

THE NEXUS OF CULTURE AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF FILM IN U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

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Throughout Chinese history the interaction of politics and culture has been paramount in defining China's identity as a state and as a civilization. In this article, Marguerite Gong Hancock analyses this historical interplay from the arrival of Western traders in the mid-nineteenth century to the nationalism ultimately embodied in the People's Republic of China (PRC). She argues that despite changing regimes and ideologies, the Chinese leaders of the twentieth-century have continually manipulated specific cultural forms, such as film, to accomplish political aims. Examining U.S. policies designed to improve relations with the PRC, Mrs. Gong Hancock proposes that because of this Chinese fusion of culture and politics, the export and exchange of American films has accurately reflected the evolving state of U.S.-China relations, as well as served as a tool for building bilateral relations with the PRC.

I. INTRODUCTION: CULTURE AND THE EVOLVING STATE IDENTITY

Culture and politics in China have been inextricably linked since the days of the early emperors. Distinct traditions and values evolved into a self-consciously Chinese *weltanschauung* which defined China as a unified cultural and political entity from the beginning of the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C. through the late nineteenth century. Emperors could claim a heavenly mandate to rule by complying with culturally dictated rites, principles, and institutions, thereby ensuring a Chinese spirit of identity.¹ This sense of cultural unity — of belonging to a civilization rather than to a state or nation² — outlived all the individual emperors and dynastic

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1. John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 98.
2. Charles P. Fitzgerald, *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1964), p. 6.

houses. In short, the state was ideally coterminous with the whole culture.³

The arrival of Western traders and gunboats in the mid-nineteenth century challenged the imperial notion of a superior Chinese political and cultural order. Although the Qing dynasty emperor viewed the intruding foreigners as "uncivilized barbarians," Chinese words and worldview proved an ineffective weapon against the West's military and technological superiority during a series of conflicts culminating in the Opium War of 1839-1842. The subsequent "unequal treaties" and treaty-port system imposed by the West shattered China's political and cultural unity and forced it into increasing confrontation with the Western dominated international system.

China faced an unfamiliar choice: succeed in redefining the state from within, or accept alien ideas and values imposed by the West. By the turn of the twentieth century China had abandoned the old-style fusion of politics and traditional culture. Educated elites denounced the political authority, social regulations, and intellectual conformity which constituted the all-embracing constraints of the old orthodoxy.⁴ Reformist groups seeking to redefine the Chinese national identity searched for a new organizing principle amid the ruins of the traditional order.

The "Self-Strengtheners," a late nineteenth-century group of reformers led by elites, supported gradual change which respected the traditional order. Their program of reform called for retaining traditional Chinese principles (*ti*) while strengthening the Chinese state by adopting Western practices (*yong*). However, they were not able to separate the collective identity of China as a nation from the high culture of Old China.⁵ To the Self-Strengtheners, repudiation of elite authority and traditional culture threatened to undermine the legitimacy of China as a unified nation. They eventually succeeded in convincing the emperor to declare one-hundred days of reform in 1898. But the experiment was short-lived. The Manchu Empress dowager Zu Xi came out of retirement to orchestrate a *coup d'état* which dashed the Self-Strengtheners' hopes of updating China through gradual reform.

A decade later, reform gave way to revolution with the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty and the establishment of the Chinese Republic. Western ideas of parliamentary government failed to take root, however,

3. John K. Fairbank, p. 99.

4. Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), p. 352.

5. For example, L'iang Ch'i-Ch'ao, "On the Public Capacity" (1902), trans. by Philip A. Kuhn in *Yin-ping-shi ho-chi* (1941). (Unpublished).

and China's warlords began a long, indecisive struggle for internal control.

By 1920, a true nationalist movement began to grow, centered around intellectuals who synthesized cultural ideas and a new patriotism. As suggested by their name, the "New Culture" proponents asserted that "new" rather than traditional culture must be the ultimate source for national unification and change. They attacked the old Confucian culture at its roots, and asserted that the origin of new culture should be living people creating their own environment. This claim that China's genuine cultural identity stems not from cultural norms established by the elite but arises anew from the popular spirit of the common man also set the stage for another revolution of ideas and institutions in China.

Amid the ferment of China's search for national direction two groups with ultimately incompatible visions emerged: the *Guomindang* (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Although the two parties agreed to a united front against common enemies — such as Western "imperialists" and the Japanese — the CCP went further than the KMT nationalists in its extension of the "New Culture" ideas of popular self-determination. Under the direction of Mao Zedong, the Chinese Communists called for a revolution of the masses to create not only "a new state and a new society" but also "a new culture". As Mao Zedong elaborated:

Not only do we want to change a China that is politically oppressed and economically exploited into a China that is politically free and economically prosperous, we also want to change the China which is being kept ignorant and backward under the sway of the old culture into an enlightened and progressive China under the sway of a new culture.⁶

Although he reaffirmed politics and culture as partners, Mao redefined their interaction and form according to his socialist vision for China. His doctrine, unlike the old imperial order, made politics supreme; culture was to serve the ideology and the Party. Mao's philosophy became enshrined in slogans, such as "Politics in command", and "Art and literature must serve politics." His definition of culture differed from the old order in two significant ways: first, culture focused on discrete art forms, not age-old mores; and second, culture existed for the masses. Even though Mao called himself a revolutionary and advocated overturning the traditional economic, political, and cultural structures, he remained true to

6. Mao Zedong, "On the New Democracy" (1940), in *Selected Works*, Vol. 2 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 340.

China's tradition of linking politics and culture. The Chinese people entered the modern world lacking a spirit of nationalism — a major component of a modern state — yet in their twentieth-century revolution their *inherited* cultural legacy would provide the foundation for a new nationalism.⁷

Mao's search for cultural tools to promote revolution led him to encourage specific art forms which the common peasants could understand. Although he endorsed a wide range of cultural activities from wood-block prints to choral singing, film excelled where other media failed. To illiterate peasants, film communicated complex ideological doctrine through lively verbal explanations. To untrained supporters who knew only farming, film displayed fighting techniques for guerrilla warfare. To distant, would-be revolutionaries sprinkled across the country, film captured the dynamism of the revolution and the voices and faces of its leaders.

Mao's ongoing concern for effective mass communication and mobilization perpetuated film's utility long after the fighting of the 1940s and into the state-building of the succeeding decades. During his nearly thirty years of leadership, Mao was able to make culture serve his political agenda. He construed culture as both a weapon for and target of revolutionary change; it was a source of inspiration and of pollution. Individual films and filmmakers, for example, were praised and purged, then promoted again, according to the leadership's political and ideological needs.

After Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping rose to power and proclaimed modernization by the year 2000 as his goal and pragmatism as his byword. Since then, Deng and his "moderate" supporters have been walking a tightrope between continuity with China's traditional and revolutionary heritage, and transformation to Deng's "unique socialism" as manifested in technological, economic, and social modernization. To achieve these ambitious aims, Deng has continued to use cultural forms, such as film, to teach the current brand of ideology to peasants, intellectuals, and cadre leaders.

