The Encoding of Female Subjectivity

FOUR FILMS BY CHINA’S FIFTH-GENERATION WOMEN DIRECTORS

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I remember the experience of watching Hu Mei’s Nüer lóu (Army Nurse, 1985) as a teenager; I felt very touched and immediately identified with the protagonist, who was my age at the beginning of the movie. I did not know how to express my feelings then, but I knew the film was very “different.” In my early twenties, I was exposed to feminist theories in Canada, first as a masters student in comparative literature and then as a PhD student in film studies. Excited and inspired by feminist film theorists’ dynamic readings of Hollywood’s “women’s films” and experimental films that emerged during and after the feminist movement, I have been consciously looking for works by Chinese women directors that may also answer to Claire Johnston’s call for a “counter-cinema” within the mainstream of feature filmmaking and Teresa de Lauretis’s incitement to a women’s cinema that not only points to a “feminist doxaesthetic” but also redefines “both private and public space” in “a new language of desire.” Meanwhile, as a former science student from China, I was hoping to “prove” to what extent Western feminist film theories are valid and useful in the context of Chinese women's cinema. From 2002 to 2008, I extensively researched the development of women’s cinema in China and interviewed fourteen important female directors from four generations.
I find that China's socialist system did allow a large number of female directors to work in the state-owned studios from the mid-1950s to the early 1990s, and as a result, there exists a remarkable though not large repertoire that can be considered women's cinema. From this repertoire, I chose four films to discuss here: Hu Mei's *Army Nurse*, Liu Miaomiao's *Maizi sheng sui* (Women on the Long March, 1987), Li Shaohong's *Honggen* (Blush, 1994), and Peng Xiaolan's *Jiazhuang mei ganjie* (Shanghai Women, 2002). These four women directors belong to China's "Fifth Generation" and are among a small number of women directors who succeeded in their transition from the socialist system to the market-oriented mode of film production. As members of the Fifth Generation, these women participated in a movement that renewed both film form and film content in the 1980s, and, like their male peers, revealed a strong concern for the individual's fate set against the backdrop of social transformations. In their works focusing on female characters, they often construct a distinctive female subjectivity that is absent in works by their male counterparts. Unlike many women directors from older generations, who prioritize "humanity" as a larger and more significant theme than "womanhood," Fifth-Generation women embrace the significance of feminine consciousness and perspectives. They may not make films for women all the time, but all of them have contributed works to the corpus of women's cinema. My choice of films here is determined by their strength in encoding female subjectivity into film narratives, which (re)write women's histories/stories, (re)construct women's speeches/voices, and/or (re)map women's spaces/places. My discussions will help to, in the words of Mary Ann Doane, "specify female subjectivity via narrative mechanisms" and "trace the contours of female subjectivity."  

China did not have a feminist movement like that which took place in Western countries from the 1960s to the 1970s, but this does not necessarily mean that China lacks the preconditions of cinefeminism. When women filmmakers in the West liberated their works from "illusionist representations" of Hollywood films and turned to experimental cinema "in search for an outlet for their inner experiences, sensations, feelings, and thoughts," Chinese women directors had their battles mainly within their own sociocultural context and the mode of feature melodrama. Most films by these women directors are not as visually shocking as such early Fifth-Generation classics like *Yige he bage* (One and Eight, 1983) and *Huang tudi* (Yellow Earth, 1984) and thus are not recognized as avant-garde works of their times. What I hope to prove is that these films are avant-garde in their own sense, as a kind of double-layered countercinema. They are countering traditional Chinese cinema as Fifth-Generation films and, simultaneously, countering the mainstream of Fifth-Generation films as women's cinema. To me, such an extension may well be the practice of cinefeminism.  

