

The Changing Representation of the Late Qing History in Chinese Film

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Introduction

From the 1950s to the 1990s, Chinese film never ceased to represent the turbulent late Qing history on the screen. The representations, all carrying the mark of their own time, not only tell a story about the late Qing Chinese predicament and dilemma of its modernization, but also reveal the trajectory of the changing ideologies behind their own production. In this sense, the films can be read as both historical and contemporary texts. This article attempts to trace the changing representation by comparing and analyzing major historical films of China from the 1950s to the 1990s, and focuses the discussion on several main themes.

National Heroes, Martyrs, and Villains

A motif in Chinese historical film is the portrayal of national heroes and the roles they play in China's self-defense against Western and Japanese invasions. Two films, *Lin Zexu* (1958) and *The Naval Battle of 1894* (*Jiawu fengyun*, 1962) created the images of two well-known heroes: Commissioner Lin Zexu and Captain Deng Shichang. In *Lin Zexu*, Lin is portrayed as a dedicated and conscientious minister par excellence. Always grateful that the Emperor's trusted him to put down opium smuggling in Guangdong Province, Lin announces in the film that he is willing to thoroughly sacrifice himself (*gannaο tudi*)

to accomplish the task. He shows a strong concern with the security and moral integrity of the nation, and holds an explicitly hawkish position of suppressing opium smuggling by closing down opium dens, surrounding the Western firms involved in the smuggling, destroying the opium in public, and forcing the smugglers to sign bonds. Disappointed with the obsolete and poor quality weapons used in coastal defense of Guangdong, Lin supervises the making of a new “8,000-jin cannon.” The film shows that as a quintessential Confucian scholar-official, Lin Zexu has a calligraphy work hung in his office that says “control your anger” (*zhinu*), which calms Lin down when he looks at it. The film presents a sharp dichotomy between two camps: the hawk faction represented by Lin Zexu, Deng Tingzhen, and Guan Tianpei, and the dove faction epitomized by Manchurian ministers Yukun and Qishan, who is openly repudiated by Lin because of corruption and capitulationism. It falls into the traditional Chinese formula about the persecution of a loyal minister by bad officials by showing how Lin is falsely accused by the foreign-related capitulationists and how the Emperor withdraws his support of Lin and eventually dismisses him from office.¹

In the film, Lin Zexu is not only absolutely dedicated to Chinese nationalism and the Daoguang Emperor, but also shows respect for the local people. At the beginning of the film, when Lin, disguised as a merchant, takes a boat to inspect the local situation in the disguise of a merchant, he feels the boatmen’s cynicism toward high commissioners from the court in solving the opium problem. However, Lin changes people’s skepticism by showing his sincere reliance on them. When Lin notices the local people’s anti-foreign sentiment, he utters “people’s minds can be utilized” (*minxin keyong*).

Lin reaches out to the locals in installing the cannons and arresting the British smuggler Dent, who is attempting a disguised escape, and he also organizes local self-defense militia. The militia becomes a point of contention between Lin and the capitulationists, for once Lin is dismissed, Qishan immediately disbands it. Lin soon becomes an icon in the eyes of the locals.

They not only enthusiastically participate in destroying the opium, take the initiative to arrest British merchants, and confront the British fleet, but they also attempt to keep Lin Zexu after he is purged. In one scene, local people request a meeting with the already dismissed Lin and heartily cry out “Master Lin, you can’t go.” Here the film attempts to create a myth that suggests that despite the incompetence of the entire officialdom and vacillation of the Emperor, one strong-minded lone hero like Lin can win the support of the people. At the same time, only with the effective mobilization and leadership of an incorruptible and determined official can the people’s patriotic potential be fully realized and consolidated. This implicit effort to achieve a balance between populism and elitism re-emerges in the film *The Naval Battle of 1894*.

The Naval Battle of 1894 follows a similar logic in portraying another nationalist hero, Captain Deng Shichang. Again, there are capitulationists such as Viceroy Li Hongzhang, who seeks the mediation of Western powers in the dispute between China and Japan, and curbs the fighting impulse of Deng Shichang and his seamen at the order of the Empress Dowager. The film portrays the commander of the navy, Ding Ruchang, as sympathetic but weak, and two fellow captains Liu Buchan and Fang Boqian as cowardly and hypocritical. In the film, Deng Shichang sees through the hypocrisy of Western mediation in the Sino-Japanese dispute from the very beginning, and shows contempt for international law, while Liu Buchan is ridiculed for his blind trust of international law. Deng openly challenges Li Hongzhang in the banquet that Li is holding for foreign diplomats, and petitions Li about the inevitability of the naval war with Japan. Deng also has “Mr. Roper,” a Japanese spy disguised as a Japanese-American diplomat, arrested and attacks U.S. partiality toward Japan.