All socialist regimes censor or promote cultural forms such as film in order to legitimize authority or reassert power; what sets Deng apart from his predecessor and from most communist leaders is his willingness to open China's gates to foreign ideas, methods, and people. He has encouraged the Chinese not only to expose themselves to foreign influ-

7. John K. Fairbank, p. 99.

ences, but also to adopt new ways — as long as they contribute to a stronger socialist China.

Translating these policies into practice has involved both conflict and cooperation between artists and the government. For example, the film industry, taking advantage of the relatively relaxed atmosphere, challenged the frontiers of artistic style and content in Chinese communist art. The Deng regime responded by delineating boundaries for what is acceptable but still allowing filmmakers freedom within that realm. So far this dialogue between the leadership and the artists has prevented the pendulum swings in policy which typified Mao's era, but it is uncertain whether the present style of modernization will be able to keep the forces for cultural censorship and disruption at bay.

The search for an effective medium of communication with the people of China has not been limited to Chinese leaders; foreigners have capitalized on the utility and versatility of film. In the 1920s, American businessmen sent Hollywood films to introduce American styles and fashions, in hopes of capturing the fabled China market. During the 1940s, the American army distributed films to the Chinese allies to bolster morale and to train troops for the anti-Nazi war effort. This flow of films to China, whether instigated by traders or government leaders, revealed a desire on the part of Americans to use cultural relations programs as a means to economic and political ends.

These early cultural experiences proved useful when the United States and China turned from antagonism to friendship in the early 1970s. Formal agreements on cultural programs, including two film exchanges, created interest, but the higher stakes of bilateral relations complicated cooperative efforts in the realm of film. Ultimately, even painstaking planning was not able to overcome the political and cultural bickering which plagued the film exchanges.

Clearly, film in the context of U.S.-China cultural exchanges has been used as an instrument of bilateral political relations. The breakdown of a film exchange has significant ramifications for a domestic Chinese audience which regards culture and politics as interrelated phenomena. The cancellation of a film event, although seemingly trivial from an American point of view, is regarded by the Chinese as a carefully considered response to a serious political problem. While Sino-American cultural agreements will not necessarily pave the way to peaceful bilateral relations, an analysis of cultural relations can be a first step toward designing solutions to otherwise intractable problems, and to exposing domestic and foreign political dilemmas which confront the leadership of the PRC.

II. FILM IN CHINA: FROM ELITE TO MASS CULTURE

Shortly after the almost simultaneous invention of film in France, England, Germany, and the United States, China projected its first "Western Shadow Play" as a filler between acts in a Shanghai amusement park on August 11, 1896.⁸ By the turn of the century, foreign entrepreneurs who charged high admission prices for "shadow plays" in tea houses and ice skating rinks commanded a good business among affluent elites in the treaty-ports.⁹ During these initial years, China seemed as if it would fulfill Thomas Edison's 1890 prediction that moving pictures would ultimately provide home entertainment for the wealthy elite. But film, in China and elsewhere, was destined to play a significant part in the life of the common people.

The arrival of films in China followed on the heels of China's humiliating defeat at the hands of the West. Because films symbolized the hated, yet awe-inspiring West, they aroused both suspicion and curiosity. The reception of the Chinese leaders to film is best exemplified by the reaction of the Dowager Empress Zu Xi. In 1904, the British envoy to Beijing presented the Empress with a projector and film for her seventieth birthday. After showing three reels of film, the generator blew up. The Empress, convinced that the incident was an unlucky omen, prohibited the showing of films in her court. The following year, when one of her ministers returned from abroad with another projector, she granted the Western wonder a second audience. Another explosion occurred, killing several people.¹⁰ Movies were again banished, but their lifespan far exceeded both the Empress' and the Court's.

In spite of being expensive and taboo, films gained popular support in China. By 1905, Pathé newsreels were shown regularly in Shanghai.¹¹ In 1906, China made its first movie — a film presentation of a favorite opera.¹² A Spaniard used sheet metal to build China's first movie theater in 1908, and in 1913 the Asian Motion Picture Company was established.¹³

Shortly after the first film showing, an American businessman brought American films to China in July 1897.¹⁴ However, the real boom for American movies in China did not begin until after World War I. As

8. Zhi Qing, "When Did China First Go to the Movies?," *China's Screen* (Summer 1981), n.p.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. John Howkins, *Mass Communication in China* (New York: Longman Inc., 1982), p. 66.

12. Hu Yaobang, "Develop in All Fields of Modernization," *Beijing Review*, 13 September 1982, p. 22.

13. Howkins, p. 66.

14. *China's Screen*, 1981, no. 3, n.p.

European competition declined in the early post-war period, the U.S. film industry rapidly became the major film supplier in the world. At the height of the silent picture era, the four closest competitors produced only one-tenth of the feature films made in the U.S., with its average of 700 per year.¹⁵

The Chinese shared the world's fascination with America and things American. Movies which portrayed American values and styles — cowboys and entrepreneurs, modern cities and vast plains — captivated audiences in bustling cities such as Shanghai.

Success and the spirit of expansionism tempted the U.S. film industry to seek new audiences. As the *Scientific American* observed in 1921, the motion picture industry became "infected with the new spirit of internationalism which [had] taken such firm root in the economic and industrial life of the country as the result of the seizure of war-time opportunities."¹⁶ Film rapidly developed into a leading force for American overseas business. Taking its title from a favorite saying of economic expansionists in the 1920s, a *Saturday Evening Post* article, "Trade Follows the Film," boasted: "the sun, it now appears, never sets on the British Empire and the American motion picture."¹⁷

Although optimistic, these claims were based on the impressive effects of film on the world market. It is difficult to ascertain the exact magnitude or range of this influence, but the response of overseas buyers seemed to confirm that trade did indeed follow the film. In Britain, a member of the House of Lords complained that U.S. films threatened British commerce, citing examples of Midlands factories forced to alter their clothes designs because customers in the Middle East demanded shoes and clothes like American movie stars.¹⁸ In Japan new words, "mobos" and "mogas" (short for "modern boys" and "modern girls"), were coined expressly for the young generation which patterned its dress and behavior after American movie styles. The extent of the influence of American films was aptly summed up in the London *Morning Post* in 1923:

If the United States abolished its diplomatic and consular services, kept its ships in harbor and its tourists at home, and retired from the world's markets, its citizens, its problems,

15. In 1927 Germany produced a total of 241 feature films; India, Japan and France each produced more than 70; in comparison, China produced only about 20. See Robert Sklar, *Movie-made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p. 218.

