
Introduction to Special Issue of "China's Sixth-Generation Directors and Their Films" —Exploring the multifaceted dimensions of China's "Independent Cinema"

Xiaoping WANG¹

Huaqiao University, China

Email: wxping75@163.com

Although China's "independent cinema" produced by the so-called "Sixth-Generation auteurs" was (and might still be) an academic hot issue, in recent years there are very few researches. Thus far, most of the published works are collections of individual papers. Before the end of the first decade of the 21st century, four books related to China's independent cinema came out year by year, starting from 2006. The first collection of theses on this subject, *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*, edited by Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, was published by Rowman & Littlefield. The next year, another collection *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Zhang Zhen, was published by Duke University Press, which was a compilation of papers presented in a symposium held six years earlier (2001) in New York. In the next year, 2008, McGrath Jason published his *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* in Stanford University Press, applying the term "postsocialism" and "postsocialist modernity" to describe China's Sixth-Generation auteurs, in which he takes a specific study of Jia Zhangke as the representative figure. And then, Michael Berry offered his monograph *Jia Zhangke's "Hometown Trilogy"* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), directly examining the key auteur in this cinematic movement.

However, after 2010, there are few books dealing with the filmic phenomenon published in the English academic world. In addition to Wang Qi's *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema*, published by Edinburgh University Press in the year 2014, my two books studying the narrative content, aesthetic feature and the cultural politics of this "independent Chinese cinema," published by Palgrave Macmillan and Brill respectively, signal that this research is still a much-needed one that calls for more academic engagement. Therefore, this special issue aims to reexamine China's "independent cinema" produced by the so-called "Sixth-Generation auteurs."

Three papers here cover differing aspects of the subject concern. My article "China's 'New Wave Cinema': A Reflection of the Sixth-Generation Auteurs and Their Productions" explores

¹ Xiaoping Wang is chair professor of Chinese studies at Huaqiao University

the following questions: In what circumstances did the group of auteurs emerge? What kind of social reality was transcribed, projected, and articulated in the movies? The cinema that this generation created has been compared to Italian Neorealism and French New Wave, and to a certain extent could be regarded as China's cinematic "new wave." What are the similarities and the differences between these different cinematic movements? And, finally, by which conditions did China's "New Wave Cinema" more or less reluctantly disintegrate and disperse? It starts the survey with a contextualization or better, historicization of this idiosyncratic cinematic phenomenon.

Justine Gustafson's "The Search for Family in Post-Socialist China: A Look at the Sixth Generational Film *The Orphan of Anyang* (2001)" examines how the modern Chinese family is constructed in post-socialist China. In her view, the characters in the film *The Orphan of Anyang* represent individuals in the underbelly of Chinese society, who are struggling to construct families based on traditional Chinese cultural influences as well as western influences. In the wake of the end of the cold war, individuals had to seek support from the concept of the traditional Chinese family. However, this return to tradition is challenged by the post-socialist realities demanding adaptations to new marketable professions as well as changes in gender roles and hierarchies within the family. The analysis helps us to understand contemporary Chinese society as well as the narrative of the film.

Yishui Chen's article covers a series of wider-ranged issues. It undertakes a historical and cultural analysis to explore the urban space and the discursive transformation in Chinese contemporary urban cinema since the Cold War. Through a study of the contents and forms of the Chinese urban cinema from 1990 to 2019, she finds that this cinema shows a process of discursive development. During the 1990s, the urban space in Chinese cinema has presented a feature of narrowness and darkness, while the class identity of the space is mainly identified as the under-class people or the unemployed stratum. However, since the new century, particularly after 2013, with the economic rise of China, Chinese urban cinema has displayed a new face; filmmakers focus on demonstrating the glamorous international metropolis, and the people living in the urban space onscreen is identified as middle- and upper-class. Nevertheless, this "new urban cinema" contains various cultural symptoms.