ANIMATING SUN WUKONG:

SHANGHAI ANIMATION FILM STUDIO'S *HAVOC IN HEAVEN* AND SYMBOLIC TRANSFORMATION ON THE EVE OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to deconstruct the complex intersection of Maoist-era propaganda and Chinese folk-art traditions in the years before China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) by interrogating the symbolic transformation of Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, into a hero who justified rebellious action. Specifically, this research analyzes director Wan Laiming's 1964 film, *Havoc in Heaven* (*Danao Tiangong* 大闹天宫), China's first domestic feature-length animated film. Employing Wan's memoir and documents from other animators at the Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS), this framework establishes artists as the unit of analysis to study symbolic change between Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propagandistic guidance and the Chinese people. This approach emphasizes the agency and mediating role artists possess when producing art as propaganda. Developing on approaches employed by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney and Alexander Bukh in their research on nationalism, this research encompasses both the narrative content of *Havoc in Heaven* and the perspectives of SAFS animators towards their work. It argues that a lack of direct party intervention during production and the unexplored frontier of animated film created permissive and productive conditions in which Ohnuki-Tierney's concept of meconnaissance flourished. Furthermore, Wan and his team reveal that the primary operating principle at SAFS was the development of a nationalized Chinese animation style, founded in traditional folk-arts, and directed towards children's education, not the fulfillment of Party objectives.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

On June 24th, 1966, Red Guards at Qinghua University's middle school posted a big-character poster (*dazibao* 大字报) calling other students to revolutionary action. They instructed classmates to follow the spirit of Mao Zedong Thought, constantly pursue rebellion, and stamp out revisionism.[1] At the conclusion of this poster the students drew a parallel between revolutionaries and the mythical Monkey King (*Sun Wukong* 孙悟空). According to the poster, the Monkey King served as a model Red Guard. The trickster, easily recognizable with his Golden-Hooped Rod, is perhaps best known for shaking the foundations of heaven with his antics in the opening chapters of the Ming novel *Xi You Ji* (*Journey to the West*). Like him, revolutionaries should "turn the old world upside down" and "make a tremendous mess" in pursuance of Mao Zedong Thought.[2] As a rallying call, I argue that this adaptation of the Monkey King character arose from the complex intersection of Maoist era propaganda and Chinese folk storytelling traditions. To illuminate the dimensions of that intersection, this paper analyzes one particular adaption from the years before the Cultural Revolution: director Wan Laiming's 1964 animated classic *Danao Tiangong* (*Havoc in Heaven*).[3]

Sun Wukong, as represented in Wan's film, moved through time and space at a remarkable scale. From the Ming Dynasty to the twenty-first century, and from China to the United States, the Monkey King transformed across storytelling forms. He first appeared in

[1] "Long Live the Revolutionary Rebel Spirit of the Proletariat," *Peking Review* 9, no. 37 (September 9, 1966): 20.

[2] "Long Live the Revolutionary Rebel Spirit of the Proletariat," 21.

[3] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964). The film was released in two parts between 1961 and 1964.

literature and theater before becoming a recurring image in film, television, and even video games. Over the course of the story's history, the nature of his struggle against Heavenly Palace changed according to the vision of the author and the context of the time in which it was written.

Just two years after the second half of Wan's film was released, a call to action rang out across the People's Republic of China from Chairman Mao Zedong: to rebel is justified. This phrase contained both Mao's rejection of revisionism and the new Red Guards' raison d'etre. What followed, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, shook the Chinese Communist Party, and the nation, to its core. Students, such as the ones from Qinghua University Middle School, gravitated towards the rebellious Monkey King. Scenes from the film leapt off the silver screen and became disastrously real. Troupes of young Red Guards, like the monkeys in Flower and Fruit Mountain, waged war against their so-called oppressors, teachers, local leaders, even family members. High-level party leadership, like the warriors of the Heavenly Palace, took up ideological arms to defend themselves but fell under society's unrelenting tide. And before them all stood Mao, a beacon of inspiration for China's ten years of havoc.

This paper argues that, although the Monkey King may seem today like an obvious symbol of anti-authoritarian rebellion, it was not a foregone conclusion that Sun Wukong would become such a successful symbol of Maoist cultural revolution. To understand how the Monkey King as a symbol came to be associated with Maoist revolutionary action in the 1960s, this paper analyzes the content of *Havoc in Heaven* itself while also interrogating memoirs and documents from the Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS) artists who produced the film. Their recollections from years of production on the film reveal a significant unit of analysis through which to comprehend symbolic exchange under an authoritarian state and party. Several studies of cultural production under Maoism have pointed out that there was significant leeway between

central policy and local implementation. Most of these studies focus on how that discrepancy produced unintended consequences and sometimes even thwarted or contradicted central Party goals. In this paper, however, I am interested in how this discrepancy ended up producing exactly the effect the Party hoped for. In other words, I examine the processes by which, in the absence of direct Party intervention, the artists who created *Havoc in Heaven* transformed the Monkey King into a powerful symbol of Maoist rebellion. This paper argues that without direct Party guidance and through the unexplored frontier of animated feature films, SAFS artists developed their own operating principles, founded more on traditional folk-art forms and concepts of education than on CCP dogma, to justify rebellion through the Monkey King character.

This framework, placing filmmakers as the unit of analysis in propagandistic symbolic exchange, builds on approaches employed by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney and Alexander Bukh in their studies of Asian nationalism and national identity formation.[4] In her study of the Japanese state's appropriation of the cherry blossom as a symbol of tokkotai (kamikaze) pilots during WWII, Ohnuki-Tierney argues that the cherry blossom was a powerful mobilizing symbol not because the state had effectively imbued it with meaning, but because the state's absence of communication about its intended meaning left the symbol open to interpretation. She calls this process meconnaissance.[5] But Ohnuki-Tierney does not ask whether certain conditions facilitate meconnaissance or make it more effective. In addressing this question, I adopt Alexander Bukh's concepts of "permissive and productive conditions," which result from significant social change

[4] Alexander Bukh, *These Islands Are Ours: The Social Construction of Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020). and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[5] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3.

and form the foundations for new agency.[6] According to Bukh, "permissive conditions" refers to the relaxation of restraints that creates the capacity for agency, whereas "productive conditions" shape how that agency is expressed. Analysis of both kinds of conditions are necessary to understand how new forms of agency emerge, and how they overlap with political interests of the state, local institutions, and individual political actors.

In *Havoc in Heaven*'s case, permissive conditions were created when CCP guidance on cultural production alternated between periods of restriction and relaxation. Furthermore, the Party did not directly inform production of the film, thereby creating permissive space for SAFS animators. Productive conditions were those that surrounded animation as a new medium. Artists at SAFS could innovate techniques and draw from traditional arts in part because animated feature length films had little precedent in China at the time. Together, these permissive and productive conditions led to meconnaissance in the meaning of the Monkey King that allowed it to become a powerful symbol of Cultural Revolutionary rebellion.

This paper is structured around three different but interconnected interpretive levels: the state, the local, and the hero. The state represents the large-scale historical forces that impacted the context for *Havoc in Heaven*'s development. The local level relies on extensive essays from the members of the Shanghai Animation Film Studio to understand the interpersonal cooperation which produced *Havoc in Heaven*. Lastly, Wan Laiming's memoir provides insight to the personal impact the Monkey King had during this period. Coining the analytic level of the hero brings attention to the fact that Wan's memoir does not give an unbiased account of his life; rather, he claims he is much like the Monkey King and positions himself as the hero of his own

[6] Bukh, *These Islands Are Ours: The Social Construction of Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia*, 14.

life story.[7] Wan's self-characterization suggests that meconnaissance occurs not only at the symbolic or textual level, but also within the lives of artists themselves. Three levels of interaction allow this analysis to expand from the lowest strata of symbolic production to the highest levels of historical change.

This paper begins with an overview of the various academic disciplines and authors who have contributed to the study as well as an introduction to the Monkey King character and *Journey to the West*. It will then analyze the content of Wan's *Havoc in Heaven* compared to those previous adaptations of *Journey to the West*. Then, the paper moves through each analytical level, the state, the local, and the hero to build a picture of meconnaissance and artistic production at the time.

Literature Review

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, in *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms*, examines the aesthetics of symbols to investigate the rise of totalitarianism and the premature deaths of tokkotai pilots in Imperial Japan. This sweeping monograph examines the intersection of patriotism, defined as beliefs held by the individual, and political nationalism, defined as a state ideology.[8] Significantly, a top-down and bottom-up dialectic surfaces. Patriotism's transformation into nationalism takes place through the naturalization of symbols in three mechanisms: refashioning of tradition, aestheticization, and symbolic meconnaissance. The latter

[7] Wan Laiming and Wan Guohun. *Wo Yu Sun Wukong* 我与孙悟空 [Me and Sun Wukong]. Shandong: Beiye Wenyi Chubanshe, 1986, 86.

[8] Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History*, 7.

two are of relevance here. Aestheticization is that process wherein cultural practices and symbols are transformed into artistic representations of beauty according to contemporary aesthetic standards.[9] Traditional understandings of propaganda matches this process. Socialist Realism, for example, attempts to represent revolutionary action in more beautiful and idealized imagery. According to Ohnuki-Tierney, aestheticization is enabled by meconnaissance, the absence of communication that arises when parties derive different meanings from the same symbols.[10] When the frameworks people use to interpret a symbol shift around them, meconnaissance masks the change and allows new meanings to become standardized.

