Remaking Chinese Cinema: Through the Prism of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Hollywood (Critical Interventions)

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CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS   **Remaking Chinese**

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Critical Interventions consists of innovative, cutting-edge works with a focus on Asia or the presence of Asia in other continents and regions. Series titles explore a wide range of issues and topics in the modern and contemporary periods, especially those dealing with literature, cinema, art, theater, media, cultural theory, and intellectual history as well as subjects that cross disciplinary boundaries. The series encourages scholarship that combines solid research with an imaginative approach, theoretical sophistication, and stylistic lucidity.

This book is dedicated to my parents,

who enabled me to explore across the Pacific

We deeply feel that shadow play [or movie, *yingxi* □□] is the basic vehicle of social education, the

supreme art form, the memoir of modern civilization, and the most effective tool for bridging variant nationalities and dissipating their misunderstanding…. We esteem shadow play as the vehicle that delivers the masses from miseries to the happy land [*letu* 樂土].

—Gu Kenfu, "Fakan ci," 1924

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Acknowledgments

It is the very darkness of memory that allows visual images to come loose from their contexts, forming new combinations, superimposing themselves on each other or finding hidden similarities.

—Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias*

The conception of this book started with surprise glimpses of points of resemblance, affinity, and dialog between China-made films and Western cinema throughout the twentieth century. These moments of connection inspired me to explore the ways in which such interactions have contributed to the formation and transformation of Chinese-language cinema. Thus, the phenomenon of border-crossing film remakes emerged as the core of my study. To underscore the dialogic relationship both between China and the West *and* between different Chinese-language regions, I evoke a filmic triangle composed of the Hollywood, Shanghai, and Hong Kong film industries. Based on wide historical and geopolitical coverage and extensive research in various archives, this book brings into focus some not so apparent border-crossing connections and constellations that gradually percolated through film history and formed the foundation of a multiaccented Chinese-language cinema.

NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

All Chinese proper names are romanized based on Mandarin Chinese pronunciation except where spelling based on Cantonese is established and conventionalized (e.g., Dr. Sun Yat-sen).

Introduction

Every film is always the bearer of another, a secret film ... the strong points [of the implicit film] are found in the weak points of the apparent one.

—Raúl Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema*1

In June 2008, DreamWorks' freshly minted animated comedy *Kung Fu Panda 1* opened in multiple countries and regions, including the United States, China, and Hong Kong. By juxtaposing two quintessential icons of "Chineseness"— kung fu and a panda—this animation embodies Hollywood's new trend of chinoiserie characterized by self-conscious appropriation and expropriation of "Chinese elements" (*Zhongguo yuansu* 中国元素). This version of chionoiserie, developed under the aegis of twenty-first-century globalization, simultaneously wowed the Chinese mass audience2 and alarmed Chinese filmmakers and commentators, who were left excited, inspired, and/or befuddled by, even indignant with, Hollywood's ability to out-Chinese the Chinese with a "China-born, US-raised" (*tusheng yangzhang* 土生洋长) cross-bred film.3 Interestingly, such anxiety voiced by Chinese critics evaporated at the 2011 release of *Kung Fu Panda 2,* a 3-D sequel that was applauded as "a Chinese animation film made by the United States" (*Meiguo zhizao de Zhongguo donghuapian* "美国制造的中国动画片)4

The confounding authorship surrounding these two animation films signals a major development in border-crossing film culture in cinema's second centennial, namely, Hollywood's increasing investment in commercializing and cinematizing East Asian elements, and East Asia's active engagement with "global Hollywood."5 Other than appropriating iconic Chineseness (as illustrated in *Kung Fu Panda*), Hollywood has also taken an increasing interest in buying the remake rights of East Asian hit films and producing English versions.6 This practice has been maligned as yet

another instance of Hollywood's hegemony that vampirizes and destroys peripheral film industries. Such criticism is concerned with preserving the authenticity of peripheral cinemas as sites of resistance to global Hollywoodization. However, these critics fail to consider the historical complexity of the practice of film remaking. Indeed, remaking started with film's inception at the end of the nineteenth century and has historically been practiced in peripheral as well as dominant film industries, with a range of ramifications.

