device that particularly emphasises this orthodox progression is montage, specifically utilised in scenes articulating *guizi* destruction. A
requisite segment of resistance narratives, these sequences depict enemy troops invading local villages either to uncover guerrilla forces or to apprehend food and materials. During this process these armies are located as agents of overarching and extensive chaos, randomly burning, killing and destroying. Moreover, enemy officers in these segments are commonly inter-cut and interspersed within these images of destruction and violence, provoking explicit marginalisation and resistive agency.

This montage form is demonstrated emblematically in *War of Mines* where a sequence of village destruction (burning, murder, looting) is disrupted by the image of a Japanese officer, Watanabe. Here the enemy figure is captured in a menacingly styled close-up, framed by the burning landscape and laughing in an irrational manner. In the context of the scene’s composition this image is indicative of a deviant, perverse and inhumane power, the precise synthesis of *guizi* menace as projected throughout revolutionary models.

Watanabe is progressively constructed throughout the narrative as a disruptive and deviant force. Despite this capacity to wreak destruction in the film however, the Imperial officer is eventually consumed and overwhelmed by his own aberrant and perverse behaviour. Having captured a trick-mine from the guerrillas he proceeds to investigate it, only to subsequently set it off and blow himself up. This inglorious demise is equally symptomatic of *guizi* deviance throughout romantic combat variants, depicted as initially potent and
threatening, but ultimately revealed as inadequate and inferior in confrontation with Socialist variants.124

Themes of enemy confrontation with guerrilla strategy and subsequent demise are continuously projected throughout Maoist era combat films, recurrently affirming notions of guizi inadequacy and illegitimacy. The obsessive and voracious response of Japanese forces to resistive enactments, including intentions to eliminate heroic agents and repress civilian ‘masses’ at large, are similarly marginalizing. Throughout most resistance narratives, enemy forces gather together local villagers and victimise the inhabitants in hope of revealing and repressing Socialist sympathies.125 In general these instances of abuse lead to a fracturing of guizi domination, manifesting in a breakdown both of external alliances and internal communications. In this manner, as the resistive forces physically overcome the enemy, they equivalently imply the inferiority of oppositional discourse and reinforce its marginal status.

The proliferation of the romanticised guizi mode throughout revolutionary variants is indicative of regulated cinematic and cultural enactments during the Maoist era. The definitive gravitation towards polarised and marginal representations of this enemy figure (in contrast to heroic models), focusing on manifestations of appearance, speech and action are symptomatic of

124 This correlatively parallels the activation of guerrilla forces within genre, effectively glorified for their determination despite earlier hindrances and impediments. As Joe Huang notes, this was central to the resistive narrative itself at the time, where defeat only featured as a ‘temporary setback’, one motivating later attacks and eventual victory. Huang, Heroes and Villains in Communist China, p. 38.

125 Within Little Soldier Zhang-ga, War of Mines and Tunnel Warfare there are explicit examples of this communal persecution and interrogation. In all these films, narrative strands detail an overarching enemy desire to violate the peasants, appropriate raw materials and repress identity and freedom at large.
political orthodoxy and cultural hegemony at the time. The enemy form thus surfaces as a significant site of generic and discursive analysis, an enigmatic site of regulated projection and orthodox imagination.

Regulated Collaborators

Whilst heroes and enemies traditionally occupy antagonistic moral, national and discursive positions in the Chinese combat film, the role and status of collaborators is similarly impacting. This scenario is particularly pertinent in this variant, where much like their heroic and enemy counterparts collaborators fulfil a signified role in the reaffirmation of regulated Socialist praxes. Within this context the progression of the revolutionary narrative itself relies upon a dual battle fought by resistive forces against both external (Japanese) and internal (collaborative) adversaries. Consequently, the representational struggle and victory of the village masses throughout the genre, suggestively re-affirms the primacy, legitimacy and legacy of Maoist orthodoxy. Furthermore, this procedure operates upon a recurrent process of unmasking and deactivating collaborative potency within the generic form.126

Throughout revolutionary combat variants the projection of national collaborators carry distinct political, cultural and social implications, symptomatic of regulated Maoist imaginings. The significance of these betayers as character types is highlighted by the term most commonly used to identify them in resistance discourse, hanjian. The word itself effectively implies treachery (jian) of the specific ethnic (han) identity, not just of

126 This model of de-activation correlates to combat films universally, including the established Hollywood form. See Lawrence Suid, Guts and Glory, pp. 295-314. And Thomas Schatz, Refiguring American Film Genres, pp. 89-128.
national or political boundaries. Through Maoist cinematic forms, the label and its figurations are activated on a patently discursive level, encompassing a wide range of implications that ultimately re-articulate and re-centralise Socialist ideologies.

Much like the yingxiong and guizi character types, hanjian figures of the Maoist era adhere to distinct and romanticised patterns of identification, prescribing to dominant renderings of resistive ideology and praxis. In order to gain a greater comprehension of the revolutionary combat variant, representations of collaborative discourse and its agents require further investigation. This revolves around an appreciation of the major characteristics of hanjian form, identified through regulated appearance, speech patterns and physical activity.

**Collaborative Appearance**

Throughout Maoist resistance narratives the manifestation of hanjian protagonists as marginalised and de-centred figures prescribes to an appreciation of cinema as an institution of political orthodoxy and regulation. A key visual element utilised to identify and affirm this in stylistic terms is physical appearance. Depicted in either affluent clothing (both Western and Chinese variants) or official collaborative uniforms, these characters are visually segregated from both resistive and enemy populations. Consequently,

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127 The term hanjian was popularised during the War of Resistance, a label referring to those who either co-operated with the Japanese or who encouraged national capitulation. It surfaced as an important term for bolstering and provoking nationalist fervour. For a historical account of these figures and their discursive significance see Frederic Wakeman, ‘Hanjian (Traitor)! Collaboration and Retribution in Wartime Shanghai’, in Yeh Wen-hsin (ed), *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 298-341.
emphasis on hybridity and amalgamation accentuates the fractured and indeterminate status of these *hanjian* figures. This stress on coalition is rendered as symbolically aberrant and heretical, located within a system of signification marked by orthodox circumscription. Heightening this sense of essentialism is the tendency to feature *hanjian* in specifically marginal colours and styles of clothing, inflecting characteristics of cultural and social threat.

In *Tunnel Warfare* this is demonstrated through primary collaborator Tang, who appears throughout the narrative clothed in a white suit and tie. This costume carries a dual sense of marginality and illegitimacy, highlighting both dangers of foreign assimilation (suit and tie as Westernised dress) and threats of cultural deviance (white as a traditional signifier of mourning in Chinese culture). Although Tang fulfils a peripheral role in the narrative (minimal presence and dialogue as well as a decentred appearance in frame) his presence as an iconic signifier of corruption and deviance is accentuated by this ambiguous and foreboding costume. Furthermore, the jarring and hybrid denotations of this attire implicate a sense of de-familiarisation and marginality, situated in contrast to the familiar and orthodox figures of resistive heroism. Whereas Chuan-bao’s centrality within the text is verified by his nationalised appearance (i.e. guerrilla uniform, Eighth Route Army Cap), Tang is contrastingly peripherated.

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128 To this extent, costuming within combat films (as in other genres) carried distinct political and collective implications. As John Hay has noted, the Chinese body (much like its Western equivalents) was steadily constructed within social context, where “garments define rather than hide”. Thus projections of *hanjian* clothing during this period were politically signified and regulated, marking collaborative discourse as corrupting and alienating. Hay, “The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?”, in Angela Zito & Tani E. Barlow (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 44.
*Hanjian* dress similarly features throughout romanticised styles of the combat film as an overt register of social and civil illegitimacy. This is particularly prevalent in texts featuring local collaborative forces as established and oppressive village authorities. Within both *Chong po li ming qian de hei an/Storming the Darkness Before Dawn* (1956, dir. Wang Ping) and *Pu bu mie de huo yan/The Inextinguishable Flame* (1955, dir. Yi Ling) the repressive and menacing implications of collaborative bureaucracy are emphasised through features of signified costuming. In the former narrative this is implied by the aberrant figure of Wu, visualised in varied styles of decadent dress (i.e. silk pantsuit, *hanjian* uniform and vest) complemented by an American style ‘cowboy’ hat. In contrast to the localised appearance of village peasants, Wu manifests as an emblem of communal and cultural threat, an unbridled agent of inconstancy and instability. A similar device is employed in *The Inextinguishable Flame* where collaborator Jiang-er is presented alternatively in *hanjian* uniform and feudal garb (*changpao*). This figurative appearance is antagonistic to that of his brother, resistive hero Jiang-san, whose guise is marked by regulated peasant attire. Within both these narratives the connotations of a de-centred and anomalous *hanjian* appearance, accentuates orthodox representational modes and romantic textual forms.

The feature of official *hanjian* uniform similarly requires analysis as projected in this variant. Whereas I argued above that heroic activation and idealisation is framed by ascriptions of orthodox attire, collaborative variants are

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129 See my ‘Plot Summaries’ for concise reviews of each text.
characterised by deviance and impotence. Looking explicitly at *Hong hai zi/Red Children* (1958, dir. Su Li) and *Ji mao xin/Chicken-feather Letter* (1954, dir. Shi Hui) the collaborative garb is repeatedly established as an icon of inadequacy and illegitimacy. Hanjian figures manifest shabbily in their uniforms, often semi-dressed and largely unkempt.

This is overtly demonstrated in *Red Children*, where collaborative soldiers appear in semi-buttoned shirts and canted hats as they drunkenly gamble amongst themselves. Equivalently, in *Chicken-feather Letter* the hanjian uniform surfaces in a marginalised manner, where the collaborators pillage a local village. Here the soldiers proceed to figuratively ‘fill their pockets’ with items of value, one literally using his hat in order to carry more loot. Thus in these sequences collaborative agents are projected as immoral exploiters and profiteers, a threatening presence to the romantically orthodox and localised village communities. Accordingly, the allegorical presence of haphazard and aberrant uniforms is indicative of a methodically illegitimate and volatile force, one paralleled to regulated resistive models.

Combined with these implications of hanjian dress, features of physical appearance and material accoutrement are similarly impacting in regulations of narrative orthodoxy. The established collaborator throughout revolutionary textual variants shares the sense of physical distortion and deviance allotted to the enemy they are aligned with. Representations thus tend towards dual modes of hanjian generalisation, the stout and rotund form (as in *Tunnel*

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130 For a summation of *Chicken-feather Letter*, see ‘Plot Summaries’ in my appendix.
Warfare and Little Soldier Zhang-ga) or tall and emaciated one (as in The Inextinguishable Flame and War of Mines). In addition to physical profiling collaborative protagonists of this style are commonly marked by bodily deformation, primarily facial moles (as in Guerrillas on the Plane and Little Soldier Zhang-ga), baldness (Red Children and Storming the Darkness Before Dawn) or jutting teeth (Tunnel Warfare and War of Mines). These physical manifestations signify distortions of the idealised revolutionary norm (as represented by the heroic body) and their corrupting potentiality.

**Collaborative Speech**

Hanjian representations are not only limited to visual manifestations throughout Maoist resistance narratives. The importance of their speech-acts, particularly as suggestive mediators between enemy forces and village communities are equally significant. Hanjian speech thus emerges as an alternative ideological platform to that of Socialist-led resistance, one ultimately rendered threatening and destructive within the variant. Whilst enemy enunciations are marked as explicitly hostile and intimidating, collaborative verbalisations surface as a more alleviated form of menace. Despite these differences however, much like the enemy model collaborative speech is progressively rebuked and de-legitimated in narrative, effectively dispersed in confrontation with Socialist orthodoxy.

Throughout revolutionary combat films most hanjian dialogue is limited to tactical plotting with enemy officers, gauging the potential for gain and personal interest. As the enemy inevitably attempt to address the villagers
however, *hanjian* figures are ‘translated’ into public broadcasters and mediators for the Imperial forces. Here the collaborators effectively direct and guide the villagers towards capitulation (thus enunciating it as a political and discursive approach), seemingly for their own salvation and protection. Further attention to these sequences reveals a distinct fragmentation of this ‘translated’ method, undermining the legitimacy and agency of *hanjian* aims. This is repeatedly articulated as a theme throughout revolutionary narratives, whereby modes of addressing the masses alternate between threat and coercion.

The corrupting rationale of the collaborative method is demonstrated didactically during *Tunnel Warfare*, where a group of *hanjian* figures impersonate Eighth Route Army soldiers whilst attempting to infiltrate and disrupt the resistive forces. After being exposed and apprehended by legitimate figures, the leader of the collaborative group, Sun, initially pleads for leniency and mercy. In the moments following this upon hearing of a nearby Japanese attack he reverses his tone and manner immediately, attempting to bully the resisters into submission and capitulation. The extremes of Sun’s manner, accentuated by conflicting and aberrant enunciations are symbolic of a deviant and irrational force (and moral order). The suggested instability and manipulation of this *hanjian* tactic is situated in stark contrast to the real Commander Cui (whom he has been impersonating),
whose speech is intent and affirmed upon admonishing the collaborators pleas.131

Collaborative Activity

The final primary aspects of *hanjian* projection requiring examination are elements of physical activity and engagement. The tendency to emphasise collaborators as effete and passive throughout revolutionary variants is symptomatic of regulated narrative modes and classifications of *hanjian* as marginalised and deviant entities. Whereas the *yingxiong* and *guizi* models feature as agents of martial activation and impact (in polar forms), *hanjian* figures of Maoist modes are marked as physically disabled and impotent. Their primary efficacy in narrative is realised through advising enemy forces, expanding dominance by provocation, coercion and manipulation rather than material capability. The *hanjian* body thus surfaces as a site of explicit incapacity during this mode, in contrariety (and thus as a threat to) the invigorated productivity of resistive bodies.

In instances where the *hanjian* body is brought into action in revolutionary variants (predominantly at narrative climax) it is ultimately projected as an ineffective and deviant force.132 This is enigmatically projected in *War of Mines*, where the didacticism of resistive success partly relies upon the

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131 The image of Cui proclaiming his identity as a member of the ‘Eighth Route Army’ (close-up, level shot) is in direct contrast to the following image of Sun (close-up but tilted shot) who trembles and wilts in response. The ideological implications of this are unambiguous, reinforcing a sense of romantic polarity and difference between resistance and betrayal.

132 These deviant bodies not only re-affirmed stereotypes of *hanjian* illegitimacy, but similarly served as contrast to the virile and capable models of heroic output. These politicised bodies (the former marginalised, the later idealised) as detailed by Ann Anagnost surfaced as central to Party domination in terms of both social control and self-identity imagining. Anagnost, *National Past-times*, pp. 98-116.
emphatic reneging and elimination of the *hanjian* body. Whilst the primary collaborative agent within the text (Fang) capably deceives a young villager into revealing strategic information about the guerrilla forces, at narrative climax this character is materially nullified and annulled. His death is dually functional in textual realisation, where he appears on a bicycle and unwittingly rides over a land mine. Just as Fang manages to scream out ‘Bomb!’ the mine is triggered, consuming him along with a number of his Japanese counterparts. In consideration of a romantic narrative style, this enigmatic renunciation of the *hanjian* body is projected as retribution for deviant, manipulative and covert practices. The evisceration of the *hanjian* figure projected in such a didactic manner thus highlights the retrospectivity of the Maoist combat variant and its stylised regulation.

The emphatic nullification of *hanjian* activity (in both moral and material forms) throughout these resistive narratives reinforces the projection of collaboration as a threatening ideology, one beset by the legitimacy of Maoist orthodoxy. Whilst *hanjian* of this variant demonstrate a capacity for manipulation and deviance in each narrative, Socialist forces inevitably and resoundingly overcome them. This condition carries dual weight throughout the period from 1949-1966, continually re-centralising Socialist legacies and its hegemony over alternative forms.

Romanticised projections and conceptions of collaboration are steadily invoked and prefaced throughout revolutionary combat films. This regulation of the *hanjian* mode concentrating on recurrent articulations of appearance,
speech and activity are established to a symptomatic degree of orthodoxy in this generic variant. Accordingly, the collaborative form fulfils an indicative role in revolutionary combat narratives, re-affirming and re-centralising the efficacy and legitimacy of Maoist legacies. Furthermore, hanjian figures play a fundamental role in articulations of Socialist hegemony as the predominant and overarching mode of national imagining.

Women in the Regulated Combat Variant

The role of women within Chinese narratives generally, and the cinematic medium in particular, has received a great deal of attention during recent critical investigations. The accustomed approach has tended to focus on varied notions of female subjectivity in cultural works (concentrating on specific impacts and consequences), delineating representational parallels of gender and nationhood. 133 Throughout these forms of analysis however, there has been a gap in accounting for projections of women within the combat film, specifically those making contributions towards national victory, redemption and revolution.

Thus, during this segment, I aim to examine the location of Chinese women throughout revolutionary combat variants (their Japanese counterparts are notably absent) as symptomatic of Maoist styles of identification. Whereas established forms of critical analysis tend to either undermine or underscore the positioning of women within combat films at large, the Chinese model

materialises as a site for conducting an alternative reading. In demonstrating this I shall focus on the two female types dominating combat films from 1949-1966, the ‘active resistive heroine’ and ‘maternal sacrificer’ respectively. Within this approach I shall pay special attention to, the iconography of the female form, specific narrative conflicts, and gendered themes symptomatic of a regulated generic model.

Chinese combat films of this era manifest as an ideal framework in which to explore the complex ‘emancipation’ of the female form throughout Maoist representational modes, towards seemingly empowered and liberated norms. As detailed in my Introduction, the importance of female characters and their projected status has pervaded Chinese film history. In particular, the seminal cinematic era of the 1930s provoked a widespread negotiation of gender roles and their discursive implications. Films including The Goddess/Shen nü (1934, dir. Wu Yonggang) and New Women/Xin nüxing (1934, dir Cai Chusheng) cast female characters largely within a new light, utilising Socialist Realism to investigate, project and debate gender issues. The degree to which the successors of this era continued or expanded this process in Maoist variations becomes a negotiated issue. I aim to demonstrate this by examining dominant female forms of revolutionary variants (the ‘active heroine’ and ‘maternal sacrificer’, respectively) and their complex implications. This will be framed by the argument I have developed thus far, appreciating progressions of this filmmaking mode towards romanticised and regulated interpretations.

The ‘Active’ Resistive Heroine

In the immediate post-1949 period the cinematic focus on female characters as nationalised or signified subjects (developed in the 1930s and 40s) was effectively intensified and expanded within China, shaded by overtly political and ideological issues. The combat model prefaced a particular arena where traditional gender roles could be challenged and appropriated, making way for enigmatically re-imagined women.

Symptomatic of this is the emergence of the ‘active’ female figure in revolutionary variants, engaging in both the preparation and enactment of resistive endeavour. Characterised as young, healthy and enthusiastic agents, active heroines are progressively channelled and ‘transformed’ during narrative into productive and didactic contributors. However, commonly framed by institutions of family and politics, the resistive heroine remains an ambiguous figure of emancipation, one regulated and restrained by discourses of orthodoxy.

In War Of Mines this active heroine role is emblematised by the character of Yu-lan, granddaughter of the village elder and a determined resistive figure. Supported by her young female friends, Yu-lan works to defend the village from enemy forces utilising a combination of basic artillery, initiative and trickery. At recurrent points in the film she is depicted in direct combat,

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135 As John Weakland details, “heroines are usually shown at the outset as weak and oppressed, yet they rapidly become invincible in spirit and influential in action as they take up the nation’s cause of resistance”. Weakland, ‘Chinese Film Images of Invasion and Resistance’, China Quarterly 47, 1971, p. 445.
exchanging fire with the enemy and enacting an organised strategy. In this manner, the resistive effort is portrayed as a means of overcoming internal fracture and division (in this case gender differentiation) through pledging allegiance towards Socialism and its regulated practices. Yet this form of gender liberation is highly conditioned, whereby activation itself is steadily mediated by patriarchal sources (a centralised, Party strategy) and involving an ambiguously symbolic de-gendering. These trends and impacts are best signified in the narrative through Yu-lan’s relations with Commander Lei and Chao-jun (a local mine expert).

At differing points throughout the film Chao-jun and Yu-lan flirt with each other, yet the nature of this relationship remains wholly unconsummated and unrealised, sublimated to resistive progression and tempered by political obligation. This is sufficiently demonstrated at two separate narrative points, as these characters re-direct personal developments towards collective action. The first surrounds Chao-jun’s return to the township immediately after having captured an enemy rifle. On approaching the villagers (who are in rapturous and celebrative applause) he offers the weapon to Yu-lan in an act of aggravated flirtation. She initially rejects it, pointing out that she is equally empowered and capable in resistive activities. Preventing the issue from deteriorating into a gender struggle, Lei steps in as an authoritative source and bestows the gun to Yu-lan, who this time accepts. The distinction of Lei’s action reinforces the importance of orthodoxy (with the Party at the centre) in

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136 Dai Jinhua suggests that the cinematic emancipation of women within these films carry distinct boundaries that obscure the clarity of representation. As she sums up, “when liberated women of China celebrate their liberation, they must assume the shackles of freedom”. Dai, *Positions*, p. 257.
organising and mediating gendered behaviour. In accepting the gun when proffered by Lei, Yu-lan’s action represents a romantic validation of the Communist Party and its policy on gender.

To an equivalent degree, the other major sequence of interaction between Yu-lan and Chao-jun tends toward sublimation of personal attraction and gender differentiation. As Chao-jun attempts to extract some of Yu-lan’s hair in order to construct a new strategic mine her initial reaction is to deny him. After he playfully steals a strand and then demonstrates its capacity to Lei, Yu-lan endorses this discovery by cutting her hair and volunteering it to facilitate more mines. This enactment itself emerges as highly problematic, whereby separate from resistive contexts the action is suggestive of a sublimation and denial of femininity in aid of political emancipation. Yu-lan is thus transformed into an androgynous figure by cutting her hair, effectively de-sexualised and de-gendered in endorsement of orthodox Maoism.¹³⁷

Rendered similarly equivocal throughout revolutionary variants are the situational presence and status of these active heroines within textual progression. Although these women seem to be on equal footing to their male guerrilla and Eighth Route Army counterparts, their centralisation in the narrative frame is distinctly regulated and marked. Whilst active female figures appear to demonstrate Mao’s genderless policies and their productive application, in broader interpretive contexts they are largely pre-figured and tangential. This situation is epitomised during the dénouement of the

¹³⁷ Dai suggests that this ‘de-gendered’ woman conditionally projects her attention towards the Party as a ‘spiritual father’ and thus the revision of political hegemony. ibid., p. 262.
resistance narrative itself, the celebration of enemy defeat, where female resistors are inevitably marginalised within the cinematic frame.\textsuperscript{138}

Looking closely at \textit{War of Mines}, \textit{Little Soldier Zhang-ga} and \textit{Guerrillas on the Plane}, the resistive victory is predominantly celebrated by male authorities (both local and Party representatives) in the concluding scenes. Although female figures are present at this point they fulfil a symbolically marginal and supplementary role in proceedings. Rather, it is the male protagonists that orchestrate, authorise and bestow the celebrations in these sequences, symbolically proclaiming and delivering the success of resistive endeavour. This is enigmatically demonstrated in the finale of \textit{Little Soldier Zhang-ga}, as the young protagonist is welcomed back into the Socialist collective. Here Zhang-ga is centrally enclosed within the frame by a bevy of male characters (Commanders Chung and Chun, Lin Po-shan), whereby the feminine presence (foster mother, sister and other comrades) occupies a fleeting and marginal role.

Another overarching narrative segment tending to exclude and marginalise efforts of active heroines are those surrounding the development and articulation of resistive strategy. As with narrative \textit{dénouement}, female characters are recurrently decentred or absent within these sequences and when they do feature are commonly submissive or silent. This ambivalence is effectively projected in \textit{Tunnel Warfare} where the ‘Young Women’s Anti-

\textsuperscript{138} As Esther Yau has detailed, it was uncommon for female characters to occupy the central role within revolutionary war narratives (roughly one fifth of total produced). At large they were structured around, or in relation to, the male military realm. See Yau, ‘Filmic Discourse on Women in Chinese Cinema’, p. 229.
Japanese Vanguard’, led by Lin Hsia, primarily operate as resistive supplements to their male counterparts. The women of this narrative subsequently participate on a localised level, providing ideological and physical support that is symbolically detached from the male-occupied battlefield and wider strategic developments. Female empowerment in this text thus appears highly conditional, delineated by masculine spheres of strategy and authority.\(^{139}\)

This delineation is further articulated within the text as Chuan-bao discusses his breakthrough strategy with the male Eighth Route Army authorities. Lin Hsia who thus far has played a central role in organising and conducting local resistance is present but marginal in the scene. She is denied a close-up throughout this sequence (in contrast to her male counterparts) and remains silent as the strategy is discussed, only speaking to affirm the devised policy with a guttural ‘hao’ (good). At this moment of central narrative development the female presence is symbolically peripheral and de-emphasised, whereby the focus remains on male authorised sentiments.

The suggestive impact of these sequences reinforces the hegemony of revolution as a masculine organised and enacted phenomenon. Within this combat variant female characters thus fulfil a symbolically empowered and emancipatory role, but one that is steadily regulated, facilitated and

\(^{139}\) Similarly in another narrative sequence, sublimated articulation is given to the ‘Young Women’s Anti-Japanese Vanguard’ as they demonstrate the effectiveness of the secret tunnels they have created in the village. Here the female corp (led by Lin Hsia) seeks the approval and verification of their efforts from Chuan-bao, the legitimating masculine agent. The necessity of male approval of female capacity (similarly evident in *Guerrillas on the Railroad, Battle for Nan Island* and *War of Mines*) re-affirms the overarching perception of resistance as a masculine led and organised endeavour.
subjugated to masculine-led ideologies. 140 Whilst the demonstration of emancipated gender and the sublimation of sexual difference may appear as fundamental characteristics of the resistance narrative itself, the underlying existence of gendered structures and roles remains. 141 This is particularly relevant when focussing on the notion of resistive action itself and the casting of the female body into a sublimated patriarchal order.

The ‘Maternal’ Sacrificer

Whilst the above segment examines the active resistive heroine, there is another predominant female form identifiable throughout this variant, the ‘maternal sacrificer’, or what Dai Jinhua effectively refers to as the “Earth Mother”. This character’s primary function is to register the dominance of enemy aggression and legitimate active resistance. 142 Consequently, the emblematic transfer of energy between revolutionary and maternal ideals serves to re-centralise the validity of Maoist-Socialism and romantically recast Party-mass relations. Whilst the maternal sacrificer appears in varied contexts during this phase, ultimately its prescriptive function is the same, to bear witness to suffering and legitimate resistance.

140 As Stephanie Donald articulates of ‘revolutionary’ women and styles of patriarchal sublimation, “He leads the struggle and she is his acolyte. She is the also the point of identification through which the spectator may observe his achievements”. Donald, Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China. Maryland & Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000, p. 116.

141 Although women were ostensibly ‘liberated’ by the Socialist revolution, as Dai Jinhua notes, this process was highly equivocal. Women faced a ‘double standard’ between familial and national obligations, a process that fundamentally created positions of rupture and conflict. Moreover, Dai suggests that these women were ultimately “heroines that have never left the home and family”. See Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, p. 112.

142 Dai critiques this form of dramatic suffering in suggesting, “the image of the mother became a core signifier for the People, an overdetermined image which is a central part of mainstream ideology…In her role as the signifier for the People she is the original motivating force of history, as well as its saviour”. Dai, Positions, p. 264.
The Inextinguishable Flame is a revolutionary text that features this maternal sacrificer in a relevant capacity. Referred to throughout the film simply as ‘Mother’ (her name is not revealed), she struggles in early narrative segments to maintain familial balance between two of her sons, Jiang-san (a covert resistive figure) and Jiang-er (a hanjian officer). Within the text she is verified as a protagonist who has endured much suffering and repression, symbolised by her appearance (grey hair, shabby clothes) and speech (expressing both bitterness and benevolence). Initially she is reluctant to become involved in the political battle between her two sons, stressing the importance of familial and filial duties.

As the narrative progresses however, and the dissent between her two sons grows, she is enveloped within a mounting political struggle, forced to choose between ideologies of ‘resistance’ and ‘collaboration’. This conflict reaches its pinnacle as Jiang-er abuses and imprisons his mother whilst attempting to discover his resistive brother’s whereabouts. Consequently, Mother disowns Jiang-er, labelling him a hanjian and renouncing his filial claims. By the time Jiang-san rescues her and overthrows the local enemy forces (including his brother), she has undergone a distinct political transformation whereby she vociferously praises resistive action and its underlying ideology. Furthermore, she proffers her youngest child Jiang-si to the Eighth Route Army, farewelling both sons at the textual conclusion as they head off for further resistive battles.

The transformation of Mother’s sentiments in the text from initial uncertainty to emphatic selflessness is symptomatic of maternal ‘sacrificers’ of this
variant. Her steady conversion signifies an idealised affirmation of Party-mass relations in narrative, whereby Socialist recognition and transformation surfaces as an inevitable praxis. The focus on dualist satisfaction and provision (Mother is both ideologically and physically rescued) romanticises her earlier indecision and its subsequent transmission into organised and legitimate sources. Accordingly, the location of Mother as a disadvantaged character who progressively rebuffs alternative practices in favour of orthodoxy symbolises a retrospective and didactic invigoration of Maoist legacies. This is characteristic of regulated statism as premised in China at the time, where cultural products glorify and naturalise processes of Socialist enterprise.143

Whereas the maternal sacrificer of *The Inextinguishable Flame* is depicted as a character of transformation and penultimate activation, another variant is similarly projected. This centres upon the representation of the maternal sacrificer as an object of recurrent suffering and emulation. Looking at *Little Soldier Zhang-ga*, this manifests in the stoic and self-sacrificing figure of Grandma. Whereas Mother is redeemed in transforming equivocal stances towards orthodoxy, Grandma’s suffering functions to reify self-sacrifice as revolutionary attainment. Whilst Grandma occupies a relatively fleeting role in the narrative (appears briefly, only at textual initiation), the didactic significance of her sacrifice to protect Commander Chung is highly symbolic and impacting. As the Japanese forces publicly interrogate her, the enigmatic

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143 This is a highly ambiguous theme, as Dai Jinhua critiques within this type of representation, “Women are accused and made to suffer, all for the sake of men’s salvation and historical redemption”. *ibid.*, p. 265.
use of an angled close-up that situates enemy officer Kameda at her shoulder attempting to bribe and cajole her serves to romanticise her principled silence.

Furthermore, Grandma’s dramatic gaze throughout this interrogation centred off-screen towards the horizon functions to emphasise her mute resistance. The use of a parallel shot subsequent to this as Grandma is framed by interlocking swords, highlights her penultimate resolve and willingness to sacrifice her own body in the action of protecting the revolutionary effort. The impact of these corresponding shots and their narrative symbolism (at the end of the scene Grandma is needlessly shot by Kameda) immortalises her sacrifice whilst justifying its later revenge and liberation, enacted on her behalf by masculine guerrilla forces.\textsuperscript{144}

The development and projection of women throughout the revolutionary combat variant emerges in ultimately obscure and deferential manners. Whereas the discursive emphasis may be on intended themes of emancipation and liberation, the enactment itself is rather more ambivalent. Moreover, the overarching conditioning of female types within Maoist modes, enigmatised by the ‘active resistive’ heroine and the ‘maternal sacrificer’ respectively, signifies trends of sublimation and subjectivity bounded by statist norms. In this manner, whilst the female form figures predominantly in resistance narratives of this variant, its presence is steadily bounded and framed by wider discursive themes and gravitations.

\textsuperscript{144} The stylistic enactment of this sacrificial sequence prescribes to regulated and romanticised Socialist renderings. As a Party figure instructed during the film’s production, this scene was to be constructed as oppressively ‘leaden’ and ‘dark’, whereby Grandma’s actions contrastingly conveyed a “towering austerity”. Noted in Lin Niantong, Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, p. 189.
Children and Families in the Regulated Combat Variant

The importance of children within the development of collective identity and negotiation is deeply embedded in Chinese cultural thought. In relation to cinema specifically, the representation of childhood and adolescence has remained highly signified and functional throughout the adult ‘public’ arena. During the Maoist era as the government popularised and regulated Socialist cinematic forms, children featured prevalently in legitimation of statist norms and centrality. Throughout combat variants of this time the situation surfaces as particularly acute, highlighted by the presence of children engaging in the struggle for national resistance and determination.

This is especially prevalent in both Little Soldier Zhang-ga and Red Children, whose titles alone identify the centrality of childhood figures within revolutionary models. Each narrative essentially configures their adolescent protagonists around larger structures of national resistance, detailing progressive developments from participatory desire through to active integration. Attention to transformations of sentiment into action under the auspices of Socialist agency are not specific qualities of child-centred narratives (equally evident in depictions of women, the ‘maternal sacrificer’ in

146 As Stephanie Donald definitively contemplates, “Childhood is a category of publicness in Chinese film language, but it is a public of adults and a space constructed for the airing and sharing of their concerns”. See Donald, Public Secrets, p. 55.
particular) but rather symptomatic of cinematic regulations and attributions throughout the Maoist period.\textsuperscript{147}

With reference to \textit{Little Soldier Zhang-ga} this regulation is romantically emblematised by the relationship that the title character shares with District Commander Chun, who adopts a fatherly and paternal role in absence of Zhang-ga’s direct family.\textsuperscript{148} Whilst Chun commends ‘\textit{ga-zu}’ (‘Soldier–Ga’ as he affectionately refers to him) for his determination throughout initial segments of the narrative, his unrestrained and immature conduct remains a barrier to the boy’s political enlightenment and activation.

As Zhang-ga progressively modifies and alters his behaviour (under the guidance of the guerrilla division) he inevitably makes a significant contribution to the resistive effort and is fully inducted into the Socialist community. As the film concludes, the ‘little soldier’ is returned to the guerrilla forces (after being imprisoned by the enemy) whereby the leaders praise him for his resistive contributions. These enigmatic images of reunion reach their climax as Chun bestows upon Zhang-ga a functional and working pistol, an object that the youth has craved for much of narrative. Whereas in an earlier segment he was forced to relinquish the pistol to Chun (after

\textsuperscript{147} This is exemplary of the Socialist narrative itself, which as Ann Anagnost notes, “projects a utopic fiction onto the space of lived reality…through the classification of its characters into coded positions, representations that are moral exemplars, clusters of signs that must be made visible in order to circulate throughout the social body and therefore to produce the effects of power, making the party, in its turn, also supremely visible in a veritable and dazzling display of presence”. Anagnost, \textit{National Past-times}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{148} Correlations between the Party and its supporters as a metaphoric ‘family’ have been conducted by a number of different researches. Within the context of cinema specifically, John Weakland compares the images of invasion and resistance to patterns of family relationship and interaction. See Weakland, \textit{China Quarterly}, p. 462.
capturing it from an enemy soldier), its return at this point highlights his attainment of political verification and reward as orthodox subject.

Similarly, throughout much of Red Children the central protagonists (a group of six capricious children) initially ignore the guidance of authorities in order to engage in their own secret resistive adventures. As the narrative progresses and they are gradually recognised by the Eighth Route Army, they similarly realign their activities towards more politically orthodox pursuits. At the text’s dramatic conclusion the children make a penultimate contribution by rescuing guerrilla leader Jin, facilitating the reintegration of Eighth Route forces and thus ensuring final success over the enemy. The progressive redirection of the children’s activities from infantile fantasy towards regulated sentiment effectively reaffirms the authority and legacy of resistive discourse. Furthermore, much like Zhang-ga, the romantic focus on childhood sublimation to authority reinforces the legitimating potential of Socialism as an encompassing discourse.

Significations of childhood figures within combat films of Maoist variants are not only characterised by adolescence and development, but are similarly framed by familial interactions and interpretations. This is of particular relevance to resistance narratives throughout this period, where familial institutions emerge as sub-textual devices of romantic and re-affirmed orthodoxy. To this extent, an account of familial structures and regulations in combat narratives of this phase is required.
A particularly ubiquitous narrative signifier throughout revolutionary combat films, families are predominantly located as markers of initial fracture and dislocation within text. This is especially prevalent in *Coconut Tree Song* and *Chicken-feather Letter*, where the familial unit is separated by war and subsequently reunited through resistive agency and endeavour. Within both these films, Socialist agents facilitate familial reunion as a romanticised reward for prescription to orthodoxy and regulation. In *Coconut Tree Song* (as detailed earlier), this is affirmed through the central protagonist Xiu-mei, who experiences familial fracture as her husband joins the resistance effort. Upon fearing for his demise she liaises with local guerrilla forces in order to locate and eventually rescue him from enemy encapsulation. Her selfless devotion (which marks her activation within the film) is dually rewarded at narrative conclusion where she is reunited with both her husband and long lost father Wang, who arrives as the local resistive Commander.

Similarly in *Chicken-feather Letter*, the interaction between childhood protagonist Hai-wa and his father (a local guerrilla leader) is highly mediated and romanticised. His father bestows upon him a scouting mission at the text’s initiation whereby the delivery of the letter (containing strategic information) is dually fuelled by collective desire (aiding resistive effort, contributing to national defence) and personal implication (to assist and satisfy his father). Upon successfully delivering the letter Hai-wa is reunited with his family and friends, whereby in presence of the Eighth Route Army he is hugged and emphatically thrown into the air. To this extent, the military (and by association the Communist Party) is again represented as a mythical and
romantic force, whereby through resistive action the familial unit is secured, reaffirmed and enhanced.

The significance of sublimating childhood and familial entities within structures of organised ideology is symptomatic of cultural and representational policies within China during the Maoist era. To this degree, it is the explicit conditioning of children and families towards regulated norms that is characteristic of the cinematic industry generally and resistance mode specifically throughout this variant. Moreover, these symptomatic developments are framed by regulated and romantic styles of filmmaking, projecting a politically orthodox and institutional envisioning of Chinese nationhood.

**Landscape in the Regulated Combat Variant**

Landscape functions as a site of critical importance in the cultural negotiation and delineation of the modern Chinese nation. Emerging originally as a discursive element within the realm of painting, during the Maoist era it was dominantly adapted to other cultural mediums, specifically drama and cinema.\(^{149}\) As a filmic and narrative device, landscape is more than just a physical topography or ‘setting’ within text. Rather it surfaces as a cultural construct, one inherently embedded in collective forms of national

imagination and identification. Landscape itself is thus inherently iconic, linked to collective projections, interpretations and cultural consciousness.\textsuperscript{150}

During the revolutionary phase of Chinese filmmaking, the magnitude of landscape as a predominant and overarching cinematic element is most discernable within focus on a specific genre. Accordingly, I shall explore the development of a regulated and romanticised cinematic landscape within Maoist combat films, examining it as symptomatic of prevailing statist orthodoxies. In particular I aim to investigate the specific relationship that heroes, enemies and collaborators share with the landscape itself and its role in projecting a regulated Socialist vision. This process will entail an identification of landscape as a site of legitimacy, validating and centralising dominant discourses whilst distancing and invalidating alternative ideologies.

\textit{Heroes, Enemies and Collaborators in the Regulated Landscape}

Throughout combat films of the revolutionary era resistive activity is effectively bolstered through its connection with ruralised landscapes, ensuring representational legitimacy and centrality. The depiction of romantic heroes as naturalised figures within a mythically constructed space serves to further reinforce the Socialist vision and its post-1949 legacy under Mao.\textsuperscript{151} In close examination of \textit{Guerrillas on the Railroad} this symbolic interaction of landscape and Party elements in active co-operation is distinctly evident. This is illustrated as resistive hero Liu is captured laying in dense scrub after

\textsuperscript{150} For more developed detail of this ‘iconic’ process see Stephanie Donald, \textit{Theory, Culture and Society}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{151} This essentially has its roots in cinema as a visualised medium, one associated with painting and poetry. See Catherine Yi-Yu Cho Woo, \textit{Perspectives on Chinese Cinema}, pp. 21-29. And Stephanie Donald, \textit{ibid.}, pp. 97-112.
sustaining an injury during a guerrilla attack. Decribed in a series of medium
close-ups, Liu is framed and camouflaged from enclosing enemy forces (who
are searching for him) by bush scrub and long grass. The symbolic sheltering
of the protagonist hero by this native local landscape reinforces the romantic
fusion of landscape and Party as a force of mythic potency.

This harmonised interaction of resistive forces with rural landscape is
extended to a further degree in Tunnel Warfare, where guerrilla forces are
metaphorically protected from their enemies by the hidden tunnels that the
film’s title proffers. The tunnels are initially employed within the narrative as
a protective device utilised to evade the Japanese army. As the narrative
progresses however and the local resistors join up with an Eighth Route Army
detachment, the tunnels are transformed into sites of military attack and
assault. The revelation of this stratagem itself, realised through the facilitation
of Socialist devices, serves to reinforce the validation of Maoist ideology as
inherently naturalised and regulated.152

Contrasted to images of inherent and naturalised legitimacy detailed above in
relation to resistive forces, the enemy are primarily de-stabilised and de-
deligitimated in Chinese landscapes. In specific terms, the Japanese are
progressively marked by their explicit foreignness and unnatural threat to the

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152 Compared to many other resistance narratives Tunnel Warfare follows a more instructive
or documentary style. The feature of a prologue that clearly outlines the film as ‘educational’,
and use of montage sequences that invoke documentary forms (including both hand-held and
continuous shots) mark it as distinct from conventional modes. The narrative however
remains highly standardised, reinforcing the romantic capacity of Maoist orthodoxy.
Looking closely at War of Mines this is suggested through the visual introduction of the enemy itself within the text, where a medium shot tracks their advance towards the village and its subsequent pillaging. As a Japanese field officer orders his troops to advance, the sharp sound of gunfire is coupled with a long shot of mountain terrain. The effect is discomforting and disorienting, alienating the enemy forces by registering their disruption within the Chinese landscape (and therefore ideological consciousness).

Moreover, the enemy presence within the topography of War of Mines borders upon themes of deviance and perversity. At one point in the narrative, after being outwitted by resistive forces, a Japanese field officer is captured frustratingly chopping at a tree with his ‘samurai’ sword, where in the following image he uproots another. This sequence not only implies mistreatment of landscape as a direct threat to Socialist legitimacy, but it similarly marks this threat as irrational, disrespectful and uncivilised. It is worth noting that this officer is later defeated within the process of resistive action when he is confronted by village elder Shi, who determinately wields a Chinese sword. This time when the enemy officer draws his weapon a naturalised and legitimised force emphatically disposes of him.

153 Ross Gibson encounters this in contemplation of ‘natural’ cinematic landscape and its underlying function. As he states, “The existence of the land in the image works to authenticate the actions of the figures in the landscape...as soon as geography is represented and dramatised with images, sounds and stories, it is no longer land. Rather it is landscape; it has been translated and utilised as an element of myth”. Gibson, South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, pp. 74-75.
The condition of landscape as a contested and dominated entity in revolutionary combat variants represents the ambiguous yet oppressive presence of the ‘foreign’ enemy. Equally significant is the projection of collaborators throughout these narrative segments. In addition to their physical marginality detailed earlier, collaborators location in the terrain is equally peripheral. As with their Japanese counterparts, the symbolic *hanjian* body is effectively exposed and marginalised in its interaction with Chinese landscapes.

This is indicatively articulated in *Tunnel Warfare* through the inherent suspicion and apprehension that *hanjian* figures display when encountering the ‘protective’ tunnels of Kao village. Featured initially as resistive impostors, these collaborators attempt to uncover the locations of the tunnels and thus hinder resistive efforts. Upon ultimately discovering the channels, their suspicious leader (Sun) insists that Chuan-bao enter first, followed by a bullied subordinate. His aggressive manner (as detailed earlier) captured in angled medium shot not only exposes hierarchy and inequality within *hanjian* discourse, but also implies an innate dislocation from national legitimacy. At a later point as the Japanese encounter the tunnels, Officer Yamada (apprehensively peeking in) similarly bullies one of his subordinates to assess and explore them. In each case these intimidated underlings are trapped and killed in the underground passageways, falling victims to superior and naturalised resistive strategy. The enemy alliance (both Japanese and collaborative forces) is thus ultimately nullified, rejected in its attempts to
comprehend and dominate the symbolic landscape, reduced to a marginal and ineffectual positioning.\textsuperscript{154}

\textit{Rural Landscape as Regulated Centre}

As cinematic landscape was steadily cultivated and regulated during this period a significant geographical polarity developed. This specifically manifest in combat films of revolutionary variants where the rural landscape is mythologised and centralised as dominant. In this manner, resistance narratives of the Maoist era strictly conform to cultural policy of the time, rigidly focussing on peasant communities and their inevitable interaction with political ideologies. The comparative urban landscapes (as depicted in earlier cinematic forms) are essentially marginalised to this degree, whereby they are commonly absented or contrastingly feature to represent industrial and capital excess.\textsuperscript{155}

Enactments of battle and combat conducted in rural landscapes thus symbolise the negotiation and affirmation of a distinctly Maoist national imaginary during this era. Accordingly, resistance narratives of this period re-centre the rural hinterland and its ideological connotations, through a process of depicting and ultimately overcoming imperialist threat. The approach taken by the respective forces, the physical location and interactions within the

\textsuperscript{154} This inefficiency is in contrast to the Hollywood combat film, where the Japanese figures appropriate the landscape and assimilate it towards their own needs. See Kane, \textit{Visions of War}, pp. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{155} Zhang Yingjin outlines this process in detail noting that, “Mao’s rewriting of the rural-urban problematic changed the political structure of urban and rural discourse in modern China…the ambivalences that had previously existed in configurations of, city and country were forced to dissolve from the 1940s on in an ever-renewed process of politicisation, which favoured clear-cut ideological solutions”. Zhang, \textit{The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film}, p. 20.
landscape reinforce romantic notions of polarity and difference. The heroes naturalised and resolute strategy is directly contrasted to the both the enemies foreignness and the collaborators incapacity. Similarly, as opposed to the haphazard Japanese menace and irrational destruction, the organised resistance model is definitively prefaced as a site of preservation and conservation.

