

## Notes

### INTRODUCTION

1. Dai Jinhua, *After the Post-Cold War: The Future of Chinese History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 75.
2. Corey Kai Nelson Schultz, *Moving Figures: Class and Feeling in the Films of Jia Zhangke* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 34.
3. For more on representations of marginalized figures in the film of Jia Zhangke, see Xie Xiaoxia, *Research on the Image of the Lower Class in Contemporary Cinema* [当代电影底层形象研究] (Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2009), 264–317.
4. Li Yang, *The Formation of Chinese Art Cinema, 1990–2003* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 162–63.
5. Shaoyi Sun and Li Xun, *Lights! Camera! Kai Shi! In Depth Interviews with China's New Generation of Movie Directors* (Norwalk, CT: Eastbridge Books, 2008), 94.
6. Cecilia Mello, *The Cinema of Jia Zhangke: Realism and Memory in Chinese Film* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 5.
7. Qi Wang, *Memory, Subjectivity and Independent Chinese Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 96.
8. See Jason McGrath, “The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic,” in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Zhen Zhang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 81–114; Yang, *Formation of Chinese Art Cinema*.
9. Yang, *Formation of Chinese Art Cinema*, 161.
10. When Jia Zhangke announced he was stepping down from the film festival, he made a widely quoted public statement: “I should’ve left [the festival] earlier and

begun to groom a new team to take over the festival, so that this festival can get rid of 'Jia Zhangke's shadow.'" This version is from an October 19, 2020, report in *Variety* by Vivienne Chow titled "Jia Zhangke Unexpectedly Quits the Pingyao Film Festival." The ambiguous nature of Jia's statement led to widespread rumors and conjecture about political meddling in the festival. On June 1, 2021, just over six months after he left the Pingyao International Film Festival, it was announced that Jia would return to the festival for its fifth edition in 2021, although his new role remains unclear.

#### ONE. A PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Chapter 1 includes some content excerpted from my 2002 interview with Jia Zhangke, originally published in *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

1. Ulan Bator would later become an important site for the film *The World*, which not only references the city but also prominently features the Mongolian folk song "Ulan Bator Night" ("Wulan Batuo de ye").

2. Teresa Teng (Deng Lijun, 1953–95) was one of the most popular Chinese singers and performers during the second half of the twentieth century. Teng was the first Taiwanese singer to gain widespread popularity in mainland China during the early Reform Era. Best known for her love ballads, such as "The Moon Represents My Heart" and "My Sweetie," Teng released albums in Mandarin, Taiwanese, Cantonese, Japanese, and English.

3. Chang Ti (Zhang Di, 1942–) is a popular Taiwan singer and talk show host. Sometimes referred to as the "quick-witted pop star" (*jizhi gewang*) for his ability to respond in real time to audience questions with humorous lines of song, Chang is best known for the songs "The Hair Song" ("Mao mao ge") and "The Nation" ("Guojia"), the latter being a patriotic song that became very popular in mainland China.

4. "Go with Your Feelings" ("Gen zhe ganjue zuo," 1988) is a popular song from Taiwan written and composed by Chen Zhiyuan and originally sung by Taiwan pop star Su Rui and included on the album *Taipei Tokyo*. An excerpt of the lyrics reads: "Follow your feelings, let them take me away / I hope you will be not far away waiting for me / Follow your feelings, let them take me away / Those things we dream about will be everywhere." This was one of the most popular songs in late 1980s China.

5. Cui Jian (1961–) is one of the earliest innovators of pop and rock music in mainland China during the early Reform Era and is generally referred to as the "father of Chinese rock and roll." His representative albums include *Rock Along the New Long March* (*Xin changzheng lushang de yaogun*), *Solution* (*Jiejue*), and *Eggs under the Red Flag* (*Hongqi xia de dan*). Cui Jian is best known for his rock anthems from the 1980s, including "I Have Nothing to My Name" ("Yiwu suoyou"), "It's Not That I Don't Understand" ("Bushu wo bumingbai"), "The Fake Monk" ("Jia xingzeng"), and "Greenhouse Girl" ("Huafang guniang"), which were extremely influential. Cui Jian is also active in film circles and directed the feature film *Blue Sky Bones* (*Lanse gutou*, 2013).