16. Editorial Note with O. R. Geyer, "Winning Foreign Film Markets," *Scientific American* 125 (20 August 1921), p. 132.

17. Edward G. Lowry, "Trade Follows the Film," *Saturday Evening Post*, 7 November 1925, p. 12.

18. Sklar, p. 215.

its towns and countryside, its roads, motorcars, counting houses and saloons would still be familiar in the uttermost corners of the world . . . *The film is to America what the flag once was to Britain. By its means, Uncle Sam may hope some day, if he be not checked in time, to Americanize the world* (emphasis added).¹⁹

Optimism about the powers of film and American culture in general, prompted aggressive American businessmen to target "needy" areas of the world as potential export markets. These businessmen had been seeking to develop the China market for years, but the expected demand for American goods never materialized. The growing influence of film, however, renewed their hopes: send American movies overseas, and orders for appliances, clothes, and cars would pour back by the millions. Belief in this film-business nexus led Congress to appropriate \$15,000 in the early 1920s to promote U.S. movies abroad. When the Motion Picture Section in the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce was established in the early 1920s, it launched a series of reports on potential business opportunities in foreign countries. China, with its 400 million potential customers, was the first target country.

During the subsequent decades, American films swept through China's major cities; they needed little U.S. government support. Hollywood moguls sent over films starring American favorites such as Gary Cooper, Bette Davis, and Ingrid Bergmann. These popular stars soon became familiar to Chinese audiences. In fact, U.S. films became so influential that Chinese studios simply imitated them, using borrowed titles such as "The Lost Kids," "Street Angels," and "The Spring River Flows East."²⁰

While Americans had their own agenda for the use of films, many domestic Chinese groups seized upon them to further their own political causes. The New Culture group attempted to reach the common people through new forms of culture such as novels and short stories written in the vernacular of the time. Nevertheless, a leading writer for the New Culture radicals, Lu Xun, recognized the potential use of film, as he recounts in the following story:

Once I had a curious experience. In the course of a banquet I said that students could learn more from films than from textbooks and that probably a visual method of teaching would one day be adopted. But my words aroused only laughter.²¹

19. Quoted in Lowry, p. 12.

20. Howkins, p. 66.

21. *The People's Comic Book*, preface.

Lu Xun was not heeded and progress was disappointing. The New Culture radicals concluded that elevation of the popular spirit to create a new culture, and thereby change China, was a long-term proposition that would have to be achieved through education. By failing to recognize the possibility that culture could change in revolutionary groups, the New Culture radicals ultimately limited their influence.

Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) stepped beyond the New Culture radicals. They translated a belief in proletarian leadership into a revolutionary cause worth fighting for, and shaped the use of film accordingly. Forced to flee to North and Central China in the face of nationalist and Japanese threats, the CCP used this period of isolation for consolidation and training. Receiving its first 16-millimeter camera from Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens in 1937,²² the CCP enthusiastically promoted the use of film. During the Sino-Japanese War, the communist People's Liberation Army (PLA) produced training films such as "The Battle of the Mine" and "Tunnel Warfare."²³ These films illustrated techniques and equipment for guerrilla warfare with seeming success, for this tactic became a hallmark of the Communists, enabling them to sustain protracted fighting in the countryside with a peasant army. Films also documented the work of the leaders, carrying the image of Mao as a dynamic leader throughout the country to help create a sense of unity among scattered supporters. These two factors, training and unity, contributed to the eventual success of the CCP. During the long struggle, many observers predicted that the obstacles of inadequate equipment, inexperienced men, and scattered support would prove insurmountable, but Mao overcame these obstacles — in part from his use of film as a political and cultural tool to explain, spread, and legitimize his revolution.

III. FILM AS A TOOL: THE RISE OF U.S.-CHINA CULTURAL RELATIONS

The rise of the CCP provoked anxiety within the U.S. government. Although the U.S. had sent missionaries, educators, and traders to China for over a century, the events of the early 1940s made China politically important as well. American diplomats realized that the pending danger of civil war between the *Guomindang* (KMT) and CCP might hinder the Allied war effort by heightening tensions with the USSR, which would certainly back the communists. The U.S. pushed for a political settlement between the Chinese rivals and increased its concrete activity within China. Accordingly, on January 14, 1942, the United States allotted

22. Howkins, p. 66.

23. Hu Yaobang, p. 24.

\$150,000 from the Emergency Fund for the President to establish a cultural program with China — the first official U.S. government attempt to promote two-way cultural contact. (The U.S. had always been slow to establish cultural programs with foreign countries, and not until the Axis Powers posed a threat to the U.S. in Latin America in 1938 did the Department of State establish its "Division of Cultural Relations" for the purpose of "encouraging and strengthening cultural relations and intellectual cooperation.")

When first proposed in 1842, the explicit mandate of the China Cultural Relations Program was "to deepen and direct into definite channels the traditional friendship between the two countries . . .," especially since "China and the United States are drawing close together in the world-wide struggle for the democratic way of life."²⁴ Drawing on the more than forty-year history of American film in China, the cultural program selected film as its first major area of activity. The program marshalled the creative talents of well-known moviemakers to produce its first efforts. For example, Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak produced "The Battle of China," a film which chronicled the fighting in China in heroic terms. "We Fly for China," a documentary about proud Chinese air cadets training in Arizona, also received widespread interest and succeeded in linking the U.S. and Chinese war causes in a personal way.

After Pearl Harbor, the China program played an increasingly important role in the war effort. Director Stuart Grummon emphasized the significance of the program's contributions with fervor:

. . . [The program] may well have an important bearing upon the continuance of China's will to fight [against Japan] . . . If it was deemed important before the outbreak of hostilities with Japan . . . to emphasize certain phases of American life which might contribute to strengthening their morale, the need is now clearly greater . . .²⁵

The urgency of the war added to the importance of cultural relations as a means to a military and political end.

Drawing on the advice of Chinese Ambassador Hu Shi, the program immediately allotted the \$150,000 budget to five areas: exchange of technical and cultural leaders, aid to Chinese students in the U.S., development of an educational radio program, donation of textbooks and

24. Wilma Fairbank, *America's Cultural Experiment in China 1942-1949* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976).

25. Wilma Fairbank, p. 207.

equipment to universities, and a \$15,000 provision for trucks and equipment to show movies. The movie allotment specified that the films were to display "American life, institutions, and war effort."²⁶

Although the program marked a significant step forward in the recognition of cultural relations as an active part of relations with China, the film program suffered from several problems. First, film prints were scarce. And even if copies were available, it was difficult to show them because projection equipment on trucks capable of travelling from village to village and projecting on outdoor screens were scarce and unreliable. Consequently, films had to be distributed among numerous local schools, which limited the number of people who could see a film to those in the immediate vicinity. Transportation time from school to school was also considerable. Second, the modest film budget of \$15,000 made it difficult to invest in additional equipment and dubbing of the soundtrack. English films often made little sense to the Chinese, even when dubbed into Chinese. The Chinese audience did not always perceive a film as intended because accurate understanding of many films usually required more than a literal translation of language. Overcoming this complex problem of culturally inappropriate scripts was virtually impossible on the \$15,000 budget.