This paper diverges from Ohnuki-Tierney's approach in a few notable ways. Firstly, she employs the journals of tokkotai pilots, recipients of this symbolic transformation, in her analysis. Instead, I emphasize artists as enactors of change. Secondly, Ohnuki-Tierney interrogates the aesthetics and meaning behind cherry blossoms. Unlike cherry blossoms, the Monkey King character as a symbol must be understood in the context of his fictional narrative. For that reason, this paper examines the film as well as the character. The result of these differences is a focus not on the state's manipulation of patriotism or nationalism, as Ohnuki-Tierney demonstrates, but on the realization of national identity, congruent with CCP goals, predicated on artistic styles of the past.

In his analysis of nationalist mobilization, Alexander Bukh introduces the concepts of permissive and productive conditions. He argues that these conditions are the result of a critical juncture, a period of significant change that "threatens or destroys social routines" and allows non-elite actors, what he calls "national identity entrepreneurs", to foster narratives about the

[9] Ohnuki-Tierney, 16.

[10] Ohnuki-Tierney, 280.

territorial extent of their nation.[11] By permissive conditions, Bukh means the relaxation of constraints during a critical juncture wherein actors have new agency. These are distinct from productive conditions that are those elements of the critical juncture that define the form of actors' newfound agency. In the historical narrative of changes to the Monkey King's identity, artists are the entrepreneurs who transform symbolic meaning. These entrepreneurs can affect change because of productive and permissive conditions within social and political routines.[12] By combining the conclusions from these two authors, this paper reveals the context in which meconnaissance arises.

Recent scholarly research on the Monkey King from Sun Hongmei further provides a framework for understanding major periods in the character's development. Her analysis prioritizes the transnational nature of the symbol for identity formation in the Chinese diaspora. She argues that the symbolic ambiguity of the Monkey King character over time made it uniquely suitable as a site for Chinese people to reconsider that identity.[13] Sun Wukong's ambiguous physical appearance, somewhere between monkey, man, and god meant that within the character itself, a broad field of meaning exists to be reapplied in new formats. Furthermore, adaptations of the character's origin story and development changed over time, providing a broad narrative field of meaning. Sun Hongmei's theoretical framework derives from the translation studies term "rewriting," applied to the cross-cultural transformation of the character between China and the United States.[14] Significantly, Sun notes in her conclusion that the majority of the

[11] Bukh, *These Islands Are Ours: The Social Construction of Territorial Disputes in Northeast Asia*, 10.

[12] Bukh, 14.

[13] Sun Hongmei, *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Representation of a Chinese Epic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 11.

[14] Sun Hongmei, 7.

adaptations in her analysis come from the *Havoc in Heaven* sequence in the original work. Not only is it one of the most well-known episodes from *Journey to the West* but it is also a period in the Monkey King's character development where he most clearly contends with personal development and transformation.[15]

Following research from Barbara Mittler, this paper subverts classical definitions of propaganda, which recognize only the agency of the state and the reflexive reaction of the people. Jacques Ellul summarizes this perspective as manipulation of the masses by an organization that wants to cause collection action.[16] Mittler flips this top-down process on its head by arguing that the central question in cultural study of that period should not be "what does propaganda do to people?" but "what do people do to propaganda?"[17] Reframing the question draws attention to the power of the individual to own, recreate, and communicate propaganda outside of official government channels. This paper will use her question as a starting point and will treat propaganda as the larger discourse between the state and its people on how to communicate, educate and exemplify values. Mediating their discourse are the artists who create symbolic change. In many respects, this conceptual understanding of propaganda mirrors the Chinese equivalent, *xuanchuan*.

In his famous 1942 speech on arts and literature, Mao Zedong described the future of cultural production in the CCP. He hoped that the artistic establishment would become a

[15] Sun Hongmei, 171.

[16] Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 61.

[17] Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.

"cultural army" capable of communicating CCP ideology to the people.[18] His prescriptions drew on the classical Chinese concept of *xuanchuan*. Evident in Chinese society after the Spring and Autumn Period, *xuanchuan* is derived from the root words "to disseminate" or "to propagate" or "to spread". It was the broad term to define ideological transfer between and among all strata of Chinese society. In premodern China, transfer of ideology between state and the people occurred when literary elites traveled across China.[19] Mass media only deepened education's reach into local communities. *Xuanchuan* notably does not carry the pejorative connotation that "propaganda" has in Western discourse. This form of social communication enabled both integration and education before the state had any other means to do so, and it prioritized improvement and change within the government and the people.[20] Based on Mittler's work and the Chinese definition of *xuanchuan*, this paper examines the agency of Chinese politics and society, at multiple levels, to interact with and change the symbol of the Monkey King.

As the Monkey King symbol's meaning shifted over time, various artists in different disciplines had the opportunity to refashion the character as their own. Those changes are significant, but it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that images of the Monkey King coalesced around his heroic and justified qualities during the events of *Havoc in Heaven*. A combination of Ohnuki-Tierney and Bukh's research on nationalism explains why meconnaissance existed and how it gave SAFS the agency to produce their film. Their agency further refutes the perspective that Mao's China was a significant disruption to Chinese artistic history and development. SAFS

[18] Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art," trans. Bonnie McDougall, *Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies*, no. 39 (1980): 2.

[19] Lin Chunfeng, "From 'Poison' to 'Seeder': The Gap Between Propaganda and Xuanchuan Is Cultural," *Asian Journal of Communication* 27, no. 5 (2017): 454.

[20] Lin Chunfeng, 455.

animators consistently argue that their work was informed not by intervention from the Party but by a sense of responsibility for their nation's folk-art traditions.

Origins of the Monkey King

Havoc in Heaven was not the first adaptation to use the Monkey King character. In fact, he was derived from Ming Dynasty novel, *Journey to the West*. Appearing in various adaptations of that novel, the Monkey King is both a magical protector of the monk Tripitaka and a clever trickster who uses his guile to wreak havoc in the heavens. Across history, the Monkey King's role in *Journey to the West* has shifted in scope and scale. At some points, he is merely a companion along a story's journey, and at others he is the protagonist of the story.

Along with his function, the Monkey King's design rarely stays consistent across literary, filmic, and dramatic depictions of the character. In print editions of the original, he is born out of stone in early history. The wind shaped him into the form of a monkey, and he took domain over Flower-Fruit Mountain. It is easy to imagine him as entirely animal in form. Other, more recent, film adaptations portray him as a hybrid man-monkey.[21] It is difficult to define an original version of the character and even more difficult to claim that he takes on a standardized form across types of media.

The Monkey King travels in the first chapters of *Journey to the West* seeking immortality and greater position amongst the deities of heaven. His quest first takes him to the abode of the Daoist Patriarch, where he spends years in study. Eventually the Monkey King gains the ability to leap hundreds of thousands of *li*[22] in one somersault, transform his body into many forms, and command individual hairs on his body to become copies of himself. With these powers he subdues a demon king and leads his monkey followers. In need of weapons, the Monkey King

[21] For example, Hong Kong actor Donnie Yen starred in a 2014 version of the *Havoc in Heaven* episode released as *The Monkey King* in the United States. Yen's face was visible for performance but the rest of his head was masked with make-up to approximate a monkey's.

[22] One li is equivalent to about half a kilometer.

travels to the Aolai Country where he gains the first of his most iconic accessories: the Golden-Hooped Rod. In every adaptation of the character, the Monkey King travels with this shape-shifting rod as his primary weapon. During his time as Tripitaka's acolyte, he gains the Tightening Fillet, a headband that Tripitaka can use to control Monkey. Taken together, the two articles are an integral part of the Monkey King. The rod can expand and contract to serve infinite purposes, while the fillet constrains him to prevent unauthorized action.

Magical powers, the Golden-Hooped Rod, and the Tightening Fillet are the core of the Monkey King's abilities, but over time he employs them differently in response to historical conditions around the narrative. Brose argues that three phases define the development of the Monkey King character and story arc.[23] Each phase will be discussed in detail below. The first phase was that of *Journey to the West*'s precursors. In this phase the Monkey King was not consistently portrayed across mediums but was generally a trickster and a demon. The second phase of the Monkey King character is represented by the release of the 1592 "original" novel *Journey to the West*. In this phase the Monkey King maintained demonic attributes from the first phase, but also achieved significant moral education throughout the length of his journey. This phase also emphasized the philosophical journey individuals make into themselves to achieve enlightenment. The third phase of the Monkey King came during China's Republican Period after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. During this period, religious allegories or philosophical musings were criticized by literati seeking freedom from China's troubled ancient traditions.

[23] Benjamin Brose, "Taming the Monkey: Reinterpreting the Xiyouji 西游记 in the Early Twentieth Century," *Monumentica Serica Journal of Oriental Studies* 68, no. 1 (May 2020).

The story told in *Journey to the West* was originally inspired by the seventh century journey of a Buddhist monk named Xuanzang to India. Over centuries the tale took on increasingly fictional themes and included mythical encounters. Before the Song Dynasty however, Tripitaka lacked a monkey companion in his journey. There are two largely accepted precursors to the 1592 novel. The first, *Da Tang Sanzang Qujing Shihua*, was most likely first printed in the thirteenth century. Some scholars argue that it appeared centuries earlier.[24] Here, Tripitaka traveled with a monkey who served as his guide. The Monkey Acolyte, as he was named in this version, was far from the protagonist. Tripitaka's mastery of Buddhist scripture was the key to their journey's success.[25] Most significantly, the Monkey is a purehearted, godlike assistant to the loyal Buddhist monk.

The second precursor to *Xiyou Ji* was *Zaju Xiyou Ji*. *Zaju* in the title refers to a type of theatrical performance. In this early Ming version of the story, the Monkey King is very different from his noble self above. Instead, he is the lowest among a series of deities and a member of a family of demons. In their presence he acts as an unserious clown and trickster.[26] The dialogue in *Zaju Xiyouji* was significant for its vernacular form. The conversations between characters were clear to even the least educated audience members. In vernacular language, the Monkey King cracked crude jokes and made satirical references to other productions popular at the time.[27] The character's attitude in this version came to inform many later adaptations.

