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**Cinema of Paradox:
The Individual and the Crowd in Jia Zhangke's Films**

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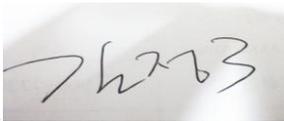
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to the department of Media and Communications**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

Signed.....

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Date.....10-Aug.-2016.....

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to understand Chinese film director Jia Zhangke with the concept of “paradox.” Challenging the existing discussions on Jia Zhangke, which have been mainly centered around an international filmmaker to represent Chinese national cinema or an auteur to construct realism in post-socialist China, I focus on how he deals with the individual and the crowd to read through his oeuvre as “paradox.” Based on film text analysis, my discussion develops in two parts: First, the emergence of the individual subject from his debut feature film *Xiao Wu* to *The World*; and second, the discovery of the crowd from *Still Life* to his later documentary works such as *Dong* and *Useless*.

The first part examines how the individual is differentiated from the crowd in Jia’s earlier films under the Chinese social transformation during the 1990s and 2000s. For his predecessors, the collective was central not only in so-called “leitmotif” (*zhuxuanli* or propaganda) films to enhance socialist ideology, but also in Fifth Generation films as “national allegory.” However, what Jia pays attention to is “I” rather than “We.” He focuses on the individual, marginal characters, and the local rather than the collective, heroes, and the national. As Deleuze points out that “paradox is opposed to doxa” (good sense or common sense), the individual in Jia’s earlier films constructs a paradox against the collective doxa in Chinese film history.

In the second part, the paradox is considered as a way for Jia’s filmmaking to address the crowd. Since his cinematic experiments in *Still Life* and *Dong*, he has developed his cinematic problematics around fiction/documentary, reality/fantasy, and

diegesis/non-diegesis by making a series of documentaries. In doing so, Jia discovers that there are people who live outside his films. Challenging traditional filmic conventions, he reflects on his own filmmaking and strives to film the people for whom he might not be able to speak. In this way, Jia questions how the film medium can represent the unrepresentable and where the filmmaker should be positioned between the camera and the subjects to be filmed.

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Introduction

This chapter briefly examines the existing literature on Jia Zhangke's films, and introduces the concepts and the theoretical framework required to rethink his works from the perspective of the relationship between the crowd and the individual. It aims to challenge the understanding of his films within the old concept of national cinema, and reconsider them through the framework of "cinema and the national" which Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (2006: 1-16) propose.

This approach of "cinema and the national" as an analytic framework is invented to consider "a range of questions and issues of the national as constructed and construed in different ways", since "the national in Chinese cinema cannot be studied adequately using the old national cinemas approach, which took the national for granted as something known" (2). As they argue, "within the framework of cinema and the national, the national appears as multiple constructed" (14). In this sense, the national which Jia's films construct, cannot be considered as fixed, given, or homogeneous, but as contested, mediated and negotiated. As an auteur in an age of transnational cinema, Jia Zhangke addresses the individual and the crowd in the ever-changing society of contemporary China, rather than the essential Chineseness that was discussed in the discourse of Chinese national cinema.

Here, the preference of "the crowd" is not only to avoid the preconceived notions of other terms such as mob, multitude, mass, people, and collectivity, but also to understand that "the crowd" is a transitional and historical concept as the Chinese socio-cultural context changes. Thus, the term "the crowd" has a wide spectrum of related

concepts including class, ethnicity, women, subaltern, and others as well as mob, multitude, mass, people, and collectivity.

In his early films, Jia pays great attention to the emergence of the individual subject. It is noteworthy that the individual subject appears in his films in the context of Chinese film history, because the collective subject has been highlighted not only in the films of socialist China after 1949, but also in early Chinese films during the colonial period before 1949. As Pang Laikwan (2002) argues, the 1930s Chinese left-wing cinema incorporates the collective subjectivity, which is mainly shown as the collective masculine subjectivity, in the name of building a new nation. (113-114) Collective subjectivity overwhelmed individual subjectivity in the logic of the priority of the collective to the individual in the 1930s Chinese left-wing cinema. The collective was more important than the individual. Since the establishment of PRC, the socialist Chinese cinema still had focused on the collective subjectivity to promote socialist ideology until the emergence of the 1990s so-called Sixth generation films.

Although the individual subject had been one of the most distinctive features in his earlier films like other Sixth generation films, Jia gradually turned his attention from the individual to the crowd in various ways in his later films after *The World* (2004). In other words, he expands his cinematic interest from himself to others, from his hometown to other places, and from the familiar to the unfamiliar. And, this tension of the relationship between these two seemingly opposite subjects becomes his own way of filmmaking in a paradoxical way. In this process, he explores how the cinema can intervene in the relationship between the individual and the crowd, the local and the global, the national and the transnational, the subjective and the objective, and the

representable and the unrepresentable. The paradox between the individual and the crowd is how he constructs the national in his films.

Jia Zhangke and Chinese Cinema Studies

Jia Zhangke might be one of the most popular filmmakers in current scholarship on Chinese film. Since his debut feature film, *Xiao Wu* (1997), he has constantly attracted critical acclaim both from the international film festival circuit and the academic field of Chinese cinema for the last two decades. Each of his new works since *Xiao Wu* has been welcomed and most won prizes in a number of international film festivals; perhaps the climax of this process being the Golden Lion awarded to his fifth feature film *Still Life* at the 2006 Venice international film festival. With this scale of success in international film festivals, Jia has gradually become a sort of representative of mainland Chinese cinema. As he has carved out his career as world-class filmmaker, accordingly, there has been a proliferation of studies on his works from various perspectives.

Most of these studies deal with Jia's films as texts that vividly describe Chinese reality, especially the negative aspects of contemporary Chinese society in the context of Chinese national cinema discourse. Discussions of his films can by and large be classified into three main categories.

First, Jia Zhangke and his films are discussed with the so-called Chinese Sixth Generation filmmakers who were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s and set out to develop their filmmaking careers in the 1990s. He is regarded as one of the most important filmmakers among the Sixth Generation filmmakers, and an exemplary case to confirm the generational discourse of Chinese cinema. In this respect, the most usual

discussions are the discourses of Chinese underground film and independent film, labels employed especially when their films are circulated around the international film festival circuit.¹

Jia's films clearly have the characteristics of independent film and underground film. He started his filmmaking career in the mode of independent filmmaking, and has never worked in the state-owned studio system. Since he had a good reputation in the international film festivals, he has worked in a transnational filmmaking mode, with access to foreign funding from diverse countries including France, Japan, and Korea. Although his recent feature films cannot be considered to be independent films, he still makes small budget films, which can be seen as a type of independent film, especially documentaries, such as *Dong* (2006), *Useless* (2007), and *Our Ten Years* (2007).

In addition, Jia is also involved in the underground filmmaking movement. His three early films, *Xiao Wu* (1997), *Platform* (2000), and *Unknown Pleasure* (2002), generally known as the 'Hometown Trilogy', were prohibited from screening in the domestic Chinese market. It was not until his fourth feature film, *The World* (2004), that he was able to show his films officially to the mainland Chinese audience. Although he has been released from the government's black list since *The World*, this does not mean that his films can be screened in China in any case. For example, his latest film, *A*

¹ This category of studies on Jia Zhangke are as mainly follows: Cui, Shuqin (2001) 'Working from the Margins: Urban Cinema and Independent Directors in Contemporary China,' *Post Script*, no. 20, pp. 77-92; Jaffee, Valerie (2004) 'Bringing the World to the Nation: Jia Zhangke and the Legitimization of Chinese Underground Film,' *Sense of Cinema*, no. 32; Liu, Jin (2006) 'The Rhetoric of Local Languages as the Marginal: Chinese Underground and Independent Films by Jia Zhangke and Others,' *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, no. 18, pp. 163-205; Ouyang Jianghe and Cui Weiping (eds.) (2007) *Zhoungguo duli dianying: Fangtanlu* (Chinese Independent Film: Interviews), Hong Kong: Oxford University Press; McGrath, Jason (2011) 'The Urban Generation: Underground and Independent Films from the PRC,' in Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (eds.) *The Chinese Cinema Book*, BFI, pp. 167-175.

Touch of Sin (2013), is banned inside China due to its treatment of sensitive subjects², despite having won the best screenplay award at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2013. In this sense, Jia is still never free from censorship as long as he deals with the subjects which the Chinese government disapproves of.

However, the discussions of Jia Zhangke relation to independent and underground film may have subsumed him into the discourse of generation, and easily generalize his works in the frame of the Sixth Generation filmmakers. With an overemphasis on the national specificity, especially on the political issues relating to censorship, Jia's films can hardly be understood as different in any significant way from the so-called Sixth Generation films or other political films. However, the Sixth Generation filmmakers have made a great variety of films which cannot be reduced into a single feature, and Jia is an individual filmmaker who makes films in his own way, producing films that are different from those of others.

Second, one of the most established discourses on Jia Zhangke's films comprises discussions of the aesthetics of his films, and this is also related to the Sixth Generation discourse to a great extent. It is discourse of realism that is regarded as one of the common characteristics of the so-called Sixth Generation filmmakers. In this respect, "on-the-spot realism (jishizhuyi)" is considered as a key to understand the aesthetics of

² Although Jia's films have been officially released in China since *The World* (2004), his earlier works have never been allowed to be screened in public cinemas. *A Touch of Sin* has been denied an official release permit in China, despite Jia and Shanghai Film Studio having worked closely with official censors from the beginning. In May 2013, it was announced that *A Touch of Sin* had been cleared for release in mainland China, and the film had not been cleared by censors by the end of 2013. It was reported that the Central Propaganda Department (Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuan bu) instructed media not to conduct interviews, reports and comments on the film. *A Touch of Sin*, based on true stories, depicts the stories of four people who are driven to violence by the pressure of injustice and indifference. Each episode includes a coal miner who struggles with corrupt officials and businessmen; a drifter who returns home and ends up shooting a woman coming out of a bank to take her purse; a female sauna employee who kills a client after an outburst of emotion when he forces himself on her; a teenage factory worker who suffers a series of crushing disappointments with tragic results.

the Sixth Generation filmmakers including Jia Zhangke. Different from the old socialist realism, it represents the so-called post-socialist reality of 1990s Chinese society. Thus, on-the-spot realism is considered not only to characterize but also to privilege the Sixth Generation films. These types of studies³ underline the importance of understanding how Jia utilizes the elements of documentary styles, such as the local dialect of the shooting location, the employment of amateur actors/actresses, and long take shots to preserve real time. Most of these studies are based on elaborate text analyses, and focus on the relationship between particular elements of his films and the post-socialist reality of China.

Although these approaches to Jia's films are credible and important, they achieve little more than interpreting how well his films represent contemporary Chinese society. In this regard, his films cannot be distinguished from those of other Sixth Generation filmmakers. Moreover, the on-the-spot realism discourse on his films is not suitable for his later films, which show various experiments between reality and fantasy, fiction and truth. Thus, this discourse cannot offer conceptual coherence to the idea of Jia Zhangke as an auteur, even though it is very useful for understanding his early films. The emphasis on the on-the-spot realism in Jia's films results in the conclusion that his films

³ See Berry, Michael (2005) 'Jia Zhangke: Capturing a Transforming Reality,' in Berry Michael (ed.) *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 182-207; Wang, Ban (2007) 'Epic Narrative, Authenticity, and the Memory of Realism: Reflections on Jia Zhangke's Platform,' in Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang (eds.) *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 193-216; Berry, Chris (2008) 'Xiao Wu: Watching Time Go By,' in Chris Berry (ed.) *Chinese Films in Focus II*, London: BFI, pp. 250-257; Lu, Tonglin (2008) 'Fantasy and Reality of a Virtual China in Jia Zhangke's Film *The World*,' *Journal of Chinese Cinema* 2: 3, pp. 163-179; Cheung, Esther M. K. (2010) 'Realism with Conundrum: The Personal and Authentic Appeal in Jia Zhangke's Accented Films,' *China Perspectives*, issue 81, pp. 11-22; Byrnes, Corey (2012) 'Specters of Realism and the Painter's Gaze in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*,' *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 24, pp. 52-93; Zhu, Ping (2013) 'The Sincere Gaze: Art and Realism in Jia Zhangke's Films,' *Chinese Literature Today*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 88-94.

represent the typical aesthetics of 1990s Chinese cinema, rather than accomplishing a distinctive cinematic aesthetics of his own.

Third, there are some discussions of Jia's films which focus on the fact that they are situated in the contemporary transnational environment.⁴ This approach examines how Jia confronts the impact of rapid globalization in his films since *The World*. While the two categories of studies discussed above are related to the common characteristics that Jia's films share with the Sixth Generation films or other 1990s Chinese cinema, this category underlines Jia Zhangke as a transnational auteur and highlight the particular features of his films. In general, the former mainly discusses Jia's early films, while the latter focuses on his later films. Works in this category often employ cultural studies and social science approaches to understand Jia's films that relate to social issues, such as migrant workers and environmental problems.

However, this approach tends to discuss such topics as the ways in which Jia describes social changes after China joined the WTO in 2001 or his films represent the Chinese people under neoliberalism in the age of globalization. In other words, they pay attention to the impact of globalization reflected in Jia's films rather than the changes in his films and filmmaking. In fact, globalization affects not simply what Jia represents in his films but also the way in which he makes his films. In his later films, Jia shows that

⁴ See Lu, Tonglin (2003) 'Music and Noise: Independent Film and Globalization,' *The China Review*, no. 3, vol. 1, pp. 57-76; McGrath, Jason (2007) 'The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic,' in Zhang Zhen (ed.) *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 81-114; Zhang, Hongbing (2009) 'Ruins and Grassroots: Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Discontents in the Age of Globalization,' in Shelon Lu and Jiayan Mi (eds.) *Chinese Ecocinema: In the Age of Environmental Challenge*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, pp. 129-153; Bordeleau, Erik (2010) 'The World without Future: Stage as Entrapment in Jia Zhangke's Film,' *The China Review*, vol. 10, no. 2. pp. 155-176; Wagner, Keith B. (2013) 'Jia Zhangke's Neoliberal China: The Commodification and Dissipation of the Proletarian in *The World* (Shijie, 2004), *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 361-377.

he expands his cinematic interests beyond Fenyang, the hometown that framed the geographical world of his early films, and also beyond cinema as a medium through which he faces the world.

An Auteur in an Age of Transnational Cinema

Although Jia Zhagngke is circulated as an icon of Chinese national cinema both in the contemporary international film festival circuit, and in the academic field of Chinese studies, his filmmaking has gradually moved into the transnational cinema environment under conditions of globalization. As the cinematic interest seen in his later films expands from the local to the national and the global, it becomes difficult to simply explain his films in terms of locality in highlighting particular cinematic locations, or in terms of national specificity to represent Chinese national cinema. The local cannot be excluded from the national, and nor can the national be excluded from the global in the age of sweeping globalization. As China exists in the context of globalization, the global already exists inside China. For instance, in *The World*, Fenyang as the local is connected to Beijing as the national, and Beijing is associated with Ulan Bator and Paris as the global. In a similar vein, the small village of Fengjie near the Three Gorge Dam area in *Dong* coincides with Bangkok in Thailand, while Fenyang, Guangzhou, and Paris are correlated with one another in *Useless*.

In this regard, it is no longer valid to understand Jia's films only within the framework of Chinese national cinema. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (1991) suggests that it is necessary to rethink the notion of national cinema and authorship in the context of the new transnational condition and the changes in Cinema Studies.

Writing about national cinemas used to be an easy task: Film critics believed all they had to do was to construct a linear historical narrative describing a development of a cinema within a particular national boundary whose unity and coherence seemed to be beyond all doubt. Yet, this apparent obviousness of national cinema scholarship is now in great danger, since, on the one hand, we are no longer so sure about the coherence of the nation-state and, on the other hand, the idea of history has also become far from self-evident. As the question of authorship in the cinema was reproblematicized by poststructuralist film theory, the notion of national cinema has been similarly put to an intense, critical scrutiny (242).

As Yoshimoto states, the old approach to national cinema needs to be reexamined in the contemporary transnational context. As the production, distribution, and consumption of cinema beyond particular national borders have accelerated, the notion of national cinemas based on the notion of national boundaries has been cast into doubt. Hardt and Negri (2003) argue that “the concept of Empire is characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries” (xiv). Empire, which is what they call the new global form of sovereignty, establishes no territorial center of power and accepts no boundaries and limits. It is “a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open expanding frontiers” (xii). Given their argument, it seems that any kind of contemporary cinema already enters into the context of transnational cinema.

In this respect, Sheldon H. Lu, in his book *Transnational Chinese Cinemas* (1997), argues that “it seems that Chinese national cinema can only be understood in its

properly transnational context” (3). Using the concept of transnational Chinese cinemas, he traces how the cinema in China has developed within a transnational context. Given that most of the world received cinema through the foreign countries in the late nineteenth century, Chinese cinema was deeply influenced by foreign films from the countries which colonized Shanghai at that time. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Chinese cinemas have been divided into mainland Chinese cinema, Taiwanese cinema, Hong Kong cinema, and diasporic Chinese cinema. More recently, Chinese cinemas have participated more in the flow of globalization through the co-production with Hollywood, European, and other Asian cinema. In this historical and current context, Lu points out that Chinese cinemas have always operated in the frame of transnational cinema, and further argues that “the study of national cinema must then transform into transnational film studies” (25).

If so, how can we understand an auteur in an age of transnational cinema? What does it mean to consider an auteur and auteurism beyond national boundaries? How different is it from auteurism concerned with national cinema? In order to identify the transnational auteur, it is necessary to examine first how auteurism has been established in relation to the discourse of national cinema.

Andrew Higson (2002) points out that the concept of national cinema in general can be summarized into four categories. First, there is an economic approach to the relationship between national cinema and the domestic film industry. This approach is “concerned with such questions as: Where are these films made, and by whom? Who owns and controls the industrial infrastructures, the production companies, the distributors and the exhibition circuit?” Second, there is a text-based approach to national cinema. The key questions are like these: “What are these films about? Do they

share a common style or world view?" Third, there is an exhibition-led or consumption-based approach to national cinema. The major concern of this approach is which films audiences are watching. Fourth, there is a criticism-led approach to national cinema. This approach is concerned with the so-called art cinema, which is usually circulated in international film festivals and art house circuits. In other words, this approach "tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema, a culturally worthy cinema steeped in the high-cultural and/or modernist heritage of a particular nation-state" (52-53).

According to Higson's classification, auteur or auteurism has been closely concerned with the discourse of national cinema, as the approach to national cinema in the fourth category shows that a particular group of national cinemas has been labeled and circulated as art cinema within the international film circuit. In fact, this process of naming particular national cinemas as art cinema is related to the attempts to establish and identify the imaginary coherence of a national cinema against the domination of Hollywood cinema. As Steve Neale (1981) argues, art cinema has played a central role "in the attempts made by a number of European countries both to counter American domination of their indigenous markets in film and also to foster a film industry and a film culture of their own" (11). Thus, the discourses of art, culture, and national cinema have been historically constructed more against Hollywood's mass entertainment film and aimed to justify nationally specific systems of support and protection rather than to explore which national cinema intrinsically could be regarded as art cinema.

This raises further questions about the relationship between art cinema and national cinema. Screening art cinema at the international film festivals implies that it is an instance of the peculiarity of national cinema production within the international film

market. As the market for art cinema is clearly international, the discourses of art cinema are also achieved in the network of international film festivals. In this respect, national cinema called art cinema into being, at the same time, art cinema is extrinsic to national cinema. Likewise, given the increasing tendency of international co-productions, it is not proper to consider a national cinema as art cinema by underscoring its specific production within a particular nation-state. As the significance of national cinema wanes, art cinema is coming to be reconsidered through the individual auteur. Thus, the question of art cinema and national cinema moves towards how the auteur and auteurism can be understood in the transnational context.

Examining how European art cinema is formed as an institution, Neale further argues that the name of the auteur appeared in the postwar period to “function as a ‘brand name,’ a means of labeling and selling a film and of orienting expectation and channeling meaning and pleasure in the absence of generic boundaries and categories” (33). In other words, his research explores a shift in the postwar period from a modernist conceptualization of authorship as the exertion of self-expressive art related to national cinema towards a post-modernist authorship which functions beyond particular boundaries and categories. This post-modernist authorship includes the appropriative strategies, competences and pleasures of audiences in the transnational context.

Timothy Corrigan (1991) in his article ‘The Commerce of Auteurism’ investigates the growing importance of auteurism from the 1970s to 1990. He argues that “a commerce of auteurism is especially critical in keeping pace with the auteur as a practical and interpretative category” during this period when “the play of commerce has increasingly assimilated the action of enunciation and expression” (104). He

considers contemporary auteurism “as a commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur” (103). For him, contemporary auteurism fundamentally constitutes a form of film consumption rather than the viewing of film text itself. Citing Meaghan Morris’s statement that “the primary modes of film and auteur packaging are advertising, review snippeting, trailers, magazine profiles – always already in appropriation as the precondition, and not the postproduction of meaning,” he argues that an auteur film seems to be “capable of being understood and consumed without being seen” (104). Thus, the contemporary auteur status is primarily a commercial status, and it functions as a commercial strategy. For the audience, as Corrigan points out, this could be the pleasure of engaging in various texts surrounding a film without its traditional authorities and mystifications (136).

Scrutinizing this current tendency in the consumption of art cinema and the commerce of auteurism, Catherine Grant (2000) discusses how we can understand the contemporary auteur and the potential deterritorialization of auteurism in the transnational context. She points out that many national cinemas beyond Europe appeared as auteurist cinemas just like European cinema in the postwar period (104). Grant, whose primary research area is on the cinemas of Latin America, argues that the so-called “Third Cinema” has been discussed in the frame of auteurist cinema since two Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino published their article ‘Toward a Third Cinema’ in 1969⁵. Citing Patricio Guzmán’s three-part documentary *The Battle of Chile* as an example, she notes that “the films in the late 1960s and early

⁵ Solanas and Getino regard the dominant model of filmmaking and distribution by Hollywood film industry as “First Cinema” and the European art cinema as “Second Cinema,” while “Third Cinema” belongs to neither of them, but to the films under particular conditions of collective authorship and distributed through noncommercial, especially underground networks.

1970s under Third Cinema and similar banners have long since been swallowed up by much the same system as that which co-opted the auteurist Second Cinema” (104). In the name of “Third Cinema,” this process was also applied to national cinemas from many other regions such as Asia and Africa.

However, under the inexorable globalization of 1980s and 1990s, auteurism enters upon a new phase of commercial auteurism practice. Confronting the marketing of their films, filmmakers allowed themselves to be interviewed and profiled in the international media to secure multinational coproduction and international funding. It is necessary for them to work in the system of the transnational film project, and dramatize themselves commercially to sell their films to international audiences. In this regard, Catherine Grant (2000) pays attention to Corrigan’s argument that there is “increasing autonomy of contemporary auteurist consumption from the auteurist film text itself” (106). She considers that it is the resistant “demand-side” appeal of auteurism that is required to see contemporary auteurism rather than the existing “supply-side” trends. Thus, with the impact of Cultural Studies on Films Studies, it is inevitable in the discourse of auteurism to commit audience studies mainly centered around cinephile cultures (106). This stance of Grant to focus on audience studies goes along with Andrew Higson’s statement on the future of national cinema studies. Accepting the difficulties of defining national cinemas in the current transnational context, Higson (2002) argues that “to explore national cinema... means laying much greater stress on the point of consumption, and on the use of film (sounds, images, narratives, fantasies), than on the point of production” (65). For him, studies of national cinemas need to move from the text-based approach towards the audience-centered approach.

However, Grant and Higson's points of view only take account of the fact that the status of the auteur and of national cinemas changes in the transnational context. They do not consider the degree to which the film text itself also changes when the auteur engages in the new environment of transnational cinema. Even though the concept of national boundaries rapidly declines under the new globalization regime, cinema cannot be understood without reference to the national, because cinema has relation to the national in any manner. Cinema eventually constructs the national, and the national affects cinema.

In case of Jia Zhangke⁶, auteurism in fact has usually functioned as a label to circulate his films as Chinese national cinema or art cinema consumed in the international film festival circuits. When it is taken for granted, the attempt to study Jia Zhangke's films tends to focus on the relationship between the film text and its context. Thus, it will be more productive to explore how his films engage in the national that is ever being constructed, negotiated, and contested rather than to understand him as an auteur in the traditional sense. In other words, auteurism in the age of transnational cinema needs to be considered in the frame of cinema and the national.

⁶ While Chinese cinema studies tended to focus on the national specificity of Chinese cinema as one of national cinema studies in the past, there appear an increasing number studies of Chinese auteurs in the transnational context. These studies include both commercial filmmakers and art-house filmmakers from Stephen Chow, Feng Xiaogang, Johnnie To to Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-Liang as well as Jia Zhangke. See Chen, Wanbao (2005) *Wo shi yige yanyuan: zhou xingchi wenhua jiedu* (I am a actor: Reading Stephen Chow Culture), Guangzhou: Nanfang ribao chubanshe; Teo, Stephen (2007), *Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film*, Hong Kong University Press; Zhang, Rui (2008), *The Cinema of Feng Xiaogang: Commercialization and Censorship in Chinese Cinema After 1989*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; Suchenski, Richard I. (2014), *Hou Hsiao-hsien*, Vienna: Austrian Film Museum; Lim, Song Hwee (2014), *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press; Berry, Michael (2009), *Xiao Wu, Platform, Unkown Pleasure: Jia Zhangke's Hometown Trilogy*, London: BFI.

Addressing the National

In the past time, it might have been possible to make a list of elements to compose something called Chinese national culture or Chinese tradition, or even some characteristics to constitute “Chineseness.” Then, we could have been able to see how these things were reflected or represented in Chinese cinema as a unified and coherent Chinese national identity with corresponding Chinese cinematic conventions. This would constitute a national cinema. However, in the age of globalization, it is obvious that the national cinemas approach with its premise of distinct national cultures is no longer compelling. In case of Chinese cinema, it is more palpable. China accommodates a great number of spoken languages, minority nationalities, and religious affiliations. Moreover, Chinese cinemas consist of mainland Chinese cinema, Taiwanese cinema, Hong Kong cinema, and diasporic Chinese cinema which are distinct from one another in terms of the historical and cultural contexts. It is thus more apparent that it cannot be valid to study Chinese cinemas with national cinemas approach.

Then, what does national cinema mean in this new environment of transnational cinema? Or how can we rethink national cinema in terms of contemporary auteurism? Paul Willemen (1994) in his article ‘The National’ argues that the issue of national cinema is a question of address as follows:

A cinema addressing national specificity will be anti- or at least non-nationalistic, since the more it is complicit with nationalism’s homogenising project, the less it will be able to engage critically with the complex, multidimensional and multidirectional tensions that characterise and shape a social formation’s cultural

configurations. ... It is the only cinema that consciously and directly works with and addresses the materials at work within the national cultural constellation. The issue of national cinema is then primarily a question of address, rather than a matter of the filmmakers' citizenship or even of the production finance's country of origin (212).

As Willemen points out, national cinema can neither be characterized as national specificity nor reduced into the production of a certain territorial nation-state. Rather, it can be considered as constructed, projected, and performed through addressing the national. The aim of national cinema studies thus is not to define what national identity is through the examination of cinema, but to explore how cinema addresses, negotiates, and constructs the national.

Cinema never simply reflects or represents an already formed and homogeneous national identity which is easily assumed as the undeniable characteristics of all national subjects. Cinema rather functions as an agency to intervene in the national, and the national appears as multiple and constructed within the framework of cinema and the national. In this sense, it is not proper to understand Jia Zhangke's film as a good example to show Chinese specificity, because his nationality is Chinese, and his filmmaking is mainly based on China. Instead, it could be more productive and significant to explore how his films address the national.

The Crowd

Lu Xun is one of the most significant figures of modern Chinese literature. Among a number of Lu Xun's writings, it might be one of the best known that his decision to engage in literature is originated from his experience that he had years earlier in Japan, which became the impetus for him to abandon a career in medicine in favor of literature. He writes it in the face of his first collection of short stories:

I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach microbiology, but at that time lantern slides were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a public demonstration, while the Chinese beside him had come to appreciate this spectacular event. (Lu Hsun, 1960: 2-3)

After seeing this lantern slide, he decided to begin his career in literature, because he felt that the practice of medicine was nothing urgent to begin with, and the most important thing was to reform the spirit of Chinese people through literature.

This decapitation scene in Lu Xun's episode has been considered by many Chinese literature scholars as the "primal scene" of modern Chinese literary creation. For David Der-wei Wang (2004), this scene signifies that the formation of modern Chinese literature began with an image of violence. Thus a great number of questions in terms of modernity, literature, and history arise from this traumatic scene. Paying attention to the combination between the beheading and the new, technologized visuality, Rey Chow (1995) considers this scene the modernist shock between "visuality and power, a relationship that is critical in the postcolonial non-West and that is made unavoidable by the new medium of film (6).

Although Wang and Chow provide insightful interpretations about this scene respectively, if this scene is considered as the primal scene of modern China, then it is the crowd that is central to this primal scene, because what was really striking to Lu Xun, as he writes, is the Chinese people who were apathetic when a Chinese spy was beheaded. The crowd was an image of the national to him. In other words, it is through making the crowd visible in the film that Lu Xun achieved his self-consciousness of the national.

In his book *The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind* (2001), Gustav Le Bon claims that "the age we are about to enter will in truth be the ERA OF CROWDS" (x). It is a coincidence that cinema was also invented when Le Bon first wrote this book in 1895. Since then, crowd and cinema indeed has been dominant in the century, and it might be impossible to explain contemporary modernity without these two modern concepts. And, these two has been closely related each other. Crowd has been constructed visibly in cinema, and cinema has been tempted to crowd.

Part 1: Rethinking Chinese National Cinema

Chapter 1

Literature Review:

National Cinema and Collective Subjectivity

In this chapter, I intend to examine how Chinese national cinema has been discussed in the existing Chinese film studies, and why the concept of national cinema is no longer valid to understand contemporary Chinese cinema under the conditions of transnational film production. In so doing, instead of the conceptual terms such as “Chinese national cinema,” “transnational Chinese cinema,” “Chinese-language film,” and “cinema and the national,” I propose that the framework of “the individual and the crowd” might be an alternative approach to understand the individual who has emerged in contemporary Chinese cinema since the 1990s, especially in Jia Zhangke’s films. The preference of “the crowd” over “the national” is not only for avoiding the homogeneity which the term “the national” could imply, but also for understanding that “the crowd” is an ever-changing historical concept as “cultural specificity” according to the Chinese socio-cultural context. Hence, the term “the crowd” could have a wide spectrum from women, people, and nation to class, multitude, and subaltern. In order to understand “the crowd” in Chinese context, this chapter critically reviews the discourses of individualism and collectivism since the early modern era. Furthermore,

with the consideration of historical collectivism in China, I demonstrate how the individual appears in contemporary Chinese cinema after the 1990s.

What dose “national” mean in Chinese cinema?

Writing about “Chinese cinema” necessarily entails some problematics of its definition and instability relating to the discourses of Chinese national/transnational cinema. First of all, I would begin to examine how to understand the concept of Chinese national cinema which was easily taken for granted in the previous Chinese film studies. The concept of national cinema has somewhat different references between the Western and Chinese contexts. In the Western scholarship, national cinema⁷, albeit “there is no single universally accepted discourse” (Higson, 1989: 36), has been generally used to describe the films produced within a particular nation-state boundary, and its domestic production has been defined against the domination of Hollywood cinema in most world film markets since as early as 1919 (Crofts 2002: 26). Thus, Western European cinemas such as French, Italian, German and British cinema as national cinemas were advocated with their national specificities and differences to compete against the Hollywood cinema which had made scientific and technological development since the 1920s and 1930s. As Susan Hayward (1993) illustrates, for French cinema, “by the

⁷ Andrew Higson (1989) lists the most frequent four approaches to national cinema as follows: The first one refers to the domestic film industry including the production companies, the distributors and the exhibition circuit, which is concerned with the question of where these films are made and by whom. The second one is a text-based approach with the question of what these films are about and what sort of projections of the national character they offer. The third one is the possibility of an exhibition-led or consumption-based approach with the question of which films audiences are watching. The last one is a criticism-led approach which tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality of art cinema in the high-cultural and modernist heritage of a particular nation-state. pp. 36-37.

1920s, calls were being made for a truly national cinema as a defense against American hegemony, all of which (in the implicit concern for the well-being of cinema) points to a historicism and narcissism of sorts” (5). In a similar vein, describing the onslaught of Hollywood cinema in German film market during the Weimar period, Saunders (1994) claims “the national cinema had limited historical significance without reference to American film ... Historical concern for national identity testifies to the tenacity of perceptions rooted in the 1920s – recognition of American’s thematic and stylistic primacy but rebellion against its hegemonic pretensions” (10). Thus, from the early 1920s national cinemas in Western Europe have sought to show “differences of taste and culture” between Hollywood and Europe (243). Although each national cinema has taken different strategies against Hollywood⁸, the concept of national cinema in Western Europe basically has been constructed through the historical conditions of Hollywood’s domination in the world film market.

The concept of national cinema in China has different aspects from the European one. According to historical and political contexts, the discourse on Chinese national cinema could be generally divided into three periodical parts: pre-1949 cinema, post-1949 cinema during Mao era, and the so-called New Chinese cinema after the 1980s. In understanding Chinese national cinema before 1949, it is indispensable to examine the Chinese historical conditions of national crisis in early twentieth century. Unlike the European modern nations that emerged from the late eighteenth century, China did not build a modern nation-state until the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 which proclaimed the

⁸ Martine Danan’s article “From a ‘Prenational’ to a ‘Postnational’ French Cinema” (1996) would be one of good examples about the strategic change of French national cinema. In her article, she illustrates how French film companies adopted a “fantasy of internationalism” strategy to compete against Hollywood and appeal European and even American audiences in the 1920s and 1980s.

transformation of China from the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China as a modern nation-state. However, even after 1911, China had been in turmoil due to the inner conflict between the Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang, or KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP), and the invasion by the Western imperial countries and Japan. Under these circumstances, it was nationalism that functioned as a banner to accomplish the double task of anti-imperialism and nation building. Although the KMT and the CCP had different stances to Chinese nationalism⁹, as Hu Jubin observes (2003) the advocacy of nationalism was a key strategy to both of them in their political struggle. “Both parties sought to win the masses to their side in the name of the nation.” (15) With this socio-political milieu, filmmaking was considered as an important tool for the Chinese nation and nationalism. The intellectuals and filmmakers, whether they were on either side of the KMT or the CCP, argued that film could be the best tool to educate people, thus it should be responsible for encouraging national spirit to save the Chinese nation. In other words, as Hu Jubin argues (2003), “the major concern of advocates of a Chinese national cinema was the Chinese nation, rather than Chinese cinema per se.” (17) Consequently, the concept of national cinema in pre-1949 Chinese cinema was closely connected with Chinese nationalism which is different from European concept of a defense against a massive invasion of Hollywood cinema.

One of the most noteworthy characteristics in post-1949 Chinese cinema is “race-

⁹ Hu Jubin (2003) classifies nationalism of pre-1949 Chinese national cinema according to periodical phases as follows: cultural awareness (pre-1920s), industrial nationalism (the 1920s), class nationalism versus traditionalist nationalism (1931-1936), colonial and anti-colonial nationalism (1937-1945), and nationalism and modernization (1946-1949). Among them, the class nationalism versus traditionalist nationalism part shows how differently two parties appropriated nationalism for filmmaking. The former considered nationalism as the class struggle to serve the Chinese nation, the latter tried to understand nationalism in relation to Confucian values of Chinese tradition. This difference appeared in Chinese films of the 1930s through the Left-wing Film Movement and the National Film Movement supported respectively by the CCP and the KMT. pp. 24-28.

ization” (*minzuhua*) as sinicization or sinification, which is a politically motivated and manipulated process of cultural production for a unified discourse of the Chinese nation. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (the PRC), as Chris Berry (1992) observes, the Chinese term “*minzu*”, which he translates as “race” in English despite its problematics¹⁰, appeared in literature and art criticism in various combinations such as “race characteristics” (*minzu tedian*), “race form” (*minzu xingshi*), “race color” (*minzu fengge*), and “race-ization”. These terms all were used as criteria for praising works of arts and literature, and applied almost automatically to the great majority of esteemed works. (47) However, what is important is that “race” here refers to the Han Chinese majority group. Although there are fifty five ethnic minorities in China, the term “race” only belongs to the Han Chinese except for the cases that needs clarification to avoid confusion like “racial minorities” (*shaoshu minzu*). Identifying this tendency with sinocentrism, Berry prefers to call it “race-centrism.” (47) This “race-centrism” is naturally reduced to “Han-centrism” because “race” (i.e. the Han Chinese) in Chinese usage overlaps with “nation” and “China.”

In this sense, the deployment of “race” or “race characteristics” in film production functions to constitute a coherent and positive nationhood and national identity with “Han-centrism.” Although “racial minorities” have had a much larger presence on Chinese screen since 1949¹¹, they are represented “as uncultured, undeveloped, and

¹⁰ On the translation of “*minzu*” into English, Yingjin Zhang objects to the equation of “*minzu*” with “race”, and prefers “ethnicity” over “race” in the field of Chinese studies, because on the one hand “race” might obscure the difference between “race” and “ethnicity”, on the other hand, it could conflate the state discourse, which upholds the Han Chinese cultural hegemony over fifty five ethnic minorities. For more details of discussions about “*minzu*”, see Chris Berry (1992) ‘Race: Chinese Film and the Politics of Nationalism’ and Yingjin Zhang (1997) ‘From “Minority Film” to “Minority Discourse”: Question of Nationhood and Ethnicity in Chinese Cinema.’