Wilma Fairbank, who worked with the Cultural Relations Program in the 1940s, dealt first-hand with the problems of cross-cultural communication. In the autumn of 1945 she joined hundreds of farmers in Sichuan to watch a Department of Agriculture film on Iowa hog-raising. Chosen by the China program to impress the Chinese peasants with modern American farming techniques, the film elicited varied responses, but few of these matched the program's objectives. Although the audience did comment with admiration about the huge size of American hogs, many onlookers criticized the sloppy techniques of trough feeding and most voiced incredulity at the climactic scene of the hogs riding trucks to the meat packing plant. Fairbank recalls that "the sequences were too remote, too ridiculous, perhaps even stupid and pointless in a society where hogs were raised on refuse and wheeled to market on wheelbarrows by manpower and the people themselves never rode in a trailer truck in a lifetime."²⁷

The greatest flaw in the Cultural Relations Program, however, was neither logistical nor linguistic, but conceptual: the Program's sponsors believed that mere exposure to "American life and institutions" would lead to constructive economic and social development. They seemed

26. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

satisfied at the sheer size of audiences, boasting that the showings of "American nontheatrical motion pictures" claimed "more than a million viewers monthly" in the summer of 1943.²⁸ Their overconfidence in the impact of American culture on a Chinese audience revealed a lack of understanding of the complex political and factional factors dividing the Chinese people and an ignorance of the peasants' concern for grassroots change. In contrast to the communists, who made direct contact with the peasants and offered potential solutions to their immediate problems, the U.S. program sought only random contacts, and offered easily misunderstood narratives about America, rather than specific plans for change in China.

IV. FILM AS A TOOL IN INTERNAL "SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION" AND CULTURAL ECLIPSE

Following World War II, China joined the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union at the Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco Conferences which led to the creation of the United Nations. At both conferences the Chinese delegation succeeded in adding cultural issues to the agenda outlined in the Charter for the Economic and Social Council, as well as for the U.N. itself.²⁹ V. K. Wellington Koo, a leader of the Chinese delegation, summed up the Chinese position on culture:

We feel that cultural and educational cooperation is one of the essential things in our international community. While the maintenance of peace is necessary, while the rule of law is also essential, at the bottom of both questions is the promotion of understanding between peoples . . .³⁰

The outcome of these conferences represented a political victory for China: just over one century after the humiliation of the "unequal treaties" China could claim that it ranked as one of the foremost members of the international system. But the fruits of this long-awaited victory were to be delayed by the turn of events within China.

In 1945 the Nationalists surrendered to the Communists, disillusioning the American public, which had idealized "Free China" for more than a decade. The "loss of China" added fuel to the fire of McCarthyism and became the focus of anti-communist hysteria. As a result, the U.S.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Report on Dumbarton Oaks Conference, " *Contemporary China* 4 (14 May 1945); *Documents of the UN Conference of International Organization in San Francisco*, Vol. 1 (New York: UNCIO Documents), p. 453.

30. UNCIO Documents, vol. 8, p. 204.

turned its back on any official relations with Mao's communist government while Mao turned inward to begin building a new China.

Under Mao's direction, China's revolutionary culture was shaped by a policy of totalism, not pluralism; the new regime promoted national unification and integration in all areas. Just as it moved decisively to centralize leadership and to collectivize land and capital, so it moved with equal purpose to make the state the ultimate authority on forms of culture.

As a result of the extensive and effective CCP use of films for ideological teaching and military training during the previous two decades, the Party quickly nationalized filmmaking groups to perpetuate the revolutionary function of film. Following in the tradition of the first "revolutionary film studio" established in Changchun in October 1946, the CCP opened a studio in Beijing in 1949 in celebration of their victory and the birth of Communist China.³¹ The film industry developed rapidly during the following years, expanding both the range of its subjects and the number of production centers. By 1953, the CCP had added a film studio in Shanghai,³² as well as a studio for the People's Liberation Army, the August 1st film studio,³³ and a studio for scientific and educational films.³⁴

The fledgling film industry became a tightly controlled instrument for spreading proletarian values. An article in the *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), the approved paper of the CCP, summarized film's dual function in New China:

Our film is a tool to educate people in patriotism and socialism; it is also a major means to lift people's cultural standards . . . [Feature films] must reflect from all aspects the excitement and liveliness of our motherland, the true contradiction in life; and growing new forces in it, and must deal merciless blows to those dying things that obstruct our progress.³⁵

This official statement let the filmmakers know that there were definite (albeit ambiguous) guidelines for messages that films could impart. Clearly film had to follow the dictates of ideology.

Acting on these Party guidelines, the newly established film studios began making features and documentaries on topics such as land reform and liberation — lauding the work of the Communists in overturning

31. *China's Screen*, 1981, no. 4, n.p.

32. Zhi Qing, n.p.

33. "Thirtieth Anniversary of August First Studios," *Beijing Review*, 13 September 1982, p. 28.

34. "The Shanghai and Educational Film Studio," *Beijing Review*, 14 March 1983, p. 29.

35. *Renmin Ribao* (RMRB), 17 January 1954.

the corruptions of the old order. A UNESCO study reported that in 1950 total audience attendance surpassed 150 million, and by 1952 more than 2,400 mobile projection units were in use.³⁶ These roving film units brought the Communist message into China's heartland, contributing to political consolidation among the peasant masses.

Film also held great potential for promoting the communist cause abroad. Taking advantage of universal film widths and subtitle or dubbing techniques, China exported films to the Philippines, Singapore, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia.³⁷ In the early years of Mao's leadership these served to spread Chinese Communist ideology, either for the purpose of conversion or for expressing solidarity in a common cause. China also produced non-ideological feature-length films which represented China in international film festivals in common-interest countries such as Yugoslavia and Poland during the 1950s.³⁸

Faced with the task of "socialist construction," early in 1956 the CCP initiated a campaign to encourage the participation of the small, but instrumental pre-revolutionary intellectual elite. Although not intended as a call for free speech, the political slogan "Let a hundred flowers bloom together, let the hundred schools of thought contend," unleashed an unexpected wave of criticism of the new leadership. The CCP responded immediately with an Anti-Rightist Campaign which made one lesson clear: collective ideological identity still reigned supreme over individual intellectual and artistic freedom of expression.

During the early 1960s China's film industry reached a high point in its development. From 1949 to 1966, film production steadily increased, averaging a total of thirty-six feature films per year.³⁹ The quality also improved as steadily as artistic expression and cultural freedom became more open.

The period of relative openness ended abruptly in 1966 when Mao launched the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" which ushered in a new interpretation of the relationship between politics and culture. Culture became both the primary target of the new stage of national revolution and the means of achieving it. Traditional Chinese and Western-influenced art and artists were denounced by rounds of scathing public criticism on *dazibao* ("big character posters") written by workers, peasants, and soldiers. All cultural works and values were forced to conform to strict ideological standards.

36. UNESCO, *Film and Cinema Statistics* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955), n.p.

37. *Ibid.*

38. See "Chinese Prize-winning films at International Festivals (1949-1982)," *1982/83 China Official Annual Report* (Hong Kong: Kingsway, 1983), pp. 708-710.

39. "For Your Information," *Beijing Review*, 21 February 1983, p. 6.

