

2. Cinema of Post-reform China

The history of film production in Mainland China since its beginning in 1905 can be divided into several periods. The commonly acknowledged history among historians of Chinese cinema summed up, for example, by Zhu (2003) is following: early social-problem cinema prior to the mid-1920s, entertainment cinema from the mid 1920s to the early 1930s, socialist realist cinema during Sino-Japan War and the subsequent Chinese Civil War from the early 1930s to the late 1940s, revolutionary propaganda cinema during Mao's era from 1949 to 1976, critical realist cinema from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the art cinema of the mid-1980s, and the entertainment wave since the mid-1980s. For the purpose of the present research, the development of Chinese cinema after China's opening up after Cultural Revolution, roughly around late 1970s will be reviewed. It should be noted that the current post-reform period is chosen for review because movies, and popular culture in general, differentiate themselves from those of the pre-reform decades under the Chinese Communist Party. A general review should inform us of the basis on which films of the 2000s are being created.

2.1 Critical realist cinema and the art cinema (1978 – 1985)

After the years of devastation during the Cultural Revolution era the film industry started blooming in the early 1980s. There were several reasons for this: relaxed

political environment, film as often the only form of mass entertainment and continuing governmental subsidies to movie industry. As Zhang (2004) observed:

Relieved from decades of political repression, filmmakers seized the rare opportunity of relative freedom to launch New Chinese Cinema. Thanks to the low percentage of household ownership of television sets and the nature of available programs, film was preferred form of mass entertainment in the early 1980s, especially in China's vast rural areas, which pushed annual attendance to an all-time high by the mid-1980s (p. 225).

The main issue during the late 1970s and early 1980s was occupied by rethinking what had gone wrong and the movies then were emotional responses to the Cultural Revolution catastrophes. These so-called “scar dramas“ depicted the traumas left by this period (*Evening Rain*, Wu Yonggang, Wu Yigong 1980; *Legend of the Tianyun Mountains*, Xie Jin, 1980; *Hibiscus Town*, Xie Jin 1986; *The Blue Kite*, Tian Zhuanzhuang 1993). Filmmakers that time depended on the concept of humanism in their reconstruction of history (Zhang 2004; p. 257) to confront the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policy errors and to render a more balanced view of history, in particular where images of the Kuomintang (KMT) are concerned.

The ascent of movie industry was accompanied by founding of movie awards and

their relevant events. In 1981, the Golden Rooster Awards sponsored by the official China Filmmakers Association was set up, and its combined ceremony with the Hundred Flowers Awards became a much publicized, celebrity-filled annual event for both film fans and the general population.

One year later, in 1982, the Beijing Film Academy graduated its first class admitted after the Cultural Revolution. The key members of the fifth generation include now celebrity directors like Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou and others such as Tian Zhuangzhuang and Zhang Junzhao. They became known for their participation in making experimental art films that challenged the socialist realist tradition (Zhu 2003). This group of filmmakers have “revolutionized film language and film styles in Chinese cinema and broke into the circuit of international film festivals“ (Zhang 2004, p. 226). The relaxed political environment or “apolitical cultural atmosphere“ (Zhu 2003) and continuing state-subsidies of the industry in the 1980s and the 1990s have relieved the film studios from any real box-office pressure and made possible the success of The Art Wave films.

The Fifth Generation films that gained reputation abroad (*Yellow Earth* Chen Kaige, 1984 ; *King of Children* Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, 1987; *Ju Dou*, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, 1989; *Farewell My Concubine*, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, 1993) broke away from the 50 year dominance of films by literature people and

entered an age contested by films by film people. There are main differences between movies done by literature and film people.

When literature people stress screenplay, film people focus on visual quality; when literature people pinpoint story, film people focus on images; when literature people stress telling, emotion and audience spoon-feeding, film people go for ambiguous imagery, cognition and viewer's participation (Zhang, 2004, p. 237).