As with Lin Zexu, Deng Shichang is a savior in the eyes of the people. The sailors call him “our Captain Deng.” When the illiterate local people attempt to submit a ten-thousand-people-petition (*wanmin zhe*) to the court urging the declaration of war on Japan, a local gentry refuses to transmit it, and it is

Deng who volunteers to draft the petition and submit it. In contrast to the “heartless officials,” the local people realize that “if Japanese come, they will make us slaves forever,” and they repeatedly urge Deng to give the order to fight the Japanese. After the war is officially, though half-heartedly, declared by the court and Deng sets off to the warship, local people surround him to present a board inscribed in his honor, which says, “Protect the country and safeguard the people.”

Another heroic protagonist in this film is a gunner called Wang Guocheng. An orphan whose father was an executed Taiping rebel, Wang takes down the white flag hoisted by his captain Fang Boqian and opens fire on the Japanese warship. Subsequently, he is discharged by Fang, but is later recruited by Deng Shichang and becomes a loyal supporter of Deng. Overall, the film has a hyperbolic representation of patriotic officials and equally patriotic people and sailors, and also suggests contempt of the diplomacy of imperialism.

In contrast with the somewhat inflated image of national heroes and their close relationship with the people in the films of the 1950s and 1960s, a film entitled *Tan Sitong* (1984) shows a distinct perception of the relationship between hero/martyr and the masses. In this film, Tan Sitong, a leading figure in the 1898 reform movement, is portrayed as a sought-after intellectual and political leader for a new China. Shot against the background of China’s economic reform of the 1980s, the film highlights the conflict between the camps of the reformers and of the conservatives. The theme of anti-imperialism that was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s has been replaced by a yearning for opening China to the West. In the film, Tan Sitong is an avid advocate of “reform” (*weixin*), and he declares that the country needs to “abandon the old first and install the new next” (*xian chujiu, hou buxin*), because “there is no law that can remain unchanged for a thousand years” (*qiangu wu bubian zhifa*). According to Tan, in the movement toward “civilization” (*wenming*), China should eliminate its arrogance and self-importance and catch up with the rest of the world. In the meanwhile, the conservatives such as Gangyi, Ronglu, and

Huaitabu managed to thwart the reform agenda by stressing that no one can change the rules laid down by ancestors. The film plays up the ignorance of the conservatives by making them say that Westerners cannot bend their knees and a bamboo stick suffices to knock them down.

Different from patriotic heroes such as Lin Zexu and Deng Shichang who reach out to the people and win their trust, Tan Sitong can hardly find an ally among the ordinary people. In the film, the masses appear not as dynamic historical actors, but as devastated villagers stricken by famine, or callous bystanders in the city. On Tan's way from Hunan to Beijing at the call of the Guangxu Emperor, the film shows, his entourage is blocked by a group of famine victims, and a half-naked boy begs Tan to take him as a servant. The vulnerability of the people is exacerbated by their lack of reformist awareness. The film shows how the urban residents are worried by the reform pursued by Tan et al: a tailor is concerned he will lose his business if the reform requires people to wear a new style of clothing; people chat about how the reformers have offended the old Buddha (i.e., the Empress Dowager) unsympathetically. On the day Tan is executed, a Beijing resident guides the way for the police and a bystander even comments that "I have said long ago that they just cannot make a fuss like this any longer." For his part, Tan looks at his compatriots with strong compassion as a sort of anachronistic prophet. Tan convinces himself that "those who are enlightened must awaken the others." (*yi xianzhi jue houzhi, yi xianjue jue houjue*).