(Re)Writing Women's Histories/Stories  
In one way or another, all four films selected here may serve as historical recounting of Chinese women's state of living in different eras. Liu Miaomiao's *Women on the Long March*—the first Chinese film to fill in a blank in China's revolutionary history, is extremely compelling. Liu Miaomiao told me in a 2006 interview that she read the original novella by Jiang Qitao—a male military writer who specializes in wartime stories—during a seminar commemorating the Long March. Liu Miaomiao was attracted to the story because it was the only one about female soldiers. She began her preproduction process by traveling along the route of the Long March and interviewing some veteran soldiers of the Red Army, who told her stories about the female soldiers—mostly aged from 10 to 20 years old—and taught her some songs sung by them, which she later used in her film. This research process is not only important in searching for historical locations for the filming purpose but also for learning about the realities that female soldiers faced. Without knowing their day-to-day struggle on the Long March, it is impossible for Liu Miaomiao to assert the female subjectivity in her presentation of these women. Even though the writing credit is given to Jiang Qitao only, Liu Miaomiao's female authorship is most distinct in many discrepancies between her film and Jiang's novella.  

The film narrative is arranged in chronological order and eliminates all but one flashback from the original story. The plot is quite simple: A Red Army commander sends a troop of eight women away to deliver telephone cables to a military post on the Tibetan plateau. The women soon find out that the main troop has continued on without them, most possibly with the consideration that it would be difficult for the women to survive the Long March. Having chosen the path of revolution, however, the women see no option but to catch up with the main troop. As Helen Praeger Young writes in her oral history, *Choosing Revolution: Chinese
Women Soldiers on the Long March, women's stories can "reconfigure the body of knowledge that has been considered history"; rather than relating "Mao's progression to power," their stories are about "how they adapted to the political, military, physical, and social demands of being soldiers" and how they "integrate and absorb unusual occurrences into their daily lives." In Liu Miaomiao's film, there is no mention of Mao Zedong or other Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders, who are often the main characters of stories about the Long March. The film is made to remember the women soldiers—psychically and historically. Near the beginning of the film, the women gather together when the troop leader, Guizhen, warns them to watch out when they answer the call of nature in the wilderness and to bury their menstruation cloths "as far away as possible. In the middle of the film, Liu Miaomiao adds several scenes that are not in the original novella. One scene reveals the women gathering around a campfire. First they sing a folksong about a girl's ill fate and worries, after which they talk about their past and their expectations for the future. From the women's own recounting, we learned that they chose revolution to escape the possibility of dying in poverty, being sold as a child bride, or being married off to a much younger boy whose family would, in fact, keep her as a servant. Revolution gives them hope. In a later scene, after two women die, Guizhen gathers her soldiers and takes out a piece of cloth with the names of all eight women written on it. Each woman presses her fingerprint under her name and under the name of a dead comrade. Liu Miaomiao creates this ritual to remember every woman's existence and to resist the easy oblivion of the official history. The presence of the group is significant here as it reinforces the vulnerable memories of individuals (fig. 7.1).

Although Mao pointed out various significances of the Long March in the course of the Communist Revolution, for these women, it is nothing more than a day-to-day struggle to survive when traveling through the vast barren land and endless swamps. In the film, a series of actions are loosely organized around three major "events." First, a "Colonel Chen" fails for one of the women soldiers—Shaozhi—and has a rendezvous with her at night near the military camp. The colonel later loses his legs in battle, and Shaozhi is assigned to look after him. He commits suicide before she finds him, and she returns to her troop. Second, the troop leader, Guizhen, and a slightly older soldier, Sister Deaf, together witness women soldiers from another detachment being captured by Tibetan bandits. Considering her troop is seriously outnumbered and has only two guns, Guizhen decides not to take any action. Members of the troop are angry and elect another soldier, Big Feet, to be the leader. Third, Junfen—a former singer in the performance troop—and Xiaohuazi see a dead horse on the other side of the river. They decide to cross the river to procure the horse for food but are swept away in the current. This loss greatly saddens the other women.

In the film's road movie plotline, Liu Miaomiao encodes a feminine narrative by a very special plot arrangement: each of the eight women cries at a different point in the story. Although the logical connection between actions and events is rather loose, the constant shift of emotional intensity from one woman to another maintains a good rhythm and tempo in the narrative. First, the youngest girl, Yaomei, cries over a nightmare she had about war. Then the pretty Junfen cries out of jealousy when she sees the handsome colonel holding Shaozhi in his arms. She cries again when learning that they have been left behind by the main troop. When Xiaohuazi and Junfen die in the river, Jinjiu cries first and then Shaozhi also bursts into tears—she was just reconciled with Junfen by confessing that her "love affair" with the colonel was only brief and platonic. When learning that Guizhen decides not to save the women soldiers captured by the Tibetan bandits, Big Feet cries, thinking of what will become of those
women. Sister Deaf cries at the sight of dead soldiers near the swamp. Guizhen is the last one to cry when she confesses that she hid the truth about the main troop’s leaving them behind on purpose. She makes it clear that there is no turning back for her after she left her loving father to join the army. These points of emotional intensity not only help to configure eight different women characters, but also avoid turning the entire film into a “weepie” and reducing its historical significance.