Yellow Earth (1984) is taken to mark the beginning of the Fifth Generation cinema. However, even when these art movies gained popularity abroad, they were not acclaimed by Chinese cinema-goers and they did not earn money. The situation of filmmakers got complicated in 1984, when film was redefined as a cultural industry rather than a propaganda institution for the reenforcement of party ideology. The consequences were not just good, as it enabled filmmakers to enjoy a greater degree of creativity and independence, but also bad, because the studios did not gain any substantial government subsidies and have been left alone to market forces. The whole situation was further complicated by the fact that studios were still overburdened by the Soviet-style institutional structure.

Since that time Chinese cinema has witnessed dramatic declines in both its audience and its flows of capital. Many scholars (Lu 1997; Zhu 2003; Zhang 2004) have called the era beginning in mid-1980 the crisis on Chinese cinema that pushed

filmmakers to commercialism. The overall situation has begun to be even more restraining when in January 1986 the film industry was transferred from the Ministry of Culture to the newly formed State Administration of Radio, Film and Television to bring it under stricter control and management and to strengthen supervision over production.

2.2 Entertainment Wave (1985 – present)

Red Sorghum (1987), which debuted director Zhang Yimou and actress Gong Li, is regarded as a milestone in Chinese cinema that marks an end to avant-gardism and a beginning of commercialism (Zhang 2004, p. 238). With its lush and lusty portrayal of peasant life, it not just gathered praise abroad (Berlin Golden Bear Award, 1988; Sydney Film Critics Award, 1988; Montreal Silver Panda, 1989; etc.) but also proved a box-office success in China.

When, according to Lu (1997), the 1980s were “the golden times of Chinese cinema“ during which “artistic, exploratory, and avant-gardist films“ were made, the end of 1980s signified the beginning of an era when “no film studios would be willing to make films that have no commercial value“ (p. 130). Profitability became the most important criterion for production and studios could no longer ignore film's box office performance, explaining why abstract, obscure and artistic films were laid back. This

was the end of the Chinese New Wave characterized by experimental films. As has been already mentioned, the era beginning in the late 1980s is generally referred to as a „crisis of Chinese film industry“. This crisis characterized by the lack of money for production and audience apathy towards new Chinese movies caught attention of the policy makers, who attempted to adopt reform policies for its resolution of the crisis. The goal of the central government was to resuscitate the studios not through state subsidies but further commercialization. The studios have been encouraged to produce quality entertainment films with competitive market value, or, in other words “movies appealing to ordinary people“ while “New Wave's experimentation became soon the target of criticism“ (Zhang, 2004, p. 239).

The move towards commercialization was caused by the economic reform of the film industry, which followed the country's move to marketization. Previously, in the centralized planned economy, studios produced features according to the quotas approved by the Film Bureau and received a flat fee of RMB700, 000 per title from China Film Corporation regardless of box-office takings. During the 1980s, however, new reform measures changed this system of guaranteed purchases, and the distributors now either paid RMB 9, 000 per print or split the revenue by the pre-agreed percentage points. Either way, the emergent market economy pressured studios to consider a film's box-office success before it went into production (Zhang, 2004, p. 239).

In sum, the recession of Chinese film industry was caused by several factors: the reform launched by Central government that pushed for privatization and pushed studios to commercialization; second, the growing popularity of the other entertainment options such as television, VCD or DVD; and third, Hollywood's entry (or foreign movies' entry in general) into China's film market in the mid-1990s that has marginalized Chinese films' domestic market share (Zhu 2003, Lu 2005).

According to Zhu (2003), “the transition from New Wave to post-New Wave was really the transition from experimental film to popular film, with the former focusing on art and the latter on economics“ (p. 135). Moreover, as will be described later, this post-New Wave has come to represent a particular mode of filmmaking involving international financing, casting and production.

