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Shuqin Cui/Women Through the Lens

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Introduction

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

In the history of Chinese cinema, gender and nation have often served as narrative subjects and visual tropes. The intersections between gender and nation that occur in cinematic representation, however, have received little critical attention. This study begins by raising the question of how gender, especially the image of woman, acts as a visual and discursive sign in the creation of the nation-state in twentieth-century China. It also makes inquiries into a parade of related issues: how early film production frames women's problems to signify the need for national awakening while using star images to attract audiences; how socialist cinema presents woman as either a victim of class oppression or a beneficiary of national liberation; how new cinema revives female sexuality and makes the female body a narrative site for the projection of national trauma and collective memory; how self-representation in search of a female identity and voice is vexed by various discourses of nationalism; and, finally, how woman-as-nation addresses international as well as domestic viewers.

In exploring these issues, this book shows how a visual form, cinema, and a gender category, woman, participate in the representation of the nation. Throughout the twentieth century, China witnessed a series of narratives of the nation, each with a particular political construction and cultural representation. The task of constructing the nation involves the drive for a sovereign position in the world order, as well as the struggle for power among domestic political factions. The process of narrating the nation engages various discursive and textual productions. Considering "nation" as an imagined community and a system of narration, one sees primarily the master narratives of China's national identity. The concept of nation is always changing and in process because sociocultural transformation never ceases. In the early twentieth century, for instance, the May Fourth intellectuals called for a modern nation that would break from tradition and engage with Western ideas. Enlightenment and cultural iconoclasm became discourses of national salvation. As Prasenjit Duara has pointed out, the process initiated by calls for national salvation allows a nation "to see itself as a unique form of community which finds its place in the oppositions between tradition and modernity, hierarchy and equality, empire and nation."[1] During times of war and revolution, the discourse of nationhood has united people in the fight against foreign invasions while dividing them under different political banners, such as nationalism and communism. The

establishment of a party-state mobilizes the masses as an institutional force as well as an agent of representation. "The division between the nationalists and the communists in the Chinese revolution," John Fitzgerald explains, "is best characterized not as a struggle between Marxism-Leninism and nationalism but as a struggle between two phases of nationalism," both of which are directed against external humiliation as well as domestic opposition.[2]

Under communist control, the party-state system centralized and elevated the project of nation building. The nationalistic discourse of self-reliance walled off socialist China from the outside world. Meanwhile, the political doctrine of class struggle drew lines between the proletariat and potential enemies. For decades, China remained isolated, and the individual was trapped inside the collective enterprise. Those who spoke the revolutionary language became a "chosen people" in the front ranks of the masses; those who did not were either awakened or eliminated by the collective authority.[3] As China emerges into the postsocialist era, the revival of nationalism involves many interacting and contradictory factors. While embracing a capitalist market system, for instance, China strives to protect its political system. After the end of the Cold War, the desire to integrate the nation into the global community may be countered by nationalistic hostility toward the West. Moreover, the turn to China's cultural heritage as a source of nationalistic values occurs as ideas and images from the West increasingly filter into Chinese life. Finally, official, mainstream cultural productions often coincide or collide with avant-garde or popular cultural trends.

The master narratives that describe the evolution of the nation-state are marked by the absence of woman as subject and her voice as discourse, even though she has a conspicuous visual presence. Thus, by taking gender as an analytical category and cinema as a form of representation, this study asks how the nation has been imagined and the narration composed. And how has gender interacted with the concept of the nation in the medium of cinematic representation? I begin from the position that nation and gender are mutually constitutive locations of social construction; in fact, nationalism is constituted from the outset as a gendered discourse.[4] In light of this hypothesis, one sees that in the cultural history of visual representation, the image of woman and the category of class have enjoyed "privileged visibility." Yet behind woman's visibility lies a complicated entanglement of gender with nation, as well as the ambivalent possibility of woman as subject. As the concept of "nation" changes, various forms of nationalism produce and depend on different discourses of gender.