This book focuses on an under-studied strain of peripheral and subaltern remaking: namely, Shanghai and Hong Kong remakes of certain Hollywood genre films, and Hong Kong remakes of Shanghai and Hollywood films. I contend that film remaking should not be dismissed as derivative imitation; rather it should be studied as a situation-dependent strategy of negotiation with a cultural and political Other. By tracing the trajectories of cross-Pacific film remaking between Hollywood, Shanghai, and Hong Kong from the 1920s to the present day—encompassing the eras of colonialism, nationalism, postwar socialism, Cold War politics, and, finally, postcolonialism, postsocialism, and globalization—I analyze the ways in which filmic representation inscribes, intersects with, and reconfigures sociopolitical circumstances. I examine how a remake at a different historical conjuncture in a different geopolitical context can begin to anticipate (without necessarily accomplishing) a definitive, new regional or national cinema; analogously, the remake may facilitate the emergence (but does not guarantee the accomplishment) of a collective, location-specific subject positioning. By teasing out the mutual constitution of three domains—film remaking, the border-crossing construction of Chinese national or regional cinema, and the (re)formation of location-specific collective consciousness—this book offers a new framework for reconsidering national cinema and collective subjectivity through the lens of cross-Pacific film remaking.

I use the phrase "location-specific collective consciousness" to designate a sense of subjectivity that evolves on the basis of shared experiences and sentiments associated with a specific location and its translocal geopolitics. Here I follow Yingjin Zhang's emphasis on the translocal and the polylocal in order to problematize the "national" and to rethink the "scale relations" between global, regional, national, provincial, and local "as a set of 'translocal' processes" that involve "multiple places of attachment experienced by highly mobile people."[7] In this spirit, the kind of "collective" I have in mind may include or intersect with the "national," yet it also goes against, beyond, or below it, forming such dimensions as the transnational, the regional, the subnational, the paranational, the supranational, and the antinational, if not all together the postnational.[8] Furthermore, I use "consciousness," "subjectivity," or "subject position(ing)" instead of "identity" in order to highlight the oftentimes inchoate, fluid, and performative nature of the becoming-collective, as opposed to the prescribed, reified, and teleological collective. Such location-specific collective consciousness resists a priori reification and constantly reconfigures itself in response to shifting experiential circumstances.

One key venue for practicing and enacting such location-specific collective consciousness is filmmaking and movie going. More specifically, cross-Pacific film remaking offers a privileged site for examining these issues because it stages ways of becoming different through repetition across a wide spatial and temporal span. It illustrates the intricate dialectic relationship between continuity and divergence, the local Self and the foreign Other, past history and the present response. As such, it helps to shape and reshape location-specific collective consciousness. In film remaking, production, exhibition, and reception are dynamically conjoined, forming a loop pattern in which reception feeds into and generates new production. Hence, film viewers become filmmakers through active appropriation and re-creation. Furthermore, film remaking scrambles temporality by fusing the past and the future, memory and projection. Such play with temporality telescopes and intertwines different film traditions and practices into an overlayered nodal point of convergence and cinematic *mise en abîme*. Mobilizing the most recent technology and working with different casts, audiences, and settings, cross-Pacific film remaking stages continuous

reenactments and renewal in accordance with the shifting and expanding temporal-spatiality throughout cinematic history. The difference that emerges from such reenactments fuels the gestation of location-specific collective positioning.

Remaking Film, Rebirthing Utopia

To understand how film remaking discursively produces localized collective subject positioning, I focus on one central operation: the processes through which a vision or utopia in one film is refigured in its remake(s) and the ways in which such refiguration contributes to projecting a new national/regional cinema and location-specific collective consciousness. My premise here is that film remaking, the construction of national or regional cinema, and the formation of collective self-positioning are fundamentally connected, and that they are structurally analogous with utopia.

As parallel venues, they facilitate each other in the processes of negotiating the Self-Other, center-periphery relationship. This is especially important given the global colonial system and the attendant worldwide power inequity. Within this system, non-Western geopolitical sites (such as Shanghai and Hong Kong) are subjected to layers of marginalization, while their relative positioning also constantly shifts.

Furthermore, these parallel venues share the underlying compulsion of repetition driven by the desire for reinvention and reconfiguration. Compulsion of repetition in psychoanalysis has been associated with trauma that simultaneously demands working through and annuls any definitive resolution. When trauma unfolds as a collective experience, it becomes a collective historical "wound" that reopens and recovers repetitively. The historical "wound" in this current context is associated with the semicolonization of Shanghai and the colonization of Hong Kong. Encountering economic and political subjugation yet enchanted by modern media technology that was simultaneously entertaining and didactic, the early Shanghai and Hong Kong film viewers (some of them assistants to Western filmmakers and exhibitors) gradually embarked upon indigenous filmmaking. In the process of appropriating a Western media technology for the Chinese audience while responding to evolving anticolonial discourses, some of these filmmakers (along with commentators) started to emphasize the importance of building a distinct Chinese cinema (*guopian* □□) geared toward the Chinese market.