When the rhetoric promotion of the Chinese cinema by the Party didn't help to revive the industry at all, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television issued a document in 1994 that allowed the annual importation of ten international blockbusters, most of them big-budget, high-tech Hollywood movies. The aim was to boost theater attendance, which was fulfilled because these imports restored the theater going habit of Chinese audiences and generated huge box-office revenues (Zhu 2003).

However, this situation brought other difficulties regarding Hollywood's impact on future direction of Chinese cinema, because Chinese filmmakers have started to feel

endangered. The consequences took place in two ways: in a renewing sense of nationalism within the Chinese film industry, and in copying Hollywood formula by Chinese filmmakers (Zhu, 2003, p. 21). This Hollywood formula of high-cost production became the standard for Chinese filmmakers and have since been taken up as models for filmmaking and marketing. Domestic blockbusters such as *Red Cherry*, Ye Ying, 1995; *Shanghai Triad*, Zhang Yimou, 1995 or *Opium Wars*, Xie Jin, 1997 have adopted Hollywood's commercial formula with huge investment and massive promotion, and the use of stars.

China started to make its own “pictures“ and the returning Chinese audiences unavoidably noticed them. According to Zhu (2003), the domestic big pictures all became top domestic blockbusters for 1995 and “with the popularity of ten big imports and the subsequent ten big domestic pictures, 1995 became the year of cinema“ (p. 86). Low-budget and low-production-value entertainment pictures not only failed to generate profits but also provoked the government's tough sanction. This trend can be demonstrated by the Changsha Meeting in March 1996 where the Chinese State Administration of Radio, Film and Television heavily criticized low-budget entertainment films because of their depiction of sex and violence and emphasized the importance of the educational mission of movies (Zhu 2003, p. 88).

At the Changsha meeting, the renewed state emphasis on film's ideological

function became obvious. The issue of ideology at the meeting was “foregrounded by the supporters of the main-melody film who claimed that Hollywood films such as *True Lies*, James Cameron, 1995 and *Forrest Gump*, Robert Zemeckis, 1994 represented, at their best, the triumph of American patriotism and capitalistic ideology“ (Zhu 2003, p. 101). These supporters argued that Chinese cinema should follow this example and “present their own cultural tradition and mainstream ideology under the party's guidance“ (*ibid.*).

Whereas the state has loosened its policy on profit-sharing distribution with Hollywood, it has never relaxed its ideological control. Film censorship actually became more strict in the aftermath of Tiananmen in 1989. *The Blue Kite* as a critique of socialist revolution was banned in China, and so was *Devils at the Doorstep*, dramatization of the absurdity of war. As Zhang (2004) noted: “*At first sight, the military crackdown in Tiananmen of 1989 did not leave any direct impact on mainland filmmaking, but the subsequent CCP investment in leitmotif films has constituted an intensified, prolonged ideological drive to instill patriotism and nationalism in the population, especially the younger generation*“ (p. 259).

Because of the blurred guidelines for filmmakers, many studios started to adopt self-censorship and avoid politically sensitive issues. These blurred guidelines were often the result of “highly subjective perceptions of the members of the film review

board in Beijing about the political correctness of art, a process that has led to considerable quarreling, censorship and favoritism“ (Lull, 1991, p. 139 -140).

The party devoted a lot of energy into encouraging filmmakers to produce leitmotif movies. Berry (1994) noted that, from 1991 to 2000 thirty-five titles of revolutionary historical films backed and pushed forward by CCP were produced, four times as many as those of the 1980s. Zhang (2004) identified several factors that contributed to the heavy investment in these leitmotif films in the 1990s: 1989 Tiananmen event that prompted the CCP to launch new initiatives to re-educate the population and strengthen the spirit of nationalism; a number of celebrations, such as the seventieth anniversary of the CCP in 1991 and the fiftieth anniversary of the PRC in 1999 that necessitated the production of leitmotif films as tributes to the party and state; and the fact that shooting leitmotif films due to substantial subsidies actually helped state studios and individual directors to accumulate political capital without any financial burden (p. 285).