After the coup of the Empress Dowager, when Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao decide to go into exile, Tan volunteers to stay. The film lets Liang challenge Tan by saying: "the benighted people will not understand you." In the film, the only grassroots person with whom Tan interacts is the martial artist Wang Wu. However, even Wang urges Tan to flee as soon as possible. The popular lack of understanding about the meaning of modernization and reform convinces Tan that the only the bloodshed of a martyr could awaken the people. After Tan is

executed, one shot shows the oozing red blood filling the entire screen, and reinforces the symbolic power of martyr's blood.²

Changing Faces of “the People” in the Films of the Late 1980s

Two late-Qing-related Chinese films were presented in 1987 that took different approaches to representing the masses. The first one, entitled *The Artillery of the Great Qing* (*Da Qing paodui*), was shot with the intention of glorifying the anonymous peasant heroes who fought imperialism, as the voiceover makes clear. Yet it uses a strategy distinct from that used in *Lin Zexu* and the *Naval Battle of 1894*. While these two older films portrayed the local villagers as highly patriotic, politically aware, jingoistic, and without a process of cultivation, people in *The Artillery of the Great Qing* are put at the forefront of the anti-aggression battle by sheer chance. Against the background of the 1860s, the plot follows Ye, a local company commander of artillery, who has long faked registrations to the superior to claim money for himself. On the day his supervisor comes to inspect the troops, Ye hires a group of young male villagers to stand for inspection to earn a reward of 50 copper coins per head. Unexpectedly, the visiting general orders the troop to set off to resist the invading joint army of Britain and France. Unprepared for a real battle many of the mercenary troops desert. The remaining ranks are diverse: there is a cowardly young man who wants to desert to preserve his family line as the only son at home; a boy only in his early teens; and a young woman named Feng Yushu, who is disguised as man in order to earn the 50 coins to bury her dead father. In the battle, the court sends conflicting orders requiring no firing on the Chinese side but also preventing the landing of the Western army. Again, the old rumor spreads among the makeshift soldiers that the legs of Westerners cannot be bent. Eventually, the artillerymen decide to capture Western soldiers after they are promised 200 taels of silver for each captive. The political ignorance notwithstanding, the artillerymen finally throw themselves into the resistance after they witness the invading army burn the

teenager boy to death. Feng Yushu at this point nullifies the court's prohibition by igniting the cannon herself.

Crazy Soccer is another film that shows popular resistance to the Western challenge, through the eyes of a makeshift Chinese soccer team that successfully challenges a team of European diplomats in Beijing in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion. The film starts with a documentary-style voiceover narrative about the political significance of soccer in the modern world. It exalts soccer as the "number one game in today's world," and claims "the victory in a soccer match can win a weak nation dignity and inflict traumatic pains on the loser." The voiceover emphasizes "soccer claims its origin in China," suggesting a dual humiliation of China for its failure to excel in a game it originally invented. At the outset of the film, there is a match between two Western soccer teams and the winner starts to humiliate Chinese spectators by kicking the ball at them. Harry, the young diplomat who is captain of the Western "Pirate Team," challenges the Chinese government to organize its own team.

As the film unfolds, the Empress Dowager instructs a muddle-headed eunuch to organize a team but orders team members to lose and never win, in order not to offend the Westerners. Under the supervision of eunuch De, the official team is trained in military drilling by using flag signals, supposedly the method used in the classical novel *Water Margin*. In the meantime, Zhou Tian, a former Oxford law student who has returned to China, decides to assemble his own soccer team, named "Green Dragon." With a nickname "Kick and Break the Sky" (*tipotian*), Zhou Tian is a free spirit and "genuine tough guy" (*zhengzheng de haohan*) who quit his job in the imperial Han Academy because he cannot put up with recording national humiliations. Zhou starts to solicit support from various individuals in Beijing: itinerant martial artists, a thief named Fox Zhao, an xenophobic former Boxer with magic power, a bandit, and a brothel gatekeeper.

Zhou is both patriotic and rational. He wants the Westerners to see that the 11 men he assembled are "quintessential

Chinese” (*zhengzheng de Zhongguoren*), and he also knows the trick of interacting with Westerners, which is “be tough and be skillful” (*wanming jia juehuo*). He believes in the strength of his teammates who wear shabby clothes and often utter dirty words, but he also enlightens them. When the former Boxer known as Leopard Hao brags about his experiences tearing down railways and announces that he does not want to touch anything foreign, Zhou confronts him by saying “you are not worth a dime now” (*ni yijing yiwen buzhi le*); he continues to lecture Hao that “not all foreign things are bad, and not all stuff left by our ancestor is good.” In the film, Harry’s fiancée Jenny is a sinologist and supporter of the Green Dragon team. When Jenny is harassed by the brothel gatekeeper, Zhou Tian becomes her guardian. She is so attracted by Zhou that she volunteers to inform them of a good place to practice soccer, and even goes as far as to say “I have already liked Chinese...like you.” This romantic encounter provokes jealousy in the arrogant Harry, who condemns the Chinese as “filthy and full of opium and braids,” but ultimately leads to Jenny’s break with Harry and realization of her love for Zhou.

