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The Rise of Chinese Nationalism since 1982 reflected in Chinese Cinema.

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at nationalism in China since the 1980s. It attempts to examine whether nationalism is increasing by investigating whether an increase is reflected in the arts, in particular Chinese cinema. The logic behind this is that if nationalism is a politicisation of arts, tradition and culture then an increase in nationalism should be reflected in arts, tradition and culture. The topic of nationalism in China has become important due to its possible effects on what is seen as China's great role on the world stage in terms of international economics, security and diplomacy.

This study takes a post-modern approach to the question. It looks at the theories of nationalism, as well as the debates, which have revolved around Chinese nationalism, with a focus on nationalism in Chinese cinema. In particular the study uses post-modern/post-structuralist methods, such as discourse analysis, and theory such as nostalgia cinema, to analyse and compare six films, which have been produced by Mainland Chinese directors since 1982. These films were selected based on fieldwork conducted in China and it is from the analysis of these six films that the study comes to a conclusion, attempting to add to the debate on nationalism in modern China.

Keywords: Nationalism, Chinese Cinema, Postmodernism, Nostalgic Cinema

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Growth of Nationalism in China

Chinese people's faith in the traditional ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began to waver in the mid-1970s as a consequence of the Cultural Revolution. The decline was escalated by the economic reforms introduced under Deng Xiaoping. While some reforms directly contradicted Marxist/Maoist thought, others opened China to the world, bringing with them foreign ideas. By the early 1980s the Party had loosened its ideological control. Abandonment of much of the CCP's ideology in favour of a market economy left the party open to an attack on the grounds of a lack of legitimacy. This attack came in the form of the 1989 student demonstration in Tiananmen Square. The government, fearing similar incidents, "launched an extensive propaganda campaign of education in patriotism, appealing to nationalism in the name of patriotism to ensure loyalty in a population that was otherwise subject to many domestic discontents" (Zhao 2004: 9), in order to rejuvenate China's national spirit, to strengthen the unity of the Chinese minorities, to reconstruct a sense of national pride and to "build the broadest possible coalition under the leadership of the CCP" (ibid.). The result of this campaign has been an unprecedented level of nationalism amongst the Chinese people, not seen since the May Fourth Movement. The growth of nationalism, defined as "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation" (Smith 1993: 1), in China has mainly been fuelled by the State. However, it is now considered by some academics such as Zhao (2004) and Hughes (2006) that nationalism in China is now self-perpetuating and out of the government's control. As nationalism is the politicisation of culture and the reinvention of a country's myth, traditions and history (Gellner, 1983, Anderson, 1991, Hobsbawm, 1990 and Anagnost, 1997) then this new form of nationalism should be reflected in the art of the Chinese people. This paper looks at one area of Chinese art - film - and explores whether Chinese cinema reflects the level of nationalism that academics claim exists in Chinese society.

1.2 Background of Chinese Cinema Since 1982-2006

“At the Fourth National Congress of Literature and Art Workers in 1979, Deng announced that the CPC would no longer demand that literature and art serve politics since such a demand had often been abused in the past to allow interference in literary and artistic creation” (Xiaoming & Yanru, 2000: 39-40). This meant the birth of an era of unprecedented artistic freedom for cinema in the PRC. What emerged from this new found freedom was a group of filmmakers dubbed the Fifth Generation. “These young filmmakers¹, who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy...helped create what is now generally known as the ‘Chinese New Wave’, a cinema noted for its artistic inventiveness, its reappropriation of the rich cultural heritage of the nation, and an eagerness to deal with social issues” (Ning 1990: 32).

In 1989 three major events occurred which greatly affected Chinese cinema. The first was the Tiananmen Square massacre. The Tiananmen massacre seemed to put the finish to the new Chinese cinema. In the aftermath of the event many figures of Chinese cinema went into exile and many productions were halted. However by the end of 1989 many of these figures had returned using their international reputations as well as foreign financial backing as a safeguard. The events of 1989 however signalled the end of much of the artistic freedoms that filmmakers had enjoyed since 1979 (ibid).

Secondly, in 1989 the government reclaimed its role as overseer of Chinese cinema. After the 1989 events the government began to invest heavily in leitmotif films, particularly targeting the younger generation. Many studio and individual directors were more than willing to co-operate with the government in making these films, as it allowed them to accumulate political capital without any financial risk as the films were heavily subsidised by the state (Yingjin 2004: 285). By the early 1990s state funded films accounted for 25% of film output (Zhu 2002: 911). These films were not without their success. They present a view of history, which appeals to people’s sense of nostalgia.

¹ Zhang Junzhao, Zhang Yimou, Chan Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Wu Ziniu, Hu Mei, and Zhang Zeming were all members of the Fifth Generation

The increasing need for commercial success was the third major factor that changed Chinese cinema after 1989. “Film studios...changed from state-financed cultural institutions to industrial enterprises...they now have to raise their own revenues to cover most of their expenditure” (Xiaoming & Yanru, 2000: 40-41). After the introduction of reforms, the film studios fell under the contractual responsibility system which meant that the financial running of a film was in the hands of the studio². Financial independence for the studio meant that films now had to make money or at least break even. The relationship between film producers and viewers had changed. During this period other leisure industries, such as television and karaoke bars became popular (ibid: 41). This had a particular affect on the Fifth Generation; the filmmakers had begun to win a number awards at international film festivals, but many of their films had been commercial failures. As a result of commercialisation, the film industry had to depend on urban residents for income, as only they could afford such leisure. This reflected in the films of the Fifth Generation who began to depict the life of urbanites rather than rural residents, which had previously been the focus of their attention.

Commercialisation of Chinese cinema did result in marginal directors such as Feng Xiaogang, who got his start on television moving into film, gaining popularity. He pioneered a formula of populist plot combined with product placement to ensure commercial success. The influence of Hong Kong cinema that had been ignored by some Chinese film historians such as Cheng Jihua (Poshek 2000: 199) became even more apparent during the 90s. The Hong Kong film industry’s main export, martial arts films, became more and more popular with mainland audiences, and by 1999 held 19% of the overall moviegoers viewing preferences (Jiqun 2000: 80) (A). Seeing the popularity of martial arts films, the Fifth Generation filmmakers began to produce such films, combining martial arts with historical feature films, producing some of the most successful commercial films in the Chinese box-office the film *Hero* being one such example. Political pressures were also a catalyst for the Fifth Generation move into martial art/historical epic. Although films about real life were still popular

² Also under the planned economy the China Film Corporation (CFC), which was under the control of the state, was in charge of distribution of films, payment of fees, promotion of the film and production of extra prints (Zhou, 2002: 907).

amongst audiences³, such films were often politically sensitive and required government approval before they could be shown in theatres. These films were branded ‘government propaganda’ as a result. They failed to win approval at western film festivals, which are considered the gateway to western markets. Zi (2000: 51) calls this the Human Right Bias of the western film community⁴. In order to achieve commercial success in both domestic and foreign markets, as well as gain government approval, many mainland filmmakers began to make historical martial art epics⁵.

Despite being abandoned by the Fifth Generation of filmmakers, the avant-garde style of filmmaking remerged in the 1990s with the growth of the Sixth Generation. This group of young filmmakers consisted of underground and marginal directors who operate from small studios. The Sixth Generation removed themselves from their predecessors in a number of areas. It associated itself more with urban landscapes. It dealt not with culture/tradition but with modern sensitivity, adopting an individualistic perception, a documentary effect rather than a grand/historical epic, which had made the Fifth Generation so successful. These films are low budget; therefore need little commercial success to allow them to operate without government approval, as they do not need as much access to theatres as big budget films need in order to cover their costs. However as Yingjin (2004:290) highlights, many of the Sixth Generation filmmakers have started to make more commercial films.