Many women directors I interviewed emphasize the use of emotion or mood as the narrative drive to push the story forward, which is not exclusively a feminine trait but is often skillfully employed by women. In Liu Miaomiao’s film, the narrative tension and rhythm correspond to the emotional ups and downs of female characters: the repressed romance, the dispute and reconciliation between girls, the moments of desperation and hope, the hallucination from starvation, and so forth. In the soundtrack are cues of rather dismantled music without a distinct melody, setting a sharp contrast to the heroic tunes often heard in other revolutionary films. This simple music that is strange to the ear of a Chinese audience creates an audio space corresponding to the barren lands and empty battlefields where the women soldiers are placed most of the time, forming the audiovisual impression of a historical vacuum. Liu Miaomiao makes no attempt at all to construct a grand narrative of a typical Chinese revolutionary film. These women’s history of the Long March is a survival story without a real contribution to the advancement of the CCP; but who can say that their history—their gradual losing of womanhood in the war—is less important?

With no movie stars in the film, Women on the Long March was not commercially successful when it was theatrically released, but people who have watched it cannot forget it. The CCP has repressed many histories of women in its official history. Li Shaohong’s Blush relates the stories of some former prostitutes who went through the labor reform around 1951, two years after the CCP set up the new regime. The two female protagonists of Blush, Qiuyi and Xiao Eh, are former prostitutes—“everyone’s lady” in a sense—played by two of China’s most talented star-actresses—Wang Ji and He Saisi, who helped to make the film a huge commercial success in 1994. Doane observes that films “organized around a woman’s act of remembering” often repress “her own history,” the “cinematic abstraction of the woman is represented as in tension with the complex articulation of memory, history and narrative.” This is quite true in Blush’s original novella, which is authored by a male writer, Su Tong (fig. 7.4).

The greatest dramatic tension in the plot of Blush is also historical. In the actual process of reform, the conflict lies between the officials’ assumption that “labor” can “cleanse” the corrupt minds of prostitutes (who are classified as lumpenproletariats in Communist China, after Karl Marx) and these women’s difficulty in coping with hard labor. At the narrative level, such tension is presented by the resistance of both female protagonists. Qiuyi runs away from the labor camp and becomes a nun after a failed attempt to stay longer with her lover, Lao Pu; Xiao Eh tries to hang herself when she cannot finish her assigned work during the day. Both of them were once “stars” in the Happy Red Inn brothel and did quite well financially in the “Old Society,” but they have to relinquish both money and freedom to be with men in the “New Society.” The film Blush, however, remembers these historical women differently from the original novella, which presents them as women who victimized the male protagonist, Lao Pu, and who have no control at all over their destinies. The film’s emphasis is placed on how they adapt to the social transformation much better than Lao Pu, and how they make the best out of their situation after the central man of their lives dies.
Women begin to whisper to each other and not all their speeches can be heard clearly.

**WOMAN A:** You know, they made us take a dozen Johns a day.

**WOMAN B:** Xiao Eh, you could tell about how the madam swore at you.

**WOMAN C:** She forced us to swallow tadpoles so we'd miscarry.

**WOMAN D:** And we never had enough to eat.

**XIAO EH:** (Speaking truthfully and bashfully) Maybe you don't know this, but I was born at the Red Happiness Inn. No one ever took care of me. I've always had to look after myself. You all come from normal families, but I was born to be a whore.

**CHIEF ARMY OFFICER:** (Looking at Xiao Eh with sympathy) Sit down, Xiao Eh. Let me tell you a true story. There was a girl whose father died when she was two. She lived with her mother. Her mother struggled to put her through university. One day, someone told her that her mother was a prostitute. She'd never dreamed such a thing. Many years passed before she appreciated her mother's suffering.

