human history also shows a limitation of some compartments in the field of Chinese studies. Disparaging that the "Yuan dynasty is one of the shortest major imperial dynasties in Chinese history" (p. 63), Yu seems to be reflecting a parochial Sinology perspective. Viewed in world history perspective and seeing beyond the Sinitic sphere, the Mongol empire(s) was a trans-Eurasian geopolitical conglomerate and a "world order" as proposed by Ayşe Zarakol in her *Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Despite those not insignificant issues, Yu's directness in bridging hard-hitting Chinese intellectual poignancy and the country's increasingly opaque political development is a welcome effort in the mapping of politically engaged intellectual expression in late reform-era China. The book can also be gainfully used as a secondary source in an undergraduate syllabus on world literature, especially of the genre of political fiction.

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Working the System: Motion Picture, Filmmakers, and Subjectivities in Mao-Era China, 1949–1966

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In *Working the System: Motion Picture, Filmmakers, and Subjectivities in Mao-Era China, 1949–1966*, Qiliang He presents an alternative paradigm to shed light on the lived experiences and careers of the following five post-1949 Shanghai-based filmmakers: Zheng Junli, Zhao Dan, Sun Yu, Wu Yonggang and Xie Jin. He finds that presenting the experiences of these filmmakers and their relationships with the Chinese Communist Party as bifurcated narratives of resistance or accommodation has inevitably "pitted "the 'good' and 'innocent' people against 'bad' socialism" (p. 7). Instead, He argues that the filmmakers during Mao-era China were "ordinary citizens" (p. 9), who had universal needs and desires just like everyone else. Through their filmmaking careers as "subjectivity practices" and working the new political and cultural system during Mao-era China, they sought financial gains, political status, job security, their artistic reputation and legacy.

In chapter one, He explores how Zheng Junli's historical and biographical films in the 1950s became a "site of knowledge production," and Zheng in turn became "a significant contributor to reconceptualizing and restructuring historiography in Mao-era China" (p. 18). He argues that during the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese historiography underwent a "disciplinization" process whereby China's past was told and represented by CCP historians as a classed revolutionary narrative that bolstered the contributions of labourers and peasants to the development of the founding of the CCP (p. 19). Amid the debacle of the campaign against the film *The Life of Wu Xun* (dir. Sun Yu) in May 1951, Zheng Junli found himself caught in the "entanglement" (p. 20) between Marxist historians and filmmakers when he made the biographical films about "patriotic figures" (p. 35) Song Jingshi and Lin Zexu during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Zheng Junli's balancing act to present both historicist and revolutionary aesthetics in his films might have raised his reputation as an artist, but at the same time, he was entangled in the "web of communication" (p. 42)

between historicists and dogmatists during the 1960s when he had to denounce himself in public self-criticisms.

Chapter two focuses on the career of Zhao Dan, the star in *The Life of Wu Xun*, from the 1950s to the 1970s and his stardom and subjectivity. According to He, Zhao Dan was not simply a martyred victim nor a star in the Communist regime. He argues that the "star system" in Mao-era China allowed Zhao Dan to not only thrive in his career, but also survive later on. While Zheng Junli suffered during the campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun*, Zhao Dan was left unscathed. In fact, he rose in the ranks in the Maoist artistic hierarchy. Zhao was not only a Party member, but he was a film star, who gained "political capital" and financial gains (p. 51). As such, Zhao's stardom was a "product of the politico-cultural conditions in post-1949 China" (p. 65). His stardom during the 1950s, however, did not protect him during the Cultural Revolution when he was forced to renounce his past actions. Ironically, Zhao's confessions became "a survival tactic" as well a "subjectivizing practice" that consolidated "Zhao's subjectivity of martyrdom qua stardom" (p. 46).

Chapter three examines the career of Sun Yu, one of China's second-generation directors. Although one of the elite film talents during the golden era of Shanghai cinema, like many from his generation, he would find himself marginalized. He analyses Sun Yu's 1957 film *Brave the Wind and Waves*, a "lyrical comedy" that allowed Sun Yu to process only not his own trauma during the campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun*, but also the daily lived experiences of those in Mao's China. While the film was met with "scathing criticism" (p. 87) for being "vulgar" (p. 89), He argues that *Brave the Wind and Waves* conformed to "CCP-endorsed norms of womanhood and love" (p. 87). Nonetheless, Sun Yu failed to regain the critically acclaimed career he had enjoyed during the 1930s; although he had both financial security and political capital, he was denied the opportunities to make revolutionary-themed films. Instead, he and other veteran directors were relegated to making "politically safe … opera films" (p. 89).