However, local filmmakers and critics disagreed on what constituted national traits, especially with regard to the new medium, and they also had different understandings of the Western impact on Chinese culture and identity. Consequently, their projection of national cinema and national identity necessarily followed what I call an asymptotic curve. That is, even as it strived toward a posited "national" position, this position remained elusive and unreachable owing to the inherent difficulty of defining this position. Such asymptotic approximation without fulfillment fueled the repeated drive to (re)construct a national/regional cinema and (re)formulate collective positioning. Both of these were mediated through the act of film remaking. Overdetermined by the colonial/semicolonial experience and the underlying compulsion of repetition, film remaking, national or regional cinema formation, and collective subject positioning became structurally analogous and mutually constitutive.

The (re)figuration of utopia in the remakes follows a similar asymptotic curve. Etymologically, utopia refers to a place that is nowhere and nonexistent, an unrealizable dream. Its virtuality makes it simultaneously alluring and unattainable. Transliterated into *wutuo bang* (□□□) in Chinese, this term has come to be associated with a vacuous pipe dream since the 1990s owing to the loss of social vision following the bankruptcy of communist ideology in China. While Utopia as a philosophical or ideological concept has become deflated in a post-1990s China increasingly saturated by pragmatic materialism and global capitalism, utopia in its vernacular implications

remains useful for understanding film remaking in relation to modern China's formation of a collective consciousness.

My use of utopia draws on Ernst Bloch's "hope,"[9] Fredric Jameson's "Utopia,"[10] and Peter Brooks' "as-if proposition" in melodrama.[11] Despite their different agendas and methodologies, all these critics use utopia to designate an anticipatory and projective vision formulated in provisionary terms. Bloch relates utopia to hope, or the "intellectual surplus that went beyond the status quo." [12] In my analysis, I link utopia with the intent to resolve the social contradiction that drives the narrative of the films and their remakes, an intent that brings about a provisionary conclusion and a vision of positive change. What makes the vision alluring is that the exact form and ramifications of the future remain open ended. In other words, the projected utopia necessarily remains elusive, undetermined, and provisionary. As such, it operates as another asymptotic curve, approaching without ever reaching the projected destination. Or, more exactly, the projected destination itself is constantly changing, thus making its accomplishment impossible.

The persistent distance from the vision debunks the notion of teleological history and foregrounds the sociopolitical conditions that circumscribe each utopic attempt. In the Shanghai and Hong Kong contexts, these conditions include the colonial power structure in the first half of the twentieth century and post–Cold War ideology, postcolonialism, and globalization in the latter part of the century up to the present day. Among these ideological structures, China's pre-1949 semicolonial status was reified during the Cold War era to legitimate the communist Chinese government. During the postsocialist era, the emphasis on semicolonialsim has been jettisoned as a symptom of Cold War era panpoliticization. Meanwhile, little attention has been paid to the discourses on semicolonialism in earlytwentieth-century China. In this book, I argue that the notions of semicolonialism and colonialism need to be reexamined and reactivated since they are crucial for our understanding of the cultural politics of film remaking between Hollywood, Shanghai, and Hong Kong throughout the twentieth century.

Peripheral Subaltern Film Remaking

through the Semicolonial Lens

China between 1842 and 1949 has conventionally been described as a "semicolonial" (*ban zhimindi* 半殖民地) society. In 1842 the British Empire defeated the Qing dynasty in the first Opium War, leading to the Treaty of Nanking—the first unequal treaty between China and the West. This treaty stipulated that Shanghai, along with four other cities, be designated as treaty ports for British merchants and that Hong Kong Island be ceded to Britain as a colony. Nearly a century later, in December 1941, the International Settlement in Shanghai, comprising British and American concessions, came to an abrupt end owing to the eruption of Pacific War and Japan's complete occupation of Shanghai. In 1945, with the defeat of Japan in World War II, the International Settlement was returned to Chinese rule. This situation contrasts with Hong Kong's colonial condition, which began in 1842 and lasted until 1997, when Hong Kong was returned to the mainland Chinese government. During the Cold War era in socialist China, the categories of the "colonial" and the "semicolonial" were ossified, leading to the reductive and dogmatic politicization in all domains of life. Cheng Jihua et al.'s *The History of Chinese Cinema,* published in 1963, exemplifies such a panpolitical approach by disparaging most pre-1949 films for their parasitic nature and slavish imitation of Western capitalist cinema.[13] The exceptions, which were also canonized by the socialist ideology, were films produced under leftist auspices and with leftist participation in the early to mid-1930s and the realistic films made between 1945 and 1949, mostly dealing with the miseries and struggles of the lower classes during and immediately after World War II.