1.3 Research Question

If nationalism in China is no longer state-led, then it is out of the control of the Party. This could not only be an unstable force for China, but also for the international community. If this is truly the case then this should be reflected in the commercial films produced by the Mainland Chinese film industry. In order to investigate this

³ Jinyue’s (2000: 89) survey of Beijing University students showed that films depicting actual life were the most popular genre of film amongst the students (34.2%). Jiqun’s (A) (2000: 80) survey backs this up, showing that overall the Chinese moviegoers viewing preferences were films that depict a modern life.

⁴ Zhang Yimou withdrew his film *Not One Less* from the Cannes Film Festival after critics branded it a propaganda film. This film was a failure in the western market; a market that was even more valuable to Chinese filmmakers due to the explosion in the illegal DVD trade in China. Sheldon (2005: 129) (B) points out that “widespread piracy is a major cause for the decline in film audience”

⁵ For example Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* 2002, Chen Kaige’s *The Emperor and the Assassin* 1998 and Feng Xiaogang’s *The Banquet* 2006

situation, this paper will first look at the works of other academics working in the field of cultural nationalism in China. Then six films will be selected based on fieldwork conducted in Shanghai, China over a period of a month. During my fieldwork I conducted five formal interviews and an internet poll, the purpose of each venture was to determine which films would be analysed for this study. The following six films were selected *The Banquet* (2006), *To Live* (1994), *Hero* (2002), *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1998), *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) and *The Big Shot's Funeral* (2001). These six films will be analysed in order to deduce whether they contain nationalist sentiment. The paper will then come to a conclusion as to whether or not commercial Mainland Chinese films have become nationalistic. This should give us an indication of the level of nationalism in China due to the fact that cultural arts become a political tool when nationalism increases in a country. Can the nationalism that academics suggest is commonplace in Chinese society, be found in Chinese cinema? This is the question that this paper hopes to answer.

2. Nationalism

2.1 Theories of nationalism

Theories of nationalism can be divided into two major categories: ethno-symbolism and modernism, with the latter being subdivided into socio-economic developmentalism and cultural constructionism.

2.1.1 Ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolism consists of two departure-points for the analysis of nation formation. The first departure point is to look at what Smith (2000: 12) describes as a “historical cluster”, meaning the collective memory of a nation; its myths, heritages, values, traditions, symbols for cultural community formation etc. The second point is the part played by ethnies⁶. An ethnie is defined as a named group with a common myth of descent, culture, historical memories, a link with a historical territory and a measure of solidarity (ibid). Armstrong (1982), Hutchinson (1994) and Smith (1986, 2000) suggest that many modern nations are formed on the basis of pre-existing

⁶ Ethnic ties and ethnic communities.

ethnic groups, which over the course of history dominate smaller ethnic groups that lie within a given territory, incorporating them into their group⁷. Civic nations are now formed where barriers to entry are low; an individual is only required to have resided in the territory for a given period of time, speak the language and adopt the culture, while an ethnic nation requires its members to be born into the ethnic group (Smith 2000: 16). It is the power struggle between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism within a modern state (which tends to be a civic nation) that causes nationalist sentiment to grow. Ethnic nationalism will grow if the ethnic group feels their identity is under threat and civic nationalism will grow if the national identity (which is normally the identity of the largest ethnic group e.g. the identity of the Han ethnic group in China is often considered to be the national identity in China) is under threat. Ethno-symbolism nationalist theory would therefore argue that the nation is not a wholly novel idea and its roots are deeply set in ethnic nationalism. Many post-colonial and post-modernist writers argue with the ethno-symbolism theory of nationalism. However they would argue that the nation is a western concept spread to the rest of the world during the colonial era. Nationalism developed in these areas as a method of resisting colonial powers. This was done either by mobilising the workforce in order to create an industrial-based society, as in the case of Meiji in Japan, which would be economically capable of resisting colonial rule; or by resistance through non-cooperation or violence against a colonial power, motivated by loyalty to an imagined community, which was created by elites within an ethnic group. These groups will often co-operate with other ethnic groups in order to expel the colonial power e.g. Gandhi, India.

2.1.2 Modernism

Ernest Gellner's 1983 book *Nations and Nationalism* is the foundation of modernization nationalism. Gellner (1983) argues that the nation is a modern concept, developed as a result of the need for a system of organisation, which would best deal with the industrial revolution. This system demanded the creation of a common identity and language amongst the new work forces of the industrial revolution. This

⁷ Smith (2000: 14) says there are two ways in which an ethnic group form a nation. The first way is laterally, whereby the elites of an ethnic group, whose boundaries are extensive but who have no cultural interest in the lower class e.g. the Normans and the French. The second way is vertically. "This is a much more compact demotic community with high barriers to entry in which all classes share more or less in a common (often religious) culture" (Smith 2000: 14) e.g. Jews and Irish

was done through the amalgamation of the history, tradition, culture and language of people living within a given territory through using a process called nationalism. Workers become more mobile as they could move easily within a nation given their common identity and language. They would also work harder, as they not only work for themselves, but also for their country. In short Gellner believes that nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness, rather it is the invention of nations where they do not exist⁸.

However within modernization nationalism theory, there is some debate. While those who follow Gellner's theory have become known as socio-economic developmentalists, those that stay within the modernization nationalism theory but disagree with some of Gellner's key points have become known as cultural constructionists. Hobsbawn (1990) and Anderson (1991) are the two main proponents of cultural constructionist nationalism theory. Hobsbawn believes that nationalism is a way of controlling the masses that were becoming class-conscious. He believes that the nation was invented through fabrication of tradition and manipulation of history and mythology. Anderson takes a different approach to cultural constructionism, believing that nations are imagined, as even in the smallest nation members will not come face to face with every other member of the nation. Therefore an imagined community based on fabrication of tradition and manipulation of history and mythology is needed in order to motivate people to work, kill and die for other members of this imagined community. Nations and nationalism emerge in the social space left by declining religious/language communities and monarchies, which began to falter due to the onset of the print and industrial revolutions. These revolutions allowed the spread of ideas on a mass scale through development of media and popular culture (books, newspapers and later radio, television, film and the internet). It also allows for the development of mass education systems where the public were

⁸ Gellner's theory sets four basic foundations for other Modernization Nationalism theories outlined by Smith (2000: 4).

- (a) Nationalism is a relatively recent novel concept.
- (b) As a social structure the nation is also a relatively recent novel concept.
- (c) The international nation state system is also a relatively recent novel concept dating back to the Treaty of Westphalia.
- (d) "All three nationalism, nation and the international order of national states are the product of specifically modern conditions namely capitalism, bureaucracy, industrialism, urbanisation, secularism and the like" (Smith, 2000:4). This is what differs modern nation states from community in pre-modern epochs.

greatly exposed to the fabrication of tradition and manipulation of history and mythology, which helped to create the imagined community. Having created this imagined community in the minds of people they become willing to work, kill and die for this community. This loyalty is known as nationalism.