Landscape does not however function only as an ideological verifier in combat films of this variant. It is equally posited as a key element in the deliverance and register of revolutionary enactment itself. Throughout these films as resistance mounts and ultimately culminates in liberation, the rural landscape is symbolically rescued and the nation effectively assured. As its contestation and suppression is inevitably overcome, a sense of nostalgic normality and futurity is suggested.\(^\text{156}\) The resistance narrative thus concludes with structured sequences of communal celebration and reunion, symbolically framed by the landscape itself (as in texts including War of Mines, Tunnel Warfare, Guerrillas on the Plane). Correspondingly, throughout revolutionary variants the iconographical landscape is romantically regulated, fulfilling a signified political and discursive role. The negotiation, protection and ultimate liberation of this entity serves to reaffirm the rural village as an allegory of ideological and political hegemony.

\(^{156}\) This is emphasised to a degree through the depiction of a seemingly unambiguous and unified past. As Anthony Smith notes, the importance of this process (re-tailoring the past in a nostalgic form) is central to the affirmation and legacy of present agency and authority. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations. Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986, pp. 177-179.
The importance of rural landscapes as iconographic signifiers throughout these combat films must not only be conceptualised on a textual level, but similarly framed by production factors and policies. This is especially so within the resistance narrative, considering that these texts suggestively denote and re-constitute the past. Invoking resistance landscape within context of the regulated cinematic industry of the Maoist era is thus indelibly marked by degrees of ideological re-writing and signification. As Stephanie Donald argues of this variant, “landscape provides not just a backdrop for the drama of history, but becomes a process of rewriting or reinscribing history”.157

The steady depiction of landscape iconography throughout the genre in this period, invoking themes of rural nostalgia and resistive polarity is thus highly symbolic. The didactic enforcement of revolutionary discourse, couched within naturalised and archaic imagery, ultimately functions to regulate Maoist discourse and its mythological legacy during the early Socialist period. As romantic verifiers of ideological legitimacy, resistive landscapes are recurrently portrayed as primary elements of a specifically regulated combat film mode.

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Combat Case Study - *Guerrillas on the Railroad*

As a means of articulating and referencing the combat film and its regulation throughout Maoist variants, the themes I have discussed hitherto in this chapter require attribution to wider cinematic developments in China. To this extent, I shall scrutinize and investigate one specific combat text as symptomatic of revolutionary norms and praxes enacted from 1949 to 1966. Of particular significance, this segment shall examine one film as indicative of developing modes of Socialist orthodoxy and hegemony.

In this format of investigation *Guerrillas on the Railroad* surfaces as a representative text, prescribing to dominant modes of Socialist filmmaking and production throughout the revolutionary era. Moreover, the film is illustrative of a regulated resistive imaginary, projecting discursive and generic elements of combat towards indicative orthodoxy. This manifests emblematically in arenas of both form and content, aligned with predominant themes of ‘revolutionary romanticism’, including the perception of cinema as a tool of political ‘education’.\(^{158}\) Directed by Zhao Ming, a ‘third generation’ Chinese filmmaker, *Guerrillas on the Railroad* adheres to policies and directives of cinema as endorsed and enforced by Socialist agency.\(^{159}\)

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\(^{158}\) As Chen Yating notes of the regulated and predetermined nature of Maoist combat films, “Both the artistic form and ideological content of these films are clear and striking… In such films the war is depicted as a struggle between light and darkness, in which revolutionary optimism always prevails”. Chen, *Chinese Literature*, p. 116.

\(^{159}\) Zhu Ying accounts for this collective of ‘third generation’ filmmakers as the “nucleus” of 1950s and 60s Chinese filmmaking. In this manner, he portrays them as instigators and assurers of a regulated style, one gravitating to modes of prevailing orthodoxy. Zhu, *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reforms*, p. 48.
The regulated and didactic mode of *Guerrillas on the Railroad* can be ascertained from the film’s prescriptive beginning with the presence of a written prologue and enigmatically styled credits. On initial account these elements may seem innocuous and insignificant (as background for narrative introduction), but framed within the scope of ‘revolutionary romanticism’ these features are indicative of Maoist cinematic styles.\(^{160}\)

The prologue is transposed upon an image of railway tracks, detailing the socio-political background of the narrative (set during the War of Resistance, where guerrilla units were created to disrupt Japanese imperialism), effectively framing the film in a specific time (the eve of revolutionary emancipation) and space (the archaic and mythologised landscape of rural China).\(^{161}\) Indicative of the Maoist combat mode, this form of address encases the narrative within themes of political orthodoxy and idealisation. The prologue (surfacing throughout the Maoist combat narrative in either verbal or written forms) sutures the overarching history of revolutionary determinism (i.e. War of Resistance and ultimately Socialist liberation) into the particular text of *Guerrillas on the Railroad*, rendering it a film of orthodoxy and hegemony.

\(^{160}\) The feature of this written prologue in particular (as evident across the entire range of combat productions) is symptomatic of revolutionary modes, where emphasis as outlined by Paul Clark, was on the ‘literary’ quality and adaptation of national cinema. Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, p. 64.

\(^{161}\) Throughout Maoist variants these enigmatic sequences would commonly frame narrative initiations of combat films (including in *War of Mines*, *Chicken-Feather Letter* and *Guerrillas on the Plane*), where the emphasis on a collectively idealised past was marked. In this manner, a distinctly romantic and regulated mode of progression could be enforced.
This theme of rigid encapsulation is equally demonstrated in the following sequence, where this registering prologue transitions to the film’s credits. As the superimposed text dissolves, a train rushes through frame (appearing side-on) whereby the image shifts to a medium close-up of its pistons and wheels in motion. At this point upbeat drum music can be heard as the credits are transposed over the moving train. Emblematic of romanticised cinematic forms, this sequence immediately registers the film as a revolutionary variant, where the didacticism of the train’s projection (as an icon of modernisation, industrialisation and bureaucracy) is harnessed within orthodox forms.  

This style renders the narrative a regulated variant, not only foreshadowing plot (Socialist agents enacting combat and resistance against the enemy) but the symptomatic conclusion as well (gaining control of the railways and harnessing the potency of technology). This mode of textual enactment is characteristic of Maoist cinematic discourses at large (especially pronounced in consideration of cinema as a tool of ‘education’), dually framing narrative within spheres of revolutionary determinism and its enigmatic realisation.

Features of colour and lighting are seminal aspects of textual projection and illustration within Maoist cinematic discourse. *Guerrillas on the Railroad* serves as no exception to this, whereby these elements are employed to a

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162 This articulation of the railway as an enigmatic signifier of industrialisation and modernity is effectively fashioned in this manner towards regulated and orthodox renderings. As Paul Clark has noted in response to other metaphoric sequences of revolutionary didacticism (i.e. of waves crashing into the shore), these moments of symbolic enactment infuse Maoist narratives with romantic agency. Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, p. 115.

163 Moreover, as Zhang Yingjin notes of this overarching methodology, the impact of these narratives sought to, “rewrite the history of modern China as a teleological process in which the Communists led the Chinese people from ‘victory to victory’”. Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, p. 193.
characteristic and regulative degree. The feature of black and white here (as in the overwhelming majority of texts produced in the years 1949-1966) marks the text as a revolutionary variant, subscribing to predominant modes of generic and cinematic orthodoxy.

Elements of shadow and lighting are similarly employed to a systematised degree, informed by specific themes of revolutionary polarity and difference. This manifests within *Guerrillas on the Railroad* as a means of differentiating between emblematically ‘bad’ and ‘good’ characters.164 Whereas Lieutenant Okamura is captured at points as an obscured figure (commonly his face is shaded or only half-lit) the guerrillas are contrastingly emphasised as luminous (full key lighting, bright and clear). This mode effectively subscribes to the ‘revolutionary romantic’ format, exacerbating ideological and narrative polarities through idealised cinematic form and style.

Just as aspects of lighting play a key part in identifying and regulating Maoist cinematic norms, other features of visualisation are similarly impacting. As detailed throughout this chapter, presences of regulated and enigmatic costumes fulfil a symptomatic role in narrative iconography and identification. Indicative of a revolutionised imaginary, the protagonists of *Guerrillas on the Railroad* all appear in rural peasant garb, costumes infused with overtones of

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164 Leo Ou-fan Lee allocates this as a prevalent characteristic of the revolutionary narrative itself, where “emphasis is focussed on struggle - the clash of two forces or two ‘lines’ resulting in the triumph of the good over the evil”. In this manner the feature of overwhelming and romanticised binaries are key aspects of the Maoist cinematic form. See Lee, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, p. 15.
Socialist didacticism, glorification and orthodoxy. Whilst members of the group must provisionally adopt alternative clothing in the text (including decadent hanjian style and enemy uniforms), by the climax of the narrative (resistive success) the guerrillas all resume their rural peasant garb.

Similarly, enemy and collaborative figures are characterised by stereotyped appearances (guizi and hanjian respectively), where their costumes gravitate towards themes of dual illegitimacy. Whereas the Japanese are visualised by menacing threat (Okamura wears pantaloons and thick black boots), the collaborators materialise in decadent modes (white pantsuit, Western hat). This form of regulated polarity is symptomatic not merely of the revolutionary combat variant, but similarly of wider cinematic trends throughout the Maoist era, where costumes are infused with iconographic and signifying capacity.

The features of cinematic framing, combined with elements of camera angle and shot, persist throughout revolutionary cinematic styles as modes of symptomatic regulation and orthodoxy. This is particularly ubiquitous within the combat genre format, where parallels between narrative action and iconographic visualisation are distinctly pronounced. Looking at Guerrillas on the Railroad these devices feature prevalently, aligned with prevailing Maoist norms and projections of didactic cinematic function.

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165 This effectively prescribes to predominant aesthetics throughout the revolutionary period, whereby Zhang Yingjin critiques the styling of protagonists’ bodies as ‘ritualised’ and ‘self-conscious’. In this manner, heroic protagonists are cast into a romantically regulated and orthodox frame. Zhang, Screening China, p. 214.

166 As detailed throughout this chapter, these icons (boots, whips, pantsuits) were projected within a binary sensibility that related to prevalent modes of both class and political-based identifications. Accordingly, the respective characters adhered to predictable and recognisable ‘models’.
Characterised by the predominant use of static medium and medium-close-ups shots the text emphasises a rigid frame, where protagonists are centrally placed.\footnote{The attention to this mode of framing (use of medium shots, centrally placed) is emblematic of the revolutionary cinematic style, steadily influenced by leftists trends of the pre-1949 period, adapted (along with other characteristic of mise-en-scène) towards Socialist aesthetics and principles.} Even during combat ‘action’ sequences, the guerrillas occupy gravitating roles, where sparse camera movement (limited panning and tracking) is employed primarily to refocus the protagonists within the frame. Moreover, the utilisation of long shots and close-up within Guerrillas on the Railroad is rare, whereby emphasis is conditionally sutured to characteristic effect (i.e. long shot mainly to register landscapes, close-ups only for emotive and climactic expressions). The overarching impact of these formal components corresponds to the ‘revolutionary romantic’ cinematic style (where close ups and long shots are employed to a correlative degree), adhering to emphasis on hegemonic and discrete modes.

In relaying the stylistic regulation and ‘romanticism’ I have argued as central to the Maoist combat mode in China, the features of editing and montage are integral. These elements fulfil a seminal role in the organization and enactment of specific texts, correlating dually to predominant notions of ‘revolutionary romanticism’ and cinematic discourse in general.\footnote{Furthermore, these aspects related to culturally specific adaptations and utilisations of cinematic trends in China. See Catherine Yi-Yu Cho Woo, Perspectives on Chinese Cinema, pp. 21-29.} Throughout Guerrillas on the Railroad the presence of editing and montage is explicitly marked, ultimately symptomatic of discursive revolutionary norms.
The film itself is quickly paced, covering multiple strands of combat strategy and enactment (over many months) in a distinctly regulated duration (79 minutes). Editing thus plays a seminal role in suturing the text into a taut format, where the presence of fades, dissolves and wipes complement standard cuts. The nature and recurrence of these editing modes similarly subscribe to a romanticised cinematic format, effectively mythologising and enigmatising the narrative itself.\(^{169}\) In *Guerrillas on the Railroad* these editing techniques (fades, dissolves, wipes) recurrently surface after sequences of expanded strategy and organization, linked to scenes that successfully demonstrate these tactics. One such edit involves Liu climactically organising a mission, where a wipe leads into its direct enactment. In this manner, these editing techniques not only highlight compacting of time/space in narrative, but they similarly display the mythologised efficiency and potency of resistive agents.

In a similar vein the specific feature of montage segments are employed in a regulative manner within *Guerrillas on the Railroad*. The requisite sequences detailed earlier in this chapter of resistive productivity and enactment, along with that of enemy violation and destruction are present, enacted in wholly orthodox modes. All these segments are characterised by simultaneous planes of action, rapid editing (including standard cuts and numerous wipes) and didactic music, which characterise the regulative employment of montage.

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\(^{169}\) This adheres to predominant implementations of filmic style throughout the Maoist era, where focuses on enigmatic and didactic modes are especially marked. As identified by Leo Ou-fan Lee, this amounts to “the source of films impact as more ‘dramatic’ than purely visual”. Lee, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, p. 13.
throughout the revolutionary era. A particularly austere manifestation of this montage mode is realised in the text as Okamura and his fellow soldiers burn the local village after uncovering the guerrillas’ secret identity. The combined use of contemporaneous action (numerous soldiers are shown torching the village), quick editing (interspersed by images of Okamura presiding over the events and laughing at progressive stages of violation) and edifying music (anxious and tension filled), serve to locate the enemy activity as monstrous and debasing. As with the progressive use of montage throughout revolutionary styles, this sequence enigmatises narrative action as romantic and regulative, effectively sutured into dominant hegemonic modes.

The elements of music (both diegetic and non-diegetic) are employed to a predominant effect throughout Maoist cinematic modes. The combat film in particular is characterised by regulative forms, where music fulfils a dually structural and enigmatic function. In Guerrillas on the Railroad this mode manifests distinctly, where music emerges in steadily romanticised manners. The musical score of this text corresponds to revolutionary styles, imposing didactic atmosphere throughout narrative progression.

To this degree music surfaces throughout the film to an instructive and directive degree, gravitating to dominant and orthodox sympathies. For

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170 Though employed in a steadily orthodox context, this is not to suggest that cinematic style necessarily prescribed to definitively hegemonic or proletarian modes. As well-known scriptwriter and Party figure Xia Yan outlined, the potential for modes of “poetic montage” pervaded filmmaking throughout this era, potentially eroding and critiquing regulative intent. Xia, ‘Problems of the Film Industry’, China Quarterly 2, 1969, p. 71.

171 The predominance of music throughout revolutionary cinema harks back to 1930s period, as identified by Jay Leyda, and the formulation of a nationalised filmic mode. Adapted in the post-1949 era as a device of romantic spectacle and enigmatisation (particularly prevalent in the combat genre), musical scores featured in regulated and orthodox styles. Leyda, Dianying, p. 94.
example, in the sequence detailing Liu’s recovery after being shot, a soft melancholic style (mournful, elegiac) is employed to underscore this temporary setback. Upon returning to the guerrillas however and launching an attack on the railway, a more didactic and uplifting tune is utilised (militant, enigmatic). Corresponding to the prevailing mode of cinematic ‘romanticism’, the musical score of *Guerrillas on the Railroad* serves as an orthodox textual marker and indicator.

In addition to features of non-diegetic melody, music surfaces in *Guerrillas on the Railroad* in diegetic modes. This is presented through elements of folk song, as one of the guerrillas (Xia-bo) breaks into spontaneous verse whilst the group recuperate from a resistive mission. Adhering to the romanticised tones of the film, the upbeat melody details the guerrillas struggle and their ultimate belief in victory over the enemy. Beginning with this sole figure (accompanied by his traditional lute) the fellow guerrillas enthusiastically join in to form a fervent chorus.172

This is steadily enforced by the characteristic style employed to convey the song. The sequence is shot in definitive brightness, with registering images of the protagonists’ interaction (in medium and medium close-ups) as the lyrics are superimposed at the bottom of the frame. As a model of revolutionary idealism this segment adheres to orthodox projection, idealising the Socialist

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172 Symptomatic of ‘romantic’ stylistic modes, this song idealises these characters unequivocal adherence to and verification of, Socialist orthodoxy. Here the emphasis on troop morale and ideological invigoration as a fundamentally enacted policy is placed into a mythological matrix. As Chen Yating notes in this narrative mode, “popular support counts far more than superior weapons. The human factor is the decisive one in the strategy and tactics of a people’s war, which must lead to victory”. Chen, *Chinese Literature*, p. 117.
community as a mythologised space of camaraderie, perseverance and legitimacy. Musical interludes are symptomatic of the revolutionary cinematic mode, where compositions emerge didactically praising Socialist discourses and its agents. In this manner, *Guerrillas on the Railroad* prescribes to romantically regulated notions of Maoist production.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, elements of rhetoric and dialogue fulfil a seminal role in the development of combat genre aesthetics. Correlatively, within the sphere of revolutionary cinematic production at large, these rudiments are equally significant. In reference to *Guerrillas on the Railroad* factors of narrative speech and dialogue are predominant, ultimately linked to themes of orthodoxy. The stylised segmentation of dialogue and its attribution to particular protagonists is symptomatic of regulated narrative content.

Furthermore, its delivery in specific, identifiable and predictable manners adheres to established notions of cinematic form. The guerrillas of the text (Liu and Li in particular) utilise romantic phrasing, whereby their content and form gravitate toward an idealised heroism. For example as Li sanctions the group into an official branch of the Eighth Route Army and bestows their first resistive mission, he notes, “We will strike through their heart like a dagger!”.

173 Esther Yau has interestingly located songs in revolutionary cinema as “phonic expressions of the subaltern”. In this context, these elegiac compositions surface as indicative modes of sublimation, gravitating towards hegemonic implementations of filmic style and praxis. Yau, ‘Compromised Liberation: The Politics of Class in Chinese Cinema of the 1950s’, in David James and Rick Berg (eds), *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 154.

174 The importance of orthodox dialogue and language throughout revolutionary cinema (in terms of both form and content) was formulated in accordance with Mao’s policy on literature and art in general, where emphasis on ‘typical’ characters was marked. Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, pp. 94-104.
Contrastingly the Japanese (led by Okamura) verbalise in dissenting manners, where their substance and delivery are steadily menacing. Upon being given the mission to eliminate the guerrillas in the region he aggressively proclaims to his Commanding Officer, “For the glory of the Imperial Army I vow to exterminate all resistance by whatever means needed!” The nature and delivery of this dialogue implies an inherently fatalistic force, one of monstrous and direct threat to resistive agents.

The presence of direct and rhetorical speech as enacted by protagonists throughout *Guerrillas on the Railroad* similarly articulates polarity, whereby dialogue is recurrently employed as a device of classification and legitimation. Moreover, dialogue is proportionately mediated within the text, where emblematic characters (i.e. central figures of Liu, Li, Okamura) are the predominant sources of espousal. This mode of dialogue in *Guerrillas on the Railroad* is not specifically limited to the combat form. Rather, the stylistic features (of romanticised content, delivery and rhetoric) are characteristic of revolutionary cinematic aesthetics, effectively directed towards conformity and regulation. In terms of definitive narrative and dialogue, the ‘revolutionary romantic’ form commonly prefaces emblematic and ‘strong’ characters, progressively enunciated as didactic agents of Socialist authority and idealisation.176

175 For an account of this within cultural policy and praxis of the Maoist era in general (incorporating other mediums such as print, theatre and radio), see Ci Jiwei, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 73-75.
176 In this manner elements of romanticism were definitively employed in cinematic styles, where characteristics of speech were projected (along with features of appearance and action) towards what Chris Berry notes as ‘grossly simplified’ forms. In this manner, the emphasis on predictable and stereotyped modes of identification was especially marked. Berry, *Cinema Journal*, p. 55.
Articulations of cinematic location and landscape surface throughout the Maoist era as spaces of analytical significance and orthodoxy. Throughout combat films and resistance narratives, emphasis on rural villages and spaces of action are prefaced. This is symptomatic of filmic discourse at large between 1949-1966, where national and cultural imaginaries are firmly embedded in rural schemas, adhering to wider Socialist policies and praxes.

Emblematic of this *Guerrillas on the Railroad* is set in the Chinese countryside, predominantly focussing on local villages and their attempt to reclaim their landscape from the Japanese, as symbolised by the struggle for the railways. Subsequently the local village (where the guerrillas originate from), the railroads (controlled by the enemy) and the house of Fang-lin’s wife (where the resistors seek refuge) constitute hegemonic places of narrative action.

At narrative inception the Japanese control the railroads, where the guerrillas operate covertly in their village, soon to be evacuated under Imperial threat. Upon escape they find temporary refuge at the home of Fanglin’s wife, where they are given provisions (Liu recuperates from his battle-wound there) until they resume resistive missions. In correlation with revolutionary combat modes, the guerrillas are initially an undermined and marginalised force. As the narrative progresses however, they gradually liberate segments of Japanese terrain (with the assistance of wider Eighth Route detachments) until the penultimate reclamation of both the village and the railway lines are
ensured. In this manner, *Guerrillas on the Railroad* subscribes to predominant themes of both the combat exemplar and Maoist cinematic modes, effectively romanticising, celebrating and extolling the ‘ruralisation’ of Socialist China.

The iconography of specific objects and items throughout the combat film from 1949-1966, surface as distinct features of revolutionary regulation and orthodoxy in Maoist cinematic modes. This process of iconic signification is not just limited to the combat genre, but rather indicative of prevailing cinematic norms, with attention to hegemonic and ideologically definitive markers. Investigating *Guerrillas on the Railroad* the manifestation of specific iconographies and significations is apparent. This especially materialises in reference to key protagonists, whose identity and status are affirmed through visual accompaniment. The feature of discursive objects is predominant to this extent, whereby differing attributes are assigned to the polar forces.

Whereas the guerrillas are characterised by proletarian and civilian items (such as Liu who appears smoking pipe or Xia-bo accompanied by his lute) the enemy contrastingly feature as repressive figures of militancy (Okamura carries a whip and samurai sword, appearing throughout in white gloves and army boots). Similarly the feature of the text’s collaborator (who is unnamed) is identified in polarity to the guerrillas’, accentuated by decadence (silk

\[\text{177 This reclamation is celebrated in the final image of the film itself, where a frontal medium shot (angled upwards) captures the guerrillas enigmatically waving to the villagers from the moving train. As an emblematic image of revolutionary didacticism, this concluding shot is indicative of regulated modes (defeating the enemy, reclaiming the railways) as projected in a romantic form.}\]
pantsuit, pocket watch, Western style hat). The combined impact of these icons correlates to a regulated cinematic mode, where emphasis on particular binaries and differences are recurrently marked.\(^{178}\) In context of wider romantic modes in filmmaking, these iconographic accoutrements subscribe to a regulative revolutionary imaginary, one idealising the legitimate and endorsed legacy of Maoist bureaucracy.

In accounting for narrative foreshadowing and regulation as detailed in the earlier passages of this case study (in response to the text’s initiation), the presence of personal sublimation is another characteristic of *Guerrillas on the Railroad* invoking revolutionary cinematic aesthetics. This manifests dually in the text, as protagonists ideally sacrifice and submit individual endeavour in order to ensure overarching Socialist agency.\(^{179}\) The initial instance of this emerges shortly after the group seize a number of rifles from the enemy. Here one of the members (Wang), an enthusiastic but tempestuous figure, voices his intent to take immediate revenge on the Japanese with their newfound weapons. Seeing Wang’s agitation and restlessness, Liu steps in to calm him down and reaffirm the necessity of waiting for the Eighth Route detachment to lead an organised and authorised effort. Similarly after Liu is nursed to health by Fang-lin’s wife, where a romantic possibility is suggested (affirmed by exchanged glances and dual concern for each other), its enactment is not realised in the text.

\(^{178}\) This correlates to Paul Clark’s notification of ‘idealised’ characterisation in the Maoist cinematic imaginary. Consequently, emphasis on these qualities and features of difference are marked according to orthodox discursive methodologies. Clark, *Chinese Cinema*, p. 105.

\(^{179}\) As documented generally within the industry by John Weakland, this revolved around a fundamental submission of ‘personal initiative and responsibility’ to collective will. Weakland, ‘Themes in Chinese Communist Films’, *American Anthropologist* 68, 1966, p. 482.
In this manner, characters willingly and romantically sublimate personal desires into resistive action, whereby concern for collective fulfilment is ultimately prefaced. This narrative mode is not only characteristic of heroic idealisation within the combat film (as detailed in other films of this chapter), but is equivalently symptomatic of narrative procedure at large throughout the revolutionary period, where characters romantically restrain and contain their own desires in aid of contribution to the Socialist collective.\footnote{As noted earlier in this chapter, the effective sublimation of protagonists desires were ultimately ‘rewarded’ in revolutionary texts, as adjudicated by orthodox socio-political discourses (i.e. family reunions, collective integrations, celebrations of Socialist victory). Subsequently the ambivalence of personal subjugation was ideally and romantically directed towards overreaching hegemonic themes in narrative.}

The gravitating result of this case study has essentially located *Guerrillas on the Railroad* as an indicative film, symptomatic of both the Maoist combat film as well as wider cinematic dispositions throughout the revolutionary period. In this manner, the analysis of particular elements of form and content (of this resistance film) signifies overarching establishment in the industry, with definitive precipitations towards the regulation and conditioning of cinematic styles. This will be effectively negotiated and reetermined in the subsequent chapter, as an appreciation of post-Mao considerations, progressing towards ‘reformed’ and ‘new wave’ variants shall be enacted throughout the cinematic medium.
Conclusion

In conclusion this chapter has traced the development of the Chinese combat film in the Maoist period against a background of distinct social, cultural and political circumstances. In investigating the genre and its exemplification of a romanticised variant, this chapter has provided further detail into the nature of Chinese cinema in this period, in particular its emergence as a state nationalised industry of regulated and romanticised norms.

Marked in relation to previous filmic style and content, the attention to the representation of distinct genre elements focussed on the regulation and determination of heroes, enemies, collaborators, women, children, families and landscape has provoked further queries into the development of the combat film genre within China. This will be developed further within the following chapter and the progression to the initial post-Mao variant of the 1980s.
Chapter Three
1980s: The ‘Reformed’ Chinese Combat Film

Introduction

Throughout the previous chapter I discussed the development of the Chinese combat film from its instigation within Maoist rule (1949) leading up to the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), with explicit attention to the emergence of a distinct resistance genre. In particular, the chapter explored cinematic progressions in the context of wider political and national ideologies, referenced within a frame of statist orthodoxy and Communist regulation.

In this chapter my focus shifts to the initial phase of post-revolutionary reform in China (1980-1990), detailing significant changes within the combat variant and the cinematic medium at large. Identified progressively as a tool of historical rewriting and re-inscription, the film industry throughout this period was steadily restructured towards negotiated and reconstituted perspectives. It was during this time that the notion of a reformed or ‘new wave’ cinema, as a specific cultural praxis was explored and emphasised. Rooted in a dual process of cinematic innovation (both form and content) and cultural reconciliation, this ‘new wave’ embodied a distinct break from romanticised styles towards reformed modes. The combat film emerges in this context as

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182 For an expansive account of this and other general developments in the industry during this period see Zhu Ying, Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform, pp. 39-69.
a predominant and productive genre for analysis, one whose presence remains central to cinematic articulation, but is highly reconstituted and redetermined.
Narratological Analysis of the Reformed Combat Film

This chapter will thus explore transitions of the combat variant during the 1980s, noting distinctive trends towards restructured and reformed cinematic modes. This progression shall entail a generic investigation into reconfigured themes of narrative form, character type, gender roles, and visual iconography. Moreover, this process will encompass a detailed account of specific representations and cinematic constructions focussing on heroic protagonists; enemy figures; national collaborators; the role of women; allegories of children and families; and finally an account of the cinematic landscape as a reconstituted force. Furthermore, I shall examine the underlying significance of this period’s developments overall, both within the context of the changing film industry and of broader ideological reforms.

Heroes, Enemies and Collaborators in the Reformed Combat Variant

The initial phase of widespread reform in China was characterised by a process of cultural negotiation and reconfiguration, manifest in re-orientations of established forms of hegemony. 183 Throughout cinema especially, filmmakers consciously breached stylistic and formal models in favour of innovation and experimentation. The reconstitution of these filmic norms was particularly astute in the combat variant, characterised by gravitations towards renegotiated expectations and considerations. This restructure of established themes and styles (as represented by ‘regulated’ Maoist forms) was

183 Ironically, Shanghai critic Xu Jilin identifies this style of development as cyclical and recurrent throughout modern Chinese history, dating back to the period of the May Fourth movement. As Xu observes, “Whenever the paradigms of social and cultural systems undergo a process of renewal or change it is inevitable that there will be a period of disorientation…In China’s case the cultural crisis is part and parcel of the dilemmas of the society as a whole.” Xu, translated in Geremie Barmé, In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 55.
symptomatic of China’s overarching transformation during this period and its re-emergence within an international community.184

Throughout combat films of the 1980s established tendencies towards ideologically predictable and stereotyped characters were effectively transmuted into equivocal and ambiguous variants. This was particularly acute in depictions of heroes, enemies and collaborators, the characters argued thus far as central to generic and narrative formation. In tracing developments of the combat genre, the following section will investigate shifts in representations of these character types (paying specific attention to elements of appearance, speech and activity) as symbolic of a reconstituted collective imaginary. Furthermore, attention to cinematic changes and adaptations at large will be accounted for within the context of social, political and cultural reforms in China.

Reformed Heroes

In the fallout of a post-Cultural Revolution malaise throughout the 1980s, broad scale negotiations of constructed heroism and its differing forms were induced in China. To the same degree that the downfall of Mao’s legacy had demonstrated the fallibility of ‘personality cults’ and a political culture of excess, so too the principles of artistic idealisation and romanticism were steadily critiqued.185 Reformed cinematic variants encompassed an expansion

185 This progression was especially marked within the cinematic medium, where Chen Xiaoming charts shifts in form and style as emblematic of a ‘post-politics’ progression. To this degree, Chen formulates that during this phase revolutionary discourse was steadily critiqued, pushed to its limits and ultimately transformed into modernist expression. Chen, *boundary 2*, pp. 123-141.
of hegemonic themes and styles within the resistance narrative towards ambiguous and fractured renderings. This was symptomatic not just of the combat genre itself but of cinematic innovation in general at the time led by an emerging group of reform-era personnel, most specifically the infamous ‘fifth generation’ of Chinese filmmakers.186

The materialisation of ‘reformed’ heroes from de-centred, obscured and marginal positionings are characteristic of 1980s combat variants. Within this progression trends towards unofficial and demarcated protagonists, often in conventionally peripheral circumstances, feature prominently. The reconstruction of these historically absent and abstract figures, centring primarily on elements of heroic appearance, speech and activity mark this process of transformation. Reformed heroes thus manifest throughout 1980s variants in a dual sense; fracturing the hegemony of Maoist cultural modes whilst articulating restructured and reconstituted alternatives. In this manner, focussing on the multifaceted manners in which resistive heroes are reconstructed, provides an opportunity to chart adjustments within the genre principally and modes of cinematic practice in general.

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**Heroic Appearance**

In the realm of cinematic discourse, regulated iconographies of heroic appearance and its idealisation are largely reconfigured throughout 1980s combat variants. Correspondingly, emerging filmmakers steadily invert and appropriate established signifiers of Socialist didacticism in favour of composite and re-determined perspectives. The resistance narrative of this initial reform era thus heralds complex negotiations of heroism, whereby emphasis is placed more on sentiments and predicaments of protagonists, rather than their appearance in politically orthodox or subjective stances.\(^{187}\)

This modification of generic form is explicitly projected in reconstructions of conventional attire and clothing, where regulations of class-based and politically distinctive uniforms are effectively disrupted. One area this specifically manifests is in projections of Nationalist figures (Guomindang, KMT), identified and marked within the variant by their uniforms. Consequently, the materialisation and visualisation of KMT resistance heroes throughout the genre (classified by these uniforms) serves to deconstruct and negotiate regulated cinematic models. The symbolic duality of these characters appearance, labelled in both marginal (uniform) and central (resistive) contexts is highly symbolic.\(^{188}\)

\(^{187}\) As Hong Junhao observed, the 1980s model “attempted to treat war-related people more like average human beings rather than politically-labelled heroes”. To this extent, reconfigured heroic types occupied a symbolically modern and negotiated space. See Hong, *Asian Cinema*, p. 99.

\(^{188}\) From a national perspective this diversion from Socialist orthodoxy was impacting. As He Baogang & Guo Yingjie have identified, the emergence of alternative heroic characters, those who are “Chinese rather than Communists”, underlined a challenge to the Party legacy and its politicising tendencies. What subsequently manifest were protagonists identified by ‘national’ rather than ‘class’ consciousness. He & Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratisation in China*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, p. 55.
This iconographic restructure is explicitly demonstrated within *Xue zhan Taierzhuang/The Battle of Taierzhuang* (1986, dir. Yang Guangyuan & Zhai Junjie), focussing on a mass division of Nationalist forces engaged in protracted battle with Japanese troops.¹⁸⁹ Throughout this text, articulations of reconstituted and maligned heroes are enhanced by their appearance in Nationalist uniforms. The manifestation of these equivocal protagonists (led by General Li who is continually frustrated by higher authorities) indicates an appropriation of revolutionary variants towards steadily redetermined perspectives of war. The symbolic blurring of regulated heroic appearances (traditionally gravitating towards political orthodoxy) highlights this mode of redeployment and negotiation.¹⁹⁰

Correspondingly, romantic visualisations of heroic agency are disrupted throughout 1980s variants, whereby clothing and uniform is utilised to demythologise and invert cinematic hegemony. Within both *Guan dong da xia/Guandong Hero* (1987, dir. Bai Dezhang) and *Guan dong nü xia/Guandong Heroine* (1989, dir Bai Dezhang & Xu Xuniang), narratives centred on exploits of greenwood bandits in Northeast China, this is explored to a symbolic effect, where heroic characters are clearly demarcated by unconventional appearances.¹⁹¹ Representative of their attachment to local and unofficial resistive forces, the central protagonists of each film appear in rugged peasant garb. The feature of these unsanctioned uniforms (made of

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¹⁸⁹ See ‘Plot Summaries’ for more detail on this text.
¹⁹⁰ Likewise Eighth Route Army attires are gradually obscured in this variant, as in *One and Eight* and *Evening Bell* (to be discussed later) where the Communist uniform appears dirty, torn and shabby. This device similarly indicates a de-mythologising of revolutionary history and authority.
¹⁹¹ For more detailed reviews of these films, see my ‘Plot Summaries’ section.
animal furs and skins) are characteristic of post-Mao styles of cinematic re-
imagining. The heavy and bulky clothing they wear, in contrast to the
regulated costumes of Maoist variants (Communist uniform or guerrilla dress),
emphasise these characters as de-centred, fallible and mortal. Equivalently,
these makeshift uniforms mark the protagonist as historically marginal figures,
detached from institutional and organisational norms.\footnote{192}

In examining heroic appearance, it is not only regulated costumes that
undergo reconfiguration during 1980s variants, but additionally the devices
and accoutrements of heroic iconography. Within \textit{Hong gao liang/Red
Sorghum} (1987, dir. Zhang Yimou) this is prevalent with the focus on the
village distillery as a space of action, and the wine in particular as a central
motif.\footnote{193} At the critical point of resistance in the text, the villagers attack the
enemy with homemade gunpowder and bombs (made from the wine itself).

In contrast to established and regulated signifiers of resistance (gun, flags,
rifles), \textit{Red Sorghum} thus emphasises archaic and unconventional icons.
Combined with the villagers’ use of an antiquated strategy (i.e. blowing a
trumpet to ‘scare’ the enemy, using too much gunpowder in homemade
bombshells), the text de-mythologises stereotypes of idealised heroism.
Resistance conducted within this film thus appears in highly localised and

\footnote{192}{A correlative text that equally disrupts these perceptions of heroic clothing is \textit{Red Sorghum}
to be detailed in the following paragraph, where the absence of institutional uniforms is
replaced by a focus on the protagonist’s primitive bodies, depicted in varying degrees of dress
and nakedness throughout the film. See Wang Yuejin, ‘\textit{Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and
Desire}’, in Chris Berry (ed), \textit{Perspectives on Chinese Cinema}, pp. 80-103.}

\footnote{193}{See ‘Plot Summaries’ for an outline of \textit{Red Sorghum}’s narrative.}

\footnote{194}{Wine as an allegorical and poetic signifier within \textit{Red Sorghum} is explored by Zhang
Yingjin in his article, ‘Ideology of the Body in \textit{Red Sorghum}: National Allegory, National
Roots, and Third Cinema’, \textit{East-West Film Journal} 4, 2, 1990, pp. 42-44.}
obscured (not to mention unsuccessful) forms, inverting and appropriating regulative styles.

**Heroic Speech**

Heroic enunciations within combat films of the 1980s are characterised by destabilisations and appropriations of established speech patterns. Romanticised rhetoric pervading revolutionary modes are symbolically absented within reform-era variants, where verbalisations are redirected towards more complex and attenuated themes. The prevalence of sparse and obscure vocalisations in these films, often characterised by casual or personalised sentiments, are symptomatic of wider national and cultural restructurings.195

Within both *Wan zhong/Evening Bell* (1988, dir. Wu Ziniu) and *Yi ge he ba ge/One and Eight* (1984, dir. Zhang Junxiang) this device is emphasised by the prolonged periods of silence and ambiguity pervading each text. 196 Whereas in revolutionary variants heroic espousals are inevitably structured and regulated around politicised themes, within reform era styles elements of fracture and fragmentation surface.197

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195 As Zhu Ying elucidates of the ‘new wave’ style, narrative dialogue is effectively minimised in favour of ambiguity and marginality. Thus ideological certainty and regularity within reform-era texts is intentionally inverted and redirected. Zhu, *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform*, p. 64.
196 See ‘Plot Summaries’ detailing these films.
197 Zhang Yingjin observes this directly within *Evening Bell*, annotating that “throughout the film Wu uses very little dialogue or music. Instead he concentrates on images, some of which seem unrelated to the story but nevertheless leave striking impressions.” The symptomatic emphasis of the text is thus on aesthetic form and impact rather than explicit content. Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 187.
Throughout *One and Eight* the presence of the Party as a rhetorical and unquestioned authority is progressively blurred and marginalised. The narrative focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of a group of Chinese prisoners during the war, where intimate use of speech emphasises their personalised and individual interactions. When the Communist Party does feature as an enunciative force in text, it surfaces in highly ambiguous and obscured forms. This is emblematised by the figure of Commander Xu, whose verbalisations in narrative are sharply distanced from the heroic rhetoric espoused by Maoist protagonists.

In a heavily inverted sense, Xu utilises speech and dialogue as a device of menace, division and persecution. This is expressed during the recurrent sequences of interrogation, where Xu attempts to manipulate the prisoners into accusing and denouncing lead protagonist Wang. Here the emphasis on politically motivated and intent speech as a tool of condemnation and destruction is articulated and critiqued. ¹⁹⁸ Whereas Communist rhetoric and enunciation figures in Maoist texts in idealised and romanticised forms, within *One and Eight* it emerges as divisive and destructive. This is particularly meaningful in the context of reform-era filmmaking at large, attempting to come to terms with the failures of Communist orthodoxy and cultural dogmatism.

¹⁹⁸ This interrogation scene emerges within the text as a meditation on the Cultural Revolution, symptomatic of post-Mao reconstruction and negotiation. As Xu questions the prisoners they are captured in low-key lighting where only their faces are discernable. The sequence thus emphasises intended menace and threat, symbolically organised and structured by Xu’s speech (the questioning itself).
Commander Xu and his counterpart Wang Jin respectively feature throughout *One and Eight* as narratively reformed and re-enunciated protagonists, effectively blurring established character types. In occupying ambiguous and complex speech positions, they appropriate romantic modes in articulating post-revolutionary considerations. To this extent, the interruption of established heroic speech and its redirection towards fractured perceptions, signifies a desire to appropriate the past and its symbolic weight into reconstituted forms.\textsuperscript{199}

**Heroic Activity**

Whilst notions of appearance and speech are primary characteristics in examining adaptations of the heroic form throughout 1980s texts, attention to other elements must be equivalently observed. This is explicitly relevant to concepts of heroic activity, similarly appropriating revolutionary modes in projecting reformed and equivocal variants. Representations of heroism are thus dramatically destabilised and negotiated throughout post-Mao narratives, whereby heroic action is redirected towards reformed themes of consequence. As with romanticised styles, the body remains a site of significance, of symbolic allegory, but is translated into a reconfigured ideological matrix.\textsuperscript{200}

In projections of heroic activity a generalised broadening of themes is enacted in this variant, expanding towards reformed modes of identification. Within

\textsuperscript{199} This characteristic of *One and Eight* has been distinctively examined by Dai Jinhua, identifying the text as ‘a re-narration of the classic hero myth’ with a ‘desire in the film narrative to transcend ideology’. See Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{200} This bears distinct symbolism within the reform period as a transformation from what Ann Anagnost identifies as a ‘politicised body’, one fundamentally involved in the inscription of the Party as a structuring force. Anagnost, ‘The Politicised Body’, in Zito & Barlow (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, pp. 131-156.
this process the Communist Party is essentially decentred from its dominant status, substituted with destabilised and reconstituted perspectives. This is overtly explored through Evening Bell, where the search for a reformed cultural identity and its impact on heroic activities is definitively marked. The Eighth Route Army division that constitutes the film’s central protagonists are thus symbolically isolated from institutional military strategy during the text. Covering a vast and empty terrain of rural China the army division functions as a mopping-up patrol, mainly burying dead soldiers and searching for survivors.

Contrasted to the romantic images of combat and resistance as depicted in Maoist texts, Evening Bell stresses the psychological impact of war and its traumatic undercurrents. These soldiers are not intimately strung into cohesive camaraderie and action, as much as they function as registers of destruction and damage. Their activities are not dominated so much by political expediency (i.e. enacting revolution, ensuring victory) as preserving humanist values and principles (i.e. how to deal with the dead, what to do with captured enemy).

In addition to reconstitutions of combat activity and enactment, depictions of the heroic body as a site of romantic impenetrability and indestructibility are similarly inverted throughout 1980s variants. Whereas protagonists of Maoist texts fervently submit and sacrifice their bodies to overarching resistive endeavours, during the initial reform mode there is a shift in emphasis. Consequently, the active heroic body transpires as a space of cultural, political
and historical rewriting in resistance narratives. Focussing closely on *The Battle of Taierzhuang*, this displacement and demythologising of the heroic body is apparent. Soldiers are randomly and graphically killed within the text to an extent that faces and forms become blurred, unidentifiable in a landscape of destruction. To this degree, the cohesive ordering and regulation that the heroic body provides throughout revolutionary models is progressively displaced and fragmented in post-Mao renderings.

Established conceptions of cinematic heroism are steadily appropriated and reformed at large throughout 1980s variants. The adaptation of the heroic form centred on articulations of appearance, speech and activity, signifies wider ideological changes in China during this period. As romanticised combat modes are progressively destabilised within genre, so too are the notions of political nationalism pervading established and regulated function. Accordingly, the emergence of an alternative heroic discourse, one based on displacing historical forms and searching for contemporary identity, symbolises a renegotiation of Chinese nationalism and cultural consciousness.

*Reformed Enemies*

To the same degree that adaptations of heroic projection can be traced throughout post-Mao combat variants, so too the depiction and role of enemy

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201 Reformations of the heroic body within the combat film of this period are scrutinized by Hong Junhao, observing a tendency towards “average human beings rather than politically-labelled heroes”. Furthermore, Hong articulates progressions towards complex individuated protagonists “with both strengths and shortcomings” in contrast to revolutionary types. Hong, *Asian Cinema*, pp. 99-100.

202 This effect of blurring distinctions and regulated demarcations between armed forces is evident in a number of films produced during this period, including *Mutiny*, *The Intercepted Order*, *Counterattack* and *Guandong Hero*. 
forces requires negotiation. Whilst the overarching trend of the 1980s narrative mode seeks to reconfirm the enemy as a violative, threatening and menacing force, fractures in representational form and style similarly materialise. The disruption of hegemonic and didactic binaries within the genre, in favour of equivocal and obscure perspectives, signifies the refraction of romantic hegemonies into modern reconstructions.

Established articulations of generalised and regulated difference (emblematised by the guizi stereotype) are thus symbolically disrupted throughout 1980s combat films, where emphases on re-constituted and re-structured enemy figures are marked. In demonstrating these shifts in form and style it is appropriate to concentrate on the primary characteristics of enemy projection throughout this variant and their contrasts to regulated styles. This is achieved in depiction of three distinct and established areas, with attention to enemy appearance, speech and activity respectively.

**Enemy Appearance**

The physical and material imagining of enemy forces within combat films of the 1980s are symptomatic of desires to reform generalised and stereotyped norms. Emphases on satirical and deformed manifestations are sublimated into more complex and critical matrices, towards reconstituted perspectives of war, resistance and history itself. The prominence of national, cultural and ethnic difference between heroic and enemy forces are effectively minimised in this era, signifying a mode of filmmaking intent on cultural self-consciousness and roots searching. To this degree, the categorisation and
classification of enemy appearance is marginalised and appropriated throughout this variant in voicing considerations of post-Mao modernity and allegorical identity. 203

This de-emphasis of conventional guizi appearance and classification is best demonstrated within Evening Bell, through the interactions of the Eighth Route division with Japanese soldier Takeda, who is initially isolated from his Imperial unit. Upon originally confronting the enemy soldier, the Chinese army protagonists monitor him with suspicion and mistrust. This is despite the fact that he represents a clearly impotent and powerless force, suffering from malnutrition and dehydration at this point, barely able to communicate with his captors at all. In the medium shot used to emphasise this, the scrawny and emaciated figure of Takeda appears exhausted, lying on the ground and covered in dirt with the Chinese soldiers towering over his presence. 204

Furthermore, in Evening Bell not only does Takeda feature as an impotent physical threat, he is symbolically adopted and gradually redeemed by the Eighth Route forces. The Chinese Commander facilitates his recovery through enforcing basic human rights (food, water, medicine) and providing relevant bilateral information to Takeda. On hearing of the Japanese surrender he gravitates from initial disbelief to trauma and finally grief, where he begins to cry. Takeda then tearfully turns to the Commander and begs him to rescue his

203 As Dai Jinhua has noted within the specific case of Red Sorghum, the enemy (Japanese) emerge as symbolic ‘castrators’, figures of allegory upon which the nation can console its historical anxiety and memory. See Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, pp. 33-34.