Since the 1980s, critics and historians have been challenging such leftist dogmatism,[14] and beginning in the 1990s, four main interventions have contributed to a revised view of

twentieth-century Chinese cinema: (1) reexamining early-to mid-1930s leftist cinema; (2) shifting the terrain of pre-1949 Chinese cinema studies by including nonleftist films; (3) exploring various dimensions of pre-1949 cinema, including gender, urban modernity, connections with other forms of visual culture, literary and theatrical practices, and the wartime reconfiguration of film culture; and, finally, (4) diversifying methodologies by incorporating cultural studies, gender studies, cultural history, and in-depth archival research.[15]

Central to all these efforts is the critique of the communist government's whole-scale repudiation of Western capitalism and the attendant reductive political determinism in treating cultural issues during the Cold War era. To better describe the complex urban culture (including the culture of cinema) in Republican Shanghai (1911–1949), these works tend to veer away from the issue of "semicolonialism" toward concepts such as "cosmopolitanism" and "vernacular modernism."[16] This critical move develops in tandem with the post-1990s postsocialist cultural politics, which has ostensibly replaced the previous revolutionary and anticolonial ideology. Yet, this revisionist turn elides the fundamental question of how exactly Republican cinema (as well as Shanghai's urban culture in general) developed through negotiating (rather than bypassing) the power inequity dictated by global coloniality. Short-circuiting this question would risk depoliticization and missing the opportunity to explore the ways in which material and discursive conditions of semicolonialism shaped Republican Chinese film culture, especially through cross-Pacific film remaking.[17]

To redress this elision, I reexamine the pre-1949 debate on China's semicolonialism as the political and discursive condition under which specific strategies of film production and consumption were developed. Unlike the dogmatic political label ordained by the postrevolutionary Chinese government, "semicolonialism" started as a much debated and multivalent notion. In 1924, Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1870– 1925), the founder of the Republic of China, called for a distinction between subcolonialism and semicolonialism. "Subcolony," or *ci zhimindi* (□□□□), a word coined by Sun, signaled China's subordination by multiple Western countries. According to Sun, China's subcolonial situation was even worse than that of Korea (exclusively colonized by Japan) or Vietnam (exclusively colonized by France) because a subcolony was enslaved by multiple countries without the benefit of being cared for by a full-time master in a time of crisis. Because of this, Sun argues, to call China a "semicolony" would be self-delusive.[18] Sun's term, "subcolony," was soon adopted by vernacular social and cultural discourses. In 1926, Lu Mengshu, an important Shanghai film critic, described China as an "oppressed subcolony" (*ci zhimindi*), and he urged the Chinese filmmakers to give up the "static" or "quiescent" (*jing* □) attitude that had become a national trait and instead to deploy proactive "neoheroism" (*xin yingxiong zhuyi* □□[19]□□).

By the 1930s, however, Sun's argument was turned upside down when the term "semicolonial" (*ban zhimindi*) became a more common diagnosis of the subjugation of Shanghai (and China in general). Denoting a lesser degree of colonization, "semicolonial" allowed China-centered critics to privilege Shanghai over complete colonies, such as Hong Kong, India, and the Southeast Asian regions. This constructed hierarchy precipitated long-standing contentions between Shanghai and Hong Kong in cultural, economic, and sociopolitical domains. The prefix "semi" also served to position China at a crucial forking point where it could either lose sovereignty and slip into total colonization or regain independence and ascend to the status of an independent modern nation-state.

The debate on subcolonialism versus semicolonialism suggests that semicolonialism did not start as a homogenous ideology, but rather as a tentative diagnosis driven by a political agenda that was subjected to constant reevaluation. These discourses significantly shaped filmmakers' and reviewers' understanding of film's sociopolitical functions and the directions of local filmmaking. It is therefore important that we reenergize the political valences of subcolonial and semicolonial discourses for the study of cross-Pacific film remaking. Only by so doing can we fully grasp the power inequity that subtended Chinese cinematic "modernity" or "cosmopolitanism" in the early

twentieth century. This power inequity continues into our contemporary era of globalization and becomes a "power geometry," which means that global movements and interconnections affect different social groups and individuals in different ways.[20] Thus, the differential experiences of modernity and globalization based on one's class, gender, racial, ideological, and geopolitical positions in the power structure are significant not only in studying twentieth-century Chinese remakes of Hollywood, but also for understanding twenty-first-century Hollywood remakes of East Asian cinema.

