

1963 电影《红色娘子军》笔记

- Directed by Xie Jin 谢晋; best film artist of Maoist cinema
- For ages, the Chinese for the most part had always understood economic inequality and poverty as the result of natural cycle of fortune and calamity. In *Confucian Analects*, it says that “life and death is a matter of Fate, and rich and powerful the business of Heaven” (死生有命, 富貴在天; 論語. 顏淵). Confucians who were concerned with social problems did see poverty or scarcity (pin, 貧, gua, 寡) as proper subject for ethical discussions and espoused the ideals of primitive egalitarianism: “Worry not scarcity but inequality, not poverty but chaos; therefore with fairness and equality, there is no poverty; with harmony, there is no scarcity; and with peace, there is no riot”, (不患寡而患不均, 不患貧而患不安; 蓋均無貧、和無寡、安無傾). To the extent that poverty could result in competition and might affect community ecology, it warranted moral attention but the issue was always subsumed in a larger conversation about rule by benevolence (仁政) to reduce infightings within social groups such as the traditional family. Although outside the context of Darwinian evolution, Confucian emphasis on filial piety was a necessary choice since more human beings are killed during infraspecific competition than through interspecific competition. The introduction of Marxism to China was indeed a revolution in thinking of society in terms of class struggle and historical materialism.
- Idealized in Maoist cinema, the destruction of the landlord class and the gentry culture (鄉紳文化) is the logical development of this change in Chinese humanity. The overthrow of the landed class was less initiated by those who were supposed to benefit from the land reform than necessitated by how the Left intellectuals understood and envisioned social progress for China. Nonetheless, it is an important change ever to occur in the history of Chinese thought when the ideals of Confucianism as a state religion were superseded by the theory of class struggle—a form of political realism.
- “While Marx had first seen man-made violence and oppression of man by man where others had believed in some necessity inherent in human condition, he later saw the iron laws of historical necessity lurking behind every violence, transgression, and violation.”² The analysis of Hannah Arendt indicates also the depth of this film and identifies the logic triumphant in the story that portrays poverty as *economic* inequality, rather than as something inherent in human condition. Poverty is not to be endured as something unfortunate but to be systematically dealt with as something unjust. This presupposition underscores the rationale of land reform (土改, *tu gai*) and *fanshen* (翻身) of the 1950s in which over two million landlords were wiped out. The film is thus a milestone in Maoist cinema making a strong case for the total destruction of the culture of landed gentry.
- In the frame of Marxism, *The Red Brigade of Women* shows the Chinese revolutionaries as acting the same way as those in the Russian, American and French revolutions. The film brings the Chinese one step closer to imagining a nation-state, as opposed to a country or empire. (天下兴亡, 匹夫有责; 国家兴亡, 匹夫无罪) The rise and fall of the moral world is the responsibility of every man; The rise and fall of the country, the common people are innocent.
- In pre-Confucian China, the so-called nation during the pre-Qin China periods (夏、商、周 2,000-221 B.C.) could be just a village, community, or town populated by a clan. Such a “nation” (guo 國) was modeled on the family system (jia, 家) in which everyone’s

rights and obligations were derived from his or her place in that clan. In the words of Mencius (385-304 B.C.), the extended family is what guarantees the world peace where everybody is kind to his relatives and respects his elders. (“人人親其親、長其長，而天下平”) Within this moral context that is the basis for law and justice, the issue of social equality would never rise. “old society” since the unification of China, the imperial power of the monarch was supreme and absolute, from top down through each and every social stratum: from the king 天子, to dukes and princes 诸侯, minister 卿(貴戚卿、異姓卿), scholar 士, down to commoner 平民 and slave 奴隸 such as Xi'er. The lowly social status of commoners and slaves left them with little to fend for themselves because, as the truism would have it, “the official must die if the monarch desired it; and the son must die if his father wished it”. (君要臣死，臣不得不死；父要子亡，子必亡 one of the key areas in which Western social thought like Marxism has great impact on Chinese thinking, namely, the presupposition of a contractual model for human beings as equals.