During the May Fourth era, for instance, "modern woman," a gendered identity created by male intellectuals and pursued by women themselves,

became a component of national salvation, as well as an important element in literary and cinematic narratives. The image of "modern woman" as an embodiment of national enlightenment implies rejection of sociocultural tradition and acceptance of the advent of modernity. The modern woman as a self, however, is torn between the given identity and a problematic reality. The question of what a woman can become after she flees the patriarchal household and signals the call for a modern nation remains unanswered. In chaotic circumstances, when the nation undergoes international humiliation and domestic turmoil, the metaphor of nation-as-woman signifies a homeland under the pressure of foreign violation or civil division. The defense of women, and hence of the nation, envisions daughters and mothers suffering imperialist abuse or social oppression and creates appropriate images for representation.

The socialist system transforms woman from a "ghost of old society" into a "master of the new state." Nonetheless, the "emancipation of woman is concomitant with a process of gender erasure."[5] Female sexuality or the sensuality of the female body is replaced with a genderless and sexless symbol that signifies the sociopolitical collectivity. In the guise of women who hold up half the sky, these figures are highly visible as political cadres, model workers, or national heroes. Woman as a sexual, gendered subject, however, disappears from representation. In the era of economic reform, market imperatives and popular cultural production return the female body as a gendered other and as a sexual commodity. The new emphasis on gender difference relocates women in the social, political, and economic margins, even as interest in her sexual difference centers her on magazine pages and movie screens. As the postsocialist nation-state integrates itself with the outside world, it offers an image of woman wrapped in Orientalism to the international gaze.

In sum, when imagining the female body as the land of the nation, one enters a terrain requesting constant exploration, violation, and reconfiguration. Ideologies and politics that mobilize women in the name of national interests express the will of men acting in authority. "In this discourse," as Gisela Brinker-Gabler and Sidonie Smith note in *Writing New Identities*, "the making of the nation becomes a masculine activity. The land upon which nation is constituted is feminized. . . . Once the nation is founded and the land domesticated the nation becomes motherland."[6] In China, the process of feminizing the nation and nationalizing gender foregrounds woman as a symbol while effacing her self-identity. The motherland takes a female form while eliding any genuine female subjectivity.

With gender in mind, this study places its subjects in a framework of a century of national history and film tradition. The historical view reveals

connections as well as contradictions between gender and nation through their cinematic representations. Moreover, the engagement between national films and transnational feminism enables gender studies to bridge academic theories and geopolitical boundaries. Analysis of selected films exemplifies *how* the meanings of gender and nation are constructed through semiotic systems. Taking the notions of enunciation and narration as methodological principles, the process of analysis shows how the mesh of cinematic codes, such as cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, and sound, constitutes the essential mechanism for the construction of meaning. The book focuses on distinct periods and issues in the trajectory of Chinese cinema: early production, socialist cinema, the new wave, and women's films. Each section introduces gender issues in a social context, followed by analyses of particular films that illustrate and explore the issues at stake.

Early cinema is examined first within a historical framework and then from a postmodern perspective. The historical account shows how the 1930s marked the transformation of early film production from an entertainment enterprise to a socionational practice. In the course of nation building, progressive filmmaking took the female image as a discursive code and visual sign to indicate the emergence of a new social order. This occurred because the call for women's salvation emerged neither from female consciousness nor as an independent movement, but from the urgency of sociocultural reform. The book's perspective therefore shows how representations of women reflected not only gender issues, but also socionational crises. In the early days of the Chinese film industry, the screen image of woman often appeared as an oppressed other to be saved or as a modern identity to be emulated.

Chinese film production at the close of the twentieth century has witnessed national transformations, especially when the handover of Hong Kong to China blurred the lines between a socialist nation and a colonialist state. Consequently, the postmodern situation raises concerns about the uncertain relationship between history and representation. Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage*, for instance, presents an intertextual juxtaposition between Chinese film history in the 1930s and its cinematic remakes in Hong Kong in the 1990s. The film's metastructure—impersonating the silent screen star Ruan Lingyu and remaking her films—fragments as well as reconstructs history and image. In addition, the engagement between past and present, or history and representation, invokes yet contradicts the concepts of feminism and postmodernism. Whereas postmodern practices attempt to decode and disrupt foundational structures, feminist critiques try to insert gender differences into mainstream discourse.