¹¹ Minority film was gradually instituted as a kind of genre in the late 1950s. About twenty minority films were produced in the 1950s. About twenty more minority films were made in a

dependent on Han leadership and learning, for which they are also grateful.” (52) Paul Clark (1987) argues “films that purported to show the way of life of these minority peoples, and their enthusiasm for socialism, contributed to the policy of national integration.” (96) With close reading of several minority films including *Serfs* (*Nongnu*, 1963), *Ashima* (*Ashima*, 1964), and *Five Golden Flowers* (*Wuduo jinhua*, 1959), he explains that the importance of minority films was concerned with the search for the exotic in a foreign setting as well as the depiction about class struggle and the liberation of the oppressed minorities by People’s Liberation Army (PLA). The minority peoples in these films are exotic, colorful, and skilled at singing and dancing, and often appear as “happy smiling naives, more prone to drop axe and bow and burst into song than to take up arms against oppressors.” (99) While filmed with various cultures of ethnic minorities, the results of the films “tend toward a homogenization of minorities culture” and do not allow “much differentiation among non-Han ethnic groups.” (99) In terms of “race characteristics” or “race color,” these minority films were praised as exemplary works in post-1949 Chinese cinema. Thus, as Clark points out, ironically “one of the most effective ways to make films with ‘Chinese’ style was to go to the most ‘foreign’ cultural areas in the nation.” (101)

In a similar vein, Yingjin Zhang (1997) argues that filming the “alien” and “exotic” minorities in post-1949 Chinese cinema was not a restoration of minority cultures to majority status, but “a legitimation of minority peoples as part of the ‘solidarity’ of the Chinese nation.” In other words, minority films functioned as “exotica” for the film audiences, who are assumed to be the Han people, and “the nation-state objectified minority peoples through stereotypes and co-opted them in the construction of a

four-year period of the early 1960s. See Chen Huangmei, *Dangdai Zhongguo dianying 1* (*Contemporary Chinese Cinema*), pp. 154-55, 263-69.

socialist China.” (79-80) For instance, in *Five Golden Flowers* (*Wuduo jinhua*, 1959) minority people are stereotypically presented as fond of song and dance, staged as an exotic spectacle for the Han viewers, and figured as “model workers” participating in the construction of socialist nation-state. From a Han-centered viewing position visually as well as conceptually, the film displays “solidarity” to identify ethnic minorities with the Han Chinese. Likewise, in *Third Sister Liu* (*Liu sanjie*, 1960), “the Zhuang people are represented as being ‘identical’ with the Han in that both were oppressed by landlords and both must be united in order to overcome their class enemy.” (80) As Zhang points out, minority people hardly occupy the subject position in the films. They are directed to pay their respect to the Han-centered nation-state, and subsumed into homogeneous and united national identity. (80) This process of “Han-centrism” as Chinese nationalism might be similar with the constitution of Indian nationalism to identify the nation with Hinduism by externalizing Muslim and other social groups¹². In post-1949 Chinese cinema, it is the objectification of minorities that constructs Chinese nationalism of the Han Chinese majority, the formulation of the Chinese nation itself. Consequently, minority films have in effect functions a kind of “internal colonialism” or “internal orientalism” to establish Chinese national cinema with Han cultural hegemony.

Although there have still existed minority films and the emphasis of “race” and “race-characteristics” with Han-centrism in “New Chinese Cinema” after the 1980s¹³, the concept of Chinese national cinema has been discussed in another context of the relationship between China and the West. It was since the mid-1980s that Chinese

¹² For more details, see Partha Chatterjee (1993), *The Nation and Its Fragments*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. Especially, chapter 5 of Histories and Nation discusses how “Indian nationalism” is historically constructed as “Hindu nationalism.”

¹³ See Chris Berry (1992) ‘Race: Chinese Film and the Politics of Nationalism’ pp. 51-56 and Yingjin Zhang (1997) ‘From “Minority Film” to “Minority Discourse”’: Questions of Nationhood and Ethnicity in Chinese Cinema,’ pp. 81-85.

cinema has been circulated and studied as an academic subject in the West¹⁴. As Yingjin Zhang (2002) illustrates, a couple of events in the mid-1980s decisively contributed to the rise of Chinese cinema studies. First, it was a significant that on April 12, 1985, Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*) was screened at Hong Kong International Film Festival. Tony Rayns (1989) recalls that "the screening was received with something like collective rapture, and the post-film discussion stretched long past its time limit." (1) After high acclaim of Hong Kong audience including many Westerners, *Yellow Earth* was circulated in other international film festivals such as Hawaii, Edinburgh and Locarno. This international success of *Yellow Earth* "greatly stimulated public interest from the West and helped push China to the center stage of world cinema." (Zhang 2002: 43) Second, as Zhang mentions, there were "legendary" seminars led by Chinese film scholars Cheng Jihua and Chen Mei in the fall of 1983 and spring of 1986 at University of California (UCLA). As a result, their seminars triggered a lecture series on Chinese cinema by American film scholars, and played a crucial role as a catalyst for Chinese cinema to rapidly enter into the legitimate curriculum of the Western academia. (44) Another condition of Chinese cinema during the late 1980s was that Western film scholars felt called upon to play a role of championing new Chinese films. They had a sort of responsibility of the struggle, taking the Chinese director's side, against the repressive forces of the Chinese government. In this respect, international film festivals have become a kind of harbor for Chinese cinema to escape the censorship of the Chinese government. Given these circumstances, the political support of the West has partly contributed big success of Chinese cinema during the late 1980s (Rothman 1993:

¹⁴ Even though there are a few pioneering works such as Régis Bergeron's *Le cinéma Chinois, 1905-1949* and Jay Leida's *Dianying/Electronic Shadow*, "in general, the pre-1980 Western publications on Chinese cinema are of informational (or descriptive) rather than academic (or critical) nature.", Yingjin Zhang (2002), *Screening China*, p. 51.

259).

In these circumstances, developed as a blooming field through the number and quality of books and articles, Chinese cinema since the 1980s has been labeled as “New Chinese Cinema” by Western critics and academic scholars. Given the fact that Chinese domestic film critics prefer to call them “the Fifth Generation Film” which imply the historical continuity of Chinese cinema, the term “New Chinese Cinema” is involved in the narrative of discovery by the West. As Chinese cinema is discovered, invented, and authorized by the West, the discourses of “New Chinese Cinema” have politics of gaze between the looking subject and the to-be-looked object. In other words, it could be considered as a process for Chinese cinema to be dealt with as a national cinema of world cinema, and the production of interpretation for the “third world” text from the view of the “first world.” As third world texts, “New Chinese Cinema” is located in the reading of “national allegory” suggested by Fredrik Jameson. In his article “The Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986), Jameson argues that:

All third-world texts are necessarily allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*.....Although we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in third-world culture. Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic-necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society* (69).

Jameson's pronouncement presumes an automatic transparency between the individual identity of the third world subject and the collectivity identity of the "third world" culture or nation. Thus, as any individual cannot be independent from the nation, the meanings of Chinese cinema as a third world text are construed in the relation with national or ethnic identity, with which is what the Western critics are primarily concerned. The difference or exoticism discovered in Chinese cinema is caught in the logic of a cultural symbolic to which it exists as "the other." This logic of cultural symbolic relies on an absolute distinction between the self and the other. Therefore, the interpretation of Chinese cinema is involved in the politics of gaze for the first world to see the third world.

Although the West has seen Chinese cinema as "the other" on the one hand, there exists a kind of complicity relation between the West and Chinese film directors on the other hand. Taking the formulation of "primitive passions," Rey Chow (1995) points out that the invention of New Chinese Cinema as exoticism constructs a way of seeing China as at once an ancient empire and modern victim. In other words, the prominent nature image including landscape, rural life, and oppressed women in the Fifth Generation films, which she calls "returning to nature," is associated with Chinese "origins" with notions of the past, the ancient, and the lost. (36) This primitivism operates with the desire to invent origins in the form of nationalistic cultural productions to insist that "China" is primary, central, and unique, when the old Chinese culture becomes "aesthetic" and "primitive" in the sense of other time. Thus, the invention of primitivism in the 1980s and early 1990s, on the one hand, aestheticizes old China as "ancient" and "backward," on the other hand, it appeals a new beginning of modern nation which is assumed as primary and unique. (37) However, Chow

considers this primitivism as a result of the collusion between the trends of postmodern global culture-collecting¹⁵ and Chinese film directors' tactic of "self-orientalism." As she explains, "like their counterparts from many areas of the non-Western world, contemporary Chinese films, even though they are always made with the assumption that they present the ongoing problems within China, become the space where 'China' is exhibited in front of audience overseas." (37) Moreover, "regardless of their personal intentions, Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Zhang Yimou, and their contemporaries become their culture's anthropologists and ethnographers." Their filmmaking itself, thus, results in a space that is either the art museum or the ethnological museum and a space that fetishizes and commodifies "China." (38) Especially, Chow argues that in Zhang Yimou's films, "primitives" are women who are the ethnographic details that signify "China," and through these oppressed women, Zhang Yimou is showing a "China" that is at once subalternized and exoticized, and "producing a new kind of orientalism" in the form of an exhibitionist self-display. Chow calls this Zhang's self-subalternizing, self-exoticizing the Oriental's orientalism. (170-171) Therefore, if "race-ization" with Han-centrism in post-1949 Chinese cinema is the "internal colonialism," then "New Chinese Cinema" led by the Fifth Generation films would be understood as a conflation of the external gaze of the West and the "internal orientalism" of Chinese film directors. In other words, the national identity or "Chineseness" of "New Chinese Cinema" is

¹⁵ David Bordwell (1996) describes that one of the most pervasive tendencies in the 1990s film studies is the "middle level" research besides "the subject-position theory" and "culturalism." He explains that "the most established realm of middle level research have been empirical studies of filmmakers, genres, and national cinemas." (27) In other words, this research attempts to rethink minor films, minor genres, and the third world cinema which was neglected by orthodox film studies in the West. Given these circumstances of the prevalence of middle level research, the discovery of Chinese cinema as "New Chinese Cinema" seems coincide with the trend or expectation of the Western film studies at that time. In this process, the Chinese Fifth Generation film directors were discovered as authors, and Chinese cinema was discussed as a national cinema in the Western film studies.

imagined by the double fabrication of the West and China itself. Here, even though they are somewhat different, while the West sees “Chinese cinema” as the strange, the mysterious, and the exotic, the Chinese film directors view “old China” as the backward, the antiquated, and the primitive, hence highlight the images of modern socialist, “Chineseness” for both of them are fictitious, assumed, and invented, and rather than actual, corporeal, and substantial.

Consequently, as shown above, whether nationalism of Chinese films before 1949, or “race-ization” with Han-centrism of post-1949 cinema, or “external gaze” and “internal orientalism” in the 1980s and early 1990s, the national identity in Chinese cinema contributes to construct homogeneous, coherent, and unified “Chineseness.” Even though Chinese national cinema is constructed in different ways from the European notion of national cinema as a defense against Hollywood cinema, and it has some variation in its historical contexts, what “national” always means in Chinese cinema is “China” as a collective national identity for national consolidation. As globalization since the 1990s undoes the traditional notion of national cinema¹⁶, Chinese cinema studies as a national cinema comes to be required to reconsider the implication and limitation of the term “Chinese cinema” under the transnational contexts of production, distribution, and consumption.

The Individual, the Collective, and Chinese Modernity

The discourse of Chinese modernity that emerged from the late Qing Dynasty was substantially developed and intensified by Chinese intellectuals through the period from

¹⁶ See Andrew Higson (2000) ‘The Instability of the National’ and Stephen Crofts (1993, 2002) ‘Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s.’

the Xinhai Revolution (1911) to the May Fourth Movement (1919). Since Chinese modern intellectuals had come in contact with Western modern culture, they thought it a primary and urgent task to escape from Sino-centrism and reconstruct the relationship between China and the West. Their approaches and solutions to the problems of Chinese modernity were divided by diverse thoughts and positions; Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang's "*Zhongti xiyong*" (Western practice-Chinese essence discourse), Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao's "*Bianfa*" (Institutional reform), Wang Guowei's "*Xue wu zhongxi*" (Going beyond any prejudiced preference or distinction in sincere multicultural explorations), and Lu Xun's "*Wenhua pianzhi lun*" (Cultural extremities discourse). Although these thoughts seem to have separate positions respectively, they in fact have a couple of characteristics in common within the so-called May Fourth discourse¹⁷, which has been continuously developed through the whole period of twentieth century.

To begin with, it was the enlightenment discourse that is one of the most conspicuous and principal slogans during the May Fourth period. Most modern Chinese intellectuals proposed the need for change and considered national enlightenment as a solution for Chinese modernization and the establishment of modern nation-state. The very reason that Lu Xun returned to China from medical school in Japan was to enlighten Chinese people by his writing. Lu Xun related how he decided to engage in

¹⁷ In a narrow sense, May Fourth Movement discourse directly refers to the historical event of student demonstration against imperialism which happened in Beijing on May fourth of 1919. Afterward, this event, however, becomes a symbol of Chinese modernization, and extends to the meaning of the socio-cultural movement including New Culture Movement (*xin wenhua yundong*) rather than a single political protest movement. Although there have been a various views of the relationship between May Fourth Movement and Chinese modernity, "May Fourth" could be considered as a signifier of various discourses on Chinese modernity during the early twentieth century. See Baek (2000), *Dong Asia ui Gwihwan* (The Return of East Asia), pp. 233-250.

literature as follows:

Before that academic year was out I had already returned to Tokyo, for after this experience I felt that the practice of medicine was nothing urgent to begin with, since no matter how healthy or strong the bodies of a weak-spirited citizenry might be, they'd still be fit for nothing better than to serve as victims or onlookers at such ridiculous spectacles. There was no need to fret about how many of them might die of illness. The most important thing to be done was to transform their spirit, and of course the best way to effect a spiritual transformation- or so I thought at the time- would be through literature and art.¹⁸

For national reform, it was the intellectual's task, as Lu Xun described, to awaken and save the "sound sleepers" suffocating in the iron house to which Lu Xun compared the situation of Chinese people in his writing. With this strong enlightenment project, the modern Chinese intellectuals longed for generating new people for the modern nation-state. While the conventions and values of traditional feudal society were denounced to be demolished, modern thoughts and cultures from the West, especially science and democracy were naturally acclaimed as important values for building a new China. The goal of this enlightenment ideology clearly was to make a new nation. The production of a new nation was developed with a series of "national character" (*guomin xing*) discourses during the early twentieth century.

The Chinese notion of "*guomin xing*" (national character), which was imported as a translation of English via Japanese, was principal to the theory for constructing a

¹⁸ Lu Xun (1990), 'Preface', *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*, trans. William A. Lyell, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, pp. 23-24.

modern nation-state. In his articles “Xin min yi” (Discourse on the new people, 1902) and “Lun zhongguo guomin zhi pingge” (On the character of the Chinese citizen, 1903), Liang Qichao, who suggests the concept of “*xin min*” (new citizen) for the new nation building, argues that the tragedy of modern China was caused by the problem of Chinese national character. Through the strong insistence on the requirement of “new people, he criticizes that Chinese people lacked nationalism and independent spirit.¹⁹ Following Liang’s argument, a number of discourses concerning national character explosively appeared in the daily papers and magazines before and after the 1911 Revolution²⁰. No matter what they focused on, they all asserted that Chinese national character needed to be reformed because it was not suitable for the modern nation-state, namely the Republic of China. Afterwards, the Chinese national character was re-defined through a kind of “essentialism” within the May Fourth discourse. Defining the “inferiority of national character” as essential nature of Chinese people, Chen Duxiu, one of the leaders of “New Culture Movement” during the May Fourth period, insisted that “national citizen” (*guo min*) should be enlightened, and the literature would be the best tool for this project.²¹

It is clear that May Fourth discourses are characterized as “literary-centric.” The early modern Chinese intellectuals tried to find ways to reform the people via literature, thus their concerns centered on “enlightenment of literature”, “modernization of

¹⁹ For more details, see Liu Lydia H., *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity-China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 46.

²⁰ One example is *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany). It had a special section to discuss this problem from 1905 to 1919. The leading articles at that time included the followings: “Lun zhongguo renmin zhi yilaixing zhi qi yuan” (Discussion on the origin of Chinese national dependency, 1905); “Lun zhongguo zhi guomin xing” (Discussion on Chinese national character, 1908); “Jingde wenming yu dongde wenming” (Static civilization and dynamic civilization, 1916); “Duoxing zhi guomin” (The lazy citizen, 1916). For a detailed debate of “national character” discourses, see *ibid.* pp. 45-69.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 49

literature” and “literary revolution.” The reform of literature during the May Fourth period focused on reform of writing style and genre. First, it was most urgent for Chinese intellectuals to change classical Chinese writing into vernacular Chinese (*baihua*) writing because they thought the superiority of the West came from the coherence between the spoken language and the written language. Second, they advocated for the prose literature genre like novel and essay, which had been a minor genre in traditional Chinese literature because they considered that prose literature was more efficient to deliver thoughts to enlighten the people rather than verse literature, major genre in traditional Chinese literature. Hence, the literary innovation including the change of writing style and the re-orientation of literary genres resonated with the desire to construct a strong modern nation-state, which was conceived as a social practice for the enlightenment of national citizens.

In fact, the role of intellectuals and the function of literature in the modern era originated from the Chinese traditional idea of “literature as a vehicle of doctrines” (*wen yi zai dao*). Because literature was traditionally regarded as the vessel for holding “doctrines” in China, its concern was more focused on a view of the world and practical politics rather than pure literary art. During the May Fourth period, this traditional maxim that “literature as a vehicle of doctrines” was transformed into a new expression that “literature as a vehicle of people” (*wen yi zai qun*). With the reconsideration of the relationship between literature, people and society, “people” (*qun*) became the primary concern of May Fourth literature. Liang Qichao understands “new fiction” (*xin xiaoshuo*) as the most useful medium for social reform, and asserts that the popular novel should play most important role for mass education²². Here, the superiority of

²² See Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian*, Durham: Duke

novel, which Liang Qichao argues, comes not only from its capacity for depicting modern reality, but from its prevalence and popularity for people enlightenment. As Liang Qichao re-defined the purpose of literature as the responsibility for making “new people” matching a new society order, the role of Chinese intellectuals and literature, which were traditionally considered equivalent, was centered on national enlightenment with the aspiration for establishment of modern nation-state of China. In other words, what May Fourth intellectuals tried to construct is not only a new cultural value, but a new political order for modern nation-state.

As mentioned above, the May Fourth enlightenment by literary revolution was clearly oriented to promote political nationalism. This nationalism has a notable feature of anti-imperialism from the crisis consciousness under the semi-colonial or sub-colonial state. The anti-imperialist nationalism, however, is caught in a vital dilemma between the value of the individual and the collective, because it is directly opposed to anti-feudalism, which was the other narrative advocated by May Fourth intellectuals. That is to say, while the anti-imperialist nationalism aims at “the salvation of the Chinese people,” the anti-feudalism intends “the salvation of the oppressed individual.” These two narratives seem to have the common goal of “salvation,” but there exists a substantial conflict in the problematic confrontation of “the individual” and “the collective.” In other words, “the individual” and “the collective” could not coexist under the specific conditions of early modern China because these two problematic narratives that May Fourth discourses proposed conceptually diverge into the socio-cultural salvation of the individual from pre-modern China and the political salvation of the nation from semi-colonial China.

In terms of a chief factor of the May Fourth enlightenment, anti-feudalism narrative moved toward a binary opposition of “the old” and “the new.” While the former implies the plural form (the collective) of old society, the latter is related to the singular form (the individual) newly evaluated in the modern system. Even though the anti-feudalism of the New Culture Movement in principle was in favor of the value of the individual, this in fact could not be detached from the national problem in the political crisis of the nation. In other words, as the semi-colonial environment made the national salvation take precedence over the individual salvation, “anti-imperialism” as the national value eventually surpassed “anti-feudalism” as the individual value. Consequently, as the enlightenment project of the May Fourth intellectuals foregrounded the “national education” for the “new citizen,” the individual became just a member of the nation. As Li Zehou (1987) illustrates, under the conditions that “*jiuwang*” (national salvation) overwhelmed “*qimeng*” (enlightenment) in the May Fourth period,²³ the Chinese political leaders and intellectuals negated any kind of individualism such as personal freedom and individual liberation of “bourgeois liberation” in the West as well as “absolute individualism” of anarchism. (37) In other words, the individual as the object of enlightenment was subordinate to the collective as the subject of national salvation.

As shown above, the formation of Chinese modernity within the May Fourth discourses contains a contradiction between the individual and the nation. Although the “individualism” signifies the self-consciousness through the emancipation of individual, in fact, it could be acquired only from the salvation of the nation. In terms of the

²³ For more details, see Li, Zehou (1987), ‘Qimeng yu Jiuwang de Shuangchong Bianzou’ (The Double Changes between Enlightenment and National Salvation) in Li Zehou, *Zhongguo Xiandai Sixiangshi Lun* (Discourse on Modern Chinese Intellectual History), Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe.

concentration on collectivism, the discourse of individualism during this period was developed by the discussion of the relationship between the individual and the nation, which was considered as interconnected and mutually reinforced. For instance, Min Zhi proposed a distinction between “*siwo*” (private self) and “*gongwo*” (public self), and tried to elaborate the dialectic of the two; Gao Yihan suggested the term “*xiaoji*” (smaller self) instead of “*geren*” (individual), which naturally evoked the significance of “*daji*” (greater self) as a trope for nation-state or society; likewise, Hu Shi called the individual “*xiaowo*” (smaller self), whose extension in society referred to “*dawo*” (greater self). (Liu, 1995: 89-95) In this respect, Lydia Liu (1995) understands that the discourse of individualism in the May Fourth period contributes to “the process of inventing “*geren*” (individual) for the goals of national liberation and revolution. Hence, despite its apparent clash with the nation-state, the discourse of individualism finds itself in complicity with nationalism.” (91)

Male Subjectivity and the Discovery of Women

With the reform of modern Chinese literature, the May Fourth literary works made efforts to communicate with the masses, because they wished to construct “the masses” matching a new society enlightened by literature. The discourse of “popular literature” (*dazhong wenyi*) during the 1920s and 1930s resulted from the approval of the masses and the pursuit of “literary popularization.” However, this “literary popularization” apparently had a tendency of elitism by Chinese male intellectuals. For example, Guo Moruo argued that popular literature was neither “the literature of the masses,” nor “the literature for the masses,” but rather “the literature to enlighten the masses.” Similarly,

Zheng Boqi also asserted that the most necessary popular literature in China was the “enlightenment literature.”²⁴

In a sense of its usage, this “literary popularization” by Chinese modern intellectuals was not served for the masses, but for intellectuals themselves. In the 1930s, this discourse on “literary popularization” was developed in relation to the “revolutionary literature” discourse which was a proletariat literature movement by the League of Left-wing Writers (*zuoyi zuojia lianmeng*). In this way, the discussion on Chinese literary modernization changes from the literary form to the purpose and role of literature²⁵. This “revolutionary literature” discourse considered “the masses” as a class unit and upheld not a personal literature but a collective literature. That is to say, the popular literature, which “revolutionary literature” suggested, pursued a collective literature as “anti-individualism” literature. Therefore, in the world of “revolutionary literature,” the hero of history was “the masses,” not an individual character. This “anti-individualism” of literature based on patriotism and nationalism had a tendency to ignore individual value as inferior to the absolute virtue of the masses. The individual could retain a meaning only in the case of a member or representative of the masses, because the individual should not be independent from the masses. In this respect, there could be no individualism as a modern subject in the early modern era.²⁶ As the

²⁴ See Wu Xiaoli (1997) ‘Zuowei guanjiancide “dazhong”’ (“Popular” as a keyword), Beijing: Peking University, M.A dissertation, p. 17.

²⁵ See Jun Hyoungjoon (1997) *Hyundai Joongkuk ui Realism Yiron* (Realism Theory of Modern China), pp. 71-86.

²⁶ From the different perspective of individualism, Wang Hui proposes to rethink Zhang Taiyan’s “individualism” discourse as alternative discourse of individualism during the May Fourth period. He argues that Zhang’s “individualism” pursues the individual as the subject to refuse collective’s request, because his “individualism” originates from the objection to collectivism. According to Wang, Zhang’s concept of “individual,” which is opposed to “public” and “community,” is based on the purpose to protect the individual subject from dominant collectivism by means of the establishment of moral criterion and behavior’s basis. However, Zhang’s individualism remained a voice without resonance, because it was a minor opinion

individual in literary works was regarded as a “national allegory,” and “literary popularization” was developed with the isolation from the masses, the reform of literature by Chinese modern intellectuals ironically resulted in serving only for the intellectuals themselves. Thus, what they were eager to construct eventually was their own subjectivity formation rather than the creation of new people by literary enlightenment.

Kirk A. Denton (1998) argues that Chinese cultural modernity in the May Fourth era could be characterized by two discourses of “romantic individualism” and “revolutionary collectivism.” He understands that “the rhetoric of the former was the vehicle for the expression of enlightenment values, while the ideal of national salvation was couched in terms of the latter” (10). And, the subjectivity formation of May Fourth intellectuals was both collided and colluded with these two discourses. For May Fourth intellectuals, the dilemma in the duplicated values of individual and collective made themselves a representative of the masses. As enlightenment for and communication with the masses were developed by the representation of the masses, May Fourth intellectuals believed that they both should and could speak for the masses. For this reason, it was a most universal and important theme for them to describe the miserable reality of the subaltern and the relationship between intellectuals and the subaltern. As a good example, Denton points out that “a central theme that emerges through the complex narrative structures of Lu Xun’s stories is the relationship between intellectual

isolated from mainstream discourse. Wang Hui esteems that Zhang’s individualism reveals the process of reception and negotiation rather than essential one in the specific history. Wang explains that the reason why he tries to re-read Zhang’s individualism is not only to criticize the binary distinction between individual and nation, but to explore the genealogy of alternative Chinese individualism discourse. See Wang Hui (2000), ‘Zhang Taiyan’s Concept of the Individual and Modern Chinese Identity’ in Wen-hsien, Yeh ed. *Becoming Chinese: Passage to Modernity and Beyond*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

consciousness and the subaltern” (54-55).

As he illustrates, this concern is expressed exemplary in “New Year’s Sacrifice” (*Zhufu*, 1924), which depicts the internal dilemma of an intellectual first-person narrator facing Xianglin Sao, “the very essence of the voiceless and victimized subaltern, a poor and husbandless peasant woman” (55). Certainly, May Fourth intellectuals reckoned the subaltern as the unenlightened, and endeavored to represent them in their literary works. However, their representations of the subaltern, in fact, functioned as the process of constructing their subject position against the primitive other (57-58). Moreover, the relationship between the intellectuals and the subaltern, the conscious subject and the unconscious object, the voiced and the voiceless was clearly gendered as the representation of female victim by male intellectuals. The May Fourth crisis of subjectivity was constituted through the “objectification” of a female other, and “a self-conscious modern subject emerges from the very recognition of its separation from this other” (55). As Stephen Chan (1988) argues, “the modern intellectual wanted desperately to re-present *himself* via a mutation in the crisis of the ‘other’” (19). In other words, the female other as to be represented was the otherness of consciousness summoned by the crisis of male self.

Taken as the first step toward any reassurance of selfhood, objectification is a central function in the dialectic of form and consciousness. To objectify is to divest oneself of, to part with, one’s self, one’s consciousness. The alienated form subsequently evolves as the alterity of consciousness, whereas the wholeness of self is maintained on the basis that it has successfully expelled that which is less coherent and “other” than self. Thus, any possible transcendence of self is to be

achieved in its very negativity. In other words, mediation through objectification consists in the process of containing the uncertain (the oneself: herself) in the certain (the one's self: his self). (Chan, 1988: 23)

From the perspective of constructing subjectivity, this “process of containing the uncertain in the certain” which Chan describes above could be understood as the process of discovering the exterior, the other, and the female object. Karatani Kojin (1993) points out that modern Japanese literature could be established by the birth of the modern subject, and this modern subject was acquired by recognition of the exterior, “the discovery of landscape.” He argues that the “landscape” is an epistemological configuration, and it is discovered by an “inner man” who has not seen the exterior. According to him, the “landscape” as the other is formed within the “landscape” itself, although it may seem like an object that originally existed in the exterior. It is through this epistemological inversion that Japanese modern self in literature could be constructed (11-44). Returning to Chinese modern writers with Kojin's argument, the landscapes which they discovered was Chinese “women” who were oppressed under the Chinese feudalism. Just like “the proletariat has been a romantic landscape for Japanese Marxist” (33), the female subaltern was a miserable landscape for Chinese male writers. In other words, the Chinese women whom they represented were, rather than ordinary people around them, a landscape which had become visible to them through the inversion of value, and the reality which they recognized was “already nothing more than an internal landscape and thus, in the final analysis, self-consciousness” (34). In this sense, Kojin understands realism in Japanese modern literature was constructed not by a simple description of, but by the creation of landscape.

It is clear, then, that realism in modern literature established itself within the context of landscape. Both the landscapes and the “ordinary people” (what I have called people-as-landscapes) that realism represents were not “out there” from the start, but had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated (Kojin, 1993: 29).

In this sense, a landscape, which Chinese modern writers tried to depict, was not the Chinese reality with vivid description, but the Chinese women newly discovered through the inversion of consciousness. Chinese modern literature and its realism, as Kojin elucidates, generated Chinese women as a landscape which, although they had always been there, had never been seen (29). In fact, the discovery of women in Chinese modern literature not only implies the process to objectify women as a landscape, but functions as a condition to produce modern self from the relationship between male intellectuals and female subalterns.

On the other hand, this discovery of women in modern China can be demonstrated literally by the invention of the feminine third-person pronoun “*ta*” (she) in written Chinese. As Lydia Liu (1995) observes, “the original form of the Chinese character for the pronoun “*ta*” contains an ungendered “*ren*” radical (denoting the human species), and the gendering of this pronoun arose from circumstances of translation” (36). Facing the Western languages in the early modern era, Chinese intellectuals found that Chinese had no equivalent for the third-person feminine pronoun, and considered it as an essential lack in the Chinese language. After a few years of experimenting to solve this lack, “writers and linguists finally settled on writing the feminine *ta* with a *nü* (woman)

radical” (36). Certainly, as Liu argues, the invention of this feminine pronoun “*ta*” appeared in converting the originally ungendered “*ta*” into a masculine pronoun. In other words, “the invention of the gendered neologism forced the original *ta* to assume a masculine character, which is, nonetheless, contradicted by its ungendered radical *ren*.” (37) The first use of this third-person feminine pronoun *ta* in literature was in Lu Xun’s “New Year’s Sacrifice” in 1924. In order to express a “female” oppressed in the feudalist traditional society, Lu Xun described the female character Xianglin Sao as *ta* by gendering the oppressed character. Confirming woman as an object, *ta* naturally became a pronoun for the oppressed subaltern. In this way, the subaltern, whom the May Fourth enlightenment discourse tried to make a citizen for a new nation, was gendered as “women.”²⁷ As Liu remarks, “a split at the symbolic level of the pronoun allows gender to shape social relations of power in a new language.” – “the upper-class narrator ‘I’ speak to and about a lower-class woman *ta*” (38). Moreover, as in case of pronunciation, the feminine pronoun *ta* is indistinguishable from the masculine pronoun *ta*, the difference between them appears only in written language which is mainly owned by male intellectuals. If it is considered that the illiteracy rate of female and non-intellectual was very high at that time,²⁸ the recognition of its meaning would be confined to male intellectuals. In this light, women ironically were expelled from “women discourse,” and remained the object to be discovered by male intellectual.

²⁷ Goh Misook argues that the modern enlightenment discourse tried to make all national people national citizens, and especially focused on women, because women are a large scaled minor group equivalent to the male group, and also bound to the responsibility of nation. See Goh, Misuk (2001), *Hankuk ui Geundaeseong, gue Kiwon eul Chajaseo: minjok, sexuality, byunglihak* (Korean Modernity, Search for its Origin: nation, sexuality, pathology), pp. 95-96.

²⁸ According to investigations on Chinese literacy rate all over the country in 1933, the basic literacy was below 30 percent. In the case of Shanghai workers in the 1930s, 50-60 percent of male and 80-90 percent of female respondents were wholly illiterate. The general illiterate was above 80 percent. See Xin Ping (1996) *Cong Shanghai faxian lishi* (Discovering History from Shanghai), p. 157.

As mentioned above, the invention of the feminine pronoun “*ta*” was basically generated from male intellectual’s consciousness of the amelioration for the linguistic inferiority in relation to the West. Xiaomei Chen (2003) argues that this kind of appeal to the West during the May Fourth period was a way to objectify Chinese women by means of the Western patriarchy.

May Fourth domestic sons rebelled against their Confucian fathers by attempting to liberate their sisters from their domestic fathers. Yet in order to do so, the sons appealed to a new surrogate father – Western imported tradition – which included its own form of patriarchal domination of women. The end result was that domestic sons’ apparent liberation of their sisters turned out to be a selling of them into new bondage in order to achieve their own new cultural freedom, which even in its Western form, existed more for men than for women (132).

As she explains, explosive attentions to women in the May Fourth period appeared in the end as the objectification of women, “the discovery of women.” In other words, it was by the inner objectification of women that the May Fourth male intellectuals tried to overcome the duplicated burdens of the tradition and the West. The feminist discourse led by male intellectuals during this period resulted in the re-definition of women as the national citizen for building modern nation-state.

The Rise of the Individual Subject and the Mass culture in the 1990s

It is one of the most noteworthy phenomena in the late 1980s Chinese socio-

cultural context that “Cultural Reflection” (*wenhua fansi*) on the Cultural Revolution became a great trend on the literary scene with a post-revolutionary mentality. Through a various form such as “Scar Literature (*shanghen wenxue*),” “Roots-seeking Literature (*xun gen wenxue*),” and “Educated Youth Literature (*zhi qing wenxue*)”, this debate is related to the discourse of rethinking Chinese modernity and subjectivity. The efforts to rethink history or memory of a collective past address the present in a different voice. “This history is evoked not only through a painful questioning of ‘master narratives’ such as those of national identity and collective movements, but also by means of reconstructing the micro-narratives of personal memories” (Liu and Tang 1993: 16-17)

However, the rapid capitalization and commodification of the early 1990s has practically made the 1980s cultural discourse impotent to some extent. As Zhang Xudong (1997) describes, the pre-1989 cultural sphere has been destroyed “not by the terror of a totalitarian regime, but by the forced uniformity of the collective resolution to ‘get rich fast’.” (18) With the dominance of consumerism accelerated by the growth of Chinese capitalism, “Cultural Fever” of the 1980s has been absorbed into “Market Fever (*shichang re*)” of the 1990s. Dai Jinhua (2002) depicts the 1990s Chinese culture through reading of “Mao Zedong fever” as an icon of post-revolutionary consumerism. She points out that in the beginning of Mao Zedong fever, Mao Zedong’s image of cars, beepers and windproof lighters was a symbol of fashion, signifier of consumerism. “It was more the revelation of a political unconscious than some kind of clearly conscious political behavior: the displacement and identification of political power with consumerism” (174). Thus, Mao Zedong’s fever as a desire for consumption of the prohibited object is the dissolution of the sacred and the untouchable, and shows a reconstruction and a parody of ideology.

Her analysis of the term “*guangchang*” (plaza) could be another good example to understand an aspect of consumerism in the 1990s Chinese culture. Since the mid-1990s, there has appeared a new type of shopping center in China, which combines retail stores, supermarkets, fast-food restaurant, and fitness center. “*Guangchang* (literally, broad place) superseded the more familiar names for shopping areas, *dasha* (mansion) and *zhongxin* (center).” (213) This term “*guangchang*” suddenly has been popularly used for any kind of shops, as for instance *Dianqi guangchang* (Electronics Plaza) and *Shizhuang guangchang* (Fashion Place). However, “*guangchang* not only refer to a modern space, it also closely linked to the remembrance of modernity and revolution, leading ideas in the great political and cultural movements of the twentieth century.” (214) In Chinese, “*guangchang*” directly means Tiananmen Guangchang (Square), which has been a political stage since the May Fourth Movement 1919. Tiananmen Guangchang signifies revolution, progress, reform, passion, youth, and blood. It is the symbol of New China (214-215). In this regard, Dai observes that “the contemporary usage of *guangchang*, a term that once had such special significance, exposes the passing of the revolutionary era and the arrival of the age of consumerism” (217). Obviously, it is one of the most symptomatic landscapes in the 1990s Chinese culture that “going to *guangchang*” means going to shopping plazas which is overlapped in the trace of political memories of Tiananmen Square.

These social phenomena of Mao Zedong fever and the transition of *guangchang*'s meaning in the 1990s not only imply the consumption of the past political prohibition, the parody of traumatic memories, and the subversion of the classical authority, but also signify the rise of the Chinese mass culture, which is generated by the brand-new consumerism. As the prevalence of popular culture and challenge to traditional authority,

the “Wang Shuo Phenomenon” in the late 1980s²⁹, a series of commercial success and controversies around his novels, would be one of the most noteworthy events in the 1990s Chinese literature. This not simply means a rise of the Chinese popular culture, but implies the subversion of center and mainstream, the transition to a new order. Dai (1999) argues that the publication of *the collection of Wang Shuo works* 1992 could rewrite the relation between the classic literature and the popular literature, because the personal collection of literary works had been considered as only mainstream writers’ privilege till then (52). In the sense of market, Wang Shuo is a bestselling native writer since 1949, and becomes a cultural icon of the 1990s Chinese consumerism. The significance of this phenomenon thus is understood as a new order between social transition and ideological change rather than the social margin or subculture against the traditional social order. Moreover, Wang Shuo himself could be considered as an icon of success in the Chinese cultural market rather than an anti-hero against the previous order (Dai 2000: 202-203).