- Characters such as Wu Qinghua (Qiong-hua) and Xi'er stand as victims of as well as rebels against an oppressive and exploitative economic system. Mao's idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat is sanctified by the same reason that produced the many excesses of the French Revolution, as historical precedents of *fanshen*. Speaking of “Reign of Terror” during the French Revolution, Mark Twain was not bashful about the violence against the aristocrats and honor the principles of liberty, benevolence and equality. His remark establishes one of the points of comparison between the French and Chinese revolutions in their excesses when people were put to death by the guillotine or the firing squad. “There were two ‘Reigns of Terror’ if we should but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon a thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor terror, the momentary terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the axe compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold insult, cruelty, and heartbreak? What is swift death by lightning compared with slow death by fire at stake? A city cemetery could contain the coffins filled by the brief Terror which we have all been so diligently taught to shiver and mourn over, but all France could hardly contain the coffins filled by the cold and real Terror—that unspeakable bitter and awful Terror which none of us has been taught to see in its vastness or pity as it deserves”
- The Chinese versions of liberty and equality are therefore just as worthy of praise or blame as other revolutions in the world, depending on one's political leaning as a liberal or conservative. “The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself”.⁷ The Maoists are undoubtedly the latter, convinced of the need to create a new political order even if it means the total destruction of the old culture deemed repressive. It is within this much larger ideological context that the film achieves its significance, namely, that politics, not culture, determines the success of a society. Mao viewed the landed gentry as a part of the feudal culture of emperors and princes (帝王將相的文化) that kept people ignorant about social equality and freedom. “Only the people”, Mao theorized as a Marxist, “are the real makers and movers of world history” (人民，只有人民，才是創造世界历史的真正動力). The film directors believed in the power of communism to save China from itself.

- In the view of Liang Shuming (1893-1988), a teacher and Confucianist, political actions and revolutions cannot solve Xi'er's problems. He saw Western ideas of social progress as indications of man's inability to live in harmony in nature and with each other. The like-minded Chinese saw harmony in human existence. Man is in harmony with himself, which is why the saying 'treat all under heaven as one family, and middle kingdom as one person'. The universe is in harmony with Man at its center. Confucians always feel amazed by and proud of human existence in the universe. They value mankind, especially truly trusting humanity and never viewing Man as a problem to be solved. With this view on harmony, people reach rationality through clear mind and serenity of the heart. "All lives exist in terms of and are limited by their being objects, but mankind is able to transcend his own objectivity, wherein lie his clear mind and harmony. This is because, clarity and harmony are all matters of life. Man knows what he sees and validates what he believes. Once he seeks, he looks outward where life is not. Nowadays, the scientific method, without exception, begins with seeking objective reality outside and ends with finding shadows of life, the mechanical parts of it, and finding problems and not harmony. It is true that Man is a problem, but only in so far as that problem originates in him. That much is true. But one must know, the problem is with Man and the solution is also with him, and not outside him. If you have no faith in Man, what can you do? Believe in god? Have faith in the country? Westerners do but Chinese do not. ...In Confucian school of thought, we find the triumph of rationality as the creed does not worship the heaven, nor god, nor emperor, nor state power, nor the majority, unless these stand for rationality. If Confucians were to have an ideology (ism), I would think it a rationalism. For over two millennia, with the Confucians taking the lead, the Chinese have cultivated a social ethos or national spirit, rarely seen in the past few decades; but it has been upon this spirit that the survival and continuation of the Chinese nation have rested in the past. This national spirit, in the final analysis, has two features: a strong will to move forward, and a deep feeling of camaraderie with others."⁸
- D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) expressed similar conservative views, with harsh words to say about democratic revolutions from which contemporary secular culture emerged. He referred to such social movements as a type of self-imposed ignorance or "the religion of the self-glorification of the weak, the reign of the pseudo-humble. This is the spirit of society today, religious and political".⁹ To Lawrence, the spread of communism or the Church opposition to monarchical rule is but expressions of man's collective fear, not because of his nobility or love. "There's no getting away from it, mankind falls forever into the two divisions of aristocrat and democratic. ... We are speaking now not of political parties, but of the two sorts of human nature: those that feel themselves strong in their souls, and those that feel themselves weak. ... So that religion, the Christian religion especially, became dual. The religion of the strong taught renunciation and love. And the religion of the weak taught *down with the strong and the powerful, and let the poor be glorified*. Since there are always more weak people than strong in the world, the second sort of Christianity has triumphed and will triumph. If the weak are not ruled, they will rule, and there's the end of it. And the rule of the weak is *Down with the strong*. They [the poor] had a will to destroy all power, and so usurp themselves the final, the ultimate power. This was not quite the teaching of Jesus, but it was inevitable implication of Jesus' teaching, in the minds of the vast mass of the weak, the inferior. Jesus taught the escape and liberation into unselfish, brotherly love: a feeling that only the strong can