204 During this sequence Takeda does in fact grab for his gun, but his efforts are ambiguous (he reaches slowly and deliberately) as if to imply an autonomous and instinctual reaction. This response is effectively countered by the Eighth Routers (who kick the gun away), rendering him an obscure force of menace and violation.
fellow comrades. The enemy no longer maintains its veneer of absolute or binary difference in this segment, breeched by a broader sense of humanism and altruism. Consequently, the text subverts notions of concrete polarity in favour of a more complex and equivocal vision of war.

A similar degree of complexity and obscurity is demonstrated throughout *Mi ling jie ji/The Intercepted Order* (1986, dir. Hua Chun), focussing on the attempted escape and eventual detainment of a Japanese general near the end of the War of Resistance. What emerges as striking throughout the narrative is the explicit attention and detail paid to the depiction of the enemy figure itself. General Shirakawa manifests as a reconfigured *guizi* type during the film, displaying sensitive and personalised characteristics that highly contrast with established variants. Although identified by military dress throughout the bulk of the film (his Imperial Army uniform) and thus inscribed as an enemy figure, he is similarly depicted in civilian attire (Japanese robe, sandals) at other points. The symbolism of this non-militaristic dress parallels Shirakawa’s complex identity within the narrative, at times torn between fulfilling his institutional role (as an army officer) and personal desires (to protect his family and return to Japan). Correspondingly, Shirakawa surfaces as a more complex and detailed enemy protagonist, symptomatic of reforming cultural narratives in China.

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205 As Paul Clark suggests, *Evening Bell* is a film that explicitly queries issues of patriotism and humanity separate from national borders and divisions. Similarly Zhang Yingjin locates the text within a process of revolutionary re-writing, towards a re-visioned image of history and humanity. See Clark, *Modern Chinese Literature*, p. 128. And Zhang Yingjin, *Screening China*, p. 188.

206 See my ‘Plot Summaries’ section for more detail on *The Intercepted Order*.

207 Shirakawa features in a number of intimate scenes and spaces throughout the film, where attentions to personal sentiments (safety of his family, sharing a meal with an old colleague, grief in visiting a war shrine) are explicitly marked and premised.
Whereas *Evening Bell* and *Intercepted Order* gravitate towards complexly detailed articulations of the enemy form, other texts institute a polar approach, de-emphasising appearance to the point of obscurity. Within *One and Eight* and *Red Sorghum* this contrasting perspective towards the enemy is demonstrated. In both these films the Japanese army occupy a minimal narrative presence, emerging primarily at textual climax in graphic, ambiguous and indeterminate modes. Unlike the renderings of Takeda or Shirakawa detailed above, there are no distinct or detailed enemy representatives in these films. Rather, the Japanese exist in peripheral and marginal forms, emerging as a dislocated and overwhelming force, registered through enacted violation and destruction. Whereas in revolutionary films attention to *guizi* stereotype and illegitimacy centralises ideological polarity, within reformed variants the obscurity of the enemy signifies narrative appropriation and allegory.

*Enemy Speech*

Renegotiations of speech and politicised rhetoric within cinematic discourses of the 1980s are symptomatic of cultural negotiations and reconstitutions throughout China during this period. In the combat film in particular, the manifestation of repositioned enemy vocalisations exemplifies this process of transformation. Therefore throughout resistance narratives of this era, Japanese verbalisations and enunciations emerge as sites of cultural re-

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208 It is worth noting that this process does not specifically entail a liberation of rhetoric and its translation into collective perspectives. As noted by Wang Jing, the articulation of ‘knowing subjects’ within cultural expressions of the time are marked by attentions to intellectual voices rather than average citizens. To this extent, speech thus emerges as an element of ongoing and continual re-articulation. See Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics and Ideology in Deng’s China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, p. 48.
imagination, where Maoist norms are de-centred in favour of reformed and ‘new wave’ perceptions.

This is demonstrated to a significant extent during Evening Bell, where features of language as an explicit site of communication and ideological fracture are explored. As Takeda converses with his Eighth Route counterparts he does so in a desperate and fragmented Chinese. Not unlike the bastardised Mandarin that features in revolutionary texts, Takeda’s actual speech is often incoherent and disjointed. However, his manner is starkly contrasted to the aggressive and gruff manner of traditional guizi characters, pleading desperately for assistance and symbolic exchange.209

Moreover to this effect, the nature of Takeda’s speech as jumbled and entangled is emblematic of his hybrid status throughout the narrative. Ensnared between personal desires to save his fellow soldiers (humanism, preservation) and army obligations of mass suicide (destruction, genocide), his emphatic dialogue is indicative of a reconstituted subjectivity, one emphasising war as a site of fracture and rupture. Within Evening Bell, enemy enunciation as a force of political and ethnic fragmentation is thus transformed into a space of modern contemplation, one that explicitly proffers notions of humanist utilitarianism.

To an equally significant extent, re-orientations of Mandarin as espoused by Japanese forces surface throughout 1980s textual variants. Whereas in Maoist

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209 Inversions of established and regulated guizi depictions are symptomatic of China’s social, political and economic development during this period. In particular, the nation’s immersion into a commodity-based international market is allegorised by these exchanges.
forms enemy speech threatens and fractures the standardised Chinese language (*putonghua*), within post-Mao styles there is a specific adjustment. Most enemy figures of this mode possess considerable skill and capacity in Mandarin. The impact of this serves to further destabilise perceptions and stereotypes of the Japanese *guizi*, in favour of a reconstituted ethic. This is verified in both *The Intercepted Order* and *Hua bian/Mutiny* (1989, dir. He Qun), where enemy officers (although immoral and undesirable) are portrayed as articulate and capable figures.\(^\text{210}\) From the perspective of post-Mao Chinese reconfigurations, the impact of this functions to refract established cultural forms whilst translating them into restructured and complex variants.

The other major factor of enemy speech in this variant that differs from revolutionary styles revolves around the nature and depiction of enemy language itself, hitherto marginalised. This is demonstrated in both *Evening Bell* and *The Battle of Taierzhuang*, where Japanese characters relate to one another in their native language for prolonged periods. Here the focus on enemy dialect as a site of potential coherence and communication is suggestive of reformed cultural and international values. Whereas restrictive attentions throughout Maoist variants delineate cultural essentialism and caricature (token, stereotyped admonitions), during the 1980s enemy vernacular is gradually marked and attenuated within resistance narratives. The overall symbolism of this adaptation highlights a reconstituted

\(^{210}\) The narrative of *Mutiny* is further detailed in my ‘Plot Summaries’ section.
internationalism in China, an explicit recognition of national differences and potential for cultural interrelation.\textsuperscript{211}

Throughout \textit{Evening Bell} specifically, enemy speech emerges to express the personal desperation and overarching degradation of war itself. As the Eighth Route division come across an enemy armament, Takeda screams out repeatedly to his comrades in Japanese to surrender to the Chinese and receive provisions.\textsuperscript{212} The impact of this prolonged sequence is highly symbolic and impacting, where Takeda’s unanswered appeals (heightened by their echo in the valley) are suggestive of cultural, political and national isolation. This is emphasised not only by the language used (Japanese) but similarly its continual repetition and desperate delivery (shouting his pleas until he gratingly loses his voice). Takeda’s displaced, unanswered and pained native claims thus surface as allegories of ‘speaking’ China’s traumatic past under Mao, reconstituted within a modern discourse of liberal humanism and alienation.\textsuperscript{213}

The disruption of established enemy speech and its redistribution into reconfigured forms is best located within wider shifts of the combat film and

\textsuperscript{211} In terms of cultural and social implications, attention to enemy perspectives fosters a sense of interrelated experience within war narratives. This in turn alleviates projections of difference (enemy as threat, violation) in favour of potential exchange and mutuality. These characteristics are symptomatic of expanded 1980s mentalities, prefacing multilateral productivity and internationalism.

\textsuperscript{212} The feature of foreign language made intelligible (through overlayed Chinese subtitles) within this segment of \textit{Evening Bell} similarly obscures the homogeny of ‘native’ cinematic forms, rewriting the tenets of narrative agency within expanding matrices of cultural mutuality and perpectivity.

\textsuperscript{213} This is a theme Wu Ziniu explicitly identifies and prefaces in his cinematic modality. As he has expressly noted, “I worship humanity, and humanity is the heart of my art. I express pain because I want people to think”. Wu, translated in Zhang Yingjin, \textit{Screening China}, p. 189.
cultural narratives at large throughout this variant. Enemy speech thus further enhances the *oeuvre* of a reconstituted medium in Chinese cinema of the 1980s, negotiating and refurbishing established generic forms in favour of modern and interrogative perspectives.

*Enemy Action*

The arena of activity as emblematic of enemy function and discourse is significantly transformed in 1980s combat variants. Shifting from the realm of stereotyped and deviant threat, domains of Japanese activity are symbolically restructured and reconfigured. Moreover, the emergence of steadily reformed depictions, infused with themes of modern humanism and liberalism, signifies wider negotiations of ideological factors and cultural representations in China during this period.

In redetermining *guizi* stereotypes throughout the initial reform period, contrary perspectives of resistive and war discourse surface. Of particular consequence, realms of enemy action and activity are highly reconstructed in combat films. This is demonstrated stylistically throughout battle sequences of both *Mutiny* and *The Battle of Taierzhuang*, where a less dogmatic and obtrusive approach towards enemy activation is employed. The prevailing use of medium and long shots in combat encounters, characterised by dynamic and panning framing, is symptomatic of this reconfigured war perspective.

Similarly, within each text an inversion of geographical and landscape norms occurs, whereby resistive forces are deposed of their elevated plane within
established narratives. During *Mutiny* there is an explicit blurring of these landscape binaries (heroes at top, enemies on bottom) in favour of a distorted and indeterminate rendering. To this extent, the battles enacted during this film are projected with a degree of ambiguity and ambivalence, utilising a style that de-mythologises the resistance narrative and transposes it towards reformed considerations.²¹⁴

Of an equivalent note, these reformed narratives encounter and articulate enemy experiences of war. This is patently expressed in *The Battle of Taierzhuang* where a Japanese soldier stumbles upon the body of a fallen comrade at one point. Here the camera singles out a melancholic shot of a burning photo that contains an image of the man’s family. At a later point in the film as the Japanese forces retreat, this witnessing soldier is solemnly depicted carrying the man’s ashes where the singed photo is prominently displayed. In substituting characteristics of *guizi* menace and violation here, for a more melancholic and contemplative perspective, values of modern humanism and utilitarianism are effectively suggested. To this degree, both *Mutiny* and *The Battle of Taierzhuang* seek to deconstruct stereotypes of enemy activity into reconstituted illustrations of war, drawn from a distinctly allegorical perspective. This transformation of established action and behaviour into reconfigured modes highlights China’s own endeavours within the initial post-Mao era, in particular the re-imagining of figurative identities.

²¹⁴ This style re-constructs established revolutionary modes, where idealised figures were deified in prescriptions of political orthodoxy. As Xin Lin explains in reference to the text, “It shows swarms of people falling and dying in the ruthlessness of war. For many years, hundreds or thousands, especially deaths of revolutionaries, have not appeared on Chinese screens. It was believed to be damaging to their heroic image’. Xin, ‘The Battle of Taierzhuang: History as it Was’, *Beijing Review* 18, 1987, p. 32.
Articulations of reconstituted *guizi* forms throughout 1980s combat variants are indicative of re-centred cinematic and cultural expressions during this time. Distinctive tendencies towards demythologised and appropriated representations of the enemy type, focussed on elements of appearance, speech and action, are symptomatic of this process. The enemy figure (much like its heroic counterpart) correspondingly features as a site of cinematic and cultural analysis, emblematic of the search for reformed identities and imaginations within China.

**Reformed Collaborators**

In the same manner that features of heroic and enemy representation undergo redefinition throughout 1980s combat variants, so too the status and articulation of collaborators is reconfigured. This steady disruption of established *hanjian* characteristics in favour of complex and obscure perspectives highlights renegotiations of revolutionary hegemony in reform-era contexts. Whilst the *hanjian* maintains its primary role in structuring the resistance narrative, its previously detailed function of delineating and centralising Communist discourse is steadily disrupted during this phase, translated into more intricate, personalised and de-politicised perspectives.215

In demonstrating the appropriation and reconstruction of *hanjian* portrayals, the fundamental signifiers and elements of collaborative discourse will be

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215 This querying of the *hanjian* and its explicitly politicised form is emblematic of cultural representation during this period, where depictions of obscure and ‘shady’ figures flourish. This attention to ‘remaking’ figures within cultural narratives (not just limited to the cinematic medium) signifies a shift from explicitly political to alternative forms of national identification. See He & Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratisation in China*, pp. 53-78.
examined from a reformed perspective. This will concentrate on three distinct modes, with attention to respective features of appearance, speech and action.

**Collaborative Appearance**

Whereas in revolutionary cinema *hanjian* appearance is projected as a haphazard entity of threat and deviance, in post-Mao variants the collaborative form occupies a space of complexity. This is indicative of wider ideological considerations during reform, particularly redeterminations of representation in the aftermath of a failed Socialist utopia. Whilst attention to potential fractures and hybridity remains a central articulation within 1980s models, this features in unestablished and reconstituted manners. *Hanjian* figures thus retain their status as historically marginal characters, traversing a precarious boundary of national betrayal and deceit, however, they emerge in symbolically equivocal modes.216

Much like their Maoist counterparts, *hanjian* characters of 1980s variants are inevitably male. To a similar extent they are identified by historical and national markers (as marginal protagonists structured within resistance narratives), but to a progressively inverted and appropriated degree. *Hanjian* figures consequently surface in symbolically institutional and certified modes, fracturing perceptions of collaboration as haphazard capitulation and submission. Reformed representations are thus redirected towards more

216 Inherent within this endeavour is a progression towards equivocal individualism, as represented across a wide range of narrative protagonists (evident here in depictions of collaborators). Ci Jiwei portrays this as a by-product of the loss of collective goals during this period and the effective failure of Maoist utopianism. Subsequently, attentions to hedonistic and indulgent character types within narrative steadily mark the process of reformation. Ci, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution*, pp. 199-206.
complex appreciations of collaborative discourse, especially its motivations and consequences. This is explicitly refracted in the visualisation of hanjian characters and their differentiation from established revolutionary styles.

One device predominantly utilised to express this throughout 1980s texts is costume, in particular the visualisation of an official collaborationist uniform. Accordingly, hanjian forces materialise as distinct institutional presences in the discourse of war, upholding a definitive ideological platform and praxis. Equivalently, collaborative armies are commonly located as militantly developed, as in Mutiny and Po xi zhan/Counterattack (1986, dirs. Zhen Zhiguo & Yu Yehua), where projected as intimidating and proficient entities.217 This is specifically articulated in Mutiny, whose protagonists (a division of collaborative soldiers) are marked throughout the narrative by appearance in hanjian uniforms, yet ultimately enact a potent and successful resistance against their Japanese overseers. To an equally contrasting extent, the effeminate and deformed manifestations of revolutionary variants are reconstituted during the 1980s era, towards ambiguous renderings. This is emblematised by Counterattack, where the collaborative figure of Qian appears as a distinctly masculinized force of uniformed regulation (muscular and menacing in officiated attire), one contrasted from effete revolutionary modes.

217 See my plot summaries for further detail on Counterattack’s narrative.
Collaborators Speech

To the same degree that textual depictions and visualisations of collaborative appearance are reformed throughout post-Mao variants, so too the nature and emphasis of *hanjian* speech is steadily reconstituted. The emergence of fractured and equivocal voices in this context is symptomatic not only of a reconfigured cultural genre, but similarly of an overarching critique of hegemonic narratives within China.\(^{218}\) The importance of speech as a mode of inversion and appropriation is thus apparent, particularly in the re-imagination of collaborative discourse from a ‘new wave’ perspective. Dissociated from its predominant perception as an entity of deviance and capitulation, *hanjian* speech re-emerges during this variant as a site of alternate and reformed articulation.

*One and Eight* explores this reconfiguration to an extensive degree, where the focus on dialogue conducted between the prisoners and protagonist Wang is particularly marked. Although Wang is the only captive charged with political ‘collaboration’ in the group, his interaction and developed intimacy with fellow ‘undesirables’ (their crimes are determined by political means) constitutes an alternative collective space. As representative of both corporeal and psychological internment, the prisoners express little physical interaction throughout the bulk of the film. Framed together in a number of cramped and confined spaces, speech emerges as a major force of narrative propulsion and

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\(^{218}\) As Ann Anagnost identifies, the nature of speech as a tool of authority and representation was effectively ‘imploded’ in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, leading to the emergence of multiple voices and layers throughout cultural narratives of the reform era. Anagnost, *National Past-times*, pp. 4-5.
character transformation throughout *One and Eight*. This itself is highly differentiated from romantic textual variants, where resistive demonstrability is primarily centred on physical activities and enactments.

The differing protagonists of *One and Eight* (one of them guilty of the actual collaboration that Wang has been charged with) thus come to symbolise a marginal and reconstituted collectivity. Attentions to their informal, personal and emotive exchanges throughout the film, which constitute the majority of narrative dialogue (where the Communist figures of Xu and Yang are decentred), are symptomatic of generic and cultural reconfigurations. The articulation of this intimate style of speech displaces the hegemony and predominance of political rhetoric in favour of reformed models. To this point the film inverts and appropriates *hanjian* speech in order to voice symbolically negotiated and reconstructed subjectivities.

In *Red Sorghum*, collaborative speech similarly materialises in styles that fracture and reconstitute traditional *hanjian* projections. This manifests in the dual figures of the butcher and his assistant, who are initially willing to flay cattle in order to please the Japanese. When they are confronted with a more menacing endeavour, flaying humans, a shift in emphasis occurs. Whilst the butcher chooses to resist the activity, denouncing the enemy as ‘fucking dogs’

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219 As the narrative progresses this stress on spoken brotherhood and understanding between these characters is emphasised (reaching a climax as they invert Wang’s *hanjian* status and declare him innocent). This alternative and marginal space thus breeches standardised narrative norms in favour of reconstituted perspectives.

220 The emergence of this peripheral collective (consisting of collaborative figures) acts as an effective inversion of revolutionary *hanjian* significations, which Frederic Wakeman observes as essential to the corroboration of a nationally resistive identity. Wakeman, *Becoming Chinese*, pp. 298-341.
(upon which he is subsequently shot) the assistant surfaces as a more complex figure. Faced with the same grievous task, he repeatedly mumbles to himself ‘grin and bear it’ before he manages to graphically enact the flaying. At this point, the film jarringly cuts to the following scene as the assistant is shown in an empty field, covered in blood and laughing to himself in a maddening manner.

The compromise of betrayal and self-interest (manifest in both the butcher and his assistant) is suggested to have graphic and devastating consequences. Emblematic of this is the repeated focus on the assistant’s words ‘grin and bear it’ during this sequence, symptomatic of China’s widespread recollection within the reform period, reminiscing upon the historical and psychological trauma of the Maoist past.221

**Collaborative Action**

Whereas in revolutionary combat films the *hanjian* body emerges as a site of incapacity and deviance, during post-Mao variants a shift in emphasis occurs. The nature of collaborative activity throughout reformed texts is largely dissociated from stereotyped forms of passivity and effeminacy, towards more complex considerations. As with *hanjian* appearance and speech, collaborative activity is reconstituted according to prevailing cinematic themes and trends, symptomatic of wider negotiations of national identity and cultural consciousness in China.

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221 Zhang Xudong observes that sequences of ‘mindless’ and graphic violence throughout *Red Sorghum* (human flaying, trampling of sorghum, failed battle finale) are symptomatic allegories of Chinese modernity within this period, specifically aimed at critiquing and de-centring revolutionary cinematic norms. Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, pp. 318-322.
With dual reference to *Counterattack* and *Mutiny*, the nature and complexity of this collaborative action is explicitly reconstructed. This is signified by the respective figures of Lang You-ren and Cheng Huan, officers representing the *hanjian* army, who rebel in each narrative against their Japanese overseers. Whereas Lang is ultimately punished for his insurgence (killed by the enemy), both he and Cheng are articulated as capable and productive (if obscure) figures. In the case of Lang this is definitively registered in the moments after he is slain by the Japanese army, as heroine Lu watches on startlingly and then rushes over to his dead body. The graphic manner in which Lang is killed (he is literally pummelled with bullets, depicted in slow motion) dually signifies the consequences of political extremism and its impact on an equivocal force.\(^{222}\)

This ambiguous transformation of Lang and Cheng’s activities from collaboration to resistance through textual progression is symptomatic of potential redemption and rehabilitation in wider narrative rewritings. Seemingly motivated to rebellion through witnessing intended mass violations (aimed squarely at the Chinese national body), both Lang and Cheng emanate as symbolically allegorical figures. Indicative of reforming cinematic modes and styles, their activations are representative of wider renegotiated themes and strands within the resistance narrative.

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\(^{222}\) This striking stylisation of Lang’s downfall (slow motion, medium-close-ups) is in stark contrast to the symbolic capitulation of Maoist forms, where *hanjian* are unequivocally and ardently disposed of. Similarly the presence of heroine Lu in this segment (as a register and verifier), fractures established polarities and demarcations of resistive orthodoxy.
The stereotype of *hanjian* activity motivated by personal greed, violation and power is further reconstructed through Cheng (who is a ranking officer) at the conclusion of *Mutiny*. Having led his troops in a gruelling resistance and realising himself to be the sole survivor, he is confronted in the battle’s aftermath by a surrendering enemy lieutenant (who genuflects before him and awaits execution). Cheng mercifully chooses not to dispose of this opponent, a symbolic articulation of war’s destructive impact and its potential for humanist redemption. This action renders the *hanjian* form as one of complex intricacy, symbolic of post-revolutionary projections and articulations. Moreover, in the final image of the text, as Cheng turns away from the lieutenant (who shoots himself) he is cast into a role of witness and verifier. Framed by a landscape of dead bodies, Cheng’s distressed expression surfaces as an allegoric rendering of trauma and devastation. The *hanjian* figure is thus reformed within *Mutiny* into one of humanist expression and documentation.

Established notions and conceptions of collaboration are symbolically appropriated and reconstituted at large throughout reform era representations. Negotiations of *hanjian* form centred on articulations of appearance, speech and activity are symptomatic of wider ideological changes in China at the time. Just as the combat variant is largely destabilised in generic terms, so too the political nationalism pervading its existence is steadily redirected. Subsequently the emergence of an alternative complex discourse can be traced, one based on displacing hegemonic and standardised forms and symbolising ongoing negotiation throughout cultural mediums.
Women in the Reformed Combat Variant

In the aftermath of the chaotic Cultural Revolution, as China sought to contemplate its existence without Mao, the boundaries and expectations of femininity were reconstituted. Recognition of female subjectivity and sublimation at large, embedded in a hegemonic and patriarchal system was identified within an array of social, political and cultural discourses. This renegotiation of feminine status was exemplified by filmic texts of the period, whereby cinematic projections of gender were starkly remoulded and reconfigured according to modern conceptualisations.

This process of reconstitution and reconstruction is equivalently depicted throughout combat variants of the 1980s, where Maoist modes are steadily critiqued, but not completely abandoned. The emergence of more complex and ambivalent feminine articulations to this degree signifies a restructure of established identifications in both the progressive collective imaginary and Chinese consciousness at large. In order to gauge the impact and significance of shifts in representational form, it is necessary to investigate the nature and style of female depictions in this variant, referenced to regulated revolutionary forms. In order to simplify this process it is useful to segment 1980s representations into two distinct areas, focussing on ‘complex’ and ‘marginal’ female figures respectively.

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224 As Esther Yau commented at the time, “investigating the psychological depths of character with forms of cultural critique, rather than with issues of political edification or emancipation of women, screen female figures are reflecting or re-producing interest which derive from the social conscious and unconscious”. Yau, Wide Angle, p. 11.
The ‘Complex’ Woman

The emergence of complex female characterisations in combat films of this variant are framed by this context cited above, noting dual shifts in cultural perceptions of femininity at large and within the cinematic industry in particular. As a response to the steadily de-gendered and politicised extremities of the Cultural Revolution period, female imaginations during the 1980s are characterised by gravitations toward regeneration and regrowth. This endeavour manifests in numerous cultural industries and mediums, where widespread exploration and innovation is steadily embarked upon. Within cinematic institutions this progression is acute, where female representations emblematise broader negotiations and reformations of Chinese identity.225

In the resistance narrative itself and combat film specifically, post-Mao variants invoke and adjure negotiations of feminine activation. Challenges to established representational models, with particular focus on subjective and conditional modes of empowerment are progressively issued and critiqued. The reconstituted female figure thus materialises in complex and variegated forms, symptomatic of overarching gravitations towards reformed and restructured styles of national imagination.226

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225 To this effect, Yau notes throughout 1980s modes that filmic projections of women are, “structured in such a way as to assist in the culture’s defensive struggles for identity in both the historical and social context of post Cultural Revolution China”. ibid., p. 15.

Firmly located in the realms of 1980s ‘new wave’ filmmaking, *Red Sorghum* emanates as a seminal text in this process of cultural re-imagination. This is attributed not only to the text’s bold stylistic innovation and ‘roots searching’ narrative, but similarly its unconventional characterisation, specifically manifest in female protagonist Jiu-er. Intimately identified and referred to throughout the film as the narrator’s ‘Grandma’, Jiu-er transpires as a fundamentally reconfigured symbol of femininity, inverting and appropriating hegemonic forms. She is a maternal figure, whose concern with the community at large is demonstrated in managing the village distillery. Yet unlike either the ‘resistive heroine’ or ‘maternal sacrificer’ of revolutionary variants she is not regulated or conditioned by the masculine Party presence. Rather, in absence of the metaphoric Socialist ‘father’ she adopts the role of alternative communal leader.227

In addition to her ‘maternal’ role, considerable narrative attention is paid to Jiu-er’s personal status, especially her sexual identity throughout the film. Much like her masculine counterpart Grandpa, Jiu-er embraces a productive and uninhibited status, inverting regulated notions of gendered politics. In contrast to Maoist variants, constructed as specifically androgynous and de-sexualised figures, Jiu-er is thus located as a force of primal and deregulated femininity. This is established from the initial stages of the film, as she fetishistically peeks at Grandpa’s body through the bridal sedan, recurring through to the narrative *dénouement* where she is cut down by a hail of enemy

227 Jiu-er thus not only disrupts the traditional political legacy, she appropriates it towards reconstructed means. As Wang Yuejin observes of her sovereignty, “the moment she gives orders, she is ‘crowned’ while simultaneously uncrowning the dead boss and his patriarchal order”. Wang, *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, p. 88.
bullets. The focus on Jiu-er as a symbol of feminine and sexual productivity is thus emphasised throughout the film, whereby her form features as an alternative identity to the politicised and sublimated models of Maoist regulation.228

A similarly complex re-evaluation of the female form is enacted throughout *Guandong Heroine*, with its focus on the title character as an ambiguous protagonist. Like Jiu-er, the Heroine (whose real name is unidentified in the text) materialises as an unconventional authority of resistive action, whereby after the death of the male bandit leader she is ‘crowned’ the groups’ successor. She features throughout the narrative as an ambivalent and complex protagonist, whereby considerations of her past (witness and experience of rape by enemy forces) and present (mythologised leader of greenwood bandits) are explicitly dramatised.

Specific attention is paid to the ambiguous gendering and self-identification of the Heroine throughout the film, recurrently torn between desires of sublimated sexuality (suggestive consequence of enemy rape) and expressive romance (budding relationship with fellow bandit Lei). As the text progresses and resistance intensifies, the Heroine is further entwined within this gendered crisis. The situation reaches its climax as she is forced to punish Lei for

228 Zhang Yingjin argues this to be the primary mode of *Red Sorghum* itself, emerging as a de-politicised narrative of ‘degradation’ (in contrast to established modes), occupying a marginal cinematic position and thus encouraging the viewer to critique wider ideological issues. Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 216.
organising the gang-rape of a Japanese girl.\textsuperscript{229} Her complex response to this (to sentence him to death, but marry him first) is symptomatic of a fractured, indefinite and differentiated identity.

\textit{Guandong Heroine} thus invokes an explicit reworking of established resistive norms through this composite female protagonist. Despite occupying status and reputation within the local community as a famed and ferocious bandit leader, she is similarly depicted as a personally marginal and fractured figure. The overwhelming impact of this split is realised at the text’s conclusion where she is captured and executed by the enemy forces. Having temporally delineated her personal fragmentation (by marrying Lei) their brief union is decimated by political forces. Captured in the realm of domesticity, wearing her wedding clothes as she is gunned down (much like Jiu-er who is killed whilst carrying food to the male forces), the Heroine’s demise is rendered as obscure, contradictory and ambiguous.

In a corresponding manner, through exceeding their gendered spaces both these re-invigorated heroines are marginalised to the extent of extermination. From the reformed cultural and cinematic perspective of the 1980s, the status of these ‘complex’ women in the combat film, whilst developed in contrast to Maoist variants, remains somewhat indeterminate. This itself is symptomatic of wider ideological negotiations within China at the time, invoking processions of cultural re-imagination and reformation.

\textsuperscript{229} Lei organises this rape as symbolic revenge for the Heroine’s earlier experiences of sexual violation at the hands of the enemy. This is ambiguously professed by Lei to be a symbol of his intimacy and love for her.
Whilst emergences of these ambivalent and ‘complex’ female resistors are prevalent throughout 1980s resistance narrative modes, similar emphasis needs to be placed on trends exploring more ‘marginal’ and intricate perspectives. Within this critical endeavour, alternative and restructured envisionings of femininity itself, subsumed and sublimated throughout revolutionary forms, need to be progressively explored and articulated. Attention to these reintegrated renderings are symptomatic of the wider enactment of reform throughout China during this period, essentially inverting and de-centring hegemonic styles in favour of a reconstituted cultural ethic.

Investigating One and Eight this is demonstrated through the obscure figure of Yang, the female army nurse who emerges as an equivocal Eighth Route Army member. Occupying a somewhat peripheral role throughout the film (in divergence to masculine protagonists), Yang operates as a symbol of distorted humanism and ineffectual liberalism, starkly differentiated from the oblique and repressive authority of Commander Xu. Her interaction with the prisoners is contrary to the class and politics based exchanges pervading Maoist variants, substituted with a focus on utilitarianism and preservation. Disbelieving of Wang’s collaboration charges, she openly questions Xu’s authority and methods at textual initiation. This is situated in direct contrast to established

230 It is worth noting here (as other theorists have) that this progression is an ultimately complex and intricate enactment, whereby articulations of alternative variants (in non-subjective modes) can be equally deterministic and overarching. For two emblematic accounts of this complexity see Rey Chow, Primitive Passions, pp. 108-112. And Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, pp. 99-151.
images of resistance narratives, where the female revolutionary subject is ideally and emphatically sublimated into orthodox compliance.\textsuperscript{231}

Yang’s interaction with the male protagonists throughout the narrative is mediated by a sense of gender separation and distinctiveness. She is commonly depicted in empathy with the prisoners yet remains isolated and marked from their space. This is ideally demonstrated at the text’s instigation, as she literally descends into the prisoners’ subterranean cell to treat one of the injured. Here she is mocked, heckled and sexually objectified. Furthermore, as divergent from the enigmatic heroine models of revolutionary variants, Yang is depicted in progressive states of paralysis and stagnation throughout \textit{One and Eight}. This is exemplified during the graphic penultimate battle of the text where she mournfully hovers over Xu’s unconscious body (pictured in an above medium shot), unable to effectively fulfil her job and administer first-aid.

Throughout the narrative progression Yang develops an anxious and vicarious attachment to the male prisoners, seemingly recognising their struggle for survival but unable to offer them any effective assistance. Correspondingly, Yang’s reactions to the traumatic events in the film are symptomatic of a reconstituted female (and thus national) subjectivity, representing restructures of cultural consciousness within China at large. Despite signifying a presence of orthodoxy in the text (appearing in de-gendered Communist uniform, as an

\textsuperscript{231} Dai Jinhua expressly locates Yang as ‘an object of prohibition’ throughout the text, a symbolic appropriation of revolutionary textual modes and enacted sublimation of the female form. See Wang & Barlow, \textit{Cinema and Desire}, p. 35.
Eighth Route Army member), Yang inverts and appropriates revolutionary forms, in favour of fractured themes.

This fragmentation of the established heroine is didactically confirmed by Yang’s inglorious demise in *One and Eight*, as a male prisoner mercifully kills her. Having been captured by the Japanese she pleads and begs him to shoot her, preventing intended rape and violation at the hands of the enemy. The emotive impact of this sequence is demonstrative of ‘new wave’ filmmaking, whereby Yang’s symbolic downfall is graphically imagined rather than shown. After she is shot, it is her shadowy reflection and not her actual body that registers her death within the frame. The overriding effect of this device highlights the obscurity of her demise and its dramatic enactment.

As an emblem of violated and overwhelmed humanism, the image symbolises the brutal potency of militant discourse and its debasing manifestations. Furthermore, Yang’s death allegorises the consequences and traumas of a reconstructed past, specifically the Cultural Revolution, where humanist ideals where crushed by uncompromising and obscure political forces.

Whereas Yang embodies the marginal reconstruction of Chinese women throughout 1980s combat films, similar attention needs to be paid to the emergence and articulation of non-Chinese forms. Framed in contexts of expanding and broadening cultural perspectives, the depiction of female ‘enemy’ protagonists serves to further fragment established hegemony,

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232 Paul Clark locates Yang’s demise within a gendered matrix, suggesting she “has to be shot to save her from the consequences of her femininity”. This explicitly marks Yang as a displaced and marginal figure, overwhelmed and then disposed of by patriarchal entities. Clark, *Modern Chinese Literature*, p. 124.
articulating discourses of negotiated alterity. In both *The Intercepted Order* and *Guandong Heroine*, the representation and portrayal of civilian Japanese women exemplifies this process. Contrasted to absences in revolutionary modes, their materialisations in 1980s variants are symptomatic of reforming generic and cultural institutions at large.

Projections of the Japanese female as an alternative register of war are effectively demonstrated in *The Intercepted Order*, primarily through concentration on Meizi (Shirakawa’s wife) and Jiuzi (a Japanese comfort woman). Both figures are portrayed as symbolic victims within the narrative, marginalised in their detachment from native environments and subjugated to the Imperial military institution. Despite being marked as decadent and foreign in the text (wearing traditional Japanese clothing, shown engaging in cultural traditions), the film recurrently portrays their heightened sense of dislocation and marginality. Jiuzi in particular emerges as a victimized protagonist, rendered an object of sexual gratification for the Japanese forces after her fiancée (an infantryman) is killed in battle. Moreover, the impact of her marginality and suffering manifests in tragic consequences, leading to her eventual suicide near the narrative conclusion (after co-operating with the Eighth Route forces to trap Shirakawa).²³³

²³³ As a marginal and foreign figure, it is definitively symbolic that Jiuzi commits suicide at the text’s conclusion. Although the narrative ultimately paints her in a sympathetic light (as a victim of the Imperial army and object of male violation), and she makes a contribution to resistive action, she is re-enforced as an exotic outsider through this demise. Accordingly, Jiuzi’s emergence as a newly articulated protagonist throughout the narrative is shaded by her marginal and tragic form.
This sense of victimization as verified by the civilian Japanese woman is similarly enacted within *Guandong Heroine*, although in a more overt form than *The Intercepted Order*. After having been rescued by the Heroine from an intended gang-rape, the foreign figure (a schoolgirl, daughter of the commanding enemy officer) traumatically witnesses her saviour’s execution. As the Heroine is shot, the girl runs towards her and then suddenly halts as she registers her dead body lying in the snow. Her distressed reaction to this (shown in freeze frame) serves as the final image of the text, a de-centred allegory of China’s suffering and paralysis in the shadow of the Cultural Revolution. Similarly, the presence of the Japanese girl at this climax point transpires as a signifier of discursive reconstitution throughout 1980s variants, reforming the bounds of established narrative agency and identification.

Developments and shifts in the diffuse representation of women throughout 1980s variants are symbolic of broader restructures within China in the initial post-Mao period. The emergence of both ‘complex’ and ‘marginal’ female figures during this phase signifies the nature of this adaptation and its progression in generic modelling. Correspondingly, regulated and conditioned projections of women in revolutionary forms are steadily appropriated throughout the 1980s, indicative of wider reformations of Chinese cultural consciousness and national identification at large.

**Children and Families in the Reformed Combat Variant**

Within the field of recent research into post-Mao cinematic projections, attention to depictions of children and families have been progressively
explored and enacted by theorists.\textsuperscript{234} This mirrors the centrality of these dual elements in the configuration of social, cultural and national institutions. Paying specific attention to the initial reform era, the restructure and reconstitution of these two elements are fundamental to an appreciation of cultural reformation in China. The textual prevalence and significance of both children and families in the 1980s combat film, thus provides further opportunity to examine the extent of adaptation in the variant during this period.

Articulations of children as enigmatically sublimated subjects in Maoist modes are largely redrawn throughout resistive narratives of the 1980s. Whilst retaining their function in signifying and allegorising national futurity, children are equally recast within wider progressions of ideological and discursive reform. Emerging as cultural and social icons of modernity, adolescent figures are repositioned as national and cultural verifiers to this degree, indicative of a refracted and reconfigured present.\textsuperscript{235}

This is demonstrated to an innovative extent within \textit{Red Sorghum}, focussing on child protagonist Dou-guan as a documenter and register of violation in the film. The boy fulfils a somewhat diluted and marginal role throughout narrative diegesis itself, yet his role at textual conclusion is central to its


\textsuperscript{235} This is based upon an appreciation of elements of ‘mimesis’ and ‘vita activa’, characteristics identified by Stephanie Donald as central to the perception and interpretation of childhood subjects on Chinese screens. Donald, \textit{Public Secrets}, pp. 47-49.
rendering as a ‘new wave’ variant. In this capacity, Dou-guan surfaces as a divergence from the romanticised childhood figures of Maoist variants, indicative of a restructured Chinese imaginary. Whereas children of revolutionary modes desire and ultimately achieve a greater sense of identity through ideological and active participation in resistance, for Dou-guan the inverse is emphasised.

In the carnivalesque and intimate environment of the local village, life for Dou-guan is inceptively untroubled and uncomplicated. A child of a socially unconventional and marginal upbringing (parented by the de-facto figures of Grandpa and Jiu-er) he is initially unaware of political didacticism or orthodoxy. This is dramatically altered by textual conclusion where he witnesses the village massacre and destruction under enemy assault. Framed in slow motion against a blood red landscape, Dou-guan is emotively captured at this point singing a song to direct his mother towards heaven. This sequence emphasises his personal suffering and trauma, a symptomatic consequence of resistive and ideological activation.236 On an allegorical level this song similarly signifies the failure of orthodox ideology, specifically manifest in the Cultural Revolution and its indeterminate aftermath. As a verifier of suffering, destruction and trauma, Dou-guan’s role is thus akin to that of the ‘new wave’ itself, seeking identity and expression through appropriating established cinematic forms.

236 As Esther Yau contemplates of this sequence, Dou-guan’s chanting has ‘an enigmatic function’ within the text, marking the transition towards a destabilised and fragmented collective identity, a symbolic reconstruction of politicised textual forms. Yau, Wide Angle, p. 20.
Similarly in *Zhan zheng cha qu/War Interlude* (1989, dir. Zhang Yuqiang), and *Counterattack* the focus on children and their role in the familial unit, as symbolic verifiers of combat is emphasised.\(^{237}\) Through articulating the war and its impact on childhood and familial interactions, the opportunity to explore and invert hegemonic perspectives arises. This is prevalent throughout *War Interlude* explicitly, focussing on a group of young orphans in the care of an Eighth Route Army detachment during the War of Resistance. The absence of specific parental figures in this film (with the exception of Chao-wa’s mother who is killed during a bombing raid), immediately denotes the text as a reformed narrative allegory.\(^{238}\) The stark omission of these overarching authorial figures within the narrative (integral to the propulsion of revolutionary modes) highlights its presence as a restructured variant, exploring de-politicised themes through adolescent protagonists. Furthermore, attention to the makeshift community as an idyllic and constructed space is enhanced by the stylistic form and feature of central protagonist Xiu-jiu as narrator (from a reflective 1980s perspective).

The children of *War Interlude* thus emerge as a dislocated and reconstituted national collective, located within grand narrative (in the care of the Communist army) yet similarly displaced by it (as witnesses of loss and suffering). This is exemplified through Xiu-jiu herself, whose immersion in the resistive community is marked by deviance and ambiguity. Whereas in established narratives children are progressively transformed into ideal

\(^{237}\) See my ‘Plot summaries’ segment for a review of *War Interlude*.

\(^{238}\) Equally symbolic is the absence of the male Communist figure within this text, whose presence (like Luohan in *Red Sorghum*) is fleeting and ineffectual. *War Interlude* thus emerges as a reconfigured combat film.
revolutionary subjects under the guidance of Party institution, in this text conventional norms are explicitly disrupted.

Although Xiu-jiu does reform from an initially mischievous troublemaker into an active communal participant in the film, this is facilitated by personal bonds and intimacy rather than overarching political orthodoxy. Through narrative progression Xiu-jiu and Chao-wa (the youngest members of the group) emerge primarily as witnesses to the private connections formed between protagonists and their subsequent evisceration by external forces. At the text’s conclusion the narration breaches into the 1980s era, where Xiu-jiu mourns the loss of her friends from the retrospective positioning of a nostalgic adulthood. The impact of this device is symptomatic of reformed approaches to the resistance narrative, de-centring revolutionary variants in favour of modern and complex alternatives.  

Similarly projected within Counterattack, the prevalence of young children as symbols of familial loss and the personal devastations of war are emphasised. This is didactically prefaced in the text as protagonist Lu Chun-xiu imagines her children alone and crying as last thoughts before sacrificing herself for the resistive effort. In the film’s final sequence, Communist figure Liang tearfully encounters the children and then leads them away (carrying the baby uncertainly and uncomfortably in his arms) to a seemingly new life. The final

239 Stephanie Donald encounters this symptomatic re-writing of the revolutionary child protagonist in her appreciation of modern cinema and its themes of civility. She locates these re-integrated figures within wider context of ‘self-perception’ in reform-era China. Donald, Public Secrets, pp. 57-59.
shot however (a long distance, shadowy image) signifies a tenuous future, an allegory of China’s own reconstructed identity during the reform era.

As noted above, the cinematic redetermination of childhood and familial projections throughout combat variants of the 1980s signifies overarching discursive negotiations during this period. Effectively destabilised from revolutionary modes, children and families are progressively relocated within newly obscure and indeterminate positions. To this extent, previously developed styles are markedly inverted and appropriated in the process of expressing reformed figurations, structured towards emergent themes of cultural consciousness and collective identity.

**Landscape in the Reformed Combat Variant**

The advent of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath had a profound impact on the representation and articulation of dominant cultural forms. Within cinema in particular, reform-era filmmakers sought to dislocate and fragment the traditional function of landscape. The combat film proves no exception to this, whereby resistive topographies are progressively disrupted and reconstituted from ‘new wave’ perspectives. Film artists subsequently appropriate established roles of landscape and translate them into wider negotiations of cultural consciousness.\(^{240}\) Accordingly, whilst 1980s variants of cinematic landscapes still articulate regulated signifiers of Chinese nationhood, they refract and restructure them from revolutionary origins.

\(^{240}\) The significance of landscape throughout the realm of ‘new wave’ innovation is explored by a number of theorists. Of these accounts the most significant are Zhang Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, pp. 232-265. And Desser & Ehrlich, *Cinematic Landscapes*, 1994.
Throughout *Evening Bell* this is explored to a considerable extent, where rural landscapes are largely de-politicised and de-familiarised from romantic styles. The fundamental structures of the Socialist landscape are implicitly rewritten within this text in appreciation of reformed and redetermined modes of cultural consciousness.\(^{241}\) This is highlighted throughout the text by interactions between the Eighth Route Division, the peasants and the landscape itself. During one sequence as the division pass through a local village they discover a land mine. The villagers run away from the bomb in fear, seemingly unaffected and undaunted by the presence of the army itself. Contrastingly the soldiers run in the opposite direction, towards the site of attention, seemingly ignorant and unaware of the villagers. This brief iconographic sequence is indicative of polarity and disphasure between these elements, characteristics that are romantically sublimated in Maoist textual forms.\(^{242}\) From a post-revolutionary perspective this sequence translates the idealised Party-mass relationship of orthodox Socialism into reformed variants, emphasising themes of dislocation and fracture.

At recurrent points throughout the narrative of *Evening Bell*, the Eighth Routers are depicted traversing the landscape in hazy medium and long shots, seemingly engulfed and minimised by the natural environment. Instead of traversing the terrain with ease and effortlessness (as revolutionary

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\(^{241}\) This is especially characteristic of the ‘fifth generation’ style of filmmaking, where as Chen Xiaoming argues, “form compresses the revolutionary myth to the most abstract level and rewrites it through the formalist language of the camera”. Chen, *boundary 2*, p. 128.