Besides the transition to market, Wang Shuo’s novels have an important meaning as the writing of “anti-allegory” in the 1990s. Zhang Yiwu (1997), considering the “anti-allegory” (*fan yuyan*) as a new type of the 1990s writings, argues that Wang Shuo’s novel *Never deceive me* (*Qianwan Bie Bawo Dangren*) in 1989 is the first writing of showing “anti-allegory”. He suggests that the anti-allegorical writing is to reflect and appropriate the “national allegory” through rewriting the “national allegory” itself (105). Zhang points out that the anti-allegorical writing is a new literary trend of post-New Era (*hou xin shiqi*) and a distinguished mark of the 1990s culture. He also argues that the

²⁹ Especially, 1988 is called “the year of Wang Shuo films.” There were 4 films adopted from Wang Shuo’s novels only this year: Mi Jinshan’s *Wanzhu*, Huang Jianxin’s *Lunhui*, Xia Gang’s *Yiban Shi Huoyan*, *Yiban Shi Haishui*, and Ye Daying’s *Da Chuanqi*.

appearance of the anti-allegory implies the exhaustion of the third world's modernity as the national allegory, and the rejoinder to the 1980s master narrative. He figures out the characteristics of the anti-allegory as followings: First, the anti-allegory transcends the mythical image of China, and constructs the returning gaze of the "national allegory." Thus China no longer exists as the other of the West, and could be understood as the substance over-determined by the complex of multiple structures. Second, the anti-allegorical writing signifies a parody of the past style. This means the subversion of the sacred of national allegorical writing in the sense of Bakhtin's "carnival" (108-109). As Zhang illustrated, the anti-allegory is the new formation of the 1990s Chinese culture, and interrogates the discourse of Chinese modernity which was centered by the "national allegory." In this respect, it might be noteworthy that the 1990s Chinese narratives, escaping from the frame of the national allegory or master narrative, have appeared in various voices.

Dai Jinhua (2002) depicts the 1990s Chinese socio-cultural environment as the complicated cultural landscape of the expression "a scene in the fog," which is "transfixed between orientalism and occidentalism, interpellated by different, diametrically opposed power centers, existing in a proliferating, multiple, overlapping cultural space" (72). In some sense, the 1990s Chinese socio-cultural change put an end to the decade of the 1980s and entered into the ambiguous postmodern culture, and the so-called Chinese Sixth Generation Film has appeared under these circumstances. As Dai argues, "the Sixth Generation, unlike its predecessors (Third, Fourth, and Fifth Generation), does not refer to a specific group of creators, aesthetics, or even a sequence of works. Even before its appearance, the Sixth Generation was already predicted and outlined in various cultural yearnings and lacks." (74) Thus "the Sixth Generation" film

actually is engaged in an entangled cultural phenomenon of various names, discourses, cultures, and ideologies. In this respect, the various terms referring to the Sixth Generation film might show their socio-cultural status and contexts. In brief, for instance, “Chinese underground films” (*dixia dianying*) indicates their political status that their films are prohibited to screen in the Chinese domestic theaters, “independent films” (*duli dianying*) means the way how they raise the fund for their films, “new documentary movement” (*xin jilupian yundaong*) implies the filmic style that they prefer realism like documentary style, and “urban film” (*chengshi dianying*) refers to the place that they takes as film’s background. Among them, two most famous nicknames might be “underground film” and “independent film.” They imply that the Sixth Generation makes their own stories a film in their own ways. In other words, the Sixth Generation, in contrast to the Fifth Generation, tells and displays their own stories and surroundings in an objective way. A Sixth Generation director Zhang Yuan confesses:

The allegory is the Fifth Generation’s core. They have done a terrific job writing history as an allegory. But I can only be objective. Indeed, to me objectivity is crucial. Each day I pay attention to what happens immediately around me. I can not see beyond a certain distance (Dai 2002: 94)

They frequently use amateur actors or their friends for the main characters. They themselves often play a role in their films, on one hand because of a lack of financial resources to employ professional actors/actresses, on the other hand because of their intention to show real figures and situations in their films. In most cases, the characters

of their films represent director's identities as avant-garde artists and minority figures in the margin of modern Chinese society: a retarded child of *Mother* (*Mama*, dir. Zhang Yuan, 1992), a psychotic patient in *Red Beads* (*Xuan lian*, dir. He Jianjun, 1993), rock and roll musicians in *Dirt* (*Toufa luanle*, dir. Guan Hu, 1994) and *Beijing Bastards* (*Beijing zazhong*, dir. Zhang Yuan, 1993), a drug addict of *Yesterday* (*Zuotian*, dir. Zhang Yang, 2001), a part-time construction worker in *Xiaoshan Going Home* (*Xiaoshan huijia*, dir. Jia Zhangke, 1995), a pickpocket and a sex worker in *Xiao Wu* (dir. Jia Zhangke, 1997), and homosexual people in *East Palace, West Palace* (*Donggong xigong*, dir. Zhang Yuan, 1996) and *Fish and Elephant* (*Jinnian xiatian*, dir. Li Yu, 2001). As Wang Xiaoshuai remarked that “producing this film [*The Days*] (*Dong chun de rizi*, 1993) is like writing our own diary” (Dai 2002: 94), the Sixth Generation film signifies the emergence of the individual with numerous micro narratives of the 1990s Chinese culture unlike the grand narrative in the Fifth Generation. In other words, their concerns are the objective description of particular lives of individuals and their surroundings instead of representing something “Chinese,” and their camera plays a witness as a kino-eye of the 1990s cultural scene.

In the 1990s Chinese cultural contexts of the anti-allegory writing, the rapid capitalization and consumerism, and the emergence of micro-narratives, the questions would be how the film of the 1990s could construct the Chinese new subjectivity, or whether these various voices in their films could be understood as “polyphony” in terms of Bakhtin's term, or how we should understand this subject formation in the contexts of the new global order.

The Individual Reconsidered in the Age of Empire

It might be somewhat inadequate to divide the Chinese 1980s and 1990s into binary dichotomy as a historical rupture because the 1990s Chinese culture has been generated from the problematics of the 1980s socio-cultural environment. To some extent, they still have the common questions of Chinese modernity such as the modernization process, new social formation in Chinese capitalism and consumerism, and the rise of mass culture. In this light, they might seem the sequence of a linear historical succession with the difference in a degree. However, the 1990s Chinese culture indeed has brought a kind of epochal transition as the return of the repressed and the visible emergence of invisible individual under the rapid development of mass culture. Zhang Yiwu (1997) argues that while the culture of the New Era (1979-1989) could be reduced to the modernity discourse and national allegory since the May Fourth movement, the post-New Era (post-1989 period) has corresponded anti-allegory, the Chinese post-modernity, and the consumerism culture (269-272). Dai Jinhua (1999) describes that if the 1980s Chinese intellectuals had constructed their self-identity through the binary position of historical progress and historical circulation, national salvation and enlightenment, and the West and the national, then the 1990s Chinese intellectual culture has entered into a sort of aphasia in the clamor of mass culture and popular culture (50-53).

Here, I would consider the year 1989 as a turning point of Chinese socio-cultural change. This approach is associated with two symbolic historical contexts: the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of Communist countries in Eastern Europe, and the Tiananmen movement in China. This year 1989 directly signifies the

end of the Cold War and the beginning of global capitalism. Wang Hui (2003) defines the Chinese 1989 social movement as follows:

The year 1989 was a historical watershed; nearly a century of socialist practice came to an end. Two worlds became one: a global-capitalist world. Although China's socialism did not collapse as did the Soviet Union's or Eastern Europe's, this was hardly a barrier to China's economy from quickly joining the globalizing process in the arenas of production and trade (141).

As Wang Hui argues, the year 1989 was a symbolic year of historical transition and the emergence of new global order. In fact, this new formation of global order has been not simply specific phenomena in one national boundary, but a dominant tendency in the world. Hardt and Negri (2000) have shown elaborate debate on globalization. They define this new global order as follows:

We have witnessed an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchange. Along with the global market and global circuit of production has emerged a global order, a new logic and structure of rule- in short, a new form of sovereignty. Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world (preface xi).

Through examining the decline in sovereignty of nation-state, they call this new global form of sovereignty "Empire." Empire is thus totally different from imperialism. They argue that "it is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that

progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii). What is interesting is that Empire itself also generates the multitude against Empire. Hardt and Negri explain that the multitude constructs “a constituent counterpower that emerges from within Empire” (59). Hence, the multitude is the ambivalent being for and against Empire. In other words, Empire and its global network might be a response to class struggle of the multitude’s desire for liberation. In this regard, “the multitude called Empire into being” (43). But “the deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction” (61).

Hardt and Negri (2004), in *Multitude* which is sequel to their previous book *Empire*, further debate the concept of the multitude. At first, they distinguish “the multitude” from “the people.” They argue that the people synthesizes or reduces numerous different individuals and classes into one unity, but “the multitude, by contrast, is not unified but remains plural and multiple” (99). While “the people” is based on national identity, the multitude is composed of a set of “singularities,” which can not be reduced to sameness. The multitude is thus different from the masses, the crowd, and the mob, which are “fundamentally passive in the sense that they can not act by themselves but rather must be led” (100). From the socio-economic perspective, the multitude is at once the subject and the object of the global capitalism:

The multitude is the common subject, that is, real flesh of postmodern production, and at same time the object from which collective capital tries to make the body of its global development. Capital wants to make the multitude into an organic unity, just like the state wants to make it into a people (101).

As they argue, if “the people” is the concept for the nation-state, the multitude would be the notion for the current global capitalism in the era of Empire. With the consideration of the 1990s Chinese capitalism and globalization in the sense of Empire, the concept of “the multitude” could be a way to understand the individual figures of the post-1989 Chinese cinema. If the previous Chinese national cinema studies concerns “the people” as a collective unit, the individual characters of the post-1989 cinema might articulate “the multitude” as diverse, multiple, and eclectic. To understand the individual is neither reduced to a simple “individualism” in terms of egoism or selfishness, nor confined to a cultural specificity in a particular region. Therefore, the individual subject emerged in the 1990s Chinese cinema needs to be examined not only in the Chinese historical contexts, but also in the current globalization environment as in the age of Empire.

Chapter 2

Methodology: Jia Zhangke as a Method

In this chapter, I take a genealogical approach to the history of Chinese cinema in order to challenge the existing historiography, and will examine how Jia Zhangke can be a method to rethink the individual and the crowd in Chinese cinema. The generation discourse generated from the work of the Fifth Generation narrated the history of Chinese film as a continuous unity from the origin of Chinese cinema. Thus, each generation is easily categorized as a specific label including “national allegories” of the Fifth Generation and “underground film” or “independent film” for the so-called Sixth Generation. Conversely, I attempt to understand the films of Jia Zhangke as a process of becoming which only makes sense as series rather than as one of the most renowned filmmakers to represent the Chinese Sixth Generation, because his filmography has an organic structure in which each film text on one hand makes different sense in different series, on the other hand is closely related to one another. Although not every single film text is discussed, each of Jia’s film constructs each chapter of the thesis. In general, the early films to *The World* will be reviewed in Part 2 from the perspective of the emergence of the Chinese individual differentiated from the crowd. The more recent films made after *The World* will be discussed in Part 3, which looks at the relationship between the self and the other, the subjective and the objective. Examining his filmography as the production of paradoxes, I will propose the framework of the individual and the crowd to understand the paradoxes of Jia Zhangke.

A Genealogy

Writing the history of Chinese film has been generally framed by the concept of national cinema. The previous most works of Chinese film history have been based on the premise that Chinese film has been developed by the linear and evolutionary history of the national. Cheng Jihua's *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* (History of the development of Chinese cinema, 1963), which is generally considered as one of the most pioneering and authoritative works on Chinese film history, describes the history of Chinese cinema from the perspective of socialist ideology. Taking a stance on the development of Chinese cinema just in book's title, Cheng understands that Chinese cinema served for socialist realism during the period from the outset up to the 1960s. In a sense, Cheng's model has played a role of the prototype for Chinese film history. Since the introduction of Chinese film to the West in the 1980s, the discussion of Chinese film history has been concentrated on the "generation" discourse in both Chinese domestic criticism and the Western academy. With the films that followed the Cultural Revolution being called the Fifth Generation films, all Chinese films are reorganized to belong to one phase of Chinese film history³⁰. What is interesting is that the Fifth Generation was the first group called a "generation." That is to say, the Fifth Generation did not follow the Fourth Generation, on the contrary, the Fourth Generation was named after the emergence of the Fifth Generation. This idea presumes that

³⁰ Ann Anagnost (1997) observes that the generational classifications such as the generation of "old revolutionaries" (*lao geming*) and the "fifth generation" have been widely popular to write Chinese history through the mass media production in the late 1980s. She points out that "as a set of generational identities, they provide the stuff of narration, in which the narrator's life is fitted into the larger narrative frame of the nation itself." (2).

Chinese film has been developed as a history of the same, and attempts to reconstruct the origin of it. In the sense of national cinema, writing Chinese film history by generation means to narrate a chronicle of Chinese films as the unity of a self-evident and national subject evolving through time. As Prasenjit Duara (1995) argues, in this evolutionary history, “historical movement is seen to be produced only by antecedent causes rather than by complex transaction between the past and the present.” (4)

The purpose of my study is to challenge the previous historiography of Chinese cinema, and to propose an alternative way to read Chinese cinema through examining various aspects of the crowd in Chinese films. Exploring the crowd represented in film means to attempt to construct a genealogy of the crowd in Chinese cinema rather than to list a chronology of Chinese national cinema. Thus, my concerns are not the history of the crowd, but an inquiry into the conditions of the crowd with variations of women, the national, the class, the people, the multitude, and the subaltern. Thus, I would concentrate on the differences, ruptures, and disparity of the crowd and the emergence of the individual through Chinese films rather than on the trans-historical, essential, immanent meaning of the individual and the crowd. In this respect, I appropriate a Foucauldian genealogy to understand the variety of the crowd in Chinese film. Thus, what I would argue is that the formation of individual subjectivity is “not the inviolable identity of their origins, but the dissension of other things” (Foucault, 1977: 142). Foucault argues that genealogy is not to justify the origins, on the contrary, to disturb what was previously considered unified, and show the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself.

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity

that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form to all its vicissitudes..... on the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us (146).

Therefore, genealogy deals with in the *Entstehung* (emergence) and *Herkunft* (stock or descent) rather than with *Ursprung* (origin). While origin aims to dissolve the singular event into a continuous unity, as Foucault argues, “emergence is always produced through a particular stage of forces” (148-149). Likewise, genealogy deals with the social conditions of the entry of forces. The objective of genealogy is not the pre-determined authority of meaning, but the endlessly repeated contest of dominations. With this approach, Foucault considers genealogy as new history called “effective” history. Thus, as he argues, “the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation” (162).

In this respect, I would explore the heterogeneity, discontinuities, and contingency of the individual and the crowd in Chinese film, rather than their consistent specificity. In other words, my aim is to highlight the formation of the individual subjectivities that emerge in particular contexts of social, political, and historical conditions, instead of justifying the pre-existing, essential, and trans-historical meanings of the individual and the crowd in Chinese films. Moreover, through this genealogy of the crowd I will

examine the crowd represented in the post-1989 cinema, and at the same time explore the new relationship between the individual and the crowd in contemporary Chinese cinema.

Jia Zhangke as a Process of Becoming

I will discuss on Jia's films in the chronological order of his filmography. His filmography reflects the changes in his concerns and attitude as a process of becoming, so each chapter of this thesis will be devoted to one of his feature-length films, covering them all in order from his debut film *Xiao Wu* to his latest documentary *24 City*. His short films are not my major concern here, but will nevertheless be mentioned when necessary. The chapters are further grouped into two parts covering his early films in terms of the emerging individual subject and his latest films in terms of addressing others respectively. While the former, Part 2 of the thesis, will examine from a diachronic perspective how the emergence of individual interacts with Chinese films within Chinese film history, the latter, Part 3 of the thesis, will discuss from a synchronic perspective how Jia's films are linked with and separated from other contemporary Chinese films produced by his colleagues.

For instance, Part 2 includes a discussion of why the individual in Jia's films is different from the "new woman" in the 1930s, how Jia's realism at once resonates with and is distinguished from the socialist realism, and how differently Jia's loser characters and the hero character of the post-1949 films are signified in their historical contexts. On the other hand, Part 3 raises such questions as how the individual character in Jia's films is different from the individual represented in the 1990s. Also to be considered is

the question of the extent to which Jia's films are related to the so-called "Sixth Generation" films, but diverge from them. Namely, Jia constructs the exteriors by going into his own interior, while his contemporaries are caught in a trap of self-replication or tautology.

Just as each of his individual film texts reveal the process of becoming, Jia Zhangke himself also becomes a process. As his film production constructs a series moving from the individual to the crowd, Part 2 and Part 3 will be interactive and cross-referred in a reciprocal relation, albeit with each of them having its own series of signification. This research project will be conducted by close reading and analysis of the narratives, the characters, the *mise-en-scène*, the camera work, and the discourses found in Jia's individual film texts.

Paradoxes of Jia Zhangke

Reading Jia's films entails a number of paradoxes. His films produce a sense in the series of one thing, at the same time the contradictory sense arises in the series of another thing. In terms of the vicissitude of his filmography, his early films have a paradoxical relation with his late films, and it is between their paradoxical relations that his films generate a sense as a series of Jia Zhangke's films. The paradoxes of Jia Zhangke's films are as follows:

The individual/the crowd: While his early films show the individual subject newly emerged in the 1990s, his late films after *The World* (Shijie, 2004) tend to address the other as a crowd. As he moves away from his hometown Fenyang, his film can no longer deal with the self, the individual. For his film, the movement to another place not

simply means a change of filming location, but implies a change in the object to be filmed. When he moves from the individual to the crowd with the reflection of the self, the individual constructs the crowd, at the same time the crowd becomes a set of the individuals with differences. In this regard, he takes a picture of the crowd through the individual, and vice versa.

The local/the national/the global: Jia Zhangke's first three feature films all are set in Fenyang, where he was born, hence they are called the Jia Zhangke "hometown trilogy." Although they contain the strong local specificity of Fenyang, they have been consumed as just another "Chinese" film mainly circulated through the international film festivals. Unlike those of the Fifth Generation films, the characters in his films speak the local dialect of Fenyang instead of the standard Chinese language, Mandarin. However, as soon as his films were acclaimed on account of their locality being different from those of the Fifth Generation, he became an icon of Chinese cinema. In other words, his films signify Fenyang films at the same time they become Chinese cinema in the opposite position to that of locality.

The national/the transnational: From his debut film *Xiao Wu*, Jia's film production has been dependent on transnational funding from diverse regions and countries, including Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and France. Besides the previous Chinese film production system, the state-owned studios, the new environment of transnational film production makes his film production possible. Although he might be one of the best examples for transnational film production, his films are trans-local rather than transnational. After the Fenyang setting, he travels to Beijing, the Three Gorge (*Sanxia*), Chengdu, and Shanghai to picture other localities in China. In other words, under the transnational environment, what he constructs is localities as an exploration of China.

The subjective/the objective: After the completion of documentary film *Useless* (Wuyong, 2007), Jia said in an interview “when I shoot fiction, I usually want to maintain a certain objectivity in presenting the characters in their settings. But when I shoot documentary, I want to capture the ‘drama’ that’s inherent in reality, and I want to carefully express my subjective impressions.”³¹ Differing from traditional notions of documentary and fiction film, Jia understands the object of the documentary film through a subjective perspective, and constructs the reality of the feature film through an objective position. In this way, the relationship between the subject as a film director and object as to be filmed extends to the question of the intervention of the audience. As seen in his documentary³² *24 City* (*Ershisi Chengji*, 2008), the audience’s active interpretation is required to address others. It is the question of ethics for him to represent others.

The representable/the unrepresentable: By showing the impossibility of transparent representation, Jia Zhangke proposes the possibility of understanding others. In a documentary film *24 City*, he reveals the difficulty in representing the other as a subaltern. The method Jia uses is to just present them without any words. Since they do not speak, the audience concentrates more on their non-verbal expression such as their appearance, gestures, costumes, and smiles. Thus they speak with silence, represent

³¹ Tony Rayns (2007) ‘Challenges: An interview with Jia Zhangke’, <http://international.memento-films.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Press-Kit27.pdf>, accessed 15/April/2012.

³² *24 City* is often called “fake documentary” because it employs professional actors/actresses to represent real factory workers. In this film, the four fictional talking heads performed by professional actors/actresses appear realistic enough to be woven seamlessly with other four authentic people. Those performed interviews brought about a sticky issue of combining the documentary genre with fiction. For instance, Lü Xinyu, a prominent Chinese documentary scholar, use the term “fake documentary” (*weizhuang de jilupian*) to explain how Jia constructs the narrative of this documentary with fictional elements. See Jia Zhangke, *Jia Xiang, 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke dianying shouji*, Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009, p. 258

themselves just through their being. In this respect, the things unspoken are more significant than the things spoken. Jia seems to suggest the question is not whether the subaltern can speak, but whether we can hear them.

Although the paradoxes mentioned above appear in various aspects, they are eventually reduced to the fundamental paradox of the individual/the crowd as a fundamental paradox. Jia Zhangke makes new sense of this paradox between the individual and the crowd. As Deleuze (1990: 75) explains, “paradox is opposed to *doxa*, in both aspects of *doxa*, namely, good sense and common sense.” In other words, while good sense and common sense as *doxa* affirm signification in a single direction, paradox reveals the possibility of two senses or more in two directions. The objection to good sense and common sense is not to simply take the other direction, but to make new sense by showing the diverse possibility of senses which one thing might have. In this regard, paradox subverts at once good sense and common sense, and it is “the force of the unconscious: it occurs always in the space between consciousness, contrary to good sense or behind the back of consciousness, contrary to common sense.” (80) Hence, it is nonsense to produce sense like the unconscious to produce consciousness.

Chapter 3

Rescuing Individual from the Nation:

The Emergence of the Individual Subject in *Xiao Wu*

The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images – Guy Debord

Jia Zhangke's first feature film, *Xiao Wu* (1997, aka *Pickpocket*), ends with a hand-held long take shot that lasts over two and half minutes. It shows an individual figure who is being stared at by a crowd. The eponymous protagonist Xiao Wu is led out from the police station and walks down the street with a police officer after having been arrested for pickpocketing. As the officer goes off to do something, Xiao Wu is temporarily handcuffed to the cable of an electricity pole at the side of the street. Helplessly squatting on the street, Xiao Wu is gradually surrounded by a group of bystanders who come to stare at the spectacle. At this moment, the camera suddenly pans from Xiao Wu to the gathering crowd. Through this camera movement, despite the lack of cutting, the objective shot of Xiao Wu changes to a point-of-view shot from the perspective of the squatting Xiao Wu, who is now out of frame. Without a reverse shot returning to Xiao Wu, the camera remains trained on a view of the crowd gawking directly at Xiao Wu (or the camera) for one and a quarter minutes until the film ends.

First of all, what makes this final scene interesting is that 'public exhibition' or

‘public execution’ (*shizhong*) is employed to conclude the story of the main protagonist, Xiao Wu. This image of ‘public exhibition,’ in fact, can be seen as a social scene, part of social life which could have been easily observed in the street, as Jia Zhangke reflects that “back in the early 1980s, it used to be quite common to see sentenced criminals paraded down the streets of Fenyang for public exhibition” (M. Berry, 2005: 136). At the same time, this should also be understood as a mental scene; one that has been frequently applied in works of modern Chinese literature, stage arts, and films ever since Lu Xun described ‘public exhibition’ scenes to enlighten the Chinese people in his canonical works, such as *Diary of a Madman* (*Kuangren riji*, 1918), *Medicine* (*Yao*, 1919), *The True Story of Ah Q* (*Ah Q Zheng zhuan*, 1921), “Preface to Outcry” (*Nahan zixu*, 1923), and *Public Exhibition* (*Shizhong*, 1925). In this respect, the bystanders gawking at the spectacle of ‘public exhibition’ could be seen as a primordial image of the modern Chinese crowd. Jia Zhangke appropriates this image of ‘public exhibition,’ not simply to reinforce the tragedy of Xiao Wu as a loser in the contemporary Chinese new order, but also to reveal a new relationship between the individual and the collective or the nation in 1990s Chinese society. It is the camera movement in this final shot that distinguishes the individual and isolates him from the crowd. The camera does not capture Xiao Wu and the crowd together in one shot. Rather, Jia makes the camera pan to the crowd, which is seen from the point of view of an out-of-frame Xiao Wu. This is done instead of either using a long shot of the crowd staring at Xiao Wu as the objective or employing cuts or camera swipes between the crowd and Xiao Wu as in a typical shot/reverse shot. The crowd is not seen from the objective perspective of the camera, but is mediated from that of the outcast individual, Xiao Wu. Moreover, this point-of-view shot of Xiao Wu has the effect of incorporating the exterior environment

into the cinematic world. As Jason McGrath argues, the crowd of onlookers was in reality attracted by both the actor Wang Hongwei who playing a role of Xiao Wu handcuffed to the cable and the spectacle of shooting a film in the street. By having the camera confront them from the point-of-view of Xiao Wu, “the stares at the lens appear to be at Xiao Wu and are thus integrated into the diegesis.” (95) Through the perspective of an individual, the social scene becomes the cinematic scene, and the fissure between reality and fiction are sutured in terms of fictional realism with documentary style. This is how Jia Zhangke interacts with the social objects to be filmed by the medium of film and where the realism of his films intervenes. In an interview, Jia Zhangke explains how to make this ending scene as follows:

In the original script the ending was supposed to be of the old police officer leading Xiao Wu through the street, eventually disappearing into a crowd. But as I was shooting, I was never really completely satisfied with this original ending. It is a safe ending, but also a rather mediocre one. During the twenty days of the shoot I was constantly trying to come up with a better ending. Suddenly one day when we were shooting a crowd started to gather around to watch us filming and I was struck with a kind of inspiration. I decided to shoot a crowd scene of people staring at him. I felt that in some way, this crowd could serve as a kind of bridge with the audience. Like the audience, the crowd is also comprised of spectators, but there is a shift in perspective. As soon as I thought of it I felt a kind of excitement. Naturally, I also thought of Lu Xun’s conception of the ‘crowd’. (M. Berry, 2005: 203)

In this chapter, focusing on the interpretation of this final scene, I will explore how Jia Zhangke represents an individual living in the 1990s Chinese new circumstances and discuss why he decides to set *Xiao Wu* as separated from the crowd rather than as disappearing into it. It is generally held that Jia's films present a crude and penetrating view into contemporary Chinese urban society, which is clearly different from the rural landscapes seen in the Fifth Generation films. *Xiao Wu*, the first of his films to be set in his hometown Fenyang, has been understood as an exemplary embodiment of 'postsocialist realism', which resonates with both Chinese new social conditions and the documentary movement in the early 1990s.

However, I will consider *Xiao Wu* as a text of 'singularity' in Chinese film history from the perspective of the emergence of the individual subject. It is different from the existing discussions which centers around aesthetic realism in art films circulated on the international film festival circuit or socio-political meanings arising from new production circumstances of underground/independent films unlike the previous state-owned studio system. Thus, what I am interested in is how the Chinese individual figure is represented in *Xiao Wu* and what this individual subject signifies in Chinese film history. Examining the relationship between the individual and the collective both in historical and social contexts, this chapter attempts to address the questions of how the individual is isolated from collective groups and why the protagonist's character in *Xiao Wu* is different from those in other post-1989 Chinese films in the context of the 1990s Chinese socio-culture. Furthermore, with the consideration of Jia's above remark about the crowd scene as 'the bridge' with the audience, one more critical question could be added to the discussion of the final scene: who is watching what in *Xiao Wu* or *Xiao Wu*?

Wandering in the Street

Xiao Wu begins with a quite impressive opening sequence, which not only introduces the protagonist Xiao Wu's character and profession, but also implies the tone and milieu of the whole film. After the title shot, what we can see first in the film is an extreme close up shot of Xiao Wu's hand lighting a match while he waits for a bus at the roadside. The following shot when he lights up his cigarette reveals the box of matches in his hand has 'Shanxi' written on it. These two shots offer the information about the character and the place where the story unfolds. As Jia explains, "I decided to open the film with a shot of his hands because he is a pickpocket, a thief, and his hands are the tools of his trade... and I wanted to highlight the fact that this was a story about 'Shanxi'.... So the hands for the thief and the matches for Shanxi" (M. Berry: 202). On one hand, they establish the main character and the background of the story to be developed; on the other hand they resonate with the ending scene in which Xiao Wu's hands are handcuffed in the street. In this sense, this film might be understood as a story of the process of how the hands of Xiao Wu shown in this opening scene come to be shackled under the changing environment of his hometown Fenyang, Shanxi.

In the following scene, Xiao Wu waves his hand to stop a bus heading for downtown Fenyang, and then gets on it. The camera, which has continued to focus on Xiao Wu's hands, shows a tattoo on his arm with another close-up shot. The tattoo in Chinese characters is *yunnan tongdang*, which means to share the burden in times of difficulty, and it exposes his social status of shady roots, because a man with such a tattoo in China is usually supposed to be implicated in a crime. After taking a seat, Xiao

Wu avoids buying a ticket by pretending that he is a policeman, and soon extends his hand into the pocket of the man sitting next to him. In the following reverse shot, it is an effigy of Chairman Mao Zedong hanging from the bus's rear mirror that quietly stares at Xiao Wu's theft. Chairman Mao, who was a symbol of absolute power and socialist idealism, now just exists as a symbol of fashion or signifier of consumerism.³³ While Chairman Mao linking the present to the past signifies the end of socialism and the conditions of Chinese capitalism, the bus carrying Xiao Wu to the city implies new China 'heading towards' (*wangqian zou*), which has same pronunciation in Chinese as the phrase 'heading for the money.' Consequently, this opening sequence, a prelude to the whole film, suggests the condition of the protagonist Xiao Wu and the new social milieu that he will soon face.

The narrative of the film, after Xiao Wu comes to downtown of Fenyang, is developed through Xiao Wu's relationship with three different categories of people: his friend Jin Xiaoyong, his lover Hu Meimei, and his family.³⁴ Xiaoyong, Xiao Wu's childhood friend and a former pickpocket, is now treated as a successful 'model entrepreneur' and local celebrity, even though he makes a fortune by smuggling cigarettes and running a nightclub. He is unwilling to invite Xiao Wu to his upcoming

³³ As discussed in the previous chapter, Dai Jinhua (2002) discusses the Chinese culture of the 1990s through a reading of 'Mao Zedong fever' as an icon of post-revolutionary consumerism. Observing Mao Zedong's image on cars, beepers and lighters was a symbol of fashion at the beginning of Mao Zedong fever, she points out that "it was more the revelation of a political unconscious than some kind of clearly conscious political behavior: the displacement and identification of political power with consumerism." (174) Thus, Mao Zedong fever as the consumption of prohibition is the dissolution of the sacred and the untouchable, and shows a reconstruction and a parody of ideology. For a more detailed discussion on consumerism and Mao Zedong fever in the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, see Dai Jinhua 'Redemption and Consumption' in *Cinema and Desire*, ed. Wang Jing and Tani E. Barlow, London: Verso.

³⁴ *Xiao Wu*'s original intended title is 'Jin Xiaoyong's Buddy, Hu Meimei's Sugardaddy, and Liang Changyou's Son: Xiao Wu.' As Michael Berry argues, this early title explicitly reveals the narrative structure of the film and the protagonist's identity constructed through his relationship with those around him. Berry, Michael, *Xiao Wu, Platform, Unknown Pleasure: Jia Zhangke's 'Hometown Trilogy'*, London: BFI, 2009, p. 39.

wedding, because the presence of Xiao Wu might remind people that he was once a pickpocket. Hearing the news of Xiaoyong's wedding from others, Xiao Wu visits him at the eve of his wedding, but he realizes that their relationship has already dissolved. Jia Zhangke sets up a couple of cinematic juxtapositions to highlight this change in their relationship. Xiaoyong first appears in the film in an interview shot taken by the local FYTV station broadcasting the news of his wedding. This FYTV functions as the cinematic establishment, not only to indicate Xiaoyong's present status as a local celebrity, but also to intensify the difference between his and Xiao Wu's status through the contrast in the way they are represented on TV. Xiaoyong actively exposes and represents himself through the interview with FYTV, while Xiao Wu avoids a street interview about the government campaign to 'clamp down' on crime. Xiao Wu, after his arrest for pickpocketing, rather is represented by interviews with others condemning him for his crime. Xiaoyong speaks on TV, but Xiao Wu is spoken of.

The difference in their status is further enhanced by the past time they shared. After refusing his friend's advice to invite Xiao Wu to his wedding, Xiaoyong turns around to look at a brick wall in his house and pats it with a sigh. A couple of scenes later, Xiao Wu also looks at it and feels this brick wall for a while when he visits the entrance of Xiaoyong's house. In these two scenes, the close-up shot shows that this brick wall bears the scratched names of Xiao Wu and Xiaoyong with the dates and height markings. The brick wall holds their past time and common memory, to which they cannot return. In a similar way, their common memory is revealed again through their bodies, when Xiao Wu meets Xiaoyong on the eve of his wedding. After a quarrel with Xiaoyong, Xiao Wu pulls up Xiaoyong's sleeve and shouts an order at him to look at his arms. His forearm, although it is hardly seen on film, has a tattoo of *youfu tongxiang* in Chinese

characters, which means to share the pleasure in times of happiness. This is the other line of a couplet shown earlier on Xiao Wu's arm. Whereas Xiao Wu's tattoo indicates the time of being together in spite of difficulties, Xiaoyong's one suggests the time of being separated due to fortune. Thus, through personal place and bodies, time and memory are embodied in this film, but are individualized rather than providing a universal history. In other words, for Xiao Wu, the past is not Chinese socialism, but rather is the times of being together with Xiaoyong, likewise, the change of time expressed as a change in his old buddy Xiaoyong rather than as a change of the world.

The second part of the film is developed through Xiao Wu's relationship with Hu Meimei, a bar hostess who works in a karaoke club. Rejected by Xiaoyong and not invited to his wedding, Xiao Wu visits a small karaoke club for consolation. Meimei, who serves Xiao Wu, asks him to sing and dance, but he is not willing to do either. At last, paying some money, Xiao Wu goes outside to have a date with her. After the happy date with Meimei for a half-day, Xiao Wu revisits the karaoke club to meet her, but hears that she is absent due to illness. Xiao Wu goes to her dormitory, and brings a hot water pack to soothe her stomachache. Meimei appreciates Xiao Wu for his kindness, and tells him to sit beside her. After singing a sad song, she asks him to sing, but Xiao Wu responds to her by opening a lighter filched from Xiaoyong that plays a mechanical sound of *Für Elise*. At last, she leans over and puts her head on his knee and he lightly embraces her shoulder. This last shot of the scene at Meimei's dormitory completes the relationship between them to signify Meimei as a haven from the painful situation of the town. As Chris Berry (2008) points out, when Xiao Wu rushes into the shop to buy a hot water pack, the camera moves fast in a handheld shot, which is the dominant style of this film, but once he returns, the camera takes a static long-shot long take to signify

“the transformation of the dormitory into an intimate space of retreat” (253). In addition to the static long take; it is the excessive sunshine shed from the window behind them that helps to make their relationship closer in a warm atmosphere.

Even though this scene shows a romantic moment between them, their relationship actually cannot last long. Soon, when he visits the karaoke club to meet her, Xiao Wu hears that she has left this town with a wealthy businessman. As Cui Shuqin (2006) argues, Xiao Wu and Meimei “sense themselves falling in love, but they fail to realize that their relationship is grounded on a commercial transaction” (110). Besides, the fragility of their relationship is also supported by their places: the karaoke club where they meet first and Meimei’s dormitory where they share good feelings. Karaoke clubs have been explosively popular in China, and take on a specific meaning, as Jia Zhangke states, “in some sense, all the people in China have no home to return to, the karaoke club is the only place for them to take a rest.” However, as he confirms, “it is impossible to expect anything there. The karaoke club is just a place to consume a temporary pleasure rather than to find an exit for life.”³⁵ Likewise, Meimei’s dormitory, although it is a space of happiness for Xiao Wu and Meimei, it is also represented as a transient and unsettled place rather than a permanent and stable home. In the scene in which Xiao Wu and Meimei sit side by side on the bed, a big travel suitcase next to the bed implies that Meimei will not stay there for long. Finally, one day she leaves without any words, and when Xiao Wu revisits this place where she is absent, he realizes that it is impossible to maintain a relationship with her.

In the third and last part of this film, after the end of the relationship with Meimei,

³⁵ Lee, Youngjae and Lee, Byungwon, ‘Guri ui siyin, somachigi ui cheolhakja’ (A Poet in the Street, A Philosopher of Pickpocket - interview with Jia Zhangke), *Kino*, Seoul, November 1999, Seoul, p. 45, my translation.

Xiao Wu returns to the home where his family live. While his family welcomes his second elder brother's fiancé who is from a rich family, Xiao Wu does not get along well with his family. His nephew is not willing to call him uncle, and his sister tells him not to fool around outside anymore. When he gives his mother a ring, which was originally intended for Meimei, she doubts if it is gold. All of the family gathers to discuss on his brother's wedding; however, Xiao Wu is out of the frame not joining them. In the meantime, Xiao Wu gets angry at the fact that his mother gave the ring to his brother's fiancé, but his father drives him away and shouts at him not to come back again.

On his way out, Xiao Wu stops and hears from the village broadcasting a local Shanxi radio report on the celebration of the reunification of Hong Kong and the subsequent private advertisement saying that "anyone who wants to have a slice of pork, come to my house." At this moment, the camera does a slow 180-degree pan from Xiao Wu's point-of-view shot to signify his loss of a sense of direction and belonging. When he looks around the scenery of the village, it suddenly becomes "the uncanny" in a Freudian sense, and he falls into a deadlock. At the end of this 180-degree pan, although the camera shows the road in front of him, Xiao Wu cannot move forward at all. This scene not only shows the desolate frame of mind that Xiao Wu experiences because he has nowhere to go, but also suggests an ironic situation that while China is united, the family is separated. Although Hong Kong's return to China is a national celebration, for Xiao Wu it actually sounds like something strange that has nothing to do with him. Just as he cannot identify himself as a member of the village community with the advertisement broadcasting for selling pork, he can never have a sense of belonging to the news of national reunification. In this respect, Xiao Wu is separated not only from

his family and home, but also from the nation-state.