[24] Sun Hongmei, *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Representation of a Chinese Epic*, 39.

[25] Sun Hongmei, 39.

[26] Sun Hongmei, 45.

[27] Sun Hongmei, 47.

The first extant copy of *Xiyouji* was published in 1592 and inaugurated a new phase for the Monkey King character. It contained 100 chapters and a long prologue about the Monkey King, which distinguished it from its narrative predecessors. Most scholarship suggests that the "original", as the 1592 version will be called throughout this project, was compiled by Wu Cheng'en based on stories like those described above. Literary scholar Andrew Plaks contests this assumption in his seminal English-language book on Ming novels. He argues that Wu Cheng-en likely played a key role in composing the Ming Dynasty version of the story, but there is not clear evidence to confirm or deny.[28] Instead of asserting one author or another, Plaks concludes that *Xiyouji* was a "product of the sixteenth century intellectual milieu" whose significance lay in its form and meaning, not authorial history.[29] It's greatest contribution to the narrative progression of *Xiyouji* was the 1592's emphasis not on physical quests but the transformational power of pilgrimages within the mind.

In *Xiyouji*, the Monkey King takes on qualities from both the earlier versions. Initially, he is little more than the trickster as in the *zaju* edition. In the prologue he antagonizes deities and seeks greater power despite heavenly warnings. After gaining the trust of the heavenly powers, the Monkey King gains the title of "Great Sage Equal to Heaven" but is given the lowly task of tending imperial stables. During a great celebration in Heaven, the Monkey King eats heavenly peaches, drinks wine, and takes the elixir of immortality reserved for higher deities. As punishment for his actions, the gods cast the Monkey King into imprisonment under a mountain. This imprisonment ends when Tripitaka rescues him, and they embark on their pilgrimage to the

[28] Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 193.

[29] Plaks, 199.

West. For the remainder of the narrative, the Monkey King redeems himself despite his demonly past. Combining forces of the Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian paths brings enlightenment to a character over time as opposed to denying it or granting it for the entirety of the tale.

Revisions to and adaptations of *Xiyouji* continued throughout the rest of the Ming Dynasty and the Qing Dynasty, but it was not until the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the twentieth century Republican Period's reform-minded intelligentsia that the third fundamental transformation occurred. This was the last phase before Shanghai Animation Film Studio artists participated in the production of *Havoc in Heaven.* Reformers sought explanations for the turbulence and change they observed around them. Three prominent authors, Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, and Hu Shih believed that tradition was at fault for their country's woes. Chen, an early member of the Chinese Communist Party, drew heavily on Western philosophy to inspire revolutionary action in youth. He argued that those who "cling to antiquated ways are declining" and only peoples committed to progress will advance.[30] Lu Xun utilized fiction to critique antiquated conservatism. In his short story, "A Madman's Diary", the dangers of tradition are allegorically depicted as human cannibalism, something that had been happening for "four thousand years".[31] He ends the tale with a plea to save the future of China, to save the children. Reformers left great concern among the intelligentsia in the early-twentieth century that change was needed, if China was to survive in a rapidly changing global environment.

Liang Qichao, one of the most prominent reformers from the period, resolutely believed in fictional literature's power to affect change in the Chinese population. His 1902 article *Lun*

[30] Duxiu Chen, "Call to Youth," in *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 221.

[31] Xun Lu, "A Madman's Diary," in *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 239.

Xiaoshuo Yu Qunzhi Zhi Guanxi, On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People, Liang did not discount centuries of philological study, but recognized that even the most erudite scholars found the greatest pleasure reading fiction.[32] Liang argued that the state of China at the end of the Qing Dynasty was a direct result of fiction's stimulative and formative power. Furthermore, fiction was one of the only routes out of China's decline. Because every person from the "uneducated butchers" to the "men of high talents or wide learning" engages with fiction at some point in their life, it could be used to reform the Chinese people.[33]

To that end, fiction which celebrated traditional, or folk, religious customs was gradually revised to a more secular ends. Hu Shih set out to transform *Xiyouji* in the 1920s with an essay condemning its previous influence on religious practices and celebrating its non-philosophical storyline.[34] Western story-telling traditions even impacted secularization when Arthur Waley's abridged version, *Monkey*, appeared throughout England and America in 1942. The debate over secularization versus tradition, however, was by no means settled during this period. One article in the *People's Daily* from 1948 praised an opera version of the *Havoc in Heaven* story for the way it reconstructed old dramas.[35] The author was quick to note that despite some changes to the performance, the opera may still be problematic according to the audience's interpretation of Maoism. Some believed it accurately portrayed the struggle of the peasant class to rise above feudalistic leadership. Others saw only the influence that ghosts and myths could have on the

[32] Liang Qichao, "On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People," in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, n.d.), 75.

[33] Liang Qichao, 79.

[34] Brose, "Taming the Monkey: Reinterpreting the Xiyouji 西游记 in the Early Twentieth Century," 188.

[35] Zhang yiying and Jiang Qi, "Guanyu 'Sun Wukong Danao Tiangong' 关于 '孙悟空大闹天宫' [Regarding Sun Wukong Havoc in Heaven]," *Renmin Ribao 人民日报 [People's Daily]*, December 24, 1948.

general public.[36] The article gives no clear resolution to this debate, leaving it up to future adaptations.

In sum, prior to the founding of the PRC, depictions of the character of the Monkey King had undergone three broad transitions or phases. In the first phase, the Monkey was a trickster and a demon. In the second phase, commencing with the 1592 publication of *Xiyouji*, the emphasis shifted to the Monkey King's journey of personal transformation: elements of previous dramas and oral stories were incorporated to depict the personal transformation that the Monkey King undergoes throughout his journey westward. In 1592, he became a much more nuanced character, sharing both the demonic and enlightened traits of his predecessors. His two accessories, the Golden-Hooped Rod and Tightening Filet, were also immortalized in this version. The third phase was marked not by a specific edition, but by a transformation in the work away from religiously and philosophically grounded fiction. With these three phases, *Journey to the West* gained the potential for a vast field of meaning, grounded in the power of the mind to create change and alluring to nearly any demographic in China.

A fourth phase began with the efforts of the Shanghai Animation Film Studio. As we shall see in the following chapters, the SAFS' production of *Havoc in Heaven* drew from the self-realization themes of the 1592 original, relied on the Republican period's secularization, and finally innovated on those previous versions to provide entertaining education to China's young masses.

[36] Zhang yiying and Jiang Qi.

CHAPTER TWO: HAVOC IN HEAVEN

The three phases enumerated culminated with an adaptation of the Monkey King who was removed from his spiritual roots. With the birth of the PRC, artists and authors found new ways to portray the character in accordance with Socialist standards. Before examining the productive and permissive conditions which were born in that period, I will analyze significant themes from the film itself. *Havoc in Heaven* tells the story of Monkey's ascension relative to the Buddhist and Daoist deities of the heavenly court.[37] It covers the first ten chapters of the 1592 original *Journey to the West*. The film begins in utopia, or the monkey equivalent, under Flower Fruit Mountain. By this point in the tale, Monkey had already learned the secrets of transformation magic and become a formidable commander of his army. He ventures out from that home to find a weapon worthy of his strength. As described above, the Dragon King gives him the Golden-Hooped Rod. It is significant that *Havoc in Heaven* begins with such a fundamental scene. Audiences connect with this traditional depiction of the Monkey King with his characteristic weapon. Monkey then goes to heaven and is granted a low position as the stable keeper. Displeased with the treatment of his horses, the Monkey King releases them from their paddocks and delights in his refutation of the heavenly court's rules. This initiates the first war of the film between the Monkey King and the heavenly court. Fighting in front of Flower Fruit Mountain, his army succeeds in defeating the heavenly court's army, thus temporarily resolving the tensions between Monkey and the court.

The second part follows a very similar progression of events as the first, this time with elevated stakes and consequences. The Monkey King finds that keeper of the imperial peach

[37] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964).

orchard is far below his station. When the court fails to invite him to the heavenly banquet, Monkey lashes out by ruining the prepared festivities and imbibing the emperor's pills of immortality. In anger, he returns to Flower Fruit Mountain to await another war. This war proceeds much as the first, but the heavenly court manages to capture Monkey and sentence him to death. They try and fail multiple execution methods before putting him into the furnace of immortality pills. Even this final attempt fails, and the Monkey King springs from the furnace, destroying the rest of heaven on his way back to Flower Fruit Mountain. The film ends the same way it began, with utopia manifest among the rebellious monkeys.

Havoc in Heaven's plot essentially depicts a utopian society manipulated by an outside force. To restore balance, the singular hero must rebel against an established bureaucratic apparatus. While it may appear to be a story written for Maoist audiences, this narrative arc does not depart significantly from the 1592 original until the end of the film. This ending, however, was already popular in *lianhuanhua* and opera by the time the film was in production. Chinese audiences already had a close connection to the characters, it had depicted the Monkey's heroism since the Republican period and painted a magical image of Marxist utopia. Wan and the artists at SAFS preen their flower into a Maoist shape by communicating the moral justification behind rebellion. The Monkey King rebels because he is slighted by the heavenly bureaucracy, represents the monkeys as their hero, and is devoted to the concept of liberation. Victimization, heroism, and liberation form the backbone of his character's motivations throughout the film.