\(^{242}\) This sequence of suggestive disphasure bears some similarity to the conclusion of *Huang tu di/Yellow Earth* (1984, dir. Chen Kaige), where Eighth Route Soldier Gu Qing returns to the local village. Here Gu is seemingly suspended in motion, striving to reach his destination but never arriving. Both texts thus emphasise dislocation between the army and peasants at these points, emphatically disrupting revolutionary myth and transferring it into modern equivocal forms.
protagonists do) these Party representatives appear deflated and isolated in the cinematic frame. Emphasising this effect is the use of a fixed front-on camera in the text, where characters seemingly ‘walk into’ the frame. This is explicitly enacted at the film’s ambiguous conclusion where the Commander is depicted having survived the explosion of the armament. The narrative progression is purposely stalled at this moment, where the camera repeats his entry into the frame three times. Each successive time the Commander comes into focus through the bottom of the frame the concreteness of the event itself is questioned. The extent to which the shot surfaces as a diegetic moment (indicating his survival) or a non-diegetic elegy (to his character and sacrifice) is obscured through this device.243 The landscape thus equivocally frames the Commander’s presence at this critical moment of Evening Bell, emphasising the ambiguity of the image itself and the mythologising of the heroic protagonist.

Equivalently, within Red Sorghum the emergence of alternatively modern and reconstituted landscapes are steadily articulated. The most striking indicator of this throughout the film features in the construction of the sorghum itself, depicted as a vastly productive yet ambiguous entity.244 As the enemy forces arrive and threaten to fragment the village community, the landscape (centrally the sorghum) functions as a verifier of violation and abuse. This is

243 With this in mind it is not surprising that Zhang Yingjin labels Evening Bell a film of ‘dissent’, one symbolically rewriting cinematic and historic discourses. Zhang, Screening China, p. 188.
244 Moreover, the sorghum emerges as a terrain that signifies equivocal attitudes towards Chinese modernity in the 1980s. As Zhang Xudong notes, “The wild sorghum field swinging in the wind, saturated by the wine-coloured sunshine...is a cult image of both a modern-time emancipation and an antimodern utopia free from the iron cage of modernity”. Zhang, Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms, p. 317.
overtly demonstrated in the sequence depicting the trampling of the sorghum itself, enacted by the villagers under Japanese gunpoint. The use of unconventional cinematic style to depict this, including high angle, panning and tilting shots is indicative of a disrupted cinematic style and order. This scene is posited in stark contrast to earlier ones of communal utopia, where the villagers interact freely and productively within the winery, an alternative site to that of the contested and dominated sorghum.

The most striking signifier of inverted and appropriated landscape within *Red Sorghum* however, is evidenced in the film’s conclusion. Having ‘failed’ in their efforts to resist, Grandpa and Dou-guan transfixedly survey and document the enacted tragedy. Through a smoking and burning landscape they stand as witnesses to devastation and destruction, traumatised by the events that have occurred. The use of a medium tracking shot that appears hazy, framed by the consumed landscape, serves to emphasise the destruction of war and consequences of its failure.

Equivalently, the feature of the equivocal eclipse during this segment, signified through use of a red filter that pervades the screen, inverts the established perception of resistive landscape and its regulated form.\(^{245}\) The ambiguous finale of the film, depicting the red tinted sorghum blowing wildly in the wind coupled with an emblematic love song, further fragments

\(^{245}\) Jerome Silbergeld portrays this eclipse as an especially ambiguous symbol, supporting multiple interpretations and possible readings. Silbergeld, *China Into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. London: Reaktion Books, 1999, pp. 74-79. To this extent, the eclipse as a cinematic allegory exemplifies the reformed style of post-Mao filmmaking, de-centring established representations in favour of equivocal and complex alternatives.
revolutionary narrative effectively translating it into reformist critique and negotiation. The alternative landscapes of Red Sorghum as emblematised by these sequences essentially materialise as allegories of graphic trauma and their impact throughout Twentieth Century China.

The appropriation and rectification of regulated landscapes within 1980s variants are thus symptomatic of ideological negotiations in the shadow of the Cultural Revolution. Whilst the topography itself continues to maintain symbolic status in framing combat films, its standardised and politicised form is largely disrupted. Similarly, the emergence of an alternative iconic landscape, one encasing complex appreciations of the resistance narrative, highlights progressions towards reformed considerations of Chinese identity and cultural consciousness.
**Combat Case Study – *Evening Bell***

In order to best locate and demonstrate the adaptation of the combat film towards reformed and restructured modes throughout this variant, the variegations I have argued in this chapter must be traced in parallel to wider cinematic trends and innovations. Consequently, the following section analyses and investigates one specific film in depth, as indicative of overarching cinematic developments and progressions of the 1980s era.

In this context *Evening Bell* emerges as an emblematic text, one effectively demonstrating both generic and cinematic modifications throughout the 1980s decade, as contrasted from revolutionary forms. Subsequently *Evening Bell* can be charted not only as a seminal film in the development of reformed combat variants, but equally of a restructured cinematic discourse and praxis at large. Directed by a formative member of the Chinese ‘fifth generation’, Wu Ziniu, it bears all the hallmarks of stylistic innovation and ‘new wave’ aesthetics that other seminal 1980s texts are renowned for. As a reformed cinematic variant the film is ultimately controversial, receiving an apprehensive response from Chinese censors, forced to undergo multiple cuts before release and ultimately winning recognition on the international stage rather than domestically.\(^\text{246}\) At the same time *Evening Bell* is undoubtedly a

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\(^{246}\) *Evening Bell* won the prestigious ‘Golden Bear’ Award at the 1988 Berlin Film Festival. Despite being recognised on an international level, the film was received suspiciously in China by both audiences and authorities alike. In this manner, Wu faced the same kind of ambiguous criticism that fellow members of the ‘fifth generation’ endured throughout the 1980s, characterised by periodic banning and blacklisting. Before *Evening Bell* the director had encountered his own sanctions in previous years, where two of his films (both war-themed) *Ge zi shu /Dove Tree* (1985, dir. Wu Ziniu) and *Huan le ying xiong / Joyous Heroes* (1984, dir. Wu Ziniu) were banned and have subsequently never been released.
generic text, one strongly interlinked with the other combat variants discussed thus far in this chapter.

The innovative and restructured style of *Evening Bell* is discerned from the film’s very inception, where features of discordance and ambiguity are prevalent. The initial sequences are highly atmospheric where the emblematic focus is on cinematic aesthetics, manifest in dissonant montage (burial flags blowing in the wind, images of wide rural landscapes) and sounds of disphasure (wind whistling through the terrain, a bell tolling from an unidentified source) that are indicative of a desolate environment.\(^{247}\) As symptomatic of ‘fifth generation’ modes, the emphasis is on forms of narrative restructure and deregulation.

Moreover, as the narrative shifts from these formulative sequences to initial character locations and identifications, there is an equivalent focus on de-centring and restructure. Whereas established narrative modes prioritise the regulated positioning of central protagonists within text (i.e. of oppressed village communities and heroic/resistive agents), *Evening Bell* takes a contrary approach. Here the enemy are identified before the Chinese soldiers, projected in a steadily menacing and distorted manner. Shown kneeling in front of their Japanese commander and responding to a role call (in their native language), they emerge as an initial source of narrative dislocation in the text. The cinematic style employed in this scene is equally discordant,\(^{247}\)

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\(^{247}\) As Zhang Xudong has noted, this emblematic style characterises cinematic innovation and exploration during the 1980s, where the focus throughout Chinese modes is on “objects of aesthetic study, rather than falling into the position of sheer illustration of political or socio-economic circumstances”. Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, p. 205.
whereby the feature of framing serves to compartmentalise the soldiers’ form (shown in continuous panning medium and close-ups shots from the head up) rendering their presence as obscure.

Throughout *Evening Bell* this tendency to compartmentalise and dissociate articulations of the human body in text (of both Chinese and Japanese protagonists) is distinctly pronounced. In this mode the angle of shots and framing utilised are employed to this effect, prescribing concurrently to reformist and ‘new wave’ cinematic styles. Wu tends to depict the Eighth Routers from a low angled perspective throughout the narrative, where their presence is commonly de-centred in the frame. Furthermore, these characters frequently pervade and permeate the boundary of the frame itself, effectively ‘passing through’ the borders of the screen. In this manner established senses of suture and centralised agency attributed to revolutionary subjects are definitively disrupted in favour of themes of alienation and marginality. These protagonists are thus ascribed as unorthodox types, whose projections are mediated towards steadily reformed and redirected modes of identification.

Tendencies towards the de-territorialisation of the generic form are further emphasised by features of dialogue at the text’s inception, towards steady displacement. The presence of Japanese language in the role call, enunciated in a discordant manner (the Commander sternly ‘barks’ out the soldiers’

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248 Zhu Ying argues that the promulgation of these reformed and ‘new wave’ visual techniques is towards a steady disruption of established ‘classical narration’ within Chinese cinema, effectively breaching into themes of ‘self-reflexivity’ and ‘self-consciousness’. Zhu, *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform*, p. 55.

249 Peter Hitchcock conducts an in-depth examination of this gravitation at large in the Chinese cinema in his account of features of ‘alienation’ throughout 1980s films. Hitchcock, *Cultural Studies*, pp. 116-141.
names to which they reply), is in steady contradistinction from the regulated and orthodox modes of revolutionary cinema. In this manner *Evening Bell*’s emphasis on themes of marginality and alienation is distinctly marked. Furthermore, dialogue remains absent and de-centred throughout the text itself, whereby the first narrative exchanges do not occur until well into its progression (roughly twelve minutes in). Consequently, *Evening Bell* prescribes to trends of dialogic reformation that are symptomatic of many ‘fifth generation’ films.250

The recurrent feature of de-centred allegory and iconographic symbolism is another striking characteristic of *Evening Bell* signifying adaptation and restructuring of cinematic norms during the 1980s. Similarly indicative of Wu’s directorial style, the presences of elegiac sequences are predominant and impacting.251 In this mode there are two specific examples of form and content that emblematise this. Somewhat surprisingly both these scenes revolve around the presence of animals in the combat film, hitherto marginalised signifiers.

The first example surrounds the aforementioned sequence of enemy role call, where the obscure nature of the scene reaches its climax as the Commander releases a white dove into the air. The feature of the dove itself (shown in both


251 As noted earlier, Wu Ziniu presents himself as an agent of ‘dissent’ in Chinese cinema, where the presence of such ambiguous sequences (as symbolic allegory) gravitate towards themes of enduring ‘humanism’ and contemplating an ‘irrational’ civilisation. Zhang, *ibid.*, pp. 82-85.
close-up and medium shot) is somewhat unconventional for a combat narrative, universally signifying themes of peace and humanitarianism. Thus the jarring presence of this icon serves to highlight *Evening Bell* as a reformed narrative mode, one infused with themes of negotiated cultural consciousness in 1980s China.

The subsequent and contrasting case involves the ubiquitous presence of a fleeing dog, chased by a group of villagers at one point in the narrative. Depicted in a slow motion montage where the feature of sound (the reverberating noises of a mass stampede) and image (the dog shown running in a medium shots towards the camera with the villagers in pursuit) prompt obscurity. As the sequence mounts (emphasised by intercepted shots of dog and villagers approaching combined with louder sounds of stampede) the atmosphere is pierced by the sound of a gunshot as the dog is blasted by one of the Eighth Routers. After this soldier is ephemerally registered (shown in angled medium shot with gun in recoil) the camera returns to an extended image of the dog lying wounded and dying. The impact of this scene is jarring, whereby the events are seemingly unmotivated and obscure. Contrasted to the image of the dove, this sequence emerges as an allegorical meditation on violation and destruction as enacted within narrative. In alignment with cinematic progressions throughout the 1980s period, these segments of *Evening Bell* gravitate towards explicit negotiation and reconnected modes of cultural consciousness within China.
In terms of symbolic allegory and recurrent signification, the feature of the Japanese belltower (from which the film suggestively takes its title) is equally significant. The recurrent presence of a lone figure chopping the tower down in three differing segments of the film (initiation, mid-point and conclusion respectively) correlates to notions of allegory and elegy in ‘new wave’ cinematic styles. As an emblematic icon of past domination and suppression, the progressive destruction of the belltower symbolically frames the narrative in contexts of the reform era.252

The projection of these segments in a specific cinematic style ensures this whereby use of shadowy lighting (from progressive moods of sunrise to sunset) and sound (the diegetic resonance of wood chopping) render the sequence as a 1980s allegory. To this extent, the destruction of the tower (leading to its slow motion collapse and freeze frame at the film’s end credits) is indicative of cinematic and cultural re-imaginings in the initial reform era, effectively overthrowing the spectre of China’s traumatic past.

The feature of framing as a device of cinematic regularity and orthodoxy is steadily restructured throughout 1980s textual modes, emblematised by the innovative endeavours of China’s ‘fifth generation’ filmmakers. Correlating to this style, Wu employs a steadily reformed cinematic frame throughout Evening Bell, one characterised by features of de-centring and

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252 The impact of this belltower procession, as outlined by Zhang Yingjin, signifies Evening Bell’s mode of ideological contemplation and negotiation. In this manner the action is projected as an explicitly symbolic sequence, one that abstractly critiques discourses of war (causes, impacts, consequences). *ibid.*, p. 82.
compartmentalisation. As with the above noted presence of dissection in relation to Japanese soldiers, an equivalent degree of partition is attributed to the Eighth Route Army figures in the text. This is pronounced throughout the film where characters are peripherally located in the frame.

Perhaps the most enigmatic instance of this surrounds the soldiers’ introduction within the narrative itself. Depicted burying their comrades in mass graves in low and high angled medium shots, the frame tends to dissect the heroes bodies. Here the presence of a fixed camera and of protagonists moving through the frame itself, are indicative of innovative and restructured cinematic modes in China. Similarly the number of dead bodies scattered throughout the landscape that fill the background of the burial endeavour serve to render the effort as overwhelming and ambiguous. Displacing the standard encasement of revolutionary images, this reformed mode gravitates towards de-mythologised and ambivalent meditations.

As noted earlier in this chapter in accordance with initial modes of the reform era, features of costuming throughout 1980s texts are steadily redetermined. This manifests definitively in *Evening Bell* where the combat protagonists are characterised by tattered and faded army uniforms, progressively besmirched through the narrative and bearing predominant patchworks. The Eighth Route

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detachment is thus projected as a de-mythologised and haphazard force, reinforcing the themes of alienation and isolation that pervade the narrative. The Japanese forces (emblematised by Takeda) are similarly begrimed in *Evening Bell*, where their uniforms are ragged and torn, indicative of a debased and degraded institutional force. This stylised format is directly contrasted to the ‘brightness’ of revolutionary variants, where clothing is steadily subsumed into modes of orthodoxy. Correspondingly, this restructure of uniform is embedded in ‘new wave’ cinematic practices, appropriating Maoist signifiers and re-directing them towards themes of disphasure.²⁵⁵

In terms of specific cinematic devices and styles differentiating 1980s variants from their predecessors, attributes of editing are foremost. This is especially indicative within the combat genre, where formal innovation and experimentation is explicitly proffered.²⁵⁶ *Evening Bell* surfaces in this context as an enigmatic case, where editing is employed in restructured manners. The feature of stark and disjointed modes characterise this text, whereby the established tendency towards suture and regulation is disrupted. Whilst the editing form is less didactic than revolutionary variants (using standard cuts rather than dissolves, wipes or fades), the mode is comparatively ambivalent, tending toward a jarring and ambiguous type of flow.

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²⁵⁵ The begrimed and de-centred appearance of these soldiers within *Evening Bell* is characteristic of ‘fifth generation’ cinematic reformations (such as in *Red Sorghum* and *One and Eight*, noted earlier), where the symbolic burden and weight of a failed revolutionary utopia is allegorically expressed. As Paul Clark notes of the film, the ‘Eighth Route’ badge labelling these protagonists is the only Chinese signifier of political or national identification in the film, where its very presence (as torn, dirty and discoloured) is rendered ambiguous. Clark, *Modern Chinese Literature*, p. 129.

²⁵⁶ As Chen Xiaoming denotes of this stylistic development in a comparative text, *One and Eight*, this amounts to formal abstraction whereby established modes are “transformed into striking graphic and narrative designs bereft of any specific meaning”. Chen, *boundary 2*, p. 127.
Subsequently *Evening Bell* is marked by a style of narrative unpredictability, whereby a ‘jumping’ of space and place often occurs.\(^{257}\) Although this surfaces in contradistinction to established cinematic formats, it adheres to ‘new wave’ tendencies of the 1980s, with emphasis on stylistic innovation and experimentation.

The pace of the film itself is comparatively slow (for a resistance narrative) with limited sequences detailing combat strategy and enactment. Subsequently, the plot focuses on the tenuous developments of a cease-fire and surrender between the isolated forces. In this manner an emphasis on negotiation and conciliation rather than martial enactment marks *Evening Bell* as a reformed textual variant. The symptomatic tension and suspense that replaces themes of progressive strategy and battle highlights cinematic restructure, whereby the combat genre is appropriated towards themes of mediated cultural consciousness and negotiation.\(^{258}\)

Another of the innovative cinematic devices utilised within *Evening Bell* is the feature of reformed narrations and flashbacks. The absence of an overarching and directive narrative source within the text immediately establishes it as a restructured mode, contrasted from revolutionary variants (i.e. presence of verbal or written prologues). Moreover, the explicit prefacing of multiple perspectives and imaginings throughout *Evening Bell* mark it as a stylistically

\(^{257}\) Zhang Yingjin relates this to Wu Ziniu’s directorial style and in particular his preference for cinematic images over narrative modality in text. Zhang, *Chinese Films in Focus*, p. 82.

\(^{258}\) This correlates with Chen Xiaoming’s perceptions of cinematic industry and praxes throughout the 1980s, with particular emphasis on a de-mythologised narrative function. In this manner, revolutionary didacticism is replaced with themes of deliberated abstraction and negotiation. Chen, *boundary 2*, p. 126.
innovative film. Varied protagonists (from both Chinese and Japanese forces) are privileged with flashbacks during the film, where these imaginings are signified in both visual and audible manners. In one particular scene, after having completed a mass burial, the Eighth Route protagonists are captured resting on a hillside, mournfully contemplating their own existence. Here the use of multiple non-diegetic voiceovers, jumping from one to the other (confirmed by their silent presence in correlative medium shots) disrupts the flow and regulation of combat norms. Subsequently this segment emphasises the subjective and psychological impacts of war, attributing each protagonist a specific and traumatic past. Indicative of ‘fifth generation’ progressions, this cinematic mode gravitates toward authorisation of marginal and alternative imaginings.

In combination with features of progressive and accentuated silence throughout Evening Bell, the presence of explicit diegetic sound is equally symbolic of reformed cinematic modes. This manifests recurrently in the film in specific relation to regulated noises, emanating natural and man-made resonances. The first specific example of this surrounds attention to birdcalls in the text. Commonly emanating during expanded sequences of silence and confrontation (i.e. as Chinese and Japanese commander’s face each other) these overt and piercing calls are effectively obscuring and disorienting.

259 As Paul Clark has effectively documented this gravitation towards multiple, alternative and complex modes of narrative authoring, is symptomatic of ‘fifth generation’ styles. Subsequently, the didactic regularity and specificity of established forms are countered by modes of displaced agency and universal experience. Clark, Modern Chinese Literature, p. 129.

260 This is similarly indicative of Wu’s cinematic oeuvre, articulating the tragic, fracturing and obviating potential of warfare. This is informed dually by Wu’s own humanistic principles and his first-hand subjective experiences of war. See Clark, ibid., pp. 127-128.
Equally decentring is the emphasised articulation of soldiers’ marching in the film, progressively building tension and anxiety in the text. To this degree, the regulated presence of the marching is an imposing referent to potential menace and destruction. The final incident of consistent resonance surrounds the grating sound of chopping wood, symptomatic of the theme of the deconstructed belltower noted earlier. In this manner, the fostering sound of chopping is rendered allegorical, signifying an attempted overthrow of repression and domination. In these three examples noted above, the gravitating theme of audible regulation emphasises themes of ‘poetic’ isolation within the film. Moreover in stylistic modes, these devices prescribe to prevailing cinematic oeuvres of the 1980s, essentially appropriating and negotiating modes of Chinese cultural consciousness.

The depiction of specific spaces and location within Evening Bell subscribes to progressive notions of ‘new wave’ cinema during the 1980s. In alignment with revolutionary predecessors the frame of action centres exclusively on rural settings, yet where the mise-en-scène is steadily negotiated and restructured. The landscapes of this film are desolate and barren (marked by the protagonists presence traversing them), emphasised by extensive use of medium and long shots where the Eighth Route group are recurrently minimised and decentred. The Chinese army are rendered isolated nomads

261 It is precisely these themes of ambiguous marginality, as relayed in this instance through sound devices that characterises Evening Bell’s stylistic endeavour. In this manner the text, as identified by both Zhang Yingjin and Zhu Ying, purports a ‘poetic’ aura. Zhang, Chinese Films in Focus, p. 80. And Zhu, Chinese Cinema During the Reform Era, p. 57.

262 Paul Clark notes the recurrence of barren and unfriendly landscapes throughout Wu Ziniu’s films as characteristic of his specific filmic style (mainly in effect of voicing themes of universal humanism and forced patriotism). He sees Evening Bell as especially emblematic of this, noting that the environment is so alien, it “might exist on the moon”. Clark, Modern Chinese Literature, p. 129.
in the film, unable to find spaces of regrouping or rehabilitation. In terms of specific locations, the only place of hospitable living emphasised in the film is ironically the enemy armament. This too is depicted as a desolate space (enclosed in a quarry, filled with ammunition and visualised in shadowy lighting) in contrast to the primitive (but structured) spaces of revolutionary enactment. The overarching impact of this renders war and combat as allegorically isolating and austere endeavours, in alignment with themes of national recollection and reformation throughout the 1980s period.

Attention to alternative perspectives and renderings of war’s impact as alienating are similarly enacted throughout *Evening Bell*, with special reference to the Japanese surrender and subsequent duty to them as prisoners of war. This is particularly manifest in terms of food and provisions whereby the Eighth Routers forgo and submit their own rations in order to provide for the enemy. The sequences projecting the Japanese army receiving the benefits of this action are subtly menacing, where the enemy soldiers desperately devour the food in a series of medium shots. Projected here gorging on the provisions (as the Eighth Routers watch on anxiously) the enemy are depicted as a symbolically animalised and primitive group. Moreover, as the Chinese Army later discover that the Japanese have engaged in cannibalism during internment, this degradation and mortification is affirmed. Framed within

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263 Dai Jinhua locates this *oeuvre* of isolation and marginality throughout ‘new wave’ variants as indicative of a ‘father-son’ regrouping in Chinese cinema. In this manner, the desolate environment these protagonists are thrust into (as Dai specifically locates in *One and Eight*) serves as an allegory of this process of negotiation and reformation. Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, pp. 13-48.

264 As with the primal references noted in relation to *Red Sorghum* earlier in this chapter, these features of emblematic debasement are symptomatic of reformed narrative imaginings and allegories throughout the 1980s. At the same time, this modality prescribes to Wu’s directorial trademark of a tragic and fractured humanism as identified in his interview with Kong Haili, *Asian Cinema*, pp. 129-133.
context of wider ‘new wave’ discursive themes, articulations of human depravity and debasement signify a renegotiation of modes of identification and cultural consciousness in China.

The bracketing and decentralisation of overarching historical conditionings is another characteristic of the reformist cinematic aesthetic pronounced in *Evening Bell*. Consequently, the narrative redirects the orthodox regulation and familiarity of revolutionary norms towards marginal and indistinct modes. The text is thus relayed in a somewhat hermetic frame, where features of the hegemonic resistive narrative are decentralised and absented. This is indicated in the plot focus of the narrative itself, concentrating on a seemingly aimless division of the Eighth Route Army stumbling into a redundant detachment of Japanese soldiers. Whereas revolutionary variants are constructed towards a potent and impacting resistive enactment (organised and authorised by Socialist agents), *Evening Bell* gravitates toward an obscure and undifferentiated conclusion, where the Eighth Routers must lead the surrendering Imperial troops back to civilisation. The restructure of the regulated resistive climax in *Evening Bell*, in articulating themes of alienation and marginality is symptomatic of ‘new wave’ cinematic trends throughout the 1980s, allegorising negotiations of the Chinese cultural imaginary and wider cultural consciousness.

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265 This is informed by the de-centring and absence of regulated narrative elements throughout the text (i.e. location of the setting, names of Eight Route protagonists, relativity or passing of time). Subsequently the film adopts an alternative approach to the machinations and enactments of war itself, framed in unorthodox and indeterminate contexts.
Evening Bell’s narrative flow is recurrently interrupted by sequences of natural and ethereal allegory that are symptomatic of ‘new wave’ cinematic trends. Here the feature of both regular and extreme long shots of differing landscapes (including the belltower itself, the moon, of mountains and valleys), embedded between narrative sequences, serve to disrupt regulative flow. Moreover these images (distant, hazy and atmospheric) epitomise themes of disphasure and alienation that characterise the ‘fifth generation’ style, appropriating established cinematic forms and translating them towards modes of cultural introspection and re-imagination.

As a symptom of ‘new wave’ cinematic trends to appropriate and redirect historical enactments, Evening Bell prescribes to the thematic mode of confronting the burden of China’s past sufferings and failures.266 As noted earlier this manifests explicitly in the feature of the belltower itself (a device of surveillance and repression), which is ultimately destroyed at the film’s conclusion. The final image of the text itself, a freeze-frame as the tower falls (confirmed by the sound of wood breaking), shadowed against the setting sun is indicative of post-Mao cinematic trends, allegorising China’s identity in the reform era. In this manner, the destruction of the tower is effectively obscured (implied rather than seen) whereby the image is rendered incomplete and in stasis. The overarching discourse of reform itself (of modernisation, of overthrowing the revolutionary past, of emerging in a ‘new’ society) is thus cast into an indeterminate sphere, one representing 1980s styles of negotiation and imagination. In this manner Wu Ziniu’s style (as with that of the ‘fifth

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266 This is enacted in a distinctly complex manner in Evening Bell, as detailed by Zhang Yingjin, gravitating towards a “double vision of transcendent humanity and barbaric civilisation”. Zhang, Chinese Films in Focus, p. 84.
generation’ at large) articulates a mode of identification that is apprehensive, an appropriated alternative to regulated and orthodox renderings of Maoist forms.

The cumulative promulgation of this case study has detailed *Evening Bell* as a representative text; not only of the 1980s combat film, but similarly of reformed cinematic styles of the time. To this extent, the investigation of specific themes of form and content (of this emblematic text) unveils wider progressions in the cinematic medium, with specific gravitations towards the appropriation and restructure of established styles. This shall be effectively extended and expanded upon in the following chapter, where an appreciation of adaptations in the latter stages of reform correlating to the 1990s period, will be enacted, gravitating towards dual developments of ‘renewed’ combat variants and cinematic modes.
Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has effectively traced the development of the Chinese combat film in the seminal period of the 1980s, towards the appreciation of a reformed generic variant. This has primarily involved an investigation and analysis of particular themes emblematic of the genre, and their representational contrast to modes and styles of revolutionary filmmaking.

This chapter has specifically encountered the reconstruction of generic themes within this variant focussing on: reformations and reconstitutions of heroes, enemies and collaborators; re-articulations of women; projections of children and families; as well as reconstructions of cinematic landscape. In particular, the chapter has explored these themes as symptomatic of a reformed cultural industry, charting shifts and adaptations within the context of wider discursive changes.

The development and progression of this investigation will be sustained within the following chapter, marking the progression of the combat film from the 1990s phase onwards and its appreciation of renewed global considerations. The importance of this era thus provides a symbolic structure for the subsequent chapter’s examination, effectively framing the impact of the initial stages of reform and its promulgation into the contemporary period.
Chapter Four  
1990s: The ‘Renewed’ Chinese Combat Film  

Introduction  

The previous chapter articulated the development of the combat variant during the initial period of reform in China (1980-1990) and the specific reconfiguration of resistance narratives. Of particular importance in this progression was the delineation of cinematic and generic adaptations within context of reconstituted political and national ideologies. Whilst this mode of analysis provides an integral platform into considerations of post-Mao representational alterations, from a generic viewpoint further expansion is required in providing a comprehensive account of the Chinese combat film since 1949. 

In this vein, throughout this chapter my focus shifts to the latter period of reform in China (1990s), detailing further adaptations in both the combat variant and cinematic medium at large. De-regulated from centralised productive modes whilst emerging as a device and register of modernity, filmic institutions during this era were steadily re-oriented toward commercial market aims. For an in-depth and detailed analysis of this progression and its particular economic considerations see Zhu Ying, *Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform*, pp. 71-110. Furthermore, as ‘new wave’ aesthetics were progressively developed, they were simultaneously eroded and renewed in favour of more contemporary and populist forms of expression. Thus, the medium in this phase was characterised by recurrent processes of complex negotiation and
regeneration, whereby the very parameters and fundamentals of cinematic discourse were steadily reconstituted.\textsuperscript{268}

Narratological Analysis of the Renewed Combat Film

This chapter therefore explores the transition of the combat variant throughout the 1990s, noting trends towards appreciations of the cinematic medium as a global and modern entity. This process entails a generic investigation into re-oriented themes of narrative form, character type, gender roles, and visual iconography. Furthermore, an extensive account of specific representations will be conducted focussing on: heroic protagonists, enemy figures, national collaborators, roles of women, allegories of children and families, and finally an account of combat landscape in light of contemporary trends and associations. Moreover, this chapter examines the underlying significance of this period in terms of a renewed Chinese identity and national imagination, both within the context of the changing film industry and of wider ideological reforms.

Heroes, Enemies and Collaborators in the Renewed Combat Variant

As China expanded and sustained the process of reform throughout the 1990s (emblematised by the continuance of the ‘Four Modernizations’ program and implementation of the ‘Open Door’ policy), styles and forms of the cinematic institution were further reconstituted and negotiated. Emerging during this period was the progression towards a “market based” style of production and distribution in cinema, which drastically shook the practices of the industry itself and provoked major alterations.269 In terms of the combat variant, the ‘reforming’ genre that materialised in the 1980s period was critically and stylistically redetermined throughout the 1990s in accordance with

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269 Zhu, Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform, pp. 75-104.
overarching cinematic and cultural developments. The resistance narrative was effectively ‘renewed’ as a filmic form, expanded and reconstituted within emerging practices of modernisation and globalisation.

What surfaces from this period is thus a thoroughly complex generic re-orientation, representing multiple, obscure and often contradictory perspectives. These developments are particularly acute in depictions of institutional characters within the combat mode, where representations are fractured and redetermined in the shadow of an emerging modernity. Predominant figurations of heroes, enemies and collaborators are destabilised throughout resistance narratives of the 1990s, characteristic of expanded cultural renewal, collective re-imagination and global integration. Throughout this following section I will thus investigate these institutional elements (in specific features of appearance, speech and action), noting progressions and articulations of an emerging Chinese modernity.

**Renewed Heroes**

Whereas 1980s modes of cultural reform invoke diffusion of politicised heroism, 1990s variants are characterised by a more developed search for complex and obscure representational forms. Within the context of expanding social, cultural and political ventures the emergence of dynamically modern and progressive protagonists are symptomatic of this process. Concentration on de-centred and non-institutional heroic types, originating in the 1980s, are

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270 As Zhang Xudong notes of interrelated cinematic trends and commercial expansions during this period, “The shining cinematic commodities in the global marketplace…have their origins in Chinese modernism, whose crisis can in turn be explained in the spectacular adventure of the new cinema”. Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, p. 206.
thus sustained and renewed here, where attention to peripheral perspectives are coupled with negotiations of contemporary themes and issues.\textsuperscript{271} This particularly manifests in articulations of heroic appearance, speech and activity where this dual process is projected. In order to gauge the full impact of renewed portrayals and developments, these generic themes of heroic depiction require extensive and detailed examination.

\textit{Heroic Appearance}

Concentrating on 1990s variants of the Chinese combat film, visual iconography and positing of the heroic form continues to function as a central signifying practice, yet is largely re-oriented and expanded towards modern articulations. Whilst in preliminary phases of reform (1980s) heroic appearance is diluted from its revolutionary origins, the 1990s era heralds a complex and entirely re-integrated envisioning. Accordingly, examining the renewal of heroic appearance facilitates appreciations of wider shifts and re-orientations within the genre.

Emerging as prevalent in the representation of a renewed heroic form throughout this period is the surfacing of physically disfigured and disabled protagonists. Within two emblematic texts of this period, \textit{Shen qiang xue hen}/Avenging Gun (1993, dir. Tu Jiakuan) and \textit{Jiu si yi sheng}/Nine Deaths, One Birth (1992, dirs. Mao Yuqin & Li Ling), heroic protagonists are

\textsuperscript{271} As Hong Junhao remarks, the 1990s war narrative is more widely impacted by specific political and economic factors than its 1980s variant. Thus resistive heroes emerge in expanded and renewed frames, impacted by a diverse range of representational themes and negotiations. Hong, \textit{Asian Cinema}, pp. 93-106.
physically marked by impairment. In each film respectively these wounds of resistive battle emerge as manifestations of personal suffering, dually marking a decentred status within orthodoxy whilst legitimating desires for resistive enactment. Significantly both protagonists of these narratives bear facial wounds, distinct allegories of social degradation and marginalisation.

For Shi-tou (of *Avenging Gun*) the wound on his cheek and his long hair (used to cover other disfigurements) function as iconographic symbols of past suffering, endured whilst trying to protect his lover, Mang-mei. During textual flashbacks sequences his unblemished image is brightly and clearly detailed, sharply contrasted to his obscure and hazy presence in resistive context.

Similarly in *Nine Births, One Death* protagonist Shi loses the use of his eye and two of his fingers whilst attempting to manufacture ammunition for the resistive effort. As the film progresses and he continues his preoccupation in developing munitions, Shi’s personal and emotional disphasu re is enhanced by his appearance as a physically deformed figure. Whilst he ultimately occupies the conventional role of a resistance hero (Party member, productive contributor to both physical and ideological battle in text) his degraded appearance is symptomatic of a de-centred subjectivity, bearing the very wounds and impact of war itself. These manifestations of physical deformity

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272 For reviews of each of these films, see my ‘Plot Summaries’ section.

273 The symbolic disfiguration and blemishing of the ‘face’ itself carries distinct social and cultural value within China. Here the loss of mianzi or lian (literally, ‘social’ face) goes beyond individual conditioning and is symptomatic of a fractured collective Chinese identity. As Ann Anagnost observes, “Concern for one’s ‘face’ is not fear of exposure, but concern for the very basis of one’s social identity”. Anagnost, *National Past-times*, p. 52. For a further account of ‘face’ that is expertly detailed see Andrew Kipnis, ““Face”: An Adaptable Discourse of Social Surfaces”, *Positions* 3, 1, 1995, pp. 119-148.
and disability are indicative of a reconfigured heroic identification, one
registering the fracturing capacity of war and its individual consequences.274

Another arena of heroic iconography established throughout previous eras and
attaining renewed significance throughout 1990s variants, is attention to
heroic uniform. The regulated resistive uniform (Communist and peasant
guerrilla forms) is further re-written from 1980s styles towards appreciations
of a de-politicised and de-stabilised Chinese modernity. Within Nanjing da tu
sha/Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937 (1995, dir. Wu Ziniu) this appropriation and
obscuration of politicised attire is explicitly evident as protagonist Tian-yuan
(a Nationalist soldier), is forced to abandon army clothing in order to avoid
being captured and executed by Japanese soldiers.275 In substitution for his
military fatigues he adopts the indiscriminate dress of a Red Cross worker
(dark grey and blue pantsuit), helping to bury dead bodies that have been
massacred by enemy forces. Furthermore, the prevalence of the makeshift Red
Cross pendant (which he wears around his neck) is symptomatic of his
composite and subsumed status within the text, substituting national
classifiers for ones emphasising humanism and preservation.276

To an equally reconfigured extent, the alternate heroic uniform of protagonists
within Huang he jue lian/Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River (1998, dir.

274 These disabled bodies’ surface in direct contrast to the virile, homogenous and wholesome
ones of revolutionary models. Furthermore, the symbolic manifestations of these symptoms
are emblematic of a fractured and anxious identity, one undergoing recurrent negotiation and
renewal.
275 Don’t Cry Nanjing is further detailed in the ‘Plot Summaries’ section of this thesis.
276 Continual references to the Red Cross institution and an ‘International Safety Zone’
throughout this narrative are symptomatic of Wu’s identification of a renewed Chinese
identity, one mediated by themes of global exchange and humanism. See Kong, Asian Cinema,
pp. 129-133.
Feng Xiaoning) and *Zi ri/Purple Sunset* (2000, dir. Feng Xiaoning) are equivalently de-centred.\(^{277}\) Here the focus on army fatigues as iconographic regularity is retained but expanded towards global contexts. This emanates throughout the former text in the figure of Owen, an American soldier stranded in Central China. On joining with a detachment of Eighth Route soldiers, he becomes an intimate part of the group and a progressive member of their resistive effort. Owen’s appearance in the film as a foreign heroic protagonist (an American, marked by his US Army uniform) thus serves to obscure and destabilise traditional resistance narratives, rewriting and renewing their foundations within frameworks of global exchange and interaction.\(^{278}\)

Owen’s dress in the text emerges in dual forms (as a young military protagonist in uniform, and as an elderly narrator in civilian clothing), indicative of an authorial split in the resistance narrative, recasting Chinese national history within an expansive and variegated global sphere.\(^{279}\) A similar clothing emphasis is utilised by director Feng Xiaoning in *Purple Sunset*, where the figure of Nadja (a Russian soldier-nurse) materialises in a foreign military uniform (although paradoxically her dress is cut into a modern mini-skirt format). As a Russian soldier operating as an ally in China, her

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\(^{277}\) Both of these Feng Xiaoning films are briefly reviewed in my ‘Plot Summaries’ section.

\(^{278}\) Additionally Owen’s presence in the text seems to verify Chinese consciousness from a de-centred and renovated perspective, one embedded within discourses of global recognition, cultural exchange and transnational interaction.

\(^{279}\) As Zhang Yingjin symptomatically notes, one of the film’s unique characteristics is that it “confirms from a Western perspective that China is an honourable country with an ancient culture, and Chinese people are legendary, self-sacrificing heroes”. Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 198.
appearance similarly refracts national mythology and seeks to rewrite the resistance narrative within an expanded international context.

In addition to depictions of uniform and dress, re-orientations toward globally modern themes are similarly projected in elements of heroic iconography and paraphernalia throughout renewed combat variants. Within both *Purple Sunset* and *Nü zi bie dong dui/Woman Commando* (1992, dir. Jin Zuoxin) accoutrements of resistive enactment are considerably redetermined and renewed. In *Purple Sunset* specifically, the signification of war artillery and weaponry is explicitly rewritten towards themes of obscurity and destabilisation.

The presence of machine guns, bayonets and helmets within the film are re-oriented from orthodox military contexts into alternative and modern renderings. The machine gun is definitively marked in the text as an icon of ambiguous power, with the potential for both group fracture (death, violation) and salvation (defence, protection). Explicit examples of this recur throughout the narrative, most enigmatically where it is used to rescue Japanese protagonist Akiyoko (as she is drowning in quicksand) and later to avenge her death (to overcame the militant enemy forces). Similarly the army helmet is reinterpreted as a source of provision (to cook grain and feed the group), whilst the bayonet is transformed into a tool of redemption (to cut the ties that...
imprison Akiyoko, to defuse explosive mines) rather than as a device of violation and harm.\textsuperscript{281}

Similar styles of renewed paraphernalia are presented throughout \textit{Woman Commando}, focussing on a covert group of female resistors during World War II. As the corp is trained in militant warfare under the rigorous guidance of Captain Yang, the feature of makeshift domestic targets (including eggs, pots and bottles) translated into a martial context provokes obscurity and ambiguity. Equally, the unconventional nature of the training itself (utilising sexuality as a covert strategy, combined with obsessive combat drills) highlights the group as a marginal and unofficial entity.\textsuperscript{282} As the squad develops from training into resistive activation, the protagonists employ a multifaceted strategy involving varied icons (knives, guns, sex appeal, alcoholic poisoning) in overcoming the enemy. In this manner, \textit{Woman Commando} surfaces as a redeveloped variant of the resistance narrative, prefacing strategies and symbols of modernity over those of established conformity.

\textsuperscript{281} Chen Baoguang similarly implies this in his review of \textit{Purple Sunset}, where the renewed depiction of these objects (i.e. machine gun, bayonet, helmet) symbolise an overarching desire to “bid farewell to war”. Moreover, this is symptomatic of Feng Xiaoning’s progressive cinematic style and the recognition of \textit{Purple Sunset} as the last in his series of films detailing Chinese wars. Chen, ‘Turning Hostility into Friendship: Commenting on Conception of the Film “Purple Sunset”’, \textit{China and World Exchange} 61, 5, 2002, pp. 32-34.

\textsuperscript{282} The dual, subjective and often contradictory representations of the female form within Chinese cinema have been encountered by a number of theorists in recent years. Rey Chow has enacted one of the most perceptive accounts of this, locating the female figure as stranded between complex perceptions of ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ in narrative. See Chow, \textit{Primitive Passions}, pp. 44-48.
**Heroic Speech**

The nature and importance of heroic enunciations within resistance narrative has been established as central to the promotion and development of the Chinese combat film throughout previous chapters. Whilst speech in revolutionary forms is characterised by political orthodoxy, and in the 1980s by symbolic destabilisation, a differing trend emerges throughout the 1990s. During this period trends of heroic speech and dialogue remain important generic elements, but like heroic appearance, are suggestively redirected and renewed towards issues of global modernity and exchange.

The focus on the dissemination and redetermination of heroic speech is thus characteristic of the combat film in its post-Mao derivatives, whereby attentions to bilingualism and verbal exchange are definitively marked.\(^{283}\) Within the 1990s variant however, this progression is expanded from its predecessor, towards themes of global interactivity and modernity. This enunciative signification is exemplified by *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* through the foreign figure of Owen, whose heroic development and integration in the text is marked by growing bilingual aptitude and capacity.

As the narrative progresses Owen’s improving Chinese is directed towards sentiments of both national and personal importance, implying a dual recognition of individual characters as well as wider meditations on the plight of China itself. To a large extent this is emphasised through the feature of

\(^{283}\) The prevalence of bilingualism and transnational enunciation in recent Chinese cinema has been explicitly detailed by Wang Xiaoying in his account of *Hong se lian ren/A Time to Remember* (1998, dir. Yip Ying). Wang notes that the specific location of a Western narrator/protagonist within the text is indicative of a ‘post-communist’ perspective, one that re-invents Chinese historical narrative from a distinctly de-centred standpoint. Wang, ‘*A Time to Remember: The Reinvention of the Communist Hero in Postcommunist China*’, *New Literary History* 34, 2003, pp. 133-153.
Owen’s reflective narration (in English, documented from present day perspective), which reinforces his de-centred and hybrid status within national narrative.\footnote{Wang argues that an emerging ‘American’ voice within cinematic discourse highlights, “a case of reversed Chinese Orientalism”. To this extent, the narration is an explicit rendering and enigmatic endorsement of Chinese history through a renewed (although highly complex) foreign perspective. \textit{ibid.}, p. 136.}

Owen is dually enunciated as a marginal and modern force, situated outside the frame of hegemonic historical narrative, yet in a position of invigorated authorisation. Owen’s textual verbalisations thus mark renewed modes of cultural consciousness, whereas the narrational segments (from an elderly, mournful Owen) function as meditations on Chinese value and significance from a global perspective. These enunciations together symbolise a complex appreciation of Chinese modernity, articulated from a wholly renewed and contemporary perspective.

Looking at \textit{Ran shao de gang wan/Burn the Harbour} (1998, dir. Li Xiepu) the emergence of a cosmopolitan heroic form is similarly suggested through devices of narrative speech.\footnote{See my ‘Plot Summaries’ section for further detail on \textit{Burn the Harbour}.} This is indicated by the figure of Captain Hong, a corporate shipping chief transformed into resistance leader when imprisoned by the Japanese army. Forced under inhumane conditions to build a harbour for the enemy’s navy, Hong organises both Chinese and Western prisoners into a co-ordinated and unified attack against their mutual Japanese enemy. The feature of bilingualism here (Chinese and English) in combination with his efficient character affirms Hong’s status as an appropriate leader for this venture. Not belonging to an institutional or authoritative political force (he
and his sailors are corporate workers), Hong’s heroic identity is thus partly determined by his capacity in management and organization. This is in stark contrast to established notions of heroism in Socialist narrative, explicitly characterised by political orthodoxy. Captain Hong consequently symbolises a renewed and modernised heroic protagonist, one whose capacity is firmly embedded within discourses of exchange, commerce and interaction.\(^{286}\)

In addition to features of heroic bilingualism emergent during 1990s variants, alternative heroic enunciations are similarly articulated. Utilisations of unconventional and informal pronunciations are symptomatic of this, relaying re-orientations of cultural narratives. This progression manifests in *Gui zi lai le/Devils on the Doorstep* (2000, dir. Jiang Wen), where heroic speech is steadily fractured and redetermined.\(^{287}\) Throughout the film protagonists engage in continual debate over the Japanese prisoners enforced to their care, arguing and procrastinating over any specific form of action. Here speech emerges in a dislocated and futile manner, fragmenting the conventional norms of heroic identification and communication. This is embedded within wider tendencies of the text to rewrite the resistance narrative at large, as an ambivalent and complex allegory of Chinese modernity.\(^{288}\)

\(^{286}\) Kam Louie has recently noted this progression towards commercial renderings within the wider representation of the centralised male form throughout the 1990s. He specifically identifies renewed themes within cultural products, embedded in emerging themes of industrialisation and consumerism. Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, pp. 55-56.

\(^{287}\) *Devils on the Doorstep*’s narrative is briefly condensed in my ‘Plot Summaries’ section.