The underlying power inequity not only necessitates and enables cross-Pacific film remaking, but also shapes the strategies of remaking. The strategies of film remaking in subcolonial or semicolonial China and in colonial Hong Kong constitute what I describe as a mode of "subaltern" articulation. For Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Spivak, the "subaltern" refers to classes that are not only physically but also mentally subordinated by hegemony. The subaltern have "limited or no access to ... cultural imperialism," occupy "a space of difference," and cannot speak, since the voice of the subaltern is destined to be muted or displaced in the available dialogic field.[21]

In my context, the subaltern includes filmmakers in semicolonial Shanghai and colonial Hong Kong who started as audiences of dominant cinemas, through which they constantly negotiated their peripheral positioning. Instead of affirming their subordinate mentality in the colonial system, however, my analysis demonstrates their efforts and capacity to develop strategies of filmmaking and remaking. My intention is not to romanticize the subaltern position, but rather to explore heterogeneous strategies of negotiation developed from the subaltern position in response to specific geopolitical and filmic situations. I consider the subaltern to be a position occupied by a social collective, or, more precisely, a becoming-collective, that is partially or completely denied sovereignty and agency yet strives to constitute itself through practices such as film (re)making. To the extent that the coming-into-being of the collective is circumscribed by its sociopolitical subjugation, such subjugation becomes the very condition for developing "situated agency" in the power hierarchy. By "situated agency," I emphasize two things. First, I affirm the desire and necessity of achieving a collective subjectivity from a subaltern position. Second, I argue that such agency is antithetical to the liberal notion of individual will, choice, and freedom, for it is emphatically contingent upon the specific situation and derived from constant negotiation and strategization vis-à-vis the power hierarchy.[22]

It is important to note that Shanghai and Hong Kong filmmakers have historically occupied the subaltern position in different ways. In the first part of the twentieth century, semicolonial Shanghai was subaltern vis-à-vis the imperialist West and Japan, while colonial Hong Kong was perceived as inferior (thereby rendered subaltern) in relation to both Shanghai and the West by China-centered critics. According to Wong Wang-chi, a contemporary Hong Kong cultural critic, pre-1949 Shanghai writers and critics tended to see Hong Kong as the colonized margin without realizing their own marginalized position as a treaty port.[23] In other words, even though Western-educated Chinese intellectuals saw Shanghai cinema as artistically primitive in comparison to Western cinema, they still considered it a notch higher than Hong Kong cinema, which was deemed ideologically conservative and artistically crude.

Nevertheless, this pecking order experienced a dramatic reversal in the second half of the twentieth century. During the Cold War, Mao's People's Republic of China became the political rival of the capitalist bloc, whereas Hong Kong was developing into Britain's crown colony and one of Euro-America's last Asian posts. As China largely confined its filmic interactions to socialist countries, Hong Kong film companies (Shaw Brothers and Cathay in particular) actively continued and expanded their connections with Europe, America, Japan, and Southeast Asia.[24] Consequently, Hong Kong developed into a major film kingdom in Asia. The late 1970s ushered in another twist when China's economic reform launched by Deng Xiaoping eventually led Shanghai to reclaim its pre-1949 glamor and resume its "kinship" as well as its rivalry with Hong Kong. The realignment

between Shanghai and Hong Kong was further complicated by Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. Whereas some critics see Hong Kong as being sandwiched between and repressed by two colonial powers (Britain and China) (*jiafeng lun* 夾縫論)[25] others, especially those based in Hong Kong, critique what they see as Hong Kong's capitalist fantasy of northward colonization (*beijin xiangxiang* 北進想像). They are concerned with Hong Kong's exploitation of mainland China's cheap labor and market even as its sovereignty was apparently annexed to the Chinese government in 1997.[26]

All of these circumstances have contributed to the reversal of the early-twentieth- century order of subalternity. In filmmaking, the contemporary Hong Kong industry, boasting cutting-edge technology, ample financing, and greater creative latitude, has increasingly turned to China for actors, location shots, and an expanded market.[27] Consequently, contemporary Chinese commercial cinema and pop culture have been significantly reshaped by Hong Kong's commercial practices. Furthermore, Hong Kong gangster, action, and horror genres have become so popular that American filmmakers have increasingly appropriated selected Hong Kong elements[28] in addition to remaking box office hits such as *Infernal Affairs* (dir. Wai-keung Lau, Siu Fai Mak, 2002) and *The Eye* (dir. Oxide Pang, Danny Pang, 2002).