2.2 Nationalism in China

Zhao (2004) claims the construction of Chinese nationalism is based on common language, customs, values, religion, history and the biological and social perpetuation. He claims these aspects of Chinese identification “were not forced into a differentiated national consciousness until the changing external environment, particularly globalisation of the European-dominated nation-state system, compelled it” (Zhao 2004: 38). Anderson (1991) distinguishes between pre-modern forms of state such as the dynastic empire found in China and modern nation states. He points out that in pre-modern states ruled by a form of monarch, the state is focused on a central power i.e. the monarch. However a modern state is defined by given territorial boundaries. Those living within a pre-modern state are bound together by their common positions, as subjects under a monarch, however in a modern state people are citizens with rights and therefore need motivation to be bound together. This motivation is found in the form nationalism. Yahuda (2000: 22) suggests that the motivation for Chinese nationalism comes from the idea/myth of a united Chinese state/culture, which has been in existence and has been centrally administered since history began. In China this nationalism first developed amongst China’s intelligentsia as an anti-imperialist/anti-western movement, which became more widespread resulting in the Boxer Revolution. Later it developed into Han ethnic nationalism/anti-Manchu movement, which resulted in the fall of the Qing dynasty. Nationalism in this new modern state remained an elitist movement in China until the full-scale invasion by Japan, where nationalism became a mass movement with the CCP playing a major role in the transformation (Zhao 2004: 37-119).

Nation building under socialism became the ideology, which held together the Chinese state until the introduction of reforms in the late 1970s. There is a general consensus that the CCP began to lose their ideological control due to the reforms,

which resulted in the events of 1989. In order to regain control, the CCP intensified its campaign to increase nationalism amongst the Chinese public. The education system, the arts and the media were all employed to achieve this goal⁹. Duara (1993: 10) states “nationalism is quintessentially a politics of culture...because national loyalties and identities are typically embodied in cultural media”, suggesting that it is the politicisation of Chinese culture that has increased nationalism. Hughes (2006) argues that the opening up of China to the forces of globalisation has caused the rise of Chinese nationalism, which in turn has caused a revival of what is considered Chinese tradition. However he also concedes that the politicisation of Chinese culture by the government has played a major role in the rise of nationalism. Jilin (2002) argues that Chinese nationalism is an empty symbol, which attempts to use a misreading of Chinese history to justify anti-western movements. He claims that some groups in Chinese society have pushed for a return to ancient Chinese traditions, which would replace the modern political identity with an identity that is in the interest of a particular party. It is here that nationalism loses its soul. “Once nationalism loses its...soul, it becomes the synonym for blind anti-foreign sentiments, blind egotism, or self-righteousness” (Jilin 2002: 35). Yahuda (2000: 34) takes a similar view in that he argues that patriotism/nationalism is in the interest of the leadership as not only does it demand the loyalty of the people but also because the leadership determines the characteristics of this nationalism through a misuse of history and tradition. “It is they [the leadership] who ‘control history...and ensure that history serves their purpose” (Yahuda 2000: 34). One method of determining the character of nationalism is through film. As early as 1987 the government had become concerned with the content of new wave Chinese cinema and set up a special committee to supervise the production of films based on major revolutionary historical events. These productions were intended on reinstalling political ideology and nationalistic pride in the population (Yingjin 2004: 240)

⁹ In November 1993 “the CCP Central Propaganda Department, the State education Commission, the Ministry of Broadcast, Film, and Television, and the Ministry of Culture Jointly issued a Circular on Carrying out Patriotic Education in Primary and Secondary Schools throughout the country by Film and Television” (Zhao 2004: 218)

2.3 Nationalism in Chinese Cinema

Anagnost (1997) argues that the re-emergence of the concept of “speaking bitterness (suku)” in the literature¹⁰ of China has been a contributing factor to the rise of nationalism in China. “In the culture of Chinese socialism, history was not destroyed but reinvented...much of...socialist culture was based precisely on the power of narrative to recall the past, albeit an invented one” (Anagnost 1993: 67). Speaking bitterness allows people to view themselves as victims of an immoral system rather than viewing their own fate as the cause of their problems. It works not by applying to conscious intelligent but as a system of representations or images that encourage people to see their place in history in a new light but which is still plausible to their sense of reality. Speaking bitterness created a process in China, which merges the consciousness of the Party with that of the people, which legitimated their claim to represent the people in the construction of the Chinese nation state, first through class struggle and later through the socialist market reform era. Berry and Farquhar (2006) and Zhiwei (2002) highlight the use of the concept of ‘speaking bitterness’ in the many reinvention of the story of The Opium Wars. It is described by Berry and Farquhar (2006: 21) as the best example of the ‘speaking bitterness’ (suku) form of history in Chinese cinema¹¹. Berry and Farquhar (2006: 21) argue that the success of the film version of the Opium War is based on ‘the logic of the wound’. It “implies a disruption of a supposedly eternal pre-existing nation and it also demands diagnosis and remedy” (ibid).

Berry and Farquhar (2006) also argue that the way a male character is portrayed in Chinese cinema is an example of nationalism in Chinese cinema. They suggest that the use of Confucian teaching; (loyalty to the ruler, filial piety towards parents and ancestors and brotherhood, the last requiring the submission of the younger to the older brother) in the story line of Chinese film particularly in historical films is a mythic symbol of national identity¹² (Berry & Farquhar 2006: 135-136).

¹⁰ Here we understand literature to mean newspaper, novels, academic works, cartoons, television programs, comic books and films

¹¹ The film reopens old wounds, reflecting contemporary problems; e.g. the justification for the Opium war (free trade), voiced by Queen Victoria (Marchetti 2000: 297) reflects Chinese talks with the WTO.

¹²This can also be seen in Hong Kong brand of Chinese nationalism. This nationalism normally occurs in Hong Kong Kung Fu films where “nationalism...comes to be literally embodied on the male body of stars like Bruce Lee...and Jet li, [and] on a body of knowledge...more specifically Chinese martial arts” (Desser 2005: 281).

Hung (2000: 256) argues that historical films¹³ try to give an accurate view of the past while in nostalgia films “history is represented in an...allegorical form, and it may be placed on an imaginary plane [therefore]...the sense of history in nostalgia genre refers not to the genuineness of what exactly happened...but to the imagination of human history” (ibid). Jameson (1991) argues that nostalgic cinema reconstructs history through images without any historical depth. He presents nostalgia cinema as a product of postmodernism where history is repackaged or reproduced by the media changing people’s perception of culture and tradition as well as history itself. This would mean that through the media, interest groups could change people’s understanding of tradition, culture and history, which form the foundation for nationalism into whatever form suits their needs. This fits well with Jilin (2002) and Yahuda’s (2000) theories that nationalism in China is being manipulated to serve the interests of particular interest groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section deals with the methodology used whilst researching this paper, and is divided into two parts. Firstly, the paper looks at the different perspectives used to construct the paper. This will highlight where this paper lies in terms of its positivist/interpretivist standpoint, as well as other important issues, such as subjective/objective and quantitative/qualitative research. The second part of this section looks at research methods outlining clearly how primary and secondary source materials were collected and analysed.