The film, which begins with Xiao Wu waiting for a bus in the street, concludes with the scene of Xiao Wu being caught in the street. Soon after being exiled from his family, and returning to downtown of Fenyang, Xiao Wu watches his old friend moving out because his shop is to be demolished because of government policy. Hereby, there is no place remaining for him among the places he has visited in the film except for the street. Xiao Wu attempts to pickpocket again in the street, and is finally arrested when a beeper, which he had bought for contacting Meimei, buzzes when he is lifting a wallet. In the film, there is by no means any home for Xiao Wu to stay in. He just wanders in the street all throughout the film. Although he visits Xiaoyong's house, Meimei's karaoke and dormitory, and his parents' home one after another, he neither belongs to their places nor takes a rest there. On one hand, the street is Xiao Wu's space, the place in which he always wanders. On the other hand, it is a non-place swung between other places.

In a similar vein, the noises of the street, which are the most dominant sound in the film, not only help to construct the cinema vérité or on-the-spot realism aesthetics, which is generally discussed in relation to Jia's films, but also intervene in and insinuate the relationship between Xiao Wu and the others. For example, in the middle of the film, when Xiao Wu stands in the street and in front of a film theatre, the sound of the lines and the theme song of *The Killer* (*Die xue shuang xiong*, 1989, dir. John Woo) are inserted in with other street noise for more than one and a half minutes. By showing that Xiao Wu stands in front of the film theatre where this film is being screened and advertised, Jia Zhangke makes this sound a noise of the street in diegesis. As this film, which represents romanticized brotherhood as a traditional Chinese value, is sutured in

diegesis, it gives rise to irony relating to the failed relationship between Xiao Wu and Xiaoyong, who shared sworn brotherhood through their couplet of tattoos. The traditional value is merely consumed as a popular culture commodity in the street, even though Xiao Wu wants to live it. Another example could be found in the scene in Meimei's dormitory, in which while Xiao Wu and Meimei sit side by side on the bed, the noise of traffic is constantly heard from the street outside³⁶. Disturbing the homely and peaceful atmosphere between them, this sound reminds us that this place is actually opened to the street and that their relationship cannot be settled. Likewise, in Xiao Wu's relationship with his family, the broadcasting sound from the speaker in the street, as mentioned above, also functions to confirm that he is separated from his family. Therefore, the street is where Xiao Wu not just wanders around, but also confirms his failed relationship and finally returns. He has nowhere but the street, after each relationship falls apart. Consequently, it is no accident that the final scene concludes with Xiao Wu being shackled in the street rather than in the police station or anywhere else. A detailed discussion of this final scene will be developed again later in this chapter.

The End of Allegory and Voices from Below

In several interviews, Jia Zhangke has mentioned that it was since he had watched Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984) that he decided to engage himself in film-making. "Going back to my interest in film, it all started with that afternoon in

³⁶ In an interview, about this place Jia says "it is Meimei's place that we only reformed. We tore down the upper part of the wall, so we can see cars passing by behind her in the scene that she yawns in the front yard.", Lee Youngjae and Lee Byungwon, 'A Poet in the Street, A Philosopher of Pickpocket - interview with Jia Zhangke' p. 47, my translation.

Taiyuan when I saw *Yellow Earth*.... I never realized that there were other possibilities of film. But all of that changed after I watched *Yellow Earth*. Suddenly I was struck with a new paradigm for cinematic expression.”³⁷ *Yellow Earth*, on one hand, obviously plays the role of a groundbreaking work signaling the emergence of the Fifth Generation³⁸ who introduced Chinese films to the world and attracted its attention, but on the other hand, as in Jia Zhangke’s example, it has provoked young post-89 Chinese directors to engage in film. Lu Xuechang recalls that, “the Beijing Film Academy allowed me and Wang Xiaoshuai to enter, mainly due to the appearance of the Fifth Generation. After *Yellow Earth*, formative art and the like became the essence of film. Because we had studied painting, we had an advantage for admission.”³⁹ Wang Chao also remarks that he gradually learned film-making skills through “watching *King of Children* and *Yellow Earth*, and writing film reviews.”⁴⁰ Although *Yellow Earth* has had a profound influence on post-89 film directors, they have challenged the model of *Yellow Earth* or the Fifth Generation and attempted to find their own cinematic styles.

³⁷ Berry, Michael (2005), *Speaking in images*, p. 185.

³⁸ Although, to be exact, the initial film of the Fifth Generation films is usually considered to be Zhang Junzhao’s *One and Eight* (1984), which was made by the collective creation of the core Fifth Generation members, *Yellow Earth* could be more significant for understanding the emergence of the Fifth Generation film on consideration of the impact when it was released. On one hand, its circulation at international film festivals since its initial screening in Hong Kong on April 12th 1985 has made a decisive contribution towards attracting the attention of Western film critics to Chinese film. On the other hand, it was the direct cause of naming of the Fifth Generation films. Zheng Dongtian recalls that Chen Kaige’s *Yellow Earth* was screened along with his father Chen Huaikai’s *Shuangxiong Hui* at the conference on Chinese films on November 19th 1984. Their different cinematic style provoked the vehement discussion on the Chinese film’s generation, and it finally resulted in the invention of “Fifth Generation,” which has become an official expression in Chinese film journals and documents since. For more details, see Zheng Dongtian (2006) ‘*Dai yu Wudai: Dui Zhongguo Daoyan Chuantong de Yizhong Miaoshu*’ (Generation and Non-generation: A Sketch on the Tradition of Chinese Film Directors), in *Dangdai dianying* (Contemporary Cinema), no. 1. pp. 10-11.

³⁹ Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou (2002), *Wode Shexiangji bu shahuang: xianfeng dianying ren dangan- shengyu 1961-1970* (My Camera Doesn’t Lie: Documents on Avant-garde Filmmakers Born Between 1961-1970), Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chuban gosi, p. 197.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 154.

A manifesto-like article titled “The Post-*Yellow Earth* Phenomena of Chinese Cinema” (*Zhongguo diangying de houhuangtudi xianxiang*) accredited to all students who entered the Beijing Film Academy in 1985, declares that “*Yellow Earth* is already gone.... In our cinema world, for a very long time, it is notion, ideology, and interpretation that have led creation.... Today, what Chinese cinema needs is not only theorists, critics, or readers, but a group of new film producers and honest (*laolaoshishi*) cinema that is shot in a truthful way.”⁴¹ This statement shows the young directors’ collective recognition of the Fifth Generation film and their particular attitude to making a film. The word “truthful” which they emphasize in fact refers to “documentary or spontaneous” (*jishi*) and “objective” (*keguan*). Unlike “national allegory” or the mythical narrative in the Fifth Generation films, what the younger generation pursues in their films is a record of objective reality and a film as a witness on the spot. In other words, they make their films with their own stories in their own way instead of representing the nation or the people through allegory or collective memories. Zhang Yuan, one of the so-called Sixth Generation or post-89 film directors, along with the documentary director Wu Wenguang, remarks that “parable is the Fifth Generation’s core” and “they have done a terrific job writing history as a parable. But I can only be objective. Indeed, to me objectivity is crucial. Each day I pay attention to what happens immediately around me. I can’t see beyond a certain distance.”⁴² Likewise, Zhang Ming also elucidates that he decided to make his debut film *Wushan Yunyu* (*Clouds over Wushan*, 1996), which is set in his hometown Wushan near the Yangzi river, because he

⁴¹ All the students of Beijing Film Academy’s class of 1985, ‘*Zhongguo diangying de hou huangtudi xianxiang*’ (Post-*Yellow Earth* Phenomena of Chinese Cinema), *Shanghai Yishujia*, 1993, no. 4, my translation.

⁴² Zheng Xianghong, “Zhangyuan fangtan lu” (Interview with Zhang Yuan), *Diangying gushi* (Film Story), no. 5 1994, Quoted from Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 94.

was fed up with northern Chinese scenery and the tradition in the Fifth Generation. He thought there was no sense of reality in such films and that he could make a film with a background of Yangzi river, by which the majority of the Chinese people live.⁴³ For post-89 young Chinese directors, as film is a medium to express themselves like ‘writing a diary’,⁴⁴ it is no accident that most of their initial films would be inspired by ordinary stories around them, and set in their hometowns or the urban places where they have lived. In the case of *Xiao Wu*, Jia explains that the lead character is derived from Jia’s old buddy called ‘Donkey,’ who is a pickpocket. When he went back to his hometown Fenyang, another of Jia’s old friends, who is a policeman, told him Donkey’s story, and Jia was inspired to make the story of *Xiao Wu*.⁴⁵

In addition to the separation from the Fifth Generation, this individualized narrative of post-89 films also refers to the socio-cultural context in which the traditional concept of the intellectual and of literature has changed since the late 1980s and early 1990s. After the end of Cultural Revolution, the 1980s, to be more exact, New Era (*Xin shiqi*, 1978-1989) was full of explosive vigor with debates on Chinese history and modernity. In the first half of the 1980s, there appeared a series of literary trends such as “Scar Literature” (*shanghen wenxue*), “Educated Youth Literature” (*zhi qing wenxue*), and “Roots-seeking Literature” (*xun gen wenxue*) which reflected on the Cultural Revolution from a post-revolutionary mentality. The efforts of rethinking history or retrieving and reinventing the memory of a collective past address the present in a various voices. As Liu and Tang observe (1993), “this history is evoked not only

⁴³ Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, *Wode sheyingji bu sahuang*, p. 31.

⁴⁴ Wang Xiaoshuai has described that “producing this film (*The Days*, aka *Dongchun de rizi*, 1993) is like writing our own diary.” *Dianying gusi*, no. 5, 1993. Quoted from Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ Lin Xudong, Zhang Yaxuan and Gu Zheng, *Jia Zhangke dianying: Zhantai* (The Films of Jia Zhangke: Platform), Beijing: Zhongguo mangwen chubanshe, 2003, p. 192.

through a painful questioning of ‘master narratives,’ such as those of national identity and collective movements, but also by means of reconstructing the micro-narratives of personal memories” (16-17). The reflection on Chinese modern history and a variety of voices of literature developed into a “Cultural Fever” (*wenhua re*) in the second half of the 1980s. “Cultural Fever,” which was an unprecedentedly vehement debate on Chinese modernity, generated a broad range of discussions from the present appropriation of the May Fourth movement, neo-Confucianism, and new enlightenment to comparisons between China and the West in almost every area⁴⁶.

However, with the shock of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, the rapid capitalization and marketization in the early 1990s and concurrent rise of mass culture, the flourishing of cultural discourses seen in the 1980s has been practically eradicated, as Zhang Xudong observes, “not by the terror of a totalitarian regime, but by the forced uniformity of the collective resolution to ‘get rich fast’” (1997:18). In other words, as the process of Capitalism in China accelerated Chinese consumerism, the “Cultural Fever” of the 1980s has been absorbed into the “Market Fever” (*shichang re*) of the 1990s. In the context of the rise of mass culture, one of most significant events in Chinese literature has been the appearance of the so-called “Wang Shuo phenomenon” at the dawning of the 1990s. Wang Shuo’s novels were labeled “Hooligan Literature” (*liumang wenxue*), which is characterized as featuring vulgar language, unreasonable plots, and young generation’s cynicism. His novels have been widely popular over the nation and became a cultural icon of the 1990s. His popularity introduced a new social trend of buying books on the basis of author’s name. He became the best selling native

⁴⁶ For more details, see chapter 3 in Zhang Xudong (1993), *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, Durham: Duke University Press and Wang Jing (1996), *High Culture Fever*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

writer since the establishment of the PRC. However, the “Wang Shuo phenomenon” does not simply mean the rise of popular culture in the 1990s, but also, more importantly, indicates the subversion of the center or the transition to a new order. Dai Jinhua (1999) argues that the publication of *The Collection Of Wang Shuo's Works* (1992) reconstructed the relation between classic literature and popular literature, because the personal collection of literary works had been considered as only mainstream writers' privilege until then. (52) Besides their meaning as a social phenomenon, Wang Shuo's novels have the characteristic of “anti-allegory” (*fan yuyan*) literature, which reflects on and examines the relationship between the nation-state and individual subjects. Zhang Yiwu (1997 a), considers this anti-allegory writing as a new form for the 1990s and cites Wang Shuo's novel, *Qianwan bie baowo dangren* (Never Decieve Me) (1989) as the first anti-allegorical work. In his analysis, anti-allegorical writing is marked by two aspects. First, it implies “the end of allegorical writing, which positions itself at the intersection of time and space. It no longer strengthens the mythic image of China created by the temporal hysteresis and the specificity of space, but freely surpasses time and space, bringing what is Chinese and foreign, past and present, into its own field of vision” (254). Thus, China is not restricted to being the other of the West, but is set in the place of an indefinable complex constructed by multiple structures. Second, anti-allegorical writing rewrites and satirizes the national allegory through a type of parody. It reexamines allegorical writing itself by using exaggerated deformation and “freely crossing the norms set up by old boundaries and hierarchical structures, which provides a new style of narration that is removed from allegorization” (251). Consequently, the anti-allegorical writing of the 1990s deconstructs the ‘national allegory’ suggested by Fredrick Jameson (1986) which has been considered as the

inevitable frame of interpretation for the third world texts, and signifies the emergence of Chinese postmodernism or of a new narrative emerging in the “post-New Era” (*hou xin shiqi*).

In the context of the new socio-cultural conditions of the 1990s, *Xiao Wu* constructs a couple of problematics in terms of the anti-allegorical character and the new subject of representation. First of all, the leading character, Xiao Wu, recalls the classical national figure of Ah Q in Lu Xun’s novel *The True Story of Ah Q* (1921), as well as the public execution in the final scene mentioned above. Ah Q and Xiao Wu not only have a similar social status in common in that they have no home, no regular job, and just wander the street, but they also similarly fail in the social relationships around them. In the same way that Ah Q is driven out of the Zhao’s household, Xiao Wu is rejected by his friend Xiaoyong, and also expelled from his family home. Likewise, Ah Q’s attempt to make relationship with Aunt Wu results in getting him into trouble, and the failed relationship with Meimei drives Xiao Wu into a corner. Although the character of Xiao Wu seems to be based on the prototype of Ah Q, it is positioned differently. While Ah Q remains a national allegorical symbol, Xiao Wu signifies an individual subject as a loser in contemporary Chinese society, because, as Michael Berry points out (2009), “Xiao Wu stands as a far more self-conscious character, keenly aware of his surroundings and predicament.” (44) In a way of satire, Lu Xun displays Ah Q as an embodiment of the negative traits of the Chinese national character, and conceives the Chinese national mentality by Ah Q’s *‘jingshen shengli fa’* (spiritual victory complex), which refers to his penchant for transforming real failures into mental victories. Thus, the ever-cheerful Ah Q is unwilling to acknowledge the seriousness of the situations he is placed in, even when he faces imminent execution in the end. However, Xiao Wu is a realistic character

with a strong self-awareness, rather than a satirical character of the national allegory for enlightenment. He is a loser of the reform era, and an outcast in margin of the contemporary Chinese society. The tragic situations he faces, rather than being predicated on national tragedy to allegorize the collective mentality, are related to his personal problems or one of various aspects of transitional China. In other words, Xiao Wu cannot become a national icon to represent China, unlike Ah Q in the early modern era or Gong Li's character in the Fifth Generation films.

Second, it is very obvious that Xiao Wu is far from the heroic characters found in socialist realism cinema (1949-1978). In fact, the heroic characters, one of the most dominant features in socialist realism, were frequently employed to represent or propagandize socialist revolution. *Song of Youth* (*Qingchu zhi ge*, 1959) would be a typical example of revolutionary heroics. Throughout the film, which is set in the 1930s, the heroine, Lin Daoqing, plays a role in various revolutionary movements despite many hardships such as near suicide through a failed marriage, and finally leads the triumph of the anti-Japanese student protest movement in 1935. In the end of the film, she not only gains admission to the Party, but also leads a crowd of students and workers. Likewise, it is more prominent that the films during the Cultural Revolution period (1964-1978) focus on the revolutionary hero for socialist realism both in feature films and in "Model Opera Films" (*yangban xi*). Jiang Qing and her allies, who led the direction of literature and art works in this period, suggested the modernized Model Operas as the new film style, which is marked by an emphasis on the strong formalism applied to the characters, exposition, acting, and film techniques. The principle operating in this formalism was that of the "Three Prominences" (*san tuchu*): a concentric emphasis on the positive characters, the band of heroes among them, and the

single most inspiring hero. (Clark, 1987: 134) Thus, the hero/heroine character was a core of the film, and a hero/heroine and the crowd following him/her was the basic structure of socialist realist films. However, Xiao Wu is nothing like these heroic characters, rather he is an anti-hero or a loser. Whereas the hero character of the socialist realism films leads the crowd or stands for it, Xiao Wu is not only separated from the crowd but also reproved by it.

Third, although the anti-heroic or marginal character is the prevalent feature of the post-89 films, the lead character of *Xiao Wu* is distinguished from those of the other films in this period. In fact, in the context of the anti-allegorical writing of the 1990s, the anti-hero narrative is one of the most conspicuous cultural phenomena both in literature and film. Dai Jinhua (2000 a), observing the Stephen Chow (Zhou Xingchi) boom and the vogue for ‘*wulitou*’ (nonsense) style that his films led to in 1990s mainland Chinese society, argues that the emergence of new subjects as anti-heroes or ordinary people resulted from the rise of mass culture and the spread of internet culture. This new voice denied traditional values and authority, and brought Chinese intellectuals, who had previously dominated the power of cultural discourse, into serious conflicts and a sense of crisis. In the meantime, the formation of a new social group and the rapid development of the cultural market generated so-called “cultural heroes,” which are different from traditional, conventional, or orthodox intellectuals. In this process, the narrative of the “cultural hero” replaced the old narrative of the “revolutionary hero,” and was consumed as a popular idol in the cultural market (1-17). Thus, in a sense, the anti-hero ironically became a new type of hero, and the margin came into the center. For instance, although Wang Shuo writes rebellious anti-hero characters through his “hooligan literature,” he himself could be considered as an icon

of success in the cultural market, rather than a marginal anti-hero against the traditional order. In this respect, he exemplifies another order in times of social transformation and ideological change, rather than the subversion of the existing order or the end of the old ideology (Dai, 2000 b: 201-204).

In the context of Chinese socio-culture in the 1990s, it could be understood that the anti-hero or marginal characters were the main subjects of the post-89 films. Examples from some early works include: a retarded child in *Mother* (*Mama*, dir. Zhang Yuan, 1992), a psychotic patient in *Red Beads* (*Xuan lian*, dir. He Jianjun, 1993), rock and roll musicians in *Beijing Bastards* (*Beijing zazhong*, dir. Zhang Yuan, 1993), *Dirt* (*Toufa luanle*, dir. Guan Hu, 1994), and *Weekend Lovers* (*Zhoumo qingren*, dir. Lou Ye, 1995), poor painters and artists in *Bumming in Beijing* (*Liulang Beijing*, dir. Wu Wenguang, 1990) and *Days* (*Dongchun de rizi*, dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, 1993), and so on. However, I would rather clarify that some common tendencies run through these characters, instead of simply saying that what they have in common is their marginality. The first tendency is that a considerable number of these characterizations deal with artists who have the tools to represent themselves. Rock musicians, painters, and avant-garde artists, reflecting directors' identities, make their voices as new subjects in the margin of contemporary Chinese society. However, they are not ordinary people, and when they are regarded as a model for alternative voices or as a token of the minority against mainstream social order, as Dai (2000 a) remarks, the real weak or marginal of Chinese society, such as migrant workers, peasants, and retired people, who cannot speak for themselves, might be pushed into the more invisible side of Chinese society (2-3).

The second tendency, which is more or less related to the first, is that these characters elaborate rebellious youth. Particularly, rock music and musicians are

employed to demonstrate their pursuit of “authentic self-expression (*ziwo biaoqian*) and emotional release (*xuanxie*) in the face of oppression (*yayi*).”⁴⁷ Whether it plays the role of the main subject as in *Dirt* and *Beijing Bastards* or relates to supporting characters and partly inserted scenes as in *Weekend Lovers* and *The Making of Steel* (*Zhangda chengren*, dir. Lu Xuechang, 1997), rock music is considered as an effective means to articulate the characters’ sense of dissension and resistance to cinematic rebellion. However, as it enters the new cultural market of the 1990s, Chinese rock music retained the rebellious and authentic features of the 1980s and is marked by the celebration of consumerism. For instance, Cui Jian, who is a leading character in Zhang Yuan’s *Beijing Bastards*, was an icon of rebellious youth in the 1980s, and his song “Yi Wu Suoyou” (nothing to my name) was sung as a symbol of young people’s mentality by the protesters during the 1989 Tiananmen movement. However, as Zhou Xuelin points out, the release of his first album “turned rock music into a commodity to be purchased, consumed, and disposed of. Commercialized rock music made its rebellious and spontaneous nature stylized” (2007:130). In other words, “this rebellion is invariably met with outrage, stiff resistance, and eventually, co-optation from the dominant culture.”⁴⁸ Considering the relationship between rock music and the post-89 cinema in the perspective of their rebellion and its institutionalization or commercialization in the 1990s, Zhang Yingjin (1997) argues that, “in choosing to work with the studio system, many young directors were even more restricted than their rock counterparts and were under pressure not only to tone down their antisocial sentiments,

⁴⁷ Jones, Andrew F. (1992) *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) p. 91, quoted from Zhang Yingjin (2007), “Rebel without a Cause,” p. 61, in Zhang Zhen ed. *The Urban Generation*, Durham: Duke University Press.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117, quoted from Zhang Yingjin, “Rebel without a Cause”, p. 64.

but also to disguise their oppositional stance by adding a token ‘repentance’ of their rebellious adolescent years” (64). Consequently, the rebellion or resentment of early post-89 films has gradually been tamed or has compromised with the government system, the new cultural market, and the changes in film production environment, and post-89 directors have subsequently taken different lines, such as producing commercial films, art films, and/or independent films that lack rebellion.

In contrast to these characteristics of post-89 films, *Xiao Wu* concentrates on the figure of a subaltern who can neither speak nor resist. The protagonist Xiao Wu is not willing to sing, except in a public bath scene where he sings alone, and hardly expresses his feelings. Considering that the post-89 cinema has a characteristic of self-expression or self-reflection, *Xiao Wu* rather echoes the social status of director Jia Zhangke, in contrast to the protagonists of most other post-89 films, which reflect the directors’ identities as artists. As a film director, Jia Zhangke understands himself as “migrant worker” (*dianying mingong*), and he has stated that he has tried to describe the lives of ordinary people who had not previously been the focus of films until then:

I feel myself identified with the migrant peasant workers (*mingong*). At that time, I thought there is really no concern about these people in Chinese films. The reason why I made *Xiao Wu* is that I felt unsatisfied with that life experiences and situations of many people were concealed. A couple of years later, if you imagine how most people live and look for it in films of that period, they will be fake and lies. In this respect, I think the film really is a way to remember. (Cheng and Huang, 2002: 362)

However, I have no intention of arguing that Jia Zhangke is the only film director to be concerned about migrant workers or the majority of people who are not spoken for or represented. In fact, more and more feature films have appeared which partly or thoroughly focus on the lives of the people who had been hitherto ignored; in particular, the Chinese new documentary films made since the 1990s have shown various aspects of the lives of marginal people in contemporary Chinese society. Wu Wenguang's documentary project *Dance with Migrant Workers* (*He mingong tiaowu*, 2002) and Wang Bing's *West of Tracks* (*Tie Xi Qu*, 2003) would be good examples.

Nevertheless, considering Jia Zhangke's subsequent films and the next steps of his colleagues, *Xiao Wu* still remains distinguished and problematic in terms of the relationship between the filmmaker and the object. As Zhang Yingjin (2006) illustrates, many post-89 directors inevitably confront the question of how they can speak for "ordinary people," and the dilemma of self-positioning. In the case of Wu Wenguang, he admits that he no longer belongs to any group, and finally clarifies his positionality as "returning to himself" (*huidao zishen*). Thus, his position is "not an official position (government), not a popular or folk position (*minjian*), not a people's position (*renmin*), not an intellectual's position (enlightenment), not an underground position (marginality), nor even an oppositional position (rebellion), but simply an individual's position" (33). In a similar vein, Jia Zhangke said that "the crow solves the crow's problem, I solve my problem.... In fact, no one has the right to represent the majority and one has the right only to represent oneself."⁴⁹ With this extreme position he has shown his relentless exploration and experiments about the relationship between himself as a film director and the object to be represented. This is seen in his subsequent films, with the change of

⁴⁹ Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, *Wode sheyingji bu sahuang*, p. 367.

filming location (*The World*), the simultaneous production of both a feature film and a documentary film on one topic (*Still Life and Dong*), a self-reflective documentary film on a Chinese costume designer (*Wu Yong*), and the employment of fake documentary style (*24 City*). In this sense, *Xiao Wu* and the character Xiao Wu do not simply signify the beginning of his filmmaking in time, but also reveal a prototype of his subsequent films, which explore the relationship and distance between the camera and the object.

A Man in the Crowd

In the beginning of *Primitive Passion*, retelling Lu Xun's anecdote about why he decided to engage in literature, Rey Chow (1995) proposes to rethink Chinese modernity from the perspective of the filmic experience and its visual power that Lu Xun encountered in early modern era. As is well-known and frequently cited, Lu Xun explains that his experience of watching a lantern slide at the medical school in Japan made him determined to return to China and to devote himself to the literary movement for the enlightenment of the Chinese people. For the efficiency of discussion, I would first quote his explanation in the preface to his first collection of short stories:

I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach microbiology, but at that time lantern slides were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of natural scenery or news to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film

showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a public demonstration, while the Chinese beside him had come to appreciate this spectacular event.

Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so important after all. The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made materials or onlookers of such meaningless public exposure; and it doesn't really matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I determine to promote a literary movement.⁵⁰

From Lu Xun's account, Rey Chow observes that what this story implies is not simply part of a great writer's personal statement about the commencement of his writing career, but also a new kind of discourse of technologized visuality in the third world (5). According to Chow, it has been generally and rationally accepted by most readers and critics of Chinese modern literature that what made Lu Xun shocked and disoriented was "the destruction that descends the victim, the apathy and powerlessness of the onlookers, and the meaning of these for China as a modern nation." She, however, points out that this interpretation lacks "the process of magnification and amplification

⁵⁰ Lu Xun, "Preface to the First Collection of Short Stories, 'Call to Arms'," *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun*, trans. Yang-Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1960, pp. 2-3.

that is made possible by the film medium, which, as it were, makes the spectacle spectacular, the demonstration monstrous, and thus underscores the significance of a technologized visuality” (6). In this respect, she claims that what Lu Xun sees is not only the horror of an execution or the apathy on the faces of onlookers, but also the horror of the activity of watching. In other words, what he sees is the direct, cruel, and crude power of the film medium itself. “What confronted Lu Xun, through his own act of watching, are thus: first, the transparent effect of a new medium that seemingly communicates without mediation; second, the affinity between the power of this medium and the violence of the execution itself” (8). Consequently, Chow elucidates that this visuality of film haunts him as two kinds of menace: a national consciousness of being Chinese and an intellectual consciousness facing a powerful new medium. First, “Lu Xun discovers what it means ‘to be Chinese’ in the modern world by watching film.” Because this self-consciousness is based on an apprehension of the power of modern technological visuality, it could not be free from a problem of the position of being a spectator. The national self-consciousness of Lu Xun is thus constructed from becoming conscious of the activity of seeing and the object seen. In other words, Lu Xun watches China being represented on the screen, at the same time, he also watches himself who is exhibited “as a film, as a spectacle, as something always already watched” by the eyes of the world. Second, Lu Xun realizes that film is a powerful medium with “the enviable effect of a clear, direct, and seemingly transparent new ‘language’ that is, precisely, the representational goal toward which the generation of modern Chinese writers in the 1920s and 1930s aspired.” Thus, what he was conscious of is a sense of crisis related to the possibility that traditional intellectuals might lose their privilege of the literature world, even though his response to this menace results in

a self-contradictory return to literature (9-10).

In Chow's insightful argument, what I would like to focus on more is that it is the crowd that is represented on film in such a vivid manner that constructs the power of this visuality in Lu Xun's anecdote. Although accepting that the shock of Lu Xun, as she illustrates, results from the visual encounter and its power of directness, aggressiveness, and crudeness, the ability of the film medium per se to represent the crowd as a seemingly transparent, unmediated image is indispensable for the construction of his national consciousness. In fact, much attention has been paid to the film medium invented in the early modern era because of its capacity to picture effectively the urban crowd and landscape as a modern spectacle. Since its incipient stage, the urban crowd has been one of the most popular materials, backgrounds and themes in various genres of films, including *Workers Leaving the Factory* (Lumière Brothers, 1895) in the very beginning of film, and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City* (Walter Ruttmann, 1927), *The Crowd* (King Vidor, 1928), *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936) in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as a great number of news reel films in this period. Furthermore, in the socialist countries during this period, the crowd is more focused on to express the power of the collective. For instance, Soviet film directors consider the crowd scene as an essential factor in their films to represent socialist class struggle and the greatness of the Bolshevik Revolution. Eisenstein's works, such as *Strike* (1925), *The Battleship of Potemkin*, and *October* (1928), would be exemplary. In a similar vein, the Chinese early filmmakers, especially the Left-wing film directors, believed that film was the most efficient tool for mass education and propaganda of socialist ideology.⁵¹ Therefore, crowd scenes were employed to evoke the collective

⁵¹ For more detailed discussions on the Left-wing cinema movement and the relationship

consciousness of class and nation. Lu Xun's national consciousness, thus, could be considered as constructed through confronting the crowd scene in the film rather than simply watching a film as the modern technological visuality.

In the sense of the cinematic image, the crowd that Lu Xun encountered in the early modern era appears again in the final scene of *Xiao Wu*. As mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter, *Xiao Wu* ends with a scene of the public demonstration or the public execution, in which the protagonist, Xiao Wu, is surrounded by a crowd of bystanders. In Chinese, "shizhong" (public demonstration), which is the title of Lu Xun's short story published in 1925, has a twofold meaning. The one is "showing something to the crowd," as in the saying "zhan shou 'shi' 'zhong'" (cutting the head off and showing it to the crowd/public), the other one is "revealing crowd as spectacle" as in the saying "zhan 'shi' qun 'zhong'" (showing the crowd). This double meaning of "shizhong" helps us to understand the different implications of the crowd in the Lu Xun's anecdote and in the final scene of *Xiao Wu*. To put it simply, the former is related to the crowd of *Xiao Wu*, the latter is connected with the spectacle of Lu Xun's story. In Lu Xun's explanation, a spy to be decapitated and the onlookers around him are little discriminated, whether a criminal or the crowd, they all are described as "Chinese" shown in film. In other words, what he watches is not a spy and the bystanders, but "the people of a weak and backward country." For him, this scene of "shizhong" thus plays a role of the modern spectacle to become conscious his national identity.

However, the scene of "shizhong" in *Xiao Wu* is constructed in a different way. As explained earlier, it is the camera movement that separates the protagonist Xiao Wu

between early cinema and nation building, see Pang Laikwan, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

from the crowd. To reiterate the camera movement in this final scene, moving from the low-angle of the Xiao Wu's eye level the camera suddenly returns the gaze of the gathering bystanders, and at this time the shot changes from an objective shot of Xiao Wu to become a point-of-view shot from his perspective. This point-of-view shot lasts for more than one and a quarter minutes until the film ends without returning to the object view by either being cut into two shots or using a point-of-view shot of bystanders as a reverse shot, or by moving the camera backward to shoot them together in one shot. Thus, Xiao Wu is the object as a spectacle to be shown to the crowd, at the same time, he becomes the subject to see this crowd.

This return of gaze generates an interactive relationship, not only between Xiao Wu and the crowd, but also between the film and the audience. As Jia himself insinuates above, the crowd shown on the screen serves the role of a bridge with the audience by placing the audience in the position of the observer. The audience watches the crowd from the position of Xiao Wu, and becomes conscious of the self as an observer watching oneself and watching others. Therefore, the scene of "shizhong" in *Xiao Wu* reveals the consciousness of inner difference through an individual separated from the crowd, while in Lu Xun's case, it constructs the national consciousness as essential, homogeneous, and undifferentiated. In other words, the former embodies the gaze of the individual subject from the inside of the nation, while the latter displays the objectified gaze from the outside.

In addition, this ending of *Xiao Wu* through "shizhong" signifies the social transformation from socialist China to the global capitalism in which Xiao Wu lives. The public execution is the final way to isolate Xiao Wu, who has been separated from the groups of traditional value throughout the film. Although the sound of the

government campaign to clamp down on crime is heard all throughout the film and Xiao Wu finally is caught by the police, the public execution of Xiao Wu's crime is actually accomplished only after the police officer as representative of state authority is absent. Despite its seemingly casual coincidentalness, the fact that the police officer leaves him puts Xiao Wu directly in relation to the crowd as a symbol of the new social environment. At this moment social execution by the crowd precedes the legal punishment of the state. Therefore, the crowd in the final scene of *Xiao Wu* could be considered to be the multitude facing the new social change of global capitalism, rather than simply being the Chinese national people, and Xiao Wu remains an individual in the age of globalization, rather than being a symbolic character of the specific Chinese context.

Chapter 4

A Song Unheard:

Memory, Desire, and Frustration in *Platform*

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke).
It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

- Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

The long and empty platform
The wait seems never ending
The long box cars are carrying my short-lived love
The long and empty platform
Lonely, we can only wait
All my love is out-bound
Nothing on the in-bound train

- Lyrics of a Chinese pop song “Platform” (Zhantai)

Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.

“But which is the stone that supports the bridge?” Kublai Khan asks.

“The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,” Marco answers, “but by the line of the arch that they form.”

Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: “Why do you speak to me of the stones?
It is only the arch that matters to me.”

Polo answers: “Without stones there is no arch.”

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

The end of the Cultural Revolution following Mao's death would lead to the end of the era of Chinese socialism characterized by criticism of capitalism. With introduction of the market economy system since 1978, the socialist reform movement has promoted economic development and modernization in the name of "Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics." Posed by severe criticism of the previous era's socialism that had centered on the system of public ownership and egalitarianism, the Chinese economic reform proceeded to encourage the private sector to enhance competition and efficiency. In the countryside this led to the disbanding of the agricultural communes, in place of which household-based agriculture was promoted according to the individual responsibility system. Such responsibility and shareholding systems were also gradually introduced into the urban industrial sector (Wang H., 2003: 151). The transformation of the economic system in the 1980s certainly motivated individuals to get rich by taking on private ownership of property on the economic level, but also impacted on the socio-political level by giving rise to great socio-political expectations and utopian visions, despite the confusion, ambiguity, and even chaos that the reforms caused. While it has variously been dubbed "the post-Mao era", "the post-revolutionary age", "the eighties," and "the Reform decade," this period was labeled the "New Era" (*Xin Shiqi*, 1978-1989), in an attempt by the Communist Party to overcome the painful history of the Mao era, while simultaneously opening up the possibility of the construction of a new nation. In other words, the "New Era" reforms aimed to implement a new modernization project within the capitalist system, abandoning the previous Maoist socialist modernization.

The economic reforms produced considerable debate about how to build a new society in the 1980s, and among these, as Wang Hui (2003) has argued, the most dynamic intellectual discourse was the New Enlightenment movement. This was an ideology of modernization, theoretically based not on socialism but rather on Western ideas which were introduced to China throughout the 1980s through pedagogic, literary, aesthetic, and political discourses. (155-157). The form of modernization pursued under the New Enlightenment movement was based within Western capitalist modernity, and debates on Chinese modernity were consequently subsumed within the dichotomy of tradition/modernity, thus resonating with the Enlightenment movement of the May Fourth discourse in the early twentieth century. Chinese intellectuals involved in the movement for the liberation of thought in the 1980s understood the socialism of the previous era as a residue of feudal tradition, and thus they sought to construct new self-identifications through their reflections on the weaknesses of the previous socialism. In the field of literature, for instance, a trend called “Scar Literature” (*shanghen wenxue*) emerged that reflected on the people’s trauma during socialist eras, particularly during the Cultural Revolution period or the “*shinian dongluan*” (ten years of chaos). This new era literature, which included a few additional categories, was labeled by critics as “Retrospective Literature” (*fansi wenxue*), “Reform Literature” (*gaige wenxue*), and “Roots-seeking Literature” (*xungen wenxue*). By and large, it appeals for a rethinking of the wounded individual in Chinese modern history through its allegorical critique of socialist periods which is represented as the oppressive feudal system. Moreover, it was through completely new genres, such as “Misty Poetry” (*menglong shi*) and “Avant-garde/experimental Literature” (*xianfeng wenxue/shiyan wenxue*), that new era literature

explored individual subjectivity and pursued literary innovation as an expression of the modernist movement through literature.⁵²

The cultural elite's utopian discourse of the New Enlightenment and the state's project to reconstruct a socialist utopia, then, coexisted uneasily during the 1980s, but was inevitably ended following the Tiananmen Square crackdown on June Fourth, 1989. With the inevitable collision between intellectuals and the state, the demise of one utopian project in the 1980s gave rise to the growth of another, the post-1989 economic boom (Wang J., 1996: 2-3). Although intellectuals identified themselves with cultural leaders and heroes for the establishment of a new utopian society during the 1980s, under the pervasive commercial culture of the 1990s intellectuals became "painfully conscious of the fact that they are no longer contemporary cultural heroes and arbiters of value" (Wang H., 2003: 144). As the elite intellectuals and cultural heroes of the 1980s became experts, scholars and professionals, they were gradually incorporated into the 1990s market economy, which is generally called "xia hai" (jumping into the sea) in Chinese⁵³. With the elite enlightenment discourse of the 1980s being spurned by the rise of popular culture in the 1990s, modernist literature lost its position to new popular literatures, such as Wang Shuo's "Hooligan Literature" (*liumang wenxue*). The utopianism embedded in an elitist discourse of the 1980s was eventually absorbed into the huge stream of Chinese post-modernism which was dominated by the market economy.