6. *Garrison's Gorillas* was a twenty-six-episode miniseries originally broadcast on ABC in 1967. It tells the story of First Lieutenant Garrison and the daring suicide squad he led in Europe during World War II, focusing on a series of their missions. After the reestablishment of Sino-US relations in 1979, *Garrison's Gorillas* was one of the first American television miniseries to be broadcast in China. The Chinese version was dubbed by the Shanghai Film Dubbing Studio and broadcast on CCTV in 1980, and it was warmly received by Chinese audiences. *Man from Atlantis* was a thirteen-episode science fiction–fantasy miniseries originally broadcast on NBC between 1977 and 1978. It was one of the earliest American television shows to be broadcast in China during the early stages of the Reform Era.

7. *Breakin'* was a mainstream 1984 film documenting the challenges faced by a group of young break-dancers. The film was extremely popular in China and even inspired Tian Zhuangzhuang's film *Rock Kids* (*Yaogun qingnian*, 1988).

8. *Life* (*Rensheng*), a novella written by Lu Yao (1949–92), was originally published in 1982 and was awarded the National Prize for Most Outstanding Novella of that year. The story follows Gao Jialin, who travels back and forth between the city and the countryside as he finds himself caught in a love triangle that included the peasant girl Liu Qiaozhan and the city girl Huang Yaping. The story was widely acclaimed and in 1984 was adapted into an award-winning film under the same title by Wu Tianming.

9. The film *Old Well* (*Lao jing*, 1986), which was adapted from a novel by Zheng Yi, was produced by the Xi'an Film Studio and directed by Wu Tianming. The film starred Zhang Yimou, in his first role as an actor, and Lu Liping. It depicted the difficult lives of peasants in an impoverished village in northwest China and their struggle to dig a well.

10. Misty Poetry was a poetry movement that took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s in large part as an artistic response against the Cultural Revolution. The movement was criticized by officials who described it as “misty,” “murky,” or “hazy,” which the movement's founders eventually took on as a point of pride, standing in opposition to the black-and-white directives of Maoist art. The representative figures of the movement included Han Lu, Shu Ying, Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Liang Xiaobin, Ouyang Jianghe, Mang Ke, and Shi Zhi. Many of these poets published in the journal *Today* (*Jintian*), which became one of the most progressive and influential portals for intellectuals and artists during the early Reform Era.

11. Bei Dao's poem “The Answer” (1976) is one of the most important representative works from this early period of his writing. Originally published in the 1976 issue of *Today*, it was an attempt to interrogate what happened during the Cultural Revolution and bring out the absurdity of that era. An excerpt of the poem reads: “Let me tell you, world / I—do—not—believe! / If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet, / Count me as number thousand and one. / I don't believe the sky is blue; / I don't believe in thunder's echoes; / I don't believe that dreams are false; / I don't believe that death has no revenge” (translated by Bonnie S. McDougall from *The August Sleepwalker*).

12. Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984) is considered one of the most important early representative films of the Fifth Generation. Besides Chen Kaige, the

film featured several other important figures from the Fifth Generation, including cinematographer Zhang Yimou, art designer He Ping, and composer Zhao Jiping. *Yellow Earth* was adapted from an essay entitled “Echoes from Deep in the Valley” (“Shenggu huisheng”) by Ke Lan. The story is about a soldier named Gu Qing (Wang Xueqi) who travels to a remote village in northern Shaanxi Province to collect folk songs. While he is there, he witnesses great poverty and encounters an adolescent girl named Cuiqiao (Xue Bai), who is desperate to escape from an impending arranged marriage and join the Eight Route Army. But in the end Gu Qing is unable to save her from her circumstances. The film received numerous international awards but proved controversial at home, becoming a key work of the “Culture Fever” that swept China during the 1980s.

13. *The Story of Qiuju* was awarded the Golden Lion and the Volpi Cup at the 1992 Venice Film Festival; *To Live* was awarded the prize for Best Actor and the Grand Prix at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival; and *Farewell My Concubine* was awarded the Palme d’Or at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival and the Best Foreign Language Film at the 1994 Golden Globe Awards and also was a nominee for Best Foreign Language Film at the Academy Awards.