3.1 Perspectives

The critical perspectives necessary to conduct this research require a number of key features due to the nature of the project. The research project involves the use of fictional materials as a qualitative primary source of information. This is rejected in most traditional dichotomies of science, however “postmodernists and poststructuralists reject the traditional Western dichotomy in science, which excludes

¹³ Here Hung understands “historical films in a general sense refers to the genre of documentary in which authenticity of historical reference is emphasized” (Hung 2000: 256)

certain expressive forms from the legitimate repertoire...fiction (which is defined in negative relation to facts) and subjectivity (which must be eliminated in order to achieve objectivity)” (Clifford 1986: 5). The use of fiction as part of the qualitative research project results in a mixture of fiction and science as tools and materials. Both postmodernists (PM) and poststructuralists (PS) would allow such a mixture of source materials to occur. This can be explained by the fact that “PM/PS abandons the normal social scientific ambition to adopt a rational approach, and to proceed from that to the presentation of reliable results, or interpretations which demonstrate the right meaning of a phenomenon. Instead postmodernists “parasitically play off the ironies, incoherencies, inconsistencies and inter-textuality of sociological writings”, (Featherstone 1988: 205).

“Postmodernism...is a broad socio-cultural trend...it is not easily captured by ready-made definitions” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000: 151). The same could be said about post-structuralism. However both PS and PM have a number of common features, which would be useful for this paper i.e. the construction of history and multiple interpretations. This paper looks at how events, (historical, current and fictional) are used to create nationalism amongst a particular people. In the case of historical events PM/PS believe that history is constructed to represent the versions of events which best suit a particular powerful social group. They believe that the voices of the marginalized are excluded from history. Therefore history cannot be taken as a truth as it does not represent all of society. “Through a careful treatment of the rich variation viewpoints and signals, postmodernists [and to a certain extent poststructuralists] aim to avoid the mainstream interest in finding a pattern, discovering or creating an order or a system or working with deeper meaning, mechanism or logic that explains contradictions and inconsistencies” (Alvesson 2002:129).

If this paper is to adopt a PM/PS perspective then it too will have to look at a rich variation of viewpoints. It will also have to accept the fact that all these viewpoints will come from a variety of backgrounds with their own ambitions and values and therefore cannot be taken as a neutral fact or be separated from their values. This becomes particularly important when it comes to discussing nationalist theory and the history of nationalism in China, as it will allow the paper to consider

the context in which the materials of both the theoretical and historical backgrounds have been written. Considering their context will allow us to accept that the information they provide is not value neutral and therefore the end result of this project will not be value neutral. Some PS/PM writers try to create a paper that is value neutral by using multiple interpretations. PM/PS view integrated theoretical frames of reference with caution. “It should also be recognized that such frames of reference can impede understanding and mislead the researcher or reader, as a result of their totalising effect and their tendency to present reality as unambiguous and accessible to representation in the chosen theoretical idiom” (ibid: 132). In order to avoid this dilemma PM/PS attempt to use a number of alternative interpretations counteracting the totalising effect of traditional theories. However, Alvesson (2002) does warn us that in order to conduct multiple interpretations, one must have deep knowledge of a number of theories. If one attempts such a technique without a deep knowledge of these theories, the result will be narrow or will restrict to paradigm theories (ibid: 133). He also claims that multiple interpretations need a lot of theoretical and analytical work with creative ideas at each stage which will be time consuming and stressful (ibid: 134). Considering this, a multiple interpretive approach is out of reach for this project. However this paper has attempted to be as subjective as possible, using an inductive approach to source material, which came from a number of different theoretical backgrounds. It is clear from the discussion on perspectives that this paper will take an interpretive approach that combines features from the PS/PM perspective. This will mean the study will take an epistemology standpoint, as this would allow for an interpretive approach to be taken¹⁴.

3.3 Analysis and Interview Techniques

The primary sources for this project consist of films and interviews, while the secondary sources comprise of academic texts. Both primary and secondary sources are analysed using a PM/PS perspective¹⁵. However both perspectives are somewhat

¹⁴ A discussion of the ontological and epistemological standpoints for this study is available in Appendix 1.

¹⁵ “Discourse analysis reveals a certain similarity with poststructuralism, in that people are assumed to be inconsistent and language is not seen as reflecting external or internal (mental conditions). DA differs from poststructuralism (PS) mainly in that it is an empirical and systematic research endeavour, avoiding the sometimes rather wordy philosophising that characterizes PS” (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000: 203)

lacking in the practicality of analysis. For this we must turn to discourse analysis (DA). “Discourse analysis¹⁶ claims that through language people engage in constructing the social world”, (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000: 205). “Discourse analysis means therefore the analysis of the relationships between concrete language use and the wider social and cultural structures”, (Titscher 2000:149). DA starts with the following assumptions: “1. Language is used for a variety of functions and has a variety of consequences. 2. Language is both constructed and constructive. 3. The same phenomenon can be described in several different ways. 4. Consequently there will be considerable variations in the accounts of it. 5. There is no foolproof way...of handling these variations...which are literal or accurate from those which are rhetorical or incorrect, thus avoiding the problem of variation which faces researchers working with a more ‘realistic’ language model” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000: 205). DA also exposes hidden power relations within a text, similar to the way activity theory looks at interrelations within text. In activity theory, activity has been differentiated from action; where activity has an explicit or implicit motive, while actions are particular and goal-oriented and constitute the activity” (Durmaz 1999: 105). A postmodernist critique of the use of activity theory is that it “underestimates the significance of interpersonal and psychic dynamics, which shape the story” (ibid: 110). By using DA we hoped to expose these power relations while still remembering the significance of interpersonal and physical dynamics that shape the story, which the discourse creates. Discourse itself can refer to extended samples of spoken and written language (Fairclough 1992: 3) and “discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions as well as the relations, identities and institutions which are behind them” (ibid: 64).

DA is derived from the same neo-Marxist teaching as PM/PS. The writings of Michel Foucault will also have a big influence on the paper in terms of the formation of concepts¹⁷ and the concept of ‘order of discourse’¹⁸. However many of Foucault’s

¹⁶ There are three aspects to this: 1. People actively create accounts on a basis of previous experience (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2000: 205). 2. They are continually and actively involved in selecting some of the words used in the account (ibid). 3. “The chosen construction has its consequences: the mode of expression has effect, it influences ideas, generates responses and so on” (ibid).

¹⁷ “By ‘concepts’, Foucault means the battery of categories, elements and types which a discipline uses as an apparatus for treating its field of interest: he gives the example of subject, predicate, noun, verb and word as concepts of grammar” (Fairclough 1992: 45)

methods are designed for debate on science such as medicine and economics and is not best suited for research in areas such as media and sociology. Therefore this paper used critical discourse analysis (CDA) techniques¹⁹. CDA is concerned with social problems and its interconnection with cultural processes, structure and language. CDA perceives that language can be used ideologically. It identifies this by studying both power in discourse and power over discourse. While DA is interpretative, CDA “implies a systematic methodology and a relationship between the text and its social conditions, ideologies and power relations” (Titscher 2000: 146).

Fairclough’s approach is concerned with the constitution of text from diverse discourse (deriving from knowledge) and genres²⁰ (deriving from activity). This he refers to as interdiscursivity. It also relies upon Foucault’s ‘order of discourse’ concept to deal with the complex relationship of language as socially constructed and as socially determined (Fairclough 1993: 138)²¹. In terms of film analysis, this means that the paper considers the social context of the film both in terms of social setting within the film and the social context during the creation of the film.