\(^{288}\) Speech manifests generally within Jiang Wen’s cinematic style as an explicit site of fracture and narrative obscurity. This is evident specifically in *Devils on the Doorstep* where the use of colloquial and idiomatic terms (i.e. ‘turtle fucker’, ‘shameless-slut’, ‘good-for-nothings’) symbolises a broad redetermination of dialogue and narrative meaning. For a more detailed account of Jiang’s indicative style see Yomi Braester, ‘Memory at a Standstill: ‘Street-smart History’ in Jiang Wen’s *In the Heat of the Sun*, *Screen* 42, 4, 2001, pp. 350-362.
Renewals of heroic speech are enacted during *Devils on the Doorstep* to an often ironic and absurdist level. Perhaps the most enigmatic example of this occurs as the villagers hysterically argue over whom should be assigned the job of assassinating the enemy prisoners. Whereas in revolutionary variants heroic speech invigorates an inherent desire for resistive coherence, within *Devils on the Doorstep* it is employed as a device of fracture and dissemination. Each character effectively formulates an excuse to shirk responsibility for the task and transfer it to somebody else.\(^{289}\) The overall impact of this device not only satirises the narrative form, but also belies the complexity of Chinese modernity and renewed identifications.

**Heroic Activity**

Whereas the 1980s combat film instigates an appropriation and reformation of heroic activity from revolutionary origins, the 1990s variant invokes further adaptation, propelling it towards wholly renewed modes. Whilst the body and its occupation in genre continues to function as a site of signification, it is steadily re-projected toward themes of globalisation and modernity. To this degree, in accounting for renewals of heroic activity, the impact and consequences of reform itself can be measured through its bearing on structured models.

These re-orientations of heroic activity and its appearance as modern allegory are best demonstrated in *Avenging Gun* and *Fei hu dui/Flying Tiger Brigade*.

\(^{289}\) This theme of national victimhood and responsibility was controversially explored at the time of the film’s exhibition, as Jiang made overtures about China’s tendency to blame others for past wrongs and current inadequacies. *Devils on the Doorstep* thus emerges as a renewed genre film, one fracturing standard styles in aim of provoking negotiation and debate on Chinese modernity.
(1995, dir. Wang Jixing) where features of combat characterised by ‘kung-fu’ are explicitly marked.\textsuperscript{290} Within both these texts resistive efforts are framed by an enigmatic sense of material activation and negotiation, exemplified by the enactment of the martial body itself.\textsuperscript{291} \textit{Avenging Gun} is particularly demonstrative of this, where Shi-tou emerges as a vigilante force of mythical empowerment in narrative, single-handedly and chimerically destroying whole regiments of enemy soldiers. To a similarly fanciful extent, the railway guerrillas of \textit{Flying Tiger Brigade} are able to dispose of vast enemy forces despite being considerably outnumbered.

The 1990s combat hero is thus projected as a figure of renewed and reinvigorated martial potency, an activation heavily encased by signifiers of global enterprise. In both these films, materialisations of traditional ‘kung-fu’ (framed by the resistive narrative) serve as symptomatic modernisations of both the specific genre and the industry at large.\textsuperscript{292} To this point the ‘kung-fu’ form manifests as a thematic emblem of Chinese capital in modern contexts, allegorising an era of commercial expansionism and cultural exchange.

\textsuperscript{290} See my ‘Plot Summaries’ for a condensed review of \textit{Flying Tiger Brigade}.

\textsuperscript{291} Attention to the emergence of ‘kung-fu’ within 1990s Chinese cinema has thus far been largely ignored within academic research. Whilst its identification as a symptom of global capital and modernity has been established in recent studies (focussing primarily on Hong Kong and American cinemas), it is yet to be explicitly applied to reform-era China. For two emblematic studies see Li Siu-leung, ‘Kung Fu: Negotiating Nationalism and Modernity’, \textit{Cultural Studies} 15, 314, 2001, pp. 515–542. And Yvonne Tasker, \textit{Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema}. London: Routledge, 1993.

\textsuperscript{292} More specifically, ‘kung fu’ emerged as a site of complex identification in reform-era China. As Geremie Barme surmises, “The newborn popularity of martial arts culture can be seen in relation to a complex of social issues on the mainland. It was in part a popular response to the official negation of Cultural Revolution ideology, a corollary to the spiritual confusion that ensured and an expression of the longing for a sense of cultural continuity”. Barme, \textit{In the Red}, p. 83.
Whilst emergences of the martial form characterise one particular style of heroic activation in 1990s modes, there is similar focus on a de-militarised variant, equally symptomatic of global modernity and exchange. Within this context the substitution of combative capacity with non-militant models are emblematic of generic re-orientations and renewals. This process materialises in the previously detailed texts of *Nine Deaths, One Birth* and *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937*, where heroic activities are divorced from the martial plain and redirected towards alternative themes.

Throughout the former film, articulations of heroism as martial and physical endeavour are rebuked through central protagonist Shi, an Eighth Route Army member and manager of a village ammunition factory. Due to his disabilities Shi is progressively marginalised from the battlefield in the text, restricted to technological and industrial endeavours. Continually frustrated by the inability to make a physical or direct impact on the war, he focuses on developing and synthesising warfare munitions. Whereas established heroic protagonists are centralised on battle landscapes, Shi’s endeavours are confined to the factory and his production efforts.293

Shi thus allegorises a modern reconfigured heroic type, one whose impact is measured in non-militant and utilitarian terms. Whilst he remains distanced and absented from the actual battlefield, the physical and emotional impact of war is nevertheless registered through his perspective. Shi emerges in the

293 The focus on growth characterised in industrial and commercial terms (as opposed to militant or political enlightenment) is indicative of reforming modes of identification in China. Correspondingly, Shi’s enterprises are demonstrative of 1990s practices (i.e. expansion of Four Modernizations, Open Door policy) rather than political exigencies of Maoist modes.
narrative as a figure of endurance and resilience, suffering the trauma of personal injury (his physical handicaps) and communal loss (he watches many of his friends and comrades die). Despite the effect of this on his own fractured identity and physical impotency, Shi’s perseverance and continuity are portrayed as ultimately heroic and altruistic.294

Equally, during *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937* heroic protagonists adopt non-martial approaches towards resistance and continuity. This is symbolised by the presence of Cheng-xian (a doctor) and the previously noted figure of Tian-yuan (a soldier), who despite their own suffering and trauma both make contributions to the safeguarding of Chinese futurity. As a doctor, Cheng-xian fulfils this through medical practitoning, reinforcing the value of human life and preservation. Furthermore, Cheng-xian protects his racially mixed family (Japanese wife and step-daughter), struggling and suffering for their survival. Despite the overarching threat of massacre and violation that the film prefaces, Cheng-xian’s application of humanist values and principles (most dramatically formed in the safe delivery of his own baby) are highlighted as redemptive and effective.295

Similarly for Tian-yuan, his capacity in rescuing and protecting a group of young children, despite witnessing mass violation (death of his comrades,

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294 The nature of Shi’s survival although tenuous throughout the film, re-affirms continuity and endurance in the aftermath of traumatic experience. This is characteristic of renewed forms of identification within 1990s China and specifically the emergence of a de-centred subjectivity.

295 As Zhang Yingjin notes of the film, Wu’s utilisation of a racially mixed family is symbolic of his ‘stylistic dissent’ (equivalently surmised in relation to *Evening Bell* in the previous chapter), effectively blurring national boundaries in emphasising values of humanism and preservation. Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 190.
rape of his girlfriend), manifests as symptomatic resistance to forces of political excess and violation. Suggestively disarmed by this point (his gun is ‘lost’, he wears a Red Cross emblem) Tian-yuan emerges as a source of resilience and endurance. More acutely, his defiance to the overwhelming massacre (his very survival) is implicitly substantiated by this transformation into a de-militarised protective force. Whilst his preserving actions carry personalised sentiments (amongst those rescued is his girlfriend Shu-qin), the responsibility for the children (futurity, security, continuity) implies his importance as a reconstructed heroic figure.

Whereas many texts invert and disturb notions of heroism toward non-martiality in 1990s combat films, others erode and reconstruct the very structures of heroic transparency and conditioning itself. This is demonstrated at length throughout *Devils on the Doorstep*, a film that attempts to divorce and wholly invert the resistance narrative from regulated renderings. The central protagonist within this film Ma Da-san, surfaces as an ambivalent figure, one whose morality and sentiments appear contrary to established heroic forms. Ma is plagued by hesitancy and self-interest throughout much of the text, seemingly divorced and uninterested in wider resistive processes. Rather Ma’s actions are motivated by a burgeoning desire to avoid confrontation with institution whilst benefiting the village community as a whole.296 This is primarily illustrated in his ambivalent interactions with the

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296 The explicit and obscure absence of the Communist Party or any other Chinese institutional force throughout *Devils on the Doorstep* reinforces the indeterminacy and hesitancy that Ma experiences. The dislocated status of what Dai Jinhua identifies as the metaphorical ‘Father’ is indicative of post-Mao filmmaking, effectively re-narrating and rehabilitating cultural narratives from revolutionary myths. Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 18.
Japanese prisoners throughout the narrative, enforced upon him by an unknown militant force at textual inception. Whereas resistive heroes of other styles are prompted into action by senses of either personal or institutional motivation, Ma is effectively paralysed by self-doubt and indeterminacy.

Ma Da-san is dually articulated as an agent and subject of modernity during *Devils on the Doorstep*, one whose deliberation and hesitation is symptomatic of negotiated discourses in 1990s China. As he is ascribed the responsibility of prisoner caretaker (feeding them, housing them) he is similarly cast into the role of humanist provider and preserver. Whereas conventional combat heroes are characterised by enactments of resistive battle, Ma surfaces as a renewed alternative, distanced from the battlefield and sanctioned by an unauthorised source. The desperation that Ma and his fellow villagers express throughout the film in arguing over how to deal with the prisoners, surfaces as an allegory of crises of modernity and identity within reform era China.297 Thus as an enigmatic narrative, *Devils on the Doorstep* seeks to explore the stasis and fracturing of modernity in the contemporary nation, specifically the failure of overarching and orthodox ideologies.

Shifts and changes in representations of heroism in 1990s combat variants are thus symptomatic of wider narrative and cultural rewritings during this period. The resistive hero emerges correspondingly as a complexly diffuse and modern figure, emblematised by renewed articulations of appearance, speech

297 This crisis mirrors the films own difficulty in exhibition and distribution after it was released (and entered into the 2000 Cannes International Film Festival) without government permission. Chinese officials subsequently threatened to blacklist Jiang, causing him in an interview to compare his own dilemmas to those faced by Ma within the film. See Richard Corliss, ‘Devils on His Doorstep’, *Time* 156, 3, 2004, pp. 20-22.
and activity. Located within specific allegories of modernity, the ‘open door’ heroic form surfaces as an invigorated figure of global exchange and re-oriented Chinese identifications.

**Renewed Enemies**

To the same extent that elements of heroic appearance, speech and activity undergo extensive negotiation during the 1990s period, the depiction and projection of enemy characters are similarly renewed. Just as the 1980s heralded a reconstruction of guizi types towards de-politicised and complex variants, combat films of the succeeding period induce further re-orientations of enemy articulation. These changes are symptomatic of expanded reforms in China and especially indicative of the ‘open door’ policy, re-integrating foreign global elements within the national imaginary.\(^{298}\) Subsequently enemy representations are ‘re-presented’ at large, whereby focus on appearance, speech and activity is steadily negotiated.

**Enemy Appearance**

At a superficial glance, the 1990s combat film appears to herald a symbolic restoration of revolutionary guizi imagery, where enemy figures are characterised by menacing and illegitimate appearances in text. Further investigation however, reveals these manifestations to be more complex than simply a nostalgic return to Maoist representational modes. Contradictory and

\(^{298}\) Whereas the proliferation of diverse foreign figures is demonstrated throughout the combat film genre, most theoretical research tends to analyse the foreign presence from a primarily voyeuristic and spectatorial perspective, principally applied to ‘new wave’ films. Ignoring the visual representations and projections of foreigners on screen (in favour of cultural exoticism and Orientalism), thus disregards the structure of Chinese self-identification and imagination within the modern era.
indeterminate projections similarly surface to this effect. In specific terms, the composite nature of Japanese visualisations throughout ‘open door’ resistance narratives needs to be framed within the aforementioned process of global re-integration and expansion.\textsuperscript{299} Obscure and complex iconographies of enemy figures during this period are thus symbolic of progressively re-oriented and modernised identifications in 1990s China.

Throughout \textit{Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937} the seeming return to \textit{guizi} menaces and violation is overtly highlighted. Here Japanese armies are depicted as a force of unconditioned and unrestrained abuse, mirroring revolutionary resistive variants. Moreover, narrative progression is steadily marked by the presence of enemy soldiers within the text, engaging in pervasive acts of brutality and abuse against the Chinese community (raping women, slaughtering children, engaging in killing competitions). The menacing and violative presence of these forces is recurrently framed by their marked appearance in Imperial army uniforms. In addition to soldiers, enemy officers are similarly articulated during \textit{Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937}, yet surface as symbolically distanced from their troops. Whereas soldiers appear as directly martial and corporeal threats to the city, officers’ emerge as de-centred but genocidal dangers, orchestrating and systematising the destruction of Nanjing.

\textsuperscript{299} This progression however, was not simply emblematised by the resistance genre or even cinema specifically. Rather the early 1990s incited a period of widespread nostalgia within China as manifest in ‘crazes’ and ‘fevers’ for revolutionary signifiers. As modern manifestations, this process was shadowed by notions of cultural consumption and commerciality, as detailed by Geremie Barme, Zhang Xudong and Dai Jinhua. To this degree, the revolutionary combat film (and its explicitly romantic form) was nostalgically re-enacted and appropriated within a commercial matrix. For accounts of these ‘crazes’, see Barme, \textit{In the Red}, pp. 235-254. Zhang, \textit{Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms}, pp. 35-71. And Dai, ‘Redemption and Consumption: Depicting Culture in the 1990s’, \textit{Positions} 4, 1, 1996, pp. 127-143.
The menacing nature of this situation is realised during the initial sequences of *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937*, where the Japanese command contemplate the conquest of the city itself. Here the enemy officers are rigidly located around a large table being addressed by their Commander, framed by massive and imposing Japanese flags. The use of close-ups and angled shots here are suggestive of an overwhelming and distorted force, one intent on widespread domination and control. The text correspondingly implies a deep hierarchical division between enemy soldiers and officers throughout the narrative, thus appearing as a multifaceted and overwhelming threat to the Chinese community.\(^{300}\)

Whilst this particular format visualises the enemy as a systematic and institutional menace, other modalities tend to feature the enemy as an excessively martial and masculinized force. This configuration is emblematised by *Guo ji da ying jiu/International Rescue* (1990, dir. Xie Hong), where the Japanese army is led by a group of seemingly ruthless mercenary figures.\(^{301}\) Highly skilled at methods of martial arts and enacting inhumane forms of torture, the excess and illegitimacy of these characters (and their methods) is emphasised by their masculinized appearance in traditional samurai dress. Here the enemy is suggestive of a hegemonic national and cultural threat (clothed in Imperial headband, traditional sword), contrasted to the hybrid figures of resistance (US Army uniform of Americans,

\(^{300}\) This is characteristic of Wu’s self-identified critical style, deliberately inverting superficial projections of war. As the director comments on his productive aims for this text, “I was very dissatisfied with China’s previously made war films, either in a hatred-revenge pattern or a black-white propagandistic mode. Therefore I would really like to make something new, something original and powerful”. Kong, *Asian Cinema*, p. 131.

\(^{301}\) *International Rescue* is concisely reviewed in the ‘Plot Summaries’ section of this thesis.
Yunnan dress for the locals). Furthermore the primitive visual gendering of these enemy figures (depiction of muscular torsoes and rippling biceps) is suggestive of a re-integrated and re-conceptualised enemy form. This emphasis on enemy appearance cast within gendered and primal structures is similarly evident in Devils on the Doorstep, predominantly through the menacing figure of Captain Sakatsuka. Initially visualised in repose at enemy headquarters, he appears a potent and primordial force, articulated by his shirtless muscular presence. His closely shaven head and the overt presence of his black boots (shown in close-up, angled and canted shots throughout these scenes) similarly affirm his materialisation as an imposing figure of domination. In a format that bears striking similarities to the primitivised protagonists of ‘new wave’ variants (Red Sorghum, One and Eight and Evening Bell), Sakatsuka is located as a distinctly masculinized force. His physical appearance effectively frames his ambiguous and indeterminate status within the narrative, enacted in martial forms as he irrationally orchestrates the massacre of the villagers near the text’s conclusion.

Sakatsuka’s physical manifestation in Devils on the Doorstep is thus symptomatic of a distinctly modern enemy form, one bearing an emergent and imposing threat to the local Chinese community. Whereas in enemy activity Sakatsuka adheres to the revolutionary guizi mode, his contrary visualisation

302 Despite initial fractures and dislocations between the local (Yunnan) and foreign (US) forces in the narrative (based largely on cultural, ethnic and gendered difference), these disparities are suggestively overcome through shared existence and mutual martial cooperation. As an allegory of a globalising Chinese identity, International Rescue thus prefaces the potential of foreign exchange and productivity within the combat genre format.
as potent masculinity signifies a modern re-interpretation of established norms and expectations within the genre.

*Enemy Speech*

Articulations and identifications of re-oriented enemy voices, extending and expanding upon enunciations of 1980s variants, are primary characteristics of enemy speech throughout 1990s combat films. Framed by wider progressions towards renewal of foreign entities in cultural narrative, the emergences of these alternative verbalisations are symptomatic of this process. Correspondingly, the nature by which enemy speech is broadened and redetermined is indicative of China’s progressive reform and location within global markets of exchange and interaction.

Looking closely at *Purple Sunset*, the diversification and expanded articulation of the enemy voice during this period is distinctly marked. This is demonstrated through the figure of Akiyoko, a Japanese schoolgirl who is displaced from her fellow countrymen in Northern China only to be captured by Nadja (a Russian soldier-nurse) and Yang (a local Chinese villager) as they make their way through the terrain. Initial contact between this group is fractured, where Akiyoko is effectively silenced in the presence of her captors (initially by forced gag and then by choice). As the narrative progresses and she is forced to speak at a moment of inherent crisis (revealing to Yang and Nadja how to survive an oncoming forest fire), the enemy voice is marked as explicitly fragmented, yet similarly as redemptive. From this point on within the narrative, speech (in a highly fractured form) plays an important part in
regulating and verifying the interactions of this unconventional trio as they make their way through the forest landscape. This initially features in a practical and utilitarian sense, whereby Akiyoko (as an ‘enemy’ captive) provides verbal directions in order to lead the group out of the jungle.

As they face further adversities however, speech is transformed into a device of cultural exchange and redemption in *Purple Sunset*. The most enigmatic of these interrelations is enacted between Akiyoko and Yang on hearing of the Japanese surrender. Here in melancholic conversation these seemingly polar figures share personal traumas and express fears of war’s consequences for their respective futures. As an allegory of China’s indeterminate status during the 1990s, these verbal exchanges are indicative of re-integrating global formations and interactions. Enemy speech is thus reoriented and reconfigured in this variant, voicing renewed conflicts of modernity and futurity.

The positivism of communication between Yang and Akiyoko however, is tragically fractured at the dramatic conclusion of *Purple Sunset*, where the gun of a Japanese officer emphatically silences Akiyoko’s conciliating voice. Here as she calls out to the Imperial regiment to prevent them from committing mass suicide and genocide, the armed collective graphically disavows her. In reform era contexts, the dramatic silencing of this voice of renewal (de-militarised, conciliatory) is symptomatic of modernist fears in China, specifically the corruption and reneging of humanist exchanges by

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303 Notwithstanding the overarching political and national factors that threaten to fragment the group, the persistence of language and splintered communication is presented as triumphant in the narrative. To this extent, director Feng celebrates human intimacy and exchange (rather than political or national orthodoxy) as the fundamental framework for global interrelatedness.
brute political violation. In an allegorical sense this sequence suggestively exposes and queries China’s recent human rights abuses, particularly the ambiguous collective responses to the Tiananmen Square events of 1989.\textsuperscript{304}

The prominence of speech and language as tools of cultural exchange and humanist redemption represents just one approach premised in 1990s variants. In contrast, alternative texts emphasise enemy speech as a continued marker of menace and inhumane potency. This pattern is prevalent throughout \textit{Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937}, where the Japanese language is utilised to portray the enemy as a mediated, intent and genocidal force. This is demonstrated in a dual sense, with attention to both the soldiers and ranking-officers that occupy and threaten the city. Soldiers’ speech is characterised by coarse indifference and monstrosity, whereby enemy figures are seemingly unperturbed by their own violative actions. At differing points within the film Japanese soldiers engage in execution competitions, keeping tally of their personal body count and congratulating each other on ‘excellent swordsmanship’. To this degree, speech is employed to articulate the enemy as a threateningly inhumane and excessive force, one that menaces Chinese collective consciousness.

Attention to officer vocalisations in \textit{Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937} may appear more civil and rational on initial exposure, but proves no less threatening in the narrative. The chillingly calm and unemotional manner in which the Japanese

\textsuperscript{304} This sequence of violent and traumatic silencing characterises Feng as a ‘fifth generation’ filmmaker, whereby the explicit concentration on brutal repression is definitively marked (i.e. as in \textit{Red Sorghum} and \textit{Evening Bell}). As observed by Zhang Yingjin, the recurrent enactment of graphic violence throughout these texts (where Feng and Wu Ziniu’s films are emblematic) ultimately reinforces themes of humanism and utilitarianism. Zhang, \textit{Screening China}, pp. 182-201.
officers organise the city’s massacre, serves to emphasise the tragic consequences of war and the excessive nature of political extremism.\textsuperscript{305} Emphasising the ambivalence of the violation itself is the seemingly articulate and premeditative nature of these authorial directives. On delivering the command to annihilate the city, the Commander-in-Chief notes and admires the value of Chinese Buddhist elements in the historical development of Japanese cultural ethics. The obscurity of this sequence (demonstrating deep cultural respect followed by the ordering of mass genocide) implies an obsessive and illegitimate institutional force, one that is seemingly unprincipled and unregulated.

\textit{Enemy Activity}

In accordance with renewals of enemy appearance and speech throughout 1990s modes, distinctly ambiguous and obscured images of enemy activity similarly characterise this variant. The diverse and often contradictory representations of this in resistance narrative signify re-orientations of the genre towards modern and expanded projections. This progression is inherently mixed, whereby on one hand there appears a categorical return to stereotyped forms of \textit{guizi} violence, there are equivalent tendencies to depict the enemy engaging in complex and compromising situations.

Invigorations of the Japanese military as uninhibited violation are evidenced in both \textit{Ping yuan qiang sheng/Gunshots Over the Plain} (2000, dir. He Jun)

\textsuperscript{305} As the Japanese Commander chillingly expresses within the text: “Nanjing is the Chinese capital, adopting harsh measures there will strike a blow to resistance nationwide. We can’t appear to be soft-hearted...Eliminate the entire population”. To this extent the massacre is depicted as an intent, meditated and politicised act of genocide.
and *International Rescue*, where heroic figures are situated in an unambiguous and virtuous polarity to enemy figures.\(^{306}\) Throughout both these narratives the Japanese army engage in especially graphic forms of torture and abuse that re-enforce the validity and ultimate success of resistive efforts. Within *Gunshots Over the Plain* this is explicitly marked as the enemy forces pluck out heroine Su’s fingernails in order to extract information from her. Set in an underground prison (Su is restrained to her chair by chains) the utilisation of a gloomy *mise-en-scène* here (low key lighting, predominant use of close-up and angled shots) enhances the claustrophobic and illegitimate nature of the act itself. Similarly the location of General Kitamura in this sequence (directing and presiding over the action) emphasises enemy activity as deviant and menacing.\(^{307}\)

Correspondingly, throughout *International Rescue* the Japanese army is depicted as a violative and abusive threat in its willingness to de-humanise and persecute resistive protagonists. This progression of degradation reaches its climax as the enemy forces orchestrate a public spectacle of persecution, forcing the local villagers to witness the torture of resistive figures. Within these sequences the Imperial soldiers engage in an exhibition of violence that includes forced amputations, suicides and beheadings. As with *Gunshots Over the Plain* the Japanese commander oversees this spectacle of violence,

\(^{306}\) For a brief account of the narrative in *Gunshots Over the Plain*, see my ‘Plot Summaries’.

\(^{307}\) This sequence bears a nostalgic resemblance to Maoist textual styles as represented by *Little Soldier Zhang-ga* and *Tunnel Warfare*, where the enemy is visualised as a sadistic and inflicting force. Moreover the particular presence of the Chinese term *pingyuan* (plain, flats) in the film’s title is reminiscent of the Maoist resistive form (i.e. *Ping yuan you ji dui - Guerrillas on the Plain*).
whereby his unperturbed (but highly vicarious) enthusiasm marks the occasion as an obscure and morbid form of entertainment for enemy forces.\textsuperscript{308}

Although both \textit{Gunshots on the Plain} and \textit{International Rescue} emphasise graphic reminiscences of \textit{guizi} violation, there are additionally complex and contradictory images of enemy occupation prefaced throughout this variant. The prevailing tendency of these modes features Japanese activity within fractured and complex discourses of war, renewing the characteristics of the genre itself. This process is demonstrated to an indicative degree in both \textit{Devils on the Doorstep} and \textit{Burn the Harbour}, where the enemy is projected towards re-oriented appreciations.

Within the context of these above-cited texts the Japanese are not configured as merely a martial, but similarly commercial force. During both \textit{Devils on the Doorstep} and \textit{Burn the Harbour}, enemy soldiers are constructed in an obscurely economic relationship with Chinese protagonists. In the former film this manifests in the meditation on enemy prisoners (Japanese Lieutenant Hanaya and his Chinese translator, Dong) around which much of narrative conflict surrounds. Here the enemy figures as symbolic capital, where the villagers facilitate their plight with considerable intensity and apprehension. Seemingly paralysed by an array of differing options in dealing with the prisoners (including harbouring, disposal and exchange) their indecisiveness

\textsuperscript{308} In a somewhat appropriated turn, features of violence and immolation are transferred from origins of political enigmatisation in Chinese narrative, towards features of global exchange and marketability. To this extent, it is evident that both generic and wider cinematic norms are adapted towards renewed commercial concerns. For an expanded articulation of this progression see Zhu, \textit{Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform}, pp. 111-142
is an allegory of China’s collective indeterminacy as a developing market economy.

As the narrative progresses and they opt to exchange the prisoners for commercial benefit (grain), the mutual development of personal intimacy and humanism (between Chinese captors and enemy prisoners) is ultimately eroded by the focus on profit and greed. This has tragic consequences, leading to the obscure massacre of the village during a co-joined celebration of local and Japanese figures. Here the swift and sudden change in enemy activity (from celebration to violation) is emblematic of precarious exchanges within the modern era, exposing potentials of fracture and consummation.  

Whereas revolutionary modes of guizi activity are portrayed as somewhat predictable and stereotyped (despite their violative forms), the obscurity of enemy activity (and its suddenness) in Devils on the Doorstep is symptomatic of re-oriented narrative variants.

Within Burn the Harbour an equivalent portrayal of fractured, obsessive and unstable enemy activity is articulated. This is evident in the figure of Officer Sato, who implements dangerous and hazardous practices whilst building a harbour for Japanese ships. A seemingly capable and composed figure at textual initiation (in contrast to his subordinates), Sato’s illegitimacy is identified in his obsessive determinacy to complete the construction job at all

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309 These seemingly fragmented and precarious projections of Chinese modernity are similarly symptomatic of reforming cinematic institutions, where the potential for diverse and contradictory perspectives emerges. As Zhang Xudong eloquently notes of ‘postrevolutionary’ narratives, general trends towards lamentations of the past can be identified, projected into both nightmarish and utopian manifestations. Zhang. Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms, pp. 221-223.
costs. Much like the enemy officers of *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937*, Sato’s transgression is implied through a disregard for human rights, in favour of seemingly irrational and illogical discursive aims. Whereas counterpart Hong’s activity is propelled by desire for preservation and protection, Sato is contrastingly portrayed as a figure of obsessive and perverse management.

The widespread re-determination of enemy forms towards diverse and defamiliarised perspectives in this combat variant is symbolic of discursive renewal within China throughout the 1990s. Attention to factors of appearance, speech and activity are characteristic of generic and cultural re-orientations, expanding and extending themes depicted in earlier reformed texts. Consequently, the 1990s enemy form can be analysed within the context of a progressive generic shift, gravitating towards negotiated premises of modernity and an emerging global identity.

*Renewed Collaborators*

As an extension of cultural and cinematic trends developing through the 1980s decade, locations of collaborative figures in 1990s combat variants are specifically marked and attenuated. Within this progression *hanjian* figures are effectively re-oriented, progressing in accordance with trends of global exchange and modernity. Much like their heroic and enemy counterparts, collaborative elements correspondingly surface in the genre as representational figures, re-writing historical, political and cultural
discourses. In locating the renewal of the *hanjian* presence towards fractured themes of modernity, characteristics of collaborative discourse will be assessed from the context of the 1990s. This process will involve a consideration of three distinctive modes, concentrating on *hanjian* appearance, speech and activity.

**Collaborative Appearance**

As the 1980s combat film primarily visualises *hanjian* figures as an alternative and institutional force within the resistance genre, 1990s variants tend towards additional developments and complexities of collaborative appearance. Here the *hanjian* presence manifests in overtly obscured and fractured forms, seemingly reminiscent of the Maoist revolutionary type yet with some distinct and symbolic alterations. Collaborative appearances as symptomatic of generic re-orientation throughout this period thus gravitate to renewed and expanded themes.

Trends towards ostensibly nostalgic re-visionings of *hanjian* parody and inadequacy are initially striking characteristics of 1990s combat films. This device is didactically projected in *Gunshots Over the Plain* as collaborative forces are portrayed as physically deviant and corrupt, manifestations of wider moral and institutional illegitimacy. Moreover, these characteristics materialise in specific agents Yang and Wu, *hanjian* gripped throughout the

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This is especially suggestive of post-1989 identifications within China, a period that Sheldon Lu noted as ‘a deep cultural crisis’. To this degree the process of re-writing and expanding cinematic structures (in this case the *hanjian* form) is indicative of wider cultural re-imaginations, specifically towards populist subjectivities. See Lu, ‘Postmodernity, Popular Culture and the Intellectual: A Report on Post-Tiananmen China’, *boundary 2* 23, 2, 1996, pp. 139-169.
narrative by mentalities of obsessive greed and indulgence that are ultimately self-consuming. Reminiscent of revolutionary variants, both these collaborators appear discomfited in their prescribed dress, the former emphasised by an Imperial army cap (ironically worn in combination with peasant clothes), and the latter awkwardly perspiring and itching in his *hanjian* uniform. Here the fractured and unwieldy nature of this attire implies these agents as marginal and inadequate figures.

To a similarly alienating degree, collaborative clothing features in *Woman Commando* to articulate distinctly Westernised forces of corruption. Here the presence of traitor Song as a self-obsessed manipulator in narrative is affirmed by his recurrent appearance in a tailored white suit. The stress on costume in this context denotes collaboration within a modernist context, characteristic of themes of commercial capital, exchange and decadence.

In addition to emphases on *hanjian* costume and clothing as indicative of generic re-orientation, associated paraphernalia and accessories of collaborative appearance are negotiated throughout 1990s variants. In returning to *Gunshots Over the Plain* this progression is particularly evident. Whereas Yang is frequently depicted riding around on his bicycle, Wu carries a tiny gun that is seemingly engulfed by his large hand. Both these images are reminiscent of revolutionary *hanjian* appearances, evocative of illegitimate and marginalised entities. Furthermore, this nostalgic projection of collaborative corruption and deviance is emphasised by Yang and Wu’s bodily manifestations within text. Both figures are portrayed as excessive in
corporeal enactments of the narrative, with Yang emerging as gaunt and severe, whilst Wu is rotund and corpulent. These characters surface in contradistinction to resistive hero Ma, who appears attractive and assured throughout narrative diegesis.

Whereas both *Gunshots Over the Plain* and *Woman Commando* reinvoke projections of menacing *hanjian* models, alternative images are similarly prefaced in the variant. Within *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* this progression manifests definitively, where collaborative appearance is redirected and relocated. This is demonstrated throughout the film by the dual figures of Angel’s father and his assistant Saopao, who initially submit and co-operate with the Japanese in the interests of protecting the communal village. Both protagonists are attributed complex identifications during the narrative, seemingly caught between desires to safeguard the township (and its commercial interests) and their own personal loyalties. Angel’s father in particular emerges as a stern and patriarchal agent within the text, emblematised by his appearance throughout in an affluent white fur-coat. He is initially visualised in the film on his horse (surrounded by his posse), further emphasising his status as an archaic and localised force of potency. Saopao is similarly projected as a renewed collaborator in the narrative, but is more attuned to the feminised appearance of established *hanjian* variants (long hair, lean body).

Whereas both these characters would be emphasised as deviant and corrupt within hegemonic modes, in *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* they are
alleviated protagonists, marginalised and haunted by individual duties and responsibilities. For Saopao in particular, at recurrent points within the film he is depicted emotively singing to an unknown and indirect source on the outskirts of the village (suggestively his dead wife). Similarly as he witnesses the demise of his boss he grieves profusely, reduced to a state of hysteria and suggestive madness. Saopao thus fractures the limits of conventional hanjian projection, redirecting them towards modern and complex appreciations. Similarly Angel’s father appears as a composite figure in text, weeping the loss of his wife and eventually co-operating with the Eighth Route forces in order to protect his daughter.

Collaborative Speech

Just as figurative elements of hanjian appearance are complexly negotiated and reconfigured throughout 1990s variants, speech and dialogue are similarly re-oriented. In specific terms, hanjian enunciations are symptomatic of emerging voices in Chinese combat films, surfacing as allegories and gauges of cultural modernity, whilst proffering and projecting a renewed global identity.

The re-orientation of this collaborative speech is exemplified within Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River, where the feature of Saopao’s recurrent and mournful singing is employed to articulate cultural loss and trauma. These songs appear throughout the film as playful vignettes (ambiguous love songs),

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311 As Ban Wang reveals of this process within the Chinese cinematic institution, individual trauma is inevitably symptomatic of collective historical suffering in narrative. To this extent, the identification of hanjian burden carried by these characters seeks to articulate alternative cultural imaginings. Wang, Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, pp. 125-155.
yet are delivered in a tortured and fractured manner, indicative of his displaced and fragmented identity as a \textit{hanjian}.\footnote{Whilst the song itself is a duet, the receiving voice (suggestively an imagined manifestation of his dead wife) remains unidentified and unverified throughout the narrative. The camera during these sequences focuses explicitly on Saopao and his ambivalent reaction to the song’s conduction. These vignettes thus emerge as symbolic allegory within the film (reinforced by their obscure content and origination), an elegy of progressive Chinese modernity and its fracturing potential.} As the narrative reaches its climax and the enemy apprehend Saopao, this singing is transformed from personal elegy into a site of indirect resistance. Here the tune is used to subtly warn the Eighth Routers of the Japanese whereabouts and their plot for an ambush. Within the sequence Saopao is shown being buried alive whilst he sings, a punishment for reneging on his deal with the enemy. As the song itself echoes through the landscape it is brought to an abrupt and jarring halt, where a close-up shows his face being muffled by the rising sand. The graphic nature of this silencing, and its emphasis as a repressive act, is registered by the disturbed reaction of the resistive group.

This equivocal re-orientation of \textit{hanjian} speech is similarly demonstrated within \textit{Devils on the Doorstep}, towards an inverted and fractured sense. This is represented throughout the film by the figure of Dong, a Chinese translator for the Japanese army, who is captured and then delivered to the village community by an unknown force. Dong utilises his bi-lingualism whilst imprisoned in the township to ensure the survival of both himself and his commanding officer, Hanaya. His continual and specific re-translation of Hanaya’s verbal attacks into co-operative engagement demonstrates this effect,
translating the function of translation into one of effective mediation and arbitration.\textsuperscript{313}

Accordingly, \textit{hanjian} speech (and language itself) is re-oriented into modernist allegory, emerging as a tool of potential conciliation and exchange. This collaborative mode of enunciation is similarly articulated as a site of humanist preservation, overriding Hanaya’s destructive intent. The ironic potential for this re-translation is demonstrated in sequences surrounding Chinese New Year, as Hanaya encourages Dong to teach him how to swear and insult his hosts in Mandarin. Instead the \textit{hanjian} translator tricks his counterpart into bestowing good wishes and prosperity to Ma and his family.\textsuperscript{314} The potential for cultural misgivings and generalisation is essentially re-written here, where emphasis for fracture and fragmentation is explicitly marked.

Enunciations of \textit{hanjian} stereotypes are similarly destabilised in \textit{Devils on the Doorstep} during sequences of village debate surrounding the prisoners’ fate. Here the word \textit{hanjian} itself is recurrently used as a derogatory and inflammatory label in expressing communal frustration. The casual and informal use of the denunciation itself (attributed to every member at the

\textsuperscript{313} The ‘misapplication’ and ‘abstract’ translation of language as argued by Ann Anagnost within narrative representation, works to unveil and invert traditionally subjective positions. Furthermore, the emphasis on language ‘collisions’ marks the emergence of renewed articulations. Anagnost, \textit{National Past-times}, pp. 146-151.

\textsuperscript{314} Hanaya bellows to his captors in a darkly comic form, “Brother and Sister-in-law, Happy New Year! You’re My Granddad, I’m your Son!” The specific metaphor of fractured familial relations here indicates renewed styles of identification that diffuse cultural, national and ethnic homogeneity.
meeting) serves to disempower the label and its categorical qualities. What surfaces is thus an appropriation and redirection of politicised brandishing towards ambivalent associations. The annulling of the term itself correspondingly marks progressions from orthodox procedures towards indeterminate and fractured resistive approaches.

**Collaborative Activity**

As detailed above, *hanjian* forms of 1990s combat variants are employed in largely reconstructed manners from previous styles, emerging indicatively as sites of negotiated modernity and global capital. Subsequently, analyses of *hanjian* activity throughout resistance narratives of this period, as with articulations of appearance and speech, are symptomatic of generic diffusions within wider processions of cultural re-orientation.

*Hanjian* bodies and their enactments emerge as sites of commodified exchange in 1990s variants, as enigmatically projected in both *Burn the Harbour* and *Flying Tiger Brigade*. Throughout these films, collaborative action is translated from an inherently capitulated discourse into a highly mediated and complex entity. During *Burn the Harbour* the distinctive absence of the Chinese *hanjian* form is appropriated by alternative European variants. Fronted by Mason, a Canadian engineer, the group initially cooperate with the Japanese army in exchange for special privileges and payment. Turning a blind eye to violations of Chinese prisoners, Mason

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315 Dai Jinhua eloquently remarks that for China, “In the 1990s, cultural signing and naming are more like a deft yet desperate linguistic tourism, a seeking of signifier for signified. Perhaps even more aptly, they resemble the strategic or gaming demonstration of a certain cultural, discursive desire, vamping and performing for a certain audience”. See Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 72.
capitulates to enemy demands in the hope of protecting his Western colleagues. As conditions worsen and abuses heighten (surrounding the lack of basic rights, food and medicine), Mason gravitates towards Captain Hong and his plans for resistance. Here *hanjian* stereotypes are further fractured, where the Westerners are prompted to rebel against the enemy in the interests of humanist preservation and utilitarian survival.  

This de-centred transformation from submissive collaboration to resistive engagement symbolises a re-imagination of the combat variant, relocated into an environment of global exchange and potentiality.

In contrasting light to articulations of *Burn the Harbour*, corruptive forces of collaboration and self-interest are exacerbated within *Flying Tiger Brigade*. In the course of the narrative guerrilla Xia-bo finds himself ostracised and banished from the resistive group, after taking sexual advantage of an imprisoned woman. In response he becomes an official *hanjian*, initially defecting to the Japanese as a method of self-survival and provision. Here he utilises his knowledge of the guerrillas to entrap and ensnare his former comrades. As the resistive campaign mounts he is brutally killed by the brigade (literally shot to pieces) as revenge for his betrayal of the group.

Despite this graphic annulment, the *hanjian* stereotype is effectively re-written in this segment of *Flying Tiger Brigade*, where Xia-bo’s swapping of sides serves to obscure and diffuse the conventional boundaries of

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316 The significance of a co-joined transnational force merged to overcome an impending and mutual threat (as similarly depicted in *International Rescue*, *Purple Sunset* and *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River*) is symptomatic of renewed imaginings of Chinese identity, steeped in structures of global exchange and interrelation.
collaboration itself.\textsuperscript{317} Seemingly motivated by a number of factors (survival, self-interest, status), Xia-bo’s transference serves to undermine the political regularity and dogmatism of resistive norms. Furthermore, his obscure status and duality within the text (operating for both resistive and collaborative forces at differing points), is symptomatic of a re-configured Chinese identity, one bounded by discourses of personal survival and global commerce.

The location and depiction of \textit{hanjian} activity in distinctly commercial and self-indulgent contexts is another characteristic of the 1990s generic variant. As exemplified by \textit{Gunshots Over the Plain}, collaborative figures appear intertwined in an internal competition for the favour of enemy officers. Here utilisation of subversive and menacing tactics for self-gain and promotion (including lying, entrapment and collusion) emphasise renewed styles of \textit{hanjian} activity. Throughout the narrative, contestation between collaborative forces is enacted by the previously detailed figures of Yang and Wu. Both struggle for the favour of General Kitamura, each utilising personal influence to gradually denounce and dispose of the other.\textsuperscript{318} Within context of 1990s discursive themes, this competition is an allegory of progressive commercial and market trends in China. In particular, the unsavoury and unprincipled tactics used by these forces (in contrast to heroic figures) in the pursuit of self-

\textsuperscript{317} Xia-bo’s materialisation as an obscure \textit{hanjian} figure is further emphasised by the background of the film itself, ostensibly touted as a remake of \textit{Guerrillas on the Railroad}. Whereas in the revolutionary text collaborative figures emerge in stereotypical \textit{hanjian} form, Xia-bo’s obscurity in the 1990s derivative is indicative of renewed generic considerations. To this extent the \textit{hanjian} form surfaces as an explicit device of modern negotiation and identification.

\textsuperscript{318} This process of denunciation and admonition is symptomatic of Chinese historical stasis in the modern period, effectively allegorising the enaction of past traumas (i.e. Cultural Revolution, Hundred Flowers Movement) towards annulled and progressive sentiments.
interest, are implied as symptomatic threats and fears of an emerging modernity.

Whereas initial reform variants promulgate a widespread appropriation and reconstitution of *hanjian* figures throughout the 1980s era, successive modalities invoke further expansion and re-orientation of the collaborative form. Subsequently, primary characteristics of *hanjian* appearance, speech and activity throughout 1990s forms gravitate towards themes of renewal, where trends of progressive modernity and emerging global negotiations grandly impact on the combat film, cinematic medium and cultural narratives at large.

**Women in the Renewed Combat Variant**

The nature and degree to which women emerge as discursive allegories and signifiers within post-1949 Chinese cinema has been detailed in previous chapters. The importance of these trends in identifying and locating female figures in the industry generally and combat film specifically, are central to an appreciation of representational shifts during the 1990s period. Feminine forms throughout resistance narratives of this variant thus remain sites of considerable significance, whose emphasis is steadily directed towards negotiations and disseminations of contemporary Chinese modernities.

Themes and styles of female projection in 1990s combat variants thus emerge as expansions and continuations of ‘new wave’ cinematic modes. Focussing on three specific areas; the ‘fracturing’ of the resistive heroine, the emergence
of ‘foreign’ active alternatives and the restructure of the ‘maternal figure’, this progression can be clearly identified and examined. The renewed representations of these women are symptomatic of wider processes of national and cultural modernity at the time, locating a reinvigorated Chinese identity within an emergent global framework.319

The ‘Fractured’ Resistive Heroine

Whereas Maoist cinematic modes belie a sublimation of female identity within political structures, and the early reform period marks the emergence of more ‘complex’ women in resistance narrative, the focus on the enactments and experiences of war from a female standpoint remains somewhat lacking. The 1990s prompt a symbolic shift in this approach, with reverberations of alternative and fractured female perspectives throughout generic variants.320 Whilst the combat film retains its dominant patriarchal form to this extent, these renewed female images and voices identify emergent modern and global themes in Chinese national cinema.

Looking closely at Woman Commando this progression is especially apparent, where the female figure is translated into a martial form whilst retaining a distinctly sexualised and gendered identity. As detailed earlier, the squad of female commandos are trained in both military and sexual tactics in order to

319 Whilst depictions of women within the post-Mao industry proscribe to negotiated and renewed perspectives generally, it is worth noting as Dai Jinhua has, that the female form (as throughout the history of Chinese cinema) remains a primarily sublimated figure of masculine crisis and representation. Dai, Positions, pp. 255-280.
320 This is characteristic of wider renewals and explorations of female perspectives throughout cultural narratives of this period manifest in a varied range of cinematic modes and styles. For just a few of these accounts see Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, pp. 99-150. Chow, Primitive Passions, pp. 1-52. And Stephanie Donald, Screen, pp. 325-340.
combat enemy forces and ensure resistive success. In contrast to revolutionary variants where the female form is rendered de-sexualised and de-gendered, employment of these tactics indicate a modernisation of the genre and negotiation of gendered projections. In this manner, the female body emerges as a site of commodification in *Woman Commando*, symbolically rendered towards composite identifications. Furthermore, complicating the location and identification of these female protagonists within the text is their obscure relation to patriarchal authorities, seemingly objectified and disposed of at will.

The most enigmatic manifestation of this in the narrative is evident in the ambiguous relationship that these women share with their commanding officer, Captain Yang. During training Yang employs a series of physical and psychological devices to ‘toughen’ these civilian women into efficient martial beings. During this process the women are continually denied their gendered identity, forced to assume androgynous army fatigues and reminded by Yang of being “soldiers, not women”. Contrastingly, in latter segments of the training regime these commandos are portrayed in revealing bathing suits and glamorous dresses, being ‘taught’ how to utilise their sexual attributes to ‘entrap’ the enemy. The contradictory and obscure projections of the commandos’ gendering during these sequences (and as a theme throughout the text itself) are symptomatic of ambivalent locations of female identity within the generic variant.