Analysis of socialist cinema in a postsocialist context uncovers how the "red classics" of the Maoist era were transformed and packaged for market consumption and ideological instruction. The attempt of the state-controlled mass culture to adapt to a new, market-driven popular culture reveals how and why a state cinema managed to lead and satisfy a mass market audience. Socialist aesthetics follow the dictates of ideology to provide model characters for the betterment of a mass audience. The central position of the proletariat as both film topic and viewing audience confines representation and perception to totalitarian motives. Owing to the empowerment of socialist rhetoric, a background power, either the Communist Party's current policy or a political event, provides a solution whenever the film narrative reaches an impasse.

While important to revolutionary filmmaking, gender relations are established more on the basis of class than of sex. The question of whether gender difference persists in the absence of sexual difference calls for a broadened feminist perspective. Careful analysis of a socialist classic—Xie Jin's *The Red Detachment of Women,* for example—shows how woman becomes a discursive device and semiotic code in the master narrative of communist revolution. Often, woman is subordinated first to the patriarchal tradition, then to the communist collective. By emphasizing her status as the "oppressed class sister," communist discourse legitimizes woman's emancipation. Nevertheless, erasing her gender difference to demonstrate equality with men conceals the political suppression of women for the purposes of a collective, sexless nation-state.

Investigation of new wave films shows how a national cinema can project itself onto international screens by articulating nation and gender in images and allegorical narratives. Creators of the new cinema, labeled too simplistically as the fifth generation of film directors, have attracted international attention with *signs* of China. Their eagerness to redefine Chinese history and their passion for cinematic innovation transform national experience into visual allegories. These allegories, I argue, highlight woman as a visual signifier of national history and as a sexual image for the world's gaze. When the female image entices international viewers yet frustrates local perception, however, the concept of the gaze has to be reconsidered as a matter of regional as well as sexual differences. In Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou,* for instance, the off-screen sound effects and point-of-view structure reveal socially defined gender positions, while the mise-en-scène and closed film form visually suppress sexual transgressions. Yet the image of Zhang's female lead conveys both sexual and national codes, drawing the international gaze to her "beautifully" suffering body. Chen Kaige's *Farewell My*

Concubine, to give another illustration, shows the impossibility of escape from the authoritarian power of history as the two male figures assume an array of historical, gendered, and professional positions. Woman's entrance into the male-dominated cultural territories of opera and history endangers men and threatens death for the female self.

This study also discusses self-representation by Chinese women directors in order to uncover a feminine film practice in film history. In China, female directors have "enjoyed" legitimate participation in the mainstream production system. Their sociopolitical visibility, however, requires the concealment of a gendered self. The suppression of the feminized self, a sacrifice made to compete with men, has hampered the development of a possible women's cinema. In addition, the lack of interest in feminist theory and the absence of a tradition of feminist filmmaking work against the development of a women's cinema. As demonstrated in my analysis of two films, we do hear the female voice and see her point of view, but the voice remains uncertain and the perspective ambiguous. In Hu Mei's *Army Nurse*, the first-person, voice-over narration and accompanying flashbacks suggest a female desire to assert a woman's voice against the dominant discourse of communist ideology. The voice, however, speaks to the conflict between social expectations and personal desire. In Huang Shuqin's *Human, Woman, Demon*, interactions between stage opera and private drama delineate the female protagonist's identity crisis rather than her self-assurance.

Although their films may embody a clear sense of female consciousness, few female directors are willing to embrace feminism's theoretical principles. To emphasize difference means to acknowledge social inferiority, and to identify oneself as a feminist would move a director from the center to the margins of film production. Questions repeatedly raised by Western feminist critics (Have you ever encountered problems because of your gender in the process of making films? What Western feminist ideas or films have influenced your filmmaking?) typically receive a flat "no" in response. Yet the explicit rejection of Western feminism does not indicate the absence of a female consciousness or poetics of film style in Chinese women's self-representations. Rather, when viewed in a distinct sociocultural setting, the issues of difference and feminism take on new meanings.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The question of sexual difference has been a central concern in feminist theoretical writings on cinema. Differences between men and women or differences among women serve as a means for feminist film critics to