Throughout the film, the Monkey King lashes out against the heavenly bureaucracy because it had wronged him at some point in the film. *Havoc in Heaven* establishes Monkey's raison d'être in the opening scene of the film. After being born from a stone, as the original story describes, Monkey becomes the king of Flower Fruit Mountain. Eventually, military drills with

his monkey followers leads him out of utopia for more weapons.[38] This interaction with the Dragon King is his first encounter with a member of the antiquated heavenly bureaucratic system in the film. Despite having no official title or recognition, Monkey enters the Dragon King's cave with bravado and demands. He bypasses the guards, sending them into a frenzy to warn their King of his approach. He also demands a weapon worthy of his self-assigned station. Throughout the ensuing dialogue, Monkey determines that only the grandest weapon in the King's arsenal is worthy of his power. While other versions of *Journey to the West* detail the work Monkey puts in to become a master of the transformative magical arts, *Havoc in Heaven* provides little description of this work. By the time the movie was released, the Monkey's story was quite popular, removing the need for heavy exposition on his training. Instead, this early interaction with the Dragon King reveals the driving dramatic force of the work, tension between the Monkey King and the heavenly bureaucracy.

On two separate occasions in the film, Monkey is given a job within that bureaucracy, not because the court wishes to grant him higher status, but because they want to avoid further trouble with him. That first position is as the keeper of the heavenly stables. The court schemes to grant him this position to keep a closer watch over his antics. When the Monkey King is given his new job as keeper of the stables, he only receives partial recognition from the court. They issue him official clothes, but with the knowledge that an official position does not make the Monkey King a more powerful deity.

His second low position is that of the orchard keeper. In a departure from the 1592 original, the heavenly court tempted the Monkey King away from Flower and Fruit Mountain

[38] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964), 0:14:01.

back into heaven to serve as orchard keeper. Their intrigue follows the climactic battle of the films first part. After losing to the monkeys of Flower Fruit Mountain, the heavenly court seeks a new way to keep watch over their unruly adversary. The Monkey King's victimization is most apparent in heavenly court conversations about his title: Great Sage Equal to Heaven. Throughout the 1592 original, Monkey strives to attain higher station among the gods of the Buddhist and Daoist court. In his journey of self-discovery, he eventually attains the power, and religious right, to be called Great Sage Equal to Heaven. In the film, however, the court decides to grant him this "empty name" (*kongming* 空名) just to keep him out of trouble.[39]

By casting the Monkey King as a victim of old bureaucratic politics, *Havoc in Heaven* does not significantly deviate from the story arc popular during the period. This conflict between Monkey and the court reveals a larger social dialogue about the nature of Chinese Communism. During the 1960s, a rift began to form between those dedicated to faith Maoism and those interested in innovating on bureaucratic Maoism.[40] Faith Maoists, represented most prominently by Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four, believed deeply in Mao's primacy as the ideological father of the party. Bureaucratic Maoists, who would come under attack during the Cultural Revolution, sought ways to make the government more efficient, at the detriment of ideological purity. Descended from centuries-old political thought on the size of government, bureaucracy during this period came under strict scrutiny. *Havoc in Heaven* provides its own very clear assessment of bureaucracy, it prevents all those things Maoism sought to realize in China.

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[39] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964), 0:47:50-0:53:15.

[40] Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 2.

The second narrative emphasis from *Havoc in Heaven*, the Monkey King's heroic representation of the monkeys, is driven by the heavenly court's constant efforts to draw him out of Flower and Fruit Mountain, away from his people. This film takes special care to develop the relationship between the Monkey King and his monkey followers. The opening sequence of the story, after Monkey is born from a stone, depicts Flower and Fruit Mountain in apparent balance. He is portrayed as a benevolent ruler who provides for his people and trains them to become a more effective army. Through this opening scene, *Havoc in Heaven* paints a clear picture of the revolutionary hero. First, he is a protector of utopian stability. While he may need to make war to realize that stability, there will always be an end goal to the conflict. Secondly, that hero is a wise teacher to all of society. Lastly, the film implies that a hero should be one of his people. In *Havoc in Heaven*, anthropomorphic gods are juxtaposed against the non-human monkey troupe. Sun Wukong, while marginally becoming a member of the religious pantheon, never loses his physical resemblance to the other monkeys. He also maintains a connection to the monkeys through his movements. Even when wearing official court garb, the Monkey King moves through space like his followers. Dancing and exaggerated flourishes define the monkeys against human characters.

Significantly, the film develops a paternalistic relationship between Sun Wukong and the monkeys. When he first returns to Flower and Fruit Mountain, monkeys climb all over Sun Wukong like a child would their father.[41] The monkeys are also voiced by children, enhancing the feeling of familial ties between Sun Wukong and his followers. Sun Wukong's name is itself a pun in Chinese which denotes his youthfulness. When granted the name in the 1592 original,

[41] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964), 0:01:15 to 0:5:31.

the Patriarch tells the Monkey King that he would give the surname *Hu*, meaning monkey, but that its connotation was too feminine. Instead, the Patriarch decided on *Sun*, its component radicals implying that Sun Wukong is a baby boy.[42] Since the beginning of the character, age has been a defining characteristic. In many versions of the tale, his youth better complements the self-discovery he undergoes with Tripitaka. *Havoc in Heaven* uses the monkeys' relative age to distinguish them from the heavenly court.

The paternalistic relationship between the Monkey King and his followers establishes an important connection to the Revolutionary Romantic heroic ideal. A hero is the father-like provider for his people. In the above example, heroes provide education to the younger generation and prepare them for class struggle. In the next salient example, heroes provide for the material needs of their people. Monkey returns to Flower Fruit Mountain in the second part of this film after he has eaten the Queen Mother's Peaches of Immortality and ruined her upcoming banquet. His return is a triumphant one, the other monkeys overjoyed to see their leader return home. From his magical bag, the Monkey King produces a nearly endless supply of food and drink stolen from the Heavenly Court's banquet table. He commands the other monkeys to "eat and be merry" as they celebrate their shared success.[43] The final item he removes from his bag is a Peach of Immortality itself, which he magically turns into an entire tree for their consumption. These peaches will imbue them with long life and good health, he says, as they dance and sing in joy. The significance of this scene should not be understated. In it, the audience observes Monkey's most profound interaction with his followers. First, he has

[42] Wu Chengen, *The Journey to the West*, trans. Anthony Yu (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 114.

[43] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964), 1:14:54.

denied the Heavenly bureaucracy what is theirs, and, by doing so, provided food and immortality for his people. In tearing down the limiting governmental structures of the past, the Monkey King gives his people an avenue to eternity. Secondly, the paternalistic relationship between Monkey and the others is most evident here. They giggle and play with their food like children as he magically hands out the meal. In this final moment of calm before the culminating battle at Flower Fruit Mountain, *Havoc in Heaven* reveals the ideal relationship between a leader and his followers. It is founded on familial, paternalistic moral relationships, educational for the symbolic youth of the group, and the leader provides for his followers.

The final narrative emphasis of significance in the film is the role of the Monkey King as a liberator. In the above paternalistic relationship to his followers, the Monkey King liberates the monkeys from death by granting them access to the Peaches of Immortality. His treatment of the Heavenly Stables demonstrates a more literal role as liberator. When the Monkey King accepts his position as keeper of the Stables, he finds magical horses constrained tied off and unable to graze. They literally chomp at the bit while he verbally questions how someone could treat an animal in such a way. On their release, the horses flourish among the clouds, dancing and celebrating in a way like the young monkeys of Flower Fruit Mountain.[44] The film lingers on this point, demonstrating exceptional artistic skill in its depiction of the prancing horses. On arrival, the Monkey King admonishes other stable keepers for prostrating before him, as if he was a god. He demonstrates immediately that the old ways are not worth defending. The release of the horses is also a rejection of their leadership style. To lead is to grant your people permission to dance and live their life as they wish.

[44] *Havoc in Heaven* [Danao Tiangong 大闹天宫], directed by Wan Laiming (Shanghai Animation Film Studio, 1964), 0:24:54 to 0:30:00.

CHAPTER THREE: THE STATE

The years in which Wan Laiming composed his Monkey King project were incredibly tumultuous. The film industry had been wracked by changes in leadership, directives, and funding. Those changes resulted in permissive conditions where repressive structures of control were not consistent. In his memoir, Wan continuously references those years when they had the most freedom as the most creatively productive for him and the SAFS. Each turn in the government's guidance changed the ideology and theory of artistic production and produced meconnaissance in popular adaptations of the Monkey King. Change to the government's control over media, and by extension its propaganda, yielded the permissive conditions for the previous section's film to be released.

Of fundamental importance in the CCP's approach to art was Mao's instructions describing Socialist Realism. At the 1942 Yan'an Conference, Mao Zedong described the future of cultural production in the CCP. Foremost among his prescriptions was the need to build a unified "cultural army" able to defend the communist front and defeat rightist enemies.[45] He cited a series of problems that stood between the current situation and his yet unrealized cultural army. First and foremost was his concern that contemporary writers and artists had no awareness of the proletariat they were meant to produce art for. If the arts remained in a lofty, literati ivory tower, how could they represent the needs of Chinese peasants? Artists' attitudes, work, and study must pursue greater awareness of that class. Mao instructed creatives to learn the "language of the masses" to better portray their lives in a manner congruent to the way they lived.[46] That speech cemented Socialist Realism in the aesthetics of China.

[45] Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art.", 1.

[46] Mao Zedong, 1.

The relationship between film and propaganda in China began with the Japanese invasion. Left-wing filmmakers began to make anti-Japanese films after the invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Centered in Chongqing, resistance cinema's role in propaganda became twofold: to disseminate information and to inspire action.[47] After the civil war and before the Rectification Campaign, two major centers for film arose: Yan'an and Shanghai.