Even directors otherwise known for art films were recruited for leitmotif productions. From the fourth generation came Zheng Dongtian and Huang Jianzhong. Earlier, Xie Jin directed the *Opium War* (1997), a film that castigated British imperialism. Representing the fifth generation in leitmotif films is Feng Xiaoning, whose *Red River Valley* (1997) stages the solidarity between Tibetan and Han Chinese

in defense against British invaders. Both films coincided with the British return of Hongkong to China that year. In general, scholars pointed out that these authors “repackage nationalism, revolution and romance in the age of post-socialist commercialization“ (Zhang 2004, p. 286).

In terms of genre, many leitmotif films are large-scale war films recounting the CCP victory over KMT. Historical and biographic genres also account for a large number of leitmotif films (biographies of Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai, etc.). Yin (1998) pointed out that CCP's ideological pressure was even more augmented with the implementation of so-called 9550 project in 1996, because “this project set an annual quota of ten excellent leitmotif films in the ninth five-year plan and encouraged state studios to compete for government subsidies“ (p. 6 - 7).

However, in spite of mandatory viewing from schools and free tickets from work units, these leitmotif movies were in general not popular among audience. Zhang (2004) pointed out that “only five major revolutionary historical films made it to the annual top ten list and the remainder failed miserably at the box office“ (p. 286), and Zhu (2003) reminded that “the propaganda films were able to claim their box-office success only through the government-organized and government-sponsored public viewing“ (p. 88).

So far, two kinds of Chinese filmmaking in 1990s have been described – the

commercial that tried to lure the audience and the leitmotif filmmaking that was sponsored by the government. However, the era of the 1990s is also related to the emergence of the Sixth Generation of directors. These young directors with an urban focus decided not to wait in the state system, but to go underground to make movies without official permission and to ship them to film festivals abroad. Examples of this genre include *Beijing Bastards*, Zhang Yuan, 1993; *The Days*, Wang Xiaoshuai, 1993; *Red Beads*, *Postman*, He Yi, 1994, 1995.

The Sixth generation is group of young filmmakers who grew up in the post-Mao era and lived in big cities. These filmmakers were overshadowed by the success of their predecessors (the Fifth generation) and focused on low-budget provocative dramas. New directors resorted to rock music, alternative lifestyles and urban culture to show their rebellion against the state system and estrangement from society. As Reynaud (2003) described, money for their underground production “was raised through private investors, and shooting took place in real locations, guerrilla-style; negatives were smuggled out of the country, and postproduction was done without the director in countries such as Holland and Australia“ (p. 56). What particularly displeased the Film Bureau was that many of these provocative underground films banned in China were shown in film festivals abroad and even got prizes. The overall situation of the 1990s was described by Zhang (2004) as:

Whereas the fifth generation moved from ethnographic to historical and contemporary subjects, the sixth generation filmmakers emerged from the margins of the studio system and earned their reputation through underground or semi-official modes of production and distribution. Meanwhile, genre films, especially comedies, have climbed to the top of the box office, attracting transnational capital along the way (p. 281).

By the mid-1990s, the Chinese film industry was as mentioned by Zhu (2003) producing four types of films: big-budget blockbusters often involving private investors, government-promoted and government-sponsored main-melody epics, middle-budget entertainment films, and offbeat low-budget urban dramas by the sixth generation filmmakers. The entertainment films had become the staple of Chinese cinema, with the commercialized main-melody pictures and post-New Wave films getting shares of the mainstream market. The big budget blockbusters including Chen and Zhang's post-New Wave films, often commanded sizeable audiences. The main-melody pictures were able to draw audiences through either government-reinforced and government-sponsored screenings or the films own commercialized packaging. The sixth generation's small-scale films became the marginalized art cinema of the new era (Zhu 2003, p. 136).