explore gender relations as they appear in cinematic representations. The inquiry into sexual difference typically posits a film structure described as a patriarchal system of visual pleasure based on a dichotomy of subject and object, the viewer and the viewed. For almost two decades, feminist film theory has been dominated by responses, revisions, and challenges to issues raised by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."[7] Taking woman and representation as a key issue and Freudian concepts of sexuality and the unconscious as a point of departure, Mulvey situates gender relations in a cinematic system of the look and pleasure. In her thesis, the division between viewing subject and viewed object assumes masculine and feminine positions; a dichotomy of man as active bearer and woman as passive object of the look constitutes the basis of a patriarchal film form. Around the axis of this dominant dichotomy, interaction between textual production and film spectatorship generates sexual difference in accordance with a patriarchal unconscious.

In an effort to move beyond the concept of sexual difference and the system of the look, feminist film criticism poses further questions regarding the construction of gender. Teresa de Lauretis claims that gender is both product and process of its representation and self-representation.[8] The process of representation depends on a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, where the former emphasizes social relations while the latter assigns meanings and effects to individuals within any given social order. The idea of self-representation indicates a subjective position where women might take a place in the process of representation. The construction of gender is also affected by investigating what is repressed in discourse and what escapes dominant representation. In de Lauretis' reformulated gender structure, it is the system of representation and sociocultural construction rather than sexual opposition between men and women that produces gender differences.

Taking the problem of representation as a fundamental question of gender difference, feminist film criticism has advocated readings of representations different from those offered by conventional studies. Two major forms of reading (deconstructive and constructive) from primarily a feminist point of view propose to open up new ways of thinking about film theory and practice. First, a deconstructive rereading of classical cinema takes the form of textual analysis, demystifying the contradictions that Doane, Mellencamp, and Williams identify as "symptomatic of the repression of women in patriarchal culture."[9] The specific engagement of reading "against the grain" means to provoke viewers into an awareness of how classical films work to support and sustain the idea of men as producers and spectators of representation, with women as images to be represented and viewed.

Among feminist interpretations, Tania Modleski's reading of Alfred Hitchcock's films unravels a crisis of masculine subjectivity by examining an ambivalent male attitude toward representations of woman and the implication of that attitude for film spectatorship. The ambivalence in Hitchcock's films, Modleski observes, arises as the male character and the director both identify with and fear femininity. Represented as a figure victimized by patriarchy, woman functions simultaneously as a mirror image and a mechanism of displacement. By identifying with the mirror image, the masculine conscious and unconscious are able to generate a male identity. Denial of this identification, however, allows men to project fear and loss exclusively onto woman, "who does the suffering for both of them."[10] Thus the dialectic of identifying with and fearing femininity conveys a male masochism.

Second, a constructive defining of "women's cinema" indicates a female consciousness that desires to read and represent women, underscoring the existence of a tradition of female cinematic writing. The contrast between the deconstructive rereading of classical cinema and the constructive defining of women's films lies in the implication that whereas the former aims to dismantle the male-dominated cinema system, the latter tries to build an alternative form of female discourse. In representing and reading women's films within the canon of conventional theories, feminist film critics have faced controverted questions: Can a women's cinema be defined? If so, how? Is it possible to sweep aside existing forms of discourse in order to develop a new form of cinematic language? What are the possibilities for an alternative feminist cinematic practice?[11]

The constructive concern for women's cinema entails the rediscovery of long ignored female directors and examination of recent female film productions outside or within the commercial and cultural constraints of Hollywood. Ambivalence and contradiction are crucial issues for the theorizing of women's cinema—as Claire Johnston shows in her study of Dorothy Arzner, whom Johnston redefines as a woman director making films that critique Hollywood's cinematic conventions from within. For Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, ambivalence and contradiction stem from the director's distance from the Hollywood model and her continuing investment in narrative cinema. For Wendy Dozoretz, an autobiographical investment in film practice creates the possibility of female inscription on film.[12] In sum, the contradictions central to feminist film criticism on contemporary women's cinema focus on the problems of theorizing women's desire, identifying female aesthetics, and establishing a subject position for women as cinematic spectators.