⁵² For more details about new era literature and modernism during the 1980s, see part 2 "Literary Discourse" in Zhang Xudong, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997 and Wang Jing, *High Culture Fever*, Berkeley: University of California, 1996.

⁵³ For the more debates on cultural heroes under the Chinese social transformation between the 1980s and the 1990s, see Dai Jinhua ed. *Shuxie wenhua yingxiong* (Writing Cultural Heroes), Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2000.

It is this decade of massive upheaval, spanning the period between Mao's death (1978) and the period leading up to the Tiananmen movement in 1989 that Jia Zhangke's second feature film, *Platform* (2000), reflects. The upbeat atmosphere of the New Era had delivered great expectations and utopian visions to ordinary people in backward provincial locations as well as to the urban elite intellectuals. To the former, the social transformation of the 1980s comprised a visible and embodied change in the reality of their daily lives, while to the latter, it was a shift in ideology and a modernization project. *Platform* delineates these individuals' experiences and memories of social transition through the rise and fall of a local troupe of cultural performance artists (*wengongtuan*). While 'Fifth Generation' films are commonly understood to present the story of Chinese national time or history through the life of individuals as national allegory (Chow, 1995), *Platform* could be considered as an attempt to personalize or localize Chinese national time into the specific time that an individual experienced. In other words, the Fifth Generation films produced in the 1980s, most of which are based on modernist New Era novels, reveal the utopianism of the 1980s through their reflection on national history. Conversely, *Platform* recalls the individual memories and experiences of the 1980s from the present perspective of the 1990s and early 2000s. Hence, what *Platform* captures is a local and specific reception of how ordinary people experienced the New Era, rather than the central and ideological discourses of elitist intellectuals. In the context of Jia's filmography, *Platform* might be seen as a prequel to his previous work *Xiao Wu*, because although there is no direct continuity of story between them they are both set in the same local place, Fenyang of the 1980s. At the same time, the film serves as a thematic and emotional prototype for

his subsequent films in terms of tracing his filmic concerns back to the time when the Chinese social change started⁵⁴.

Individual Memory and Fragmented Time

The Chinese capitalist reforms and social transformations of the 1980s brought new personal values and identities to ordinary Chinese people, and this led to an increased focus on popular memories of previous eras in the 1990s and early 2000s in the wake of the “Mao Fever” of the late 1980s (Jing Wang, 1996: 266-67). Through television drama, documentaries, novels, songs, plays, and commercial goods, commercial and public nostalgia for China’s revolutionary past has been pervasive in Chinese society, generating a so-called “memory industry.”⁵⁵ As the past is reflected through popular memories, history comes to be re-narrated by ordinary people. The Cultural Revolution, for instance, is recollected by former Red Guards, the Great Leap Forward famine is testified to by ordinary peasants. Whether nostalgic, traumatic, or critical, the “politics of memory” generates “contentions over interpretations of historical experiences between official history and social memory, and among different versions of popular memories” (Lee and Yang, 2007: 3). Memories thus are distinct from official history, because they are constructed from below by people living in history. As Stuart Hall (1997 34-35) argues, “the subjects of the local, of the margin, can only come into

⁵⁴ To Jia Zhangke, *Platform* might be considered as a starting point of his filmography, as he said that “*Platform* should have been my first picture. I wrote the script of *Platform* before I wrote *Xiao Wu*. To make it, I knew I would need a huge budget, so I didn’t make it and went on to make *Xiao Wu* instead.” Stephen Teo, “Cinema with an Accent – Interview with Jia Zhangke, Director of *Platform*,” *Sense of Cinema*, no. 15, 2001, www.senseofcinema.com.

⁵⁵ See Geremie R. Barme (1999), *In the Red*, New York: Columbia University Press, and Michael Dutton (1998), *Streetlife China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

representation by, as it were, recovering their own histories. They have to retell the story from the bottom up, instead of from the top-down.... These are the hidden histories of the majority that never got told.” Histories of the local and of the margin through memories are more dependent on subjective impressions than on the objective chronology of official history, as presented in textbooks for example. Hence, they are fragmented rather than unitary, and there are often discrepancies between the memories of different individuals, as well as those between individual memories and national history. In other words, the national past time gets to be re-narrated with the embodied voices of the oppressed people, and, as Ann Anagnost (1997) argues, “‘speaking bitterness’ (suku) provided a narrative structure in which oppressed members of the ‘old society’ took center stage to vent their rage in a compelling performance that made the working of history palpably ‘real’” (17).

Platform is a film echoed by this proliferation of popular memories since the late 1990s. The film deals with the past as memory, and therefore the story is ambiguous and loose, rather than delicately designed. In other words, the film attempts to capture the atmosphere of the time instead of delivering the ‘facts’ of what happened at the time.

Although the film runs for about two and half hours⁵⁶, the plot is somewhat simple. The rough outline of the story is as follows: In 1979 winter, in Fenyang, a troupe of cultural performance artists stages the drama *Train to Shaoshan* (Huoche xiangzhe shaoshan pao) in order to praise Chairman Mao. There are two couples in the troupe: Cui Mingliang (Wang Hongwei) and his love interest Yin Ruijuan (Zhao Tao), and

⁵⁶ The first cut of *Platform* was 210 minutes long, but Jia cut twenty minutes off to submit the 190 minutes version to Venice international film festival. However, the most prevalent version to date is the 150 minutes cut, which has been circulated for international theaters and film festival as well as DVD release. Moreover, this version is the director’s favorite. (Stephen Teo, “Cinema with an Accent”, *Sense of Cinema*) For this reason, this paper takes the 150 minutes version of *Platform* as the object of discussion.

Zhang Jun (Liang Jingdong) and his girlfriend Zhong Ping (Yang Tianyi). Although they perform for Chairman Mao and the Cultural Revolution on the stage, what they are actually worried about is anxieties relating to their loves and futures. Just like other Chinese social units, the troupe faces the social transformation of the Reform. As the troupe is privatized, their performance repertoire shifts from propaganda arts to popular shows. They have their hair permed, dance to disco music, and sing popular songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan. In these changing social conditions, new members join the troupe while others leave for a new life. The troupe wanders from place to place performing for their living, but their situation gets worse. At times, their performance is rejected, and they go a long way in vain. No longer welcomed, they even perform their show on a truck in the street where nobody watches. One day, after 10 years of upheaval, Cui Mingliang returns home at last, however, his home is no longer what it used to be.

In *Platform*, time is episodic. The period of ten years is dealt with as if it were one unit instead of being divided in phases matched to specific socio-political events. The events in the film are fragmented rather than chronological. While a scene covering a short plot period is prolonged, two shots eliding a long time gap are directly connected together. Just as in memory, cause and effect is ambiguous, the order of events is often reversed. In an interview, Jia Zhangke discusses what he thinks about time in *Platform*:

This is a film about memory. When set in that time, I in fact could not figure out what was changing. Thus, the moment of the change is not clear.... In my original script, the dividing line of time was very clear. However, through two years of making the film, I abandoned it, because I came to have a different opinion about time.... For instance, we can see cutting-edge hairstyle in Beijing in 2000, but

returning to my hometown Fenyang, I found people still keeping the 70s hairstyle. Skyscrapers increase on the one hand, but traces of the Cultural Revolution still remain next to them on the other hand. Such a mixed landscape always makes the situation ambiguous. I don't want to express this period of ten years simply. If I divided time exactly, audiences might understand more easily. But, that's not the change of China which I experienced.⁵⁷

What Jia captures is not history, but an image from history. While Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (Huo zhe, 1994) and Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (Bawangbieji, 1993) clearly divide time by political events, thus rendering time as history, *Platform* instead focuses on the fragmented time of the individual rather than on history per se⁵⁸. In other words, while the former films turn the time of the individual into national history by way of national allegory, the latter divides national history into individual time. Hence, in *Platform*, time is not conveyed through socio-political incidents, such as the implementation of the one-child policy (1979), the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the PRC (1984), and the Tiananmen Square crackdown (1989). Rather, it is conveyed through changes in popular culture: fashion, films, dance, and popular music. Time in the film is reflected by individual experiences: the moments when bell-bottom trousers were popular; when permed hair was a fashion icon; when the Indian film *Awara* (1951) was screened in theaters; when the characters gathered to dance disco in

⁵⁷ Jung, Sungil (2000), 'Gieok ui rod mubee, ddoneun cheonanmun sedae ui baekhwajebang.' (The Road Movie of Memory, or the Liberation of Tiananmen Generation), *Kino*, Nov., vol. 69, Seoul, p. 76, my translation)

⁵⁸ In terms of generation discourse, *Platform* implies a farewell to the Fifth Generation films. While *To Live* and *Farewell My Concubine* deal with history through the Cultural Revolution, and ends at 1979, *Platform* starts at that time, 1979. Jia Zhangke moves forward from where the Fifth Generation film directors stop, and addresses Chinese history in a new way which is different from the Fifth Generation films.

their hideout; and when they sang along with the modern disco rock song “Genghis Khan”; when they first listened to the Taiwanese pop singer Deng Lijun (Teresa Teng) via pirated tapes; and when the Chinese pop-rock song “Platform” (Zhantai) expressed their feelings. As the past is remembered through the popular culture experienced at the time, it is personalized through the specific experience of a particular place. Even though a certain cultural product was originally produced and/or officially imported into China a long time ago, it would refer to the present time if an individual encountered it now. For instance, although the Indian film *Awara* was originally made in 1951, in *Platform* it indicates the early 1980s when the characters watched it. Likewise, despite a time lag of Deng’s popularity between Taiwan, overseas Chinese communities, and mainland China,⁵⁹ Deng Lijun’s songs indicate the 1980s China, or more exactly, the 1980s in Fenyang. In this light, *Platform* (re)collects the individual time which characters in the film experience or the ‘Fenyang time’ or the local time of the place in which the characters live rather than Chinese national time in the 1980s.

Employing popular culture as a marker of time conveys not only the passage of time, but also the personalities and emotions of characters in the film. For example, during the ten-year period of the film’s plot, fashion styles ranged from the Mao jackets and overcoats prevalent during the Mao era to bell-bottom trousers, blue jeans, trench coats, and leather jackets. On the one hand, each costume refers to a specific period when it was popular; on the other hand, these various trends all coexist simultaneously

⁵⁹ Deng Lijun’s popularity boomed worldwide in the 1970s after she made a debut in Japan. In the 1980s, her music like other singers from Taiwan and Hong Kong was officially banned for several years in mainland China, because of political tension between mainland China and Taiwan. Yet, her music continued to get more popular in China thanks to the black market. At that time, her Chinese nickname was “Little Deng” because she had the same family name as Deng Xiaoping. It was said that Deng Xiaoping ruled China by day, but Deng Lijun ruled China by night. (Zhou, 2009: 145)

to represent a situation of transition through mixed time phases. For instance, Cui Mingliang wears home-made bell-bottom trousers with a Mao jacket, and Zhong Ping appears with permed hair while others retain the Mao era style. As Jason McGrath (2007) points out, “the film eschews easily identified, monolithic changes in the characters’ dress and hairstyles as the narrative (and decade) progress,” and through the disjunction of characters’ fashion, reflects “the multiple temporal frames of reference that actually coexist at any particular historical moment” (100). Likewise, popular music in *Platform* is employed not only to indicate references for specific periods, but also to imply the atmosphere of the time and the internal emotion of the characters. For example, the Chinese pop-rock song “Platform,” from which the film draws its title, represents the 1980s in Fenyang, but, at the same time, it also evokes a feeling of anticipation and disappointment. This song is featured twice in the film. The first time is in the scene in which Cui Mingliang puts the cassette tape into the car stereo when the troupe’s truck breaks down in a desolate place, and the second time occurs when Cui Mingliang himself covers this song with the troupe’s band in a performance to an enthusiastic audience. Both times the songs deliver expectations about the future and also the frustration of waiting endlessly and fruitlessly. Jia Zhangke recalls what this song means to him and why he utilizes this song in the film:

“Platform” is a song from the mid-eighties that was especially popular among young people; it was also the very first rock-and-roll song I ever heard. The lyrics describe someone waiting on a platform for the arrival of his lover, expressing a mood of expectation. For me, that song represents a key to unlock my memories of the eighties. The “Platform” is a place from which one sets out, but also returns to.

The “Platform” is related to the journey; I always loved the title of that song which captures the exhaustion and sadness of life⁶⁰

In terms of the ways in which the New Era was experienced differently, the time of individual or the local experience may well be irrelevant to or inconsistent with that of central or national time. While the central discourses of elite intellectuals during the period were marked by utopianism and the expectation of new social changes, individuals at the local level may well have been disappointed with the new social transformation as experienced physically in reality or may even have suffered as a result of it. As Michael Berry (2009) points out, Jia Zhangke accentuates the irony of individual life set against national history through his juxtaposition of the personal and the historical. In his former work, *Xiao Wu*, Jia inserted an announcement of the reunification of Hong Kong and China at a point in the plot where the protagonist is exiled from his family, which serves “not only to provide a historical context (in this case 1997), but also to highlight the irony of a newly unified country with a newly destroyed family” (2009: 64). Likewise, in *Platform*, there are a few scenes that highlight the ironical tension between historical events and personal situations. For example, when Zhong Ping enters the clinic operating room to have an abortion after slapping Zhang Jun’s face, the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the PRC (1984) is broadcasted on the radio. Even though the PRC greeted the most glorious moment under Deng Xiaoping’s regime at that time, it was little relevant to the individual’s life. Additionally, it is on the birthday of the nation that Zhong Ping and Zhang Jun’s unborn baby dies. Another example would be the sequence of Cui’s return

⁶⁰ Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou (2002) *Wo de sheyingji bu sahuang* (My Camera Doesn’t Lie), Beijing: Zhongguo youyi chubangongsi, p. 370.

home in the latter part of the film. When the troupe and Cui Mingliang return home after the end of a long period of wandering, the loudspeaker in the bus station announces a list of criminals for whom the authorities have issued a warrant. Although there is no direct or obvious reference, it easily evokes the list of students wanted by the government in the wake of Tiananmen crackdown⁶¹. Cui Mingliang's returning home and settling down after his long wandering coincides with national crisis of 1989. In this respect, the historical contexts in *Platform* are employed either to illustrate that the individual makes a living regardless of them, or deployed as a contrasting reference to emphasize the individual's dramatic situation. Hence, what *Platform* captures is fragmented time experienced in Fenyang during the 1980s rather than history as the unitary time of the nation.

Long Shot and Long Take: A Way to Watch Time

Platform begins with a long and high-pitched whistle against a black screen. As the whistle sound overlaps with the gabbling sound of the crowd, the opening long shot reveals a group of people, the source of this sound, waiting for a theatre performance. Shortly after this, the film shows the stage performance of *Train to Shaoshan*, which is one of the most popular stage dramas of the 1970s, and the whistle in the beginning

⁶¹ The names of criminals announced in this shot are Sheng Zhimin and Yu Lik-wai, who are a production manager and cinematographer of the film respectively. As the announcement says they are 22 and 24 years old, which correspond college student age, if calculating the year from their actual age, we can assume that it might be soon after 1989. The usage of their names as the wanted criminal not only implies the year of 1989, but also, as Michael Berry observes, makes a comic and ironical effect. With this self-referential touch, Jia insinuates that he and his fellows always have the potential to be criminals because the independent filmmaking was illegal in China at that time. (Michael Berry, *Xiao Wu, Platform, Unknown Pleasure*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 64)

turns out to be a train whistle that signals the commencement of the performance. Jia Zhangke shoots the entire sequence of this stage performance in one long take that presents an extreme long shot from the perspective of the audience just as in films of Model Drama (*yangbanxi*) made during the Cultural Revolution period (1966-76). This extreme long shot works not only to obscure the distinction between the individual performers on the stage, but also to display the collective character of the audience. As Michael Berry (2009) argues, it emphasizes “a group experience as embodied by both the collective performance and the audience’s collective response, laughing and clapping in unison” (59). In other words, taking in at once the stage performance and the audience response in one extreme long shot of long duration instead of employing the separate shots in the action/reaction shot format, Jia suggests a social scene of the collective culture in the late 1970s. *Train to Shaoshan*, which Jia employs to represent a social scene of the late 1970s, is a play which depicts the fact that the diverse passengers from different class and ethnic backgrounds on the train towards Shaoshan, (the birth place of Mao Zedong) are united in socialist idealism. As a typical socialist propaganda stage drama, *Train to Shaoshan* represents socialist collectivism as a trace of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, and this is contrasted with the performance of popular culture by this troupe later in the film. In a similar sense, while the train in this stage drama serves as a vehicle which takes people to a socialist utopia, the train at which Cui Mingliang stares later in the film connotes a symbol of expectation and hope in the Chinese New Era.

After this opening sequence, the film cuts away to another long take shot showing members of the troupe on the bus returning home after the performance. The two chief characters are introduced as the troupe leader Xu calls their names to make sure that

everyone is on board. In this scene, Zhang Jun and Cui Mingliang are the only two names that Xu has to call twice, because they come late. Cui, the last to board the bus, is particularly foregrounded through his quarrel with Xu, who criticizes him for his lack of collective spirit in making the other members wait for such a long time. Xu's criticism then turns to Cui's poor whistle imitating in the performance. Cui counters that he could not perform well, because he had never even seen a train, let alone ridden one. This bus scene, then, captured in a long shot, encapsulates the process of the shift from the collective to the individual that is articulated across the entire film. The opening sequence's extreme long shot obscures the identities of individual troupe members, especially the two chief characters Zhang and Cui. Indeed, it is only through the act of "interpellation" in this bus scene that they are differentiated from the collective and produced as individuals with unique names, emotions, and personalities. The transition between these two early scenes operates to display the social transformation from the collectivism of socialist China to the individualism of the new capitalist world on one hand, while on the other hand it also exhibits "the stark contrast between the utopian train that unites different classes under communist idealism and the dilapidated bus of the real world where discord, sarcasm and argument rule the day" (M. Berry, 2009: 59-60).

In terms of concentration on the process of shift from the collective to the individual, the passage of time could be conserved to be the main cinematic object in *Platform*, rather than the four individual characters. To render time into the film, Jia prefers to use long shots and long takes. According to him, there are only two close-up shots in *Platform*, and even those close-up shots are employed not with the intention of providing the audience with detailed information, but rather, to evoke a mood. Thus

within that mood it does not matter whether the audience can see something or not. Jia then argues that his preference to long shots is related not to the objectivity of the film, but to the way he sees the world and cinema.⁶² As mentioned above, Jia only shows the situations or results of historical and personal change, and avoids the explanations implicit in the obvious cause and effect narrative. Just like memory, then, the narrative is episodic and detailed contexts are often skipped. For example, Jia never explains when or why Zhong Ping left the troupe, how or why Yin Ruijuan became a tax agent after she left the troupe, what happened to Zhang Jun after the relationship with Zhong Ping broke up, nor how Cui Mingliang and Yin Ruijuan got together in the end. The film just shows how they are at that time. In fact, according to Jia Zhangke, in the original script, all of the characters' backgrounds and details were very clearly delineated. However, over the long period of film production, he suddenly came to think that there was no need to explain those details, because he felt it was impossible that he could understand somebody's life in great detail. For this reason, he decided to revise the script⁶³. His use of filmic ellipsis, as Jason McGrath (2007) pertinently points out, resonates with Bazin's praise of De Sica and Rossellini's films: "The empty gaps, the white spaces, the parts of the event that we are not given, are themselves of a concrete nature stones which are missing from the building. It is the same in life: we do not know everything that happens to others."⁶⁴ In this light, time in *Platform* recalls the Bazinian concept⁶⁵ of "cinema of duration" in which time is organized "not according

⁶² Stephen Teo, 'Cinema with an Accent'

⁶³ Cheng Qingsong and Huang Ou, *Wode shexiangji bu sahuang*, p. 346

⁶⁴ André Bazin, 'De Sica: Metteur en scène' in *What is Cinema*, vol. 2, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972/2004, p. 66

⁶⁵ Chris Berry suggests that Bazinian aesthetics might have influenced Jia Zhangke's films, because he attended the Beijing Film Academy, where there was a strong interest in Bazinian film theory since the early 1980s. Besides, at that time, among various film theorists, Bazin was the most frequently translated one in Chinese film journals. Chris Berry, 'Watching Time Go

to dramatic needs but rather in accordance with ‘life time’ – the experience of time as simple duration in a life that is more full of quotidian moments, inactivity, and boredom than spectacular events even in an era of dramatic historical change” (98-99). To render this duration of time into the film, Jia favors the use of extremely long takes, as he explains:

What I like most in a long take is that it preserves real time, it keeps time intact....In *Platform*, the characters have a relationship with time. You see two people smoking and talking aimlessly for a long time. Nothing happens plotwise but at the same time, time itself is kept intact. In that long and tedious passage of time, nothing significant happens, they are waiting. Only through time can you convey this. If I were to break up that scene which lasts for six or seven minutes into several cuts, then you lose that sense of deadlock. The deadlock that exists between humans and time, the camera and its subject. Everybody experiences the monotony of time passing where nothing that is noteworthy occurs.⁶⁶

Chris Berry (2008), in his article on *Xiao Wu*, understands Jia’s long takes and cinematic time in relation to Deleuze’s distinction between the movement image and the time image. As he explains, the movement image, which Deleuze generally relates to pre-war classical cinema, proceeds in a logical, linear and narratological manner. Deleuze conceives the movement image as a homogeneous structure. It follows the sensory motor scheme: characters in certain situations react on what they perceive in chronological order. Thus, in the movement-image the past, present, and future are

By’ in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, London: BFI, 2008, p. 252

⁶⁶ Stephen Teo, “Cinema with an Accent”

clearly distinguishable whether a character confronts a present situation, or a flash-back, or a flash-forward. In contrast, the time image, which is related to Italian neo-realism and French nouvelle vague films, does not follow the chronological order and narratological logic of action/reaction composition. Thus, the time image makes the past, present, and future indistinguishable.⁶⁷ Considering cinematic time in *Xiao Wu* as differential, multiple, and disaggregated rather than homogeneous, linear and unified, Chris Berry suggests that “lack of focus and narrative distension in *Xiao Wu* can be seen as a dismantling of the movement-image and a drift towards the time-image” (251). His understanding of *Xiao Wu* as the time-image would also be applicable and more pertinent to *Platform*. As mentioned above, the cinematic time in *Platform* is fragmented, temporal, or episodic rather than linear, logical, or homogeneous. Time flows in memory, thus, it is often ambiguous, and the cause-effect narrative is also unclear. Jia Zhangke observes the time that the individual has undergone through equanimous long shots and long takes rather than intervening or explaining it with edited cuts/montage.

Although the characters in *Platform* wait for the new reform era with hope and high expectations, to borrow Berry’s expression, they “are not the drivers of China’s post-socialist project but instead, at best, its passengers, and more often onlookers at the roadside, watching as it passes them by” (251). This rhetoric is literally represented in a later scene of the film. The traveling troupe is stranded on a riverside, because their truck breaks down. While the sound of the song “Platform” (*Zhantai*) is echoing in the valley, the train in distance comes roaring in. Cui Mingliang and his colleagues rush

⁶⁷ For more details, see Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, and Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989

towards the railway to get a closer view with loud cheers. However, they are just watching the back of the train as it is speeding away. The camera cuts away to an extreme long shot of long duration that shows the train leaving them behind. As a symbol of speed, progress, and modernity, the train represents not only the bright future that they are waiting for, but also a vehicle to get them to the outside world. However, as Cui Mingliang confessed in the opening sequence, they have never ridden a train before, nor will they. They merely watch it pass by the platform, in other words, they cannot help “watching time go by” while being outside of it themselves.

Space and Desire

Just as time in *Platform* is recalled as individual memory rather than national history, space is divided by the difference between the inside as private and the outside as public. While the former is related to the individual, desire, and the future; the latter is related to the collective, the political, and the past. Through the contrast between these two spaces the film displays the social transitional moment of the shifts from socialism to capitalism, from the political to the popular, and from public to private occurred. In one early scene, Cui Mingliang and Zhang Jun arrive at the front of a theater to meet Yin Ruijuan and Zhong Ping who are waiting for them. Zhang Jun shows off his bell-bottom trousers before they go into cinema. In the background, the faded name of Marx is seen on the wall. This juxtaposition of political and private appears several times in the film, especially through the distinction between interior and exterior space. For instance, in the following scene, Cui and Yin enjoy the Indian film *Awara* inside the theater with a boisterous audience who sing the theme song of the film. However, Yin’s

father, a policeman, calls his daughter out into the lobby and dissuades her from watching a foreign film in such a disreputable place. Unlike the free and vibrant atmosphere of the inside, the lobby scene is designed as a public space which fosters the solemn air of state power. As a signifier of the socialist system, portraits of Lenin and Stalin are hung on the top of the wall, and a portrait of young Mao Zedong is seen between Yin and her father. The power of the state is further emphasized by the group of young men forced to squat against the wall by Yin's father (M. Berry, 2009: 71-72). The separation of these two spaces illustrates the tension and conflict between the individual and the state, the private and the public, desire and discipline. Another example is found in the contrast between two scenes set in the hair salon and in the troupe's meeting room respectively. While the hair salon where Zhong Ping has her hair permed functions as a sign of the new culture and fashion and so signifies the individual's freedom and desire, the troupe meeting room is related to collective order and state discipline. The distinction between these two scenes is effectively delivered through their similar shot design and through consecutive editing. Both scenes feature portraits in central positions. One is a stylish female model with a perm, the other is a classical picture of Chairman Mao. These two portraits dominate the characteristics of two spaces. While the hair salon scene is high-spirited in atmosphere with people in bright and colorful clothes, the troupe's meeting proceeds in a dry and formal tone among people wearing Mao jackets. When Zhong Ping enters the troupe's meeting room, the praise for her perm hair in the hair salon is replaced by troupe leader Xu's sarcastic joke that she looks like a Spanish girl. As Michael Berry (2009) points out, "while the internal world of [the hair salon] seems to be a self-contained world of

liberalism and openness,” the troupe meeting room in which the cadre is smoking in center frame “appears to be an example of a conservative socialist space” (71).

Such contrasts appear throughout the whole film. While old socialist slogans are seen on the wall of the street and political announcements on national events are aired on the radio, the individual enjoys new popular culture in their own private space where desire can be revealed. For example, it is in Zhong Ping’s room, which is decorated with commercial model posters, that Yin Ruijuan not only gossips about their boyfriends and sex, but also learns to smoke from Zhong Ping despite being very obedient to her father. Cui Mingliang and Zhang Jun dance disco with pirated western pop songs in their hiding place. Towards the end of the film, there is also a scene in which a group of young people watch a video about sex life in a dim and secret room. Among such scenes, that of Yin Ruijuan dancing in her office would be one of the most beautiful and heartbreaking scenes in the whole film. After refusing to travel with Cui and the troupe because she had to look after her father who suddenly fell ill, she became a tax agent in Fenyang. While listening to popular songs over the radio in her office, she starts to dance serenely alone. Although she could not join the troupe traveling, she still has the inner desires of a dance performer. In her own private space alone, she can dance despite herself without any conflicts and constraints.

Chapter 5

The Death of a Man:

The Local and the Global in *The World*

The death of a man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic – Joseph Stalin

Cut off from their home, migrant workers disappear into huge urban slums without the protection of a traditional rural mutual dependency system.... In Mexico City or Seoul, in Berlin or Chicago, migrants mix and compromise alongside other aliens from other regions. Neither nativism nor pluralism are in their thought, only survival. – Masao Miyoshi (748)

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation - Jean Baudrillard (12)

After the so-called “Hometown Trilogy,” *Xiao Wu*, *Platform*, and *Unknown Pleasure*, having left his home town both physically and metaphorically, what Jia Zhangke encountered was “the world.” This means that his fourth feature film *The*

World (*Shijie*, 2004) has two significant changes. The first, as mentioned above, is that it is the first of his feature-length films set outside of his hometown, Fenyang in Shanxi, although his first short film *Xiaoshan Going Home* (*Xiaoshan hui jia*) had also been set outside of Fenyang. The second change is that *The World* was also the first of Jia's films to be officially released in the Chinese domestic market, following his removal from the blacklist by the Chinese authorities as it was co-produced with the state-run film studio Shanghai Film Studio.⁶⁸ In other words, it signifies not only the beginning of his physical move from Shanxi to Beijing, from the familiar to the strange, and from the self to the other, but also a shift in his status from "underground film" (*dixia dianying*) to so-called 'aboveground film.' As *The World* was officially approved by the Chinese government with cooperation of the state-run Shanghai Film Studio, the term "underground," which had been one of the most important key words for explaining the films of Jia and his contemporaries, became contradictory and controversial. In fact, since the majority of the so-called Sixth Generation directors, who were also known as "underground film" makers, have moved to 'aboveground' productions, such as Zhang Yuan's *Seventeen Years* (*Guonian huijia*, 1999) and Wang Xiaoshuai's *Beijing Bicycle* (*Shiqi sui de danche*, 2000), it has become difficult to claim that "underground" filmmaking is an exclusive characteristic of their films or that they fulfill a certain subversive function by producing outside of the state system. Consequently, the distinction between "underground" and "aboveground" filmmakers has become flexible and negotiable, and some underground filmmakers have, to some extent, been able to move freely back and forth across the boundary between underground and aboveground

⁶⁸ *The World* is a joint production by Office Kitano (Japan), Xstream Pictures (Jia's own production company), and Lumen Films (France) in association with several Japanese corporations and the Shanghai Film Studio.

under the connivance of the government. For example, as Paul Pickowicz (2006) observes, one of the most influential Fifth Generation directors, Tian Zhuangzhuang, made an aboveground film *Springtime in a Small Town* (*Xiaocheng zhi chun*, 2002) after his underground film *The Blue Kite* (*Lan fengzheng*, 1993), and one of the most popular state-sector actors, Jiang Wen, went underground to make *Devils on the Doorstep* (*Guizi laile*, 2000). Also, on one hand, Zhang Xianmin, a seminal figure of Chinese independent film, is a producer of many independent films such as *Raised from Dust* (*Ju zi chen tu*, 2007), *Fujian Blue* (*Jin bi hui huang*, 2007) and *Old Dog* (*Lao gou*, 2011) but on the other hand, he is a professor of Beijing Film Academy as a government employee.

The state system dominates film production in China, therefore the term “underground film” is often used interchangeably with “independent” (*duli*) filmmaking. While the term “underground” was generally preferred by overseas media, which tend to focus on the subversive aspects of such productions in counter distinction to mainstream productions and the censorship of the state and the party, the majority of young Chinese filmmakers favor the term “independent”, and this has gradually become more prevalent in contemporary Chinese media and scholarship. While the concept of “independent film” generally indicates a small budget art-house film that is financially independent of any major studio system such as Hollywood, Pickowicz (2006) has pointed out that, in the Chinese case, “independent” relates more to independence from the Chinese state system, rather than to offering an alternative or resistant to the dominance of the capitalist and commercial film production culture (3). The Chinese independent filmmakers want “greater freedom of expression, including freedom from oppressive and restrictive political and bureaucratic controls, more than they want vast

sums of money” (4). In this respect, Cui Shuqin (2005) argues the term “independent” is fraught with contradictions. This is because, while on one hand, the state system still holds hegemonic power over production and distribution despite the struggle of the young Chinese directors to be independent, on the other hand the filmmaking environment is moving towards a commercial model based on profit making (96).

Another important fact is that the Chinese “independent film” is largely dependent on international channels. Indeed, “going abroad” is necessary for independent filmmakers to get any recognition or acclaim, due to the lack of alternative production and distribution channels in China. Moreover, international film festivals programmers and art-house distributors welcome Chinese independent films in order to ‘discover’ a brand new Chinese cinema and support their subversive performance of the political predicament. In other words, the Chinese independent films “meet the need of international film circles in the desire for a new ‘other’ to succeed the fifth generation and a new vocabulary to define Chinese cinema” (97). Although this kind of collusion makes it possible for Chinese independent films to be produced, they are still limited by the fact that they cannot be screened in the Chinese domestic market. As Cui suggests, independent filmmaking should be understood as a strategic mode of survival within and outside the mainstream system, rather than the achievement of artistic autonomy. For the filmmakers outside the system like Zhang Yuan, an official stamp of sanction is still crucial to get international distribution, and they need to be skillful at dealing with official censorship. Filmmakers inside the official system, like Lu Xuechang, are also conscious of self-censorship required to get financial support from the government. They cannot help but adjust to the political situation and to think about commercial

success in the film market. Thus, they face the double burden of the political restrictions of socialism and the commercial pressures of capitalism (78-79).

Despite the significance and effectiveness of the terms “underground films” and “independent films”⁶⁹ to explain new Chinese films of the young filmmakers in the 1990s, they also have disadvantages to only focus on the specificity of Chinese political issues and film production conditions neglecting their artistic achievement. It is, as mentioned above, because they were welcomed and labeled through the international films circuits. Circulated in the outside of China, they were underlined by their political context of “underground” and “independent” instead of their cinematic characteristics.

Although many of these films are apolitical, they are often categorized as “underground” or “independent” in an attempt to theorize them. Indeed, since the early 1990s, this politics of naming has been employed to describe the young Chinese film directors who were born in the late 1960s and 1970s and grew up in the 1980s under the reform era. However, various other formulations have been suggested to name this group in an attempt to avoid the problems that attend the use of “underground” or “independent” and to produce more accurate definitions of the generation. These include “sixth generation,” “urban generation,” “post-Fifth generation,” and “newborn generation (*xinshengdai*)”. (Pickowicz, 2006: ix). Although each of these terms highlights specific contexts of these films makers and/or different characteristics of their films, it is clear that such a diverse range of expressions can be used to describe Chinese film makers of this generation demonstrates that it is inappropriate to bind and label them with just one term. For instance, the term “urban cinema” is one of

⁶⁹ For more detailed discussions, see Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang eds. (2006) *From Underground to Independent*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers and Shuqin Cui (2005) ‘Working From the Margins’ in Sheldon Lu and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh eds. *Chinese-Language Film*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

the most prevalent concepts used to refer to Chinese films made in the late 1990s and the 2000s. It literally refers to the tendency of most contemporary Chinese films to use urban settings and the city as a cinematic backdrop, and to explore the everyday life of people living in the ever-changing Chinese urban milieu. As the term Chinese urban cinema in fact easily reminds of the early Chinese urban cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, the use of the term urban cinema is largely dependent on the specificity of the Chinese national film context. Thus, the significance of urban cinema can not be considered without reference to the particular historical contexts.

First of all, urban cinema is distinguished by the contrast with the rural backgrounds commonly seen in Fifth Generation films. In other words, the term “urban cinema,” which is hardly ever seen in discussion of other national cinemas, is not only unusual for explaining contemporary cinema, but also meaningless without reference to previous Chinese films. To some extent, it seems that the spatial shift from rural to urban in Chinese cinema was caused by the transformation of Chinese society from the 1990s onwards, rather than by any significant cinematic change. Indeed, as urbanization and modernization have accelerated, contemporary Chinese cinema has paid increasing attention to urban life and space. Thus, this tendency is not confined only to the Chinese young directors called “underground”, “independent,” or “sixth generation”, but is also found across the spectrum of contemporary Chinese film production, including commercial films and those made by fifth generation directors, as well as those of other young directors. In a similar sense, not all young directors produce films that can be labeled “urban cinema.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ An example of commercial film as “urban cinema” would be Feng Xiaogang’s *Be There or Be Square* (*Bujian busan*, 1998), *A Sigh* (*Yisheng tanxi*, 2000), *Cell Phone* (*Shouji*, 2003). Likewise, the Fifth Generation films Zhang Yimou’s *Keep Cool* (*Youhua haohao shuo*, 1997)

Therefore, the term “urban cinema” might be more suitable for describing Chinese contemporary cinema as a social phenomenon, rather than as the product of a particular film generation or group. Chinese society changes rapidly year on year, and therefore the film production environment also changes in unpredictable ways. Moreover, the more the film production system has diversified, the more eclectic contemporary Chinese cinema has become. There have been sweeping changes in film production and film directors have altered both the form and content of their cinematic work, with the result that it is more difficult to label them with any certain term. In other words, they differ from each other in various ways, and films and directors have been disassembled and individualized out from the group label of “Chinese cinema.” In a sense, this differentiation of contemporary Chinese cinema seems to echo the way in which the character is individualized from the crowd in Jia Zhangke’s films, as discussed in previous chapters.

Despite the diversity of their films, many film scholars like Cui Shuqin (2005) argue that Chinese young filmmakers “share the core quality of wanting to tell one’s own story from one’s own perspective,” and their films “from a personal point of view are no longer traumatic histories and allegorical narratives” (98-99). In a similar sense, Paul Pickowicz (2006) points out that the picture of China in their films is not simply diverse, but “a view that reveals a China that is fractured into many parts and strikingly disconnected, a China in which people go about sorting out their own individual identity” (15). However, he takes a negative stance towards this tendency, and feels

and *Happy Times* (*Xingfu shiguang*, 2000), Chen Kaige’s *Together with you* (*He ni zai yiqi*, 2002) are also set in the urban milieu. On the contrary, some young filmmakers have made their films away from the urban space like Zhang Ming’s *Rainclouds over Wushan* (*Wushan yunyu*, 1996) and *Weekend Plot* (*Miyu shiqi xiaoshi*, 2001); Huo Jianqi’s *Postmen in the Mountains* (*Nashan, naren, nagou*, 1999); Lu Chuan’s *Mountain Patrol* (*Kekexili*, 2004).

that after many decades of “group-oriented” socialist filmmaking Chinese young filmmakers are too obsessed with the search for individual identities. While the past was the collectivist excesses, the present is the individualist excesses. Pickowicz (2006) further argues that “many of the characters who appear in documentaries and feature films seem superficial precisely because they are so self-absorbed.” (15) The films often look claustrophobic, and seldom move beyond private spaces or connect their problems to larger social and political contexts. Thus, they seem asocial, apolitical, and ahistorical, and the characters are hollow, self-indulgent, and unattractive (14-16). Pickowicz assumes that this results from the “self-Orientalism” through which Chinese filmmakers are so eager to provide the foreign audience with what it seems to expect. In fact, “the dynamics of the global market force marginalized Chinese artists to deliberately engage in self-Orientalization.” Consequently, he is critical of the way in which globalization operates one-dimensionally in contemporary Chinese films; ignoring internal factors, and focusing all attention on external factors only. Hence, the films/the directors “fail to locate globalization in the context of recent domestic history”, and globalization easily becomes “an excuse for neglecting research on the internal factors that have shaped the current cultural scene” (18). In other words, according to him, excessively self-centered, the films of young Chinese directors are indifferent to exploring the relationship between the internal problems of China and globalization.