Chapter four discusses how second-generation director Wu Yonggang was able to regain his artistic autonomy through his opera film, *The Jade Hairpin* (1963), an adaptation of a Yue opera. While other older filmmakers found it hard to regain their reputation, Wu Yonggang, though he had been labelled a Rightist in 1956 and 1957, enjoyed some degree of "professional autonomy" (p. 110) while making this film. Like many opera films in the early 1960s, *The Jade Hairpin* was a co-production between China and Hong Kong (p. 100) and enjoyed huge success among audiences in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (p. 106). Ironically, opera films made by marginalized second-generation directors became weaponized by the PRC state during the cinematic Cold War. Ideologically, *The Jade Hairpin* played an important role during this period in shaping the hearts and minds of the diasporic Chinese communities outside of China. Economically, such films reaped large profits in the overseas markets for the communist Chinese state. Wu Yonggang might have been segregated from the huge domestic audience, but he was afforded the freedom and autonomy to deviate from the strict Party line in *The Jade Hairpin* since it was screened exclusively outside China, and he was able to "give vent to a sense of grievance and express his desire for the party's understanding" through his cinematic humanism (p. 110).

The final chapter examines the successful career of Xie Jin. By focusing on three of his most renowned and popular films, *Woman Basketball Player No. 5*, *The Red Detachment of Women* and *Stage Sisters*, He argues that Xie Jin's success could not be attributed to his artistic talent alone, but rather it was very much a product of the "sociocultural conditions in the first 17 years of the PRC, including the policy of building a national film market" and most importantly the state's agenda to prioritize the careers of younger filmmakers during the first half of the 1950s at the expense of older-generation directors (p. 116). For instance, in 1954, although Xie Jin was never among the People's Liberation Army cadres, he was promoted to the rank of assistant director (p. 117). And while many of his mentors and friends became victims during the Anti-Rightist Movement, Xie Jin was never charged (p. 118). Despite Xie Jin's rise in the ranks as director, his artistic vision was not always realized. He introduced the concept of "multiple authorship,"

especially when it applied to *The Red Detachment of Women*. The protagonists Qionghua and Changqing's love story was deleted by the Party authorities against Xie Jin's will and Xie became "a reluctant recipient" rather than a "collaborator" (p. 126). The "tug of war between Xie Jin and the CCP cadres" in Shanghai and Beijing could be observed as well in the making of *Stage Sisters* (p. 126). In fact, as He argues, the three films examined in this chapter, are all "co-authored works" (p. 134) and his distinct melodramatic mode of filmic style was a product of the "tug of war" between the different authors (p. 136).

This is a well-researched study of five Shanghai-based filmmakers during Mao's China. It will be of interest to scholars and students of Chinese film history, modern Chinese history and the Cold War.

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Revolutionary Becomings: Documentary Media in Twentieth-Century China

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As Ying Qian notes early in her compelling new book, although contemporary independent documentary in China has received extensive academic attention, the same cannot be said of non-fiction media from the Maoist and Republican eras. While there are practical reasons for this, not least issues of access and preservation, it has also proven challenging to find ways to make sense of this material's unabashedly political form and content. Qian argues that to do so we must understand documentary as "eventful media" (p. 4): media that actively seek to intervene in the conditions from which they arise. Such interventions may be aesthetic, but Qian emphasizes that cinema mediates – that is, it brings previously unconnected forces into mutual relation – both on and off screen. This definition is central to the book's methodology, which explicitly combines close readings of individual texts with the historical analysis of documentary production culture. However, it also allows Qian to locate non-fiction more precisely within the Chinese revolution. The Maoist principle of the mass line explicitly positioned cultural workers and cultural products as intermediaries between the Chinese Communist Party and the masses. After Yan'an, documentary therefore became a critical conduit through which the Party communicated socialist ideas to the masses, and the masses spoke back to the Party, in a mutually co-constitutive dynamic that defined revolutionary culture. It was this bond that shaped the form and tone of Chinese documentary through most of the twentieth century, until it fractured irrevocably in 1989.

Revolutionary Becomings traces this relationship through six chronological chapters and an epilogue. Chapter one considers documentary's beginnings. Qian demonstrates how the imbrication of early Chinese actuality films with colonialism, transnational politics and revolutionary agitation manifested in their style and content, but also in how film exhibition came to finance radical political networks, with screenings an opportunity to generate recruits. Documentary film culture thus became a way for Qing elites to reposition themselves in the vanguard of political modernity,