Feminist theory continues to seek possible explanations for the relation of experience to discourse, of sociality to subjectivity, of language to consciousness, and of institution to individual. Although feminism often questions the validity of its own theories and practices, it is not without problems and challenges. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, there is no "all-purpose feminist frame of reference."[13] Differences among women need attention, and so do differences within women—women's heterogeneous subjectivity. Feminist psychoanalytic film theory, Gaylyn Studlar suggests, "may not be equipped to uncover the diversity of structures, the complexity of a varied spectatorial fascination with/desire for, an historically determined cinema."[14] Especially in the realm of sexual difference, feminist film theory faces the challenge of a broad spectrum of difference in race, class, ethnicity, regionality, nationality—that is, "differences among and within women." As a political approach to articulating the experience of women, feminism seems capable of speaking without discursive boundaries on behalf of women. However, as a textual construction generating categories for readings of gender difference, feminism remains not a monolithic but a multiple reference embedded in specific social, historical, and cultural power relations.

Concepts that are prominent in Western feminist theories and film studies are regrettably not a serious concern for Chinese "sisters." A review of a century of Chinese cinema reveals that gender issues do not arise merely from sexual difference but rather are embedded within the discourse of nationalism. As gender and nation intertwine, questions of identity and difference remain indistinct and ambivalent because the gender-nation complex shifts along with social transitions. To make the issue more problematic, women themselves in China—literary writers, film directors, or academic critics—either reject a feminist identity or show no particular interest in feminism in its Western forms. As Li Xiaojiang, one of the prominent "feminists" in China, observes, "Women's liberation in China, differentiated from Western feminism, has never been a self-motivated movement but part of national revolutions. Under the discourse of nationalism, the state apparatus acts as an agency mobilizing women, and party policies function as criteria in creating female images. No other feminism or feminist movements are capable of incorporating women into the collective body of the nation-state."[15] In a similar vein, a senior woman director wonders, "Why should I make women's films? Men and women are all alike. I want to make war movies and epic films."[16] Voices that dissent from Western feminism call for dialogues and negotiations across national boundaries.

As a Chinese woman and a concerned scholar in the fields of gender and film studies, I am caught between Western theories and Chinese

conditions. Problems from both sides are not difficult to identify. Although Western feminism extends its notions beyond differences of sex, race, class, religion, or ethnicity, it remains within the borders of Western cultural realms. The restriction, as Gayatri Spivak suggests, reflects a misrecognition of transnational links, an oversight that fits the political agenda of reactionary interests. "There is interest," she says, "in not allowing transnational complicities to be perceived."[17] As Chinese women count on nationalism for their emancipation, they fail to realize that the need to free feminism from nationalist discourse is a primary necessity for freeing oneself. In seeking a theoretical field where boundaries can be crossed and differences negotiated, I turn to transnational feminism.

Transnational feminism, while proposing to move feminist theories and practices beyond a fundamental notion of difference, envisions the commingling of a grand diversity of women. The urgency of transnational feminism, as Kaplan and Grewal point out, comes from the need for "critical practices that link our understanding of postmodernity, global economic structures, problematics of nationalism, issues of race and imperialism, critiques of global feminism, and emergent patriarchies."[18] In broad terms, "the task for transnational feminist cultural studies," Spivak states, "is to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic."[19] Crucial to this "negotiation" is an awareness of the geopolitical conditions of particular nations and their transnational intersections, such as social conditions, cultural histories, and economic norms. In addition, we need to create a forum for different theories or voices. As a form of negotiation, transnational feminism subverts a possibly hegemonic centrality or locality and thus positions itself outside certain master narratives. As a result, feminist theories and practices will "acknowledge the scattered hegemonies that intersect discourses of gender."[20]

To review a century of Chinese cinema from transnational perspectives brings to light a number of comparative linkages and constructions. Theories and practices once restrained within certain localities and definitions now embody multiple dimensions. The thesis of difference, spectatorship, and representation so central to feminism, for instance, contains broader definitions when put in a Chinese context. In early films, female images and gender relations are situated against interactions between foreign invasions and national salvation, leftist practices and commercial productions, and urban audiences and screen-star icons. In socialist cinema, difference recasts its focus onto class conflicts between the proletariat and the ruling elite. As the collective symbol of the Communist Party acts as a forceful agent to eliminate class exploitation, the concept of difference finds

meaning in the relation between the party, the revolutionary savior, and woman, its subaltern. Difference appears as well in the contrast between socialist model heroes and the masses waiting for political enlightenment.