From the Rectification Campaign (1951-1952) onwards, guidance on propaganda and the course of the film industry developed at pace with national campaigns. Deputy Minister of the Propaganda Department Hu Qiaomu initiated the campaign with a November speech about ideological remolding among artists.[48] Ideological remolding meant realigning propaganda to the original intent of Mao's speech in Yan'an. Hu believed that some filmmakers did not adequately speak the language of the masses and that all should turn to uplifting the worker class. In order to do so, the Rectification Campaign supported strict criticism and self-criticism. The conflict between aesthetics and ideology, form and function, first arose during the early Rectification Campaign. Artists, in their self-criticism, admitted that an over prioritization of form led to a lack of class consciousness in their works.[49] This debate would continue to define the Party's relationship to art for the rest of the Mao period.

The Second National Assembly of Chinese Literature and Art Workers in 1953 discussed the implications of the Rectification Campaign's criticisms. To summarize up to this point, propaganda was founded on the ancient idea that art had a role in shaping the attitudes of the people. Its new target audience was to be the peasant working class. Lastly, criticism should be

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[47] Jessica Chan, *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2019), 30.

[48] Chan, 32.

[49] Chan, 34.

used to help artists understand the difference between ideology and aesthetic form. The Assembly identified in Socialist Realism from the Soviet Union a model for their new artistic undertaking.[50] Borrowing from Soviet models, Mao's Socialist Realism portrayed the "muscular bodies, metallic will, utopian light, glory of the people" that revolution promised.[51] And adherence to Revolutionary Realism did not detract from the liveliness of the artwork, often capturing the essence of bustling (*renao* 热闹) locales and people. This burgeoning aesthetic taste included folk forms, adopting them to connect with the past and creating methods to retell the stories.

With this discussion on Socialist Realism in China came an emphasis on the nature of the hero in artistic works. Heroic emotion and character development was an arena within which to combat petty bourgeoisie sentiments. Some literary theorists, such as Zhou Yang, believed that Romanticism and love held the key for demonstrating a character's heroism in relation to socialism.[52] Purely positive characters, with static emotional development and unrealistic character traits, could not adequately inspire the people to take up revolutionary action.

The First Five-Year Plan's discussion on heroes and their personality traits was not new to Chinese literary studies, nor would it end with the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Social models in this Communist context were based on a long history of didactic literary figures in China's artistic history.[53] Confucianism used the concept of a virtuous gentleman (*junzi* 君子) to teach

[50] Chan, 36.

[51] Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution* (London: Verso, 2017), 31.

[52] Chan, *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966*, 38.

[53] Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture*, 16.

morality. In time, models were a canonized method to communicate social values and expectations. The most recognizable model person (*mofan* 模范) from the Cultural Revolution was Lei Feng, a soldier meant to exemplify the revolutionary spirit and military discipline of the era. *Mofan* were living people or projects who were then celebrated in propaganda as an ideal. Later, artists and writers built model characters or works (*yangban* 样板) that expressed similar virtues to the *mofan*. Unlike *mofan*, however, *yangban* were entirely the product of fictional literature. They epitomized the values of the CCP. In this distinction between *mofan* and *yangban* characters, the difference between Revolutionary Realism and Romanticism becomes clear. *Mofan* portrayals of real people fulfilled the literary dimensions of Realism and *yangban* works realized the utopia of Romanticism.

The first Five Year Plan discussion on relaxing strict ideological forms in the arts culminated with the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Initiated by external forces in the Soviet Union as much as internal changes to the CCP, this campaign sought deep reform by allowing expanded scientific and artistic endeavors. Members of the film industry spoke upwards during this period to change what they saw as glaring issues in "censorship, the changing status of directors, and the changing identity of actors" under collectivization and centralization.[54] Like Red Guards did a decade later, the industry targeted their leadership in speeches and published articles. They believed that censorship had reduced the availability of scripts and forced production teams to release lower quality and quantity films since the PRC was established. These critiques, however, could not last and the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 put an abrupt end to public critical discourse about the state of the arts.

[54] Chan, *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966*, 41.

When the Great Leap Forward began in 1958, central leadership placed a new emphasis on addressing the quantity of woes that had been expressed during the Hundred Flowers Campaign. The entire film industry benefited from a boon in work. More films were produced during the first two years than had been made since 1949.[55] This solution to some criticisms did not extend to the relationship between ideology and aesthetics in film. Anti-Rightist policies of strict forms and censorship continued throughout the great leap forward.

Despite the Anti-Rightist Campaign's harsh crackdown on ideological dissent, Zhou Enlai's policy of "walking on two legs" did enable a type of aesthetic growth in the Chinese arts from this period. One of the concepts, which took hold, was an expansion of Revolutionary Realism called Revolutionary Romanticism. Unlike its realist counterpart, Revolutionary Romanticism was the artistic expression of Marxist ideals. Realism's long tradition in the Soviet Union and China sought to depict the world as it was, while Romanticism tried to imagine utopia as it could be. Significantly, Revolutionary Realism typically utilized imaginary heroes to achieve its goal. In 1958, a Mao Zedong slogan called for artists to synthesize Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism. His new synthesis was motivated by the need to inspire greater dedication to the beginnings of the Great Leap Forward, during the same year. Revolutionary Romanticism still took an inward turn, subordinating aesthetic structure "to ideology and also devoted to its perfection".[56]

After the Great Leap Forward, a period of Blooming and Contending followed, and became the defining political atmosphere for the release of Wan's *Havoc in Heaven*. The failures of the Great Leap Forward inspired CCP leadership, specifically Chairman Mao, to reenlist the

[55] Chan, 46.

[56] Pang Laikwan, *The Art of Cloning: Creative Production During China's Cultural Revolution*, 33.

help of intellectuals for the purposes of education and industrial development.[57] A series of national meetings and work conferences met from 1961 to 1962 to decide how education should be handled. One of those meetings, between the Culture and Education Small Group, led to the release of the Eight Articles on Literature and Art as well as the Thirty-two Articles on Film.[58] Leader of the small group and director of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, Lu Dingyi, cautioned against guidance on the particulars of educational programs. Instead, the documents turned to larger questions of culture and political intrusion to that space. The Eight Articles encouraged retrieving from traditional art forms, allowing art as a space for proletariat relaxation, not just education, and avoiding politically motivated criticism.[59]

Their discussions about theater reverberated into the highest levels of Party leadership through Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. Being a former actress, Qing wrote extensively of theater productions during her life. During work conferences on the arts and literature, it became clear that traditional Chinese operas were one genre that could appeal to the masses. Performances exploded as across the country as film production increased. Of the 3,000 theatrical companies in China by the mid-1960s, only 170 of them were dedicated solely to modern dramas. The rest continued to perform traditional plays, often in their original version.[60] By 1964, at the time of the Peking Opera Festival, the tide had again turned on artists. The Central Committee's Propaganda Department decided that immediate efforts should be made to reform operas. Jiang Qing was the leading voice in the reform efforts. She claimed that priority must be placed on

[57] Roderick Macfarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961-1966*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90.

[58] Macfarquhar, 3:91.

[59] Macfarquhar, 3:119.

[60] Macfarquhar, 3:110.

performances with contemporary themes, and only traditional plays which had been thoroughly reformed.[61]

This brief study of the state's relationship to the arts at the highest level reveals key dynamics that guided creative efforts during this period. First and foremost, artistic limits were historically contingent. Changes to propaganda and guidance on the arts were the effects of changes in social and political forces, not causes of those forces. Whether it was the PRC's relationship to the Soviet Union or the need to improve educational standards, the arts and literature were drawn into political debates. Within the arts themselves, debates over ideological function and aesthetic form dominated. When the Party turned to restrictive guidance for the arts, artists responded with restricted depictions of centralized ideology. In periods such as the Hundred Flowers and Blooming and Contending, artists felt free to criticize and explore less restrictive plots and characterization. Lastly, and most significantly to *Havoc in Heaven*, the hero remained a central topic in fiction circles. Heroes had an educational role as well as an aesthetic expression. They were a point where the debate between ideology and aesthetics could be localized and resolved.

[61] Macfarquhar, 3:388.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LOCAL

Without clear and consistent input from the state's propaganda organs, the SAFS turned inward, developing their own goals, standards, and priorities for the art they developed. I have coined this analytical level local because, throughout their memoirs of their time with the studio, filmmakers and artists commented on the community, almost family-like, atmosphere of the production teams. Directors were largely auteurs, removed from the technical details of animation unless specifically asked for input. The remainder of the team was left free to collaborate and explore this medium. A few significant themes about the artist's relation to their work and to Chinese society emerge in this series of interviews: their awareness of animation's educational role, their responsibility to preserve culture, and their distance from formal party control. These self-defined priorities at the local level were productive conditions within which SAFS redefined the Monkey King in animation. Furthermore, with new productive conditions, meconnaissance reinforced popular themes about the Monkey King including his morally justified response to the Jade Emperor and his heroic powers.

Shanghai Animation Film Studio

The animated film industry in China began in the 1940s with small workshops within live-action film studios. At the time, several animation groups sprang up, subordinate to larger studios such as the Northeast Film Studio, the Shanghai Science and Education Film Studio, and the Beijing Science and Education Film Studio.[62] During the early years of animated film in the 1940s, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) maintained a close relationship with animation

[62] Daisy Yan Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation 1940s-1970s* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019), 5.

groups at various studios. They often produced films with strong nationalist themes and anti-Japanese sentiments.[63] Many of these film studios also recognized the educational value of early animation. Filmmakers generally believed that animated films were a childish medium, only suited for youthful productions.[64] Over ninety percent of the Mao era's animated films, however, were produced by the Shanghai Animated Film Studio. The SAFS was established in 1957 with the express hope of delivering diverse animated productions to the Chinese nation. It was also established under the implicit threat of government censorship if its films departed from party ideology. When party conservatives took issue with the 1950 film *The Life of Wu Xun*, they called on party members to close the studio which released it.[65] From 1953 on, studios outside party norms were consolidated under state leadership. SAFS remained the only studio solely dedicated to animated works throughout the socialist era.