The constant reshuffling of the order of subalternity underscores its historical contingency, which further complicates the Shanghai and Hong Kong filmmakers and remakers' situated agency. By studying subaltern remaking as a situation-dependent practice, my study departs from current scholarship that emphasizes film remaking as a postmodern game.[29] Such scholarship has primarily focused on Hollywood remakes of French and other European cinemas, with little attention to the cross-Pacific filmic transposition.[30] Its agenda is, in Mazdon's words, to replace the "original"/"copy" binary with "circles of intertextuality and hybridity."[31] My task is not just to debunk the binary of the original and the copy, the high and the low, but, more importantly, to explore the cultural and political ramifications of the subaltern copy per se. Evoking Michel de Certeau's notion of "textual poaching,"[32] which emphasizes readers' or viewers' active interpretation and resignification of a media text (independent of the text's intended meaning), I understand subaltern remaking not just as a manifestation of de facto power (as Hollywood remakes tend to imply) or a postmodern game of transformation and intertextuality, but also as a vehicle for appropriating power and reshuffling the power geometry, even if it simultaneously borrows from, depends on, and partakes in the existing power structure.

Politics of Allegorical Representation

To discuss the political efficacy of subaltern film remaking, we need to address two questions. First, what exactly is the relationship between the realm of representation (or remaking in the current context) and the sociopolitical conditions under which a remake is produced? And, second, in what ways might the figural representations acquire political efficacy (such as the capacity to constitute alternative collective subject positioning)? The key to these questions is not only to acknowledge that a text (or film) is inevitably imprinted by its time and space, but also to scrutinize the extent to which a film may in turn reconfigure the sociopolitical structure.

I describe this dual direction of imprinting in terms of allegory as it pertains to modern technologies of reproduction (of which filmmaking and remaking are perfect examples). In his seminal treatise on modern artistic work, Walter Benjamin points out the lack of authenticity and aura in reproductions, for "[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[33] Yet, he does admit that a photograph, enabled by none other than technologies of reproduction, is "seared" by its immediate context (the Here and Now).[34] It is the "the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now," or reality-on-the-spot, in short, that inextricably stitches the photograph into a unique, present time and space. The act of searing (or what I call imprinting) may literally result from the physical process of light being reflected from an object, penetrating

the camera obscura, burning the emulsion on the negative, and then being rendered into a positive image through chemical processes. Yet "searing" also offers a trope for conceptualizing the interlocked, even potentially violent manners in which the contingent geopolitical conjuncture impinges upon the filmic form (as well as content). If a photograph or a film inevitably results from being "seared" by the "the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now," then to decrypt the film's "expressive contingency" in relation to "social-historical dynamics" entails a "forensic" or an "archeological" reading, as Paul Willemen argues.35

Different from Willemen's formulation that implies a cryptic and potentially violent relationship between an artistic work and its historical and geopolitical circumstances (the artistic work seen as akin to the remains of a crime), Fredric Jameson and Ismail Xavier deploy the concept of allegory to highlight the political subtext inherent in the imprinting process. In his study of Third World literature as national allegory, Jameson describes allegory as crystallizing "a specifically political resonance" of a cultural work.36 Ismail Xavier goes further to argue that a film is allegorically related to its geopolitical circumstances and is "situated in its own time" rife with "ambiguities and contradictions."37 A film's allegorical relationship with its time and geopolitics, therefore, is manifested in the ways it registers the latter's ambiguities and contradictions. To the extent that the film serves as a textual attempt to address geopolitical and ideological "ambiguities and contradictions," the filmic representation also foregrounds a "crisis of representation," thus calling into question the possibility of representation.38 In other words, a film does not simply re-present or mirror geopolitics in the mimetic manner; rather, it must engage with existing representational conventions and generate specific strategies of representation (or figuration) in order to address and allegorize its geopolitical ambiguities. Thus, the resulting film is imprinted or (violently) "seared" by its geopolitics in an allegorical manner.

Conversely, the film, mobilizing specific strategies of representation, also helps to generate new geopolitical and discursive coordinates that conduce to different modes of subject positioning. In so doing, the film acquires political efficacy. Using the heterogeneous makeup of Chinese cinema as an example, Chris Berry spells out precisely the discursively *constitutive* power of cinematic representation.39 Instead of assuming an a priori national agency that produces an easily recognizable national cinema, Berry argues that the national is discursively reiterated and pluralized through region-specific filmmaking practices that both intersect and conflict with each other. I extend Berry's study and argue that filmmaking and remaking lead not only to national agency, but also to other collective subject positions such as the regional, the antinational, the subnational, the supranational, and the paranational.