When Chinese new cinema finally gains access to international screens, the world order has become a rapidly evolving transnational system. International relations, capital flow, market economics, and geopolitics all interact within a transnational framework. As international audiences sample the global marketplace, the concept of film spectatorship moves beyond the positioning of either men or women in a subject viewing position. In a transnational framework, cinematic spectatorship involves “a cooperative Orientalism” in which filmmakers consciously exhibit national allegories for viewers who embrace the representations as expected symbols of Chineseness. Thus the film directors acquire transnational capital for further productions, and the international market receives more non-Western cultural products. As national cinema engages capitalism, worldwide distribution, and diverse audiences, it needs to be seen anew in relation to the relevant conventional theories and practices. Are all third world texts necessarily political allegories, as Fredric Jameson has proposed? Or what does Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism have to say to this new situation?[21]

The possibility of seeing gender difference and cinematic spectatorship from a transnational perspective arises from or depends on certain representations. Visual representations that embody national identities and attract international audiences rely on history for meaning and women for pleasure. Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine*, for instance, positions both heterosexual and homosexual relations against national history and the tradition of Peking opera, successfully winning a market for an exotic, erotic product. Due to its stunning visual beauty and female sexuality, Zhang Yimou’s *Ju Dou* lures the audience into pleasure in looking. The visual pleasure, in contrast to Laura Mulvey’s assumption, involves psychological torment as the woman responds directly to the gaze with her bruised body. Zhang’s visual mise-en-scène of a concealed iron house, a sexually abused woman, and a sadistic or impotent man has become his trademark. Is this the entire picture of Chines cinema? Few would bother to pursue the question so long as the films coming from China meet the criteria of international film festivals and the expectations of international viewers. Under conditions where officials control mainstream production inside China and the elite attract capital, efforts at self-representation face tremendous difficulties when trying to bring either a feminine voice or a female poetics to film practices. Problems like these are exposed only when seen from transnational feminist perspectives.

FILM AS TEXTUAL SYSTEM

Critical attention to Chinese cinema, while largely a response to interest in cultural differences, as well as in national allegories, has frequently given short shrift to film as a visual medium. The language systems and semiotic dynamics that make the medium distinct from other art forms have not received enough attention. In considering how the meanings of gender and nation are constructed through visual representations, this study takes textual analysis as a basic methodology. The primary assumption of textual analysis, according to Stephen Heath, "is the will to treat films as texts, as units of discourse."[22] Nonetheless, to treat film as text entails multiple perspectives. Christian Metz, for instance, sees textual analysis as a means to explore the mesh of cinematic codes, images and sounds, and extra cinematic codes. For Jacques Derrida, textual analysis involves the practice of deconstruction, a process of "unpacking" texts to reveal the "unspoken premises while being alert to the discursive heterogeneity." For Roland Barthes, the concept emphasizes a distinction between work and text. The work he defines as a completed product that carries intended meanings, while the text refers to an imagined space where meanings arise from interactions between writing and reading. From a Bakhtinian perspective, textual analysis involves both text and context, where "the artistic text," as Robert Stam summarizes, "is not to represent real-life existents but rather to stage the conflicts through the coincidences and competitions of languages and discourses."[23]

Guided primarily but not exclusively by these analytical suggestions, my readings of six exemplary films demonstrate the textual process of producing cultural work. I take special interest in understanding how a visual language system participates in constructing the meaning of nation and gender. The essential elements of the visual medium include series of cinematic devices, elaborated with respect to cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, sound, and color. These are the areas where narrative meanings as well as semiotic structures can be articulated. Any presumption that film analysis can be adequately approached through the mere viewing of a film followed by interpretations of narrative meaning is simplistic.