During the Yenan years, Mao's "cultural army" had joined in the military struggles of the 1940s; now the enemy was no longer the Japanese, but internal dissidents, and the battleground was culture itself. Beneath the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution lay clear political aims and consequences: reform for an unresponsive and unwieldy bureaucracy, destruction of an opposing leadership faction, and the orchestration of Mao's apotheosis. The guiding concept behind Mao's political aims, and the first principle of the Cultural Revolution was that fusion of politics and culture was the key for moving the masses into revolutionary action.

Unfortunately for the film industry, the Cultural Revolution spawned leaders, such as Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, who had a particular dislike for Chinese filmmakers. Jiang Qing's unsuccessful attempt at movie stardom haunted the Shanghai movie makers who had failed her. She opened a vicious attack on film circles, and promoted only a handful of films which she had made. These revolutionary model operas were generally regarded as mediocre productions at best. Some "technical documentaries," however, were still permitted. One of the more memorable revealed how dialectical materialism and the thought of Mao Zedong applied to Shandong peanut growing.⁴⁰

V. U.S.-CHINA REDUX: NORMALIZATION AND CULTURAL PRESSURE

After more than twenty years of silence, the dialogue between the U.S. and China officially resumed with a handshake between Mao Zedong and President Richard Nixon in February 1972. Sino-American *rapprochement* had been made possible largely by the demise of the American war effort in Vietnam and the growing Sino-Soviet rift. Initially, both sides moved cautiously, choosing a path of cultural and economic cooperation as the best means of defining and pursuing mutual interests.

The Shanghai Communique of February 1972 — the first step on the road to normalization of relations — affirmed the "desire to broaden the understanding between the two peoples." Official talks revolved around specific areas of cooperation such as science and technology, sports, journalism, and cultural exchange. These people-to-people exchanges served as the foundation for a cautious normalization process.

In 1976, the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong left a vacuum in national leadership and created uncertainty over national direction. Though communism was not openly questioned, a crisis existed because the Cultural Revolution had not only left China's cultural, social, and economic structures in shambles, but also had blighted the notion of the infallibility of communist politics.

40. Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), p. 31.

Facing the difficult tasks of political consolidation, social rehabilitation, and particularly economic development, Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang assumed Party leadership. As champions of the "moderates," they carefully criticized the Cultural Revolution as "ten years of internal chaos," relying once again on a redefinition of the relationship between politics and culture for their legitimacy. While selectively maintaining continuity with "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought," the Deng leadership proclaimed the beginning of a "new historic stage" in which the focal point of the CCP would change from class struggle to modernization. At the watershed Third Plenum in December 1978, the CCP summarized this significant ideological shift in the following statement:

The principal contradiction our country has to resolve is that between the growing material and cultural needs of the people and the backwardness of social production. It is imperative that the focus of party and government work be shifted to socialist modernization centering on economic construction and that the people's material and cultural life be gradually improved by means of an immense expansion of the productive forces . . .⁴¹

In conjunction with this redefinition of overall ideology, the role of culture in the state was reshaped. The forty-year-old Maoist slogan, "Literature and art serve politics," was replaced with "Literature and art serve the people and socialism." This Dengist trend away from Mao's strict ideological style allowed for major changes in policy, especially in the economic realm. But Deng's changes still conformed to the approved parameters of the Communist regime and to the Chinese notion of national unity defined in both political and cultural terms.

In pursuing his goals, Deng followed a familiar pattern: whenever twentieth-century Chinese leadership has wanted to effect a radical ideological or political restructuring, it has consistently worked within the context of a reinterpretation and reaffirmation of the fusion of politics and culture. This has been an ongoing source of its legitimacy as well as a convincing rationale for motivating change. Deng attempted to justify his policy changes as progressions from or corrections of the Maoist legacy rather than rejections of it. Describing his changes as "new policies in a new period," Deng introduced not only the goal of material modernization, but also the partner concept of "socialist spiritual civilization," defined vaguely as "the ideological and the cultural permeating each

41. Yu Jianxun, "Firmly Bear in Mind the Principal Contradiction in Our Socialist Economy," *RMRB*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) 5 October 1981.

other."⁴² Socialist spiritual civilization, according to the official line at the 12th National Party Congress in 1982, was to "safeguard the socialist orientation of China's modernization."⁴³ Alarmed, however, by the rapid spread of material objectives and capitalist motives, the Deng leadership armed itself with an open-ended mandate to fight "corrupt" or "distorted" values. Under this multi-purpose rubric, leaders blacklisted sources of "spiritual pollution" and created new interpretations of ideology "peculiar to the Chinese way of modernizing."⁴⁴

Despite this effort to control the effects of modernization and ideological change, a much more relaxed atmosphere evolved. Conscious decisions by Deng to grant freer rein in the economy and society in general allowed for more decentralized decisionmaking at both the governmental and the individual levels. After 1978, control over the arts was eased and receptivity to Western culture visibly increased. Under Deng's leadership, the devastated domestic film industry recovered quickly, receiving support for the expansion of studio capacity and increased film production. China's studios had been averaging a combined output of only ten feature films per year,⁴⁵ but output increased by two-and-a-half times in 1977 alone. The following year the figure almost doubled again to 46. Subsequent years maintained a steady growth rate, until after 1982 more than 100 feature films were produced annually.⁴⁶

The domestic film industry also gained impetus from the flow of foreign, especially American, films that began shortly after normalization of U.S.-China relations in 1978. Amidst the flurry of optimistic activity surrounding normalization, the U.S. and China signed a six-article Cultural Agreement in Washington, D.C. in January 1979. This Agreement and its two Implementing Accords, assumed an important role as both symbol and substance in U.S.-China relations.⁴⁷ The first Implementing Accord, signed in Beijing in August of 1979, outlined nine areas of cultural exchange in detail. One of the most publicized events was the Fall 1981 U.S. Film Week during which a selection of America's best films would be shown in China.

But even before the official Film Week occurred, privately sponsored films made their way to entertainment-hungry Chinese audiences. The

42. Hu Yaobang, "Develop in All Fields of Modernization," *Beijing Review*, 13 September 1982, p. 22.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Pang Yangjie and Li Shanquan, "Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization," *Beijing Review*, 2 May 1983, p. 15.

45. "For Your Information," *Beijing Review*, 21 February 1983, p. 6.

46. See "Thirtieth Anniversary of August First Studios," *Beijing Review*, 13 September 1982, p. 28 and Zhang Ming, "Golden Rooster Awards," *Xinhua*, FBIS 16 March 1983.

47. Interview with George Beasley, U.S. International Communications Agency, 30 March 1983.

film trade into China followed the pattern of overall diplomacy, with small private deals preceding the implementation of formal cultural accords. In January 1979, Charlie Chaplin's classic "Modern Times" was shown to a Beijing audience of one thousand. The Chinese government attempted to exercise control not only over the selection of films, but also over their distribution. Tickets to American movies went first to officials with clout, or people with connections, except for a relatively small number of highly-publicized tickets which went on sale for commoners at affordable prices. The government also attempted to suggest proper interpretation of the films: Chaplin's film was given high marks for its "deep social significance," "superb art," and "rich ideological content."⁴⁸ Other American classics gained acclaim because of their ideological worth: "The Sound of Music" was reportedly bought because it was "anti-facist."⁴⁹

Within a year of the initial showings of American films, their sheer number, as well as the increasing exposure of audiences to Western films and ideas prevented full government control in either selection or interpretation. While some recent American hits, such as "Julia" and "Death on the Nile" made their way to China after successful reviews in the U.S., so did less acclaimed films such as "the Hunchback of Notre Dame," "Nightmare in Badham County," and "Convoy."