The Chief Army Officer's voice is choked and the room is silent. Women's heads are lowered. Xiao Eh remains silent but she does not seem to be touched at all. The meeting scene is 3 minutes 40 seconds and one of the longest scenes in the film.

The female subjectivity is established here within Mao's predominant ideology of class struggle. The Chief Army Officer always addresses the former prostitutes as "sisters" and makes every effort to win them over. When she asks Xiao Eh to speak "frankly," Xiao Eh speaks of her own "truth." The Chief denies her "truth" as not "the main reason" and offers her own thoughts, but Xiao Eh refuses to confirm or accept them. When the Chief then asks Xiao Eh to denounce the brothel-keeper, she again fails to understand. Another army officer is impatient and gives examples of the kind of things they want to hear. Other women in the classroom immediately pick up the signal and start to give a list of the brothel-keeper's crimes. Xiao Eh, however, interrupts them and confronts them all by stating that her case is different. Asking her to sit down, the Chief Army Officer ends up giving secondhand testimony by telling the story of a prostitute's daughter, which is most likely her own story. Both the officer's verbal repression and Xiao Eh's resistance can be clearly felt. The women in the classroom form a spectatorship that is absent in the novel. The diegetic spectatorship here is set in tension with that of the...
film audience, whose identification with Xiao Eh’s perspective and position is established earlier in the film.

In addition to the diegetic voices of characters used in the film *Blush*, there is an interesting female voice-over at the extra-diegetic level, which speaks both in the women’s language and about their desire. This voice-over opens the film even before the first frame appears from the dark screen: “So many things changed after liberation. One morning, all the girls in the Green Cloud Lane were taken away. What a scene it was!” Then we see the red-light district guarded by lines of soldiers, and prostitutes in their cheongsams are being taken on a boat to a temporary clinic for check-ups. Although this voice-over, acting like the omniscient narrator in a fiction, naturally claims a higher level of reliability and authority from the audience, Li Shaohong does not construct it to dominate the overall narrative. First, this voice speaks in a soft-toned Shanghai dialect and in a chatty manner, as opposed to the male, Mandarin-speaking voice of authority—the voice Chinese people often hear on radios and in films, especially news or historical documentaries. Second, the role of the voice-over is not fixed. Every time it appears, it has a different narrative function: bridging the informational gaps in the story, explaining a character’s state of mind, predicting the fate of women, or, analyzing two characters’ relationship. Third, the narrative suggests different possibilities regarding the source of this disembodied voice. We see the town’s storytellers—a man and a woman—singing in a teahouse when Qiuyi leaves Lao Pu’s home. We see women exchanging gossip at Xiao Eh’s wedding about her pre-marriage pregnancy. We see Qiuyi hearing stories about Xiao Eh and Lao Pu in a food stall run by Ruiyong, another former prostitute. Following Ruiyong’s words, the voice-over says: “And so Ruiyong told Qiuyi about Xiao Eh’s baby. No big deal really. But what moved her to tell Mrs. Zhang about Qiuyi having lost Lao Pu’s baby? Mrs. Zhang told Lao Pu. He was shocked. His old feelings for Qiuyi came back in a rush. He felt terrible. Wondered how he could ever make it up to her.” The voice-over here tells how a secret is being passed around. At this moment, the voice-over could be linked to one of the women in the film who knows all the main characters, or to Mrs. Zhang who is a storyteller herself, or to a collective voice combining different versions from different people.

Like the female voice used in Helke Sander’s *The All-Round Reduced Personality—Redupers* (1977), this voice-over “exists as an ungrounded presence, emanating from a number of sources, none of them privileged as the center of the film.”34 Compassionate but detached, the voice-over interacts with other voices as well as the visuals in storytelling. In Bakhtin’s words, this voice is to “express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” or to form a dialogue “between two intentions.”35 The film is a dialogic text that is “open to dispute” and is “charged with value,” especially in the context of feminist filmmaking.36 The voice-over in *Blush* “emphasizes the plurality of truths, the proliferation of perspectives that are possible”37 and contributes to an excellent dialogic narrative with a distinct female subjectivity. Through such a voice with a concern to relate, Li Shaohong fulfills her passion in “writing women’s own history.”38