14. *Dingjun Shan*, sometimes translated as *Taking Army Mountain*, was the first Chinese film ever produced. First exhibited on December 28, 1905, it was directed by Ren Qingtai and starred Peking opera star Tan Xinpei. The content of the film was adapted from a Peking opera of the same name, which in turn was derived from a story in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*).

15. Besides being an established cinematographer who has shot such features as Ann Hui’s *Ordinary Heroes* (*Qianyan wanyu*, 1999) and William Kwok’s *In the Dumps* (*Laji niantou*, 1997), Nelson Yu Lik-Wai (1966–) is also an established director in his own right. His 1999 feature *Love Will Tear Us Apart* (*Tian shang renjian*) was an official selection at Cannes the year of its release and is also playfully referenced in *Unknown Pleasures*. Yu has served as cinematographer for almost all of Jia Zhangke’s feature films.

16. Robert Bresson (1901–99) was a painter and film director who became a key figure in French cinema. After beginning to make films in 1934, Bresson directed thirteen feature films over the course of more than four decades. His major works include *A Man Escaped* (1956), *Pickpocket* (1959), *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), and *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962).

17. Eric Gautier (1961–) is an award-winning French cinematographer who has worked on films by Agnès Varda, Olivier Assayas, Walter Salles, Sean Penn, Alain Resnais, Ang Lee, and Hirokazu Koreeda.

## TWO. THE HOMETOWN TRILOGY

Chapter 2 includes some content excerpted from my 2002 interview with Jia Zhangke, originally published in *Speaking in Images: Interviews with Contemporary Chinese Filmmakers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

1. After the success of his work with Jia Zhangke, Wang Hongwei has been increasingly in demand as an actor and was featured in Dai Sijie’s production of his novel

*Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2002). He later eased into film production and has produced several independent Chinese films.

2. *The Human Condition* has been made into a film by producer-director Michael Cimino under the title *Man's Fate* (2003).

3. Lu Xun (1881–1936), the father of modern Chinese literature, gave up a career in medicine and began writing after seeing a slide of a Chinese man being executed surrounded by a crowd of his compatriots, who looked on numbly as the sentence was carried out. Images of apathetic crowds would be featured prominently in several of Lu Xun's later literary works, such as *The True Story of Ah Q* (*Ah Q zhengzhuan*, 1921).

4. Kent Jones, *Physical Evidence: Selected Film Criticism* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 24.

### THREE. DOCUMENTING DESTRUCTION AND BUILDING WORLDS

1. Liu Xiaodong (1963–) is a contemporary Chinese artist. He studied at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, earning both a BA and an MFA in oil painting, and later furthered his study in Madrid. His work has been exhibited in major exhibitions, museums, and galleries around the world. He has also had numerous ties with the independent Chinese cinema movement, starring in one of the first Chinese independent films, *The Days* (*Dongchun de rizi*, 1990), serving as art director for *Beijing Bastards* (*Beijing zazong*, 1993), and even becoming the subject of documentary films by Jia Zhangke and also Yao Hung-I's *Hometown Boy* (*Jincheng xiaozhi*, 2011).

2. Takeshi Kitano (1947–) is a prolific Japanese actor, director, comedian, television personality, and film producer. Sometimes referred to as Beat Takeshi, he has directed more than eighteen films and starred in more than fifty; his major works include *Sonatine* (1993), *Hana-bi* (1997), *Brother* (2000), and *Zatoichi* (2003).

3. Shozo Ichiyama (1963–) is a Japanese film producer who has produced films such as *Violent Cop* (1989), *Lovers on Borders* (2017), and *Chasuke's Journey* (2015). He has worked on several Chinese-language films, including Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998), *Good Men, Good Women* (1995), and *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (1996) and Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (2000). He has collaborated with Jia Zhangke on numerous films, including *Platform*, *Unknown Pleasures*, and *The World*.

4. Jean-Pierre Melville (1917–73) was a French filmmaker best known for classic films like *Le Doulos* (1962), *Le Samourai* (1967), *Army of Shadows* (*L'armée des ombres*, 1969), and *Le cercle rouge* (1970). His work had a major influence on the French New Wave and later influenced a new generation of East Asian filmmakers, including Johnnie To, John Woo, and Takeshi Kitano.