know. And this, sure enough, at once brought the community of the weak into triumphant being; and the will of the community of Christians was anti-social, almost anti-human, revealing from the start a frenzied desire for the end of the world, the destruction of humanity altogether; and then, when this did not come a grim determination to destroy all mastery, all lordship, and all human splendor out of the world, leaving only the community of saints as the final negation of power, and the final power. ... The community is inhuman, and less than human. It becomes at last the most dangerous because *bloodless* and insentient tyrant. For a long time, even a democracy like the American or the Swiss will answer to the call of a hero, who is somewhat of a true aristocrat: like Lincoln: so strong is the aristocratic instinct in man. But the willingness to give the response to the heroic, the true aristocratic call, gets weaker and weaker in every democracy as time goes on. All history proves it. Then men turn against the heroic appeal, with a sort of venom. The will only listen to the call of mediocrity: which is evil. Hence the success of painfully inferior and even base politicians. Brave people add up to an aristocracy. The democracy of thou-shalt-not is bound to be a collection of weak men. And then the sacred 'will of the people' becomes blinder, baser, colder and more dangerous than the will of any tyrant. When the will of the people becomes the sum of the weakness of a multitude of weak men, it is time to make a break. ... Many men are socialists out of perverted power lust. And this form of lust is diabolical, deadly, it is a fearsome form of hate. Even Lenin was pure hate. The rest of the bolsheviks are usually impure hate. It comes from the perversion of the nature of power in a man. ... Lenin was a pure poet of action as Shelley was of words. ... He was, in a sense, the god of common people of Russia, and they are quite right, in the modern sense, to worship him. 'Give us this day our daily bread'. And Lenin wanted above all things to give them their daily bread. And he could not even do that. What was love in theory became hate in practice.¹⁰

- This debate over progress is better elucidated by Henry Sumner Maine (1822-1888), a British comparative jurist, for whom the history of legal systems from primitive to progressive is a movement from status (identity) to contract. In "primitive" societies, people tended to view their rights and obligations as part of their social status, namely, their place in society as blood relatives, courtiers, father-son, plebeians, the king or his subjects. While these social statuses defined a person in China for millennia, in more "progressive" societies such as ancient Rome, people freely enter into contractual relations and derive their rights and obligations accordingly. In traditional aristocratic society (when there was not much industry or trade to speak of), the moral authority of the patriarchal system explained justice in terms of the individual's *social status* and his or her social obligations.
- Communism thus signals an important moment in Chinese history from which a new human subject emerges, no longer complacent with what Andrew Plaks defines as the affirmative view of the universe. "The ubiquitous potential presence of a balanced, totalized, dimension of meaning may partially explain why a fully realized sense of the tragic does not materialize in Chinese narrative. But in each case the implicit understanding of the logical interrelation between these fictional characters' particular situation and the overall structure of existential intelligibility serves to blunt the pity and fear the reader experiences as he witnesses their individual destinies. In other words, Chinese narrative is replete with individuals in tragic situations, but the secure inviolability of the underlying affirmation of existence in its totality precludes the

possibility of the individual's tragic fate taking on the proportions of a cosmic tragedy. Instead, the bitterness of the particular case of mortality ultimately settles back into ceaseless alternation of patterns of joy and sorrow, exhilaration and despair, which go to make up an essentially affirmative view of the universe of experience.¹¹

- In *The Red Detachment of Women* (1958), the same democratic instincts also move Wu Qionghua, a bond maid to a local gentry on Hai Nan Island, again underscores the need for revolution and calls for the violent overthrow of the local despots. The story is set in the armed struggle between the Red Army and the Nationalists, in which the personal vendetta of the female lead against landlord Nan Batian (played by Chen Qiang, the same actor who appears as Huang Shiren). Wu Qionghua to represent the spirit and humanity of a new China. She is the new proletariat subject personified, the same as Xi'er, who desires the total destruction of the aristocratic culture and the aristocrats (landed gentry).



When Qionghua escapes from Nan Batian who owns her as *nexum*, a form of *mancipatio*, she is whipped because “ancient law knows next to nothing of individuals. It is concerned not with individuals, but with families, not with single human beings, but groups”.¹² But with economic developments worldwide, this type of ancient law became problematic as more people began to accept the assumptions that “all men are born equal” and that “all men are born free” in the very first lines of American Declaration of Independence, assumptions that can be traced all the way back to the time of the Romans.