Ten years before *Blush*, Hu Mei also experimented with the heroine’s voice-over in her directorial debut, *Army Nurse*. She tells Chris Berry in an interview that her original voice-over of Xiaoyu—the central character—was less “precise. It was scattered and fragmentary. She might be doing one thing, but she is talking about something else.” When Xiaoyu separates from her first love, she watches him leaving with the voice-over saying: “What is a shadow? I really don’t understand. . . . When I want to grab hold of it, it goes far away, and when I want to get rid of it, it insists on following me.” The leaders of the August First Film Studio that produced the film did not understand it.39 Hu Mei had to delete a lot of narration in this voice-over, which lends the film an extended space of psychological exploration. E. Ann Kaplan observes that “the heroine’s voice-over narration increases the spectator’s close identification with her. In this way, the film arguably offers more resistance to dominant Chinese sexual and political codes” by “asserting the heroine’s subjectivity, and in making us identify with her sexual desire and its impossibility.”40 *Army Nurse’s* female subjectivity, however, is encoded not only by this voice-over. Xiaoyu is not an articulate person and is often caught between other more outspoken nurses with different opinions. Her voice-over is thus necessary to reveal her internal thoughts and her habits of “turning things over in her mind.” This voice-over only works through its mismatching with the vision of “the world from what is completely a woman’s angle.”41 The construction of her “vision” depends on how the space surrounding her is presented and how she maps out this space in her daily life.

(Re)Mapping Women’s Spaces/Place

The film *Army Nurse*, like Xiaoyu’s life, is set mostly in a hospital. She walks through the corridors to bring medication to the wards and collects used sheets from the wards; in the X-ray room, she listens to Lingling’s
soothes her, even though her gaze is not always returned. Her desire for him reaches another climax when she learns that he has left the hospital early. She chases him over a hill to say goodbye to him. At the road under the hill, the two are alone, but they have to part. When Xiaoyu finds the first letter from him in the mailroom, a fellow nurse, Yamei, is reporting to their commissar about another girl XiuXiu, accusing her of keeping a love letter. Xiaoyu is eager to read the letter and so she goes into the lady’s room. She barely finishes reading the love letter when someone knocks on the door. In panic, she throws the letter into the toilet, and as it is being flushed away, Xiaoyu immediately regrets it. Her only private space is in her diary, in which she pastes his address from the envelope.

Beatriz Colomina suggests that the “politics of space are always sexual, even if space is central to the mechanisms of the erasure of sexuality.” In Army Nurse, such politics are presented as the constant erasure of sexuality. Following the lady’s room scene, Xiaoyu’s “absentmindedness” is reported to the army’s commissar, who speaks to her in the meeting room about her future. An inscription of Mao’s writing occupies the entire wall in the background, while the commissar and Xiaoyu sit at one end of the table in the middle ground. The foreground is composed of a long table and empty chairs turned on their sides. Such framing is meaningful: the most “public” space in the hospital is now turned into the place for discussion about a girl’s private matters. The result of this talk is Xiaoyu’s repression of her personal desire and her devotion to work for the next ten years. When Xiaoyu is nearly thirty, the commissar talks to her again while walking up the hill, asking her forgiveness for having checked the background of Tu Jianli, a potential future husband introduced to her by a friend. Xiaoyu’s courtship with Tu is brief and unromantic in a city setting. Being a “model of late marriage,” Tu is awarded an apartment by the army, which he prepares as a home for him and Xiaoyu, but Xiaoyu refuses to rest in the bed as he suggests. Tu shows Xiaoyu the hospital that he will get Xiaoyu transferred to, but the sight of medical equipment only reminds Xiaoyu of her mountain hospital. Xiaoyu spends part of the evening with Tu in a hotel room, where she knits a sweater and he reads a newspaper. She feels that she is suffocating and pushes open the window. The next day, she returns to the army hospital where she sacrificed her youth, when her voice-over asserts that only there can she find a meaningful place for herself.