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321 Rey Chow has detailed the complex sexualization of the female form within recent Chinese cinema, and specifically located it as a symptom of national re-imagination. Furthermore Chow articulates the ‘instability’ of a newly emergent female sexuality as indicative of wider reformulating ideologies. Chow, *Primitive Passions*, pp. 67-70.
Moreover, despite developing an informal intimacy with the group as they begin resistive engagements (even as a potential romance with one of the women, Man-yun, arises), the potential for camaraderie and recognition between the commandos and Yang remains symbolically fractured. As the narrative unfolds the heroines are progressively killed off, where Yang is placed in a compromising, oppositional and ultimately combative arrangement to his former trainees. Here this aforementioned potential for personal attachment is crushingly overwhelmed by the ruthlessness of patriarchal political dogmatism, whereby both parties are rendered disposable pawns. At the text’s climactic point, Yang and the commandos engage in a martial battle that culminates in his death and the ambiguous survival of a sole female figure. The final image of the text captures this lone survivor traumatically surveying the enacted violence and registering the deaths of her female comrades.

*Woman Commando* disrupts the gendered norms and styles of the resistance narrative in enacting complex and contradictory perceptions of a modern Chinese imaginary. The ambivalent overthrow of the group’s patriarchal head within these final moments of the film are an allegory of collective identity throughout the 1990s, emerging from the projective shadow of established rule towards obscure identifications. Similarly this ambiguous concluding image indicates the fracturing potential of a haphazard and repressed gender identity, gravitating toward disaffected and traumatic consequences.

Whereas *Woman Commando* distorts regulated modelling of the militant heroine within Chinese combat films, divergent and contrary forms of
fracturing are similarly projected in this generic variant. Looking especially at *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* an alternative depiction of the disphased resistive heroine arises. This is represented by the composite character of Angel, a former medical student serving in the Eighth Route Army. Primarily located through Owen’s perspective (filtered through his present-day narration), Angel is constructed in an intimate manner as an enigmatic figure of complex motivations. Seemingly burdened by a traumatic past (loss of mother, estrangement from father, rape by the Japanese), Angel is equivalently articulated as a source of personal and collective rejuvenation in the narrative.322

Identified by the American narrator-protagonist Owen as ‘an Angel’ (her real name is An-jie), she comes to represent the potential for transcultural exchange, characterised as both archaic and modern throughout the text. This is symbolised by her fractured attachment to both traditional signifiers (the Yellow River, daughter of village head, maternal figure) and modern imaginations (medical student, proficiency in English, transnational romance). Angel is correspondingly depicted as a composite female heroine, where figurations of agency, capacity and activation are prefaced in non-martial and fractured sentiments.

322 As Zhang Yingjin perceptively clarifies, the protagonists (including Angel) of *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* emerge as symbolic transformations of those found within *Yellow Earth*. See Zhang, *Screening China*, p. 198. What Zhang fails to note however, is Angel’s derivation of a female figure in another seminal ‘new wave’ text, that of *One and Eight*. Whereas Angel bears a nascent similarity to Cuiqiao (of *Yellow Earth*) she is more reminiscent of the figure of Yang within *One and Eight* (as detailed within the previous chapter). This is endorsed by dual correlative appearance (both in Eighth Route Army Uniform) and function (as nurses, symptomatic humanitarian signifiers). However, whilst Yang surfaces as a figure of paralysis and trauma through her experience, Angel emerges contrastingly as an emblem of continuity and regeneration. This further marks *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* as a renewed combat variant, expanding issues and themes of Chinese modernity.
The Active ‘Foreign’ Female

The fracturing of the resistive heroine in this variant is similarly paralleled by the emergence and manifestation of foreign alternatives. Consequently, active articulations of non-Chinese women throughout resistive narratives are indicative of discursive renewal and restructure. The presence of nascent foreign figures within the genre is emblematised by *Purple Sunset* and *Jun lie sha chu zhong wei/Army Killing in a Heavy Enclosure* (1993, dirs. Leng Shan & Cheng Ke), where non-Chinese woman are radically repositioned as forces of agency, activation and capacity. Furthermore, these female foreigners emerge as symbolic witnesses of war itself and its globally fracturing impact.

In *Purple Sunset* this foreign enigmatisation is dually represented by the figures of Nadja (Russian) and Akiyoko (Japanese), whose presence and interactions within the text serve to renew resistive norms. Along with Yang (as the non-martial male), these protagonists overcome their seemingly diverse national backgrounds in an effort to survive the harsh conditions of war. The absence of an active Chinese heroine in this context, replaced by foreign alternatives highlights the fracture of established narrative and simultaneously charts China’s re-identification within a global environment.

The seemingly alienated and isolated status of these foreign figures (both separated from their respective homes) whilst afforded a degree of authority in the text (with mutually harrowing pasts as established through flashback) is

323 See my ‘Plot Summaries’ section for a brief review of *Army Killing in a Heavy Enclosure*. 
indicative of a reconstituted female subjectivity, one provoked by liberal, humanist and intimate impulses. Both are depicted as psychological victims of war (as is their counterpart Yang), marginalised in their personal suffering and traumas. Whereas Akiyoko’s destructive tendencies are portrayed as a by-product of obsessional political conditioning and are gradually transformed in the film, Nadja’s alienation is equally related through intimate loss of her son (in a bombing raid) and a benevolent desire to assist those that have equally suffered (regardless of nationality) in war.

Similarly throughout *Army Killing in a Heavy Enclosure*, the development of Yoko (a soldier-nurse, like Nadja) as a central protagonist within the narrative highlights re-orientation and expansion of textual variants. Progressively split between soldierly duty to the Imperial Army and intimate attachment to fellow soldier Hiromi, Yoko is portrayed as a fractured and marginalised figure. During the film she is continually enforced to repress her sensitivity (as emphasised by her appearance in Imperial uniform and unconsummated relationship with Hiromi) within the context of national and military obligation. Exploited by an obsessive Japanese command, she is ultimately killed and consumed on the battlefield with her personal desires unfulfilled. The obscure depiction of her death (she and her beloved Hiromi grasps hands as they die together) effectively generates critique of the indiscriminate and overarching destruction of war itself. Furthermore, the receptive identification and subsequent decimation of this foreign woman in narrative diegesis is

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324 These are characteristics that have been progressively attached to Chinese women in recent critical researches (i.e. Dai Jinhua, *Positions*. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*). The transfer of these themes to an alternative female form in this text (i.e. the ‘foreign’, the ‘enemy’) thus highlights the projection of an expanded female consciousness within the Chinese imaginary, one that transcends the established boundaries of representation towards global considerations.
symptomatic of generic re-orientation in 1990s variants, suggestively expanded towards themes of global exchange and interaction.

*The ‘Renewed’ Maternal Figure*

To the same degree that active resistive heroines undergo considerable adaptation throughout 1990s variants, maternal female figures are similarly appropriated. This progressions is exemplified within differing context of both *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937* and *Devils on the Doorstep*, through the explicit presence of pregnant female characters. Emerging as predominant signifiers of preservation, rationale and futurity, these maternal figures are indicative of renewed and modern Chinese identifications.

In *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937*, this is demonstrated through the character of Rieko, a Japanese civilian who is married to Cheng-xian and pregnant with their child. Whilst Rieko is established as a figure of marginal status throughout the film (as both a foreigner, and one of ‘enemy’ nationality) she is effectively validated and redeemed according to maternal characteristics. She subsequently manifests as an alternative female projection, one that rewrites and re-orientates conventional formats of the resistance genre. *Rieko* is commonly depicted in domestic engagement during the narrative, enthusiastically assuming the maternal role (as wife and mother) within her hybrid family. She seemingly dotes over her Chinese husband and adoptive son, despite external threats and the menace of war itself. Moreover, her

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*Throughout the narrative Rieko emerges as a dual figure of resilience, not only in re-writing projections of foreign guizi within text, but similarly by fracturing the female maternal image as a homogenous penultimate signifier. Rieko thus surfaces as a renewed and alternative figure to the sacrificing ‘Earth Mother’. See Dai Jinhua, *Positions*, pp. 264-270.*
pregnant condition throughout the majority of the text marks her as a wholly fertile and productive substitute for the Chinese mother. Ultimately she is depicted as a figure of resilience, endurance and determination, protecting her family and literally ‘giving birth’ to a future generation. Consequently, Rieko features as a re-integrated maternal figure, adopting the role of motherly invigoration in a fractured and substituted manner.326

The depiction of an alternative maternal agent is similarly evidenced in Devils on the Doorstep, fracturing the role of the ‘maternal sacrificer’ whilst transforming it towards re-oriented perspectives. This is articulated through the pregnant figure of Yu-er, Ma’s de-facto partner and would-be wife in the text. Emerging from a conventionally marginal position (widow, single-mother, engaging in an illicit relationship), she nevertheless features as a central part of the narrative, registering the fractured and personalised impact of war on her developing relationship with Ma. Despite the clandestine disapproval of their relationship by the villagers at large (and her demented father in particular), Yu-er consistently enforces her principles and opinions to her partner (as does Rieko to Cheng-xian within Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937). Subsequently she emerges as a personally grounding and intimate figure for Ma throughout the film, buffering him from the rest of the villagers and their desire to bully him. Yu-er thus surfaces as a dually invigorated maternal figure in Devils on the Doorstep, operating on both a physiological level (the baby itself) and psychological plain (for Ma).

326 In an explicit sense this form of ‘re-integration’ appropriates established allegories of family throughout Chinese narrative as homogenous and nationalised signifiers, redirecting them towards themes of global expansion and internationalism.
One of the most striking peculiarities shadowing Yu-er’s presence in the film is that her fate is never revealed within narrative, but rather ambiguously implied through its impact on Ma. Having survived the village massacre, both she and the unborn baby entirely disappear from the narrative process. Whereas Rieko’s secure delivery of her baby implies collective continuation and resilience, Yu-er’s vanishing works to contrary effect in *Devils on the Doorstep*. Her absence (as highlighted by Ma’s descent into an isolated madness) is indicative of an indeterminate and fractured futurity, representative of China’s ambivalent and stunted developments during the ‘open door’ era.

The re-orientation and diffusion of female representations throughout 1990s variants are symbolic of overarching negotiations of social, cultural and national discourses within China at the time. More specifically, both the reconfiguration of the active female form and the articulation of progressively alternative perspectives are symptomatic of this process, whereby the foundations of the generic form are explicitly renewed in emphasising themes and issues of a globally modernising identity.

**Children and Families in the Renewed Combat Variant**

Correlative to reforming childhood and familial significations in 1980s combat films (as detailed in the previous chapter), the following period facilitated expansion and continuation of these developments. To this extent,
childhood and familial representations of 1990s variants are re-oriented towards renewed themes of modernity, specifically emerging as allegories of a reintegrated Chinese imaginary.\textsuperscript{327}

One area this particularly manifests is in articulations of the familial as an intimate and de-politicised space, ambivalently entwined within national precedents. Correspondingly, the family surfaces as a site of rupture during this variant, fracturing established myth whilst allegorising modern modes of negotiation. One text demonstrating this is \textit{Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River}, where familial and personal relationships are ultimately prefaced over communal considerations. This is dually evidenced in the narrative, projected through Angel and her relationship with her father (as discussed earlier), as well as between resistive leader Haizi and his daughter, Hua-hua. Both fathers sacrifice their own lives at textual climax to protect and defend their families. Styled as archaic and patriarchal figures throughout, both ‘fathers’ entrust their daughter’s protection to Owen (the foreigner) upon their demise.\textsuperscript{328}

Whereas ‘fatherly’ characters heroically rescue and ensure their offspring’s survival within revolutionary variants, in \textit{Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River} the patriarchal power of salvation is transferred to an externalised and marginal source (in this case the highly modern and liberal manifestation of a US army pilot). Here the homogeny and progression of familial authority is

\textsuperscript{327} In the framework of the national imaginary, the childhood form (and specifically its relation to the family institution) emerges as a space of re-oriented identification. As Ann Anagnost details, “The child becomes an intense site of commodification, as well as providing a site of remoulding the cultural and physical resources of the nation”. Anagnost, \textit{National Past-times}, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{328} As Zhang Yingjin has declared, this situation does not explicitly challenge the Communist revolutionary legacy, but rather signifies an alternative ‘packaging’ of the war narrative itself. To this extent the centralisation of Owen’s figure within the text (as both protagonist and narrator) symbolises a more commercial rather than distinctly cultural or historic re-writing. Zhang, \textit{Screening China}, p. 200.
essentially interrupted, transformed towards complex and renewed appreciations.

This disruption of homogenous and untainted patriarchal lineage is similarly projected in *Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937*, where focus on familial rejuvenations and childhood redemptions are marked. Concentration on the plight of the family’s unborn mixed-race child manifest in the text as an allegory of collective endurance and survival. The unborn baby emerges during the film as an ambiguous marker of the family’s indeterminacy, and the threat of political elements within the war landscape. Both Chinese and Japanese forces display discouragement and hostility towards Rieko’s pregnancy (the latter kicking her to induce a miscarriage), signifying the threat of ethnic, cultural and political dogmatism. Cheng-xian’s successful delivery of this endangered baby and Rieko’s dramatic naming of it as ‘Nanjing’, serve as suggestive rejuvenations of the familial bond and its endurance within a threatening environment.\(^{329}\) In the absence of an explicit political or national saviour throughout the narrative, it is the familial union itself that is ultimately celebrated as redemptive and liberating.

To a similarly renewed degree, as Tian-yuan gathers the children together at narrative conclusion and leads them off into an unknown forest there is a figurative suggestion of survival, endurance and futurity. This is further

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\(^{329}\) Cheng-xian is located as an allegorically ‘renewed’ figure throughout the text. Unlike the resistive heroes of revolutionary forms whose capacity is determined by martial and political expediency, his status is confirmed through intimate and humanitarian signifiers. Furthermore his ability to deliver the baby in unsuitable conditions (as both father and doctor) is indicative of a ‘renewed’ Chinese legacy, one bounded by themes of preservation, resilience and rejuvenation.
implicated in the text’s final sequence as the grand image of a ship sailing across the screen is coupled with children’s voices singing ‘Don’t Cry Nanjing’, the film’s theme song. Here the symbolism of childhood discourse and its seemingly reassured status is characteristic of national enigmatisation and futurity. Whilst the film itself is firmly set within the period of 1937, these final affirmations of childhood futurity serve as allegories of reform-era China, suggestively overcoming historical trauma and suffering translated towards humanist sentimentality.

An alternative approach towards depictions of children as assurers of futurity is demonstrated throughout Zhan zheng zi wu xian/Meridian of War (1990, dir. Feng Xiaoning), focussing on a group of childhood resistive figures stranded in central China. Isolated and cut-off from their wider detachment, the group are assigned a scouting role to deliver vital information to the Eighth Route forces. As the narrative progresses the enclosing enemy systematically kills off these children, until a sole survivor (the present-day narrator) completes the mission. Whereas in revolutionary variants childhood scouts make enthusiastic and impacting contributions to resistive effort, in Meridian of War these figures appear disorientated and displaced in the war environment.

The lyrics of the song are emblematic of collective perseverance and naturalised rejuvenation; “Don’t cry Nanjing, don’t cry child. The little sailboat floats, the Yangtze River flows fast. Kiss the moon when you see her, and say hello to the sun”. Themes of intimate survival and humanist endurance against overwhelming and oppressive odds are in fact characteristic of Wu’s cinematic style. As he notes of Don’t Cry Nanjing 1937 itself, “what I would like to express behind the scenes is not hatred, but love, a kind of love which transcends wars, deaths, and hatred in a general sense. This love is humanistic and eternal”. Kong Haili, Asian Cinema, p. 130.

See the ‘Plot Summaries’ section of this thesis for an outline of this film’s narrative.
Moreover, the childhood protagonists of *Meridian of War* seemingly carry the burden of a traumatic past and an indeterminate future. This is demonstrated at progressive points where the narrative flow is disrupted, as characters are mythically relocated to the reform-era to enact personal desires and fantasies. Whereas one boy is seen in a science class reciting lessons, another is imagined on the athletics track, competing in a running race. The impact of these sequences (rationalised through the narrator, whose flashback encompasses the story itself) serve to query established perceptions of childhood and its function within Chinese cultural narratives. Articulations of these subjective desires and modern fantasies are symptomatic of a collectively repressed mentality, one that has been suppressed and sublimated to statist discourse in the past. As representative of renewed war narratives, *Meridian of War* refracts and obscures the established view of childhood in favour of ambiguous identifications.

The re-orientation of childhood and familial structures in these above-mentioned texts symbolise the expansive negotiation of generic and cultural norms within 1990s variants of the combat film. The specific disruption and appropriation of considerations, prolonged from 1980s forms, reaffirms progressions of cinematic output as global capital and symbolic modernity. Moreover, the emergent themes of renewal and expansion characterising childhood and familial projections throughout this era are symptomatic of

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333 Specifically these ‘fantasy’ sequences appropriate the childhood form as a desired site of modernization and development. This coincides with Ann Anagnost’s argument that the child surfaces as a dual site of commodification and cultural remoulding within narrative text. As she states, “The commodity becomes the supplement for what is lacking in the national culture, an expenditure that is made to fill in what is missing”. Anagnost, *National Past-times*, p. 124.
discursive adaptation and alterations of collective imaginings within contemporary China.

**Landscape in the Renewed Combat Variant**

The initiation of the 1990s period in Chinese cinema effectively heralded a continuance of innovation and experimentation within the medium. Correlating to the realm of cinematic landscape in particular, these restructures amounted to a renewal of projective forms and styles. Landscapes of this mode and of the combat variant in particular, thus emerge as symbolic registers of institutional modernisation and representational reform. Most useful impacts of analysis can be ascertained within two simultaneous areas, re-orientations of rural landscape throughout resistance narratives and expanded articulations of urban topography towards themes and issues of global modernity.

*The ‘Renewed’ Rural Landscape*

A predominant trend of 1980s resistance landscape that is expanded and developed in 1990s variants, is the de-familiarisation and disorientation of rural iconography. Within Feng Xiaoning’s productions this process is particularly acute, where rural topography is adapted as a wholesale signifier of Chinese modernity and perseverance. *Purple Sunset* and *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* surface as specific examples of this, whereby the Chinese landscape is dually portrayed as harsh and redemptive.\(^{334}\)

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\(^{334}\) Feng’s obscure utilisations of landscape throughout *Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River*, as emblematic of his distinctive cinematic style, is detailed by Zhang Yingjin within *Screening China*, pp. 197-201.
Within both films this manifests in the vast terrain that the protagonists are forced to traverse throughout the bulk of each narrative. Its ever-present recurrence (stylistically emphasised by frequent long shots, high angles and zooms) is suggestive of a potentially engulfing and threatening environment. However, each text similarly identifies the rural landscape as a site of aesthetic preservation and redemption. In *Purple Sunset* this manifests in the reference to the ‘purple sunset’ itself, which is noted and admired by the film’s protagonists at differing stages of the narrative. Correspondingly, the landscape emerges as a complex metaphysical source within the film, renewed towards marginal and alternative themes.

*Lover’s Grief Over the Yellow River* similarly appropriates rural landscapes of the resistive narrative form, renewing them as sites of depoliticised and ethereal imagination. This predominantly centres throughout the text on the location of action itself, set in central China (alongside the Great Wall) with specific attention to the Yellow River, identified during the text as the ‘Mother River’.335 Angel in particular demonstrates a romantic affinity with the river itself, proclaiming it a site of mythical rejuvenation, coalescence and corporeality. Whilst the initial segments of the narrative document the group’s intersection of the landscape in search of a larger Communist detachment, it is at the film’s climax (set on the banks of the river itself) that the action reaches a dramatic conclusion. Here the group must traverse the ‘wild’ river in order

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335 In locating a prevailing style of cultural nationalism within post-Mao China, Arthur Waldron has investigated the interpretation of iconic features including both the Great Wall and the Yellow River. He suggests that both materialize as complex signifiers throughout the contemporary era, charting China’s ambivalent transformation towards a tenuously located modern identity. Waldron, ‘Representing China: The Great Wall and Cultural Nationalism in the Twentieth Century’, in Harumi Befu (ed), *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California, 1993, pp. 36-60.
to escape from the enclosing enemy forces, and it is here that Angel sacrifices herself in order to ensure Owen’s survival. As she literally ‘cuts herself free’ from him (they are tied together with calabashes to help them float) she is shown dissolving and immersing into the river in a dramatic slow motion shot.

This sequence emphasises Angel’s metaphoric liberation and redemption, whereby in losing her own life she is suggestively reconnected and rejuvenated with a mythical existential source (the ‘Mother River’). Furthermore the film’s final sequence locates Owen’s return to the riverside in the present day form of an elderly man, where he mournfully remembers those who sacrificed their lives to ensure his survival. As emblematic of this process, Owen casts the photos he has collected into the river itself, a symbolic elegy of remembrance and emotive recognition. The river landscape is thus dually projected as a site of redemption and continuance, an allegory of China’s inherent survival and endurance within the emerging modern period.

The ‘Renewed’ Urban Landscape

The other major trend identifiable throughout 1990s generic variants is the further re-integration and renewal of urban landscapes in resistance narrative. Here the cityscape as an industrialised space of resistive action surfaces as an allegory of China’s commercial urbanisation and development.\(^336\) Paying specific attention to *Flying Tiger Brigade, Gunshots Over the Plain* and

Woman Commando this trend is particularly evident. Within each of these films respectively, the modernisation of resistive activity (in terms of both weaponry and strategy) is emphasised by the location of the action itself in urban spaces. To a similar degree, the identification of resistive forces throughout these narratives as localised and non-institutional entities characterises these texts as allegories of changing commercial and industrial renewal.

Within Flying Tiger Brigade urban spaces are definitively marked, where the action is primarily centred on battle for control of the city’s railway system. In contrast to the expansive and naturalised settings of revolutionary variants, Flying Tiger Brigade is characterised by condensed spaces and claustrophobic action. Similarly the prevalence of these developed and industrialised spaces (restaurants, bathhouses, train carriages) framed by political resistance is highly symbolic, re-furbishing the legacy of nationalist ideology within a distinctly modern and urbanised iconography.337

This style of urbanisation is similarly emphasised throughout Woman Commando, as the cityscape is marked as a site of cosmopolitan excess and transaction. The feature of decadent and metropolitan locations within the text including nightclubs, bars and mansions emphasises a particular style of urbanity, one representing emergent social classes and affluence. Thus the city surfaces in Woman Commando as a re-oriented space of action, characterised by themes of commercial corruption, self-interest and promotion. These

Moreover the device of mise-en-scène within these sequences is effectively dramatised within Flying Tiger Brigade, where the predominant feature of shadowy lighting and dark tone colours (i.e. black, grey, green) emphasise a distinctly urbanised battle.
characteristics framed in a war narrative setting, serve to highlight generic renewal towards negotiations of modernity in 1990s China.

*Gunshots Over the Plain* similarly re-enforces allegories of urbanisation within the combat narrative, but in a slightly differing context. Here the central presence of the prison itself throughout the film (a suffocating site of surveillance and enclosure), serves to re-orient the fundamental structures of resistive practice. Accordingly, the prison surfaces as a space of enclosure and repression, one that illegitimately oppresses its inhabitants. As symbolic allegory, the prolonged periods of struggle and rebellion enacted within this location are suggestive of China’s transformations since 1949, registering a desire to overthrow repressive political systems and replace them with altruistic alternatives. Correlatively, re-locations of the resistance narrative in familiarised urban spaces and the overcoming of obsessive political dogmas are characteristic of renewed processes of identification and national projection within modern China.

The established landscape of the 1990s combat variant is thus subjected to a wide-scale endeavour of fracture and reconstruction, indicative of wider discursive negotiations within Chinese cultural consciousness. This itself is characterised by two distinct developments of renewal, the appropriation and re-configuration of rural iconographic forms and expanded articulations of urban discursive themes. Both developments are symptomatic of the ‘open door’ period itself in China, effectively re-orienting historical and cultural consciousness towards allegorical themes of modernity.
Combat Case Study - Devils on the Doorstep

In scrutinizing re-orientations of the combat genre throughout the 1990s period, the demonstration and analysis of specific variants in context of overarching trends within the medium is necessitated. To this extent, the following segment shall examine one emblematic combat film in depth, tracing key adaptations in line with discursive filmic progressions of the 1990s, most notably towards themes of renewed modernity and identification.

Following this premise, Devils on the Doorstep surfaces as a most appropriate text for this endeavour, dually demonstrating variegations in both combat and cinematic forms from previous modes. Correspondingly, Devils on the Doorstep can be analysed as a definitive film in both the progressive renewal of the combat genre, and of the cinematic industry in general, throughout the ‘open door’ period. Directed by Jiang Wen, a figure who traverses the ‘generational’ boundaries of post-Mao Chinese filmmaking (gaining his reputation as a formative actor in ‘new wave’ films, where his directorial efforts are more commonly associated with later movements), this text attracted the same controversy that many other ‘post new-wave’ films attained during this era. To the same degree, Devils on the Doorstep is definitively a renewed generic text, gravitating towards appreciations of Chinese modernity and identification throughout the 1990s.

338 The notion of a ‘post new wave’ Chinese cinema, commonly associated with the 1990s period has been detailed by Zhu Ying, Chinese Cinema During the Era of Reform, pp. 111-143. Similarly identified as the ‘sixth generation’ these filmmakers are renowned for their own modes of experimentation and innovation (often low-budget productions set in urban spaces with obscure narratives), attracting the attention of film critics. For in-depth accounts of this see Donald, Public Spaces, pp. 121-138. Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, pp. 71-98. Zhang Yingjin, Screening China, pp. 281-292. And Xu Ying, Asian Cinema, pp. 39-43.
In stylistic terms the commencement of *Devils on the Doorstep* enacts an adaptation of the combat genre, and of cinematic modes at large, towards themes of renewal. The film’s inception is steadily ambiguous whereby the narrative seemingly ‘bursts’ onto the screen through combined effects of image and sound. Detailing a musical parading of Japanese soldiers through Rack-Armour Village, the initial focus on these troops is dislocating. The mood of the sequence is somewhat satirical, whereby the presence of caricature (soldiers monotonously playing the same theme, the Lieutenant obsessively conducting the troops from atop his horse) is emphasized. At the same time however, this opening articulates themes of potential menace and violation through specific iconic visualization (close-up shots of enlarged black boots, horse straps and an imposing Japanese flag). To this effect, the opening foray emblems the ambivalent nature of *Devils on the Doorstep* itself, a film that steadily redirects historical significations (of the legacy of resistance, World War II, and nationalist realisation) towards dualistic themes of both parody and violation.339

Elements of lighting and colour feature throughout 1990s Chinese films as distinct factors of cinematic renewal and re-orientation. In this manner, many texts effectively appropriate and reconfigure established modes.340 Within *Devils on the Doorstep* this process is especially marked, where themes of

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339 These are notions similarly embraced by the director in his debut film, *Yang guang can lan de er zi/ In the Heat of the Sun*, (1994, dir. Jiang Wen) which similarly re-orient the Chinese historical imagining (in this case, The Cultural Revolution) towards progressively obscured renderings. See Yomi Braester, *Screen*, pp. 350-362.

340 As Dai Jinhua has surmised, many emerging directors of 1990s films had specific ‘avant garde’ agendas, positioning themselves at the ‘margins’ of cultural production and gravitating toward a steady ‘subversion’ of mainstream cinematic form and style. Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 84.
disphasure and disorientation prevail. The specific use of a black and white colour format throughout the film highlights this effect, reminiscent of revolutionary cinematic modes.\textsuperscript{341} To this extent, \textit{Devils on the Doorstep} is stylistically marked as a derivative text, one that directly retraces and retracts the established combat (and revolutionary) mode. Coupled with the redetermined nature of the narrative itself (towards the psychological and emotional struggles of war) however, the impact is ambiguous.

Features of lighting similarly manifest in explicitly haphazard manners throughout the film, whereby attention to ambivalence is definitively pronounced. Here the presence of renowned ‘fifth generation’ cinematographer Gu Changwei is significant, projecting remnants of a ‘new wave’ influence over \textit{Devils on the Doorstep}.\textsuperscript{342} Specific elements of variegation characterise the lighting patterns of this film, whereby use of unconventional sources (from candles, camp fires, natural sunlight) and effects (haphazard shadows, blinding brightness) are employed.\textsuperscript{343} The gravitations of this mode are representative of renewed cinematic forms, inclining toward generic and cinematic redeterminations.

\textsuperscript{341} The use of this ‘nostalgic’ black and white format throughout the text imbues the narrative with an explicit obscurity, one that harks back to the Maoist revolutionary imaginary (of the 1950s and early 60s) whilst simultaneously distorting and fantasising it to the point of obscurity.

\textsuperscript{342} A recognised graduate of the ‘fifth generation’ school, Gu’s cinematography is commonly associated with ‘new wave’ directors including Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. In recent years Gu has gravitated towards alternative productions, where his participation within global and transnational films is particularly marked. This is the second feature that Gu has filmed for Jiang Wen, having previously been the cinematographer for \textit{In the Heat of the Sun}.

\textsuperscript{343} This disorientation of established cinematic style (in this instance, of lighting) is indicative of Jiang’s anarchic style, manifest by Cui Shuqin as a mode of, “auteurist’s imagination”. Cui, ‘Working From the Margins: Urban Cinema and Independent Directors in Contemporary China’, in Sheldon Lu & Emily Yueh-Yu Yeh (eds), \textit{Chinese Language Film}, pp. 96-119.
Indicative of a re-oriented combat mode, *Devils on the Doorstep* fractures and redirects many aspects of established resistive dialogue. The most striking feature of this is the overwhelming restructure of speech itself in the film, gravitating towards colloquial and informal modes. The protagonists of Rack-Armour Terrace enunciate in thickly accented Mandarin, signifying a shift away from the culturally hegemonic and predominant formats of established Chinese modes. This is symptomatic of a renewed cinematic form, recurring throughout 1990s styles as a means of articulating alternative and repressed voices.344

Narrative attentions to specific instances of mistranslation and misinterpretation are marked throughout *Devils on the Doorstep*, often to a comically dark effect. Underlying themes of both satire and menace are employed in character dialogues of the film, symptomatic of discursive disphasure and re-orientation throughout the 1990s. One of the most enigmatic examples of this surrounds the debated identity of the figure that brings the prisoners to the village. Acknowledged simply as *wo* (‘I’) the protagonists engage in recurrent debate in trying to determine his identity (i.e. intently asking Ma ‘Who am “I”’, ‘Where did “I” come from’). On an allegorical level these discursive queries are significant, symptomatic of renewed cinematic questionings of the 1990s, progressively examining the Chinese imaginary whilst negotiating collective consciousness.

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344 In this manner Jiang makes explicit these protagonists marginalisation and alienation from established cinematic modes. As a device of symptomatic allegory, the feature of localised and accented ‘voices’ is symbolic of Jiang’s dual ‘subjective’ and ‘auteurist’ style as recognised by Cui Shuqin. ibid., p. 113.
As detailed earlier in this chapter the location of translation as a mediated mode of communication is a seminal theme of *Devils on the Doorstep*. At recurrent points in the film Dong’s (mis)translation is queried by both Hanaya and the village protagonists. In allaying fears of misunderstanding (which he is ironically enforcing), Dong recounts specific cultural stereotypes such as “Japanese always talk like they’re angry” (to Ma and Yu-er) and “Chinese don’t get angry, they’re used to being insulted” (to Hanaya). The gravitation of these statements implicitly destabilises forms of generalisation, projecting alternative renderings of speech. Furthermore, these assertions are indicative of renewed styles of identification, towards progressively intricate and multifaceted modes.345

Characteristics and qualities of cinematic iconography are steadily expanded and renewed within Chinese cinema during the ‘open door’ era of reform. In this manner, features of camera positioning and framing are integral, employed to wholly restructured and redirected degrees. In *Devils on the Doorstep* the use of disrupted and haphazard framing features throughout the text as a means of emphasising themes of re-orientation and renewal.346 One of the most enigmatic instances of this in the text follows the sequence as Ma recovers after having rescued the prisoners from suffocation. In this scene the

345 Stephanie Donald effectively traces this style of development throughout the Chinese filmic format of the 1990s, locating its specific interrelation with wider social, cultural and political contexts. In this manner, a specific mode of Chinese ‘civility’ emerges, one that I argue to be progressively negotiated and redetermined around emerging themes of a global modernity. Donald, *Public Secrets*, p. 121-138.
346 Derek Elley has noted in his review of *Devils on the Doorstep* that the overall production effect of the film is somewhat ‘over-realistic’. In this vein I argue that Jiang has explicitly utilised these techniques (such as the framing example here) in effort of projecting an overtly stark and intensely allegorical Chinese modernity. To this effect, the very mode of identification and signification is redirected in the text. Elley, ‘Devils on the Doorstep’, *Variety* 379, 1, 2000, p. 28.
use of inverted framing (in point of view style) to register both Ma and Yu-
er’s response is symptomatic of cinematic redetermination and redeployment.

To equivalent degree, ambiguous and stylised modes of framing are used within the film as Ma emphatically bellows at the approaching Japanese army from his roof. Here the use of an image that registers the unresponsive army, effectively shot ‘between’ Ma’s legs, is symbolic of iconographic renewal and redirection. Point of view is similarly used in the preceding scene, where Hanaya’s experience of being entrapped in a sack is transposed on the screen. Here the feature of a segmented filter emphasises the impact of Ma’s action (feeding, nurturing), rendering him a redetermined figure of paternity.

Camera movements and angles similarly prevail throughout *Devils on the Doorstep* as symbolic devices of cinematic renewal. Features of dynamic movement characterise the film’s iconography, whereby the continuous shifting signifies a re-orientation of discursive aesthetics. Moreover, the recurrent movement of the camera implies a narrative ambivalence, highlighting the ambiguity of the text itself as a classificatory form. To an equivalent degree, features of camera angle manifest in the film in renewed modes. Accordingly, *Devils on the Doorstep* re-orients established modes of both cinematic and generic flow in favour of themes of indeterminacy and imprecision.

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347 As Elley further comments, the text unfolds at a steadily ‘frantic’ pace, whereby the use of unpredictable angles and recurrent movements characterise *Devils on the Doorstep* as both an ‘exhilarating’ and ‘exhausting’ film. *ibid.*, p. 28.
In stylistic terms, perhaps the most emblematic sequence of renewed iconography is demonstrated in the film’s heady climax, as protagonist Ma is beheaded by Hanaya. The moment the execution occurs, the camera shifts to a subjective point-of-view shot, articulating Ma’s last few moments before dying. Here the feature of movement (tracking 720 degrees as a manifestation of decapitation) and colour (seeping onto the screen in dull tones) are employed in emphasising textual ambivalence. Moreover, as Ma experiences his final moments, an elliptic red filter glazes over the screen (from his point of view shot), an emblematic icon of his ambiguous demise. In this manner the fractured location of Ma as a symbolic ‘witness’ (of even his own death), represents renewed projections of the protagonist norm within cinematic discourse, towards seemingly ruptured and conditioned perspectives. As symptomatic of a renewed cinematic style, this sequence of conclusion imbues the text with explicit disphasure, precipitating themes of stasis and paralysis.

This emphasis on witnessing and verification is similarly enacted immediately after the sequence of communal massacre, as Ma and Yu-er row towards their emblazoned village. Captured in a medium shot with shadowy lighting (where the flames of the village are seemingly reflected off their presence), their paralysed response is indicative of trauma and distress. In an allegorical sense, these two sequences of witnessing (violence, abuse) signify renewed narrative

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348 This feature of witnessing (as discussed throughout this chapter) emerges as a key aspect of 1990s cinematic modes and gravitations. As Dai Jinhua has effectively noted, these alienated protagonists symbolise a “profound experience of how human existence is fragmented through continual wounds and shock”. Wang & Barlow, Cinema and Desire, p. 95.
positionings, re-orienting both the established renderings of the combat genre, and of cinematic discourse at large.

The presence of unconventional editing throughout *Devils on the Doorstep* serves to mark it as a renewed cinematic text, one verging into themes of fantasy and surrealism.\(^{349}\) Whereas standard cuts are employed throughout most of the film, occasional and unconventional uses of dissolves, fades and wipes are similarly evident. One such example of this, noted above, emerges near the text’s conclusion where a dissolve is used as Ma and Yu-er (who are rowing to take part in the joint celebrations) register the massacre of their local village. Here a medium-long point of view shot depicting the township in flames, subsequently dissolves into the ambiguous image of a phonograph playing a Japanese song in the regional township. In this manner the narrative effectively jumps space and time, following Ma’s displacement and obscure descent into madness (where he butchers the Japanese enemy). Similarly fades and wipes are utilised throughout the text as indicative of traversed space and time. The most enigmatic mode of this manifest in the aforementioned sequence of Ma’s beheading. Here the final colour image, projected from Ma’s perspective, is emphasised by two horizontal wipes (mimicking his blinking motion) followed by a fade to a red screen where the credits role. The edits in this sequence provide an alternative and somewhat surreal mode of cinematic conclusion, emblematic of renewed styles as enacted throughout this period.

\(^{349}\) As indicative of Jiang’s emblematic and ambiguous style, see Yomi Braester’s article in *Screen*, pp. 350-362.
Features of re-oriented montage and subjective fantasy are projected throughout *Devils on the Doorstep*, indicative of both Jiang Wen’s ‘auteurist’ style and ‘subjective’ modes of cinematic imagination in general.\(^{350}\) This explicitly manifests in the text through Lieutenant Hanaya, whose anxiety in response to his imposing death is extensively articulated. Fearing an imminent demise he imagines the villagers as a group of mercenary samurai, making their way to Ma’s house in order to kill him (depicted in slow motion, articulated in medium shots with rapid multiple cuts, interspersed with images of Hanaya’s trepidation). Dressed in customary Japanese costume and coupled with traditional music, the sequence is indicative of subjective imagining, whereby the spectacle of the scene (accompanied by Hanaya’s tempered narration in Japanese) provokes foreignness and ambiguity.\(^{351}\) Although Hanaya’s fears are ultimately unrealised, the enunciated fantasy of this scene (in accentuated Japanese perspective) re-positions and re-orients established narrative viewpoints towards themes of destabilisation, multiplicity and cultural exchange.

The specific obscuration of space and time throughout *Devils on the Doorstep* mark it as a text of modern allegory, characteristic of a renewing cinematic imaginary throughout the 1990s.\(^{352}\) This manifests in the primary location of the narrative itself, subsumed into the local village of Rack-Armour Terrace, a

\(\text{\textsuperscript{350}}\) Cui, *Chinese Language Film*, p. 112.
\(\text{\textsuperscript{351}}\) At the same time the ‘foreignness’ of this sequence, as projected in an imagined ‘spectacle’, highlights the progressive commercialisation of cultural identifications, effectively grounded in themes of global exchange and interrelated tangibility.
\(\text{\textsuperscript{352}}\) This aligns with Dai Jinhua’s promulgations on 1990s cinematic themes, in particular notions of comparing film developments to ‘scenes in a fog’. In this manner *Devils on the Doorstep* correlates to textual modes of ‘reconstruction’, emerging to obscurely diffuse established norms whilst similarly reconfiguring them to emerging trends of a commercialised modernity. Wang & Barlow, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 72.
seemingly hermetic and enclosed space. Although there are Imperial Navy forces nearby (occasionally parading through the village), initially there is a somewhat peaceful and uninterrupted co-existence in the region. With the ambiguous arrival of the Japanese prisoners however, the discourse of war permeates directly into Rack-Armour Terrace, leading to destructive and tragic consequences.

In this mode, external spaces are clearly marked within *Devils on the Doorstep* as foreign, emblematised by the local township (a bustling place of commercial enterprise including hawkers, soldiers and assassins) and the Japanese headquarters (a rigid space emphasised by features of imposing walls and a multileveled building). In narrative progression, Ma is forced to depart from the enclosed and familiar space of Rack-Armour Terrace into these external locations in order to solve the prisoner problem. In an allegorical sense, this enactment signifies progressions of modernisation and expansion in China, incorporating global themes into frames of identification. This is correlative to features of place and identity as explored throughout the renewed cinematic mode, negotiating a re-oriented Chinese topography. 353 Initially this procedure of external endeavour appears successful in the text, indicated by Ma’s return to the village with more grain than intended. Ultimately however, this process is rendered tragic, whereby external forces permeate and ultimately destroy the community. By the text’s conclusion, Ma’s descent into desperation is informed by loss (of his partner, child and

home), where he is forced into the marginal and hostile environment of the bustling township (which renders him a criminal and offender, ultimately leading to his demise).

The location and nature of the prisoners’ makeshift confinement in Devils on the Doorstep is indicative of allegorical themes of modernisation marking the genre in this period. Separated and segregated from the village whole, Hanaya and Dong are detained in the community’s storehouse, usually reserved for keeping grain and wheat. Whilst there, they are well treated and cared for by the villagers receiving medical treatment (Hanaya’s bullet wound is tended by Yu-er), quality food (they eat white flour whilst the community survive on maize and brown-flour) and even alcohol (wine). Ironically they enjoy a better lifestyle than the local peasants whilst in detainment (a point explicitly argued about during village meetings), symptomatic of their presence as commodities in the text.354 The combined impact of this situation is symbolic of China’s identities and conflicts throughout the ‘open door’ era, gravitating towards renewed socio-political norms. Foremost in this procession is the feature of commerce and commodification, whereby the allegorical nation (in this case the inhabitants of Rack-Armour Terrace) must negotiate and adjust to these changes.

The obscurity and disphasure of the narrative mode is similarly informed by temporal features of Devils on the Doorstep, ultimately contributing to

354 This emphasis on commodification and its ambiguous development is an allegorical signifier of Chinese modernity. The feature of these themes throughout 1990s cinema is symptomatic of renewed identifications and imaginations within cultural consciousness. For a brief account of how this has impacted the industry see Zhang Yingjin, Chinese National Cinema, pp. 288-296.
renewed cinematic forms. Correlating with other modernised combat texts, the feature of progressive ‘war time’ is rendered ambiguous in *Devils on the Doorstep*, translated into progressively personal and subjective modes.\(^{355}\) The presence of unrealised deadlines in the narrative, manifest in relation to the prisoners’ stay in the village, seemingly brackets an overarching timeline of war and history. In this manner, the text correlates to reoriented styles of identification, informed by marginal and alternative imaginings to established norms. Moreover, the feature of personalised timelines (such as New Year, Spring Festival and Yu-er’s pregnancy) sublimate hegemonic and prevailing notions of time into a subjective and hermetic frame.

In terms of overarching themes of cinematic renewal as emblematised by 1990s variants, the depiction of village massacre in *Devils on the Doorstep*, manifest in the mode of an expanded montage sequence, is highly impacting. Although the pace of the scene is mediated and slow, the transfer to violence is contrastingly sudden and dislocating. Seemingly orchestrated by the menacing figure of Sakatsuka, the Japanese figures transformation from enacted celebration (drinking, eating, singing) to violation (stabbing, killing, dismembering) is abrupt and surprising. Moreover, the nature of the massacre itself (including especially graphic and explicit abuses) is discomfitting, emphasised by a dislocating and haphazard cinematic form. The features of both sound and image gravitate towards ambivalence throughout this

sequence whereby music (continuously repeated Japanese naval anthem), framing (shaky/haphazard manner) and lighting (shadowy and flickering firelight) emphasise dissonance.

Equivalently, these sequences preface disphasure and fragmentation, characteristics prescribing to renewed cinematic modes. The massacre appears seemingly unmotivated in the text, illegitimately enacted by Sakatsuka at the behest of an irrational and destructive authority. As he laments the Japanese surrender and the end to war whilst his army attack the villagers, he threateningly notes, “I’ll miss killing all you Chinese”, an obscurely menacing and monstrous enunciation. The explicit ambivalence of dialogue here (towards fracturing and indeterminate sentiments) is symptomatic of renewed cinematic forms, destabilising and disorienting established modes.356

One of the primary characteristics of the renewed cinematic mode, developed since the 1990s, has been the tendency towards appreciating themes of commercialism and consumerism within narrative. As detailed throughout this chapter, the combat film has been no exception to this, where *Devils on the Doorstep* follows this model. The recurrent features of reward and livelihood in the text manifest in explicit material goods (carts of grain and white flour predominantly). The villagers are prepared to exchange the enemy prisoners for grain, recompense for the time and materials used to facilitate them in the village. Unsure of the enemy response to their request (made in a contract

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356 This references the absurdist duality of the text itself, gravitating towards what Richard Corliss identifies as a ‘humanist misanthropy’ of war. In this manner Jiang presents a tragi-comic narrative of menacing intent, allegorising themes of a potentially compromised modernity, yet one infused with distinctly renewed and reinvigorated modes of identification. Corliss, *Time*, p. 21.
with the two prisoners), the villagers (and Ma in particular) are willing to
gamble their fate in the hope of being rewarded with grain. Correlating with
themes of modern and contemporary negotiation, this feature of commercial
materialism and reward is symptomatic of renewed cinematic modes enacted
since the 1990s.357

The threatening and ambiguous presence of ‘Wo’ (literally “I”) the figure that
deposits the prisoners at Rack-Armour Terrace, thus bringing the discourse of
‘war’ directly into the village, is deliberately stylised towards fracture and
ambivalence in Devils on the Doorstep. Appearing only briefly within the
narrative (for roughly one minute at textual initiation), this depiction is
nevertheless impacting and symptomatic of renewed cinematic styles. ‘Wo’ is
never actually visualised in the frame, but rather represented by dual
menacing icons (a pointed gun and a bayonet) both utilised to threaten Ma Da-
san. Furthermore, devices of dialogue and sound are used to provoke
ambiguity, whereby both his guttural voice (ethereal and indiscriminate) and
obscured content (threatens Ma’s life if he does not follow instruction,
literally refers to the prisoners as dongxi, ‘things’) are intimidating. The
framing in this sequence focuses almost exclusively on Ma (who grimaces and
closes his eyes when threatened), whereby the obscured presence of the
perpetrator seemingly parallels Ma’s own subjective experience.