- As a footnote in Chinese and World history, Wu Qionghua’s story demonstrates the adage “that which natural reason appoints to all mankind is called the Law of Nations”, according to which she as a free person cannot be held against her will. In the scheme of the communist revolution, she has every right to rebel against the ancient patriarchal law and customs that keep her a slave. Her freedom or emancipation is not complete with her joining the Red Army. In the fight for communism under the guidance of the brigade commander Hong Changqing, she realizes that there are ways in which her existence as a woman is inextricably connected to the cause of communism to liberate all those in the world who are also victims of social injustice like herself. With the help of Hong Changqing who helps her join the Red Army in the first place, Wu soon understands that the real end to her misery and suffering does not come when she kills Nan, which she later does, but when social classes are eliminated through the communist struggle and when all individuals enjoy the basic rights and equality everywhere. This moment in which she wakes up to her new identity and real purpose in life is quite dramatic; it is also a perfect example of an individual exercising her free will. She stops herself from walking out of the confinement where she is being disciplined for trying to shoot Nan Batian and exposing the position of the red army troops. It is the first instance in which she, now no longer a captive, chooses to return to her holding cell—her new identity as a revolutionary soldier—instead of running away the moment she could,
- To illustrate the magnitude of their new identity as revolutionaries, Hong Changqing asks Wu Qionghua to meet with him in the red army headquarters, furnished with the pictures of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. During their meeting between an officer and foot soldier, Hong asks her to find Coconut Grove on a map of China. When she realizes that

it is too small to be even represented on the map, Hong tells her that personal courage, when coming from one individual, is not enough to liberate the whole country because the social justice that guarantees her freedom goes far beyond individual grievances or courage. It is predicated on the liberation of the proletariat in the whole world. He expects her to become a conscientious red army fighter willing to lay down her life for the cause of communism like himself. This scene of a political initiation takes place in front of the portraits of Marx and Lenin as founders of world communism, as well as a world map. These stage props illustrate the scope and style of Chinese imagination in which film auteurs like Xie Jin depict the Self, the nation and the world in the 1960s. In other words, personal identities have roots and origins in the concept of free will rather than in one's ancestral lineage or social status. As the story ends, Wu takes over the commanding post of Hong after his death as a communist martyr. She says to her detachment: "Pick up your guns and beat down the enemy no matter he is Nan Batian or Bei Batian. It is not enough for us to do so. Our children need to take over the fighting. We'll fight till the entire proletariat class is liberated". Her speech is followed by the theme song: "March forward, march forward. Soldiers' duties are heavy as women's grievances are strong". As Wu goes off to wage a much greater battle against economic exploitation and political oppressions everywhere in the world.

- Xi'er and Wu Qionghua are the human faces of a new Chinese historical subject. They can be said to represent the triumph of liberty, equality and individual rights as these precepts were understood in the West. But if put within other cultural contexts, the Chinese experiment with freedom through communism can be viewed very differently, especially as time goes on to allow more social progress to take place. The disparaging remarks by D. H. Lawrence about social democracy provide an alternative vision of social change. To do full justice to the two films as important (artistic) articulations of Chinese communism, one would be remiss to ignore the objections to social revolutions as "the democracy of thou-shalt-not" by "a collection of weak men" rule by "the sacred 'will of the people' [that] becomes blinder, baser, colder and more dangerous than the will of any tyrant".
- In the violent cinema of Red Classics, revolution as a destructive force also creates a new humanity and its own antithesis to validate the need for more revolution because, as pointed out by political theorist Hannah Arendt, that such a revolution often became a form of totalitarianism to stamp out true freedom, especially when in the name of economic necessity. "Necessity and violence, violence justified and glorified because it acts in the cause of necessity, necessity no longer either rebelled against in a supreme effort of liberation or accepted in pious resignation, but on the contrary, faithfully worshipped as the great all- coercing force which surely, in the words of Rousseau, will 'force men to be free'—we know how these two and the interplay of them have become the hallmark of successful revolutions in the twentieth-century, and this to such an extent that, for the learned and the unlearned alike, they are now outstanding characteristics of all revolutionary events. And we also know to our sorrow that freedom has been better preserved in countries where no revolution ever broke out, no matter how outrageous the circumstances of the powers that be, and that there exist more civil liberties even in countries where the revolution was defeated than in those where the revolutions have been victorious".¹⁴ Such may be an irony in the history of Chinese communism, so honorably conducted for the cause of freedom and liberty, only to have brought into

existence a totalitarian state. To the directors of this violent cinema, the Chinese owe their enlightenment and initiation into modern politics where they could begin to understand, as the father of American Revolution Thomas Jefferson did, that “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants”.