During my fieldwork I conducted five semi-formal open-ended interviews. The purpose of each interview was to determine which films should be analysed in the study. However each interview was conducted with Chinese citizens who had received third level education, some of which had studied abroad and others who had or who were at that time engaged in film studies. This meant that not only did the interviews not take into account a wide sector of Chinese society; they also had an intellectual bias. All interviews were conducted through English with two interviews being conducted via email. This affected the power relationship in the interview, which could have affected the results of the interviews. I also watched more than 34 films when deciding which films would be used in the study. However for each film I had to rely on subtitles as the films were in Mandarin Chinese. This affected the

¹⁸ “The order of discourse of a social domain refers to the totality of discourse types and the relationships between them in this domain (Titscher 2000: 149)

¹⁹ Developed by Norman Fairclough.

²⁰ Genre; the use of language associated with a particular social activity (Fairclough 1993: 138)

²¹ Another source of information on CDA, such as Wodak (1996), allows us to see discourse as something not only embedded in a particular culture, ideology or history, but are also connected intertextually to other discourses such as feminism.

results of the analysis, as I was working from a translation and therefore an interpretation of the film rather than the film itself.

4. Film Analysis

4.1 Film Selection

During my fieldwork I conducted five formal interviews based on an open structure format, which allowed an open discussion on the Chinese film industry. The purpose of each interview was to determine which films would be analysed for this study. As suggested by my first interviewee, I set up an Internet poll to determine the best Chinese film since 1982 amongst students of journalism and film at Fudan University, Shanghai. The winner of this poll was *To Live*²² followed by *Beijing Bicycle*²³ and *The Big Shot's Funeral*²⁴. From my research of academic texts on Chinese cinema, I understand *The Big Shot's Funeral* to be an example of a commercial film. From my interviews I had garnered that many Chinese directors had started to make historical epics to gain commercial success. This was true in the case of the director of this film, Feng Xiaogang, who also made *The Banquet* (2006) a historical epic. This also lay true with Zhang Yimou, director of *To Live* and *Hero* (2002) also a historical epic and one of Mainland China's most successful films. I decided to compare the earlier film of each director with the later film, analysing both in order to see if nationalism can be found in either film. If it is only in the later film it should indicate that Chinese cinema has become nationalistic, if it is only in the earlier film it should show that Chinese cinema is moving away from nationalism. Some interviewees suggested that history in these historical epics is often inaccurate. To see if this is the case, I decided to analyse two historical films, which depict the same historical period and some of the same historical characters and storylines. I decided to compare *Hero* and *The Emperor and the Assassin* which both deal with the first emperor of China and an assassination attempt on his life. Finally I decided to analyse the film *Beijing Bicycle*, as it is an example of the work of the Sixth Generation. If this piece contains

²² Dir: Zhang Yimou (1994)

²³ Dir: Wang Xiaoshuai (2001)

²⁴ Dir: Feng Xiaogang (2001)

nationalism, it would suggest that nationalist sentiment is widespread, being found in both the margin and the mainstream.

4.2 *The Big Shot's Funeral* Dir: Feng Xiaogang, 2001

The Big Shot's Funeral tells the story of Yo Yo, a cameraman, who has been asked by Tyler, a world famous American director (currently remaking the film *The Last Emperor*) to give him a 'comedy funeral' shortly before Tyler has a stroke. Yo Yo sets out to fulfil Tyler's last wish, selling advertising space during the funeral to Fortune 500 companies. However unknown to Yo Yo, Tyler is not dead, meaning Yo Yo is now guilty of selling advertising under false pretences. Yo Yo then fakes madness to avoid punishment, however Tyler sells Yo Yo's story as a film and pays off Yo Yo's debts clearing him of charges.

Superficially *The Big Shot's Funeral* is a great example of the commercial form of Chinese cinema, which has made Feng Xiaogang famous, and few would consider that the film contains any form of nationalism. However when we examine the power relationship between the characters it becomes clear that the film displays nationalistic characteristics, although these are not the dominant theme of the film.

We start by examining Tyler, Yo Yo and Lucy's discussion about the Eastern and Western perspective of the Last Emperor of China displayed in the film *The Last Emperor*. The discussion revolves around the film's perception of the last emperor of China as a tragic figure. Tyler argues that this is an incorrect view that is designed for western audiences. He claims that Chinese people would never think in this way because they have a different perception on life. Lucy protests saying she thinks the emperor is a tragic figure and she is Chinese but Tyler points out that she was raised in the west with western perceptions. Yo Yo claims that Chinese people do not view the last emperor as a tragic figure. This discussion can be viewed as a promotion for Asian values as it attempts to show that western and eastern people have a different way of thinking. The idea of Asian Values and the idea that Chinese people think differently due to their unique culture, tradition and history, therefore cannot adopt western ideas such as democracy, is the cornerstone of Chinese nationalism.

Overall this film is more of an example of the wave of commercialism that has hit China over the last decade than the rise of nationalism in the country. However within this commercialism we see the selling point of nationalism. For example when designing Tyler's reincarnation video, Louis Wang insists that Tyler should come back as Chinese if not "it could injure the feelings of Chinese people". We see it again when Yo Yo and Wang are discussing what time to air the program. Yo Yo states that the Chinese audience must come first. From this we can see the importance of nationalism to the commercialisation process in China as a selling point.

4.3 *The Banquet* Dir: Feng Xiaogang, 2006

The Banquet is set at the end of the Tang Dynasty and the beginning of the Song Dynasty in a period known as the five Dynasties, ten kingdoms period (907-960 AD). The story is based on that of Hamlet. The emperor is poisoned by his brother, who usurps the throne and marries his brother's widow. The emperor's son, the crown prince, is haunted by the death of his father and tries to prove that his uncle is a murderer. In the end all lay dead but the emperor's widow.

The film is an example of Jameson's (1991) theory of nostalgia cinema. The film is set in a period of great political upheaval, however cultural activities such as the arts continue, unabated by the anarchy. This can be seen in the huge theatres and arts schools depicted in the opening scene. This suggests that not only did China have a sophisticated society that could produce such a high level of art but also that it could continue during an unstable period. Chinese audiences might feel a sense of pride that their ancestors had built such a sophisticated civilisation. This should create a sense of nostalgia for the heights of civilisation reached during this period. A number of scenes seem to be designed to create this sense of nostalgia. We see this clearly when the imperial palace is depicted as an enormous citadel towering over the city. Such a structure would be beyond the capabilities of most civilisations during that period of time. In the power relationship between the audience and the film this should give the audience a sense of superiority that their ancestors were so advanced. The positive depiction of Chinese bodies of knowledge such as martial arts and Chinese calligraphy can also be seen as part of building an air of nostalgia around the film.

The idea that Chinese culture could develop such sophisticated bodies of knowledge compared to the external world during the early 10th century helps to further develop the sense of superiority, as well as the longing to return to such a high stage of development compared to the outside world.

The various scenes of self-sacrificing for the state seem to suggest a certain honour in dying for one's country. Here we deal with the Chinese concept of 'face'. It can be understood usually by drawing "the distinction between *lian*, roughly understood as moral respectability, and *mianzi* as social prestige and power (Anagnost 1997: 53). Loss of 'face' would mean loss of honour or social standing, not only for oneself but also for one's family, something to which death would be preferable. To fail one's country would mean a loss of face. We can see this reflected in the scene where the assassins sent to kill the crown prince kill themselves on the bridge on learning they had failed the emperor. This could send the message that failure to serve the state means a loss of face; therefore if the state demands you become more patriotic then you obey and nationalism increases.