Sun (2000) came up with a similar classification. According to her there are three

main groups of directors now legally operating in China, each group having distinct aims and sources of revenue. Of the first group are Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, who have no problems attracting foreign investment. Another group of directors are happy to make government-approved films which promote official interpretation of historical events. The third group are filmmakers who are willing to consider the tastes of domestic audiences and aim for box-office success.

However, as scholars like Zhu (2003), Lu (2005) and Cornelius (2002) have noted, the 1990s represent the “era of the hegemony of popular culture“, meaning that Chinese cinema is first of all based on commercial value. Zhu (2003) has summed it up well: “there exists only one wave in Chinese cinema at present, the commercial wave“ (p. 154). This observation was shared by other scholars. Lu (2005) argued that “the discourses of humanism, enlightenment, and the reconstruction of subjectivity that were fervently advocated by the intelligentsia from the late 1970s through the 1980s had become largely forgotten projects and cultural fast food became the order of the day (p. 121)“. Cornelius (2002) has the same view, commenting that recently, “the most influential factor in film production has been economics“ and that “films need to appeal to an audience who increasingly demand well-crafted American or Hong Kong entertainment films“ (p. 48). These changes have led the 1990s to be described as a time of consumerism, commercialization, but also depoliticization, and

deideologization because market and economics are becoming more important than politics.

What are the genres common among Chinese movies nowadays? According to Zhu (2003), the most popular domestic genre is comedy, a genre that is most culturally dependent and therefore less susceptible to Hollywood's penetration (p. 160). However, Zhu (2003) also identifies “thriller, kung fu movie, melodrama, and comedy as catchphrases for film marketing and audience identification“ (p. 103) and argues that “by the mid-1990s, all of the former New Wave filmmakers were engaged in producing such films“ (ibid.).

2.3 Chinese Communist Party and Media Control

Some scholars argue, that a new generation of Chinese leaders headed by President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao has opened new opportunities for Chinese filmmakers because the new leaders are trying to look more pragmatic, less ideologic. Lu (2005) described the current situation:

With the fading influence of Jiang Zemin, previous cultural policies have been modified. The party's new propaganda boss, Li Changchun, advocates a new jingoism: Three Closes (san tiejin). The new cultural doctrine means that literature and arts should be close to life, close to

reality, and close to the masses. The new leaders have attempted to portray their style of ruling as low-key, down-to-earth, more lenient, and closer to the concerns of ordinary people. As a result, strict rules of censorship in the film industry have been relaxed to a certain extent and the artists have more freedom to choose what kinds of films to shoot and how to shoot them. This is especially good news for emerging young filmmakers, who have yet to establish themselves. Under the new regime, censors approve film projects more quickly and with fewer hindrances than before (p. 132).

However, it can not be assumed that CCP forgot the importance of films in spreading ideology. Chinese communists have traditionally believed that „ideology forms an atmosphere favorable to political development“ (Su, 1994, p. 77) and that „film is a tool to educate the people in patriotism and socialism; it is also a major means to lift people's cultural standards“ (Liu, 1971, p. 159). CCP got to know that films are very effective when it comes to communication with uneducated people because „movies not only transmit oral messages but also illustrate them with vivid images through which illiterate and traditional-minded peasants acquire some basic notion of nationhood“ (Liu, 1971, p. 157). That is why mobile projection teams were used very often in the Mao's era. Liu argued that they helped Communists to spread their ideology

in an entertaining way and as so worked for national integration.