In this light, *The World* could be a counterexample to Pickowicz’s argument, and comprises, at the same time, Jia Zhangke’s conscious response to both his previous works and his contemporaries. In this chapter, I attempt to explore how Jia Zhangke moves from self to others, from local to national and global, and from aesthetic realism to the feeling of the real in *The World*. As a turning point or intermezzo in his

filmography, *The World* illustrates the transitional process towards the cinematic concerns that he developed in his subsequent films. However, the change in Jia's work is not a one-direction shift from one set of concerns to another, but is a significant experiment in generating meaning through the paradoxical tension between those two.

The Local in the Global/The Global in the Local

As mentioned above, *The World* reveals a significant shift in Jia Zhangke's cinematic attention from the individual to larger groups of people, and a physical movement from the local town, Fenyang, Shanxi to the metropolitan city, Beijing, as well as a change in Jia's social status from underground to aboveground. While his previous films focused on an individual with strong local specificity, to the extent that they are even called Fenyang cinema or Shanxi cinema rather than Chinese cinema, *The World* is located at the center of China, in Beijing where the Chinese transformation has progressed rapidly. Jia discloses the way his cinematic concerns changed in *The World* as follows:

I was interested in social relationships, relationships within society, that is to say, what someone is in this social relationship. For example, a pickpocket (*Xiao Wu*), a wandering peasant culture troupe (*Platform*), and the young unemployed (*Unknown Pleasure*). However, while I was making *Unknown Pleasure*, I realized that it is not enough. I wanted to show the diversity of lives in contemporary China rather than that of a certain person. I thought I should picture how they live there per se rather

than the specific individual or a certain person. Thus, *The World* must be changed. That change is my change about the change of China.⁷¹

In the sense that the characters in his films have an organic relationship⁷² with one another, it seems that it was the world outside Fenyang that the protagonist Cui Mingliang and his colleagues in *Platform* were eager to know and see. Thus, Beijing, a background in *The World*, is another Guangzhou, which is a symbol of a new world and a space of new possibilities and of a chance for a bright future in *Platform*. The world that unfolds in front of the protagonists' eyes, however, is not the splendid new world that they had seen on a postcard in *Platform*. *The World* is a story about people who leave Fenyang, and meet and experience "the world" in Beijing. The film title refers to a theme park, World Park in the outskirts of Beijing, which features miniaturized replicas of world famous sights such as the Eiffel Tower, the leaning Tower of Pisa, Tower Bridge, the Pyramids, Notre Dame, and even a Lower Manhattan with the World Trade Center still intact. In this World Park, there are two migrant workers, Tao (Zhao Tao), a performing dancer and her boyfriend Taisheng (Chen Taisheng), a security guard who is

⁷¹ Jung, Sungil (2006), 'Jiajangkur ui stillaif' (Jia Zhangke's Still Life), *Cine 21*, no. 575, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/do/article/article/typeDispatcher?mag_id=42355&page=1&menu=&key_word=&sdate=&edate=&reporter=, my translation.

⁷² In Jia's films, a couple of main actors/actresses have reappeared in his subsequent films. By and large, their characters are developed with great consistency across the films, though they have different roles and names in each film. Hence, for example, when we see Wang Hongwei, who is often called Jia's persona, play Cui Mingliang in *Platform*, we cannot help but be reminded of the protagonist Xiao Wu in *Xiao Wu*. He reappears in *Unknown Pleasure* even with the same name of Xiao Wu, and plays a migrant worker from Shanxi in *The World*. In a similar vein, Zhao Tao, who is called Jia's muse, plays the 'same' role of a dancer in all of Jia's first four films, *Platform*, *Unknown Pleasure*, *The World*, and *Still Life*. In a sense, that they are main characters in Jia's cinematic world, they are Jia Zhangke himself and his lover, that is to say, I and you. As Jia's films change, they also change. Since Jia's cinematic attention has moved from the self to others/the people, it is not surprising that while Wang Hongwei disappears, Zhao Tao and Han Sanming are in charge of main characters in Jia's later films. Further discussion on Jia's actor/actress will be developed later.

from Shanxi. *The World* displays the Beijing life of these two protagonists and people that surround them. For Tao, Taisheng is a reliable lover who makes her sustain her Beijing dream against a tough reality. Nevertheless, he becomes enraptured with Qun, an imitation goods manufacturer, whom he meets by chance. At about the same time, Tao is also seduced by a rich guy at a karaoke bar. Refusing his offer, she runs into a toilet, where she meets Anna, a former colleague and a Russian dancer in the park, who now works as a hostess at the club to make money. They hug each other and sob for their tragic situation without words. Meanwhile, Erxiao, a security guard in the park and Taisheng's cousin from Shanxi, is fired for stealing performers' purses while they perform on the stage, and Erguniang, a construction worker from Taisheng's hometown, comes to a tragic death in a construction site accident. When Tao sees a text message on Taisheng's mobile phone from Qun, who was leaving for Paris to meet her husband, she decides to leave Taisheng.

The opening sequence of the film introduces two distinct spaces which are divided into onstage and backstage spaces in the World Park. The film begins with roughly three-minute hand-held long take shot that follows Tao, and cruises over the dim corridor and dressing rooms where performers are playing cards, chatting, and preparing for the show in exotic costumes. After visiting the performers one by one in the squalid backstage, the camera cuts away to the splendid stage where they perform a grand fashion show in various traditional costumes of the world. While the show proceeds on the stage, the camera cuts back to the empty and silent corridor. With this contrast, the World Park as a background of the film is divided into two spaces belonging to one place: the backstage as the local, living, reality space, and the onstage as the global, performance, fantasy space. In a like manner, the last shot of the opening sequence

adeptly illustrates a humble local person living in the global landscape. It displays a panorama of the World Park at a great distance, and an old ragman carrying a garbage bag, who comes to the foreground from the left side of the frame. He walks slowly to the center, and halts to turn his head to the audience. With the appearance of the film title “a Jia Zhangke Film, The World” on the screen, he exits to the right of the frame. This title shot contains two contrasting images; the shabby old man in the foreground and the grandiose theme park in the background. In the sense that the film title appears when the old man reaches the center of the frame, “the world” that Jia Zhangke understands is not an exhibition of the spectacular World Park alone, but a living space that can be complete only after the intervention of the local person. In this way, this short opening sequence concisely implies Jia’s problematic of the local and the global which is played out throughout the whole film.

For Jia Zhangke, the local seems to coexist in constant tension with the global, rather than “disappearing” or becoming “hybridized” into the global. For example, Ackar Abbas (1997) suggests the notion of “disappearance” to understand the culture and politics in Hong Kong, where the local disappears in the age of post-colonialism, postmodernism, and postsocialism. “Disappearance here does not imply nonappearance, absence, or lack of presence. It is not even nonrecognition – it is more a question of misrecognition, of recognizing a thing as something else” (7). Chu Yiu Wai (2005) thinks that the local identity of Hong Kong represented in Hong Kong cinema is not authentic or pure. He argues that, “Hong Kong has to claim “its local imaginary by referring to theories of ‘hybridity’ – a culture of translation instead of tradition.” That is to say “the ‘local’ here has already been transformed into more complex cultural space” (322). However, Jia Zhangke employs the local as the counterpart of the global with its

indigenous local specificity. The two thus construct a dialectical relationship through mediation, contention, and negotiation. Instead of filming the theme park, World Park, as a symbol of the global as a homogenous space beyond the local, Jia separates the local from the global. In other words, *The World* depicts migrant workers from Shanxi who make a living in a global city, Beijing, rather than a simple Beijing life away from Shanxi in the age of globalization.

In this regard, the Shanxi dialect in *The World*, which is spoken by Tao, Taisheng, and most supporting characters from Fenyang, is rather different from the local dialects in Jia's previous films, which are all set in Shanxi province in towns such as Fenyang, Taiyuan, and Datong. While the dialect in *Xiao Wu*, *Platform*, and *Unknown Pleasure* is employed for reality in cinematic diegesis, as Sheldon Lu (2007) observes, the local dialect in *The World* "clashes with the anonymous, universal *Putonghua* (Mandarin) blaring out from loudspeakers in the park." In contrast with Mandarin, the Chinese official language, "the provincial dialect is a mark of backwardness, lack of modernity, and the incommensurability of China's poor with the postmodern virtual world" (154). Given that Mandarin is the national standard, to be more exact, there now seem to be three layers of the local, the national, and the global. However, Jia poses a bilateral relationship between the local and the global, rather than the tripartite relationship mediated by the national, and Mandarin is handled as a token for entering the global rather than as a mark of national integration. Situated between the state socialist ideology and the global capitalist economy, they, migrant workers in Beijing, speak Mandarin, not because they are forced to speak it for national consolidation to serve the Chinese socialist ideology, but because they need it for individual economic activity in the milieu of global capitalism. In the scene in which Taisheng visits his childhood

friend, Sanlai (Wang Hongwei), who works in the construction site, Sanlai tells Taisheng that “the workers come from everywhere, we speak in standard Chinese” when Taisheng says in surprise that “you do not speak dialect anymore.” For Sanli, Mandarin is a necessary condition to make money in the Chinese society of global capitalism, thus he encounters it in this way at the global level rather than at the national level.

Masao Miyoshi (1993) in his article titled “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State” points out that the nation-state is thoroughly appropriated by transnational corporations in the age of contemporary global capitalism. Eventually, the nation-state no longer works, and it merely persists through “an illusion of a classless organic community of which everyone is an equal member” (744). He observes that migrant workers in search of jobs all over the world are changing global demography, as “they come, legally or illegally, from everywhere to every industrial center.” However, they are not paid or cared for adequately, although global capitalism needs them. “Cut off from their homes, migrant workers disappear into huge urban slums without the protection of a traditional rural mutual dependence system” (747-748). For instance, the death of Erguniang in *The World* reveals an aspect of the life of migrant workers living in this world of global capitalism. With an emphasis on the powerful spread of transnational corporations beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, Miyoshi feels that national history and culture are over-written by globalization. In common with Abbas’ postulation of cultural disappearance discussed above, he observes that cultural globalization erases the specificity of local cultures, and subsumes them into one universal complex. Thus, they remain merely variants of globalization (747). Although, he aptly illustrates the decline of the nation-state and the

new borderless transnational order in the context of globalization, it might be more valid to appropriate the concept of “Empire” proposed by Hardt and Negri to understand the balance or inter-relationship between the local and the global represented in *The World*.

Hardt and Negri (2000) postulate that “sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule.” They call it “Empire.” Empire is “a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii). In other words, “the concept of Empire is characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries: Empire’s rule has no limits.” (xiv) In the passage to Empire and its process of globalization, “the object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower” (xv). Although Empire presumes a world order with no boundaries in the flat and smooth space where there is no outside of capital, what it conveys is not globalization as a simple homogeneous force. On the one hand Empire refers to the constitution of a supranational world power, on the other hand the affirmation of differences accepted within Empire itself. Hardt and Negri criticize “a dichotomy between the global and the local, assuming that the global entails homogenization and undifferentiated identity whereas the local preserves heterogeneity and difference” (44). They understand that “the differences of locality are neither preexisting nor natural but rather effects of a regime of production. Globality similarly should not be understood in terms of cultural, political, or economic homogenization. Globalization, like localization, should be understood instead as a regime of the production of identity and difference, or really homogenization and heterogenization” (45). Thus, locality needs to be addressed in

terms of “the production of locality”⁷³ rather than as a value to be protected or that is resistant to the dominant intrusion of globalization. In other words, Empire on the one hand incorporates all differences into a universal integration under imperial rule, but on the other hand “involves the affirmation of differences accepted within the imperial realm” (198-199). Since these differences are regarded to be cultural rather than political on the grounds that they will not generate unmanageable conflicts, they are compatible with the inclusionary mechanism of Empire. For instance, ethnic and cultural diversities are advocated under the universal inclusion in socialist and former socialist countries after cold war, and “local languages, traditional place names, arts, handcrafts, and so forth are celebrated as important components of the transition from socialism to capitalism.” While the old colonial apparatus sought to forge fixed and unified identities by a unique solution, Empire is changing continuously by multiple complex variables that admit a variety of incomplete but effective solutions (199). To put it simply, Empire “recognizes existing or potential differences, celebrates them, and manages them within a general economy of command” (201). Hence, the local and the global are trans-located, interdependent and overlapped rather than separated, fixed, and hierarchized. As Saskia Sassen argues (2001), the new geography promoted by the global economy leads to the need to rethink conventional spatial hierarchies that were taken for granted, such as local<national<global. Crossing borders and spaces, for instance, “international professionals and immigrant workers operate in contexts that are at the same time local and global” (270).

The phrase first shown in *The World*, which appears before the film’s main title

⁷³ A similar discussion on “the production of locality” is also found in Arjun Appadurai’s book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996, pp. 178-199

“The World”, is a quote from the promotion catchphrase of the World Park, “see the world without ever leaving Beijing (*Buchu beijing, zoubian shijie*).” This is not simply the rhetoric for advertising a theme park which provides replicas of famous world architecture, but implies that it is not necessary to leave Beijing to experience the world, because the world is already inside Beijing. In other words, it does not mean that visiting the theme park is global, and the outside of the park is local, but rather, that the park itself is at once global and local, and so is the outside, because the local is always subsumed into the global, and the global is localized again in the flat and smooth space of Empire which admits no outside to capital. What matters is not if the global culture displayed in the park is real or authentic, but that it is eventually received and consumed as the global. In a sense, this is the way Beijing as a local place receives the global, or the localized global, and vice versa. Therefore, there is no difference between the inside and the outside of the park. The World Park as a simulacrum of the world, as Baudrillard (1994) argues, no longer raises the question of a false representation of reality. The simulacrum is not an imitation of reality, but becomes the truth itself since the original is no longer distinguished from the replica in the postmodern society. The simulacrum thus becomes the reality, and vice versa. That is why the theme park is represented as a real space in which the characters live, while the outside of the park is full of fantasy elements such as animation. Jia himself explains why he inserts animation scenes in *The World* as follows:

The World must be changed. That change was my change to China’s change. The Chinese young people live in two kinds of worlds. One is the reality, the other is the Digital world. It was important for me to show both of them at once. I want to show

the contemporary post-modern life in China, not as an aesthetic method, but as a way to live in this era. It was not enough to express it only with a story. Thus, I needed animation, cinemascope, and subtitles.⁷⁴

Jia, on one hand, divides the theme park as a simulacrum space from the outside of it as a reality space, on the other hand, shows they are not distinguishable, because fantasy is indispensable to the reality he confronts. (The questions on fantasy and reality will be discussed further in chapter 6)

“Paris in Beijing suburb (*Daxing de bali*)” is the first section title after the film title. Certainly, it indicates that Paris is represented as a symbol of the global in the local theme park by famous Parisian architecture, such as the Eiffel Tower. This co-existence of the local and the global, however, is reversed as “Chinatown in Paris” in the scene in which Qun talks with Taisheng about her husband who has left for Paris. After dancing with Taisheng in her office, Qun shows him the picture of her husband and says that she applied for a visa to visit her husband. Taisheng tells her to come to the park if she does not get it, because the Eiffel Tower, Norte Dame and the Arc de Triomphe are there. But Qun answers that the park does not have Belleville, the Chinatown where her husband lives. In a sense, while Taisheng sees Paris in Beijing’s park, Qun’s husband occupies Chinatown in Paris. Or Taisheng lives Beijing life in the World Park, while Qun’s husband experiences Paris in Chinatown. Paris is to Beijing’s theme park, as Belleville is to Paris. Thus, there is no difference between Taisheng and Qun’s husband who are migrant workers in Beijing and Paris. At this point, Beijing and Paris are connected as the local or the global rather than as the national of China and France. To

⁷⁴ Jung, Sungil (2006) ‘Jiajangkur ui stillaip’ (Jia Zhangke’s Still Life), *Cine 21*, no. 573, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/42355, my translation.

be more exact, they are *Daxing*, a suburban district of Beijing, and Belleville, a Chinatown of Paris. Not only are the places more localized, but the characters are also more subdivided, rather than being presented as Chinese nationals and as a homogeneous unity. While Taisheng is from Shanxi, Qun's husband is from Wenzhou. Jia Zhangke inserts Qun's line that "people from Wenzhou are attracted to going abroad" to explain the reason why Qun's husband went to Paris. In this sense, just as Taisheng from Shanxi is to work in Beijing, Qun's husband from Wenzhou is to make a living in Paris. That is to say, each individual encounters the global as a new world order and bodily experiences it in their own way. In this respect, the setting of the theme park in *The World* serves to highlight the individual vis-à-vis globalization in the age of Empire which has no boundaries, rather than to show "China's desire to integrate itself into the global community" (Cui, 2006: 113) or to simply emphasize the phantasm that "the Chinese dwell in the illusion" (Shi, 2007: 226). In other words, what the film concerns is how the individual lives in the milieu of global capitalism beyond national boundaries, belonging to the local and the global simultaneously, or standing on the threshold between them.

The Death of a Man

As shown above, *The World* deals with the Chinese migrant workers who make their living in Beijing, as well as Qun's husband, the overseas migrant worker who is only mentioned without any physical appearance. The migrant workers (*Mingong*), "the floating population (*Liudong renkou*)" from rural to urban areas are one of the most conspicuous social phenomena in contemporary China. At the same time, to employ

Appadurai's notion of the "ethnoscape," they construct the new landscape of the world as a sign of the Chinese social transformation. Appadurai (1996) proposes that the new global economy should be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order instead of the existing center-periphery models. To theorize the complexities of global cultural flows generated by this global capitalism, he differentiates them into five dimensions; ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples. The ethnoscape⁷⁵ refers to "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (32-33). Although the migrant workers shown in *The World* unveil the social mobility and flows at the domestic level rather than at the international level, the Chinese ethnoscape that they construct contains socio-political problems caused by current global capitalism rather than those merely caused by rural-to-urban labor migration within the modernization process of a single country.

Although migration from rural to urban areas is by no means unique to the Chinese case, a social phenomenon of migration as a floating population arose from specific contexts of collusion between the rapid spread of global capitalism and the migration policies of the Chinese government. New market forces in the post-Mao era caused a large scale influx of peasants into urban areas, where their cheap labor and services were in high demand. Also, some of them brought small amounts of capital to run small business in cities, and were able to accumulate a considerable amount of new wealth. However, most peasant workers not only have nothing to sell but their labor on a daily

⁷⁵ For more details, see chapter 3 "Global Ethnoscaples: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology" in *Modernity at Large*, pp. 48-65

basis, but also live with an illegal status under the Chinese household registration (*hukou*) system, which discriminates them from urban residents. *Hukou* is a residence permit issued by the government of China. It includes identification information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth. For peasant migrant workers, the *hukou* system has become onerous since the 1980s, and it is estimated that about 200 million Chinese live outside their officially-registered areas.⁷⁶ As Zhang Li (2001) observes, far away from rural authorities, but not incorporated into the urban control system, they have become “a kind of third subject (neither rural nor urban) in a period of unprecedented spatial mobility” (23). In other words, deprived of the legal rights to residency, they are internal aliens or noncitizens in the cities. In light of the fact that the floating population has been growing rapidly as a result of diverse factors both inside and outside of the state apparatus, the *hukou* system has been transformed to regulate peasant migrants on the move more efficiently (23). Therefore, given that *hukou* functions as the legal right to move in and out, it works just like a passport; the *hukou* is to Chinese migrant workers as the passport is to overseas visitors.

In *The World*, Passports appear as a symbol of mobility three times, which evokes status of migrant workers in the context of global capitalism. The first one is the passport of Anna, a newcomer from Russia who has come to make money in the theme park. When she gets to work, she is forced to give the broker her passport, and despite her great reluctance, she is unable to resist his demand. She is deprived of her legal rights. Another passport is shown in the scene in which Tao meets her ex-boy friend, Liangzi. Saying that he is on the way to Mongolia, he shows her his passport. Although

⁷⁶ For more details, see Wong, Daniel Fu Keung, Chang Ying Li, and He Xue Song (2007), ‘Rural Migrant Workers in Urban China: Living a Marginalized Life,’ in *International Journal of Social Welfare*, vol. 16, pp. 32-40

Tao is curious and takes a look at it, she says “I don’t understand.” She seems not only unaware of it, but also not interested in having her own one. The last case is Qun’s passport, which she shows Taisheng in her room. Although Qun explains about her plan to visit Paris, Taisheng assumes airs, telling her to come to the park that has all that French stuff if she does not get a visa. In the film, the passport is not allowed to Tao and Taisheng. It is either deprived of, unfamiliar, or disregarded. While Liangzi is going to Mongolia and Qun leaves for France, both with their passports, all that Tao and Taisheng can do is to experience the “magic carpet ride” displayed on the TV screen or to perform the role of stewardess on the plane exhibited in the park.

In the sense of legal mobility, the film contains an interesting event which implies the migrant worker’s problems with *hukou*. One day, Erxiao, a security guard from Shanxi, steals performers’ purses while they are performing the show on the stage. Soon after, the police come to the park to arrest him, and he is fired from his job and sent to his hometown. What is interesting in this event is that the punishment for his crime is not going to prison, but being expelled from the park, and from Beijing, to his hometown, Shanxi. In a sense, it seems like the deportation of an illegal immigrant back to their country of origin. Even though there is a shot of the police as a law-enforcement agency, the governmental power abandons a criminal penalty, and instead transfers the punishment to the public sector or familial rule. The only person who takes the role of punisher towards Erxiao in the film is Taisheng, his elder cousin, who slaps his face in the park and sends him back to his hometown, Shanxi. In other words, Erxiao is outside the legal system of the state. As Zhang Li (2001) points out, rural migrant workers, who belong neither to rural authorities nor to the urban legal order, are considered “out of place” and “out of control.” (2) On the one hand, this large-scale and unmanageable

floating population is regarded to be potentially criminal and to generate social problems, but on the other hand the places they inhabit, such as the “congregating zones of floaters” (*liudong renkou junjudian*) that have been recently established, construct a “political vacuum,” a place beyond government control (1). In the sense that they are beyond the juridical system, they do not belong there though they are there. Likewise, they are invisible although they exist, and inaudible although they speak. They are in “a state of exception.”

For this reason, migrant workers resonate with the concepts of “*homo sacer*” proposed by Giorgio Agamben. *Homo sacer*, which is taken from Roman law, indicates the sacred man who “may be killed but not sacrificed” because he is outside of both human and divine law. Agamben (1995) employs the life of this *homo sacer*, the bare life, as a political category in modern times to explore the outcasts through the operations of sovereign power. He argues that the place of sovereignty is on the threshold between what lies both inside and outside the juridical order (15). Exception is an original structure of sovereignty where law exists by virtue of the exception it captures in itself. In other words, “the original political relation is the ban (the state of exception as zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exclusion and inclusion).” And, “the fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as ordinary political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture” (181). Agamben (2000) suggests that, “if sovereign power is founded on the ability to decide the state of exception, the camp is the structure in which the state of exception is permanently realized” (40). The camp is a place that is outside the normal juridical order, but it is not simply an external space. According to the etymological sense of term “exception,” which is an inclusive exclusion that serves to include what is

excluded, “the camp is a hybrid of law and fact in which the two terms have become indistinguishable” (Agamben, 1995: 170). The camp as the “*nomos*” of the modern appears with new laws on citizenship and the denationalization of citizens, whereas the old *nomos*, according to Carl Schmitt, was founded on the functional nexus between a determinate localization (land) and a determinate order (the State) (174-175). The camp, as the new *nomos*, is produced at the point that marks the inscription of bare life within the old *nomos*. “To an order without localization (the state of exception, in which law is suspended) there now corresponds a localization without order (the camp as permanent space of exception)” (175). Thus “the political system no longer orders juridical rules in a determinate space but instead contains at its very center a dislocating localization that exceeds it and into which every form of life and every rule can be virtually taken. (175).

Appropriating these concepts, the *homo sacer* and the camp, *The World* might be understood as a record of the bare life of migrant workers in their camp-like spaces. The scene about the death of “Little Sister” (Er guniang)⁷⁷ could exemplify the state of the rural migrant worker as *homo sacer*. He comes from Shanxi to Beijing to look for a better life. However, one day he is taken to a hospital emergency room as a result of a construction site accident. When Taisheng arrives in a hurry, Little Sister is already in serious condition. Taisheng asks Sanlai what happened, and Sanlai answers that Little Sister had hauled steel all day long, and when he worked overtime at night a cable had broken causing the accident. Taisheng pushes Sanlai with anger asking why he was working at night, and Sanlai answers the pay is better. Little Sister gives Taisheng a

⁷⁷ In the film, his real name is Chen Yuanbing. However, he introduces himself as “Little Sister” because everybody calls him that. He explains the reason why he has a girl’s name is that his mother expected a girl when she gave birth to him. Given that he is killed in vain by accident at the end of the film, the loss of a real name and his reverse sex role might imply his status as *homo sacer* who is outside both human (juridical) and divine (familial) order.

note written on cigarette wrapping paper in his final moments of life. The camera, which initially faces the characters waiting outside the emergency room, finally shows what he had written in a panning shot with no sound. It is a long list of debts with names and the amount that describes how much he owed to each person. The reason why Little Sister came to Beijing and worked so hard was to make money to pay back his debt. For him, the construction site is a place where he can survive, but at the same time he can die at any time⁷⁸. In fact, although it is obvious that a great number of similar deaths occur in Chinese cities every day, they are invisible, or remain mere statistics on paper. These deaths are of no value, just as is the death of *homo sacer*, who may be killed but not sacrificed. Nobody takes responsibility for their death; the construction site is beyond the normal juridical order, it is a space of exception. However, it is through the scene of Little Sister's death that *The World* makes the invisible visible, the conceptual death the corporeal death, and statistical figure a tragic event. In other words, the film witnesses and remembers rural migrant workers and their bare life on the threshold between the inside and outside of contemporary Chinese urban spaces.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, his third book in the *Homo Sacer* series, Agamben (1999) raises the ethical problem of testimony, which is regarded to the necessity of a lacuna in testimony in which the factual condition of the camps cannot correspond to what is said about them. Thus, the paradox lies in the fact that the survivors are not the true witnesses and that the complete and true witnesses of Auschwitz have not returned

⁷⁸ This coincidence of life and death in the working place recalls the so-called life-and-death contract (*shengsi hetong*) in *Platform*. Under the conditions of privatization, it makes the mine owner exempt from responsibility for the death of mine workers. It is ironical that Sanming, who signs this contract in *Platform*, comes to Beijing to receive the compensation money for Little Sister's death in *The World*.

to tell about it or have returned mute (33). In response to this question, Agamben takes up as the complete witnesses the “*Muselmann*” of the camps, those who had reached such a state of physical decrepitude and existential disregard that “one hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death” (44). The term “*Muselmann*” refers to the “living dead,” who are the “anonymous mass” and the “backbone of the camps.” For Agamben, the suggestion that the *Muselmann* is the true witness of the camps reveals that “the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority” (52). Thus, assuming the task of bearing witness in the name of those who cannot speak reveals that the task of bearing witness is basically a task of bearing witness to the impossibility of witnessing. Agamben observes that the disjuncture between the human as living being and as speaking being is the condition for possibility of testimony. In an analysis of pronouns, such as “I” that allows a speaker to put language to use, he argues that the subjectification in this process is conditioned by simultaneous de-subjectification. He argues that “the subject of enunciation is composed of discourse and exists in discourse alone. But, for this very reason, once the subject is in discourse, he can say nothing; he cannot speak” (117). In other words, “for not only is the ‘I’ always other with respect to the individual who lends its speech.” On one hand, this I-other stands in an impossibility of speaking, on the other hand, in the event of discourse, subjectification and de-subjectification coincide at every point (117). Consequently, Agamben suggests that “if there is no articulation between the living being and language, if the ‘I’ stands suspended in this disjunction, then there can be testimony” (130). In this sense, testimony appears as the practice of remaining human, since the human being undergoes the process of appropriation in speaking.

In *The World*, what Jia Zhangke as a survivor attempts to bear witness to is the bare life of migrant workers as *homo sacer* living in contemporary Chinese urban areas, like a camp. Given the fact that Jia identifies himself as a “migrant film worker (*dianying mingong*)” (Cheng and Huang, 2000: 362), it is through at once subjectification and de-subjectification that his testimony takes place. For him, *The World* stands on the threshold between underground and aboveground, local and global, and self and others. Keeping the paradoxical relationship of his cinematic concerns between these questions, he further explores the limits of the film medium and cinematic language to speak about others in his subsequent films. In other words, he moves from Fenyang, his hometown to Beijing, where he spent his college days, then he further moves to more unfamiliar places, Sanxia (*Still Life and Dong*), Chengdu (*24 City*), and Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (*I Wish I Knew*) in his later films. This move implies not simply his shift of the cinematic locations and objects, but also his change of the cinematic method to address the unfamiliar. It is a series of experiments crossing between fiction and documentary that he explores how to film others outside. On one hand, his outward journey after *The World* is a process to discover the people outside, on the other hand, it results in his inward reflection to return to himself via them. His cinematic concern gets more interactive and paradoxical in terms of character, genre, object, method, and so on. The following chapter will discuss how Jia Zhangke deals with people in a strange place, Fengjie, and why he decided to make at once two films of fiction, *Still Life*, and documentary, *Dong*, on the same subject.

Chapter 6

The Discovery of the Landscape:

People, Fantasy, and Reality in *Still Life* and *Dong*

The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history – Mao Zedong

All great fiction films tend towards documentary, just as all great documentaries tend towards fiction [...] One must choose between ethic and aesthetic. That is understood. But it is no less understood that each word implies a part of each other. And he who opts wholeheartedly for one, necessarily finds the other at the end of his journey. – Jean Luc Godard

Truth becomes fiction when the fiction's true; Real becomes not-real where the unreal's real – Cao Xueqin, *The Story of the Stone*

According to him, after *The World*, it was accidental that Jia Zhangke visited the Three Gorges region (*Sanxia*) to make a documentary film *Dong* (2006) and *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006) which won Golden Lion Award for Best Film at the 2006 Venice Film Festival. Liu Xiaodong⁷⁹, one of the most renowned young painters, proposed Jia

⁷⁹ Jia Zhangke explains that the title of documentary film *Dong* is derived from Liu Xiaodong's name because everybody calls him "dong". Liu Xiaodong is not only famous in art scene, but also friends with many Chinese young filmmakers as well as Jia. Before this documentary

Zhangke to make a documentary film about his work to paint eleven male laborers living around the Three Gorges area. Jia states that as he had been curious about Liu's work which captures everyday life of the Chinese ordinary workers on his canvas, he willingly accompanied Liu Xiaodong on the trip to the old village Fengjie located in the hinterland of the Three Gorges area. After arriving there, Jia found that the old village already became the past, and people were not saying about the bygone days. Since this world largest dam construction started in 1994, a number of villages were submerged and a myriad of people were displaced.⁸⁰ When Jia visited there, the construction was still in active progress, and Three Gorges area was ever-changing. He confesses what difficulties he had in making a documentary film *Dong* and why he decided to make a feature film *Still Life* as follows:

Dong consists of three parts: the first one is about Liu Xiaodong's painting, another one is the interview with him, and the last one is about the laborers who are the model for his paintings. I came to think about these people who worked in such a dangerous place and their physical beauty to work there by the sweat of their brow. There was an old man among laborers whom we shoot. One sunny day, we took a picture that he was working all day. After dusk, he returned to his home. Seeing his way back home, I became curious how he live at home after his work. Although

project *Dong*, He has played a role of a karaoke customer in Jia's previous work *The World*. Besides the co-operation with Jia, he has acted a main role in Wang Xiaoshuai's first feature film *The Days* (Dongchun de rizi, 1994), and worked as art director in Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastard* (Beijing zazhong, 1993).

⁸⁰ Since the Three Gorges dam construction started in 1994, about 1.4 million people have already been relocated from this area, and the displacement of people has not been done even after completion of the construction. According to an announcement by the Chinese government in 2012, another 100,000 people may be moved from the area around Three Gorges dam in the next 3 to 5 years. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-17754256> accessed on 10/Jan/2013

documentary pictures their lives, the closer I approach them, the deeper they hide their secrets. Thus, I needed a story to come into their secrets. Three Gorges were changing day by day, being broken and becoming a new space every day. As I came to Three Gorges to make a documentary, I have no preparation. Playing a laborer's role by myself, I wrote the scenario for three days.... This is the beginning of *Still Life*. This scenario was very loose and supposed to change on the spot. Instead, I had one principle that the film must be pictured from the stranger's perspective. The reason is that if I filmed their life of people in this place, it would turn out a fake because I came here only ten days ago.⁸¹

Dong opens with a long shot that contains Liu Xiaodong's back who stares at the landscape of Fengjie, Three Gorges. Soon after, the camera follows him to picture, as Jia explains above, the process of Liu Xiaodong's painting work with eleven laborers. Several interview shots of Liu Xiaodong who explains about his works help to understand why he paints them there, and periodic long and extreme long shots of the people and landscape serve to show the backdrop of the film and its atmosphere. One day, one of Liu Xiaodong's eleven models is killed in the accident that the building under deconstruction collapses. Liu Xiaodong visits his family to inform his death. There are only women, children, and old men in the village since most men left for the cities to make money. They receive the news of his death with equanimity. Returning to Fengjie, the film moves on from Three Gorges, China to Bangkok, Thailand by cutting away from the shot of Liu Xiaodong on the boat in Yangzi River to the shot of him on the boat in Menam River. Liu paints eleven Thai sex workers in the studio to complete a

⁸¹ Jung, Sungil, (2006), "Jiajangkur ui stil laip" (Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*)," *Cine 21*, no. 575, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/42355 accessed on 10/Jan/2011

pair of his paintings for the balance of Yin and Yang. He thinks that it is important to make a balance between male and female subjects in his paintings. Showing how Liu works on those female sex workers in the studio, the camera turns abruptly to one model of them, and keeps following her, not returning to Liu. As she leaves the studio after work, the camera comes out from the studio along with her. On her way home, there are various daily life sceneries of ordinary Thai people in the street. Just like Liu's visit to the village in the former part of the film, the camera following her calls on her house. She watches TV news saying that there happens a big flood in the northern area of Thailand from which she came. She leaves for her hometown, and the camera sees her off at the train station.

After this documentary *Dong*, Jia Zhangke returned to Three Gorges to make a feature film *Still Life*. As soon as the scenario was completed, he called his main actors/actresses and staffs to come to Three Gorges, and set to film *Still Life* with them as well as other actors/actresses cast on the spot.

Still Life follows two leading characters of Sanming (Han Sanming) and Shen Hong (Zhao Tao) who travel from the outside to Fengjie to look for their absent spouses. Sanming, a coal miner from Shanxi, visits Fengjie to search for his ex-wife who left him 16 years ago. He finds that the address she left him has been already submerged by the Three Gorges dam construction project. He wanders around the town to search for his ex-wife and daughter. In order to support himself during his time in Fengjie, he gets a job with a demolition crew that tears down buildings of the city before its impending submersion. Shen Hong is looking for her husband, who disappeared two years ago to work in a factory of Fengjie. She meets one of his old friends, Dongming (Wang Hongwei) to ask him to help for finding her husband. While she traces his whereabouts,

she discovers that he becomes a successful businessman in Fengjie and has an affair with a wealthy female investor. Although she eventually finds her husband, she tells him that she has a new lover and wants to divorce. After a short talk with him walking along the bank of the dam, she leaves Fengjie. In the mean time, Sanming also meets his ex-wife and wants to get her back. However, he is informed that he should pay her brother's debt first to be reunited with her. In the end, Sanming goes back to Shanxi to make money with his new friends who want better pay despite more danger of death.

Dong and *Still Life* are on the one hand closely related to, on the other hand independently different from each other. In other words, they respond with two attitudes to one place respectively, or contain two perspectives on one situation. *Dong* is neither a documentary film about the process of *Still Life* production, nor a pilot project as a pre-production for *Still Life*. While *Dong* observes the changes happening on the surface including spatial changes, actual events and lives of people in that place, *Still Life* intervenes in the layers of time which is inherent in that space via stories of two protagonists who visit Three Gorges. If the former captures what arises in the present, the latter rather contemplates what might and may happen in the past and the future. In a similar sense, the former is related to the actual, the latter, however, is interested in the virtual. Filming events actually happened there into the documentary *Dong*, Jia Zhangke considers that making a feature film *Still Life* could deliver a sense of space which contains plural potential events. In an interview on *Still Life*, he comments that "what is important is space in which the characters exist. Although there are characters and events in space, space remains even after they leave. And, other events can happen there. Thus, space contains plural events, not a single event. ... Events passes away as time goes by, however space remains there. There must be events before the characters in the

film arrive there, moreover will be other events after they leave there.”⁸²

The Three Gorges region, a backdrop of *Dong* and *Still Life*, is a strange place to Jia Zhangke where he has never been before albeit he must know of it. In fact, his previous works all were set in places with which he had been very familiar. For instance, *Xiao Wu* (Fenyang), *Platform* (Fenyang and other small cities in Shanxi province), *Unknown Pleasure* (Datong, Shanxi), and *The World* (Beijing) are filmed either in Shanxi province, his hometown or in Beijing, his current place of residence ever since his college days. *Dong* and *Still Life* however are made through his first visit to Fengjie, an old town in the Three Gorges area, Sichuan province in southwest China. Encountering a new space makes Jia consider what is happening outside himself and how he understands this new space and people who live there. While his previous works focus on the individual figure understood with his experience and knowledge, *Dong* and *Still Life* show that he becomes conscious of a bigger change happening in other place to which he had not paid attention. In other words, if the former demonstrates his understanding about how the individual is in ever-changing social relationships, the latter reveals a process to understand the social change of other space and people in China. On the one hand, this is a succession or extension of his previous cinematic concern, on the other hand, a fundamental conversion of his cinematic object and a beginning of his subsequent explorations on the possibilities and limitations of the film medium through his late films.