In representing the community of Rack-Armour Terrace as an allegory of
modern China and its discursive renewal, the projection of the village elder is

357 This correlates distinctly with both Wang Xiaoying and Xu Ying and their predications of
a ‘globalising’ Chinese industry. See Wang, New Literary History, pp. 133-153. And Xu,
Asian Cinema, pp. 39-43.
similarly symptomatic in *Devils on the Doorstep*. Uncle Liu is recurrently depicted as an archaic and redundant figure throughout the narrative, counselled by the villagers’ for advice but ultimately rendered an agent of incapacity. An elderly peasant in his eighties, Liu is representative of established patriarchal authority (as emphasised by his presence in convening village meetings), yet he speaks throughout the film in elegiac riddles that translate into unhelpful obscurity. Liu is able to philosophise and contemplate the seriousness of the village predicament, noting themes such as “Comes no good and no good comes”, but incapable of making practical or impacting enactments. In an allegorical sense, Liu surfaces as a symbolically displaced figure (an agent of outdated and hegemonic authority) in contrast to Ma Da-san, an enigmatically renewed and emergent variant.

The overarching outcome of this case study has detailed *Devils on the Doorstep* as a characteristic text, not only of the 1990s combat film, but equivalently of renewed cinematic styles throughout the later period of reform. Consequently, this exploration of definitive elements of form and content (within this representative text) signifies expanded adaptations of cinematic discourse in this period, with specific developments towards the renewal and re-orientation of previous modes. Moreover, this manifests in negotiations of themes of emerging modernisation, commerciality and globalisation, issues distinctly prevalent in 1990s China.
Conclusion

The widespread changes and shifts evident within the 1990s combat variant are symptomatic of the expansion and extension of reform throughout China during this period. As industrial, social and economic practices are recurrently exposed to Western and global interest, so too cultural and representational factors are steadily impacted. What emerges in the cinematic medium generally is thus a trend towards commercial and global exchanges. Accordingly, the very structures and foundations of cinematic production are largely mediated and renewed by emerging factors of modernity.

Within the combat film and resistance narrative especially, manifestations of these changes and their symbolism have been detailed and encountered throughout this chapter. Articulation of generic elements during this period including the role of heroes, enemies and collaborators; the representation of women; location of familial and childhood figures; and the imagination of the cinematic landscape, have all been encountered in this context. The overarching themes that pervade this 1990s period are symptomatic of wider ideological negotiations and reformations in China at the time, specifically the renewal of Chinese discursive imaginary within contexts of global exchange and interactions of modernity.
Chapter Five
A Synthesis of the Chinese Combat Film Genre

In addition to its exploration of Chinese film history, this thesis has thus far contributed to an expanded conception of film genre criticism at large. Unlike prevailing ‘first world’ studies (centred on Hollywood, British or German forms) my argument challenges descriptions of film genre as industrially or commercially specific. This tenders ‘genre’ a dynamic and changeable entity, evading any universalist evolutions.

At the same time however, in adapting the generic model to a hitherto under-explored industry (that of China), this argument has developed particular strands of reasoning and conclusion, reaffirming its value as an adaptive critical framework. As such, the thesis proffers a generic approach that is socially, culturally, economically and politically variable, and so is responsive to nuances and sensitivities that typically transcend scholarly categorisation.

On a more specific level, this thesis, in its examination of Chinese ‘combat films’, complements research conducted thus far on ‘war films’ and ‘war-themed’ cinema. This expands the range of genre criticism through tendering alternatives to ‘first world’ industrial modes, providing an alternative framework for critical investigation of prevailing theories, which in turn fosters a broader understanding of film studies and the factors informing its critique.
The previous three chapters offer a dual analysis of the Chinese combat film since 1949. Representing three distinct and indicative phases of generic development, I have evaluated changes and adaptations within the cinematic mode accordingly. However, in order to gauge the overarching significance of these variants as emblematic of cultural negotiation in modern China, further deliberation is required. The following chapter seeks to provide a synthesis, a comparison and contrast to the diffuse trends and progressions throughout the period since 1949. This re-affirms and re-assesses the significance of these developments as symptomatic of Chinese cultural consciousness and imagination through to the current era.

**Synthesis of the Chinese Combat Film**

*The Regulated Mode: 1949-1966*

Whilst precursors and antecedents of generic war modelling can be identified in Chinese cinema leading up to the 1949 Revolution (especially in the decade preceding it), its emergence as an orthodox mode did not precipitate until the implementation of Communist rule. Subsequently, the materialisation of the predominant combat form is traced to this period, and specifically the absorption of cinematic institutions into dominant discourses. Under this regulated rubric, cultural production is rigidly centralised and appropriated towards Maoist ideals and practices.

The emergence of the progressive war model in this context, the combat film, is thus heavily shrouded in political and statist functionality. As detailed earlier, within this procession features of ‘resistance’ prove foremost, whereby
the invocation of recent imperialist memories are combined with didactic affirmations of Maoist agency and ascendancy. Taking into account these factors, the combat film (of which the ‘resistance’ narrative is predominant) surfaces as an indicative and generic cinematic mode, dominating not only the industry of the time but later variations and developments as well.

In the interests of re-affirming impacts of revolutionary combat variants, the predominant aspects and variables of transmission require re-articulation. These trends (their recurrence and consistency) provide the foundation for generic examination and analysis. The focus in this segment is thus on themes of regulation and orthodoxy, charting developments in accordance with statist policies and praxes, dating from 1949 through until 1966. Furthermore locations of these primary characteristics operate as a framework for comparison and contrast with subsequent variants.

In reviewing the combat film throughout this period, the overarching œuvre towards revolutionary hegemony is heavily assured through features of both form and content. Predominant aspects of this are secured in dual qualities of regulation and romanticism, whereby the genre manifests in orthodox and consistent modes. Hereby the feature of ‘resistive’ activity (i.e. of Chinese protagonists battling an external invading force) offers an opportunity for patriotic-dramatic spectacle, effectively subsumed into Maoist orthodoxy. The combat film thus emerges as a source of revolutionary re-enactment, symbolically affirming the origins and legacies of Communism in the post-1949 national imaginary. The most indicative feature of this process is the
tendency towards representational consistency and regularity throughout the variant, characteristics ultimately adhering to wider cultural, political and social discourses.

These observations affect the corpus of film genre criticism at large, in the sense that filtering into established modes of regularity and evolution, is countered by an emphasis on alternative (i.e. Communist) ideals. Whereas prevailing studies articulate presentational modes through ‘first world’ industrial progressions (i.e. aspects of commercial expansion and democracy), the Chinese form provokes an inversion. The application of generic modelling in this manner challenges such overarching, and especially ‘industrial’, expectations of criticism, suggesting discursive features (including social, cultural, political and economic factors) as key classifying elements.

The Reformed Mode: The 1980s

The enactment of the Cultural Revolution in China had profound impacts on cultural institutions at large and the cinematic medium especially. Whilst films were produced in the years immediately following its aftermath, the overarching consequences of its policies and trends persisted into the 1980s. For the combat genre in particular (as an established revolutionary mode) its predominance in the film industry waned. It was not until the emergence of a ‘new wave’ reformed variant, with considerable adaptations to form and content, that the resistance narrative truly remanifest within the Chinese cinematic imaginary.
In its resurgent format however, the combat film bears little resemblance to romanticised predecessors, rather emphasising themes of national reformation and cultural reconfiguration. The prescribed and regulated ‘functionality’ of the revolutionary variant is effectively displaced throughout the 1980s, whereby resistance narratives are inherently appropriated, fractured and reformed in light of post-Mao considerations.

Whereas detailed above, the Maoist period transforms emblems of resistive discourse into orthodox forms of regulation, throughout the 1980s these same themes and icons are progressively reconstituted, towards trends of dislocation and fracture. Subsequently, this variant signifies a developmental disphasure and rearticulation of Chinese cultural consciousness, surfacing in the shadows of failed romanticism and utopian revolutionary discourse. Just as legacies of socialist teleology and its determinism are progressively disrupted throughout the reform period, so too the mythologies of its origins and continuance (of which resistance discourse plays a foremost role) are redirected.

Whereas the regulated Maoist variant gravitates towards consistency and orthodoxy in terms of form and content, combat films of the 1980s are by contrast marked by themes of destabilisation, innovation and polysemy. Therefore the overarching œuvre of the initial reform-era mode is potentially ambiguous and contradictory, shifting away from discrete or homogenous classifications. In generic terms, combat variants of the 1980s drive towards
collective de-politicisation and ambivalence, qualities symptomatic of wider
discursive negotiations.

As to film genre studies, whilst the ‘reformed’ variant affirms the validity of
the industrial base as a critical framework, it equivalently takes into account
the specific discursive factors (social, cultural, political and economic)
informing it. Accordingly, the application of generic classification to the
Chinese medium becomes a heterogenous process, one involving potentially
ambiguous and contradictory trends. In this sense, a comparative account of
the 1980s combat film with its Maoist predecessor facilitates a more thorough
comprehension of how genre can be applied to alternative and non-established
industries.

The Renewed Mode: The 1990s

Following exposures and progressions during the 1980s, cultural institutions
are further augmented and reformed throughout the 1990s. Located as
foremost in this process is cinema itself, whose fundamental machinations of
form and content are renewing at large. Whilst many of these advancements
could be ostensibly viewed as a continuance of trends developed in the
previous decade, the depth and degree of adaptation is vast and complex.
Correspondingly the 1990s mode constitutes a generic progression and
redeployment from 1980s variants, manifest in specific gravitations towards
themes of globalism, commercialism and modernity. Whereas the emphasis of
initial reform variants is on the promulgation of cultural consciousness and
perceptivity, the latter oeuvre stimulates reintegrated projections of Chinese
identification, bound by premises of figurative expansionism, exchange and negotiation.

To an enlarged degree the primacy of the generic model and resistance discourse is again redirected during this era, as the constituents and signifiers of the enigmatised combat film are steadily configured to contemporary themes. Whereas 1980s variants preface trends of stylistic fracture and disphasure, the 1990s precipitate structured turns towards themes of global exchange, dissemination and relatedness.

As a generic model of textual consistency and regulation, the 1990s combat form is characterised by features of renewed variegation and multiplicity. Whereas initial reform models traverse themes of explicit fracture and disphasure, later variants prove even more diffuse and complex. Subsequently, resistance imaginings of the 1990s are emblematised by alternative and often-contradictory renderings to their predecessors, symptomatic of China’s wider discursive re-orientation throughout the ‘open door’ era. To this degree, the combat film regains an institutional ‘function’ during this phase (as noted of the ‘regulated’ form) directed towards the negotiation of discursive regulations and themes (from Maoist orthodoxy to global modernism).

In terms of the discipline of film genre, the 1990s combat film relays trends of global development and comparative significance in cinema criticism. This, however, needs to be argued in terms of genre as a malleable and flexible entity, so that the Chinese industrial mode can be shown to be informed by
particular discursive circumstances. Accordingly, in tracing the development of the Chinese combat model over time (from regulation, to reform and subsequently renewal), a more attenuated understanding of contemporary genre analysis can be offered. In this respect, the thesis is able to redress an imbalance in the established conditions and expectations of film criticism.

Upon reviewing these trends within the combat genre from its origins in the immediate post-1949 period through until the contemporary era, an overarching projection of the model and its impact can be appreciated. However, in order to reaffirm the significance of developments and progressions (as well as my argument) it is necessary to directly examine key aspects of the genre across these variants. This will be facilitated throughout the rest of this chapter, as I shall compare and contrast the major themes of the Chinese combat film, particularly the features of: heroes; enemies; traitors; women; children; families; and landscape.

Heroes, Enemies and Traitors of the Chinese Combat Film Genre

As detailed throughout previous chapters, features of factional identification and of armies in particular, surface as major components of the combat film mode. The structure and enactment of the genre itself gains principal agency through depiction of militant strategies and endeavours between competing forces. Within the emblematic history of the Chinese resistance narrative, the recurrent feature of three distinct institutional forces: heroes, enemies and traitors is predominant. As an integral framework to an understanding of the generic model and its specific variations since 1949 an appreciation of each of
these factors must be reviewed. Furthermore, each entity must be examined in a relative sense, according to the prevalent and respective manifestations of appearance, speech and activity.

The Regulated Mode: 1949-1966

In focussing on discursive representations throughout revolutionary variants, features of segregational difference and binary (deliberated across military and institutional factions) are predominant themes. The presence of symptomatic heroes, enemies and traitors, surface as requisite pillars of narrative regulation and procession throughout this era. Polarities and distinctions are clearly marked between these groups, inscribed by respective qualities of appearance, speech and activity.

Regulated Heroes

Heroic protagonists in combat films of the Maoist variant are suggestively romanticised, reified and subsumed as ideal revolutionary subjects. Their projection as didactic yingxiong figures within narrative is continually and intricately sublimated to Communist orthodoxy. Whether they surface as official army figures, peasant guerrillas or underground spies, heroic characters of each combat film are illustrated (and glorified) in their submission to centralised Communist authority. Characteristics of iconic appearance play a key role in this procedure, whereby heroic figures manifest as romantically aestheticised subjects. Accordingly, the predominance of class-based uniforms (both army and peasant variants) along with other
stylised signifiers (expressions, gestures and objects) mark combat heroes as distinctly orthodox subjects.

Elements of speech and dialogue are similarly promulgated as central aspects of heroic formulation and projection in this variant. Thus in narrative orthodoxy the emphasis on enunciated political rhetoric and classification (combined with the ever-present and directive feature of music), serves to reinforce stylistic modes of romanticism and regulation. Additionally, within the spectacle of heroic activity characteristics of suffering, self-denial and inevitable salvation are prefaced. Heroic figures enact resistance in steadily hegemonic and sublimated forms, enthusiastically proffering themselves (and their bodies in particular) to revolutionary efforts and the machinations of Socialist productivity. This overarching emphasis on submission and acquiescence is by no means a coincidental outcome of generic development or association. Rather it is symptomatic of statist cultural policies, aimed at the reaffirmation of Maoist legitimacy and its bureaucratic legacy.

Regulated Enemies
Situated in an entirely oppositional and binary sphere to heroic forms, enemy manifestations are similarly correlative to orthodox revolutionary norms. The regulated presence of enemy figures (in a contrasting or comparative sense) operates as an especially threatening and menacing force of agency. Characterised by the "guizi" stereotype and label, the enemy is represented as an imminent danger, rendered both potent (martial, destructive) and defective (morally corrupt, illegitimate). These contradictory figurations gravitate
towards a force of inherent aberrance, manifest in key aspects of regulated appearance, speech and activity.

Enemy appearances materialise throughout revolutionary variants in satirical and caricatured modes. Japanese soldiers are consistently visualised as romanticised threats to resistive enactment, allegorically endangering the agency of Socialist organization and its bureaucracy. Correspondingly, enemy armies are characterised by stereotyped inadequacy, whereby markings of ambiguous costuming (ill-fitted, unsuited uniforms) and marginalised icons (expressions, gestures, weapons) are emphasised. The enemy thus manifests as an institution of threatening debasement and deviance, one in direct contrast to assured heroic variants.

In addition to elements of visualisation, projections of enemy dialogue and enunciation are similarly signified throughout revolutionary variants, where features of bastardised and violative speech reaffirm regulative narrative modes. In this variant, Japanese verbalisations (in intimidating and menacing forms) function to reinscribe notions of discursive illegitimacy whilst romanticising the threat, agency and realisation of resistive success in narrative progression.

Equivalently, presences of enemy activity during revolutionary combat films are dually marked by themes of deviant threat and comparative inadequacy (to heroic variants). In this context enemy destructive intent is progressively combated, usurped and eventually disposed of in orthodox textual modes. The
destabilisation of *guizi* forces at narrative *dénouement*, culminating in overwhelming defeat of the enemy, surfaces as the climactic moment of regulation within the generic variant, didactically reaffirming Maoist orthodoxy and its post-1949 legitimacy.

**Regulated Collaborators**

The final institutional faction featuring predominantly in combat variants of the revolutionary period are Chinese traitors and collaborators. Fulfilling symbolic roles of deviance somewhat akin to enemy figures, *hanjian* execute equally signified positions in narrative, reaffirming themes and facets of orthodoxy. Projected in equivalent manners to their Japanese overseers as agents of dual potency and inadequacy, traitors are differentiated from the enemy in terms of ethnic and cultural representations. To this extent, *hanjian* emerge as a more localised and internal threat to resistive orthodoxy than their Japanese allies, yet they attain the same degree of de-regulation and de-stabilisation in narrative process. Furthermore, the moral and ethnic consequence of their collaboration is projected in romanticised forms, functioning to progressively reaffirm the primacy and legitimacy of Communist regulation. As with heroic and enemy counterparts, this manifests in established features of *hanjian* appearance, speech and activity.

As representative of degraded and compromised Chinese forces, collaborators are depicted throughout Maoist variants as romantically deviant and marginalised figures. Appearing physically grotesque and misshapen at large, these protagonists manifest as intent but ultimately incapacitated entities. In
accordance with regulated revolutionary forms, hanjian characters are visualised as a haphazard unit whereby uniforms (decadent, foreign, hybrid) and illustrative icons (expressions, objects, gestures) incline towards themes of marginality. Furthermore collaborative appearances within text are characteristically framed by enemy authorisations (i.e. discussions with Japanese commanders, located in enemy spaces) affirming projections of hanjian figures as capitulated ‘puppets’.

Speech similarly surfaces as a projection of deviance and difference in collaboration, whereby pronouncements manifest in inconsistent and threatening manners. Most specifically, hanjian dialogue figures as an explicit enunciation of capitulation and corruption. Whereas heroic speech is articulated as a site of regulated orthodoxy and national rejuvenation in narrative, collaborative speech is contrastingly portrayed as a tool of disempowerment, submission and national effacement. As with enemy verbalisations noted above, this vernacular effectively romanticises the threat of non-Communist praxes and reaffirms resistance as a legitimating and regulative endeavour.

Equally marked and signified throughout Maoist combat variants are portrayals and implications of collaborative activity. In this arena hanjian embodiment is consistently depicted as a passive and ineffectual entity, one contrasted with heroic productivity and thus corresponding with Communist orthodoxy. Moreover, collaborative activity manifests in traditionally effete and emasculated forms (i.e. hanjian potency informed by verbal
manipulation), emphasising a martially incapable and inadequate force. The emphatic disposal of these figures thus highlights the reiteration of regulated Communist projections, in particular the notion of the army (as representative of the Party itself) as a dominant and efficient institution. Correspondingly, representations of *hanjian* characters in romanticised textual variants, function (in association with both heroic and enemy counterparts) to reaffirm Maoist orthodoxy and regulation.

**The Reformed Mode: The 1980s**

The established factional binaries and regulations of character types so romantically enforced throughout revolutionary variants, are steadily restructured in the initial period of reform. Inherent in this procession is an effective dislocation and reconstitution of traditional resistive signifiers towards ambiguous and marginalised forms. Subsequently, the three established factions of the combat film itself (heroes, enemies and traitors) undergo considerable negotiation and redetermination.

**Reformed Heroes**

The symptomatic function and status of combat heroism is steadily restructured throughout 1980s variants, as romanticised and orthodox portrayals are replaced and usurped by reformed figurations. Therefore the emergence of alternative heroic forms, manifest towards de-regulated and marginal renderings surface as the prevailing trend within resistive narratives. As with its revolutionary predecessor, significations of these heroic qualities materialise in specific characteristics of appearance, speech and activity.
Visualisations of the orthodox combat hero are symbolically disrupted and appropriated throughout the 1980s period, in favour of de-familiarised and reformed iconographies. This is especially prevalent in terms of resistive uniform (towards unofficial, alternative modes), paraphernalia (reconfigured objects, icons) and gestures (unconventional, archaic modes).

Similarly, enunciative capacities and sublimations of the heroic ideal are deregulated in combat discourses of the 1980s, substituted with destabilised speech patterns (predominantly elements of silence, obscurity and fracture) and de-familiarised music scores, projecting ambivalence and ambiguity. The reformed heroic protagonist thus features as a redetermined and re-enunciated figure in contrast to orthodox revolutionary variants.

In terms of activity and enactment, heroic projections and perceptions are effectively destabilised and subsequently broadened towards deregulated positions during the 1980s. To this degree, romantically established activations of the heroic form (as an impenetrable and subjectified entity) are reconstituted throughout this period, towards marginal and alternative variations.

Reformed Enemies
In the same manner that heroic depictions are reformed throughout 1980s combat films, projections and representations of enemy figurations are equivalently augmented. Romantic stereotypes of guízi menace are systematically displaced and fractured throughout this variant, replaced by
equivocal renderings that gravitate towards ambiguity and reconstitution. This re-articulation of enemy components, towards complex and negotiated portrayals explicitly manifests in elements of appearance, speech and activity.

Prevailing revolutionary visualisations of the enemy as a deformed and satirised threat are effectively deregulated in the initial reform period, where emphasis shifts to themes of complex association and dissemination. Steady dissociations of enemy parody (uniform, gestures, objects and icons) are correspondingly substituted with reformed articulations premising explicit themes of displacement, ambiguity and marginality.

The constituents and characteristics of enemy speech are equivalently reconfigured in this variant, whereby the intent threat of guizi imperialism is transformed into allegories of (mis)communication and displacement. Narrative articulations of these alternative speech forms (i.e. native languages, subjective experiences as relayed in Japanese) are indicative of a wholesale deregulation and discursive restructure.

In the same manner that enemy appearance and speech is progressively reconstituted in the 1980s variant, activity is similarly transformed and negotiated. Shifting from projections of guizi threat and impotence towards themes of indiscriminacy and humanism, enemy activity is depicted as a diffuse and equivocal entity. In this format, Japanese endeavours are no longer regulated characteristics of romantic polarity, but rather surface as explicit sites of disphasure, dislocation and demythologisation.
Reformed Collaborators

Requisite projections of collaborative discourse, aligned with developments in heroic and enemy articulation, are correspondingly reformed throughout 1980s variants. *Hanjian* figures are enigmatically appropriated and redirected from revolutionary origins toward themes of narrative de-politicisation and de-regulation. Moreover, *hanjian* reconfigurations are informed by emerging trends of Chinese identification during the 1980s, manifest in negotiated themes of humanism, displacement and reconstitution. To this extent the emphasis, perception and projection of collaborative discourse (as an allegory of reforming discourses in China) constitutes a major generic redeployment. In assessing the nature and extent of these developments it is necessary to re-articulate the primary materialisations of this representation: those of *hanjian* appearance, speech and activation.

Depictions of Chinese traitors throughout 1980s variants of the combat film, in contrast to Maoist forms, are marked by symbolic ambiguity and reconfiguration. Whereas in revolutionary models *hanjian* figures are characterised by grotesque and marginalised appearances, these visualisations are effectively appropriated and restructured during the initial period of reform. Collaborative projections of the 1980s thus gravitate towards institutional complexity, whereby features of uniform (official, organised, sanctioned) and alternative discursive iconographies (masculinized, militant, martial) are emphasised, indicative of negotiated narrative forms.
Correspondingly, articulations of collaborative speech are steadily refurbished in this variant, whereby romanticised accentuations of capitulation and deviance are effectively inverted. Collaborative verbalisations are privileged throughout this style as sites of hegemonic fracture (de-mythology), alleviated subjectivity (perceptivity) and reaffirmed humanism (empathy). In this context, the complexity of *hanjian* speech in de-regulative and appropriative modes is indicative of generic reformation in 1980s combat variants.

Equivalently de-mythologised and usurped, representations of collaborative activity are steadily reconfigured in this era towards more complex associations. The converted *hanjian* force (as detailed in appearance as more institutional and masculinized) is articulated as a potent and capable entity, whose impact is steadily measured and registered within resistance narratives. Furthermore, collaborative figures of 1980s texts are commonly developed as potentially redemptive where ambiguities, marginalities and consequences of collaborative action are distinctly marked. Thus, the efficacy of collaboration as an alternative (if undesirable and marginal) discourse is ambivalently articulated as reformist allegory.

*The Renewed Mode: The 1990s*

Whereas initial phases of reform provoked themes of restructure within 1980s variants, throughout the 1990s the combat genre was further adapted and negotiated. Emphasis on renewed and expanded themes manifest distinctly in this mode, resulting in further adaptations to institutional factions of the generic model. Subsequently representations of resistive heroes, Japanese
against enemies and Chinese collaborators during the 1990s, are symptomatic of
discursive trends towards global renderings and modernity. In order to gauge
the extent and significance of changes within the genre, these institutional
factors require further examination, with specific attention to primary
manifestations of respective appearance, speech and activity.

Renewed Heroes

Heroic formulations of the ‘open door’ period seemingly expand trends of
reformation in 1980s variants towards more marginal, unofficial and obscure
perspectives. Specific gravitations towards non-institutional and de-centred
forms are especially prevalent here, symptomatic of discursive deregulation
and renewed identification. In terms of heroic appearance, this progression
manifest in overarching reconfigurations of heroic iconography, precipitated
by elements of uniform (demilitarised, deteriorated, displaced), physical
corporeality (disfigurements, disabilities, deformations) and combat
paraphernalia (dissociation, obfuscation, reinterpretation). The projection of a
renewed yingxiong form, one characterised by elements of polysemy and
recurrent negotiation is indicative of this generic redevelopment and
progression.

Features of heroic speech is similarly re-enunciated throughout 1990s variants,
expanded towards themes of emblematic modernity and global interaction.
Foremost in this progression is the development of dialogic exchange to
include elements of multiplicity (bilingualism, translation) and decentring
(informal, colloquial modes), enlarging the scope and range of alternative
renderings. The symptomatic impact of this renewed heroic speech is inevitably measured in wider discursive trends, where combat films are re-oriented towards mediated themes of Chinese modernity and global exchange.

To the same degree that appearance and speech are steadily renewed throughout 1990s variants, the deployment of heroic enaction is similarly renovated. Correspondingly, activations of these protagonists are infused with elements of negotiated modernity and exchange, whereby alternative styles of enactment including non-martial and utilitarian modes prevail. The archaic development of the resistive hero as a dominantly militant and combative figure is effectively displaced by renewed and complex modes of activation. These forms are inevitably linked to progressive themes of discursive restructure within 1990s China, gravitating towards modern themes (of humanism, preservation, endurance) and global integrations.

Renewed Enemies
In the same manner that heroic projections are adapted and negotiated throughout 1990s combat films, enemy characters are similarly reconstituted, towards modern and global figurations. Whereas the initial reform period tends to explicit inversions of the romantic guizi model, variants of the 1990s gravitate to overarching modes of renewal and redetermination. As with heroic formulations, the enemy as an institutional entity features as a symptomatic allegory of contemporary China, signifying complex and negotiated styles of identification. This manifests in the three specific
elements argued so far as central to the formulation of institutional representations in the combat genre, those of appearance, speech and activity.

Visualisations of enemy protagonists in 1990s resistance narratives are informed by undercurrents and allegories of ideological bewilderment, tending to obscure and often contradictory positionings. Whereas on initial examination trends appear to gravitate towards nostalgic guizi manifestations (as institutional and inherent threat), implied by features of uniform (militant, masculinized), threatening iconography (imposing flags, weapons) and gestures (pervasive, brutal), the emphasis on parody and satire is symbolically absent. Subsequently, the enemy emerges as a systematic and intimidating entity, characterised by immoderate martial potency and overarching destruction. Whilst earlier projections articulate the Japanese army as an ultimately containable and restrainable force, 1990s variants emphasis themes of excess, monstrosity and obviation.

In a similar manner, features of enemy speech are steadily re-oriented during the ‘open door’ era, whereby enunciation gravitates towards premises of progressive reform and global emergence. Enemy verbalisations (in multilingual, prefaced and expanded forms) thus surface as sites of symbolic exchange and redemption. Moreover, dialogue is emphasised in explicitly modern and contemporary manners (i.e. towards themes of humanism, agency and communication), symbolic of renewed discursive motivations, negotiations and expressions within the 1990s combat film.
In accordance with adaptations noted in enemy appearance and speech throughout latter reform variants, elements of activity are similarly re-oriented and renewed. Subsequently, regulated and consistent depictions of the Japanese army are further obscured in resistance narratives of this era, progressively destabilised and redirected towards diverse themes. Enemy manifestations of the 1990s are thus characterised by dualistic and often contradictory trends, whereby emphasis is on both stereotyped and complex forms.

The former model (as with enemy appearance) is informed by a seemingly nostalgic return to *guizi* illegitimacy, where Japanese soldiers are depicted in uninhabited and inhumane sequences of martial violation. This format is characterised by grotesque forms of spectacle, where enemy figures are shown in escalating modes of monstrous obviation, progressively marked as overwhelming deviance and threat. Contrastingly, more alleviated modes emphasise elements of fracture and complexity when projecting enemy activity in combat narratives. Within these arrangements, Japanese figures are discerned by interactive and personalised ambivalences, whereby mediations on themes of duty and obligation (in an obsessive Imperial hierarchy) are depicted as fracturing and traumatic. In this manifestation the enemy is articulated as a de-familiarised source of renewal, one of symbolic allegory and alternative rendering in context of an expanding and modernising 1990s China.
Renewed Collaborators

Whereas initial reform variants portray collaborators as figures of alternative and institutional agency, 1990s combat films precipitate further complexity and developments in *hanjian* characterisation. Subsequently, Chinese traitors of resistance narratives are projected in renewed manners, surfacing as allegorical agents of modernity and global expansionism. Whereas 1980s modes promulgate a collaborative model based on themes of de-mythology and reformation, adaptation in the following period signifies further generic shift, towards emerging discursive trends. This progression is explicitly manifest in features of *hanjian* appearance, speech and activity, where steady negotiations of signification can be traced.

Manifestations of collaborative appearance are figuratively adapted throughout 1990s variants, gravitating towards overt obscurity and fracturing. As with the other institutional features of this period, initial visualisations of the *hanjian* form (in terms of uniform, paraphernalia, gestures) are seemingly reminiscent of romantic Maoist models, implying symptomatic corruption and illegitimacy. However the simultaneous presence of alternative renderings, surfacing through matching characteristics, signify generic re-orientations and renewals. Accordingly, the *hanjian* status as a de-centred and alleviated space of agency is articulated and prefaced in ‘open door’ variants.

In the same mode as appearance, elements of collaborative speech are steadily renewed throughout this period, where *hanjian* enunciations signify discursive reconfiguration and adaptation. In this form, voices of marginal collaboration
are privileged within the variant as sites of alternative rendering and association. These emergent verbalisations (multi-lingual mediations, personalised sentiments and poeticised vignettes) highlight the re-orientation of generic modelling towards conditions of modernity, privileging specific themes of conciliation, exchange and preservation through verbal enactment.

Together with manifestations of appearance and speech, arenas of hanjian activity are progressively renewed and reconfigured throughout the 1990s combat film. The collaborative form thus surfaces as an explicit site of commodification and exchange during this variant, tending toward features of institutional complexity and mediation. In this context, collaborative action is prefaced as an agency of corrupt self-interest (greed, money, power) and of enduring self-survival (collective bureaucracy, protection, subsistence). The potentially contradictory and subversive nature of these projections is shadowed by their enactment within a renewed commercial sphere, where martial activity (and resistive responses) emerge as allegories of global adaptation and modernity.

To this level, re-oriented identifications of the hanjian form (in terms of appearance, speech and activity) signify wider trends of narrative deployment towards specific themes of global orientation, interaction and expansion. As an institutional presence within the combat film, these 1990s variants connote refraction from previous modes towards symbolically contemporary negotiations and considerations of the Chinese cultural imaginary.
As asserted in these sections above, progressive depictions of institutional elements throughout the history of the Chinese combat film are indicative of wider discursive adaptations and restructures since 1949. Furthermore, respective projections of heroes, enemies and collaborators can be traced to progressive variants of generic redeployment, from initial modes of didactic regulation (revolutionary era), to symptomatic reconfiguration (initial reform of the 1980s) and subsequently to alternative modes of renewal (later reform of the 1990s).

**Women of the Chinese Combat Film Genre**

Specific renderings of female representation have a prolonged and complex tradition in Chinese film circles. Ranging from the very origins of the medium itself through to contemporary modes, female projections have been recurrently displayed, negotiated and critiqued onscreen. Within the realm of the combat film this process has been particularly acute, whereby variegated female depictions explicitly mark and inform the genre. In gauging wider significances and adaptations of the resistance narrative in China since 1949, these characteristics must be effectively articulated, with regard to historical periods and specific generic variants.

*The Regulated Mode: 1949-1966*

In accounting for non-institutional forces in combat films of the Maoist era, the presence, role and depiction of female characters surface as entities of considerable significance. Of particular interest is the projective tendency to feature women as supplementary and subjective figures in both combat and
resistive contexts. Whilst a multiplicity of female roles can be identified throughout this era, keenly contributing to the resistive effort, the degree of emancipation and liberation attributed to these characters remains somewhat ambiguous, ultimately conditioned by patriarchal sources of Communist orthodoxy.

In focussing on representations of this variant, whilst trends of inclusion and regulation are clearly discernable, the predominance of characteristic female types is significant in adjudicating themes of patriarchal sublimation and subjugation. Appropriate generic classification is thus required, providing further coherence and depth to critical signification. Throughout revolutionary modes, female combat projections are segregated into two predominant forms, concentrating on the ‘active’ resistive heroine and the more passive style of ‘maternal’ sacrificer respectively. Although in many ways these elements manifest in contrasting manners, their overarching gravitation toward themes of regulation and orthodoxy render them generic partners.

The ‘Active’ Resistive Heroine

On initial observation the most didactic rendering of the female form in Maoist variants is the ‘active’ heroine, commonly a youthful and enthusiastic figure translating resistive sentiment into martial activation and battlefield contribution. In regulated and romanticised terms, the active heroine legitimates revolutionary agency as an entity of enigmatic liberation. Resistive heroines projectively idealise Socialism as a redeeming and emancipatory discourse, effectively harnessing and directing collective energies. To the
same degree however, these female figurations are heavily structured and ambiguous, whereby gendered sublimation and submission predominates. To this level, patriarchal conditions and directives steadily mark and regulate the surfacing of enigmatic heroines throughout this variant.

Manifestations of authority, organization and bureaucracy throughout revolutionary combat variants are inevitably masculinized (i.e. Eighth Route Army or Party divisions), where women romantically subjugate to male dictates. Even in situations where female figures are collective or regimental leaders of resistance, their authority is inexorably deferred to higher patriarchal sources through narrative process. Furthermore, the consequences of activation itself in the genre are similarly fracturing, whereby symbolic acts of female silencing and de-gendering (at the hands of the masculinized Party) overshadow the variant. Yet ‘active’ heroines are not the sole type of idealised female figure in combat films of this period, where their more ‘passive’ counterparts are similarly impacting.

The ‘Maternal’ Sacrificer

The alternative and inert variant to the ‘active’ heroine, often classified as the ‘maternal sacrificer’, similarly fulfils a patriarchally regulative role in revolutionary combat texts. Primarily functioning as enigmatic registers of enemy repression and violation, these women both mark and bear witness to enactments of destruction and deterioration. Characteristically matured and maternalised (commonly middle-aged and domesticated organisers of the
family unit) they emerge as figures of symptomatic reverence, idealised signifiers of revolutionary motivation and agency.

As with their ‘active’ counterparts, these ‘maternal’ figures are progressively transformed through narrative process, penultimately offering their energies (and often their lives) to the resistive effort. Whereas ‘active’ heroines directly endeavour toward martial engagement and strategy, these women are contrastingly portrayed as supportive and domesticated contributors. In romantic and enigmatic terms, the signifying capacity of these women is steadily regulated to the agencies and mechanisms of Socialism. This is predominantly projected through dual characteristics of suffering and self-sacrifice to which the ‘maternal’ sacrificer subscribes. Thus enactments of resistive threat as registered and ultimately confronted by these ‘maternal’ figures, function as acts of invigoration and regulation within narrative.

The Reformed Mode: The 1980s

In a comparative manner to the ways that factional representations are steadily reconfigured throughout 1980s variants, articulations and projections of female figures are similar restructured in the combat genre. Whereas the ‘active’ heroine and ‘maternal’ sacrificer gravitate towards trends of regulation in revolutionary forms, their successors are characterised by themes of de-politicisation and discursive negotiation. Adaptation of female identifications during this era are thus significant, whereby two forms, that of ‘complex’ and ‘marginal’ women are impacting.
The ‘Complex’ Resistive Heroine

Whereas ‘active’ heroines of revolutionary films are emblematized by sublimations and subjugations to hegemonic Socialist norms, 1980s variants precipitate the development of more complex and variegated representations. Correspondingly, many resistance narratives portray heroines in ambiguously gendered positions, exacerbating distinct notions of identity fracture, dissolution and differentiation. Similarly the ‘complex’ female resistor of reformed modes is depicted as a figure of intimate and personal agency, effectively deregulating romantic (and altruistic) motivations in favour of unconventional and tangential considerations.

Of equal significance, active heroines are commonly cast in ambiguous relations to male protagonists throughout the 1980s variant, often in explicitly submissive and subjective manners. These alternative female renderings displace and usurp structures of patriarchal hegemony within the combat genre. Female subjects are correspondingly reconfigured as agents of ambivalence in narratives, recurrently negotiating and restructuring overarching discourses. These women preface and authorise alternative modes of praxes, inevitably tending towards themes of marginality, obscurity and trauma. The ‘complex’ female of this combat variant therefore surfaces as an indicative figure of reformation, symptomatically fracturing hegemonic norms and translating them into themes of disphasure, indeterminacy and negotiation.

The ‘Marginal’ Woman
Whereas ‘complex’ females of 1980s resistance narratives represent appropriation and reconstitution of established regulated forms, the emergence of ‘marginal’ variants signifies an exploration and articulation of alternative scopes. Accordingly, this marginality is not just limited to the inherent significance of national resistors (as in the Chinese women of revolutionary forms) but similarly envelops traditionally decentred and dislocated figurations (i.e. foreign women) as well.

Articulations of ‘marginal’ female figures during combat variants thus surface as allegories of reconfigured cultural consciousness in 1980s China, gravitating toward fractures and restructures of collective identification. Moreover, manifestations of these peripheral themes and positionings signify a wholesale redevelopment of generic norms and models. In being characterised by explicit marginalisation and essentialism, these women expressly disrupt and dissociate regulative narrative modes. ‘Marginal’ females throughout this combat mode are thus marked by conditions of alienation and disphasure, symptomatically overwhelming their productive capacities and contributions within text.

In this manner, the progressive appropriation and restructure of Maoist female projections throughout 1980s variants is indicative of wider discursive reformations in China during the period. Subsequently, the emergence of both the ‘complex’ and ‘marginal’ types signify this progression toward restructured modes of imagining, manifest dually in the combat genre specifically and in cinematic forms at large.
The Renewed Mode: The 1990s

Characteristic of wider negotiations and developments throughout the 1990s decade, female projections in combat films are marked by trends of widespread renewal and re-imagination. Whereas initial reform variants manifest obscure and marginalised renderings, the ‘open door’ era expands this process towards symbolic themes of modernity and global identification. Moreover, diffusions of female depictions during this variant highlight wider redeployments of the generic form, indicative of renewed cultural negotiation and consciousness within China. In tending to these representational shifts, trends toward three enigmatic types can be ascertained, segregated into: the ‘fracturing’ of the resistive heroine, the emergence of ‘foreign’ active alternatives and the restructure of the ‘maternal’ figure.

The ‘Fractured’ Resistive Heroine

Although the 1980s cultivated developments of more complex resistive heroines than revolutionary predecessors, it was not until the 1990s that attenuated figures of female agency surfaced in combat narratives. In contrast to established modes, renewed active heroines of this variant manifest as inherently ‘fractured’, problematising themes of gendered sublimation to patriarchal military efficacy. The active heroine correspondingly emerges as a complex agent of resistive zeal, regulated by masculine efforts to an explicit point of commodification and dogmatism. In this context, renewed projections of the active female form as a gendered and malleable entity, simultaneously render it as fractured and de-centred. Contrary and negotiated projections of
personal duty and obligation characterise active heroines of this era, marked as symbolically composite and marginal within the genre. Consequently, the female figure as an entity of discursive agency and enactment is symbolically obscured throughout this variant, redirected towards alternative and negotiated ciphers of identification.

The Active ‘Foreign’ Female

In the same manner that active Chinese heroines are fractured throughout 1990s resistance narratives, projections of alternative and de-centred ‘foreign’ variants are equally significant. Therefore depictions of non-Chinese women as active participants in martial endeavour symbolises a renewal of narrative norms and identifications towards global strictures. In context of wider generic redeployment, these active foreigners emerge as agents of reconstitution, effectively tracing the discourse of war (its impacts, consequences) within an expanded global matrix. Articulations of these hitherto absent figures in the combat form are thus indicative of generic re-orientations towards reintegrated perspectives. Subsequently, emphases of combat and resistance as nationalised and specific entities are redrawn in gravitations towards renewed identifications of Chinese modernity.

The Restructured ‘Maternal’ Figure

Enduring projections of the ‘maternal’ Chinese figure are equivalently reformed and renewed throughout 1990s combat variants, whereby an expansion of established modes and expectations is facilitated. To this level, features of maternal signification and its association are adapted and re-
oriented. Manifestation of alternative variations (including both Chinese and non-Chinese forms) towards themes of hybridity and restructure are especially marked, allegorising premises of Chinese modernity and expanded identification. The symbolic de-centring of the regulated maternal form is characterised by emphasis on alternative qualities, prefacing elements of resilience, endurance and determination. Similarly the maternal sufferer of the 1990s is reconfigured as a figure of potency and fertilisation within the genre, into an agent of enigmatic nurturing and intimacy. Whereas in established forms the enigmatisation of maternal features are characterised by suffering (in the revolutionary era) and allegorical stasis (in the initial reform), progressions of the ‘open door’ era gravitate towards themes of renewal and reintegration.

Overarching projections and diffusions of female figures within the combat film since 1949, progressing from regulated sublimation to reformed constitution and finally to alternative renewal, must be analysed within contexts of wider discursive adaptations in China throughout these periods. To this extent, the diversity and range of themes explored affirms the symbolic capital of female representations during this progression, whereby recurrent negotiation and rearticulation highlights characteristic genericity and significance.

**Children and Families of the Chinese Combat Film Genre**
In addition to features of institutional and female representation within Chinese combat films, the assertion of childhood elements similarly emerges as a key aspect of the genre. Furthermore, the recurrent and symptomatic projection of the familial unit in differing narrative styles surfaces as a central component of the resistance narrative and its cinematic variants. In order to fully complement the details above, deciphering and appreciating differing variants of the genre since 1949, the dually interrelated characteristics of childhood and family projection must be examined.

**The Regulated Mode: 1949-1966**

As a didactic manifestation of stylistic regulation and romanticism, Chinese combat films of the revolutionary variant, sublimate and appropriate established aspects of discursive signification. Inherently located and projected in this context are features of children and families within resistance narrative, ultimately surfacing as allegories of idealised subjugation and orthodoxy.

Predominantly articulated as romantic envisionings of Socialist futurity and its sutured legacy, child protagonists of revolutionary combat films are progressively transformed within resistance narratives into potent and capable forces, effectively facilitated and conditioned by Communist tutelage. Similarly, features of regulated infantile characters as projected through a romantic lens serve as an idealised allegory of Maoist bureaucratic capacity, reaffirming orthodoxy as a mode of institutional guidance and formulation. In this manner, the presence of deterministic resistive youth (often working as
spies or scouts within narrative), verifies statist agency and its emancipatory forms. Similarly the precipitation of these children enacting and deifying Communist praxes (i.e. resistance), symbolises enigmatic projections of regulated futurity, stability and conditioning.

Equivalently, the familial unit is figuratively sublimated to orthodoxy throughout revolutionary variants. In this mode, combat films feature differing families as integral respondents to resistive enigmatisation, enduring registers of Socialist idealisation and as agents of redemptive agency. Symbolically appropriating the family as an entity of established identification, one figuratively sutured and subsumed into Communist hegemony, functions to reaffirm the regulative legacy of Maoist discourse.

Romantic projections of childhood and familial elements during revolutionary combat films are indicative of a rigidly configured national imaginary within China at the time, one regulated and directed towards Communist orthodoxy. Whilst this format surfaces in didactic and idealised manners throughout the Maoist era, its discursive impacts are steadily reconfigured and renewed throughout successive generic variants.

### The Reformed Mode: The 1980s

Romanticised depictions of childhood and familial entities as idealised Socialist subjects are effectively disrupted and redirected in 1980s combat modes. Whilst these elements retain traditional signifying power and cohesiveness (as symbols of national futurity, collective fusion and
enactment), they are steadily restructured. Accordingly, children and families surface throughout this variant as rudiments of generic appropriation and redeployment, manifest in specific cinematic reformations and reconfigurations.

Whereas children of revolutionary narratives arise as idealised and enigmatic projections of socialist subjugation, during post-Mao variants the emphasis shifts towards complex and alternative interpretations. Foremost within this is the tendency to feature childhood characters as verifiers and witnesses to historical sublimation, whilst measuring the impact and consequences of past developments. Thus, children throughout 1980s resistance narratives commonly precipitate as figures of paralysis, loss and dislocation. In contrast to romantic Maoist forms, the impact of these enacted conditions are registered in symbolically personal and intimate modes, ones that instead of manifesting in subsumption to orthodoxy, project themes of alienation and isolation.

To the same degree that signifiers of childhood are steadily reconfigured within this generic model, romanticised projections of the familial unit are similarly restructured. Whereas the function of the revolutionary family gravitates towards rigid themes of regulation and orthodoxy, initial reform articulations tend to more obscure and complex variations. Familial entities surface throughout 1980s resistance narratives as explicit sites of fracture and disphasure, translating collective subjectivity into ambivalent notions of alienation, dissociation and personal trauma. Whilst the family unit maintains
its signifying capital as a narrative register and regulator, its capacity is steadily redirected towards de-politicised and reconfigured modes of cultural consciousness.

The Renewed Mode: The 1990s

In the same manner that initial reform variants facilitate deregulations of children and families in combat variants, the following period expands and continues this progression, towards nascent themes of modernity and identification. To this level, elements of childhood and familial representation are steadily re-oriented and renewed, informed by symptomatic allegories of global exchange and integration.