Organized under the State Bureau of Radio, Film, and Television, SAFS worked closely with the state apparatus and Party to design, write, and produce its many films. Financially, it was also entirely reliant on state funds. The government annually required "around thirty to forty films, ten minutes per film, altogether three hundred to four hundred minutes, around three million Chinese Yuan output".[66] SAFS also had no concerns about distribution and marketing because the state distributed film and organized screenings at the community level. More significant projects such as feature films received additional funding, all without regard for profits. Individual workers were compensated relatively highly for their efforts in the studio. All

[63] Duan Xiaoxuan, "Walking Our Own Path and Innovating," in *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective*, ed. Daisy Yan Du, trans. Nick Stember (Boston: Brill, 2022), 28.

[64] Du, *Animated Encounters: Transnational Movements of Chinese Animation 1940s-1970s*, 6.

[65] Du, 116.

[66] Daisy Yan Du, *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective* (Boston: Brill, 2022), 6.

artists, except for a project's named director, received the same monthly salary. Even the gap between those two echelons of pay was small.[67] High and equitable pay gave artists ample comfort from which to produce their films.

Part of the studio's success compared to other animation groups under traditional film studios should be attributed to the high standard of living SAFS artists maintained. While many in China struggled with the results of Great Leap Forward reform, these artists flourished. Their team was a tight-knit community, closely collaborating on their films. All this is evidenced by their recollections compiled in *Chinese Animation and Socialism*. When China reopened under Deng Xiaoping, foreign animated films flooded the theaters. Most notable was Japan's *Astro Boy* which "captured the hearts of the Chinese people" and forced Chinese films out of the public eye.[68] The 1980s continued to present SAFS with crises until finally, in 1995, the studio was pushed into capitalist marketization. Where other industries grew under increased marketization, SAFS floundered.

In 2017, film scholar Daisy Yan Du gathered a significant number of living SAFS artists together in Hong Kong for a Chinese animation conference. There, they contributed individual essays on their experiences in the studio and their thoughts on animation's relation to Chinese art. Attendees included Duan Xiaoxun, chief engineer; Yan Dingxian, animation designer and president (1984-1988); Lin Wenxiao, animation designer; Pu Jiaxiang, professor and director; and Fung Yuk Song, designer and director. As evidenced by this list of attendees, artists at SAFS often served various jobs within the studio. Because pay was standardized, the only rank which truly stood above others was that of studio president. Renowned animator Te Wei guided the

[67] Du, 7.

[68] Du, 6.

SAFS as its president from 1957 until his retirement in 1984.[69] Much of the ideological direction and innovation at the studio was inspired by Te's leadership.

SAFS Thoughts on Animation

Duan Xiaoxuan noted in her essay that the studio's "original directive" was to create films for children.[70] She does not elaborate on where that directive came from. It can reasonably be inferred that Te Wei's relationship with the State Bureau of Radio, Film, and Television informed this directive. Duan also writes that during the Hundred Flowers Campaign, SAFS turned towards producing animations for all ages. She does not state if rectification altered their desire to produce certain films but based on the list of movies and shorts made after 1960, the primary audience seemed to return to children.

Xuanchuan had a deep connection to youth well before it was conceptualized to teach Communist values during the Mao era. When the *xuanchuan* school was celebrated by pre-Qin intellectuals, it stressed two forms of social relationship, loyalty (*zhong* 忠) to the state and piety (*xiao* 孝) to the family. These two concepts went on to become foundational social pillars during the Ming and Qing dynasties.[71] The model for loyalty to the state began when children were raised to live piously towards their elders. During twentieth century intellectual reform, the social category youth began to grow into a discursive category as well. Through news and journals like *New Youth*, adolescents "became both the voices of new political ideas and targets

[69] Du, 5.

[70] Duan Xiaoxuan, "Walking Our Own Path and Innovating," 39.

[71] Lin Chunfeng, "From 'Poison' to 'Seeder': The Gap Between Propaganda and Xuanchuan Is Cultural," 455.

of various political positions", a trend that did not end with the founding of the PRC.[72] Under the CCP, youth were the vanguards of China's future, and their education was to be taken seriously. Live-action films from the period directed at youth generally portrayed morally upright characters and the plot centers on their transformation into better representatives of the Party.[73] SAFS reached an audience even younger than those targeted by live-action youth films. Pre-adolescent animated film was the battleground on which SAFS could build a better China.

The *People's Daily* recognized the SAFS' intent to educate the next generation in an article after *Havoc in Heaven* was released. The author spends much of the article writing about how the film is specifically constructed for a younger audience. He notes the "beautiful colors and charming scenes" that drew his kids into the film and recalled his own childhood joy (1962). This article demonstrates none of the trepidation that previous news had taken towards Chinese folk stories. Instead, the author celebrates the simple, humorous, and exaggerated approach SAFS used to portray the Jade Emperor's failures and the peasant uprising of the Monkey King (1962).

In addition to educating the youth, the SAFS also had a responsibility to maintain Chinese artistic tradition within their films. As the only major animated film studio of the Mao Era, they had the solitary task of identifying what could be derived from painting, poetry, dance, and operas to be used in their films. Te Wei himself realized the immensity of their task. He implored the rest of the animators to "blaze the trail for a national art style" in animated film.[74] One further reflection, Duan Xiaoxuan realized how significant their "nationalizing" project was

[72] Zhong Xueping, "'Long Live Youth' and the Ironies of Youth and Gender in Chinese Films of the 1950s and 1960s," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 11, no. 2 (1999): 154.

[73] Zhong Xueping, 161.

[74] Duan Xiaoxuan, "Walking Our Own Path and Innovating," 36.

regarding artistic style.[75] Significantly, neither animator drew from the typical CCP lexicon to describe their work. Not once do they mention the relation between what they were animating and Socialist, or Revolutionary, Realism and Romanticism.

Two of the first artistic styles pulled directly from Chinese art history were shadow puppet plays (*piyingxi* 皮影戏) and papercutting (*jianzhi* 剪纸). Shadow puppet plays were a traditional form of storytelling accessible to small farming communities across China. Puppets cut from various materials such as paper or animal skins could be manipulated in front of the audience.[76] This intricate art form was also tied to papercutting, where intricate designs were cut into paper then pasted onto windows. When light shown through the papercut art, it would illuminate the scene depicted. In much the same way, animators at the SAFS used small segments of an animated character to design action into a sequence. They divided characters' facial features to manipulate expressions and moved background pieces to simulate motion.[77] Ink-painting, papercutting animation was a uniquely Chinese contribution to global animation styles. This did not go unnoticed by the rest of the world as more and more SAFS films screened in foreign countries. One American newspaper wrote that SAFS had "achieved something Disney could not" when it distilled traditional Chinese art practices into a unified animation style.[78]

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[75] Duan Xiaoxuan, 34.

[76] Tang Rui, "The Heritage of Wang Piying Troupe: Shadow Puppetry in North Sichuan," *Asian Theatre Journal* 35, no. 1 (2018): 55.

[77] Pu Yong, "On the Art of Papercutting Animation," in *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective*, ed. Daisy Yan Du, trans. Isabel Galwey (Boston: Brill, 2022), 87.

[78] Pu Jiaxiang, "National Style and Characterization," in *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective*, ed. Daisy Yan Du, trans. Isabel Galwey (Boston: Brill, 2022), 76.

Duan also argued that previous national traditions of art production could be applied "in a wide range of artistic settings".[79] Animation simply did not exist in dynasties past, but the artistic emphases, values, and styles of *lianhuanhua* comic strips, traditional painting, and even calligraphy could be refashioned in a moving picture. Artists built collections of folk art and children's toys that they wanted to evoke within their films.[80] These objects were not limited to papercutting and shadow puppets, but also included clay dolls and peach blossom wood-block prints. They even pulled from national traditions of folk religion to represent in their art. One of the lead designers working on *Havoc in Heaven*, Yan Dingxian, said that they based their Jade Emperor on the Kitchen God of Chinese folk custom.[81] This is especially interesting given the later criticism applied towards *Havoc in Heaven* director, Wan Laiming. Red Guards claimed that his Jade Emperor was meant as a veiled criticism of Mao himself. Far from attacking CCP leadership, the depiction of the Jade Emperor was a celebration of Chinese folk symbols and a rejection of the old religious, bureaucratic system.

The final revelation shared by SAFS artists at their conference was the distance they felt from party control. At first glance this does not comport with evidence from other art forms or literature. After 1949, the CCP established a series of organizations to better control artistic production throughout the PRC. The All-China Federation of Literature and Art Circles (ACFLAC) served as the largest body in their bureaucratic system. ACFLAC managed various smaller associations responsible for various artistic fields such as literature, music, dance, and

[79] Duan Xiaoxuan, "Walking Our Own Path and Innovating," 52.

[80] Lin Wenxiao, "Dribs and Drabs," in *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective*, ed. Daisy Yan Du, trans. Nick Stember (Boston: Brill, 2022), 73.

[81] Yan Dingxian, "An Authentic Animator," in *Chinese Animation and Socialism: From Animator's Perspective*, ed. Daisy Yan Du, trans. Nick Stember (Boston: Brill, 2022), 59.

filmmaking.[82] Notably absent from the list of ACFLAC associations was one dedicated solely to animation. Most likely this was due to rapid developments in animation during the period and a limited number of animated film studios. At the bottom of this system, artists were part of work unit-like teams where they received pay and housing. During the anti-rightist campaign, experts from all fields were put under intense scrutiny, including artists. For many work units, pay disappeared and they were forced into the countryside to better understand the language of the masses.[83] Peasants filled their place in the artistic field, encouraged by the Party to write Communist folk songs and perform approved plays or musicals.