It is difficult to evaluate how these films were received. To those who watched hoping to gain insights into American society, the impressions they received were probably misleading. To government leaders responsible for the cultural fare of the people, the movies most likely caused dismay. Whatever the case, American films were once again catching the attention of Chinese audiences.

Following the tradition of the trade expansionists of the 1920s, U.S. film entrepreneurs hoped to win the fabled billion-viewer China market. Encouraged by the high demand for American movies of all types and qualities, Jules Stein, Senior Vice President of American International Pictures, expressed an optimism shared by the entire American industry: "in the next ten years I'm sure the number of theaters in China will increase, and the amount of income ultimately coming out of that country could be very, very important."⁵⁰ Although many American films escaped censorship, the film industry's initial euphoria was quickly tempered by hardline Chinese policies requiring film purchase by flat fee for full

48. "PRC Film Director Comments on Charlie Chaplin Films," *Xinhua* (19 January 1979), FBIS 23 January 1979.

49. Howkins, p. 68.

50. Hal Morris, "China's Movie Theaters Will Soon Give 'Futureworld' Look at US films," *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1979.

exploitation rights, rather than by the accepted American practice of royalty fees. Once again, the China market proved more elusive than optimistic American businessmen had hoped.

VI. DOMESTIC FILM: NEW FREEDOM AND IDEOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Under more relaxed conditions spawned by Deng, the domestic film industry has bloomed. Feature film awards were reinstated in 1980 after a seventeen-year hiatus. Solicitation by the magazine *Popular Movie* (*Dazhong Dianying*), for votes on the best film made during 1976-1979 attracted enormous response from its readers. After the 700,000 votes were tallied, three films "tied" for the top award: "Tearstain," a drama about a rural CCP officer who clears his predecessor of false charges; "Little Flower," a story about a People's Liberation Army soldier and his reunion with his two sisters during the War of Liberation; and "General Li Hung Chang," a biography of a KMT officer who joins the Chinese Communists to fight the Japanese in the 1930s. Ultimately, however, the atmosphere of freedom, artistic evaluation, and public acclaim for films proved to be misleading.

In the fall of 1979, the climate for intellectual and artistic freedom changed dramatically, culminating in the denouncement of one film as a warning that the cultural renaissance had strict boundaries. Many leaders decided that the growing influence of certain domestic and foreign ideas had to be checked, especially as new "realistic and critical" art, which catalyzed outspoken debate about fundamental principles of socialism in China, edged beyond official acceptance. Films were judged not only on ideological purity as they were during the Cultural Revolution, but also on artistic style; when artistic expression threatened to undermine the leadership and the legitimacy of the revolution, censorship descended.

In 1981, Bai Hua's movie script entitled "Unrequited Love" ("*Kulian*") raised fundamental questions about the value of contemporary Chinese socialism. The main character of the film, Chenguang, is a Chinese painter who flees his war-torn motherland in the 1940s. Although successful in America, he returns to "New China" because of his patriotic love. During the Cultural Revolution he is humiliated and beaten. Afterwards, he is plagued by relentless pursuers. His daughter raises the piercing question which is the central issue of the whole film: "Dad, you love your country. Through the bitter frustration you go on loving her. . . . But Dad, does this country love you?"⁵¹ He cannot answer.

51. Bai Hua, "Bai Hua's Controversial Script 'Frustrated Love,'" Excerpted in *Inside China Mainland* June 1981, p. 17.

Tormented by this question, he attempts to escape by fleeing to the wilderness. He abandons his artistic talent and his family and becomes a "wild man," a fugitive in a wasteland. The film closes with his daughter's search:

A helicopter flying slowly. A bird's eye view
from above.
Reeds . . . mounds . . .
On the snow covered plain, a black question
mark . . .
The helicopter slowly descends . . . the question mark
becomes larger and larger. It is finally seen to
be immense. In the very last stage of his life,
Chenguang used his remaining strength to paint a
huge question mark on pure white snow. The final
dot in the question mark is his own frozen body.

Huddled in the snow, Chenguang is raising his
hands toward Heaven. As his strength gave out, he
was not able to raise them very high but his
intention is still clear in his final, frozen
gesture. His eyes are not closed. They are
staring straight forward fixedly.⁵²

The film's unanswered question apparently struck a sensitive chord. Rapid and decisive official censorship followed. The film was banned, branded by the official army paper, *The Liberation Army Daily* (*Jiefang Jun Ribao*), as "a reflection of the incorrect, anarchistic, ultra-egoistic, bourgeois liberalizationist . . . way of thinking."⁵³ Nevertheless, daring popular support for Bai Hua followed with more than one thousand letters written in his defense.⁵⁴

Following a process of official criticism, Bai Hua was rehabilitated with remarkable speed. His self-criticism was widely published in November 1981, an acknowledgement that his film "ignored the power of the Party and the people, precisely the power . . . that is building a lively and healthy political atmosphere today."⁵⁵ The official party magazine, *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*) published a mild and thinly masked judgment

52. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

53. "Violations of the Four-Firm Principles Cannot be Toleated — A Criticism of the Cinematic Literary Drama, 'Unrequited Love,'" *Jiefang Ribao* (*Liberation Daily*), 20 April 1981.

54. Takashi Oka, "Fate of 'Bitter Love' Embitters Chinese Writers," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 October 1981, p. 2.

55. "Report on the Council Meeting of the Chinese Writer's Association," *Beijing Review*, 11 January 1982, p. 29.

of Bai Hua in December of the same year: "Certain comrades see art as purely an individual enterprise, and see a work as a personal expression of the writer or artist's self, with no relation to society and politics. They believe . . . that in creating a work he need not consider his social effect . . ." ⁵⁶ Having clearly articulated the moral of Bai Hua's censorship to all cultural elites or potential supporters, the Party leadership reaffirmed Bai Hua's position as a leading writer at the end of the year. At the National Conference on Feature Film Creation on December 27, 1981, Hu Yaobang declared: The question in regard to "Unrequited Love" is closed satisfactorily . . . Bai Hua is a communist Party member. He is a writer, and will continue to write. ⁵⁷ The government leaders had used Bai Hua to make their point and had clearly demarcated the boundaries of cultural license vis-à-vis ideology.

Subsequent signals reinforced these boundaries. For example, the third annual "Golden Cock Awards" in March 1983 awarded a prize for one of the best feature films of 1982 to "Middle Age," a story of (mis)treatment of intellectuals by the Party. ⁵⁸ Lu Wenting, a middle-aged ophthalmologist, represents China's intellectuals who shoulder the bulk of the national modernization work, sacrificing personal health and family relationships, but receiving little salary compensation or social recognition.