People in the Landscape

⁸² Jung, Sungil, (2006), “Jiajangkur ui stil laip” (Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life*),” *Cine 21*, no. 575, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/42355, my translation.

It is a long-take handheld shot that opens *Still Life*. This parallel shot carefully shows faces, gestures, skins, and noises of the people on the boat which runs along the river, and ends with the introduction of the protagonist, Sanming sitting on the bow of the boat. After holding Sanming who gazes into the distance for a while, the camera following his gaze directs to the landscapes around the river. In a long shot of the landscape of the bank with the sound of arrival announcement, the Chinese film title appears, “Sanxia haoren”, which literally means “good people of the Three Gorges”, and then “Still Life” in English.

In fact, this long take hand-held shot in the opening sequence is a very familiar way to unfold Jia’s films. In his previous works, *Xiao Wu*, *Unknown Pleasure*, and *The World*, the camera following the protagonist moves, and introduces the surroundings around them. *Xiao Wu* begins with the opening sequence that follows the protagonist Xiao Wu who waits for the bus in the street, and boards on the bus heading for town. The first shot of *Unknown Pleasure* is a long take shot in front of the protagonist who rides a bike in the street. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the camera in *The World* following the protagonist cruises through the corridor of the backstage. The opening shot in *Still Life* is similar with those shots in Jia’s previous works. However, *Still Life* has a slightly different position or attitude. The camera in *Still Life* seems interested in observing people and space from the perspective of the protagonist Sanming rather than Sanming himself, while the previous films focus on the protagonists. As *Still Life* begins with the arrival of Sanming from the outside to look for his ex-wife, the film is naturally developed through his wandering around the small village Fengjie. Just like him, another protagonist Shenhong also goes here and there to meet her husband. Crisscrossing Fengjie, they meet various people, and witness what happens there. In

other words, what the film displays is people and landscape of Fengjie that they encounter in the process of looking for their estranged spouses rather than the family reunion of them per se. In this sense, they even seem to function as a kind of MacGuffin⁸³ to just lead the narrative of the film. In this regards, what *Still Life* really concerns is people in the landscape who are discovered by the two protagonists Sanming and Shenhong. Jia in an interview explains the reason why he uses Mao's letters to make the Chinese title of "Sanxia haoren" as follows:

Everybody criticizes Mao Zedong. However, he is the only Chinese politician who acknowledged the power of people. Although he abused that politically for which he was criticized, I highly appreciate him for the fact that he made the people realize their power. In order to understand the Chinese people, we should understand Mao Zedong, and learn more. The characters of film title in the beginning of *Still Life* are made by selecting one by one among the letters that Mao himself wrote.⁸⁴

As shown above, Jia observes the Three Gorges through the perspective of Sanming and Shenhong who come from the outside world instead of the characters inside the Three Gorges. As *Dong* begins with Liu Xiaodong's arrival in Fengjie, Sanming's visit to Fengjie opens *Still Life*. Two stories of *Still Life* unfold as two protagonists Sanming and Shenhong visit from Shanxi to Fengjie respectively, and they

⁸³ The term of MacGuffin, which was popularized by Alfred Hitchcock, is a plot device to lead a central focus of the film, but then decline in importance. The most common type of MacGuffin is an object, place or person. It may come back into play at the climax of the story, but it is usually forgotten or ignored by the audience.

⁸⁴ Jung, Sungil (2006), 'Jiajangkur ui stillaip' (Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*), *Cine 21*, no. 574, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/42356, my translation.

ends as they leave there. In other words, the narrative of *Still Life* is composed of events during the time of coming to and leaving Fengjie as a kind of “jianghu”⁸⁵ in terms of a space away from the government system or another new world out of home. This narrative structure, as Jia himself admits⁸⁶, is nothing but the traditional narrative structure of Chinese martial arts film. The typical Chinese martial arts film generally endeavors to focus on the protagonists’ heroic aspects and their sentiment in the process to revenge their enemies, however, *Still Life* rather pays attention to the protagonists’ surroundings while they are searching for their estranged spouses. If the former highlights the protagonists’ individual, extraordinary, and heroic features, the latter is more interested in people, space, and atmosphere around them. In other words, Jia observes, feels, and understands the old village Fengjie from the perspective of Sanming and Shenhong. He mentions how he thinks about space and people of Fengjie in making *Still Life* as follows:

Visiting cities in China, I find there are spatial pains. I want to borrow Michelangelo Antonioni’s sentence that I particularly like. He says that when you arrived in a space, you must begin to make a conversation with it for five minutes. Everywhere

⁸⁵ The concept of “jiang hu” is not easy to define or translate into English. It is usually employed in martial arts novels and movies. Although “jiang hu” literally means “river and lake” it is generally understood as “the underworld of wandering fighters” or “the world of secret societies and bandits”. On one hand, the reason I use the term “jiang hu” here is it could mean “the world out of home” to Sanming in that entering “jiang hu” implies to meet the new and strange world, which consists of various people. On the other hand, as Zhang Hongbing (2009: 151) points out, the majority of people whom Sanming encounters are struggling outside of government or institutional systems. They live in unstable, chaotic, and tough world just like Little Brother Ma who mimics Chow Yun-fat in Hong Kong noir films.

⁸⁶ Jia himself acknowledges that he found the narrative structure of *Still Life* is like the Chinese martial arts film after he wrote the synopsis of it, though he was not conscious of it while he was writing. He confesses that it might result from his experience of watching a plenty of Hong Kong films. For more details, see Jia, Zhangke and Wang Zun (2008), “Dianying gaibian rensheng” (Cinema Changed a Life) in Ge Fei, Jia Zhangke et al., *Yi ge ren de dianying* (Cinema of an Individual), Beijing: Zhangxin chubanshe, pp. 86-87.

has its own conversation. It is necessary to go to the space and feel it breathing. Thereafter, I think, feel, and make a conversation with people who live there. Space and people are both important to me.⁸⁷

In order to observe people and space of the Three Gorges, Jia employs numerous over-shoulder shots and point-of-view shots of protagonists. They frequently gaze at into the distance, and the landscape of the Three Gorges appears in their eyes. As the opening shot of *Dong* is that Liu Xiaodong stares at a grand view of the Three Gorges, as described above, Sanming's point of view shot to spread out the landscape of Fengjie leads *Still Life* off. While *Still Life* opens with the landscape of the Three Gorges in Sanming's eyes, it ends with people in the Three Gorges in his eyes. In the final scene, Sanming leaves Fengjie for Shanxi to earn money with the demolition workers with whom he makes friends there. In the way to Shanxi, Sanming looks at a person who walks precariously on the rope between two buildings being demolished. Sanming abruptly takes a glance at the camera and walks out of the frame, in which way Sanming leaves this ruined village Fengjie, where the rope walker still remains at stake in the air before the end credits appear. In the sense that the film unfolds with Sanming's point-of-view and closes with his point-of-view, *Still Life* is captured in Sanming's eye as an observer who comes from the outside of Fengjie. Although a panoramic view of Fengjie comes into the Sanming's view when he first arrives in Fengjie, what he sees in the end is a rope walker who might insinuate people on the line who dare to accompany Sanming to earn more money at the risk of their lives when he leaves Fengjie. In this respect, *Still Life* could be considered as a process to discover people from the landscape

⁸⁷ Jung, Sungil, (2006), "Jiajangkur ui stil laip" (Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*)," *Cine 21*, no. 575, Seoul, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/42355, my translation.

of the Three Gorges. Through two protagonists' eyes, the film beholds what happens in Fengjie, encounters who are there, and feels how they live. Moreover, as Sanming turns his head to the camera in the final scene, Jia Zhangke asks the audience to become a witness of this space and people.

To reiterate, *Still Life* pictures space and people of the Three Gorges rather than merely two particular characters, Sanming and Shenhong. Unlike the protagonists of Jia's early films who are marginal characters separated, differentiated, and dissociated from the collective, Sanming and Shenhong in *Still Life* are typical ordinary people who can be easily seen in the Three Gorges area, albeit they are visitors from the outside, Shanxi. If Sanming represents people who are displaced, nevertheless still work, live in the demolition site as the one side of the Three Gorges dam construction, Shenhong, in the process of tracing his whereabouts, introduces a story of her husband who achieves economic success as the other side of it. They are everymen to stand for people of the Three Gorges, not because they are a miner and a nurse as common occupations or they represent two aspects of Fengjie as demolition and construction, but because they address, approach, and walk into people.

Although *Still Life*, as mentioned above, has a quasi martial arts film structure in terms of a story that the protagonists visit a town from the outside to search for someone, in fact it shows more interest in the local people and their spaces that they come across during their search rather than their estranged spouses, the objects per se for which they wander to search for throughout the film. As shown in the opening sequence described above, when constructing scenes, *Still Life* takes a constant stance to introduce deliberately spatial backgrounds first and observe the people there with a certain distance, and then make the protagonists enter the scenes of them. In other words, as the

camera pictures the landscape of space and people by the frame, the protagonists Sanming and Shenhong walk in and out the frame. Hence, the camera in *Still Life* seems to be there already waiting for the protagonists rather than it either arrives with them together or comes after them. In this sense, even after the characters leave there, the camera still remains there for a good while.

For example, when Sanming visits the village office to inquire about the old address that his ex-wife left for him, what is first seen in this scene is a group of people who are quarrelling in the corridor outside the office about the compensation issue for displacement due to submersion. The scene is not introduced with the appearance of the Sanming, but he instead is found among the people who are already there, and absorbed into the scene. Like the first appearance of Sanming, Shenhong is also introduced in the middle of the film by panning the camera from Sanming who looks at UFO flying over the landscape of the Three Gorges to Shenhong who also stares at UFO vanishing across the top of the mountain. After the short introduction of Shenhong mediated by UFO, when she goes to the factory where her husband worked, the film displays the scenery of the factory first. Although Shenhong sneak into the office to someone to ask about her husband, the camera pays more attention to the people who are claiming for indemnity than the protagonist Shenhong. The camera in *Still Life* always observes the people whom they encountered on the way to search for their spouses. When Sanming drops by the boat to see his ex-brother-in-law who lives on the boat with other colleagues, the camera carefully pictures how they live on the boat. Likewise, Shenhong goes to see Dongming who is a friend of her husband, the film shows the sites where he unearths the relics of Han Dynasty, which implies time of two thousand years accumulated in the place of Three Gorges area.

In order to observe the people in the landscape, Jia employs Sanming and Shenhong as observers coming from outside. The landscape of Sanxia is viewed from the perspectives of Sanming and Shenhong with the distance between the subject and object. To use Karatani Kojin's term, this is "the discovery of landscape" enabled by an epistemological inversion. Kojin (1993: 11-44) argues that the modern subject can be acquired by the recognition of the exterior, the discovery of landscape. The discovery of landscape is not describing the landscape, but creating the landscape which has not been seen, although it always has existed. In this respect, he argues that the discovery of landscape is the discovery of hidden reality, common people, and history. In this regard, what Jia discovers in *Still Life* is the landscape, ordinary people, and time in Sanxia.

Chapter 7
Rethinking Documentary:
The Distance to the Subject and Self-reflection in *Dong* and
Useless

He [Jia Zhangke] is the most unselfish director among the so-called Sixth Generation directors.
–Tian Zhuangzhuang

When I shoot fiction, I usually want to maintain a certain objectivity in presenting the characters in their settings. But when I shoot documentary, I want to capture the ‘drama’ that’s inherent in reality – and I want to carefully express my subjective impressions – Jia Zhangke

The youngster painter says, “Art is not a reflection of reality, It is the reality of a reflection.” To me it means something. Art is not only a mirror. There is not only the reality and then the mirror-camera. I mean, I thought it was like that when I made *Breathless*, but later I discovered you can’t separate the mirror from the reality. You can’t distinguish them so clearly. I think the movie is not a thing which is taken by the camera; the movie is the reality of the movie moving from reality to the camera. It’s between them. – Jean Luc Godard

Since *Still Life* and *Dong*, two modes of filmmaking on the same subject, Jia Zhangke has further explored how the film medium can address the subject to be filmed

and what the filmmaking means to himself by making a series of documentary films such as *Dong*, *Useless*, *24 City*, and *I Wish I Knew*. Although he has got a worldwide reputation for his feature films from *Xiao Wu* to *Still Life* which especially won the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival, it is *Dong*, a documentary film that is more linked with his subsequent films rather than *Still Life*, a fiction film, and his cinematic interests has turned to making documentary films in his own ways.

Given that documentary films are less popular in the contemporary film industry, it is unusual that the filmmaker like Jia Zhangke successful in the feature films focuses persistently on making documentary and short films, while the opposite cases moving from documentary or short films to feature films are even more common. To name the films he has made since *Still Life*, they are *Our Ten Years* (Womende shi nian, 2007, short film), *Cry Me a River* (Heshang de aiqing, 2008, short film), *Useless* (Wuyong, 2007, documentary), *24 City* (Ershisi cheng ji, 2008, documentary), and *I Wish I Knew* (Haishang chuanqi, 2010, documentary). In fact, this list of short films and documentaries might seem like an incoherent group of impromptu production on their situational conditions rather than Jia's certain intention to make a series of documentary project, because the most of them were commissioned by different commercial companies or public organizations as he had difficulties in fundraising for his next feature film project right after *Still Life*. For example, *Our Ten Years*, an experimental short film running less than ten minutes, is made to celebrate tenth anniversary of Southern Metropolis Daily (Nanfang dushi bao) from 1997 to 2007. A documentary *24 City* shot in Chengdu is co-produced by the real estate developer Huarun group which is also famous for one of the largest supermarket chains in China, and *I Wish I Knew*, a documentary on Shanghai, is originally commissioned by the 2010 Shanghai World

Expo Organizing Committee to be screened at the World Expo site in Shanghai.

Despite these different topics, styles, locations and sources of funding, they have certain aspects in common to show Jia's changes since *Still Life* and *Dong*. First of all, reflecting on himself, Jia questions his own way of filmmaking. He, on the one hand, critically examines his cinematic hallmarks shown in his previous works, on the other hand he further explores the relation between himself as a filmmaker and the subject to be filmed. For example, if the main characteristics of Jia's earlier films, generally regarded as virtues, were on-the-spot realism, hand-held camera work, long takes, locality of Fenyang, amateur actors/actresses, individual stories/memories, the private, marginal characters, and so forth, then in his later films, he rethinks realism/reality, edits the scenes with more shots, moves to other places outside Fenyang, juxtaposes amateur and professional actors/actresses, considers the public and people, wonders collective or spatial memories, and makes interviews with intellectuals and celebrities. Challenging his earlier films in this opposite way, Jia has endeavored to explore his cinematic world including genre, style, subject, and attitude. Thus, his later works move outside himself physically and cinematically to reflect on himself in a reverse way, while his earlier films are generated from Jia Zhangke himself and his neighborhood to meet, understand, and communicate with the world. In other words, as he accepts not only he and his surroundings have changed but also his outer world which was out of his interests has changed spanning over about ten years since *Xiao Wu* (1997), he attempts to embody these changes as his cinematic changes in his later films.

Second, it is documentary that Jia Zhangke focuses persistently on to develop his cinematic questions. In fact, "documentary-style" has been generally considered as one of the most notable features of Jia's films as it constructs the "on-the-spot" realism.

Employing natural light, amateur actors/actresses, long takes, noise in the street, and local dialects, what Jia has tried to capture in his earlier films is spontaneity, directness, and liveliness which refer to on-the-spot realism, one of the most significant values of the “new documentary movement” (xin jilupian yundong) since the early 1990s. In other words, Jia makes his fiction films just like documentary, or his fiction films share their techniques, aesthetics, and attitudes in common with contemporary documentary works. However, his documentaries, on the contrary, include parts of directed scenes like fiction film to respond to, intervene, and mediate rather than pursue the old myth of documentary to be pure, transparent, and truthful. Thus, his documentaries tend to be subjective while his fiction films were inclined to be objective. Even though they include Jia’s subjective perspectives, what his documentaries pay attention to is the public rather than the private. They focus on people rather than an individual, factory rather than home, and big city rather than small town. Besides, celebrities as public figures also play an indispensable role in his documentaries while marginalized subjects are highlighted in most of contemporary Chinese documentaries. As making documentary in a subjective way has a paradoxical relation to general sense of documentary genre as well as his former filmmaking, it is contrary to contemporary Chinese documentary that Jia’s documentaries are interested in the public because his colleagues endeavor to make the private visible with their DV cameras. In this way, developing the cinematic problematics from *Dong* and *Still Life*, he challenges the conventional distinction between documentary and feature film, and explores further what the film medium itself could/should convey across the boundary of them.

Third, for Jia, making documentary is a process to approach and understand the unfamiliar people as a new subject to be filmed. After he left his home town Fenyang

and Beijing where he was born and educated, as discussed in chapter 6, he had to consider how to film the different people in other places such as Sichuan and Bangkok (*Dong*), Guangdong (*Useless*), Chengdu (*24 City*), and Shanghai (*I Wish I Knew*). Traveling around, he films a variety of people including unknown physical laborers, ordinary people, celebrities, and even foreigners. Unlike his earlier films, his documentaries are interested in a group of people rather than a particular individual, and led by celebrity figures rather than the marginal characters. Although Jia displays various celebrities such as a painter Liu Xiaodong (*Dong*), a fashion designer Ma Ke (*Useless*), an actress Joan Chen (*24 City*), a filmmaker Hou Hsiao-hsien, and a writer Han Han (*I Wish I Knew*), it is hard to simply say that he becomes interested in being successful or his film moves from the marginal to the center. Rather, Jia looks at the marginal anew through those celebrities onto whom he projects himself. In the making of documentaries with the appearance of the celebrities, Jia gets to identify with not only those celebrities as he himself already becomes a well-known artist, but also the marginal people who have been Jia's cinematic subject all the time in his previous fiction films. With this double identity with both of them, Jia, on the one hand, reconsiders reflectively the marginal people from the perspective of the celebrities inside the film, on the other hand, realizes the distance to the marginal people as his cinematic subject outside of the film, as he is now a world-class celebrity as a successful filmmaker though he called himself "cinematic migrant worker" (*dianying mingong*) in his early days. In other words, while he made his fiction films with the concentration on the marginal individuals, he now confronts the "celebrity" individual and the marginal "people" in his documentaries. In this regard, his documentary shows his changes of filmmaking, rethinking the relationship between the individual and the

collective. He extends his cinematic interests from the self, the familiar, and the private to the other, the unfamiliar, and the public, or oscillates between both of them. With this contradictory relationship, Jia critically examines his previous works and appropriates it to his own method of filmmaking.

This chapter, focusing on *Dong* and *Useless*, discusses on how Jia employs documentary genre to reflect on his own filmmaking by questioning the codes and conventions of documentary. *Dong* is not only a documentary film as a counterpart of a fiction film *Still Life*, but also a starting work of his subsequent series of documentary films. In this respect, *Useless* extends his self-reflection on his filmmaking, at the same time, shows how he tries to address others, which is developed in his later documentaries. They, on the one hand, show his attitude towards filmmaking or the ethical ground for his later documentaries, on the other hand, function as a kind of turning point of his whole filmography constructed in a paradoxical way. It is by making documentary that Jia rethinks/reconstructs his filmmaking between fiction film and documentary, self and other, and the individual and the collective.

The Chinese New Documentary Movement and Jia Zhangke

Since the late 1980s, documentary filmmaking has been one of the most prevailing socio-cultural phenomena in China. This documentary fever which is generally called “the New Documentary Movement” (*xin jilupian yundong*) has developed in the historical, social, and political context of the 1980s and 1990s. Although the movement itself is heterogeneous and still in progress in more various ways, as Lü Xinyu (2010: 15-6) observes, it shows one common characteristic to challenge against the old, state-

owned, and political system, especially the “special topic film” (*zhuantipian*), the model of traditional propaganda documentary to promote socialist ideology. Thus, the New Documentary Movement filmmakers tried to find a new way to film their “reality” in their own ways. On the whole, they tend to pay attention to marginalized people, and reveal their vivid, mundane, and often painful reality experienced within a new market economy society. This is why it was labelled as “new” and “movement,” even though there was no manifesto or schema.

Before the advent of the New Documentary Movement with the defining features such as spontaneous format, private production and mundane reality, *River Elegy* (Heshang, a.k.a. *Death Song of the River*, 1988; dir. Xia Jun) is generally considered as a historical background which initiated the new documentary form. This six-part documentary, which first aired on China Central Television (CCTV) in June 1988, one year prior to the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, portrayed the backwardness of traditional Chinese culture as cultural isolationism and persistent feudalism. Thus, it immediately provoked huge and fervent debates on Chinese culture and social problems among intellectual circles, the government leaders, and even the overseas Chinese communities. The polemic on the significance of this documentary developed to a social phenomenon called “*Heshang* phenomenon” (*Heshang xianxiang*)⁸⁸, and after the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement, the members involved in the production of this documentary were arrested or wanted by the Party as the Chinese Party accused *River Elegy* of being one of the primary elements to trigger the 1989 Tiananmen rebellion. Although its unprecedented criticism on Chinese traditional culture was challenging and

⁸⁸ For more details, see Jing Wang (1996), “*Heshang* and the Paradoxes of the Chinese Enlightenment,” in *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 118-36

sensational, as Chris Berry (2007) points out, “*River Elegy* cannot be considered the beginning of new documentary in China” (117), because it still followed the old form of the pre-scripted illustrated lecture in which all Chinese documentaries before 1989 were made. This illustrated lecture format is nothing but the form of “special topic film” (*zhuan ti pian*), which implies that *River Elegy* is eventually another top-down model of pedagogical documentaries isolated from ordinary people.

The defining feature of the New Documentary is a spontaneous format to capture a new “reality” experienced in everyday life. Wu Wenguang’s *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (*Liulang Beijing*, 1990) is generally regarded as the first Chinese documentary that takes the spontaneous format different from the old illustrated lecture format. Just like Zhang Yuan’s debut film *Mama* (1990) to signal the so-called “Sixth Generation,” this pioneering documentary was also made outside the state-owned production system, never screened in China, but introduced, circulated, and acclaimed in the international film festivals. First shown at the Hong Kong Film Festival in 1991, *Bumming in Beijing* created a great sensation as same as Chen Kaige’s feature film *Yellow Earth* (1984) did in the same film festival in 1985. Thus, the appearance of this documentary *Bumming in Beijing* at Hong Kong is usually mentioned as a symbolic event to announce the first manifestation of the Chinese New Documentary movement as if the emergence of the Chinese Fifth Generation was declared there six years before.

Chris Berry explains four main characteristics to make *Bumming in Beijing* so distinct, and argues that these characteristics are shared not only with the other new documentaries in common that began to appear at that time, but also with the early feature films of young Chinese filmmakers which are so called Sixth Generation films. First, the experience and memory of Tiananmen Square movement underlies their

filmmaking as an absent presence. Second, they focus on contemporary urban life experienced among educated young people like the filmmakers themselves. Third, the spontaneity of shooting is preferred for on-the-spot realism. And fourth, independent production is dominant over the state-owned systems (118). However, he also points out that these characteristics changed over time. As the Chinese society gets depoliticized⁸⁹, the shadow of Tiananmen Square goes dim. The focus increasingly moves from the educated elite to ordinary people. The spontaneous mode of documentary also becomes prevailing rather than experimental due to technological development including the widespread use of digital video (DV) camera. Furthermore, it is harder and harder to tell the clear distinction between independent, state-directed, and market-driven productions in the context of post-socialist China (118).

Lü Xinyu (2010), who described the main features of the New Documentary Movement in her pioneering work *Documenting China (Jilu Zhongguo)* in 2003, rethinks these changes of the New Documentary Movement spanning over two decades through the differences between two phases; the first phase from the 1980s to the mid-1990s and the second phase from the mid-1990s onward. As mentioned above, in the first phase, there appeared a group of young documentary directors such as Wu Wenguang, Duan Jinchuan, Jiang Yue, and Zhang Yuan who sought to create a new vision of “reality” in contrast to both the old socialist realist documentaries and more recent special topic programs. Their pursuit of a new kind of documentary became

⁸⁹ Wang Hui (2006) argues that the depoliticization has been a dominant tendency in contemporary China since “the end of the revolution” in 1989. He understands that the Chinese “revolutionary century” stretches from the Republican Revolution in 1911 to around 1976. Its prologue was from the Hundred Days Reform in 1898 to the 1911 Wuchang uprising, and its epilogue was from the late 1970s through to 1989 Tiananmen Square movement. After 1989, he observes, the current Chinese depoliticization is propped up and intensified under the rapid marketization, globalization, and neutralization of both market and state. See Wang Hui “Depoliticized Politics, From East to West” in *New Left Review*, no. 41, Sep/Oct.

gradually collective, thus took shape of the movement to challenge and rebel against the official special topic programs (17). She argues that the documentary that presages the second phase of the movement is Jiang Yue's *The Other Bank* (1993). This documentary contains the production of an avant-garde play, but it rather focuses on the young actors who come to Beijing to pursue their dream. When the play no longer runs, they cannot dream anymore. Portraying the cruel reality that they have to face, the director sympathetically depicts those who come to Beijing to be filmmakers. Lü thus points out that *The Other Bank* reassesses the utopianism of the 1980s, showing how it was torn down in the film. By the mid-1990s, Chinese society had undergone formidable transformations, through which “the idealism that grew from challenging authoritarianism was encountering its major enemy: commercialism” (32-33). With the acceleration of the market economy, the popularization of DV, the diversifications of film production, and social transformation of depoliticization since the mid-1990s has made the New Documentary Movement enter the second phase of multiple and heterogeneous developments.

In the context of this socio-political transformation, Lü Xinyu argues that the most notable feature of the second phase is that the filmmakers in this phase tend to emphasize on their individuality by self-reflexive or performative explorations. Since the late 1990s, the production of documentary has been invigorated in more diverse forms including avant-garde art, fine art, multimedia, educational films, amateur DV projects, along with the stronger connections to television stations. In accordance with the increasing numbers of documentaries, topics have been more particularized, intensely focusing on “marginalized groups such as sexual minorities, ethnic minorities, the disabled, low-income groups, miners, sex workers, farmers, low-paid labourers, and

substance abusers” (34). In fact, these marginalized subjects might be regarded as just an extension of the first phase. However, Lü points out that while the films of the first phase took an observational mode like the 1960s American Direct Cinema, the filmmakers of the second phase have begun to express their individuality by constructing a different relationship between documentary and art. According to her, if the filmmakers of the first phase were “artisans” who pursued their ideals such as democracy by making their documentaries in the streets, filmmakers of the second phase underline their personality and artistic explorations through self-reflexivity. In other words, documentaries of the second phases foreground individual experiences through which the problematics of art and reality is also re-explored (24-25, 34-36).

Even though Lü divides the movement into two phases to understand the changes and differences between the earlier documentaries and later ones, she argues that “the significance of the emergence of the New Documentary Movement lies in its perspective from the bottom up on the status of different social classes under current political, economic, and social transformations in China,” thus it gave ordinary people opportunities to speak in the writing of history (32). In a similar vein, Yingchi Chu (2007), in her book *Chinese Documentaries: From Dogma to Polyphony*, carefully investigates the vicissitude of Chinese documentary in chronological order from the beginning to the present. As can be seen in the book’s title, she understands that “Chinese documentaries have evolved from an initial failure to develop their generic potential before 1949, through a phase of monological, dogmatic style, to a polyphonic diversity in terms of subject matter, presentational mode, and speaking positions in today’s media market” (8-9). She uses the term “polyphony,” which refers to Bakhtin’s idea of the polyphonic novel, to explain various forms and multiple voices of personal,

political, and cultural self-presentation in contemporary Chinese documentaries, while the term “dogma”, the dominant mode in the documentaries of the Mao period, indicates a top-down, unitary, and doctrinal voice of the authoritarian government which constitutes an official political ideology (26-27). The polyphony of contemporary documentaries signifies many voices of “ordinary people” who have not been in a position of power to make their own images and express themselves. Hence, the polyphonic documentary, especially DV documentary, she says, enables ordinary people to speak their voices, which deliver memories and experiences of diverse individuals, alternative visions of the past. Calling it DV historiography, she values the possibilities of DV documentaries to bring occluded social aspects to the surface of history. (183-189).

In terms of the prevalence of DV documentary in post-1990s China, Wang Yiman (2005) focuses on the emergence of the amateur author with three old concepts of authorship, self-expression, and realism in the context of postsocialist China. As she observes, “post-1990s documentarians share a dual stress on self-expression and truth-value,” and this double task to establish their own reality by DV camera puts them in an authorial position (16-17). Thanks to its practical advantages that DV filmmaking does not need much budget and professional training to begin with, they can produce their own works based on “solo production” (*geti zhizuo*) which is considered as its cultural emphasis of “getihu” (self-employed worker), a term widely used in the 1980s. As this “solo production” outside the state-controlled system is associated with the unofficial and the private, the debates on amateur DV filmmaking centre not only around a democratizing weapon to decentralize the state-controlled film system, but around a new means to trace the truth as experienced by an ordinary person (18-19). Wang’s

attention to the significance of the amateur author in DV filmmaking naturally invokes Jia's declaration that "the age of amateur cinema will return" (Yeyu dianying shidai jijiang zaici daolai).

In his book entitled *Jia Xiang* (2009), a collection of his selected writings, Jia recounts that he replied that "the age of amateur cinema will return," when Tony Rayns asked him what will become the driving force for the development of films in the future (32). Although his expression of "amateur cinema" seems to resonate with Wang's argument of "amateur author", what Jia intends is actually different from the socio-cultural significance of DV filmmaking that Wang highlights. Jia's "amateur cinema" is to underline a challenging attitude towards filmmaking rather than to simply retell that filmmaking becomes less professional or cinema gets democratized. In his article, Jia criticizes that professionals are likely to stick to rigid concepts and pre-existing prejudices, thus they are indifferent to innovation even though they always assert the necessity of change in word. However, Jia argues that amateur cinema opens up possibilities to conceive new cinema, as Godard, Bunuel, and Fassbinder, who are free from the stereotypes of filmmaking could achieve groundbreaking innovations in film history (34). In other words, what Jia accentuates with the term "amateur cinema" is a certain attitude or perspective for cinematic innovation rather than its political importance of independent film production or socio-cultural significance of polyphony in postsocialist China. In another article titled "*In Public* in my own words," mentioning that there occurred some misunderstandings in the discussion on his article "the age of amateur cinema will return," he restates that "amateur cinema" he meant is a type of amateur spirit, which opposes a stale way of filmmaking, especially within the system (109-110). In this article, he also describes how he thinks about DV after he first used

DV camera to make a short documentary *In Public* (Gonggong changsuo, 2001).

As he uses the concept of “amateur cinema” to advocate innovations in filmmaking, he appropriates DV to develop his filmmaking with its economic, physical, and technological merits. In other words, he pays attention more to the fact that the novelty of DV can provide new possibilities when he makes his documentary rather than its socio-cultural significance of amateur authorship, polyphonic voices, and DV historiography which have been mainly discussed on Chinese DV documentary. He confesses that his experience of DV filmmaking was not exactly what he had imagined as follows:

I originally thought it would allow me to film some very lifelike scenes, but in the event I found that its most precious attribute was that it could film even abstract objects. Just as most people walk along a river according to a certain sequence, the advantage of DV is that you can wade in, but you can also keep an objective distance with it, following its rhythm, its pulse, watching it attentively while you progress, which allows you to conduct an ideal observation. (Jia, 2010 a: 53)

As seen from his comment above, after the actual use of DV he gets to understand that DV camera has more advantages to observe the objects with a certain distance than to express a personal story with the liveliness of reality. To observe signifies seeing the outside. In other words, Jia turns his eyes to the outside world with DV camera, while other Chinese DV filmmakers, who consider DV as a useful tool to express themselves, tend to go inside⁹⁰. Its economic and technological advantages make Chinese DV

⁹⁰ There are also a group of Chinese DV documentary filmmakers who are interested in the

filmmakers tend to focus on self-expression and the private, however, Jia rather gets interested in observing people and the public for the very same reasons.

Such a different understanding of DV naturally leads to a different manner to make a film. Jia also remarks that DV gave him the pleasure of freedom from the existing film production system, and this freedom makes him get over the constraints and norms imposed by the industry, the control of film censorship, and the film-making method itself (53). When filming *In Public*, he says, he could experience the moments and situations that he had never expected thanks to long-time filming with DV camera relatively free from time and money constraints. After he came out from the workers' club shooting, he found some people waiting for the bus. He decided to film them and all surroundings on the spot as he could spend all afternoon to shoot freely. Filming an old man among them, he was already satisfied. However he kept filming him and followed him onto the bus, and a woman suddenly rushed in. When Jia kept his eyes on her, he found the backdrop behind her was a very ordinary area of workers' dormitory. Although Jia was bewildered by this unexpected situation, he says, he had a certain religious feeling (53).

In Public is a digital short documentary commissioned by the Jeonju International Film Festival's "Digital Short Films by Three Filmmakers" programme. As seen in the programme title, he had to make a short film by digital video camera. When he had a chance to employ DV for the first time, he chose to go to Datong to film the people in public spaces in the form of documentary. The people in Datong away from his home

public. Wang Bing, who is well-known for his nine-hour documentary *Tie Xiqu* (West of the Track, 2003), could be an exemplary case. Most of his works portray the Chinese marginal people such as miners (*Tie Xiqu*), poor peasants (*Three Sisters*), and psychiatric patients (*Til Madness Do Us Part*). However, here I highlight the relationship between Chinese DV documentary movement and the private, because filming the private after the spread of DV is a major tendency which is relatively distinct from the previous Chinese documentary.

town Fenyang were beyond his knowledge, and it is the first time for him to make documentary since his feature debut film *Xiao Wu*, though he was said to make a short documentary *One Day in Beijing* (You yitian zai Beijing)⁹¹ uncompleted. He attempted to do a thoroughly different film work, and he developed his method of filmmaking after this documentary work. He realizes that he needs to not simply capture the surface of the objects to be filmed, but apprehend something behind them in his film. In other words, it becomes central in his later films how to approach, feel, and understand the people who he cannot know. After *In Public*, he mentions that making documentary gives a new impetus for him to keep making films:

When you pick up the camera and begin shooting, this task itself forces you to experience spaces, people, and events that you have no opportunity to experience otherwise. I believe a director slowly becomes less self-confident, because being less-self-confident does not translate into filming badly; on the contrary, when you are depicting someone or something, you experience doubts: is this what the person is thinking? Are this person's values, questions, ways of dealing with problems really like this? When I feel that my life is being changed more and more, that my desire for knowledge is becoming weaker and weaker, that the resources of my life are becoming narrower and narrower, shooting documentary revives my experience of life, as if my blood was beginning to circulate again after my arteries had been blocked for a long time (53).

⁹¹ According to Jia Zhangke, he made a fifteen-minute Betacam video documentary called *One Day in Beijing* prior to his first short film *Xiaoshan Going Home* (Xiaoshan huijia) in 1995. Jia said that he had a chance to use a movie camera free for one day, so he went to Tiananmen Square to shoot tourists who wandered there. However, it is hard to say that it is his first film work, because it was neither edited nor screened, moreover it is missing now. Hence, it may as well be considered as a simple filming experience rather than a complete form of film work.

On one hand, Jia makes his documentary film resonating with his contemporary Chinese filmmakers in the New Documentary Movement, on the other hand, unlike them, he rather employs documentary to observe the unfamiliar, the public, and the collective, while his early fiction films set in his hometown focus on the familiar, the private, and the individual. However, his changes in making documentary are not a brand new start to make totally different films or a temporary adjustment due to the genre difference between fiction and documentary, but an extension and development of his filmmaking which have been cultured from his previous films. Jia's documentary thus not only challenges, but also reflects on his own way of filmmaking. Documentary makes him conscious of the distance between the camera and the objects, and his full-fledged exploration of this relationship between himself carrying the camera and the objects to be filmed is attempted from the experimental project of *Still Life* and *Dong*, and further developed through his subsequent documentary works.

The Engagement with the Public

As described in chapter 6, *Dong*, a companion piece to *Still Life*, is a documentary film following the celebrated painter Liu Xiaodong, who suggests Jia Zhangke to join his painting expedition to the Three Gorges area. After painting a group of male labourers, Liu moves to Bangkok in Thailand as he wants to paint a group of female sex workers. On the face of it, this film seems like a tribute documentary to explore Liu Xiaodong's world of art. Its title is also named from his nickname 'dong' which is short

for Liu Xiaodong. However, this documentary in fact pays more attention to his painting subjects, male and female physical workers rather than the artist Liu Xiaodong himself. Even though Jia has mentioned that “*Dong* consists of three part: the first one is about Liu Xiaodong’s painting, another one is the interview with him, and the last one is about the labourers who are the models for his paintings,” (Jung, 2006) *Dong* rather has three parts of the painter Liu Xiaodong, male labourers in China, and female sex workers in Thailand. To be more precise, Liu simply plays a role of a link between two groups of physical workers.