- Thanks to the power of these red classics, the Chinese have come to see themselves through the lens of communism. These films rendered the political changes at the time comprehensible when landlords who knew how to farm the best were being murdered like Huang Shiren and Nan Batian. Characters such as Hong Changqing, Da Chun, Uncle Zhao and Wu Qionghua are products of the hero myth, like that of Heracles who killed many monsters. These revolutionary heroes in film serve the function of saving people whom the monster threatens. The films give the communist movement moral and political dimensions in which later historians could reinterpret it as cold-blooded murders no different from Nazi extermination of the Jews. The red classics may be viewed as new cultural horizons on which the Chinese begin to see themselves as a new people and nation, making revolutions that during normal times must be squelched as mob activities.
- According to Rene Girard looking at social upheavals from outside political ideology, those who are well-off tend to “enjoy all sorts of protection and privileges which the disinherited lack” but who, during periods of crisis, often find “that the odds of a violent death at the hands of a frenzied crowd are statistically greater for the privileged than for any other category,” because “crowds commonly turn on those who originally held exceptional power over them”.¹⁶ The legacy of the red classics is the legitimacy of violence in the name of *Fanshen* and communism, which resulted in a humanity not self-conscious of the facts that real heroes are sometimes misguided, that just because one believes one is acting heroically does not mean one really is. The hero myth used to connect China with the rest of the world in the name of liberty can be the ultimate refuge of the scoundrel who may just be acting in a mean-minded or vengeful way.
- The films also develop the national spirit into the cult of Mao who, as the ultimate folk hero, represented the right values for the Chinese people at the time. It is this cult of personality that characterized the Chinese worldview. This is the extent to which it matters whom Mao was and how to deal with the legacy of communism, because any meaningful change in Chinese identity and character is contingent on such political matters. So much of what people think of themselves as individuals or a society becomes crystalized and solidified when they judge Mao, the person behind the *fanshen* land reform. This is ultimately his legacy: as a populist and demagogue, he profoundly changed the ways people think of themselves in China.
- Maoist cinema deserves more critical attention than it has commanded so far. What needs to be studied in depth is the powers of violence in art to destroy history and reshape humanity. In both stories, murder is aestheticized to proselytize the myth of a new world (myth on the Left) in which Mao or his name is a synonym with a good life, the same way as the bourgeois myth of capitalism (myth of the Right) may constellate itself in an advertisement of a sexy young girl standing next to a brand new racecar to signify the ultimate personal fulfillment. The value of Maoist cinema is that of myth as Roland Barthes understands it, “Myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi: it is enough that its signifier has two sides for it always to have an ‘elsewhere’ at its disposal. The meaning is always there to present the form; the form is always there to outdistance the meaning. And there never is any contradiction,

conflict, or split between meaning and form: they are never at the same place”.¹⁷ Today, when most of the Chinese have outgrown Maoism and begun to discredit communism, the *fanshen* myth no longer has its alibi “elsewhere” to guarantee its truth and significance. However, it is not possible to completely decouple the Chinese revolution from the idea of freedom as historically conceived in these red classics. The violence in revolutionary art still chaperones the discourse on freedom and democracy with which the Chinese people resonate. Thanks to these films, the Chinese for the first time were able to imagine their daily life as intimately connected with other peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America, destined to inherit the world as its rightful owners. Their heightened “democratic instincts” still compel them to feel outraged by official corruptions and social privilege the way Xi’er and Qionghua feel towards the people who lord over them.

Notes

¹ Hannah Arendt; *On Revolution*. Pelican Book, 1963, p.22.

² Hanna Arendt; *Ibid.* p.63.

³ Mao Zedong, *The Talk in Yan’an on Art and Literature*; Foreign Languages Press, 1955

⁴ Adolphe Jensen. Quoted in *Violence and the Sacred*, by Rene Girard. p.91.

⁵ Mark Twain, quoted in *Fanshen* by William Hinton, p.101

⁷ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, quoted in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (2000), ed. by Samuel Huntington who wrote the Preface “Cultures Count”

⁸ Liang Shuoming, *The Substance of Chinese Culture*, (1942) pp.126-7.

⁹ D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, Granada, 1981, p.9

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, *ibid.* (1931) pp.8, 17, 129-130.

¹¹ Andrew Plaks, *Chinese Narrative*, pp.351-2

¹² Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection to the History of Early Society*, Pantinos Classics, 1917. p.123.

¹³ Henry Sumner Maine, *Ibid.* p.144-5.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Ibid.* p.115.

¹⁵ Rene Girard. *Things Hidden since The Foundation of the World*. p.288.

¹⁶ René Girard. *The Scapegoat*, John Hopkins University Press, 1986. p.19.

¹⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Noonday Press, 1957, p.123