Many authors (Zha 1995, Zhao 1998, Lynch 1999) talk about the changing climate related to commercialization in China. However, they agree on a fact that “the Party still claims that the media are the voice of the Party and the people“ (Zhao, 1998, p. 152). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) maintains sophisticated structure of ideological control that can be divided into six spheres: military, political, administrative, “united front“, mass organization, and propaganda (Lee, 1994, p. 79). This structure enables the Party to hold the ideological control over military and school system, scientific research and mass organizations and to control print and broadcast media, books, films and arts. Even when commercialization has disrupted the total control of the CCP over the media in general and film industry in particular the changes haven't generate what Lynch (1999) called public sphere and an autonomous civil society. He claims that the short-term effect is depolitization when the Party is trying to reassert its control at the same time. As Zhao (1998) illustrated in the case of news media: Commercial outlets survive and flourish not by directly challenging the Party principle and discarding political propaganda but by softening the tones of political propaganda, moving beyond narrow political propaganda, and broadening content to include social and personal issues“ (p. 159). Thus she considers their content as supplementary rather than oppositional to the Party organs. Zhao (1998) also calls

attention to another trend that appeared in the new environment – “convenient fit between propaganda and commercialism“ that can be manifested by *Beijing Youth News* educational campaigns (p. 155).

This trend, characterised as new artistic-commercial-political alliance is taking place also in film industry. Zhang Yingjin (2004) described it in the case of Zhang Yimou's *Hero*, whose premiere was held inside the Great Hall of People at Tiananmen Square, “thereby reinforcing the impression of state sponsorship of this entertainment project“ (p. 138). Moreover, Zhang Yimou was also commissioned to shoot the promotional video for China's bid for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. According to Zhang Yingjin (2004) “the surge of nationalist pride in the wake of China's success situates Zhang in a new alliance of art, capital and politics“ (p. 293). Zhu (2003) has similar point of view: “Both Chen and Zhang have avoided any real clash with the government. Zhang Yimou's withdrawal from Cannes due to the festival's very political interpretation of his current films might be a gesture to reconcile with the state“ (p. 138). No wonder that Zhang Yimou is perceived as one of the most influential mainland China directors and his career vividly portrays the development of Chinese cinema in the past twenty years. A closer look at Zhang Yimou is thus helpful.

2.4 The Case of Zhang Yimou

Asked by *Film Quarterly* about his beginnings in movie industry, Zhang Yimou said:

“When we started making films more than ten years ago, we definitely wanted to rebel.

Defiance against the older generation is born with the younger generation“ (Ye 1999, p.

4). Noticeably, Zhang Yimou's early works were quite controversial in China. *Raise the*

Red Lantern (1991), for example, raised fears that the story would be taken as an

allegory against Chinese communist authoritarianism and therefore was initially

banned from theatrical release in China. However, this movie as well as his other works

(*The Story of Qiu Ju*, 1992; *To Live*, 1994; *Not One Less*, 1999) gained international

reputation and were praised by Western audience, making it nearly impossible to

belittle Zhang and his films.

In the early nineties, when Zhang Yimou's films started to gather prizes from international festivals and other Chinese director's successfully exported their movies as well (Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* became a winner of Cannes Festival in 1993; Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Blue Kite* won Grand Prix prize in Tokyo International Film Festival in 1993) Chinese cinema began to win increasing popularity in the West. No wonder Hong Kong-based *Asiaweek* included an observation by Jeannette Paulson, director of the Hawaii Film Festival: “This is a time of discovery for films from Asia“ (*Asiaweek*, ed. 1994).

However, the Fifth Generation's post-New Wave films were challenged for their

legitimacy in representing China and Chinese culture. Because they “depicted a distorted version of China, a version influenced by Eurocentrism and catering Western taste” (Zhu 2003, p. 133). Zhang (2002) argued that these filmmakers were fully aware what will satisfy Western expectations and in line with that often used “primitive landscape and its sheer visual beauty (including savage rivers, mountains, forests, deserts); repressed sexuality and its eruption in transgressive moments of eroticism; gender performance and sexual exhibition (including homosexuality, transvestism, adultery, incest) as seen in exotic operas, rituals, or other types of rural custom; and mythical or cyclical time frame in which the protagonist's fate is predestined” (p. 32).