The sexual politics of space plays more bluntly in Peng Xiaolian’s Shanghai Women. The film begins with the daughter, Ah Xia, leaving
for school on her father's motorcycle. A call to her father’s cell-phone, forgotten at home and picked up by her mother, brings the first moment of narrative tension. By the twelfth shot, the daughter’s cheerful conversation with her father is interrupted by the sound of a crashing dish in the kitchen. The girl rushes in there to find her mother in tears. The horizontal frame is constantly divided by the vertical lines of the door and window frames separating the domestic space. The daughter is asked to go back to her room when her parents need a private conversation. The camera is in the daughter's room, showing the girl standing by the partly open door and peeping at the mother sitting in the living room. The father attempts to close the door once in the middle of the long talk, but the door is ajar again. The focus is on the mother first, and then switched to the girl's face in the end after the father yells out: "It is you who wants a divorce! You can take anything. You can take our girl too. But this apartment was given to me by my work unit!" The claim of the space's ownership here will soon be a curse on the mother and daughter.

"A cultivated man does not look out of the window," but an unhappy girl stares from her window all the time. When the camera pulls out from a close-up of her gaze while her mother asks her to hurry, we see a divided space again: the father is typing on a computer in the room on the left, while the girl is sitting on a chair in her room on the right. Her mother moves in the foreground, packing up things. The girl tries to say goodbye to her father, but he goes into the washroom. She leaves while he is flushing the toilet.

With many things hanging from their bicycles, the mother and daughter arrive at the grandmother's place on a sunny morning, but are not welcomed. The grandmother smokes in the background when the mother unpacks in the foreground. We learn that this is the third time the mother has returned to the grandmother’s home, in a rage, after learning that her husband’s affair with another woman has continued for two years. The grandmother blames her daughter for being too easy to agree to a divorce, and asks her to start looking for another place as her brother will soon be married: "I even if my place is a hotel, you cannot live here forever." The mother’s salary is not enough to rent a place of their own and the director wastes no time placing her in an arranged marriage with a widower who has a teenage boy. Problems in their new life still revolve around space issues. The boy is annoyed that he has to give up half of his room to the girl. A sliding door is installed, and closing the door becomes an act of war between the boy and the girl. When the couple makes love, the kids do their homework on the other side of the thin wall, of which the boy’s soccer star posters are shaken off. Although the mother tries her best to keep her new family together by willingly doing all the housework and buying a pair of new shoes for the boy, when the water bill comes with a doubled amount, the stepfather accuses her and her daughter of showering every day. The mother finally snaps when her husband says that he worked hard to pay for the apartment and that she is using "him as a meal ticket" (fig. 7-4).

Going back to the grandmother's is not easy this time, as the girl's uncle is already married and cannot spare a room for the mother and daughter. When the uncle's wife reveals her discontent, the grandmother defends her daughter and granddaughter and shuts the wife out of her room. The scene where the three generations of women live in three parallel beds is very touching; they are united in one space, but under such sad circumstances. The grandmother's room is like a box in the middle of a house, where another family lives downstairs. The original living room is now used as a shared kitchen. Such a setting is normal in Shanghai's old houses, where privacy is about never speaking loudly and leaking out family secrets. In such a place, the girl does not even have her own chest. When she catches her mother reading her diary, she is very mad.

FIGURE 7.4 The bathroom is the only space where the mother and her daughter can have a private conversation in her second husband's home. (Shanghai Women, 2002)
The grandmother stops her from throwing things at her mother: “She is your mother. Can she harm you even if she reads your diary?”

By this time, the girl’s father has finished his affair with the other woman, who went abroad, and he proposes to her mother again for their daughter’s sake. The grandmother asks the mother to accept the proposal, but the daughter stops her mother on her way to her ex-husband’s: “He is not a man that you can trust. Don’t ever marry him again for my sake!” The reconciliation between the mother and the daughter is compensated by her father’s agreement to split his property with her mother, with which she purchases a small flat for herself and her daughter. The message seems to be that a woman needs her own room more than she needs a man; but the “happy ending” (which was also required by the studio leaders) does not completely reduce the harsh reality of Chinese women’s search for living and spiritual spaces. Shanghai Women won several awards from international film festivals and was released in Japanese theatres for thirteen weeks in 2003, after it was “discovered” by a Yorumi Shimbuu reporter in Shanghai.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

While studying the history of Chinese women’s cinema and approaches taken by female directors, I find that the theoretical frameworks of psychoanalysis, Marxist, and other feminist film theories are not readily applicable to the Chinese context and cases, but many concepts are quite useful in textual analyses. (They did help me, for instance, to explain why I was moved by a film like Army Nurse in a much more crystallized way.)