In the beginning of the film, the camera faithfully follows Liu Xiaodong with a couple of interview shots asking him about his work on a group of labourers. Meanwhile, it happens that a man is killed by an accident at the construction site. Liu visits a remote village in the mountains to inform his family of his death. The film shows at some length not only how rugged the road to the village is, but how destitute they scrape a living. In the village, there are only children, women, and old men because most men in the village went to the city to earn money. They are glad to receive gifts from Liu for a moment, but soon in sorrow after being informed of his death. However, they calmly accept his death to a wonder. Right after the shot of Liu on the bus returning to the Three Gorge from the village, there appears a tracking shot to sweep on the canvas where Liu painted a group of labourers. The camera moves slowly to look at them one by one. In contrast with the previous scene, this tracking shot reminds their real lives that cannot be delivered on the canvas. At this moment, the focus of the film certainly moves from the painter Liu to the physical labourers painted on his canvas. In other words, this tracking shot reveals that Jia gets more interested in how he films them with his camera than how Liu paints them.

This stance of Jia Zhangke is repeated and reinforced in the second half of the film. After painting the male labourers in the Three Gorges, Liu moves to Bangkok in Thailand to paint female sex workers because he wants to construct a balance of yin and yang in his paintings. Like the former part, the camera shows how Liu paints those female sex workers in the studio. However, in the shot of the interview with Liu who is explaining about his work at the same time painting one female model lying down, the camera turns to the model, and follows her without returning to Liu. As she leaves the studio after work, the camera comes out from the studio along with her to keep chasing her. The film carefully takes a picture of various people and street scenes which she encounters on her way home until arriving home. Watching TV news at home, she realizes that there happens a big flood in the northern area of Thailand, her hometown. She leaves for her hometown, and the camera sees her off at the train station. The scene of her leaving for hometown is followed by a slow zoom-out shot of the picture of her which Liu was painting in the studio. This shot begins from a close-up shot of her face painted in the picture, and zooms out to a long shot of the picture on the wall. This shot reminds of the tracking shot moving over the picture of the male laborers in the first part of the film. As illustrated above, Jia stares at the laborer painted in the picture with a tracking shot right after visiting his hometown to inform his death in the Three Gorges part. In like manner, the camera returns the female character painted in the picture after visiting her home in the Bangkok part. Just like the tracking shot in the first part, this zoom-out shot staring at the picture of her on the wall contemplates who she is or how painting can represent her reality. Zooming out from the close-up shot of her face to the long shot of the picture on the wall of the gallery, this shot brings the relationship between painting and reality into question.

Besides these moving shots of tracking shot and zoom-out shot, the first and second parts of *Dong* have a similar narrative composition: Liu painting physical labourers, interests in their real lives, visiting their homes, and questioning about the relationship between painting and reality. The structural similarity of these two parts seemingly comes from Liu's idea that he considers it significant to balance yin and yang in his painting, however it eventually shows how Jia turns his interests from the painter Liu to the physical laborers, models in his painting. The most distinctive component to make the second part resonate with the first one is not that it accompanies Liu to paint eleven female laborers in Bangkok just like eleven male laborers in the Three Gorges area, but that it also contains a scene of visiting the the laborer's home. While the first visit in the Three Gorges is accidental, the second one in Bangkok is arranged to show Jia's perspective on this documentary *Dong*. When the camera moves out from Liu's art studio to follow her way home, Jia's attention obviously turns from the artist Liu to the nameless female laborer. Although the title *Dong* comes from Liu's name, Liu Xiaodong, what this documentary *Dong* pays attention to is the laborers struggling for life rather than the artist Liu. In other words, *Dong* discloses the people via the celebrity Liu Xiaodong as *Still Life* discovers the people via the two visitors Sanming and Shenhong.

It is also shown in *Useless* to look at the people mediated by the celebrity individual. *Useless*, which means useless, is a documentary to rethink the meaning of clothes in contemporary China. It consists of three parts. The first one is set in a clothing factory in Guangzhou. Starting with a tracking shot of people working in the factory, the film carefully looks around the factory system for a mass production of clothes in China today. In the factory, the labourers collectively work in the system of

the segmentation of labor. They work together in each part, eat together in the factory canteen, and get medical treatment in the factory clinic. As showing the clothes produced in the factory are displayed in a downtown store, the first part leads to the second part which deals with an international fashion designer Ma Ke, who established a high-fashion brand, Useless, from which the title of this documentary is derived. The second part contains her interviews about her fashion philosophy, and the process that her fashion brand Useless is presented at Paris Fashion Week. As expressing the opposition against mass production of goods, she persists to make her clothes painstakingly by hand. Her handcrafted pieces introduced in Paris are highlighted by having been buried in the dirt. After being highly acclaimed in Paris, she drives to the heart of a mountain in Shanxi province to get an inspiration for her clothes. On the way, the camera suddenly gets out of her car to follow an old man who walks to a remote mountain village in Fenyang. The third part of *Useless* begins like this. The place where the camera arrives after following him is a small tailor's shop. The people in this small mining village come to this shabby shop to alter their clothes. Following one of the customers who comes to the shop, as done in *Dong*, the camera visits her home. In an interview with them, her husband tells that he was a tailor and used to make clothes for her wife, but a small scale of clothing business became nothing profitable, thus he had to change his job to be a miner. After taking a picture of their clothes hung on the clothesline in the yard of their house, the camera cuts away to look at miners' clothes which are covered all with dirt while they take a bath to clean their bodies. In the end, *Useless*, which begins with a tracking shot of labourers working in the factory of Guangzhou, ends with a long shot of a tailor who works alone in his shabby shop of Fenyang.

Just like *Dong*, *Useless*, titled from Ma Ke's fashion brand, seems a documentary about her artistic world as a celebrity fashion designer, however Jia's attention obviously is more paid to the ordinary people and their clothes in the third part of the film. In contrast to Ma Ke's use of dirt for making ethnic atmosphere of her clothes, Jia underscores the dirt on miners' clothes as traces of real life. In other words, while Ma Ke's clothes with dirt are displayed in bodies of western models in Paris, the miners' ragged clothes with dirt deliver the stories of their lives. Right after the interview with the miner couple, the camera pans to show the clothes hung on the clotheline in the yard of their home. In the following scene, Jia shows the miners who are taking a bath after finishing their work. The camera again moves to stare at the clothes which they throw off. As the camera returns to the pictures of laborers in *Dong* as mentioned above, Jia's gaze at the clothes of these two scenes reveals his interest and affection towards their lives. In this respect, what Jia accentuates in *Useless* is the ordinary people discovered via the celebrity Ma Ke rather than her personal life as an artist, as he did in a similar way in *Dong*.

The bathroom scene in *Useless* exemplifies Jia's change of cinematic concern from individual to people. As mentioned in chapter 3, in his first feature film *Xiao Wu*, the protagonist Xiao Wu takes a bath by himself in the public bathroom. Although he refuses to do even in the karaoke room, he sings a song to express his emotion. In other words, Jia appropriates the public bathroom as a personal space to show Xiao Wu's solitary feeling as he is deserted from his friend, lover, and family. However, in *Useless*, Jia returns the bathroom to the people. In the bathroom, a group of miners take a bath together exposing their bare skins. Then, the bathroom becomes a public space which makes each of the individuals in different clothes gather together. In this scene, their

bare skins with dirt seem like their clothes which are also full of dirt. What Jia asks in this scene is what the clothes means to the ordinary people rather than a fashion designer Ma Ke. This critical gaze goes not only to Ma Ke but also to Jia Zhangke himself. In other words, in this scene, returning the bathroom from Xiao Wu to the people, he reflects on his previous filmmaking as what the film means to the people or what his films are like supposing that the clothes are the film and the fashion designer is the filmmaker. Likewise, if the mass production of clothes in first part corresponds to commercial film like produced in the factory, and Ma Ke's work is similar with the previous Fifth Generation films or the so-called Sixth Generation films including Jia Zhangke himself which have been circulated and acclaimed in the West. In this sense, the third part of *Useless* signifies that Jia considers how to return the film to the people and where he places between the camera and the object.

In his documentaries *Dong* and *Useless*, the distance to the object is revealed, as Jia himself is mediated by Liu Xiaodong and Ma Ke to approach the people. On one hand he identifies himself with them, on the other hand he critically reflects on them in a way of alienation from them. In other words, he tries to address the people with the tension between the subjective and objective position rather than a fixed method. As he explores how he can address the people with whom he is unfamiliar through the experiment of making at once fiction and documentary in *Still Life* and *Dong*, he crosses the conventional line between the subjective and objective documentary. What is more important to Jia is to recognize the distance to the object. The distance that Jia is conscious of when he makes a film of others means his attitude towards the object, which also shows his ethics of filmmaking.

Conclusion

This chapter sums up the contents of the whole thesis in brief, while seeking to suggest a possible route for future research. The thesis has attempted to understand, a Chinese filmmaker, Jia Zhangke and his films as cinema of “paradox”. Based on film text analysis, my discussion has developed largely by two parts: the emergence of the individual subject from his debut film *Xiao Wu* to *The World* and the relationship between the individual and the crowd from *Still Life* to his recent documentary films such as *Useless* and *24 City*.

The first part, challenging the existing Chinese film history, has focused on how the individual is differentiated from the crowd under the Chinese social transformation during the 1990s and 2000s. In so doing, I have explored how Jia Zhangke’s early films construct the Chinese individual subject to examine what they signify in the context of Chinese film history. The second part has discussed the change and expansion of Jia Zhangke’s cinematic interest from the individual to the crowd, from the self to the others, and from the inside to the outside. Through his subsequent cinematic experiments since *Still Life* and *Dong*, I have examined how he explores the questions on the individual/the crowd, the local/the national/the global, the subjective/the objective, and the representable/the unrepresentable to address others outside him. It also includes the problematic on possibilities and limits of film medium and cinematic language by questioning the relationship between fiction film and documentary.

I have considered the emergence of the individual subject in Jia’s early films as the concept of “paradox” which Gille Deleuze (1990) proposes. “As paradox is opposed to

doxa, in both aspects of doxa, namely, common sense or good sense” (75), Jia’s early films pose a paradoxical stance in terms of the individual subject against the collective subject which was usually considered as common sense in Chinese film history. The individual subject in his early films is clearly differentiated from the collective subject to “serve for the people (wei renmin fuwu)” in socialist propaganda films and to signify “national allegory” in the Fifth Generation films. In his later films, paradox is marked by his cinematic experiments against the convention of fiction/documentary to represent the impossibility of representation. Posing a manner of making a fiction film in an objective way and a documentary film in a subjective way, Jia questions which is real, whom he can address, and what the film medium can represent. In other words, after he constructs his own cinematic language in his early films challenging a tradition of Chinese film history, then he deconstructs it in his later films reflecting on his early films in an opposite way to his own filmmaking. In this regard, studying how his individual films are developed to construct paradoxes in his oeuvre, I have sought to explore the significance of Jia Zhangke’s cinema arising from between these paradoxical relationships.

In introduction, I have examined the existing discussions on Jia Zhangke in Chinese cinema studies and suggested to study his films in the framework of cinema and the national rather than the traditional auteur theory or the discourse of national cinema. Under the current wave of globalization, contemporary auteurism and national cinema confronts the new environment of transnational cinema. Auteurism adapts itself to the process of globalization, and namely the deterritorialization of cultural production and the commerce of auteurism with the targeting of particular audience. Likewise, cinema beyond a particular nation-state in the transnational context can no longer be

understood adequately with the old frame of national cinemas. However, even though the concept of national boundaries rapidly declines under globalization, cinema cannot be understood without reference to the national, because cinema has relation to the national in any manner. For this reason, I have proposed that it can be more productive to explore how Jia's films engage in the national which is ever being constructed, negotiated, and contested.

In this regard, chapter 1 have proposed that the framework of “the individual and the crowd” as an alternative approach to understand the individual subject who has emerged in contemporary Chinese cinema since the 1990s. The preference of the term “the crowd” over other terms such as the collective or people is not only to avoid the preconceived notion of those terms but also to understand that the term “the crowd” is “the national” which is ever-changing historical concept as the Chinese socio-cultural context changes. Hence, the term “the crowd” has a wide spectrum including women, class, people, ethnicity, multitude, others, and subaltern. In order to understand the crowd in Chinese context, this chapter has critically reviewed the discourses of individualism and collectivism in China since the early modern period. Considering the historical context of Chinese collectivism, I have demonstrated how the individual subject appears in contemporary Chinese cinema in the 1990s socio-cultural context.

In chapter 2, I have examined how Jia Zhangke's early films could be understood as a challenge against Chinese film historiography in the framework of the individual and the crowd. His films are dealt with to seek to explore the significance of the individual subject rather than to gain a general tendency of the so-called Sixth generation films. In other words, I have aimed to rethink Chinese film history from a genealogical perspective in terms of the emergence of the individual to avoid the

generation discourse based on the linear development narrative of Chinese film history. While the generation discourse is to narrate Chinese film history as a continuous unity seeking its origin, I have rather focused on the individual figure in Jia's films as an "event" of Chinese film history. Furthermore, with the paradoxical relationship between the individual and the crowd, this chapter has suggested that "paradox" can be a key concept to understand Jia Zhangke's films. Paradox, as a method, not only functions as a basic framework to analyze each film text in each chapter, but also constructs the relationship between his early films and late films in his entire filmography. Thus, his early films to *The World* are reviewed from the perspective of the emergence of the individual subject differentiated from the crowd, and his later films after *The World* are discussed examining the paradoxical relationship between the individual and the crowd in terms of addressing others in a different way from previous Chinese films. In so doing, this chapter has explored his cinematic experiments crossing the boundary between the individual and the crowd, the self and the other, the local and the global, the subjective and the objective, reality and fantasy, and fiction and documentary film.

Chapter 3 has explored how Jia pictures the individual figure in his first feature film *Xiao Wu* (1997) by textual analysis. For example, the last scene of *Xiao Wu*, which reminds the early modern image of a criminal surrounded by the crowd in Lu Xun's well-known essay, is taken by two separate shots which consists of a close up shot of Xiao Wu and his point-of-view shot staring at the bystanders, instead of putting the individual figure and the crowd in one shot to show a close relationship between the individual and the crowd. Jia Zhangke appropriates the image of "public exhibition" surrounded by the crowd not simply to enhance his tragedy of the eponymous protagonist Xiao Wu as a loser in contemporary Chinese new order, but also to reveal a

new relationship between the individual and the collective under the Chinese socio-cultural transformation in the 1990s. The narrative of the film is developed by showing how Xiao Wu is deserted by his old friend Xiaoyong, his lover Meimei and his family one after another. In the film, there appears no place for him to stay and take a rest. He has no home to return, and just wanders in the street. The film, opening with the Xiao Wu waiting for a bus in the street, ends with the scene of Xiao Wu arrested in the street for his pickpocketing. He is described as a loser of the Chinese reform era, an outcast in the margin of the contemporary Chinese society. Unlike the characters in the previous socialist Chinese films or the Fifth Generation films, Xiao Wu is neither a heroic character to praise socialist ideology nor a national to represent the Chinese nation as a homogeneous unity. In this way, the film *Xiao Wu* constructs the local, the quotidian, and the individual rather than the national, the historical, and the collective.

Reviewing *Platform* (2000), chapter 4 has examined how it produces diverse micro narratives as the personal, the private, and the local rather than the collective, the public and the national. *Platform*, a story about the people in a local troupe of cultural performance during the Era of Reform from 1978 to 1989, pictures individual figures that undergo rapid social change through a rise and fall of the cultural troupe. Although it depicts a process of the social transformation spanning over a decade, it endeavors to construct specific, fragmented, and often distorted personal memories rather than represent Chinese national time by a form of national allegory which the Fifth Generation directors employ to represent the Cultural Revolution period. If the Fifth Generation films make personal memories a Chinese national time/history, *Platform* personalizes and localizes the Chinese national time as specific individual experiences and memories. For instance, while the last scene of *The Big Parade* (*Da Yuebing*, dir.

Chen Kaige, 1986) consists of a long shot of a group of soldiers' marching in Tiananmen Square and a black-out face of a soldier leaning against the sun, *Platform* ends with a family shot in the private space that two male and female protagonists have dreamed after undergoing a long time social changes. In other words, if *The Big Parade* concerns the collective value for which each individual could be sacrificed, *Platform* is interested in the significance of the individual in new social conditions of contemporary China.

In a similar vein, love between a man and a woman in *Platform* is dealt with in a different way from in old Chinese films. The former belongs to the private and individual, the latter is subordinate to the collective value of class and nation. The former is little relevant to the community or even undermines it, but the latter encourages and reinforces the unity of the community. Four protagonists in *Platform* are also non-heroic characters, rather a sort of losers in Chinese contemporary society, while hero has been one of the main characters in the traditional Chinese films, especially in model works (*yangbanxi*) film during the Mao era. Despite different social contexts to some extent, the structure of a hero and the following crowd has easily been seen in old Chinese cinema including Shanghai early cinema, the Fifth Generation Film, contemporary commercial films as well as so-called "leitmotif" (*zhuxuanlü* or propaganda) films.

In terms of non-heroic characters in Jia's films, the characters in *Unknown Pleasure* (2002) resonate with a tendency of Chinese post-modernism in the 1990s. After the frustration of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, the Chinese intellectual field, which was full of vigor in the 1980s, faced crisis of intellectuals' role and status with the circumstance of popular culture boom in the 1990s. Through vehement debates on

intellectuals and humanistic spirit, the traditional concept of Chinese intellectuals and writers was questioned and repositioned. In the meantime, the capitalized culture market acclaimed new voices of unprecedented writers on urban popular culture such as *Wangshuo*. Under these circumstances, the characters in *Unknown Pleasure*, however, represent neither the intellectual's impotence, nor new consumerism in the context of the Chinese post-modern popular culture. Likewise, they belong neither to the traditional heroic character, nor to the new successful people in the 1990s Chinese society. The two young men in *Unknown Pleasure* are doubly isolated both from the old value of traditional socialist ideology and the new value of global capitalism, and they get lost in the way where they can neither move back nor forward, just like the penultimate shot of the film that one of protagonists stop his motorcycle in the middle of the road just after the failure of bank heist scene.

Chapter 5 has discussed on *The World* (2004), which is Jia's first film after he was officially released from the blacklist of the Chinese authorities, and also the first film made away from his hometown Fenyang where he grew up. In his filmography, *The World* becomes a turning point. With a Jia's response to contemporary global capitalism, it shows that he begins to be interested in "people" who live in China now. As the location moves from a local place Fenyang to a metropolitan city Beijing, the characters of the film are the migrant workers moving from Shanxi province to a Beijing theme park. What Jia illustrates in *The World* is that they still have to struggle for life or encounter even worse situations though they move to Beijing with great hopes and dreams. The characters in *The World* personally confront contemporary global capitalism with no boundary in the flat and smooth space of Empire where there is no outside to capital as Hardt and Negri (2002) argue. As the individual is differentiated

from the collective, global capitalism is received in the level of personal experience without any mediation or translation of the national.

Put it in another way, the characters in *The World*, a private security guard, a dancer in amusement park, a woman who manufactures counterfeit goods, and construction workers, belong to the private sector, more exactly to global capitalism market outside the control of the nation state. Thus, for them, it is money that dominates, and the government is absent. For instance, in punishment for stealing money, a security guard Erxiao is dismissed from his job, not sent to the prison; it is by money that a construction worker Erguniang is compensated for his accidental death at the construction site; the male protagonist Taisheng who works in the theme park is engaged in forging fake ID cards to earn extra money; Qun who manufactures counterfeit goods is described as a good business woman. In fact, what they confront is the global capitalism rather than a simple Chinese national transformation. In this respect, in *The World*, the local already exists in the global, and vice versa. The local does not disappear, nor gets hybridized into the global.

The amusement park in *The World* provides the characters with fantasy as the simulacrum of the world (J. Baudrillard, 1994) while the global capitalism they confront functions as “the symbolic order” which makes them desire. Fantasy here does not mean illusion to be opposed to reality, but rather an essential element to construct reality or the defensive mechanism for the sense of reality. In other words, the amusement park as fantasy functions to construct reality, through which the migrant workers of the film evade to directly face the real. In a similar vein, love also serves as fantasy in the film as well as in Jia’s other films including *Xiao Wu*, *Platform*, *Unknown Pleasure*. It is love that enables them to sustain their reality and believe that life is worthwhile. Although

love between Tao and Taisheng in the early part of *The World* plays a role of fantasy to sustain their reality, the separation of them as the collapse of fantasy in the later part leads them to the dead end as they encounter the real. In this respect, the collapse of fantasy in Jia's films leads the last scenes to the deadlock situations such as arrestments (*Xiao Wu*, *Unknown Pleasure*), impotence and aphasia (*Platform*), and the symbolic death from gas poisoning (*The World*).

In terms of the cinematic object, *The World* shows that Jia begins to be interested in people. The "people" here is not the one to be presumed as a collective unity in old Chinese films, but the differentiated, individualized "people," which refers to "multitude" in the works of Hardt and Negri (2004). In other words, that Jia gets interested in "people" means that he attempts to not only reveal the migrant workers who are the invisible presence of contemporary Chinese urban society, but also individuate people as the embodied persons with their own narratives. Erguniang's death could be a good example. Erguniang, a migrant peasant worker, leaves a testament to list his debt to be paid back before he dies from the accident at the construction site. Through his debt list which makes it possible to imagine his personal character and quotidian life, this scene embodies a migrant peasant worker as the actualized figure rather than social phenomena or statistics seen from news reports. The death of Erguniang becomes a tragedy not because of poor economic conditions of migrant peasant workers, but because of pathos actually incarnated in a particular individual figure Erguniang.

As mentioned above, *The World* shows that Jia's cinematic interest begins to move from the individual to the people as he moves from Fenyang to Beijing. In other words, Jia's addressing the people is closely related to how he understands the unfamiliar place

which he does not belong to. If his early films before *The World* are considered to depict the individual figure familiar with him in a specific local city Fenyang, then his late films since *The World* shows how he discovers the people when he moves to other places which he is unfamiliar with. In other words, while the former focuses more on time which the individual actually experiences, the latter pays more attention to space where the people live. In this respect, *Still Life* (2006) is a kind of extension of the problematic of *The World*, at the same time, a new start to explore how to represent others and places which he is unfamiliar with.

Still Life, discussed in chapter 6, depicts space and people in the old village Fengjie, Sanxia which is supposed to be submerged by building Three Gorges dam. Although *Still Life* has two plots of Sanming and Shenhong who come to Fengjie to look for their spouses respectively, what the film really concerns is the ever-changing landscape of Sanxia and the people who work and live there. In a sense, two protagonists Sanming and Shenhong might just play a role to lead a narrative of the feature film *Still Life* and function even as a kind of MacGuffin, a technique which Alfred Hitchcock popularizes, to approach and understand this space and people.

A tracking shot of the opening sequence could be one of good examples to show what Jia wants to film in *Still Life*. The slow parallel tracking shot, which is also used in opening sequence of his documentary *Wu Yong*, carefully observes faces, gestures, skins, and noises of the ordinary people on the boat instead of focusing on the introduction of a protagonist, Sanming, while the opening sequences of *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasure* are shot by handheld camera following the protagonist. Jia's frequent use of tracking shots without the appearance of protagonists as well as the opening sequence in *Still Life* could make it clear that he more concerns space and people than the

protagonists encounter as they wander around, while in the previous works he prefers to employ long takes and handheld shots to focus on the individual character. When Jia addresses people who are unfamiliar with him, Jia takes an attitude to reveal the distance to them, instead of pretending that he understands their lives with a sense of belonging. Jia observes the landscape and people of Sanxia from an outer perspective mediated by two leading characters Sanming and Shenhong coming from Shanxi outside Sanxia. In other words, as done in *The World*, Jia employs the characters coming from his hometown, Shanxi to observe the unfamiliar space and people by constructing the relationship between the filmmaker and the object to be filmed. In this respect, when he shoots the landscape of Sanxia, he favors to use over-shoulder shots from the leading character's perspective. The landscape of Sanxia is discovered and represented as the landscape in *Still Life* by Jia's recognition of the distance between the subject and the object. To use Karatani Kojin's term, *Still Life* shows "the discovery of landscape" through Jia's epistemological inversion. Kojin (1993) suggests that the modern subject can be acquired by the recognition of the exterior, the discovery of landscape. As he argues, the discovery of landscape means not describing the landscape, but creating the landscape which has not been seen though it always has existed. The discovery of landscape is also the discovery of reality, common people, and history.

Chapter 7 has explored Jia's recent two documentary films *Dong* (2006) and *Useless* (2007). *Dong* is a documentary about the laborers working in Sanxia, which was made along with the production of *Still Life*. In making documentary, Jia considers how he addresses the object to be filmed in terms of an attempt to understand people with whom he is unfamiliar. Likewise, *Useless* is a similar challenge to try to construct the relationship between the filmmaker and the object. In both documentary films Jia

reflects on his filmmaking as the subject to represent the object. Jia sees the painter Liu Xiaodong in *Dong* and the fashion designer Ma Ke in *Useless* as his personas in terms that they all are internationally acclaimed Chinese artists. Given that Jia's films have been mainly circulated around the international film festival circuits, Jia's self-reflection as a Chinese filmmaker is implied in the last scene of *Dong* and the Paris fashion show scene of *Useless*. The last scene of *Dong* is that two blind men, who are playing the cassette tape to beg money, walk through the market street in Bangkok. Surrounded by the western tourists who stroll to shop in that market, they keep going somewhere as they do not know where they go. The Paris fashion show scene describes that Ma Ke's clothes covered with dirt to make Chinese ethnic atmosphere are acclaimed by the western audience. Right after this scene, Jia's camera takes a turn to Chinese ordinary people's clothes covered with the miner's dirt in a remote mountain village of Shanxi where the designer Ma Ke roams around to search for dirt to get artistic inspiration. By not only identifying with, but also feeling alienated from them, Jia shows his cinematic exploration of how the filmmaker can represent others with the distance between the subject to film and the object to be filmed. Given the Chinese new documentary movement since the 1990s, Jia's experiment of documentary might be understood as an attempt to address the subaltern and to question the limit and possibility of the film medium to represent the unrepresentable.

In his following documentaries, he further explores this question of the relationship between film and reality. *24 City* (2008), a type of fake documentary film, might be an exemplary work. It is developed from his problematic proposed in *Dong* and *Useless* as to how the film returns to the people. In *24 City*, challenging the genre conventions of documentary, he tries to reveal the limitation of the genre by the experiment on the

object between to present and to be represented. *24 City* depicts the people who have lived and worked in the state-owned military factory 420 in Chengdu, Sichuan province. As the factory is being demolished to make way for a modern apartment complex, the people tell their own memories associated with the factory. The stories are narrated by the interviews with eight characters of four professional actors/actresses and four authentic people who have lived in the factory, though they all are presented in a documentary format. It is by employing the well-known actresses such as Joan Chen and Zhao Tao who are too famous to overlook that Jia intentionally reveals the border line between fiction and documentary instead of trying to erase it like fake documentary film. If mixed with the genuine and the fake, it makes not only that the fake is not regarded as the genuine, but that the genuine get doubted as the fake. Jia thus suggests that we should watch this film with doubt when we listen to their words. In other words, what Jia wants with this intentional fake is to listen to what is not spoken from what is spoken, and to see what is out of frame from what is in frame. At this time, what is important would be how they speak rather than what they really speak. For example, in the first interview, an old factory worker He Xikun reminds his former master Wang. In the scenes that He meets Wang, Wang tells that he can neither hear nor remember well their old memories. He only speaks repeatedly that he was always working and never stopped his working even on Sundays and holidays. In this scene, what is heard more is his murmuring and mourning that he constantly makes when he does not speak. When camera is moving from their hands to He's face, Jia does not take a reverse shot to show Wang's face. Wang is murmuring like crying out of the frame. By abandoning to shoot Wang's reaction, Jia reveals an inability to represent him, and suggest that we should listen to what is not spoken or what cannot always be spoken. As Fernando Coronil

(1994: 645) argues, what is important is not to make the subaltern speak, but “to listen to the subaltern subjects, and to interpret what I hear,” and to engage and interact with their voices. In order to address those who cannot speak, Jia does not make them speak against their will, but leaves them silent and captures their being on film as if he suggests that being is speaking.

As the real people are discovered by the intervention of professional actors/actresses, silence of real people can be recognized by their statement of professional actor/actresses. Like the relationship of fictive and documentary style between *Still Life* and *Dong*, he also employs the mixed interviews of both fictive and authentic documentary styles to address the people who live in the factory which is being demolished. In order to evoke what is not spoken, Jia makes the scenes of the all eight interviewees as flat, monotonous, and typical as possible. His focus is not on interviewees themselves or their statements, but on silence they make and noise heard from the outside of frame. The stories dictated by the eight interviewees including four professional actors/actresses deliver the representative examples that three generations of people have experienced in the 1950s, the 1970, the present. In this respect, *24 City* seems to concern how to represent them to construct a collective memory of the factory, but what is more striking in *24 City* is the brief moments when the real people are intermittently inserted in the middle of the film. As the camera returns to the real laborers right after the close-up shots of the picture in which they are painted in *Dong*, these portrait shots, which are shown as a bridge shot to connect an interviewee to another interviewee, rather underscores the silent presence of the real people.

In so doing, Jia reveals the gaze reversed between the subject to see and the object to be seen. As Slavoj Žižek (1992: 125) illustrates, “the gaze marks the point in the

object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already gazed at.” In this sense, the gaze belongs not to the subject, but to the object. A shot of two factory workers could exemplify the gaze of the people returning to the subject. Two men stand still in front of the camera for a brief insert shot like other people do. Yet, after a short while, one person unexpectedly begins to touch the other’s neck to tickle him, and repeats it a few times. Although the other person endures it first, but finally burst into laughter. Jia probably told them to just stand still without any words. However, they broke the rule of the object to be filmed. It might be an accident. Jia could edit this shot or ask them to do stand still again without any action. But he neither reshoots it nor edits it away. Rather, he shows this shot through the unusual long take of about twenty seven seconds compared with the shot of other people consistently shown for about ten seconds. The two factory workers might be very conscious that they are being shot by the camera, but they refuse to be recorded transparently by obeying the rule of filming. As the object breaks the rule of the subject, the gaze of the subject gets disturbed and reversed between them. With this reverse relationship, the object gets a sight, in other words, it speaks. This is how Jia listens to the object as the subaltern who cannot speak, but speaks silence, and represents the unrepresentable. And, at this moment, the people is discovered and invented not as already presumed, but as the autonomous subject. To quote Deleuze’s statement (1994: 217), “art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people. The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims ‘there have never been people here,’ the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos.”

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The World (*Shijie* 世界, 2004), Shanghai Film Group Corporation and Xinghui Production (Hong Kong).

Dong (*Dong* 东, 2006), Xstream Pictures and Beijing Chuntian Advertising Company.

Still Life (*Sanxia hao ren* 三峡好人, 2006), Shanghai Film Group Corporation and Xstream Pictures.

Useless (*Wuyong* 无用, 2007), Xstream Pictures, Mixmind Art & Design Co., Ltd, and China Film Association.

Our Ten Years (*Women de shi nian* 我们的十年, 2007), Southern Metropolis Daily.

24 Cities (*Ershi si cheng ji* 二十四城记, 2008), Shanghai Film Group Corporation, China Resources (Holdings) Co. Ltd., Office Kitano, Bandai Visual, and Bitters End.

Cry me a River (*Heshang de aiqing* 河上的爱情, 2008), Xstream Pictures, Centre de

Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), and Cité de l'architecture & du patrimoine, Paris.

I Wish I Knew (*Haishang chuanqi* 海上传奇, 2010), Shanghai Film Group Corporation, Xstream Pictures, NCU Group Ltd., Star Art Vision, and Bojie Media.

Other Films

A Sigh (*Yisheng tanxi* 一声叹息, 2000), dir. Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, Beijing Films Production.

Ashima (*Ashima* 阿诗玛, 1964), dir. Liu Qiong 刘琼, Haiyan Film Studio.

The Battleship of Potemkin (1926), dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Goskino.

Be There or Be Square (*Bu jian bu san* 不见不散, 1998), dir. Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, Beijing Film Studio and Beijing Forbidden City Film.

Beijing Bastards (*Beijing zazhong* 北京杂种, 1993), dir. Zhang Yuan 张元.

Beijing Bicycle (*Shiqi sui de danche* 十七岁的单车, 2000), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, Pyramide Productions.

Berlin, the Symphony of a Great City (1927), dir. Walter Ruttmann, Deutsche Vereins-Film.

The Big Parade (*Da yuebing* 大阅兵, 1986), dir. Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, Guangxi Film Studio.

The Blue Kite (*Lan fengzheng* 蓝风筝, 1993), dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮, Beijing Film Studio.

Bumming in Beijing (*Liulang Beijing* 流浪北京, 1990), dir. Wu Wenguang 吴文光.

Cell Phone (*Shouji* 手机, 2003), dir. Feng Xiaogang 冯小刚, Huayi Brothers

Advertising, China Film Group.

Clouds over Wushan (*Wushan yun wu* 巫山云雨, 1996), dir. Zhang Ming 章明, Beijing Film Studio.

The Crowd (1928), dir. King Vido, MGM.

Dance with Migrant Workers (*He mingong tiaowu* 和民工跳舞, 2002), dir. Wu Wenguang 吴文光, Wu Documentary Studio.

Days (*Dongchun de rizi* 冬春的日子, 1993), dir. Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅.

Devils on the Doorstep (*Guizi lai le* 鬼子来了, 2000), dir. Jiang Wen 姜文, Asian Union Film & Entertainment.

Dirt (*Toufa luanle* 头发乱了, 1994), dir. Guan Hu 管虎, Zhongguo huagong jinkou zong gongsi.

East Palace, West Palace (*Donggong xigong* 东宫西宫, 1996), dir. Zhang Yuan 张元, Amazon Entertainment Ltd. Ocean Films.

Farewell My Concubine (*Bawang bieji* 霸王别姬, 1993), dir. Cheng Kaige 陈凯歌, Beijing Film Studio.

Fish and Elephant (*Jinnian xiatian*, 今年夏天, 2001), dir. Li Yu 李玉.

Five Golden Flowers (*Wuduo jin hua* 五朵金花, 1959), dir. Wang Jiayi 王家乙, Changchun Film Studio.

Fujian Blue (*Jin bi hui huang* 金碧辉煌, 2007), dir. Wong Shouming 翁首鸣.

Happy Times (*Xingfu shiguang* 幸福时光, 2000), dir. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, Guangxi Film Studio.

Keep Cool (*You hua haohao shuo* 有话好好说, 1997), dir. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, Guangxi Film Studio.

The Killer (*Die xue shuang xiong* 喋血双雄, 1989), dir. John Woo 吴宇森, Golden

Princess Film Production Ltd., Long Shong Pictures.

The Making of Steel (*Zhang da chen ren*, 长大成人, 1997), dir. Lu Xuechang 路学长, Beijing Film Studio.

Metropolis (1927), dir. Fritz Lang, UFA.

Modern Times (1936), dir. Charles Chaplin, Charles Chaplin Productions.

Mother (*Mama* 妈妈, 1992), dir. Zhang Yuan 张元, Xian Film Studio.

Mountain Patrol (*Kekexili* 可可西里, 2004), dir. Lu Chuan 陆川, Columbia Pictures, Huayi Brothers Media.

October (1928), dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Sovkino.

Old Dog (*Lao gou* 老狗, 2011), dir. Pema Tseden 万玛才旦.

One and Eight (*Yige he bage*, 一个和八个, 1984), dir. Zhang Junzhao 张军钊, Guangxi Film Studio.

The Other Bank (*Bi an* 彼岸, 1993), dir. Jiang Yue 蒋樾.

Postmen in the Mountains (*Nashan naren nagou* 那山那人那狗, 1999), dir. Huo Jianqi 霍建起.

Raised from Dust (*Ju zi chen tu* 举自尘土, 2007), dir. Gan Xiaoe 甘小二.

Red Beads (*Xuan lian* 悬恋, 1993), dir. He Jianjun 何建军.

Serfs (*Nong nu*, 农女, 1963), dir. Li Jun 李俊, Bayi Film Studio.

Seventeen Years (*Guonian huijia* 过年回家, 1999), dir. Zhang Yuan 张元, Istituto Luce.

Song of Youth (*Qingchu zhi ge* 青春之歌, 1959), dir. Chen Huaikai and Cui Wei 陈怀恺 崔嵬, Beijing Film Studio.

Springtime in a Small Town (*Xiao cheng zhi chun* 小城之春, 2002), dir. Tian Zhuangzhuang 田壮壮, Beijing Film Studio.

Strike (1925), dir. Sergei Eisenstein, Goskino.

Shuangxioung Hui (*shuangxiong hui* 双雄会, 1983), dir. Chen Huaikai 陈怀恺,
Beijing Film Studio.

Third Sister Liu (*Liu sanjie*, 刘三姐, 1960), dir. Su Li 苏里, Changchun Film Studio.

To Live (*Huo zhe*, 活着, 1994), dir. Zhang Yimou 张艺谋, Shanghai Film Studio.

Together with you (*He ni zai yiqi* 和你在一起, 2002), dir. Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, 21
Century Shengkai Film.

Weekend Lovers (*Zhoumo qingren* 周末情人, 1995), dir. Lou Ye 娄烨, Haixia shiji
yingshi wenhua youxian gongsi.

Weekend Plot (*Miyu shiqi xiaoshi* 秘语十七小时, 2001), dir. Zhang Ming 章明.

West of Tracks (*Tie Xi Qu* 铁西区, 2003), dir. Wang Bing 王兵, Wang Bing Film
Workshop.

Workers Leaving the Factory (1989), dir. Lumière Brothers.

Yellow Earth (*Huang tudi* 黄土地, 1984), dir. Chen Kaige 陈凯歌, Guangxi Film
Studio.

Yesterday (*Zuotian*, 昨天, 2001), dir. Zhang Yang 张杨, Iman Film Company, Xian
Film Studio.