4.3.1 Comparison; The Banquet and The Big Shot's Funeral

When we compare the two films we see that Feng Xiaogang's earlier film *The Big Shot's Funeral* is an example of commercial filmmaking, while his later film is a historical epic. If we consider the surrounding in which both films were made, we can see that the later film was made after the success of other historical nostalgic films such as *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*. These historical films are less politically sensitive than films depicting modern Chinese society, which makes it easier to gain political approval. They give an image of China's glorious past and rich tradition, which inevitably creates a sense of pride and increases nationalist feeling. *The Banquet* is far more symbolic in terms of nationalism than his earlier film *The Big Shot's Funeral*. However when we consider that *The Big Shot's Funeral* was conceived and written while China was battling to host the 2008 Olympic Games, we can understand why the film presents the Chinese ability to stage a worldwide event as a great act of patriotism in a positive light.

4.6 *To Live* Dir: Zhang Yimou, 1994

To Live, tells the story of one mans life during some of the most important political events in China during the last century, namely the Chinese civil war, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The film begins in pre-war China. The main protagonist Fugai falls into debt due to a gambling problem and loses his house. Later he discovers that the man who took his house has been shot for counterrevolutionary actions. From that moment on Fugai decides to follow the Party faithfully. This results in the death of his two children²⁵.

This film displays very little in the way of nationalism; in fact one could easily consider it quite anti-nationalistic or anti-communist in the way it demonises the actions of the Chinese government. The running theme of the film is the danger of blind faith in ideology, represented by the death of Fugai's two children, and it is through this theme that the Chinese government is demonised. If we examine the cult of Mao, featured so prominently in the period in which the film depicts China in the 1960s, we can see how people are swept up in such mass movements. Throughout the scene depicting the 1960s, pictures or murals of Mao are prominent, overlooking every action of the main characters. This creates a god like symbolism around Mao, which is reconfirmed when Fugai's daughter marries the head of the local factories Red Guard and a picture of Mao is asked to bless the occasion. We can see that the cult of Mao takes on religious features and to go against such a movement would be similar to blasphemy, resulting in the same social discrimination or violent reaction. If we agree with Hughes (2006) and Zhao (2004) that nationalism has replaced communism and therefore the cult of Mao, the blind faith in the cult of Mao depicted in *To Live* should be replaced by a new blind faith in nationalism.

Nationalism is not the main theme of the film. One could easily argue that the main message of the film is to not let politics control or live your life. This can be seen in the closing scene of the film when Fugai talks to his grandson about what chicks grow up to be. This is a copy of an earlier scene where Fugai is discussing the

²⁵ Fugai's son, Younging, dies in a motor accident involving the Party district head when he is smelting steal at his school during the Great Leap Forward. Fugai's daughter dies during childbirth as her doctors, Red Guard students, remove the experienced doctor from the hospital and complications occur.

same topic with his son. In the earlier scene the chick grows up to be a communist, however in the later scene the chicks grow up not be a communist or capitalist but simply to ride planes and trains.

4.7 *Hero* Dir: Zhang Yimou, 2002

Hero is a historical film set during the Qin Dynasty. It tells the story of an assassin called 'Nameless' who, together with two other assassins, plans to kill the emperor of Qin. They are motivated to do this because the emperor of Qin has destroyed their home kingdoms in order to create a united China. The basis of Nameless' plan to kill the emperor is his pretence that he is a faithful servant of the Qin Dynasty. To prove this, Nameless brings trophies (swords, spears and calligraphy) from the other assassins, which Nameless claims to have defended in order to protect the emperor. The film then depicts how Nameless defended each assassin. However the Emperor sees through Nameless' plan, but Nameless still has the opportunity to kill the Emperor. The Emperor convinces Nameless that a united China is far more important than revenge for his destroyed kingdom, as it would bring peace and prosperity to "everything under the Heavens". Nameless is convinced and allows the Emperor to execute him, which is in line with Qin law. The other male assassin, 'Broken Sword' is also convinced but the female assassin is not. A battle occurs between the assassins and she is killed.

Zhang Yimou's *Hero* premiered in a much-publicized event inside the Great Hall of the People on Tiananmen Square (Yingjin 2004: 292). This would suggest that even before the premier, nationalism would feature heavily. We can see that nationalism is the main theme running through the film when we look at what Berry and Farquhar (2006: 164) suggest is one of the main messages in the film; that both 'Broken Sword' and 'Nameless' are both heroes as they submit to the principle of a united empire which will bring with it peace and progress. They propose a unique reading of the power relationship amongst the main characters of the film. They suggest that the Emperor represents a new China, which has a violent and patriarchal authority that will bring with it peace and erase the old China represented by the warriors (ibid). If we take this reading of the film it seems to carry a message, which

calls for the people of China to sacrifice ethnic nationalism/separatism or political ideology in order to united behind the CCP as they lead to progress and peace.

The idea of holding the nation state above all is clearly a nationalist statement. However there are also a number of other features of this film, which could be, considered nationalistic. Berry and Farquhar (2006) argue that the way a male character is portrayed in Chinese cinema is an example of nationalism in Chinese cinema. They suggest that the use of Confucian teaching in the story line of Chinese film is symbolic of national identity (Berry and Farquhar 2006: 135-136). Confucian teaching such as loyalty to the ruler, can be clearly seen when Nameless allows himself to be killed by the emperor in accordance with Qin Law. Feelings of loyalty towards parents, ancestors and brotherhood can be seen in the fact that the warriors seek to avenge the destruction of their home states.

Desser (2005: 281) argues that nationalism is embodied in the male body of stars like Jet Li and on a body of Chinese knowledge i.e. Chinese martial arts. If this were the case then the numerous displays of martial arts and sword play used in the film would suggest that it is highly nationalistic. What is also interesting is that neither one of the embodiments of nationalism (the warrior bodies or the warrior martial arts and swords skills) is used to harm the Emperor. If we take the Emperor to represent the state, then this could be read to suggest that this nationalism should not be used to attack the state itself; rather it should be used to protect it.

Another indication that nationalism is the overriding theme of *Hero* is the perception that history has not been accurately portrayed. Berry and Farquhar (2006: 167) outline how some critics saw this as a glorification of authoritarianism. They also point out how the film glosses over the fact that the first Emperor of Qin was a ruthless brutal leader. Three of the respondents interviewed for this study also pointed out the historical inaccuracies in *Hero*. A reconstruction of history would suggest that *Hero* is what Jameson (1991) labels 'nostalgic cinema'. Jameson (1991) claims that this genre of film reworks history, using images presented to change people's views of history and therefore of tradition and culture. One could easily suggest that Zhang Yimou has repacked this period of Chinese history in line with Jameson's theory, in order to embody the idea of a united empire/China in the mind of the modern Chinese

public. The film's attempts to link itself to Chinese history/culture are easily seen in the film's closing scene where the Great Wall is shown bathed in sun light.

4.5.1 Comparison: *Hero* and *To Live*

Yinjin (2004: 293) suggests that with his films, Zhang Yimou has now become an ally of the state. This was evident when he was chosen to shoot the promotional video for China's bid for the 2008 Olympic Games. This is a far cry from the anti-nationalist message, which seems to be running through his film *To Live*. His earlier work *To Live* seems to examine the events that occur due to blind faith in ideology and by no means are these events portrayed positively. However in *Hero* Zhang Yimou seems to be suggesting that submission to the state under a united China will result in peace and progress. If we take the stand that *Hero* is not a true representation of history then in accordance with Jameson's (1991) theory we can say the Zhang Yimou has repackaged historical events, changing people's perception of history through images. Into this new perception of history he has implanted the concept of a united China as a historical fact. This adds to nationalist sentiment by giving a historical background to calls for national unity and cooperation.