### FOUR. FILM AS SOCIAL JUSTICE

1. The raw interviews upon which Jia Zhangke structured *24 City* were published in a full-length collection, *Interviews with Chinese Workers: 24 City* [*Zhongguo gongren fangtanlu: Ershisi chengji*] (Jinan: Shandong Pictorial Publishing, 2009).

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2. The Third Line Construction Project (*sanxian gongcheng* or *sanxian jianshe*) was a national government plan implemented in 1964 in response to escalating tensions brought on by the Vietnam War, American military activities near the South China Sea, and a small-scale armed skirmish with the Soviet Union. The Third Line Construction Project was aimed at expanding the infrastructure in China's less populated inland regions to bolster national defense, science and technology, industry, power, and transportation. It originated with the Chinese military and ended up impacting thirteen provinces and autonomous regions in central and western China from 1964 until 1980, resulting in the creation of thousands of factories, the relocation of millions of people, and a fundamental shift in the priorities of national development.

3. Zhai Yongming (1955–) is a poet from Chengdu who began publishing her work in 1981. She has published more than a dozen collections of essays and poetry; one representative work is the twenty-poem cycle “Woman” (“Nüren”).

4. This is reference to a series of suicides that took place at a Foxconn factory in southern China in 2010. The suicides led to a large number of news stories about the working conditions of Foxconn employees.

5. Lu Zhishen is a character from the novel *The Water Margin*. He is one of the 108 heroes of Liangshan who is known for his short temper, unmatched strength, and uncompromising sense of justice. Originally named Lu Da, he was once an army officer, but after being charged with murder during a battle, he deserted his post and became a monk, assuming the Buddhist name Lu Zhishen.

6. Wu Song is another character from the novel *The Water Margin* who also appears in the classic novel *The Golden Lotus (Jinping mei)*. An orphan raised by his elder brother Wu Dalang, Wu Song was renowned for his uncanny strength and became known for killing a tiger with his bare hands. Later, when his brother became the victim of adultery and the target of a murder plot, Wu Song killed his brother's unfaithful wife, Pan Jinlian, along with her lover, Ximen Qing.

7. The wuxia films of King Hu (Hu Jinquan) frequently featured strong female protagonists, such as Golden Swallow (Cheng Pei-pei) in *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and Yang Hui-zhen (Hsu Feng) in *A Touch of Zen* (1971). The English title of *A Touch of Sin* is also clearly inspired by the latter film. In a direct reaction against the dominance of female stars in Hong Kong cinema from the 1960s, Chang Cheh's (Zhang Che's) martial arts kung fu films like *The Heroic Ones (Shisan taibao, 1970)* and *The Blood Brothers (Ci ma, 1973)* featured male-dominated casts and highlighted a new notion of masculinity.

8. *Forest of the Wild Boar (Yezhu lin, 1962)* was an opera film produced by the Beijing Film Studio. It was codirected by Cui Wei and Chen Hua'ai and starred Li Shaochun, Du Jinfang, and Yuan Shihai.

9. Lin Chong is a fictional character from the classic Chinese novel *The Water Margin*. Lin was a skilled martial artist and an instructor of the Chinese imperial guards when the son of a powerful official attempted to steal his wife. This plot led to Lin Chong's false arrest and exile. Eventually, Lin joined the 108 outlaws of Liangshan

and became one of their leaders. Lin Chong's story has been popular in numerous forms, also appearing in several traditional Chinese operas, including *Record of the Precious Sword* (*Baojian ji*) and *Lin Chong Fleeing by Night* (*Lin Chong yeben*).

10. Tian Zhuangzhuang (1952–) is a representative figure from the Fifth Generation. While best known for his fifteen feature films as director, including *On the Hunting Ground* (*Liechang zhasa*, 1985), *The Horse Thief* (*Daomazei*, 1986), and *The Blue Kite* (*Lanfeng zheng*, 1993), Tian has also served as producer for several independent Chinese filmmakers. He has also won acclaim for his acting in films like *Love Education* (*Xiangai xiangqin*, 2017) and *Us and Them* (*Houlaide women*, 2018).

## FIVE. RETURN TO JIANGHU

1. Lord Guan (Guan gong), or Guan Yu, was a historical figure who served as a general under the warlord Liu Bei during the Eastern Han dynasty. He was renowned for his loyalty and military prowess. After his death, his achievements were glorified through literature (like the novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and through various dramas and stories. Over time, he came to be worshipped as a deity by various Chinese folk religions, with shrines and statues found all over the Chinese-speaking world.