Stanley Kwan's *Center Stage,* for instance, presents metanarratives complicated by a silent screen star's personal drama and the process of remaking her films and therefore connects history and representation. A deconstruction of the film's metastructure enables us to see the concept of history as an unfolding process of textualization. The use of Maggie Cheung, a contemporary Hong Kong star, to impersonate Ruan Lingyu, the star of early Chinese films, forges an intertextual connection. This casting

links past to present and postsocialist China to postcolonialist Hong Kong. Alternations between the original and the remake of the archival films show history reconstructed from fragments of a vanished past. Moreover, self-reflexive exposure to the filmmaking process, such as uncovering the shooting procedure or revealing the camera or the director, displays to the audience how cinema as an ideological and mechanical apparatus turns history into textual production or reproduction.

By way of contrast, Xie Jin's *Red Detachment* of *Women* exemplifies the norm of socialist aesthetics. A close reading of the film enables the audience to see how the ideology of national revolution transforms woman from an oppressed victim into a model proletarian. The film's characterization reproduces class conflicts between the exploiters and their victims, while the gender difference between male political mentors and female subalterns is masked. The matrix of transformation from oppressed female into revolutionary heroine requires that woman reject her sexual/gender identity and submit to a degendered, collective entity. The film's visual devices include extreme close-ups to centralize the heroes or heroines and montage editing to reinforce class conflict. Contrasts in lighting draw spatial divisions between land ruled by the oppressors or liberated by the communists.

In Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou,* the use of off-screen sound effects and a point-of-view structure unravels a social order that allows a husband to abuse a woman's body while his nephew possesses her body visually. The directorial designation of the mise-en-scène and closed film form illustrates a confined social system within which sexual desire can be practiced only through incestual transgressions. In Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine,* the spatial division between on-stage opera and off-stage realities juxtaposes the protagonists' life stories to fifty years of Chinese history. The metaphor of castration, the ritual practice of corporal punishment, and the use of costuming and makeup elaborate the gender identity of the female impersonator. In Hu Mei's *Army Nurse,* a first-person, voice-over narration in conjunction with a flashback structure conveys a female desire to assert a woman's voice against the dominant discourse of communist ideology. A female point of view insists on a woman's consciousness—to see as a desiring subject. In Huang Shuqin's *Human, Woman, Demon,* spatial transitions and interactions between stage opera and personal drama delineate the female protagonist's identity crisis. Here the use of conceptual montage reinforces a sense of crisis by arranging different images of an individual within a single frame.

In order to further examine gender and nation in cinematic representation, this study also stresses the conceptual distinction between narrative and narration. This distinction was underscored by Gerard Genette,

introduced to film studies by Seymour Chatman, and applied by Edward Branigan, among others. In his investigation into how meaning is produced in classical cinema, for instance, Branigan expounds his arguments about point of view and subjectivity through the contrast between narration and narrative. Narrative, according to Branigan, refers to what the film presents to us—that is, "what is told." Narration concerns how the film constructs its representation—that is, "the telling." The contrast between the told and the telling, then, is represented by a subjective point-of-view structure. Branigan further defines narration as a textual activity of giving and ordering a narrative. Subjectivity refers to "a specific instance or level of narration where the telling is attributed to a character in the narrative and received by us as if we were in the situation of a character."[24] In other words, narration and cinema become subjective when both the storytelling and the reader's perception are mediated through a film character's perspective and tailored by way of the director's point of view.

The process of narration, according to Branigan, brings together a number of textual systems. First, the establishment of an *origin,* occupied at times by either camera or character, marks the creation of a *space* from which representation is derived. Then, the *character* in the space transmits a vision (glance, sight, look, or gaze) from his/her point to an object to be revealed or represented. In addition, *time* links the units of the representation, and *frame* divides what is represented from what is not. The final element, *mind,* is a coherence of representation or intelligibility evident in the organization of the narrative.[25] As a result, the process of narration forms a subjectivity when all the textual elements are imposed on a character and transformed through the character's point of view. The character functions to lend coherence to the narrative and to the viewer's comprehension of meaning. Finally, the spectator's position with respect to space forges an identification with the character.

Yet another function of narration in the visual arts is the positioning of the viewer with respect to visual space. In other words, when the production of space is correlated with a character, a character point of view will control the telling and viewing of the story. Here the emphasis is on a dialectical relationship between narration and perception, or narrator and spectator. First, the establishment of space introduces a point of origin and invites the viewer's vision into the space from which narration derives. Second, the attribution of space in constructing a character point of view regulates the viewer's access to the diegetic world. Therefore, the spectator's absorption of the film, Branigan suggests, is the experience of being this character. In sum, character subjectivity, in relation to both the telling and

the viewing, constitutes a communication between the film world and the spectator's consciousness of that world.