Furthermore, film remaking is not only imprinted by and constitutive of extrafilmic and geopolitical circumstances, but also explicitly engages with one or more predecessor film text(s) on the formal, technical as well as thematic levels. As such, film remaking self-consciously explores the relationship between the representational form and geopolitics, thus offering an ideal platform for studying the cultural-political efficacy of forms of (re)presentation.

In this book, I focus on one specific (re)presentational form as a means of structuring my study of cross-Pacific remakes: genre. A film genre is inherently conducive to remaking to the extent that it turns on a relatively consistent yet constantly mutating representational formula that governs the entire feedback loop of production, exhibition, reception, and reproduction. Additionally, my selection of genre as the basis of remaking is inspired by Jameson's understanding of genre not simply as a given coded representation (or as representational codes), but more as a form that is "apprehended as content."40 As Jameson explains, the generic form necessarily inscribes and manifests politics (or content) because it embodies "*a formal conjuncture* through which the 'conjuncture' of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be *detected and allegorically articulated.*"41 The coexisting modes of production are indicative of social contradictions, or what Xavier calls social ambiguities.

As a form "apprehended as content," the genre constantly develops specific representational strategies for the purpose of managing and resolving social contradictions and ambiguities. This becomes more obvious when a genre travels from one geopolitical context to another, registering and addressing different social contradictions. Encountering the "crisis of representation" caused by the traveling process, genre necessarily becomes destabilized, hybridized, and reformulated.

In my study, I see genre not only as related to forms of representation, but also as speaking to and cultivating modes of reception (or viewing habits). It functions as an interactive map that guides us to anticipate, discern, and comprehend the specific filmic mediation of various vectors of geopolitical contradictions and resolutions. Since genre-specific representational strategies arise from staging and managing specific social contradictions (according to Jameson), to remake a genre film means to innovate new strategies in order to register shifting geopolitics and actively reconfigure it. This process in turn fosters a new horizon of reception and its attendant collective subject positioning.

Structure: Melodrama, Singsong Drama,

Operetta Film, and Horror

I focus on four broadly defined genres, each genre consisting of a Western formula and a comparable Chinese counterpart. They are melodramas (and family ethics drama, or *jiating lunli ju* 家庭伦理剧), musicals (and singsong drama, or *gechang pian* 歌唱片), operetta films (and Western-costume Cantonese opera film, or *xizhuang ju* 西装剧), and horror films (*kongbu pian* 恐怖片). Each genre remake revolves around a major social issue or contradiction that seeks a resolution in the form of a utopic vision. My concern is not just how each issue is represented in a genre, but how a genre and its remakes make the issue representable in different ways, or how the issue gets obscured or foregrounded through different strategies of representation. My guiding questions are: What strategies of representation emerge in the process of border-crossing remaking? With what utopic implications? And how does the utopic thrust suggest an emerging collective subject positioning?

By comparing the utopic visions in remakes with those in their predecessors, all drawn from the above four broadly defined genres, I critically contextualize and politicize the transtemporal and transspatial filmic trajectories. My goal is not simply to compare and contrast the utopic visions, to blur the high and the low, or to rehearse the argument of postmodern simulacrum. Rather, I am more interested in uncovering geopolitical politics at the spatial level and the politics of memory (and reenactment) at the temporal level. Both the spatial and the temporal dimensions are inherent in cross-Pacific film remaking, where the reception of films from different times and spaces generates new communities of spectators, precipitating new rounds of reception and production.

I understand the continuous transspatial and transtemporal practices in terms of *Nachleben* (afterlife) and *Urgeschichte* (prehistory), offered by Walter Benjamin. Taking the cue from Benjamin, I suggest that the predecessor films do not simply elicit the anxiety of influence for the remakes; rather, they embody an *Urgeschichte* that needs to be rewritten and fulfilled through remakes (or *Nachleben*).[42] Importantly, the afterlife fulfills its predecessor not by mimicking it, but rather by intersecting with and reorienting it, thereby developing and fulfilling what Raúl Ruiz calls the "secret film" embedded in it.[43] To put it more strongly, by reworking or even reversing the predecessor film, and denaturalizing its strategies of representation, the remake not only *bears* and brings forth a secret film embedded in its predecessor, but also potentially *bares* and undermines the predecessor's ideological premise and structural principle.