Projections and imaginations of childhood figures throughout this mode are progressively developed towards alternative and renewed themes. In contrast to generic predecessors and emphasis on qualities of successive sublimation (Maoist era) and traumatic witnessing (1980s), the ‘open door’ era manifests in more complex and ambivalent renderings. Accordingly, contrasting features of resilient endurance and projective indeterminacy dually mark childhood determinism throughout resistance endeavour. In the first circumstance, as paralleled by familial depictions, children are articulated as signifiers of assurance and survival, symbolically enduring and overcoming the threatening enactments of war. In this manner, childhood representations are projected as the symbolic futurity of Chinese cultural consciousness, effectively ensured (although ambiguously) within the national imaginary.
Contrastingly, illustrations of this variant similarly project an indeterminate and deregulated future, one heavily informed by enacted trauma and past sufferings. Although children are portrayed as enduring successors, they inherit a fundamentally fractured and tainted legacy, requiring further rehabilitation and continued dissemination. In turn, these enactments are effectively framed and endorsed by contemporary progressions of reform, necessitating discursive expansion and exchange on a global-based scale.

In addition to childhood re-orientations, the familial unit as a signifying entity is similarly re-imagined within 1990s variants, surfacing as a complex and depoliticised space of articulated renewal. This alterity manifests in specific themes of intimacy and correlation, whereby mediations of familial interaction are steadily informed by personalised and embedded sentiments. Furthermore, fracturing and dissemination of the family structure to this effect is rendered a traumatic and impacting occurrence, one that steadily redirects and re-orients characteristics of the resistance narrative itself.

The propensity towards articulation of unconventional and heterogenous family circumstances (ranging from traditional patriarchal to hybrid interracial) is equally indicative of renewed cultural imaginings and identifications. The familial unit thus articulates and intensifies themes of endurance and survival in this variant, qualities threatened and endangered by the machinations of indiscriminate war. From a highly allegorical viewpoint and in absence of an overarching institutional saviour, the family as a source of redemption and liberation is explicitly prefaced in narrative. As an allegorical form, features
of childhood and familial signification are steadily renewed throughout 1990s variants, towards enigmatic premises of Chinese modernity and a re-emergent cultural consciousness.

As generic and presentative elements of the Chinese combat film, the requisite characteristics of childhood and familial representation are highly impacting. In particular their expansive development since 1949 from themes of sublimated regulation (1949-1966) through to complex reconfiguration (1980s) and finally alternative renewal (since 1990s) trace the configurative adaptation of the genre as a whole whilst similarly identifying the premises and factors informing these progressions.

**Landscapes of the Chinese Combat Film Genre**

The final aspect of generic consideration that necessitates substantial examination is that of landscape, an element of distinct negotiation since the origination of the combat film itself within China. As detailed previously, this landscape surfaces as more than simply a geographical framework for narrative enactment, but also as a site of wider discursive legitimation and imagination. The projection of this element since 1949 in differing variants and adaptations thus emerges as a symptomatic parallel of the progressive Chinese imaginary. In contrasting and comparing these variegations (as split into the requisite periods) a more developed ascertainment of the combat genre, and in particular of the discursive factors informing its construction, can be appreciated.
The Regulated Mode: 1949-1966

In terms of implicit cinematic features, one of the most prevalent in the revolutionary combat variant is the presence of a romanticised and standardised landscape. The geographic regulation of resistance discourse as projected upon the Chinese rural countryside, hence serves as an indicative emblem of Maoist dogmatism, functioning as an embedded register, disseminator and privileger of orthodox signification. This is particularly evident in locating institutional factors within text (heroes, enemies, traitors) whereby landscape itself emerges as a symptomatic marker and regulator.

This symbolism manifests consistently in the classification of heroes throughout Maoist combat films, romantically naturalised in the rural countryside as figures of innate and instinctive interaction. Contrastingly enemy figures are portrayed as a violative threat to this degree, an inherent and symbolic danger to Chinese corporeality. Like their Japanese counterparts, traitors are similarly marginalised and de-legitimated within the landscape, rendered by associative implication as an ineffective, fractured and corrupt force.

In addition to this regulatory function, features of the combat landscape as an enigmatically rural entity are figuratively emphasised, adhering to predominant political imaginings and projections of Communist convention. From the viewpoint of a revolutionary imaginary, this ruralised space is heavily infused with themes of regulated cultural imagining and a centralised Maoist legacy. The location and positioning of the combat genre itself within
Romanticised iconographical sites (villages, counties) reaffirms the orthodoxy of the resistive mode and its renderings of dominance.

The Reformed Mode: The 1980s

Regulated elements of combat landscape and iconography are effectively restructured and de-familiarised throughout the reform era. In the initial period of the 1980s, this manifests in a symbolic disruption and inversion of standardised models towards alternative and negotiated variants. Similarly as an institutional verifier and legitimator, rural resistive landscapes are effectively inverted and disrupted. Heroes, enemies and collaborators are correspondingly dissociated from romantic forms, subsequently projected into ambivalent spaces of indeterminacy and arbitrariness.

Throughout this progression the rural landscape is steadily reconfigured towards conditions of disorientation, obscurity and indeterminacy. Whereas Maoist variants operate as regulators of institutional interactivity, effectively privileging and naturalising Socialist praxes, reconfigurations in the reform era tend toward steady de-territorialisation and disphasure. Furthermore, rural landscapes of the 1980s combat film emerge as highly de-familiarised spaces, marking trends of obscurity and ambivalence in the cinematic imaginary. This manifests in explicit themes of alienation and marginality, whereby the combat geography is commonly depicted as a barren and sterile entity.

This indicative restructuring of landscape signification is symptomatic of wider representational trends throughout this initial era of post-Mao
conditioning, informed by cultural reformations and a search for alternative modes of Chinese identification. Moreover, the reconfigured impact of these developments is steadily couched towards systematic features of deregulation, disphasure and ambivalence.

*The Renewed Mode: The 1990s*

Throughout the ‘open door’ period cinematic landscapes are steadily re-oriented and renewed at large, in accordance with prevailing discursive themes. The combat genre proves no exception to this, whereby adaptations to previous styles are evident and impacting. Consequently, projected combat landscapes of 1990s variants surface as enigmatic signifiers of re-orientation, gravitating towards ambivalent and complex modes of imagination. This progression is depicted throughout resistive topographies of this period, where trends of rural restructure and urban expansion are especially marked.

Whilst the feature of rural landscapes as a de-familiarised and disoriented entity is characteristic of 1980s modes, gravitation towards extended renewal and re-imagination only materialise in 1990s variants. Cinematic topographies of the latter period are thus emblematised by dualistic features (i.e. harsh/redemptive, barren/productive, primal/mystic), tending to complex and polysemic renderings. Similarly, rustic landscapes of this era are adapted in allegorical terms as embedded signifiers of Chinese modernity, effectively marking and framing narrative action within a renewed discursive matrix. Correspondingly, environments of rural combat are articulated as spaces of alternative projective imagining, upon which negotiations of expanded reform
(especially themes of emerging globalisation and exchange) are prefaced and enacted.

To an equivalent degree the presence of urban and metropolitan landscapes are reconstructed and re-oriented throughout 1990s combat variants. Trends towards industrialised and commercialised spaces of enactment are predominant here, whereby resistive discourse is effectively reframed through an allegorically modern lens. The renewed cityscape as a site of resistive activity thus emphasises specific themes of emerging localisation and re-imagination, refurbishing nationalist legacies to modern and urbanised iconographic forms. In this manner, articulations of specifically urban integrations in the combat film (nightclubs, bars, mansions) signify a redeployment of generic models towards renewed Chinese identifications.

Predominant landscapes of the 1990s combat film thus emerge as sites of explicit fracture, reconfiguration and renewal, emphasised by dual features of rural re-orientation and urban expansion. Whereas the initial period of reform manifest in disruption, disorientation and appropriation of established modes, this later period surfaces as explicit renewal towards alternative renderings, figuratively marking, negotiating and prefacing progressions of Chinese modernity.

**Conclusion**

The chapter detailed above provides an effective synthesis, comparison and contrast of the Chinese combat film since 1949, indicatively examining
progressions and adaptations within the genre since this time. The specific articulation of thematic features including armies, women, children, families and landscape, provides an indicative and in depth account of this procession.

Moreover, this examination articulates these developments in light of overarching discursive trends, clarifying changes in reference to progressive variants of regulation (1949-66), reformation (1980s) and finally renewal (1990s). As the prevailing combat genre (and Chinese cinema itself) proceeds through the Twenty First Century, further developments are bound to occur that expand beyond the scope of this study, dually affirming the endurance of the model itself and forging queries of ‘What will be the next phase of the Chinese combat film?’.
Conclusion

In focussing on variations of the Chinese ‘combat film’ since 1949, this thesis contributes to research disciplines in two major areas. The first provides detailed analysis of a corpus of films yet to receive the critical attention it deserves. Secondly, the thesis makes a theoretical addition to Chinese cinema studies by arguing for the identification of the ‘combat film’ as the seminal ‘war film’ mode in the industry, marked by a specific form and three historical variants. Both the detailed cinematic analysis and generic arguments of this thesis are presented against the diverse backdrop of Chinese film history since Communist Revolution. At the same time, articulations of the ‘combat’ film have facilitated observations in the renegotiation of critical conceptions of Chinese cinema at large.

In concluding my argument I shall summarise the major thrust of this thesis, before reviewing the answers given to the questions I raised in my Introduction. I shall track the particular ways I have addressed these queries, through modes of specific critical and textual analysis, before suggesting potential developments and future researches.

Focussing on narratological elements of representations including heroes; enemies; women; families; children; and landscape, my argument has progressively examined the evolution of the ‘combat’ film and ‘resistance’ narrative under Socialist authorities, formulating a model of generic analysis and interpretive scrutiny. This filmic development has been split into three distinct ‘variants’, correlating to institutional and historical changes that have
significantly influenced cinematic discourse in China since 1949. At the same
time my thesis has provided an in-depth analysis of emblematic case studies
within each variant, further emphasising the generic characteristics of each
mode in the context of prevailing filmic trends.

In chronological order, the initial form investigates Communist productions
dating from 1949 to 1966, charting the development of a ‘regulated’ cinematic
aesthetic. In this manner I have investigated modes of ‘romanticised’ form
and content throughout Maoist combat films, registering progressions in
reference to prevailing statist perceptions of the industry at the time. A
didactic and functional situation subsequently emerges, one that effectively
frames both combat and other cinematic outputs within cultural orthodoxy.

In demonstrating variations of the ‘combat’ genre I have detailed the 1980s
era, focussing on symptomatic developments as modified by ‘reformed’
cinematic styles. Located in context of wider post-revolutionary discursive
themes, this mode has been shown to incorporate re-structured and inverted
elements. In this manner, the overarching effects of cultural and artistic
innovation, as manifest in ‘new wave’ aesthetics, have been charted in the
context of prevailing socio-political trends. Consequently, a complex and
ambivalent condition surfaces, appropriating hegemonic and revolutionary
signifiers in favour of de-centred and negotiated perspectives.

The films of the 1990s cinematic form indicate further generic development
and re-deployment, progressively informed by emerging trends of
globalisation, modernity and commercial expansion. Positioned as a continuation of ‘reformed’ styles, the emphasis throughout this combat variant has been identified to be on configurations of ‘renewal’ and re-orientation. Accordingly, the extension of cinematic adaptation is effectively manifest in contemporary styles and themes of representation, framed by ‘open door’ discursive progressions. In this manner, ambivalences of succeeding modes have been argued to be harnessed into emphatically ‘renewed’ imaginings, gravitating towards emblematically modern and commercial renderings.

Having summed up my critical argument, the thesis questions raised in my Introduction require reassessment and negotiation. In this manner the foundational and elemental motivations of this study can be subsequently addressed and responded to. I concisely re-iterate those questions:

- *How has Chinese cinema been approached thus far in research disciplines and are there any appreciable gaps in the critical field?*
- *What are the key characteristics of established film ‘genre’ identification and are there limitations in these modes of examination?*
- *Do ‘genre’ configurations exist in the Chinese film industry, and if so what are the critical implications of this?*
- *What are the major determinations of both the ‘war film’ and ‘combat’ film respectively, and do these ‘generic’ modes manifest in Chinese cinema? If so, what are the conditions and factors shaping these characteristics?*
• Can China’s diverse film history be explored in a study that is both general (covering numerous decades) and specific (detailing comparative and correlative factors/themes)?

An introductory analysis of the approaches and methodologies employed thus far in English studies on Chinese cinema, demonstrated that there are gaps and fissures in accounting for ‘genre’. This is dually attributed to the relatively recent nature of Chinese film historiography itself (largely since the initiation of reform) and perceptions of established research fields. Within this matrix, ‘genre’ has been commonly utilised as a label of native attribution (‘martial arts’, ‘swordplay’ and ‘opera’) rather than as a critical frame of investigation. Whereas other predominant approaches concentrating on spheres of gender, ethnicity, nationalism, ‘generational’ waves and landscape have all been explored in depth, investigations of ‘genre’ are limited. In explaining this predicament I wish to point out that China is not an isolated case, noting that film genre criticism has traditionally been associated with developed and ‘first world’ cinematic industries. In applying this mode to a hitherto marginalised ‘third world’ medium, this thesis has negotiated the origins and constraints of established Chinese film criticism.

At the same time, by examining the scope of Chinese cinema research, my argument has challenged notions of film genre criticism at large, in particular as a Western oriented and hermetic mode. In this manner, my study queries and subverts established researches, questioning the key elements, themes and constraints of ‘generic’ transmission within dominant industrial bases. My
thesis thus proffers the Chinese medium as a framework to interrogate fundamental aspects of film genre criticism, contemplating themes of discursive specificity and representation at large. Correspondingly, my argument reveals the complex and attenuated manners in which film ‘genres’ are adapted in differing cinematic industries. Moreover, this thesis has unveiled modes of development in Chinese cinema as informed by an alternative range of factors to that of established genre streams. This argument precipitates a scope of genre representation steadily informed by themes of diverse augmentation, as delineated across social, cultural, national, historical and economic features.

In response to whether or not the ‘genre’ approach can be effectively transposed onto the specific Chinese cinematic industry, my argument has illustrated that this is a complex but feasible endeavour. Despite being overshadowed by varied forms of subjectivity throughout much of its history, the filmic medium has remained an important marker of Chinese nationhood and collective identification. Consequently, my argument has articulated and investigated modes of ‘genre’ (with the ‘combat’ film as the emblematic form) in the context of prevailing discursive norms. The Chinese ‘generic’ style has thus been shown to materialise in an alternative manner to conventional types (such as the Hollywood, British or Australian industries), and in so doing is demonstrative of a specific critical mode. The implications of this demand further inquiry into the structures and methodologies of film genre criticism on the whole.
In terms of investigating established modes of identification within film studies, the thesis has provided a negotiated and alternative rendering of the ‘war film’ and its critical implications. In approaching one of the most popular and predominant styles of genre variation, my argument both complements the corpus of research conducted in the area, whilst simultaneously challenging and negotiating its hegemonic forms. As detailed in my Introduction, the categorisation of the ‘war film’ has proved to be a critically complex endeavour (as demonstrated by variants of ‘war dramas’, ‘Prisoner of War’, ‘military training’, ‘homefront’ films, etc), one whose elements, constraints and boundaries are by no means permanent. My argument sought to resource this mode of investigation, proffering Chinese manifestations as a scale for correlation and enhancement. This is particularly relevant in features of ‘war film’ origins, history and determination, which thus far in criticism have been appreciated in only limited and hegemonic contexts (i.e. established American, British and German industries). Accordingly, my transposition of the archetypal ‘war film’ to a marginal ‘third world’ industry not only provides an alternative mode of critique, but similarly exposes many of the conditional aspects of traditional ‘war film’ analysis.

In appreciating the ‘war film’ as a complex critical entity and generic mode, articulations of its predominant form, the ‘combat’ film, have been shown to be a highly fruitful avenue. It is precisely this manifestation of the genre that has provided the most productive base for analysis. The investigation of the Chinese ‘combat’ film in correlation with established studies has revealed a specific form, significantly affected by changing socio-political discourses.
Correspondingly, my argument sustains the validity of the ‘combat’ variant as a definitive mode, one marked by distinct characteristics and themes. At the same time, my thesis has challenged conventional articulations of the ‘combat’ film (as representative of ‘first world’ and Hollywood industries in particular) arguing as it does for an alternative range and scope of development. What has emerged from my argument is the emblematic ‘resistance narrative’, which is tendered as a cinematic and narrative mode exclusive to the Chinese medium. The progressive variegation of this entity within the industry has been shown to be inherently tied to prevailing discursive norms, originating with themes of ‘regulation’ during the revolutionary era, to those of ‘reform’ in the 1980s, and ultimately in ‘renewal’ since the 1990s period. The implications of this complex transposition are significant, in terms of both established manners of Chinese film criticism and film genre research at large.

The final question of the thesis asked whether it is possible to conduct an examination of Chinese film history with the potential to provide both generalised and specific modes of critique. My approach illustrated that integrative styles of study correlative to this are indeed feasible and that the investigation of the Chinese ‘combat’ film can effectively account for both these modes. In this manner, the thesis provides a concerted and rigorous appreciation of the Chinese film industry, in terms related to specific themes as well as its complex divergent history. At the same time, this study locates the investigation of the Chinese medium in reference to universal and
integrative appreciations of film, beyond those styles examining ‘first-third’
world, ‘national’ or ‘cross-cultural’ analysis.

Having examined the evolution of the Chinese ‘combat’ film since 1949, I
want to emphasise that the thesis does not assume an absolutist or hermetic
position in critical praxis. Whilst my argument focuses exclusively on the
Mainland Chinese industry, locating developments in context of the Socialist
period and its particular progressions, complementary studies could
equivalently account for other ‘Chinese’ mediums, especially those from
Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Chinese Diaspora at large. Correlative researches
in this area would provide an effective counterpart to my thesis, with further
investigations into the complex boundaries and conditions of Chinese cultural
identification.

In the initial stages of my argument I employed the ‘combat’ film as the
emblematic and predominant mode of the Chinese ‘war film’. The articulation
and development of other modes (such as ‘war based’ dramas or films with
‘war settings’), could similarly be investigated as a counterpoint to the
research conducted in this thesis. Moreover, my concentration on the
particular ‘resistance narrative’ (‘The War of Resistance’ during World War II)
could be correlated with analysis of alternative forms, such as those detailing
the Civil War (1945-1949); Korean War (1950-1953); and the border war with
Vietnam (1978). Alternatively, in encompassing a more attenuated
comprehension of the ‘war film genre’ and its progression through Chinese
history, an account of texts with ‘military themes’ could be undertaken. This
could correlate the articulation of diverse subjects such as ‘military training’, ‘army lifestyle’ or ‘consequences of war’ aspects, which might serve as a supplement to my thesis argument.

Lastly, I have demonstrated the quite considerable degree of adaptation and negotiation within the Chinese cinema since 1949. As the medium is by no means a static entity, it cannot be expected that the most contemporary mode of the ‘combat’ film will represent the final stage in its development. On the contrary, this genre study accounts for the certainty of future augmentation and precipitates the formulation of succeeding ‘variants’ as Chinese cinema continues its expansion into the Twenty First Century. In this manner, the coverage of these diverse disciplines would prove a valuable addendum not only to the research conducted within this thesis, but to a wider comprehension of Chinese cinema and film studies at large, presenting an opportunity for expanded styles of critical investigation and analysis.
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Yellow Earth / Huang tu di / 黄土地 – 1984, dir. Chen Kaige
### Chinese Glossary

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Plot Summaries

A squad of expertly trained commandos is given a mission in Northern China during the War of Resistance to disrupt and destroy the Japanese presence in the province. Led by Officer Zhang, the group’s major task is to sabotage the extensive railway that transports goods and personnel to the Imperial Army throughout China. Initial efforts of the squadron are successful but somewhat mired by personal differences and grudges. In particular, the group’s liaison from the region turns out to be a former foe of one commando, creating recurrent tension during missions. As enemy attention on the squad intensifies however, these fractures are overcome in the aim of ensuring successful resistance. During their final assignment (bombing a major railway station) a prolonged battle with the enemy ensues, leaving their task completed but with most of the commandos dead.

Avenging Gun / Shen qiang xue hen – 1993, dir. Tu Jiakuan
On the eve of the Anti-Japanese War, labourer Shi-tou is beaten, disfigured and subsequently banished from Fengshu village after a confrontation with landlord Zhao over a prospective engagement to his girlfriend, Mang-mei. Shi-tou consequently seeks refuge in the surrounding mountains where he joins up with a group of greenwood bandits that train him in a range of martial and military arts. Returning years later to the village in the midst of war, Shi-tou once again confronts Zhao who is collaborating with the oppressive Japanese forces. Initiating his own mercenary resistance against the unruly authorities, his feelings for Mang-mei are once again rekindled as he manages to dispose of Zhao and free her from his bondage. As the lover’s reunite however they are ambushed by the Imperial army and subsequently die in each other’s arms.

Battle of Nan Island – Nan dao feng yun – 1955, dir. Bai Cheng
Fu Luo-hua, a female army nurse, is left to care for a group of wounded Eighth Route soldiers on Hainan Island during World War II, as the rest of their detachment move out to conduct resistive operations. Isolated in the mountains with limited food and medicine, Fu effectively creates a makeshift infirmary in the camp, but is aware that a traitor’s presence overshadows and impedes the group’s recovery. As provisions within the encampment dwindle and attempts to contact the wider Eighth Route Army fail, Fu takes decisive action. Organising the wounded into a provisional resistive troupe, she manages to obtain provisions from a nearby village whilst uncovering and eliminating the collaborative spy in their ranks. Eventually Fu and the wounded are reunited with their Eight Route division, whereby their efforts are congratulated before returning to regular combat duties.

Centred on United Nationalist and Communist forces during the Anti-Japanese War, this narrative tracks the preparation and involvement of these
diffuse armies in the infamous and bloody ‘Battle of Tai’erzhuang’, where many lives on both political sides were lost. Initially focusing on high-ranking Nationalist officers and generals, the first half of the text contemplates the decisions and politics preceding and determining the nature of combat. Contrastingly, the latter part of the film focuses on the protracted battle itself, in particular on General Li Zhong-ren of the Nationalist Army, who in spring of 1938, led his detachment to an unlikely and bloody victory against the Imperial Army. The text concludes in the battle’s aftermath as a blood-soaked Nationalist flag frames a scarred landscape of dead bodies without survivors.

**Burn the Harbour / Ran shao de gang wan – 1998, dir. Li Xiepu**
The Japanese army appropriates a foreign shipping business during World War II. Captain Hong and his crew are subsequently imprisoned by the enemy and forced to work as labourers in building a harbour for military ships and submarines. Joined by other captives, both Chinese and foreign, the workers are exposed to dangerous and inhumane conditions on the harbour site. As operational Officer Sato ignores the labourers’ claims for more food and medicine, Hong formulates an undercover plan for resistance and escape that is initially rebuffed. When the Japanese demand a dangerous increase in the pace and scale of production however, a shift in sentiment occurs as the differing factions join together to support and facilitate Hong’s strategy. With careful planning the workers launch a successful revolt that results in the liberation of all prisoners and destruction of the harbour.

**Chicken Feather Letter / Ji mao xin - 1954, dir. Shi Hui**
Hai-wa is a young shepherd boy who spends his days surveying the mountains for an enemy attack during the Anti-Japanese War. Having uncovered some vital information, Hai-wa’s father (a resistive spy) entrusts his son with the duty of delivering it to Commander Cheng of the Eighth Route Army. Along the way to the Communist base Hai-wa recurrently encounters enemy forces that violate, abuse and bully him. Yet he manages to eventually escape and with the Imperial army in pursuit, completes his mission by delivering the letter. The resistance forces subsequently use the information to launch an attack upon the Japanese and liberate the region. Hai-wa, who has been injured, is finally reunited with family and friends as the villagers celebrate their victory. The film concludes as the resilient Hai-wa returns to his post as a shepherd, surveying and protecting the village.

**Coconut Tree Song / Ye lin qu – 1957, dir. Wang Weiyi**
When her husband goes missing after undertaking an espionage mission for the resistive forces during World War II, Lin Xiu-mei ventures from her village on Hainan Island in order to find him. With the assistance of a local boatman, Lin manages to evade the Japanese forces and eventually locate her husband on the mainland. Subsequently she contacts the undercover Communist organization in order to seek refuge and assistance. Agent Wang arranges and accompanies the villagers’ return to Hainan Island, carrying a hidden transmitter in order to better liaise and communicate with the Eighth Route Army on the mainland. Despite close attentions of Japanese patrol boats, the resistors successfully return to their village with the transmitter
intact. As the community come together to celebrate these safe returns, Xiu-mei’s mother recognises Wang as her long lost husband, whereby the family is enigmatically reunited.

**Counterattack / Po xi zhan – 1986, dirs. Zhen Zhiguo & Yu Yehua**
After the brutal slayings of both her husband and mother-in-law at the hands of the enemy during World War II, local villager Lu Chun-xiu organises a township militia to resist the Japanese forces. Leaving behind their families and homes, this group link up with a wider detachment of Eighth Route soldiers in the region (led by Commander Liang), undertaking a number of strategic and supportive missions, involving small-scale combat and espionage activities. The militia is progressively successful in its operations, delaying and inhibiting enemy activities until the arrival of Liang’s mobilised forces. In the troupe’s penultimate endeavour, the guerrillas engage in a heavily protracted battle whereby Lu’s division ultimately sacrifice themselves in order to ensure the safe passage of Liang and the wider Eighth Route detachment.

**Devils on the Doorstep / Gui zi lai le – 2000, dir. Jiang Wen**
Rack-Armour Terrace is a small farming village in China that is largely immune to and uninvolved in the Anti-Japanese War. Maintaining a somewhat amicable relationship with their regional occupying forces, the community is suddenly endangered when a mysterious character enforces them to temporarily accommodate a captured Japanese officer (Hanaya) and his Chinese translator (Dong). Centrally focussed around Ma Da-san, who is burdened with primary responsibility for the two men, trouble arises as their captors seemingly forget to return at the allotted time to reclaim the hostages. After much debate and indecision focusing on what to do with the prisoners (including harbouring, slaughtering or exchanging them), the villagers collectively decide to return the men to the Japanese encampment in exchange for grain, an action that carries deadly and devastating consequences.

This narrative primarily centres on a mixed race family seeking refuge in Nanjing during the infamous Japanese massacre of 1937. Consisting of Cheng-xian the Chinese father, his pregnant Japanese wife Rieko, and their respective children (a Chinese boy and a Japanese girl), the family initially struggle to survive the destruction and devastation of the massacre whilst in hiding. Their identities are eventually uncovered however, as Cheng-xian is detained by the enemy whilst his wife and children escape to the refuge of the Red Cross Zone. Meanwhile the Japanese army continue their systematic destruction, murdering, raping and looting the city, where Cheng-xian is finally released and returns to his family. After further upheaval as the Imperial Army invade the Red Cross Zone, Cheng-xian manages to save his endangered baby, whom Rieko names ‘Nanjing’ as a memorial to the unfolding tragic events.

**Evening Bell / Wan zhong – 1988, dir. Wu Ziniu**
A seemingly isolated division of Eighth Route Army soldiers are posted in the rural hinterland at the end of the Anti-Japanese War. As they traverse the
terrain clearing and burying the dead masses they uncover a small group of surviving Japanese soldiers, on the verge of starvation and unaware of their nation’s impending surrender. The Chinese soldiers sympathetically offer their last rations to the Imperial soldiers who are clearly in need of provisions. However, the Japanese command still harbours a destructive intent, instructing their troops towards mass suicide by blowing up their armament. This plan is ultimately interrupted, whereby only the commanding officer suicides, leaving his subordinates without instruction or direction. Subsequently the armament is exploded, leaving the Eighth Route soldiers to escort their Japanese counterparts to the Communist base and into an unknown future.

Touted as an adaptation of *Guerrillas on the Railroad*, this film details the activities of an undercover group of resistive mercenaries in Shanghai near the end of World War II. Having each suffered personally at the hands of the Japanese, these diverse individuals join together to form a guerrilla unit intent on sabotaging and inhibiting enemy influence in the city. Gaining a reputation as an uncompromising and efficient force, the Japanese army rigorously attempt to uncover and destroy the group. As they manage to recruit one member (Xia-bo) to collaboration he reveals important information on the group’s identity and whereabouts. A bloody and protracted battle follows as the brigade attempt to continue its activities whilst similarly evading their Japanese pursuers. One by one each of the group’s members are eliminated until only a sole survivor remains and manages to escape from the city.

*Guandong Hero / Guan dong da xia* – 1987, dir. Bai Dezhang  
During World War II a rural village in Northeast China is massacred by a troop of Japanese soldiers, leaving many dead and the community in ruins. The sole survivor of this attack, Guan Yun-tian, escapes to the surrounding forest where he forms a guerrilla force to enact revenge on the enemy. Training and organising the bandits into a potent squadron, Guan develops a reputation throughout the region as a feared resistance leader, known simply as ‘The Guandong Hero’. Due to the success and effectiveness of these covert attacks the Imperial Army grows wary of Guan’s influence and resolve to eliminate him. The enemy manages to eventually infiltrate his bandit council and create defections. Subsequently the Japanese launch a penultimate attack on the bandits, whereby Guan is betrayed and ultimately slaughtered.

*Guandong Heroine / Guan dong nü xia* – 1989, dirs. Bai Dezhang & Xu Xunxiang  
At the inception of the War of Resistance a gang of Japanese soldiers rape a young Chinese woman. Gaining refuge within a division of ‘greenwood bandits’, she is subsequently trained as a member and eventual leader of that group. Sublimating her own familial desires, she consequently directs her local army towards a vigorous and protracted resistive campaign with the enemy, whereby local communities mythically proclaim her as ‘The Guandong Heroine’. Meanwhile the Imperial army become more mindful of her authority and power in the province, formulating their own secret manoeuvre to eliminate her, her bandits and their legacy. The enemy
eventually capture the heroine in a prolonged battle where she is killed and the remaining bandits (including her newly married husband, Lei) are massacred.

**Guerrillas on the Plane / Ping yuan you ji dui – 1955, dirs. Su Li & Wu Zhaotil**

Led by legendary guerrilla Li Xiang-yang, this film traces the actions of a group of rural resistors fighting the Japanese army during World War II. As the text begins, Li and his fellow guerrillas return to their native township where they are emphatically greeted by family and friends. Celebrations of this homecoming are short-lived however, whereby the presence of the Imperial army forces the group into hiding. Under Li’s command the guerrillas initiate a covert resistance, only for the Japanese to respond by further abusing, bullying and killing local villagers. Deeply impacted by this violation, the guerrillas increase their activities, determined to liberate and reclaim control of their community. Following Communist instruction this is successfully carried out, where at textual climax Li captures and kills the opposing Japanese General in a dual act of revenge and order restoration.

**Guerrillas on the Railroad / Tie dao you ji dui – 1956, dir. Zhao Ming**

Set in Northern China during the Anti-Japanese War, a group of local railway guerrillas are inducted into the official resistance effort under the leadership of Officers Li and Liu. Initially setting up a charcoal shop as a front for their activities, their efforts are jeopardised by the arrival of Lieutenant Okamura, a Japanese officer whose role is to eliminate all Chinese forms of resistance. The guerrillas flee into the mountains where they seek shelter with the widow of a former comrade (Fang-lin’s wife). As the battle intensifies Li is injured thus leaving Liu to lead the guerrillas in attack. With a surplus of soldiers strategically placed on the enemy side, the guerrillas are seemingly trapped. Yet Liu uses his cunning and knowledge in order to lead the resistors to victory, where by the text’s finale they have taken control of the railways and liberated the region.

**Gunshots Over the Plane / Ping yuan qiang sheng – 2000, dir. He Jun**

Ma Yi-jun, a platoon leader of the Eight Route Army during the Anti-Japanese War, attempts to form a resistive troop from inside the walls of a prison camp. A wanted man, isolated from his detachment in battle, Ma initially enters the camp under an assumed identity in order to seek refuge. Whilst there he meets a number of detainees demonstrating resistive sentiments, joining them in creating confusion for the enemy forces. As his detachment eventually locates him and makes contact, Ma enacts an escape plan, taking with him many fellow prisoners. In the aftermath of the escape, the Japanese expand their efforts to hunt down Ma’s group but are plagued by internal fracture and division. At the same time, the resistive group formulates their own plan to liberate the prison and eliminate enemy forces. Despite being steadily outnumbered and with losses of many lives, the guerrillas manage to succeed in their mission.

**The Inextinguishable Flame / Pu bu mie de huo yan – 1955, dir. Yi Ling**

Jiang-er and Jiang-san are brothers, but they are segregated by political obligations during the War of Resistance. Jiang-er is a collaborative officer,
working to stabilise Japanese control within their native village, whereas Jiang-san is a member of the Eighth Route resistive forces. Initially the brothers attempt to overlook their ideological differences in order to maintain harmony in the family and to please their mother. As resistive endeavour in the region escalates however, Jiang-er tricks his younger sibling into revealing guerrilla locations, launching subsequent devastating attacks. The brothers become sworn enemies after this point, each trying to defeat and capture the other. Jiang-er resorts to deviance, imprisoning both his mother and sister-in-law to lure his brother out, but Jiang-san recognises this tactic and launches his own response that is ultimately successful.

**The Intercepted Order / Mi ling jie ji – 1986, dir. Hua Ke**

Realising near the end of World War II that defeat is inevitable, the Japanese military command orders a high profile officer serving in China, General Shirakawa, to return with his division to Tokyo. The Japanese command are concerned that Shirakawa (a favourite officer) could reveal strategic information to the Allied forces if detained. The Eighth Route Army hears of this secret plan and sends a group of underground agents, led by Luo Bei-yue to prevent the General’s escape. These agents covertly monitor and survey Shirakawa as he prepares for departure, waiting for the optimum moment to apprehend him before he leaves China. Although the Japanese manage to uncover the resistive plan and a bloody combat breaks out between the warring sides, Luo is able to entrap and capture Shirakawa using a combined strategy of military attack and espionage.

**International Rescue / Guo ji da ying jiu – 1990, dir. Xie Hong**

A division of American soldiers infiltrate Japanese-occupied territory of Yunnan in order to rescue an imprisoned intelligence agent during World War II. As the enemy effectively ambushes the recovery platoon, only a trio of American soldiers survive, rescued by a group of Yunnan guerrillas. Despite initial fractures and mistrust between these factions (based primarily on racial, cultural and social differences), the surviving Americans co-operate with the local forces in order to ultimately confront and delimit Japanese potency in the region. The undermanned militant group subsequently carry out a number of resistive endeavours utilising unconventional and informal strategies. As the final battle mounts, the rescue effort proves successful, whereby the sole remaining American manages to escape with the intelligence agent, but not before almost all local resisters are killed.

**Little Soldier Zhang-ga / Xiao bing Zhang-ga – 1963, dir. Cui Wei**

Zhang-ga is a mischievous young boy who joins the Eighth Route Army after his Grandma is killed in a Japanese massacre during World War II. Seemingly homeless and without guidance he gains purpose and function through resistive effort and activities, whereby he develops into an excellent scout. On initially joining the Communists his behaviour is decidedly immature, determined for an immediate and personal revenge against the enemy. Undergoing guidance and education within the Socialist camp however, Zhang-ga is progressively transformed into a productive model youth. When the resisters ultimately devise and launch a protracted battle against the enemy, Zhang-ga makes a considerable contribution to the effort, which eventually
results in victory. At the film’s dénouement the guerrillas celebrate their resistive success, where Zhang-ga is surrounded and supported by both the Communist Party and local villagers.

**Lovers Grief Over the Yellow River / Huang he jue lian – 1999, dir. Feng Xiaoning**
Owen is an American air serviceman whose plane is shot down by the Japanese during World War II. Crashing near the Yellow River in China, he is rescued by a small regiment of the Eighth Route Army, led by the earthly and serious Haizi. Having been injured, he is cared for by a young female medical student whom he nicknames Angel, and subsequently falls in love with. Under constant threat of the Japanese forces, the group head out for the Communist headquarters. Along the way they are detained in Angel’s native township, where her estranged father (the village head) is collaborating with the enemy. Torn between communal obligations to the Japanese and personal feelings for his daughter, Angel’s father resolves to facilitate the resistors escape. Ultimately he, along with Haizi and Angel, submit their own lives in order to ensure Owen’s safe passage and survival. The narrative concludes as Owen, revisits the Yellow River in the present day to farewell his past love and remembers the sacrifices made for his survival.

**Meridian of War / Zhan zheng zi wu xian – 1990, dir. Feng Xiaoning**
A group of young children are isolated near the Great Wall of China during World War II, where they are given the task of finding and delivering vital documents to a wider detachment of the Eighth Route Army. Guided by only a critically wounded soldier and a displaced nurse, the children endeavour to complete their mission whilst the enemy rapidly encircles upon their location. As the Japanese army progressively hunts them down, killing them one by one, they secretly pass the documents to one another to secure the completion of the task and to prevent an enemy interception. The film concludes in a present day context, as the task’s sole survivor reminisces upon these wartime experiences, including the eventual completion of the mission, her own personal survival and the heady sacrifices of her childhood friends.

**Mutiny / Hua bian – 1989, dir. He Qun**
As part of its military plan to expand occupation and dominance within Chinese cities during the War of Resistance, the Japanese army set up a number of martial regiments consisting of Chinese collaborators. Facing progressively harsh discrimination and conditions under the authority of their Imperial benefactors, dissent progressively grows within the collaborative ranks. As this situation worsens (with dissatisfaction actively fostered by Japanese authorities), the divisions contemplate rebellion. Led by a senior collaborative officer, Cheng Huan, one detachment undertakes a resistive mutiny against their Japanese overseers resulting in widespread massacre and death. At the film’s graphic conclusion Cheng is rendered the only survivor, a traumatised witness to the destructive capacity and obviation of war itself.
**Nine Deaths, One Birth / Jiu si yi sheng – 1992, dirs. Mao Yuqin & Li Ling**

Officer Shi is an initially determined and enthusiastic member of the Eight Route Army during World War II. Assigned to a village community in order to oversee the synthesis and manufacture of warfare munitions, production goes smoothly until the Japanese army arrives within the region. The enlarged demand for artillery and short supply of materials creates mounting pressure on Shi and his rudimentary factory. Growing more desperate for increased output Shi takes further risks in manufacturing, leading to an explosion that leaves him disabled (losing an eye and two fingers). Upon recovery Shi appears a troubled figure, undertaking an obsessional approach to factory work and artillery production. Ultimately he succeeds in synthesising the munitions but at a heavy cost, marked by his own disfigurements and the deaths of most of his comrades.

**One and Eight / Yi ge he ba ge – 1984, dir. Zhang Junxiang**

*One and Eight* focuses on a group of eight political prisoners in the detention of an isolated Eighth Route Army division (led by Commander Xu) during World War II. One of these detainees is Wang Jin, a former Communist officer that has been questionably charged with collaboration. As the text progresses and these figures are transported across Northern China for sentencing and trial, Wang earns the respect and admiration of his fellow prisoners who firmly believe that he is innocent of all political charges. Xu is unresponsive to these developments, rather pressuring and interrogating the captives unsuccessfully to denounce Wang. As the group travels unwittingly into enemy territory, the Japanese army ambushes them. A battle ensues and the Socialist forces are decimated, leaving only the detainees (led by Wang Jin) to free themselves and fight the enemy. These figures are similarly slaughtered in heavy battle, leading one prisoner to escape and only Wang Jin to carry the injured Commander Xu to the Eighth Route Army base.

**Purple Sunset / Zi ri – 2000, dir. Feng Xiaoning**

Nearing the end of World War II, an unconventional trio appears lost in the forests of Northern China. Comprising of Yang (a Chinese civilian), Nadja (a Russian army nurse) and Akiyoko (a militant Japanese schoolgirl), the group progressively work together despite their differences, in order to survive the harsh environment and ultimately return to civilisation. Facing recurrent and menacing obstacles along the way (of political, cultural and environmental forms) the protagonists develop an intimate and personal bond with one another, ultimately joined by their overarching desire for preservation and survival. Through co-operative efforts the group finally manage to emerge from the forest, only to run into a Japanese armament where Akiyoko is subsequently gunned down. The film concludes from a present day perspective as an elderly Yang and Nadja contemplate past sufferings and war experiences.

**Red Children / Hong hai zi – 1958, dir. Su Li**

A group of eight young children witness the Japanese occupation of their village during World War II with a degree of distaste and aversion. Unable to join their parents and village elders, who are in the mountains as part of
guerrilla encampments, these children formulate their own plans for resistance as part of an unauthorised teenage troupe. Initially concentrating on small-scale endeavours including the kidnapping of collaborative figures and capturing of their weapons, the group gravitate towards more daring activities. In one such mission they manage to rescue a detained guerrilla leader whilst killing an enemy regimental commander. The children are subsequently congratulated and recognised for their efforts, inducted into the official resistive effort and permitted to reside in the mountain encampment with fellow villagers and relatives.

*Red Sorghum / Hong gao liang – 1987, dir. Zhang Yimou*

Set in a rural Chinese village during World War II, *Red Sorghum* centres primarily on Jiu-er, a woman in her twenties who is sold to the leprous owner of a wine distillery. Her initial apprehension and fear is overcome as the leper mysteriously disappears, whereby she discovers romantic feelings for a labourer identified as Grandpa (by the film’s narrator), to whose advances she willingly submits. Jiu-er subsequently becomes the head of the winery and with the co-operation of the workers, the distillery flourishes. Accompanied by the birth of a son, Dou-guan, life seems peacefully utopian for the community. This is shattered with the arrival of the Japanese army in the region, seeking to build a road and dominate the villagers. The destruction enacted prompts Jiu-er to organise and transform her workers towards resistance. As they launch their attack, the superiority of the Japanese army is unleashed, annihilating the villagers including Jiu-er. The text concludes as Grandpa and Dou-guan (the only survivors) contemplate their paralysing loss and suffering.

*Storming the Darkness Before Dawn / Chong po li ming qian de hei an – 1956, dirs. Wang Ping & Liu Peiran*

Yan Zhi-gang a brash platoon leader of the Eight Route Army during the War of Resistance, is seriously wounded during a combat endeavour, but is rescued and rehabilitated by the members of Lijiaying village. Upon returning to the military front he is initially careless and reckless in combat strategy and enactment. Criticised by Eighth Route superiors for his rash manner, Yan re-orientes and re-applies himself towards developing a more impacting resistive discipline. Subsequently he formulates an intricate strategy for entrapping the enemy and collaborative agents that utilises features of direct combat, initiative and entrapment. The plan is subsequently approved by his superiors and successfully put into action. As the narrative’s concludes, Yan is re-united with the citizens of Lijiaying village, who have been liberated by his innovative combat tactic.

*Tunnel Warfare / Di dao zhan – 1965, dir. Ren Xudong*

*Tunnel Warfare* concentrates on the resistive struggles of Kao village, a rural township under the constant scrutiny of the enemy during the Anti-Japanese War. Initially intent on surveillance and domination, the Imperial Army quickly graduates towards direct confrontation (in seeking out resistive agents), amounting to widespread massacre and destruction. Formulating and implementing a localised strategy based on Maoist principles (set out in the treatise, *On Protracted War*) the villagers develop a network of underground
tunnels and secret passageways in order to launch counter-attacks on the enemy. Led by local leader Chuan-bao, in co-operation with regional and wider Eighth Route Army squadrons, the mutual resistive units successfully implement their guerrilla tactic in defeating the Japanese Army. The film concludes as the resistive forces return to Kao village to jointly instigate and implement Socialist rule.

*War Interlude / Zhan zheng cha qu – 1987, dir. Zhang Yuqiang*

Xiu-jiu, a young girl orphaned during the War of Resistance is sent to an Eighth Route encampment shortly after the death of her parents. Grouped with other orphaned girls she is initially unwilling to conform to either her new surroundings or the Socialist lifestyle itself. Rather, she undertakes a confrontational approach, seeking to antagonise and disrupt camp life as much as possible, regardless of the impact on the girls around her. As time passes however, and with the guidance and patience of Socialist authorities, she adjusts to the new environment, transforming into an enthusiastic and reformed contributor. Just as normalcy seemingly pervades the camp, the Japanese enemy attack, forcing Xiu-jiu to once again face personal danger and uncertainty. Ultimately she manages to escape and survive the enemy bombing raids, but not before witnessing the deaths of many comrades and friends.

*War of Mines / Di lei zhan – 1962, dir. Tang Yingqi*

Set during the mid-point of the War of Resistance, this text concentrates on a small village’s defence against the invading Japanese army. Led by Chao-jun, a local mine expert and under the guidance of Eighth Route Army Commander Lei, the villagers wage a small-scale resistance effort using *dilei* (mines) to disrupt and delay the Imperial Army. The Japanese respond by calling in bomb expert Watanabe to void these efforts, thus allowing the soldiers to invade the township, where they pillage, burn and kill. Determined on resistance, the villagers recoup the destruction of their community and under Lei’s guidance devise a new combat strategy, utilising trick mines to further destabilise the Imperial forces. With the added arrival and support of a wider Eighth Route Army detachment in the region, the plan is confirmed and enacted. Upon succeeding and overwhelming the enemy, the villagers reclaim their township and pledge to institute Socialist modes of bureaucracy.


Eight capable young women are enforced and enlisted to form an elite squad of commandos during the War of Resistance. Rigorously trained under the harsh guidance of Captain Yang the women gradually develop into a potent martial squad. Upon graduation from training they are subsequently given a series of espionage missions involving the elimination of high profile Japanese and collaborative figures. As they successfully complete these tasks they similar uncover trails of corruption and deception, which progressively leads to their entrapment and betrayal at the hands of higher authorities. Recognising the danger the commandoes pose to the bureaucratic powers, the squad are ultimately sent on a doomed suicide mission, culminating in a
confrontation with Yang that amounts in overwhelming death, whereby only one traumatised member remains.