Although the main character of "Middle Age" questions the government's actions on an issue of equal sensitivity to Bai Hua's "Unrequited Love," the film escaped official criticism because it offers an optimistic conclusion. "Middle Age" closes with hope for improved living conditions, because, as author Shen Rong commented, "The Communist Party understands the intellectuals." ⁵⁹ In sharp contrast to Bai Hua's scene with the frozen body huddled in a question mark, Shen Rong depicts a heroine who finds reason to live for her country. In the author's eyes, "She [Lu Wenting] can't die, for the people need her, and she has a lot to accomplish. I can't let her die." ⁶⁰

While carefully orchestrated government praise and criticism have delineated boundaries for the current scope of political inquiry, they have done so with constant support for film as an important cultural form. Praise for increased reflection of daily life and for progress in artistic style has made it clear that films are being viewed by government leaders as

56. Hu Qiaomu, "Dilemma on the Ideological Front," *Hongqi (Red Flag)*, 12 December 1981, p. 4-5.

57. "National Conference on Feature Film Creation Held," *RMRB*, 28 December 1981.

58. Zhang Ming, "Golden Rooster Awards," *Xinhua*, FBIS 16 March 1983.

59. Zhang Ming, "'Middle Age' On Intellectuals," *Xinhua*, FBIS 16 March 1983.

60. "At Middle Age," *Beijing Review*, 28 March 1983, p. 29.

a means of satisfying the people's desire for entertainment. As Xie Tieli, a director of films for more than twenty years and a deputy of the National People's Congress, remarked, "With more money in their pockets, peasants want to see more and better films."⁶¹ But only as long as film uses its mass appeal to help ensure "political stability, economic prosperity, educational progress, and high moral standards,"⁶² are government leaders likely to remain, as Hu Yaobang described himself, "cheerleaders for the film industry."⁶³

Within these clearly prescribed limits, however, the government has given much more to the film industry than sideline cheers. Within the past four years, the Ministry of Culture and the People's Construction Bank have provided loans for the building of 4,000 cinemas in rural market towns which comprise roughly 80 percent of all the cinemas in China.⁶⁴ New film studios have been established in remote areas, such as Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang, reflecting the decentralization of the industry which was formerly concentrated only in urban centers shortly after the founding of the PRC. The Deng leadership's moderate stance has attempted to tread the fine line between more flexible ideological constraints which "serve the people's material and cultural modernization," and ideological boundaries which preserve the country's current two-pronged identity as socialist and Chinese.

VII. U.S.-CHINA FILM EXCHANGE: CONFLICT IN POLITICAL RELATIONS

In accordance with the 1979 cultural accord, U.S. film critics and International Communication Agency leaders, acting on behalf of the U.S. government, selected ten past Academy Award-winning films for the first Film Festival. From these ten, the Chinese chose the following five to represent major genres: "Shane" as the Western; "Singing in the Rain" as the musical; "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" as the social commentary; "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" as the fantasy; and "Black Stallion" in the children's category.⁶⁵ For the reciprocal exchange, the Chinese Ministry of Culture selected five films to represent both pre- and post-Cultural Revolution filmmaking in China: "Song of Youth," "Third Sister Liu," and "Two Stage Sisters" represented the pre-1966

61. Embassy Airgram, "Film in China," China Cultural Background Series of Department of State (Beijing: American Embassy, 1982), p. 3.

62. "National Conference on Feature Film Creation Held," *RMRB*, 28 December 1981.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Embassy Airgram, p. 2.

65. Beasley interview, 30 March 1983.

period; and "Second Spring Mirroring the Moon" and "Bus Number Three" represented the post-1979 period.⁶⁶

Despite painstaking selection of the films and careful planning, the film exchanges disappointed both governments. Both governments quietly complained that the other side had not fully upheld the agreement. The U.S. side, although pleased that more than three million Chinese viewed the American films in less than three weeks, saw the method used by the Chinese to show the films as exploitative. The written agreement specified the Chinese cities that would view the films and so only two prints of each film were sent. However, once the films were in China, multiple showings were scheduled in neighboring theaters within each agreed upon city so that bicyclist messengers could deliver each reel of film to multiple audiences as soon as it was completed. This questionable method significantly increased viewing possibilities without breaching the limit of two prints per film; but the U.S. government criticized this Chinese maneuvering, arguing that the government was still held responsible for agreements made with the Motion Picture Association of America which allowed only limited viewing rights.⁶⁷

The Chinese side was similarly disturbed; but for quite different reasons. In contrast to the widespread popular reception the U.S. films received in China, the Chinese films which toured the U.S. from October 1981 to January 1982 played to embarrassingly small audiences. No lines waited outside theaters. In fact, the tour of films went largely unnoticed. The U.S. attempted to explain the reasons for the small reception, pointing to such facts as a relatively small interested audience, a vast array of competing American films and other forms of entertainment, and the reliance upon small distributors for publicity. Whatever explanations were proffered, the Chinese government planners concluded that the Chinese film exchange did not appear successful, and they judged that the U.S. side was to blame.⁶⁸

Despite the mutual displeasure at the opposite government's handling of the first film exchange, the momentum of political relations and growing expectations led to a second implementing Accord which included a second Film Week. But this time the language of the provision was changed, in order to guard against a repeat of the problems of the first exchange. Each government's jurisdictions, responsibilities, and restrictions were explicitly outlined. For example, two phrases were added:

66. "China Films in US," *Notes from the National Committee on US-China Relations*, Winter/Spring 1982.

67. Interview with John Thomson, Cultural Officer in American Embassy in Beijing 1979-1981, 30 March 1983.

68. *Ibid.*

"in accordance with the actual conditions in each country" and "will adopt appropriate means."⁶⁹

Again, an involved selection process by the U.S. International Communications Agency resulted in the selection of five American films. Chosen from more recent productions were the films "Star Wars", for its high-tech graphics; the Katherine Hepburn and Henry Fonda drama, "On Golden Pond;" "Turning Point," the story of ballet dancers and their families; "Coalminer's Daughter;" and "Kramer vs. Kramer," a treatment of divorce. By March 1983, final arrangements were being completed for the scheduled fall showings.⁷⁰

Within weeks, however, all planned cultural exchange programs were cancelled. The April 7, 1983 announcement by the Chinese Ministry of Culture was allegedly precipitated by the U.S. decision to grant political asylum to Chinese tennis player Hu Na. This abrupt action ended not only the Film Week but also all formal cultural relations — meaning all provisions agreed upon in the September 1981 Implementing Accord for 1982 and 1983 — between the U.S. and China. The Chinese publicly objected to the U.S. "infringements of sovereignty and interference in China's internal affairs."⁷¹

The Chinese side treated the incident as the last of a series of actions by the U.S. government which conflicted with the official statements of goodwill and fair relations. Official Chinese commentators cited a litany of events during 1983 that justified the PRC action: in January 1983 the U.S. enforced "unilateral controls" on textile imports; in February Reagan was quoted in the weekly *Human Events* as planning to "abide by" the Taiwan Relations Act, a "direct violation" of the August 7, 1982 joint communique for reduced U.S. arms sales to Taiwan; in March the State Department showed its "intention" to block the PRC entry into the Asian Development bank by insisting that Taiwan remain in the organization; in April the U.S. granted asylum to Hu Na after long collusion with Taiwan agents, thus deliberately infringing on China's sovereignty as protected in the Shanghai Communique and the normalization agreements.⁷²

69. *Implementing Accord for Cultural Exchange in 1982 and 1983 between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the People's Republic of China* (Official text), 5 September 1981.