Despite the problems plaguing other creatives throughout the country, SAFS animators continued with their work nearly uninterrupted. As mentioned above, they received relatively high pay throughout the anti-rightist campaign and Great Leap Forward. I argue that it was animation's novelty as an art form which prevented intervention during the CCP's more repressive campaigns. There was no state or party apparatus in place to manage this new type of filmmaking, so, as a result, it was not subjected to the same investigation that other art forms were. Through the words of SAFS animators, artistic and narrative decisions were not dictated by party officials.

Multiple anecdotes, in fact, reveal that character building goals guided the vast majority of creative decisions at SAFS, not guidance from a party representative. One pivotal scene from *Havoc in Heaven* was proof of their design and writing system for films. In the scene, the Monkey King is frustrated that the Heavenly Court relegated him to a lowly position as heavenly

[82] June Dreyer, *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*, 10th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 274.

[83] Dreyer, 277.

orchard keeper while simultaneously refusing him an invitation to the Queen Mother's banquet. In protest, he eats her peaches of immortality and gets drunk with the alcohol meant specifically for the banquet. He wreaks havoc on the banquet preparations, flipping tables and stealing food and drink he wishes to take back to his monkey followers in Flower Fruit Mountain. In this scene, Monkey King expresses great anger towards the Jade Emperor and his court. Much like Wu Han's *Hai Rui Dismissed*, this scene depicts a member, albeit marginal, of the bureaucratic elite criticizing the leadership of the emperor. Unlike the play, however, this film was not initially criticized by CCP leadership and nor was it connected to any allegory of Mao.

The artists responsible for this sequence, Lin Weixiao and Yan Dingxian, believed his actions and speech were "a funny thing to do" and "fit with Sun Wukong's personality" (Lin, 68). Their decision would have been met with resistance by party leadership, if they had been a part of this film's planning process. Instead, Lin and Yan worked in isolation from other control. Lin first made rough drafts of scenes which she would pass on to Yan for review. He revised this draft then produced a final copy to be worked into the full film. Their sole guiding principles during the drafting process were the dedication to children's' education and entertainment and an eight-character phrase. This phrase evoked "matchless fantasy, unique skills, tragic heroism, cinematic beauty, life, death, resurrection, and uproar" (Yan, 61). While related to some symbolism in Maoism, this eight-character phrase relied on many themes from the ancient stories which informed their feature films.

In their distance from party control, SAFS artists found meaning in producing films for children which exemplified the values and culture of historical China. They communicated that past to the general population and to the state. To unify their project of communication, SAFS prioritized education, preservation, and freedom. First, they consciously designed their film with

children in mind. As a relatively new art form, animation was relegated to cartoons, but this did not stop the SAFS team from infusing their work with valuable themes that were popular in contemporary opera. Secondly, they identified folk art forms that best represented the unique qualities of Chinese culture and based their animated techniques off those styles. They did not follow a long history of technique because one did not exist. Lastly, their work flourished under permissive conditions from changes to government policy that preceded *Havoc in Heaven*'s release.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE HERO

Wan's memoir, the source used in this analysis of his relation to the character, casts himself as the main protagonist. In many ways, he is the hero of his own story. When recollecting the hardest time in his life, detention and purge during the Cultural Revolution, Wan remains the infallibly dedicated director of China's classical work of animation.[84] Furthermore, Wan compares his own life to the life of the Monkey King at multiple points in the memoir. Wan traveled extensively throughout his life in response to the Japanese invasion and work opportunities. When he moved back to Shanghai for the film studio there, he calls it his "personal journey to the west."[85] And when explaining why he held such a fascination with the Havoc in Heaven episode of *Journey to the West*, Wan claimed to always possess Sun Wukong's "monkey spirit".[86] Wan completely internalized his relationship to the Monkey King symbol. He was changed by his work on the symbol, and he felt he contributed something new to it.

The memoir is largely told chronologically but diverts into long treatises on animation at random. One of these diversions, his seventh chapter, describes three tenets of animation he hopes will inspire future artists. The tenets he enumerates contrast the guidance that Party officials laid out for Revolutionary Realism and Romanticism in the years before *Havoc in Heaven* was released. In one respect, Wan wrote this chapter expressly for other animators, so the subject is tied directly to his art form. His first tenet on nationalization, is a new way to understand the impact arts and literature had on national identity at the time. The last two tenets

[84] Wan Laiming and Wan Guohun. *Wo Yu Sun Wukong* 我与孙悟空 [Me and Sun Wukong]. Shandong: Beiye Wenyi Chubanshe, 1986, 154.

[85] Wan, 112.

[86] Wan, 87.

represent his way to reconcile with memories from the Cultural Revolution and creative repression he personally witnessed during the period.

Before analyzing his words, the context of Wan's memoir must be understood. The book was published in 1986, only a decade after the end of the Revolution, and at a time when many were publishing "scar" literature, a medium through which they could reconcile the turmoil of their past with their continued love for their country. Wan's remarks on the Cultural Revolution followed trends from other authors of the 1980s. He refers to the Cultural Revolution as the Decade of Disturbance (*shinian dongluan* 十年动乱).[87] This naming convention recognized the pain China went through during this period and far from celebrated the Cultural Revolution's mission. Wan also repeats throughout his chapter on the decade that blame fell squarely on the Gang of Four's shoulders. He still maintained faith in the CCP, in the PRC, and the tenets of Maoism that had brought his country to that point.

Wan Laiming and *Havoc in Heaven*

Wan Laiming worked at SAFS and eventually directed some of the studio's most famous films. Born in 1900, Wan lived through monumental changes in China's politics. He was a member of Mao's generation and observed firsthand the end of the Qing Dynasty, Japanese imperialism, and the founding of the PRC.[88] As a result, his exposure to the rest of the world was directly influenced by the cultural and political fervor of the Republican Period. Most notably, Wan and his younger brother lived in Hong Kong before returning to Shanghai where they were exposed to more Western media than they would have been in other parts of China. As children

[87] Wan, 156.

[88] Wan, 9.

they fell in love with the movement and action of animated movies. Both knew that they wanted to learn the movement evidenced in traditional Chinese *shanshui* (山水) and apply it to Chinese versions of Western cartoons.[89] This upbringing, balanced between a love for early animation in Western countries and a passion for Chinese traditional art styles, influenced their work throughout the remainder of their careers.

In 1926, as a part of the Great Wall Film Company, the Wan brothers released what many consider to be China's first animated film called *Uproar in an Art Studio* (*danao huashi* 大闹画室).[90] This film was a celebration of the art form itself. In it, art takes on a life of its own and leaps from the artist's drafting desk. Always self-conscious of his social role as an artist, Wan Laiming included elements in his films to reflect that role. In his memoir of the film *Havoc in Heaven*, Wan views his life through the films which he produced. Other parts of his life are merely tertiary to the eventual production of his magnum opus. For example, when recalling the bitter years of Japanese occupation, Wan writes only of the patriotic films he contributed to the war effort, not of the political change around him.[91] Wan was also acutely aware of animation's ability to carry on Chinese tradition. Like the SAFS artists he worked alongside after the war, Wan knew they had a responsibility to create uniquely Chinese films in a uniquely Chinese style. Throughout his life, Wan was motivated by two things: his passion for animated films and his love of the Monkey King character.

[89] Wan, 39.

[90] Wan, 60.

[91] Wan, 107.

Supposedly *Havoc in Heaven* was a project 20 years in the making because Wan Laiming and his brother had conceived of the idea in the 1940s but had not been able to secure enough artists and funding until the 1960s.[92] Wan's thoughts on this film converge at the end of his memoir in a series of "enlightenments" he gained by working on the film. Each read as prescriptions for future animation artists to abide by. The first is that animated films should follow the path of nationalization. The second argues that romanticism represents the foundation and hopes and dreams of modern life. Lastly, animated film art forms must abide by and be in service of the film's content or substance.[93]

Wan's first tenet of animation, following nationalization (民族化 *minzuhua*), means that he hopes future artists create a uniquely Chinese style for the arts. To summarize this argument, Wan employs a garden metaphor. The arts are rooted in Chinese soil and so they must be cultivated in that soil to flourish.[94] Furthermore, while the other styles of film may be older, animation's seedling has a chance to become the most colorful and varied flower in the garden. In this tenet, Wan also addresses concerns that the Shanghai Animation Film Studio was merely adopting styles from America's Disney films. He blatantly dismisses the criticism because he believes the film came from traditional art forms, not as an imitation of foreign styles. The observations from SAFS artists above reaffirms that belief of Wan's. Wan goes on to celebrate the period of freedom artists discovered after the Great Leap Forward.[95] He recognizes that the film could not have been made in another other context.

[92] Wan, 3.

[93] Wan, 128.

[94] Wan, 130.

[95] Wan, 131.

Wan's exact wording for the term nationalization is important here. *Minzu* (民族) connotes both nation and ethnicity and continues a tradition of debate dating from before the formation of the CCP and the PRC. Wan's contribution to that debate is his personal belief in the primacy of artists and creatives within the debate. As reformer Liang Qichao equally recognized, fiction has immense power over the views of the people. Wan argues first and foremost that the responsibility lies on creators to cultivate fiction in line with essential characteristics of the nation/ethnicity. The complete term *minzuhua* (民族化) transforms a static national and ethnic identity into a dynamic process of contestation. The basis for nationalization is derived from historical and cultural tradition but is preened to shape by artists and writers over time. As discussed in the previous section, SAFS artists found inspiration for their techniques in Chinese folk art and performances. As the animated arts developed, this folk foundation grew into a nationalized Chinese animation style.