As Chinese cinema has become increasingly commercialized over the past decade, fewer films present the realities of China, let alone films concerning ordinary Chinese women. The full recognition and dynamic reading of existing works by Chinese female directors are very important as they are still trying their best to work within the mainstream production system. As long as a group of women directors can stay in the business, there are chances for female subjectivity to be reaffirmed and for them to produce their own counter-cinema, even a cinefeminism, if “feminism” is defined as “personal growth (gaining independence, sexual and intellectual self-fulfillment),” as “political activism (changing laws and policies affecting women with a view to changing the world),” and as “scholarship (developing new interdisciplinary insights through taking up female perspectives and topics),” Or, as Teresa de Lauretis states in her speech at The 10th International Women’s Film Festival in Seoul in 2008, for a “cinema by and for women,” she might be “willing to give up the word feminist.”

NOTES

2. A survey shows that 19 female directors directed 180 films from 1979 to 1989, see Huang Shiqin, “Nixing-zai di anxious de nanxing shijie II” (Women in the Male World of Film Industry), 39. For historical reasons, a majority of these women directors belong to China’s Fourth Generation. A more detailed introduction to the four generations of women directors in China can be found in S. Louisa Wei, “Women’s Trajectories in Chinese and Japanese Cinemas.”
3. Most women directors in the Third and Fourth Generations did not succeed in such a transition.
5. E. Ann Kaplan, Women and Film, 88-89.
6. The Long March was a massive military retreat undertaken by the Red Army of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), to evade the pursuit of the Nationalist Party army. There were several Long Marches, but the most well known is the march from Jiangxi province, which began in October 1934 and reportedly traversed some 13,000 kilometers (or 8000 miles) over 370 days. As the Long March began the ascent to power of Mao Zedong, it is represented in films and musically as a monument of the CCP history. Only one-twelfth of the force that left Jiangxi completed the march; most died of starvation along the way. Over 2000 women took part in the Long March, though this number may not be accurate. For my interviews with Liu Miaomiao, see S. Louisa Wei and Yang Yanying, Nixing de dianging (Women’s Films), 169-193.
7. Helen Prager Young, Choosing Revolution, 8.
8. All erotic scenes that involved sexuality and nudity in the original story are not shown in the film. The colonel’s desire for Shaozhi is indicated by a long gaze and his throwing a pair of straw shoes to his feet. This is partially per the request of director Liu Miaomiao’s studio leaders, who also revised the beginning of the film where women soldiers are sitting on the bridge so it cannot be bombed as there are other soldiers coming. In the released film, it seems that the women soldiers are sitting because they are tired.
9. Ironically, the belated release of the film’s DVD by Xiaozhang Film Studio’s Home Video Division has printed on its cover the caption “prelude to Feng Xiaogang’s Assembly,” falsely promoting it as a “grand war piece.”
10. Wei and Yang, Nixing de dianging, 152.
11. Blue is one of the earliest cooperated films that adopted the production and distribution mode of Hong Kong. With an investment of a million yuan (roughly 430,000 U.S. dollars),
in 1994, it grossed 38 million yuan. This is also the biggest commercial success ever enjoyed by a Chinese woman director to date.

13. See more discussion on this matter in Xu Jian, "Blush from Novella to Film."
17. Ibid., 276; Lucy Fischer, *Shot/Counter-Shot*, 301.
19. Li Shaohong, "Wo de nixing juewu" (My Feminine Consciousness), 155.
20. Chris Berry, "Interview with Hu Mei," 34.
22. Berry, "Interview with Hu Mei," 34.
25. This film is inspired by a composition written by Xu Minxia titled "At the End of My Teenage Years," which describes how she and her mother have to move to her uncle's flat after her parents' divorce, and move again to her aunt's flat when her uncle's son needs to get married. In my interview with Peng Xiaolian, she said that she had been feeling constantly unsettled, though she's been living in Shanghai most of her life. The action of "moving" here provides her with an action necessary to a film story. Keeping the teenaged Ah Xia's feelings about her mother and two boys in her school and neighborhood, Xiaolian adds a very strong grandmother figure and constructs the plot around the relationship between grandmother, mother, and daughter.
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Acknowledgments ix

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