70. Beasley interview, 30 March 1983.

71. "China Cancels China-US Cultural exchange Programs," *RMRB*, 8 April 1983; "China Lodges a Vehement Protest Toward the American Government," *RMRB*, 6 April 1983.

72. Mu Youlin, "A Measured Response," *Beijing Review*, 18 April 1983, p. 405; see also "Mutual Respect of Sovereignty and Non-Interference in International Affairs will Enable China-US Relations to Develop," *RMRB*, 30 March 1983.

The U.S. immediately denied any breach of China's sovereignty and deemed the cancellation of cultural exchanges "inappropriate." If indeed the Chinese considered the granting of political asylum to the tennis player a "long premeditated," "grave," "hegemonistic" act, then why choose culture rather than the Los Angeles Olympics as the stage for protest?⁷³

As a result of the abrupt Chinese actions and the general downswing in U.S.-China relations, the five films which had been painstakingly chosen for the second Film Week were never sent. Within China, however, the film industry continued to grow. The popular films of 1983 reflected Deng's pragmatism and influence on modernization. Science and education films, such as "Elimination of Wild Rats," "Birth Control," and "Chicken Raising" received acclaim for their informative and realistic portrayals.⁷⁴ The feature films varied from "Liao Zhongkai," a glorification of the Chinese vanguard in the "democratic revolution" of the 1920s, to "Under the Bridge," a contemporary love story involving the young mother of an illegitimate son who is scorned by her lover's family.⁷⁵

In 1984, Chinese films continued to reflect the wide scope of subject matter promoted by the government's cultural leaders. Still, the Deng regime's focus on economic modernization has been reflected in its official film policy. Addressing filmmakers, and television and radio announcers, Deng made it clear that culture must serve the party leadership's aims of economic reconstruction.⁷⁶

Economic modernization, in Deng's terms, has evolved into an unlikely mixture of philosophies which have given rise to slogans such as "Socialism with market forces," "One must get rich first," and others which run counter to orthodox Maoist and communist thought. For precisely this reason, films of all genres attempt to instill Deng's values in peasants and urban workers. Film titles, such as "Ways to Make Fortunes," make clear that this aim is not supposed to be disguised or hidden. Although this comedy shows "the contradictions" of trying to become rich, the moral of the movie is that prosperity is possible for peasants who are resourceful, honest, and upright.⁷⁷

A recent film release, "He is in the Special Zone," conveys a similar message to the urban worker. This film is a tribute to the builders of Shenzhen, a thriving Special Economic Zone designed to attract foreign

73. Ronald Smothers, "Bewilderment and Dismay Voiced by U.S. Sports and Culture Groups," *New York Times*, 8 April 1983.

74. "1983 Outsanding Films," *China's Screen* 1984, no. 3, p. 2.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Deng Liqu, "China's Cultural Policy," *Beijing Review* (19 December 1983), p. 5.

77. "Ways to Make Fortunes," *China's Screen* 1984, no. 2, p. 24.

investment and advance Chinese industrialization. Because they are "highly-skilled and enterprising," Shenzhen's builders are dubbed "1980's heroes." To an American audience, the film's glorification of Chinese "familiar with advanced electronic and laser technology," and "working in up-to-date facilities" may be unbelievable.⁷⁸ Moreover, the woman worker's Western-style trench coat and camera, or the man's tie and TV may seem very ordinary. But to any Chinese audience converted to Deng's policies by the improvements in living standards, the film's heroes and their privileged way of life bring a message of hope for China's future.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how a specific cultural form, film, has been manipulated to accomplish political aims. The PRC leadership, under both Mao and Deng, has repeatedly used film to consolidate domestic power and influence foreign policy. The U.S. has sporadically used films to bolster bilateral relations with China, both in times of war and peace, and to promote commerce.

Through Mao's swings between promotion and censorship of China's film industry we can trace his evolving vision of "culture for politics sake" which served to establish and perpetuate his communist regime through mass mobilization. Deng's treatment of films reflects his re-orientation of Party priorities to modernization and his careful courting of peasant worker and urban intellectual elite alike. The parallels between changes in film and internal changes in leadership, ideology, and policy emphasize the persistent partnership of politics and culture in China. Any national leader seeking to legitimize his ideological definition of China's identity and to maximize his political leadership has taken advantage of this interaction.

Through the export and exchange of American films to China the U.S. government has sought to build cultural and political bridges to China during volatile years of expansionist trade, World War, Cold War, and, more recently, recognition and friendship. Though intended to promote understanding, the Chinese manipulation of cultural relations has at times bewildered U.S. policymakers, as in the Hu Na case.

No simple explanation exists for the persistent lack of U.S. understanding of cultural relations, particularly during the last decade. Culture has embodied both the symbol and substance of political relations; cultural exchanges have accurately reflected gains or losses in bilateral political relations. Culture allows the Chinese to make symbolic foreign

78. "He Is in the Special Zone," *China's Screen* 1984, no. 3, p. 20.

policy statements without seriously jeopardizing economic or political relations, thereby satisfying the need to be tough with the West for their domestic audience, but at the same time avoiding a foreign backlash that would harm their long-term goals. Halting relations in such areas as tourism, trade, or a refusal to appear at the Olympics would have blocked important inflows of foreign exchange and damaged China's international prestige, neither of which China could afford. Hence the lesson from the Hu Na incident should not be, as one American official commented, that "the Chinese do not seem to understand the political realities in the U.S." or that the Chinese actions "don't matter,"⁷⁹ but that Americans should remedy that lack of understanding of the cultural realities of the Chinese government.

Deng has set a complex agenda for China which poses significant risks and considerable challenges. Despite official assurances that Deng's shift is a permanent condition, many domestic and foreign observers remain skeptical. Based on the volatile history of the Chinese Communist Party and the memories of the Cultural Revolution, the potential for disruption is considerable. Meanwhile the United States is taking strides in the direction of political and economic interdependence with the People's Republic as manifested by substantial direct investment. The American stake in China extends far beyond mere sentiment or causal interest. As such, U.S. policymakers will do well to understand what their Chinese counterparts have long used in their own behalf: culture, as illustrated by film, is an accurate gauge by which to monitor Chinese temperament and an effective means of working toward political and economic goals.

79. "Nineteen Events with U.S. Canceled by China — 'Overreaction,' U.S. Says", *New York Times*, 8 April 1983.