To remake a film is therefore to critically engage in dialog with that film, with the goal of producing a new vision through reversioning. To quote Walter Benjamin again, "To articulate the

past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was.' It means to *seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger."*[44] In my context, it means that a film remake does not restore the predecessor film as it was, but rather repurposes it for emerging and emergency situations, or moments of danger. Such moments of danger have permeated the colonial, Cold War, and postcolonial eras throughout the twentieth century in Chinese-language regions. By striving to seize hold of and reset (or respatialize) a re-membered film, the peripheral and subaltern Chinese remakes reconfigure the previous utopic projection, thereby contributing to fostering alternative, situated collective subject positions.[45] I map out these complicated processes and strategies in four chapters, each dealing with a genre and its cross-Pacific remaking.

I start with three maternal melodramas: *Stella Dallas* (dir. Henry King, 1925), *The Goddess* (*Shennü*) (dir. Wu Yonggang, 1934, Shanghai), and *Rouge Tears* (*Yanzhi lei*) (dir. Wu Yonggang, Chen Pi, 1938, Shanghai/Hong Kong). They all narrate the ultimate disappearance of a lower-class mother who sacrifices her own interests and relinquishes her child to the more respectable patriarchal figure. Simultaneously virtuous (embodying selfless maternal love) and abject (being a woman of bad taste or an illegal streetwalker), the lower-class mother poses a representational dilemma. That is, how can maternal melodrama—a genre that privileges virtuous femininity and normalizes the middle-class, nuclear home space— portray a mother who is inextricably mired in moral decrepitude and illicit female sexuality and desire? This representational dilemma is key to understanding Shanghai and Hong Kong remakes in the mid- to the late 1930s, when social problems and Chinese national politics tended to be coded in terms of gender politics.

A major factor that precipitated the prioritization of Chinese nationalism during this period was the escalating Japanese invasion. Indeed, not only Chinese politics but also the Chinese film industry were significantly reshaped by this event. It experienced decentralization from an increasingly Japan-occupied Shanghai to other regions, including Hong Kong and hinterland China. Meanwhile, the industry was also undergoing the difficult transition from silent to sound technology. The rapidly shifting geopolitics and filmmaking conditions led the Shanghai and Hong Kong remakes to adopt opposite strategies of representation, namely, elliptical sketch in *The Goddess* and elaboration (or what I call "excessive mimesis") in *Rouge Tears.* These strategies resulted in divergent utopic visions in the two films, which reveal different ways of treating the core sociopolitical issue, that is, the gendered experiences of urban colonial modernity and nationalism. The juxtaposition of the Shanghai and Hong Kong remakes also raises the issue of Hong Kong's locality, which is implicated though not narrativized or thematized in the Hong Kong–made remake. Relatedly, it invites us to consider the emerging southern Chinese cinema (*Hua'nan dianying*) vis-à-vis the more dominant Shanghai cinema at this historical conjuncture of political and filmic reconfiguration.   *

 From melodrama to Cantonese opera, from silents to 3D animated film, *Remaking Chinese Cinema* traces cross-Pacific film remaking over the last eight decades. Through the refractive prism of Hollywood, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, Yiman Wang revolutionizes our understanding of Chinese cinema as national cinema. Against the diffusion model of national cinema spreading from a central point—Shanghai in the Chinese case—she argues for a multi-local process of co-constitution and reconstitution. In this spirit, Wang analyzes how southern Chinese cinema (huanan dianying) morphed into Hong Kong cinema through trans-regional and trans-national interactions that also produced a vision of Chinese cinema.

Among the book's highlights are a rereading of *The Goddess—*one of

the best-known silent Chinese films in the West—from the perspective of its wartime Mandarin-Cantonese remake; the excavation of a hybrid genre (the Western costume Cantonese opera film) inspired by Hollywood's fantasy films of the 1930s and produced in Hong Kong well into the mid-twentieth century; and a rumination on Hollywood's remake of Hong Kong's *Infernal Affairs* and the wholesale incorporation of "Chinese elements" in *Kung Fu Panda 2.*

Positing a structural analogy between the utopic vision, the national cinema, and the location-specific collective subject position, the author traces their shared urge to infinitesimally approach, but never fully and finitely reach a projected goal. This energy precipitates the ongoing processes of cross-Pacific film remaking, which constitute a crucial site for imagining and enacting (without absolving) issues of national and regional border politics. These issues unfold in relation to global formations such as colonialism, Cold War ideology, and postcolonial, postsocialist globalization. As such, *Remaking Chinese Cinema* contributes to the ongoing debate on (trans-)national cinema from the unique perspective of century-long border-crossing film remaking.

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