The motivation for Zhang Yimou's move towards nationalistic films is unclear. However this study can suggest two possible reasons. The first is the onset of commercialism in Chinese cinema. Martial arts films became more and more popular with mainland audiences by 1999 then held 19% of the overall moviegoers viewing preferences (Jiquan 2000: 80), holding a higher percentage among key demographics such as higher income earners. Seeing the popularity of martial arts films, the Fifth Generation filmmakers began to produce such films. Combining martial arts with historical feature films, which had also gained popularity²⁶ producing some of the most successful films at the Chinese box-office. Political pressures would also have been a catalyst for Zhang Yimou to move into martial art/historical epics. Films depicting politically sensitive issues like those dealt with in *To Live* would not have been approved by the government, which would mean less funding or an all-out ban.

²⁶ Historical films scored highly amongst key demographics with 29% in enterprise and organization cadres, which is higher than any other genre of film in the Jiquan (A), (2000: 80) survey.

This would suggest that there are forces within Chinese society that are changing Chinese cinema towards nationalism through political and commercial films.

If we look at the core value in both films, we see that peace and prosperity is at the core of each film. The goal of each of the main protagonists is to achieve a better life; for his people in the case of *Hero*, and his family in the case of *To Live*. Peace and prosperity could be seen as the core goals rather than any particular ideology. If this is the case then it would mean that Zhang Yimou has not changed the type of film he makes in terms of core values he has simply changed the settings.

4.8 *The Emperor and the Assassin* Dir: Chen Kaige, 1998

The Emperor and the Assassin is set in the year 221 BC and tells the story of the king of Qin, Ying Zhang who has made the unification of China his personal crusade. He is motivated to do this because he believes that his ancestors have given him the mandate to conquer the other seven states and unite China and believes that this will bring peace. In order to justify his attack on one of the seven states, Yan, he enlists the help of his lover, Lady Zhao his childhood sweetheart, who is from the state of Zhao where Ying Zhang was raised. She suggests that she fool the king of Yan into sending an assassin to kill the king of Qin. However the assassin she picks refuses to kill the king as he no longer wishes to kill people due to an event with a blind girl which results in her suicide. While Lady Zhao is in Yan, the king of Qin discovers a plan, which would see his mother's lover killing the King and usurp his throne. When the King crushes the rebellion lead by his mother's lover he learns that his father is in fact the prime minister. The prime minister commits suicide in order to protect the public face of the King. The King, stricken with grief, orders an attack on Zhao claiming revenge for the treatment he received as a boy in Zhao where he was held hostage. The armies of Qin destroy Zhao burning and killing everything as they move towards the capital. Lady Zhao learns of this killing and visits the King of Qin to convince him to at least save the children of Zhao. However after one child spits at Ying Zhang, he orders the children to be buried alive. This convinces the assassin Jiang Ke that the King needs to be killed. However he fails in his attempt, as unknown to him the King had his sword broken after he entered the castle. The King kills the assassin but Jiang

Ke dies laughing at the King because he knows the King has now become nothing but a brute and that history will judge him to be a monster.

The film displays a number of nationalistic characteristics, in particular when it deals with the unification of China. The Qin king believes that the unification of China is inevitable. This can be seen in the scene where he is arguing with the Prince of Yan who is threatening to kill the King of Qin in order to prevent him from conquering Yan and uniting China. The King tells the Prince that the Prince can kill the King but that China will still be united and Yan will still be destroyed but by a different King. This makes it seem like a united China is a predestined creation, that it has been decided by a higher being. The idea/tradition of a single power within this new empire was also portrayed in this film when the King says, “the empire will be united and there will be only one leader”. The King reaffirms this position later on in the film when he sits in the centre of a map, which displays the known world. This symbolises the King's position as the centre of all under heaven. This could possibly be a reflection of the position the CCP holds in China as the sole power or at least a reflection of a tradition, which the CCP has carried on.

The brutal actions taken by the King in order to unite and control the empire could be read as a justification of the uses of violence in running China, as this is how it was traditionally done. In turn modern Chinese rulers could justify the uses of violence by claiming that they are carrying on tradition. However in the director's commentary available on the DVD of this film Chan Keige admits that the King represents modern China but believes that the main message in the film is embodied in the assassin. He believes that the assassin's bravery in facing up to the future Emperor despite the intimidating surroundings of the cultural masterpiece that is the Qin palace is the main force of the film. He believes this symbolises the power one man has when he stands up to a great power. If this is truly the message behind the film and we take the director's intended message, then the main hero is a man who tried to prevent the unification of China and the main villain is a power hungry brutal killer who cruelly conquered independent states to create China. If this is the intended message, the film cannot be considered a nationalistic film.

4.8.1 Comparison: *The Emperor and the Assassin* and *Hero*

If we compare *The Emperor and the Assassin* with *Hero*, which deals with the same mythical tale then we see that they tell very different stories. By comparing the power relationship between the assassins and the emperor in each film we can see a major difference in who is portrayed in a positive light. We can see that in *Hero* the emperor is always shot sitting above the assassin, which is a sign of power. Also the emperor manages to convince the assassin that his goal of uniting the states into one empire is a positive move, as it will bring peace. This is a sign of not only the power of the emperor but also of the principle of a united China. However in *The Emperor and the Assassin*, the emperor is a much shorter man than the assassin and when the two characters are face to face the assassin seems more like the powerful character. When the assassin laughs at the emperor's plan of uniting China with his dying breathe this trivialises the emperor and his plan, reducing his power. Therefore in *Hero* the power relationship shows the emperor in a positive light and if we take the emperor to represent the modern Chinese government it therefore shows them in a positive light.

By comparing these films we can also confirm to an extent Jameson's (1991) theory of nostalgia cinema. Both films tell the same mythical story. However in *Hero* the emperor is shown in a positive light, as a bringer of peace, while in *The Emperor and the Assassin* he is generally depicted as a brutal killer. The fact that they are depicted differently shows that at least one of the films shows a false depiction of the past (perhaps both). This can also be seen in how the assassin dies in *Hero*. He allows himself to be killed as he thinks this Emperor will bring peace, while in *The Emperor and the Assassin*, the assassin is killed by the king through deception. The assassin then laughs at the idea of the King bringing peace. As at least one film has repackaged the past, adding new concepts and ideas and taking from it old concepts/tradition this can change people's perceptions of the past, which is one way of creating nationalism.

4.9 *Beijing Bicycle* Dir: Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001

Beijing Bicycle tells the story of Guo Liann-Guei, a boy from the country that has received a job with an express delivery company in Beijing. On the first day of work he is given a new up-market mountain bicycle in order to carry out his deliveries. He

is told that within a month he will have the bicycle paid off and he will own the bike. On the day he pays off the value of his bicycle, it is stolen. His boss tells him that if he finds the bike he can keep his job. Through his cousins he finds out that a young city boy, Jian who live in the Hutong area of Beijing, has the bike. He attempts to steal the bike back but Jian's friends stop him. Guo then tells Jian's father, who confronts his son demanding to know where he got the bicycle. Jian explain that he brought the Bicycle at a second-hand bicycle market. The father then demands to know where he got the money to pay for the bicycle. It appears that Jian stole the money from his father. His father gives the bicycle to Guei, however Jian has not given up on the bicycle and he and his friends try to steal it back. Guo and Jian come to a compromise and share the bicycle using it on alternate days. One day Jian see his ex-girlfriend with an older boy Da Huan. Jian decides to hit Da Huan with a brick. Then he gives the bicycle to Guo, however Da Huan's gang decide that Guo was in on the plan to hit Da Huan with a brick and chase him. This results in Jian and Guo being badly beaten, as well as the bicycle being damaged. The final scene is of a beaten Guo carrying his bicycle down a busy Beijing road.