On the day of the match, the Pirate team thoroughly defeats the official team with score of 6-0. The Green Dragon team volunteers to compete. With every technique they can think of, including the magical *qigong*, Green Dragon dramatically wins a victory with the score of 7-6. Green Dragon’s patriotism even moves Harry, who says to Zhou: “I found the Chinese people are really outstanding in many ways. I want to make friends with you, not them (meaning the officials).” But the film ends with a tragedy: Green Dragon’s victory wins back China’s dignity but violates the court’s order. All players are to be executed. Zhou Tian refuses Jenny’s offer to protect him as her fiancé and joins the other players, so that they can “play soccer in Heaven.”

Compared with the larger-than-life, natural-born revolutionary peasant images in earlier films, the characters in the two 1980s’ films are gradually transformed from selfish and apolitical individuals to self-conscious patriotic fighters,

particularly when they witnessed the suffering and victimization inflicted on their own people. While extolling patriotism, these two films criticize blind anti-foreignism and the superstition among the people, such as the notion about women's detrimental role in battle and the commander's fruitless prayer to gods before the battle. Toward the end of *The Artillery of the Great Qing*, all of the defense efforts are fruitless and the devoted fighter Yang repeatedly inquires: "Why do we always lose?" and "Why can our magnificent nation not defeat foreign devils?" The film conveys a complex message with typical sentiments of the 1980s: extolling spontaneous patriotism, recognition of the weakness of the peasantry as well as their potential for sacrifice for the nation, repudiation of the cruelty of Western invaders, and scrutiny of China's own backwardness. Similarly, *Crazy Soccer* shows an interest in a less organized grassroots society and how the people can gather their vigor, courage, and wit to protect the dignity of the Chinese nation.

Both in *The Artillery of the Great Qing* and *Crazy Soccer*, the patriotic people are victimized by the capitulationist policy of the court and an interracially backward technique on the Chinese side. *Crazy Soccer*, however, seems to be more reconciliatory and attempts to achieve a balance between learning a Western game and defeating the West. The film creates a new type of Chinese hero in Zhou Tian, who is not an official but plays a leading role in a patriotic endeavor. Unlike Lin Zexu or Deng Shichang, Zhou's commitment is to the nation, not the court, and unlike Lin or Deng, Zhou understands the West quite well. The combination of his cosmopolitan outlook and national spirit makes him an ideal Chinese modernizer. With his credentials as an elite intellectual and the charisma needed for a popular leader, the fictional Zhou Tian is comfortable in both Western and Chinese milieus, and might have been a perfect candidate to bring China to modernization. In addition, *Crazy Soccer* effectively exemplifies the Chinese frustration with their own soccer team's poor performance in the international arena throughout the 1980s and its anxiety that weakness in soccer

implies incompetence of the nation as well as Chinese masculinity.

A *Fin-de-Siècle* Re-examination of the Opium War

In 1997, the renowned director Xie Jin (1923-2008) presented a film entitled *The Opium War* (*Yapian zhanzheng*, 1997) to celebrate the return of Hong Kong that same year. Like *Lin Zexu* nearly 40 years earlier, *The Opium War* provides an account of Lin Zexu's handling of the opium smuggling in Guangdong, the outbreak of the Opium War, Lin's relationship with the Emperor, his conflict with the pacifists such Qishan, and struggles with the British merchant Dent and trade superintendent Charles Elliot. However, *The Opium War* adopted an angle distinct from all the films mentioned above.

First, Lin Zexu in this film is more an open-minded reformer than a staunch nationalist. Rather than rely on the patriotism of the local peasants, this Lin Zexu collaborates with He Shanzhi, an English-speaking young man often dressed in Western attire who has had his hair braids cut. Despite the fact that He's father is an opium merchant in the guise of tea and textiles dealer, Lin Zexu hires He as his translator and from him learns Western customs, law, and the techniques for making cannons and guns. The film shows that it is through the linguist He that Lin learns how the British ruler handles the opium question domestically. And, by observing He's Western-style dressing and eating habits, Lin comes to the conclusion that "Western clothes are convenient" and "a nation that uses metal as utensils should not be taken slightly."

