

## Made in Censorship: The Tiananmen Movement in Chinese Literature and Film

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As censorship continues to intensify in China, Thomas Chen's *Made in Censorship: The Tiananmen Movement in Chinese Literature and Film* is a welcome and timely publication. The understated book cover belies its rich content and surveyed material, including state propaganda documentaries, literary works and independent films on the topic, both overlooked and well-studied. Consisting of four main chapters alongside the introductory and conclusion chapters, the book invites the reader to consider censorship more as "what is created than what is blocked," in that "censorship does not merely cross out or strike through; it also forms and fashions, molds and manipulates" (p. 2). Chen argues that the study of censorship should be broadened to include "instances of authorization," which "are every bit as violent as proscription and erasure," (p. 53) and writes that "the twin dimensions of censorship" are "prohibition plus propagation" (p. 78).

Based on its study of different genres, from state-produced documentaries, independent documentaries, feature films and reportage literature to novels, the interdisciplinarity of *Made in Censorship* calls to mind book-length studies by Jason McGrath, Robin Visser and Michel Berry.

Chapter one focuses on state propaganda produced in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Movement, including a volume of literary reportage, *Songs of the Republic's Guardians: Collection of Reportage Literature on Martial Law Troops' Heroic Deeds in the Capital* (*Gongheguo weishi zhi ge: Shoudu jieyan budui yingmo shiji baogao wenxueji*), and the television documentary *Flutter, Flag of the Republic: A Record of the Quelling of the Beijing Counterrevolutionary Riot* (*Piaoyang gongheguo de qizhi: Pingxi Beijing fangeming baoluan jishi*). The chapter makes a strong case for examining the strategies adopted by the party-state for shaping public opinion in its own favour, especially during a legitimacy crisis.

The strongest section in the book is chapter two, where three works are given a close reading: Wang Guangli's documentary *I Graduated* (*Wo biye le*) (1992), Tang Xiaobai's feature film *Conjugation* (*Dongci bianwei*) (2001) and Sheng Keyi's dystopian novel *Death Fugue* (*Siwang fuge*) (2011). Chen demonstrates how, in spite of, and owing to censorship, these works problematize official narratives on the Movement while highlighting state violence. In particular, the chapter takes on the significance of archiving oral history captured in independent documentaries such as *I Graduated* and examines how filmmakers like Tang creatively represented the scenes leading to the Incident.

Chapter three examines two well-known films: Stanley Kwan's *Lan Yu* (2001) and Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* (*Yiheyuan*) (2006), which the author places within the framework of "made in China/made in censorship." The analysis of these two important works on Tiananmen, including scenes which have been removed, aims to re-politicize the concerns and references related to the Movement. One of the ways that the author effectively achieves this is through the critique of crony capitalism leading up to and after the Incident, as epitomized by the character of businessman Handong – Lan Yu's lover.

Chapter four focuses on two novels, namely, Jia Pingwa's *Ruined City* (*Feidu*) (1993) and Hu Fayun's celebrated *Such Is This World@sars.come* (*Ruyan@sars.come*), set against the severe acute



respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2002–2003. Based on engaging reading communities and how they are shaped by censorship, the author examines how both works highlight the displacement of participatory publics in a post-Tiananmen era.

Chen's book does an admirable job at remembering and examining works related to the Movement, though its argument on censorship as productive is not necessarily as novel as it claims to be. The theorization could benefit from a more rigorous engagement with the works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, including the latter's *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (1997, Routledge), and Geremie Barmé's chapter "History for the masses," which suggests that "every policy shift in recent [Chinese] history has involved the rehabilitation, re-evaluation and revision of history and historical figures" (in Jonathan Unger (ed.) *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*, Routledge, 1993, p. 260). It is also unfortunate for the book to have overlooked Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* in 1942, the discursive roots of which continue to fuel the censorious practice of denouncing objectionable works while establishing exemplary ones for writers to model in post-socialist China today.

Chen is impassioned in his commitment to calling out "the banning of books and films," "the tailoring of memory" and the "molding of the public." (p. 175) However, the writing style tends towards the lyrical and, at times, the hyperbolic. These rhetorical flourishes often dilute the cogency of ideas in the book. Just one of the numerous examples is, "TV programming glorified soldiers and their selfless sacrifice and (re)called the audience to the republic forged in the flames of war and to the canonical tradition of obedience to organization" (p. 71).

Concluding with the notion that the "public-making of censorship is always a work in progress" (p. 173), the book judiciously links the state discourse of "prohibition and proselytization" (p. 11) on Tiananmen to COVID-19 in the conclusion chapter. For scholars, university tutors, students and China observers who work on Chinese literature, cinema, history and politics related to the Movement, this book will be of interest and relevance.

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## China's Grandmothers: Gender, Family, and Ageing from Late Qing to Twenty-First Century

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Chinese grandmothers have played a crucial role in Chinese families as essential caregivers for grandchildren, in the Qing dynasty as in the 21st Century. Although women have been easily marginalized and overlooked, especially in the public realm, by traditional historical narratives in China's patriarchal society, they have found ways to be active and influential in their own lives and in those of surrounding others through the remarkable grandparents–children–grandchildren relationships within families. *China's Grandmothers*, by Diana Lary, uses the experiences of Chinese grandmothers from the late Qing dynasty to the present as a lens to provide vivid pictures of intergenerational relationships and interactions in Chinese families. By locating various Chinese