Among directors accused of offering “Orientalism” (a phenomenon described by Said, 1978) to the western audience, Zhang Yimou is the most prominent one.

However, Lu (1997) pointed out at the same time that even when Zhang served the Western Orientalism, “under the conditions of global capitalism, (Zhang) has been able to pursue and sustain a critical project that has become impossible in his home country” (p. 107).

As some scholars have noticed, the turn of the 21st century marked the conversion of Zhang Yimou towards more benevolent stance towards the government. His martial art film *Hero* is in this sense often perceived as a turning point, not just because of the premiere held in the Great Hall of People, but most of all because of the content that

was due to Zhang's benevolent view of the notorious despot who slaughtered his opponents in the name of a unified Middle Kingdom considered reactionary in the West. Lu (2005) argued:

The audiences loses the old Zhang Yimou, who had the nerve to probe sensitive untouchable issues of Chinese society and whose films were banned several times. Now he has become the regime's favorite director. While China was bidding for Beijing to be the site of the 2008 Olympic Games, China's Olympic Committee chose Zhang to create a short propaganda film to show the new face of the city to the world. The rebel director has transformed into China's official director (p. 133).

Zhang refuses any claim about political meaning of his movies. As he said for *Film Quarterly*: "Film by nature is for society. I do not care how you perceive my films. But really I was not deliberately making up anything ideological; I did what my creative urge and my passion prompted me to do" (Ye 1999, p. 9).

Following the commercial success of *Hero*, Zhang completed another martial arts film set in the past and detached from contemporary politics, *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and in 2006 finished another historical epic *Curse of Golden Flower*. Zhang's recent movies show the current trend in Chinese cinema: martial art's blockbusters and historical epics. According to Zhu (2005), the trend of historical epics have dominated

also dramatic programming on primetime television in China. He calls this trend of “revisionist Qing dramas” that pay tribute to the prosperity and national unity of the early Qing and differ from those focusing on cultural decline and corruption of late Qing aired during 1980s (p. 3).

Chan (2004) focused on the ideological impact of *wu xia pian* that he considers as very strong and important because “the exoticism of one-armed swordsman, fighting Shaolin monks, and women warriors carreeing weightlessly across the screen” are informing senses and creating (mis)understandings “of Chinese culture, values and notions of Chineseness more radically than any Chinese-language lessons” (p. 3).

However, Zhang's recent films are synonymous not just with the new alliance of art, capital and politics, but also with another trend - the globalization of Chinese cinema and the ascent of Greater China co-productions across Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China.

2.5 Greater China Co-productions

The recent trend of co-productions involving filmmakers from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan that started in the 1980s has been a result of flows of investment

capital across these three Chinese societies. As Zhang Yimou acknowledged at the 1992 Academy Awards press conference in Hollywood: “Now more and more mainland Chinese realize that China is really three areas: the mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Among directors, there is a great deal of contact and exchange across these three areas“ (Yang, 1993, p. 308).

Several factors account for this increasing cooperation. On the Hong Kong (and Taiwan) side is, according to Zhang (2004), there is the opportunity for filmmakers to use cheap labor and inexpensive equipment provided by mainland studios. These studios, on the other hand, are willing to rent out their equipment and human resources in order to cope with the decrease in box-office profits as a consequence of the popularity of other forms of entertainment such as DVD, VCD, discos, etc. Hong Kong filmmakers also “actively seek opportunities to cooperate with the mainland film industry and aim to play a role on the mainland market.“ (Chu 2003, p. 115). Moreover, cooperation is advantageous for Hong Kong and Taiwan in a sense that these co-productions are exceeding quota for foreign releases. But, at the same time it means that these co-productions, if they want to enter Chinese market, must accommodate mainland China's requirements. On the other hand, for Chinese movie industry this is a chance to get regional stars, professional movie makers and build the image of blockbuster that can satisfy the audience spoiled by Hollywood movies.