Second, while giving prominence to a young, Western-influenced Chinese linguist, the film makes little mention to *lao baixing* (one hundred surnames, i.e., grassroots people), as all other films did. There are neither assertive, militant masses as in *Lin Zexu*, nor apathetic masses as in *Tan Sitong*, nor is there patriotic mob as in *Crazy Soccer*. In *The Opium War*, the masses are nearly nonexistent in contrast with the prominent place given to the linguist and expert in foreign affairs. *The*

Opium War and *Lin Zexu* differ greatly in their representation of the destruction of opium in public, an already mystified and emotionally charged scene in Chinese collective memory. In this scene, *Lin Zexu* uses many close-ups to demonstrate the exuberant facial expressions of the masses and uses long shots to show how the masses as a collective make the victory their own carnival by striking gongs and drums and playing musical instruments, but *The Opium War* simply presents a group of half-naked laborers mechanically dumping the opium into a ditch as voiceless and faceless silhouettes.

Third, the formerly Manichaean distinction between hero and villain gets blurry. The image of Qishan, who has long been regarded in China as a traitor because of his negotiation with the British and signing of a draft treaty that cedes Hong Kong, is more or less rehabilitated. Much length is given to the imperial audience and the debates on the policies in which Qishan is allowed to have his own voice. The viewers get the impression that Qishan's seeking of peace with the British was a rational choice simply because the British gunboat was too powerful, and Lin's impetuous attitude might indeed do more harm than good. The film allows Qishan opportunities to attack Lin for his arrogance and lack of knowledge of the West, and lets Lin scrutinize himself for being overly optimistic. In the closing scene, both Lin and Qi are fired and punished by the Emperor, Lin for being too tough and Qi too compromising. Feeling that he will not be able to see the Emperor ever again, Lin asks Qi, a Manchu aristocrat, to present a globe to the Emperor on his behalf. "Tell His Majesty, the world today is replete with strong powers, and we can no longer be the frog sitting at the bottom of the well," Lin says. *The Opium War* thus boils down to the notion that China must face up to the inevitable opening to the world and join the international rivalry; this is the most significant lesson the film draws from its historical representation. This contrasts with *Lin Zexu*, which ends with the start of "the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggle of the Chinese people" after China's defeat in the Opium War, as announced by the solemn voiceover.³

Fourth, though most of the films caricatured Western intruders by making them deceitful, rude, or brutal, *The Opium War* shows the decision-making process on the British side in detail. The film demonstrates how the trade superintendent Charles Elliot despises the opium traders as “fat greedy rogues,” and how the British parliament debates about whether it should go to war with China. There even appears an anti-war Western missionary who condemns opium in Guangdong. According to the film, Queen Victoria approved the war not so much in favor of opium as a source of revenue, but out of a concern that “If all countries follow China and reject free trade, the British Empire will no longer exist within a year.” The Queen also says, “We must teach China a lesson on free trade.” While the film shows the detrimental effect of opium on Chinese officialdom and society, the discourse on free trade somewhat justifies the British motive of waging the war, for in no place does the film challenge the value of free trade per se. If free trade is a given premise for the filmmaker at the turn of the century, then the film attempts to rationally differentiate the economically and morally damaging opium trade, represented by Dent, from the demand for regular international trade, represented by Elliot, which China had been embracing since the reform and opening up of the late 1970s. This is a much more up-to-date view than the sweeping moralist condemnation in *Lin Zexun*.

Femininity and Masculinity

From the perspective of gender, both *Lin Zexu* and *The Naval Battle of 1894* portray self-assertive female warrior-type of characters, who play a major role in installing cannons or arresting foreign spies just like men. But in *The Artillery of the Great Qing*, Feng Yushu, the young woman who is disguised as man to earn 50 coins, eventually manifests her femininity. Due to repeated defeat in battle, the artillerymen start to suspect that Feng brings them bad luck. This accusation put her in a vulnerable position and she shouts, “I brought bad luck. Kill me please!” In a highly sensational night scene, Feng starts to capitalize on her sexuality to redeem herself: she is dressed in

pink and sits in the tent with her previously hidden long hair resuming its normal style. She then announces to the fellow soldiers that she has unbound feet but is still a virgin, and anyone who wants her can have her as wife that night. Deeply moved, nobody touches her; Feng goes ahead and asks whether she is a good wife and is reassured by the dumfounded men.

Though the resumption of Feng's sexual identity is a major departure from the previous degendered representation, it seems that the film maker is convinced, quite problematically, that a valid way for a woman to reward the patriotic fighters is by offering her own body. This type of mindset is also shown in *Crazy Soccer*, in which the gatekeeper of brothel brings a bunch of prostitutes to "take care of" the soccer players the day before the match. Zhou Tian immediately criticizes him because it is believed that having sex before a match will cause loss a subsequent lack of vigor in the players. Here no one questions the legitimacy of using prostitutes to comfort athletes; the only problem is the harmful effect it might bring to their nationalist endeavor. The film also repeats the message about soccer as a men's game and lets the gatekeeper say "playing soccer best manifests men's prowess" (*tiqu zui xian nanren weifeng*). That Zhou can win the heart of a young, female European sinologist greatly reinforces the character as an effective combination of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and masculinity.