Beyond the distinction between narrative and narration, the concept of enunciation functions as another productive instance in the process of a textual system. "The concept of enunciation refers . . . to the entire cinematic process, comprising both 'author' and 'spectator' in the desiring production of the text."[26] Addressing the spectator as the reading or viewing subject, the director's system of enunciation is first to design series of images in terms of various cinematic strategies. In order to maintain the film's power to fascinate the audience, the controller of enunciation (director and camera) will conceal itself in the operations of film production but leave the screen images to speak to the spectators' desires and invite their comprehension. In the apparent absence of authorship and a source of origin, the spectator will assume the position of subject of enunciation and conceive the cinematic signs as a representation of history or reality. Effacement of the markers of enunciation, as Christian Metz explains, is so "that the viewer may have the impression of being that subject himself, but an empty, absent subject, a pure capacity for seeing."[27]

The concept of enunciation, with certain modifications, helps to explain the encounter between the discourse of Chinese texts and the imagination of Western audiences. In the process of meaning production, commitment to representation and obsession with visuality have motivated many Chinese filmmakers to transform a national or cultural experience into cinematic images. The structuring of a cinematic world involves a subjective and socioculturally specific process. After distribution to the Western film market, however, the film becomes a discursive and visual text removed from its context of production and left for spectators' various interpretations. It is in the perception of the audience that meaning is constituted. An audience will, for instance, obtain impressions of China's modern history from cinematic images in Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine,* Zhang Yimou's *To Live,* or Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite*. The political clamoring on the sound track and the images of Red Guard violence are signs of the Cultural Revolution. Editing strategies that crosscut between different historical moments suggest the expanse of China's history. But when the signs function in the eyes of the audience only as the referents of "history," their implied meanings remain unrecognized. Decades of sociopolitical upheavals for Chinese people can be reduced to momentary spectacles of political violence shorn of connotation.

As a further example of the audience as the subject of enunciation, viewers might comprehend China's patriarchal oppression of women in a

compositional shot such as the one in Zhang Yimou's *Ju Dou* that shows the husband sitting astride his wife like an animal and abusing her. Seeing a woman in the foreground, a dynamic image in the film's production of meaning, the audience may experience a visual pleasure: the Asian woman as a heroine who "suffers so beautifully and sexually."[28] In addition, the male presence concealed from the screen in Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* or rendered sexually impotent in *Ju Dou* may be read by the audience in terms of political allegory—that is, how the power regime in China still dominates even though it is now impotent or old. The experience of interpreting meaning from non-Western cinematic texts positions the spectator as the subject of the production of film discourse. As a result, the spectator engages in an imaginary "I-you" relation with the film text. The production of a national cinema and its Western reception, in this "I-you" relation, might dissolve cultural specificity in the pleasure of the spectacle.

Nevertheless, a Western audience need not take an "I-you" stance with every Chinese film. When films such as Hu Mei's *Army Nurse* or Huang Shuqin's *Human, Woman, Demon* raise the possibility of a feminine language (not feminist yet) in film production, they do not have the appeal of spectacular films. When I screen these two movies in a film class on the subject of gender and representation, students receive them as examples of romance or B-level movies. Searching for an explanation to this reaction, I find that, on the one hand, a core representation of female experience apart from historical epics or spectacular scenarios denies the audience's desire for viewing pleasure. On the other hand, viewers have difficulty interpreting the films unless they are willing to bring a gender consciousness to bear. The system of enunciation thus stresses the construction of both a textual system and a viewing subject. It is through a reciprocal encounter—the film's power to fascinate the audience and the audience's expectation of familiar signs—that cinematic meaning is produced.

As a result, a framework of sociocultural context, a method of close textual analysis, a perspective of transnational feminism, and a consideration of film spectatorship make possible the analysis of the cinematic production of meaning. From these bases we are able to examine gender, nation, and representation in Chinese cinema from multiple points of view.