The second tenet argues for fiction and romanticism in future works. In this section of his memoir, he discusses how the film fit into contemporary Revolutionary Realism despite being based on a fictional legend. While it is a story of the Monkey King, it also represents the people's struggle.[96] He believes that this allowed him to pursue the film despite it being so outlandish a story. He tried to approach the entire filmmaking process with caution while also adhering to the original principles of *Journey to the West*. In the story he saw an individual with big aspirations struggling against a dark system. He equates the Monkey King's rise against Heaven to "his comrades" attacks on capitalist roaders.[97]

[96] Wan, 140.

[97] Wan, 134.

It is also here that he argues that this was an entirely new version of the Monkey King and his Havoc in Heaven saga. Sun Hongmei notes that this was, of course, not true.[98] Operas and *lianhuanhua*, which had been popular at the time and espoused by Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing, depicted the same chapters with the same ending. Wan's first tenet provides a possible explanation for his point in this section. The global community's interaction with the Monkey King came largely through the film. While some earlier operas had showed overseas, they lacked the popularity of *Havoc in Heaven*.[99] In comparison to the West, and in that intersection between the global and the local, Wan believed he had made something truly special.

His final tenet reminds future animators that the priority for their work must be the content of their film. This section is perhaps least coherent, as he jumps between topics and arguments, but the most important is that he does not acknowledge the impact social and ideological forces might have on the filmmaking process. He credits many things for the version of the film that he produced, but official guidance and interference was not one of them. Like the filmmakers from SAFS noted, there was very little input from the Party on *Havoc in Heaven*. Instead, Wan claims he pursued the essential substance of the film, which was movement and the character's relation to the environment.[100] At the very end of this section, he summarizes his beliefs with a quote from Lenin: guarantee expansive personal creativity and hobbies, ideas and dreams, forms and contents. This quote is a direct repudiation of the violent crackdowns he observed during the Cultural Revolution. Instead of limiting the creative efforts of their artists, Wan hopes the Party will allow them to grow and flourish.

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[98] Sun Hongmei, *Transforming Monkey: Adaptation and Representation of a Chinese Epic*, 83.

[99] Sun Hongmei, 67.

[100] Wan, 146.

Wan's personal reconciliation with the Cultural Revolution occurs along two axes. The first, from his first tenet on animation, regards the responsibility of artists in national identity formation. As his animators agreed, creatives are a keystone in the aqueduct that delivers traditional culture in modern interpretations. Despite being purged during the Revolution for mocking Chairman Mao through his portrayal of the Jade Emperor, Wan trusts that his impact on Chinese culture will be upheld. The second axis is a hope, and plea, for the future. He recognizes that *Havoc in Heaven* could not have been produced unless the Party was in a period of less-restrictive cultural production. Across all diegetic and aesthetic elements of film, freedom and creativity must be prioritized.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that analysis of propaganda must consider the distance between central policy and local implementation. Often, the discrepancy between state or party goals and individual execution runs entirely counter to national objectives. As evidenced by essays from the animators and Wan's memoir, the primary concern at SAFS was not refashioning a traditional symbol through contemporary themes. Nor were they driven to portray the Monkey King in a certain way by state intervention. The artists were motivated by a passion for their work and the hopes they placed in animation as an art form. In the absence of a historical animated film tradition, they turned to what the nation would recognize most: paper-cutting, Beijing opera, and a classic image of the Monkey King. Building on these folk forms, animators employed an adaptation of the *Havoc in Heaven* episode that was in popular use at the time. The result was a domestic and international hit, recognized for its representation of the Chinese nation. Despite developing internal operating principles derived from traditional arts and storytelling, SAFS' *Havoc in Heaven* still portrayed a Maoist Monkey King whose rebellion was justified.

Permissive conditions for the film's development resulted from shifts in government regulation on the arts and literature. In those periods of lax regulations and relatively open public discourse, Wan Laiming and the SAFS artists felt free to explore the furthest reaches of their art form. In turn, animated filmmaking as a brand-new artistic medium created productive conditions within which SAFS drew from traditional folk art forms including paper-cutting and puppetry. Furthermore, they incorporated elements of *lianhuanhua* comic strips and Beijing Opera in their film. It was from those two influences that Wan Laiming derived his ending for the film, with the Monkey King escaping consequences for his actions and returning to Flower

Fruit Mountain to be with his fellow monkeys. *Havoc in Heaven* brought new light to a classic mythical tale, repackaging it for children, all the while providing moral justification for revolutionary action.

Meconnaissance occurs when permissive and productive conditions allow the mediators of symbolic meaning, artists, to interact with the broad field of meaning around that symbol. Establishing artists as the primary unit of analysis reveals a new side to meconnaissance and symbolic change from that described by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney in *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms*. Instead of seeing the state act on a symbol's meaning to mobilize the population, this case demonstrates an artistic team adapting a symbol on terms they believed best suited for their nation and its international identity. In this distinction lies the realization that agency may still reproduce propagandistic themes. Furthermore, artists as a unit of analysis clarifies how propaganda, more specifically the Chinese concept of *xuanchuan* and its educational role, led to the Monkey King becoming a justification for rebellious action. Even before the Cultural Revolution changed many forms of Chinese art, adaptations of the Monkey King began to coalesce around his more heroic attributes. SAFS animators drew upon these adaptations in a format specifically billed towards children and perpetuated a Maoist iteration of the character. When synthesized, the concepts of meconnaissance and permissive and productive conditions allow for a more nuanced analysis of how revolutionary "propaganda" works, in China and elsewhere, not by creating a radical break from the past but by realizing new agency for artists to pursue their work in ways that are congruent to the state's goals.

Afterword

Upon its release, *Havoc in Heaven* was applauded the country over. Newspapers from Beijing to Hong Kong announced the release of both parts with excitement and praise. Some authors commented on the film's artistic design and expression of the Monkey King character himself. They celebrated how his will to despise theocracy, represent a heroic struggle, and live with boundless energy was so skillfully displayed in animation.[101] Other articles wrote about its success at films festivals both domestically and abroad. *Havoc in Heaven* won the Hundred Flowers Award in 1963 for best opera film.[102] Its first episode also won a Soviet film competition for the best short film.[103] Lastly, newspapers collectively agreed, *Havoc in Heaven* successfully drew from traditional Chinese art forms including paper-cutting, Beijing opera, puppet shows, and national music.

Despite the film's positive reception, Cultural Revolutionary fervor called even the much-celebrated director into question. In 1966, as soon as the call for Red Guard action went out across the country, Wan and his family became targets of the Guards' attention. He believed that because of his fame in the animated film industry, he was identified as a rightist by youth.[104] This suspicion was enough for them to raid his house then take custody of Wan, separating him

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[101] 最有趣的神话拍成了电影　动画片'大闹天宫'上集摄成　艺术家万籁鸣二十年愿望今日实现 [Myth Made Into an Animated Movie 'Havoc in Heaven' Artist Wan Laiming's 20 Year Wish Was Fulfilled Today]," *Renmin Ribao 人民日报 [People's Daily]*, November 3, 1961.

[102] "國內外投來十八萬選票國產影片百花獎揭曉最佳影片李雙雙最佳女主角張瑞芳最佳美術片大闹天宫最佳戲曲片三打白骨精 [180,000 Votes Were Cast at Home and Abroad, the Hundred Flowers Awards for Domestic Films Announced the Best Film, Li Shuangshuang, the Best Actress, Zhang Ruifang, the Best Art Film, Havoc in Heaven]," *Dagong Bao 大公报 [Ta Kung Pao]*, May 23, 1963.

[103] "卡罗维发利国际电影节闭幕 我动画片'大闹天宫'上集获短片特别奖 [Animation "Havoc in Heaven" Wins Special Award for Short Film at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival]," *Renmin Ribao 人民日报 [People's Daily]*, June 26, 1962.

[104] Wan, 157.

from his family and his community. Once in custody, Red Guards investigated his presupposed guilt. Wan derided the "many crimes" he was accused of by Red Guards.[105] None made any sense to the artist, but he identified his depiction of the Jade Emperor in *Havoc in Heaven* as the most likely evidence the Red Guards had to interrogate him. He figured in his memoir that Red Guards thought his criticism of the Jade Emperor was a veiled criticism of Mao Zedong. Wan's Jade Emperor, however, was based on the Stove God of Chinese folk religion and a rejection of the religious, bureaucratic ways that had potentially steered his country wrong during the Qing Dynasty.

Despite Wan's intentions, Red Guards carried out their investigation against him. They used big character posters throughout town and public debate sessions to build a case against the famous animator.[106] When these sessions concluded, Wan was found guilty and imprisoned for two years, apart from his family and his community. He was not able to receive mail from them and had no way of knowing where he was detained. During the two years, he was put on a work crew and almost died from disease. Upon his release, life had fundamentally changed for his family. They were moved into a smaller, dark, damp home and forced to get by on very little money.[107] Then, as soon as it started, it was over. Local leadership apologized for his imprisonment and gave him his house back. It is in this episode of Wan's life that further research must be conducted. While this paper lays a foundation for the reception of the film, it does little work on the discourse about the film throughout the Cultural Revolution. Why was *Havoc in Heaven* criticized while the Monkey King character SAFS helped shape was touted as

[105] Wan, 156.

[106] Wan, 157.

[107] Wan, 158.

a model for Red Guard rebellion? The pursuit of this question would significantly develop the implications of symbolic transformation under meconnaissance.

Despite the trauma of his purge, Wan spent little time in his memoir, scarcely two pages, detailing this part of his life. His sole focus in the final chapter of his book was the effect this period had on *Havoc in Heaven*. As an artist, Wan cared deeply for the symbol he dedicated years of his life to being a part of. The Monkey King was both his muse and his twin in the filmmaking process. The depth of the connection between Wan, the SAFS and their art is the true center of this analysis. Without their passion for the work, the film could not have been produced and the history of *Journey to the West* adaptations would be much less rich.

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