In *The Opium War*, female vulnerability and strength is portrayed in another way. Without heroes from grassroots society, it portrays a young girl named Rong'er, who is the lover of the linguist He Shanzhi. In one scene, Rong'er rejects the audacious sexual advance of Dent by saying "I don't sleep with Westerners." Later, to provide comfort to the British, Qishan agrees to offer them food (here we see local people carry food to the British camp callously) and women. When Rong'er is recruited, she goes to the British camping area with her fellow girls. Saying that those girls only sell their performance, not their bodies, Rong'er requests the release of the girls, and stays herself. But when she accompanies the British officer, she suddenly produces a dagger. Eventually,

Rong'er is executed at the order of Qishan for spoiling of the peace between the two countries. Here, the old pattern of mass resistance to foreign encroachment and humiliation has faded away and been reduced to a desperate and suicidal attack of one young woman. Rong'er's refusal to sleep with a Westerner seems to echo a hidden notion in *The Artillery of the Great Qing*, which is: female chastity is the last stand of Chinese national dignity. It can be offered as a reward to Chinese soldiers' patriotism, but cannot be taken away by a Westerner in any circumstance. In this sense, the seemingly laudable actions of Feng Yushu and Rong'er by no means depart from the traditionalist point of view. Moreover, the film puts a particular emphasis on Rong'er's identity as the granddaughter of a former four-rank bodyguard of the late Qianlong Emperor, who is dismissed and ends up being a blind musician. The film unwittingly suggests that a woman with connections to the royal house has a stronger awareness of nationalism and loyalty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Late Qing-related films have undergone changes in theme and perspective from the 1950s to the 1990s. The first stage, represented by *Lin Zexu* and *The Naval Battle of 1894*, follows a pattern of national heroes allied with revolutionary masses against imperialism, in which both leaders and the masses are somewhat artificially amplified. In the second stage, as *Tan Sitong* in 1984 represents, the film maker's elitist attitude toward the masses led to an ambiguous and even critical assessment of the role of the masses they are seen as lacking progressive political views, in contrast with the strong commitment of social and political change embodied by radical and alienated reformer intellectuals. Apparently, this perspective was influenced by the cultural climate of the 1980s when self-esteem was rising among the intellectuals. From this time on, criticism of Chinese tradition and calls for learning from the West have become recurring themes. In the third stage, ordinary people were re-emphasized in the 1980s, however, unlike the

stereotypically perfectionist heroes in the 1950s' films, they are diverse and full of human weaknesses, and the revelation over time of their good qualities becomes the main story line of the films. In the last stage, *The Opium War* continued the discourse through film about open-mindedness, change, and coming to terms with the Western-oriented international order; however, it is also the most elitist film, for it entirely wipes out the role of the masses and makes them irrelevant to China's encounter with the West, except as the victims of opium or imperialist conquest. The emergence of gender in the films is noticeable, but it has been tainted by a male-centered perspective and improper connection between ideals of the nation and female chastity.

Endnotes

¹This type of Chinese convention of imagining the persecution of a loyal minister by a sinister colleague is manifest in the myth of Yue Fei, a Southern Song Dynasty general. He was put in jail and murdered by the capitulationist prime minister Qin Kui with the support of the emperor, because of his determined fighting against the invading Jin state. In spite of the popular extolling of Yue Fei, two prominent Qing Dynasty scholars, Wang Fuzhi and Zhao Yi, shared the idea that at the time the appeasement policy was a valid option. Wang even went so far as to criticize Yue Fei for being too impetuous. See Wang Fuzhi, *Song Lun* (Theses on the Song Dynasty), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008 and Zhao Yi, *Nian'er shi zhaji* (Notes on the Twenty-two Histories), Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2008.

²For blood-related imagery and its symbolic meaning in twentieth-century Chinese political culture, see Jeffery N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 111-112.

³A valid re-assessment of Qishan as a scapegoat of traditional popular militarism and of the "traitorous minister" stereotype has been done by Mao Haojian in his *Tianchao de Bengkui* (The Collapse of the Celestial Dynasty), Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1997, 9-21.

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