This film is clearly a commentary on Chinese economic development in terms of the gap between urban residents and urban migrants who come from the rural areas of China. Guo represents the rural migrant who knows little about city life and is easily fooled. Jian represents the modern urban resident who spends his time learning tricks on his bicycle and playing video games, living a more westernised lifestyle. If we take each character to represent their respective group, when we analyse the power relationship between them, we find that Jian is a much more powerful character than Guo. Jian is always surrounded by his friends, while Guo is always alone when the two characters meet. Guo never looks at Jian and rarely speaks unless spoken too. When the two characters meet Jian controls the situation through his dialogue or indirectly through his friends. This shows Jian to be the more powerful character, therefore represents urban residents to be more powerful than the rural migrants. This is a negative image in terms of nationalism. The film shows the uneven power distribution between the rural and urban people of China. This is not a message of national unity; in fact it portrays a message that there are limited resources for which Chinese people must fight each other. Rural people band together in an effort to fight their urban counterparts for these resources. The film also sends the message that the

government can do little to help. If we taken Jian's father to represent the government or at least the establishment, we can see in the scene where Jian father gives the bicycle back to Guo, that despite the fact that Jian has been told it is no longer his bicycle, he still attempts to take it back and his father is powerless to stop him. If we look at Gellner's (1983) modernisation theory of nationalism, we see that nationalism is created in order to mobilise workers from different backgrounds to co-operate in order to benefit the nation. This film seems to send a message, which the broken bicycle represents, that this co-operation will result in neither group benefiting.

4.9.1 Comparison

If we compare *Beijing Bicycle* to the other films we have analysed we see that it deals with the life of ordinary modern Chinese people, while the other films portray either important historical events or extraordinary events in modern times. The film uses a much simpler story to represent an issue that is very important in modern China, that is the conflict between rural migrants and urban residents. In terms of nationalism it shows the potholes that come with Gellner's (1983) modernisation theory of nationalism. It shows the conflict between the rural and urban groups in modern Chinese cities and this conflict is a matter of survival, something, which is a stronger motivator than nationalism.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that some interpretations of these six films reflect nationalism, which some academics claim exists in China today. In particular historical films like *The Banquet* and *Hero* repackage history feeding people's sense of nostalgia. This adds to history's modern concepts such as the nation state and modern ideas such as a united China. This matches Jameson's (1991) theory of nostalgia cinema in which he argues that this genre of film reconstructs history through images. He presents it as a product of postmodernism where history is reproduced by the media changing people's perception of history. This suggests that through the media, particular groups have the ability to change people's understanding of history. History forms the foundation for nationalism, as it gives us our understanding of culture and tradition. It is the political

uses of culture and tradition that creates nationalism therefore those who control our understanding of history control nationalism.

George Orwell once said, “Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past”. It seems that film directors have the opportunity to manipulate people’s understanding of the history of a nation through their films. However it is unclear whether a positive nationalistic message is the direct focus of these films (with the possible exception of *Hero*). It is also unclear that nationalism is found in all areas of Chinese cinema. It seems that nationalism does not play a role of great importance in films at the margins of Chinese cinema, which can be seen in the films of the Sixth Generation as we can see from *Beijing Bicycle*. It is also unclear if it appears in commercial film like *The Big Shot’s Funeral*, and where it does appear it is not necessarily positive.

This study has shown that no coherent pattern of nationalism has appeared in every genre of China’s film industry. However historical films, which deal with ancient China seem to have a theme of nationalism running through them even if this is not the intention of the director as we saw in *The Emperor and The Assassin*. Academics such as Gellner (1983), Jameson (1991) Armstrong (1982), Hutchinson (1994), Smith (1986, 2000), Zhao (2004) Anderson (1991) and Anagnost (1997) have all highlighted the important role history plays in the formation or acceleration of nationalism. The commercial success of historical films such as *Hero* would suggest that this genre of film is quite popular in China and that people feel a connection with the film and the message it carries therefore opening up the possibility that it reflects modern Chinese society and that nationalism is a part of that society. However without knowing how popular films like *Hero* are in the illegal DVD trade, which far outsell cinema tickets, there is no way of comprehensively proving this theory. This study has left us with an indication that nationalism is reflected in historical films produced by the Chinese film industry. This shows to some extent that there is some level of nationalism in Chinese society.

6. Bibliography

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1: Ontology and Epistemology

7.1.1 Appendix 1.1, Ontology

Ontology is the view of the world i.e. what is in this world to know about? It views reality as a common-sense physical or perceptual entity, meaning that reality from an ontological point of view is a changeable historical-cultural configuration, i.e. reality can be seen differently from different perspectives, rejecting the idea of total history, “the project of a total history is one that seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle - material or spiritual – of a society, the significance common to all phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion – what is called metaphorically the ‘face’ of a period” (Foucault 1969:10). Instead, ontology views reality as a hidden set of power relations. Here we look for causalities or patterns. It seems clear that in a text of this nature, it would be quite difficult to verify cause and effect within the text. However it seems to be much easier to find patterns. Seeing reality as a hidden set of power relations means that, in terms of discourse, reality is constantly created when we communicate. It cannot be fixed and is constantly being evolved or changed. In terms of ontology, we must question what a text can tell us about the world. Neutral facts are needed to take a positivist ontological approach to this text. Instead we need to look at the hidden power relations within the text or discourse. Trying to comprehend relationships between the

characters would be very subjective e.g. the relationship between the main characters and nature. So from an ontological standpoint, we search for patterns and values meaning that we would use an interpretive approach when analysing this text.

7.1.2 Appendix 1.2, Epistemology

Epistemology is a view of knowledge i.e. what we can hope to know of this world. It deals with origins or sources of knowledge. This means that one must consider their preconceptions of the text. I must consider that a number of text were originally in Chinese (some meaning may be lost in its translation into English), as well as one's own preconceptions of knowledge of Chinese culture/society. The structure of the knowledge situation must be considered, i.e. can knowledge be derived from permanent/set situations or does knowledge derive from discourse? It is difficult to derive set facts from a fiction film so it must be conceded that this is a situation where knowledge is derived from discourse. One would need to look at the different types of knowledge. Again we encounter the debate between positivism and interpretivism. If a positivist approach were undertaken, it would be objective. It would involve explaining the text, through deduction and quantitative methods. This approach is not suitable, as the text is documented in such a way that the meanings are hidden behind symbolism, thus can only be interpreted and not directly explained. We can only make this statement by being subjective by trying to understand the text rather than explaining it. This means we need to be inductive when finding facts and realise that these facts are connected to values: values that one may hold, values of the author, values of his culture etc. We must also accept that these values cannot be separated from the facts. The limits of knowledge gained from the text must also be considered. Can I make any grand claim? From analysing the text I cannot make such a claim but can merely attempt to understand the hidden power relations within the text.