2. Wei Wei (1922–) is best known for her role in *Spring in a Small Town*. She was most active between 1948 and 1964, during which time she starred in more than fifteen films.

3. Sally Yeh (Ye Qianwen, 1961–) was born in Taipei and immigrated to Canada at a young age before starting her singing career in Hong Kong in the early 1980s. She was one of the most popular Mandopop and Cantopop singers of the 1980s and 1990s and has released more than thirty albums. Yeh also starred in more than twenty-five films from 1980 through the early 1990s.

4. She Ai'zhen first became involved with the Shanghai underworld during the Republican period. She was the goddaughter of Li Yunqing and later married the notorious gangster Wu Sibao. After Wu Sibao's death, She began a relationship with Hu Lancheng, who was serving in the Ministry of Propaganda for the Wang Jingwei puppet regime. In 1945, She was arrested and served a seven-year sentence; on her release, she moved to Hong Kong and later settled in Japan.

5. Hu Lancheng (1906–81) was a writer, intellectual, and politician who served in the Ministry of Propaganda under Wang Jingwei during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai. His major works include *China through Time* (*Shanhe sui Yue*, 1954) and *This Life, This World* (*Jinsheng jinshi*, 1959). He was married to the noted writer Eileen Chang from 1944 to 1946 and later served as a mentor to Taiwan writers Chu Tienwen and Chu Tien-hsin.

6. In the wake of the tax scandal that shook the Chinese film industry in 2018, Feng Xiaogang's scenes from *Ash Is Purest White* were cut from the domestically released version of the film, although his scenes were still shown in versions screened at various international film festivals.

1. Jia Pingwa (1952–) is a prolific and popular writer best known for the novels *Happy Dreams* (*Gaoxing*), *Broken Wings* (*Jihua*), *The Lantern Bearer* (*Dai deng*), *The Mountain Whisperer* (*Laosheng*), and *Ruined City* (*Feidu*). He is the winner of the 2009 Mao Dun Literature Prize and is generally considered one of the greatest Chinese writers of his generation.

2. Shen Congwen (1902–88) was a leading Chinese writer active during the Republican period, when he wrote such classic works as *The Border Town* (*Biancheng*) and a series of acclaimed short stories. After 1949, he turned away from fiction and spent the second half of his life conducting research on traditional Chinese costumes and clothing. Eileen Chang (Zhang Ailing, 1920–95) was a novelist, screenwriter, translator, and essayist best known for her works of classic fiction like *Half a Lifelong Romance* (*Ban-sheng yuan*), *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qingcheng zhi lian*), and *Lust, Caution* (*Se jie*). Her work has been adapted into numerous films and has been widely influential across the Chinese-speaking world.

3. Su Tong (1963–) is a contemporary Chinese writer best known for the books *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Qiqie chengqun*), *Rice* (*Mi*), *My Life as Emperor* (*Wo de diwang shengya*), and *Petulia's Rouge Tin* (*Hongfen*). Yu Hua (1960–) is a contemporary Chinese writer whose major works include the novels *To Live* (*Huo zhe*), *Chronicle of a Blood Merchant* (*Xu Sanguan maixue ji*), and *Brothers* (*Xiongdi*) and the collection of nonfiction essays *China in Ten Words* (*Shige cihui li de Zhongguo*). Sun Ganlu (1959–) is an influential writer who came to prominence in the 1980s and was closely associated with the Chinese avant-garde movement. His major works include the novel *Breathing* (*Huxi*) and *The Messenger's Letter* (*Xinshi zhi han*).

4. Ma Feng (1922–2004) was a veteran writer of numerous novels, essays, and short stories including *The First Investigation* (*Diyici zhencha*) and *Vendetta* (*Cun chou*). He fought against the Japanese during the War of Resistance and joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1938, later doing cultural work, education, and propaganda in Yan'an. He also wrote the screenplay to several films, including *Marriage* (*Jiehun*, 1953).

5. Liang Hong (1973–) is a professor of Chinese literature at Renmin University. She is also the author of several books of literary criticism, essays, and fiction. She is best known for the book *China in One Village* (*Zhongguo zai Liangzhuang*).