



Inventing Rituals: Cultural Politics in Zhang Yimou's Historical Films

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+ Abstract

If a ritual has no historical precedent, what make it recognizable as a ritual?

The rituals central to Zhang Yimou's early films *Dahong Denglong* *Gao Gao Gua* (*Raise the Red Lantern*, Zhang Yimou, 1991) and *Judou* (1990) were created for the films, rather than based precisely on historical precedent. This has significant implications for their cultural and political meanings, which has indirectly effected how these films have been received. Specifically, I argue that through invented ritual, *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* criticise the culture and politics of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the 1990s and engage actively in cross-cultural politics. The Chinese government found these representations so uncomfortable, that they resulted in bans of the films in the PRC¹.

These days, Zhang Yimou is most well-known as director of twenty-first century global blockbusters *Ying Xiong* (*Hero*, 2002) and *Shi Mian Mai Fu* (*The House of Flying Daggers*, 2004), which were popular both in China and abroad. These spectacles were also set in China several centuries ago, but primarily aimed at large Lunar New Year audiences and warmly received by the Chinese state². *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* were markedly different from Zhang's earlier historical dramas; *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* were produced on modest budgets for niche audiences. Critical work on Zhang Yimou's early films often discussed their treatment of history, but rarely addressed the rituals prominently featured in the films. Some responses to Zhang's early historical dramas criticised the falsity of their rituals; others disregarded the rituals in favour of a focus on issues of gender, sexuality and the body.³ Chinese journalist Dai Qing attacked the rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern*, arguing that the lack of realism in the film's cultural and historical detail amounts to cultural misrepresentation.⁴ Similarly, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu described Zhang's films as a "cultural sell-out," which display Third World spectacle for the pleasure of Western audiences, while "real Chinese history" is forgotten.⁵

Compared to other films from PRC in the early 1990s, Zhang Yimou's films enjoyed unprecedented popularity abroad: large foreign audiences accompanied international awards. *Hong Gaoliang* (*Red Sorghum*, Zhang Yimou 1988) was the first Chinese film to win the Berlin Film Festival's Golden Bear in 1988, and *Judou* was the first nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar in 1990. Conversely, in PRC both *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* were banned for several years and

then given a limited release⁶. In response to this contradiction, China's Film and Television Minister Ai Zhisheng remarked: "Abroad they give prizes. At home they are ridiculed. Surely China is the best judge of a Chinese film's merits."

⁷ Like Dai Qing, many Chinese have attributed the conflicting responses to Zhang's films to Western Orientalism.⁸ Thus, many Chinese regard these films as complicities which feed into Western fantasies of the Oriental 'other,' reinforce their position as cultural others and reproduce Western hegemony.⁹ I would like to account for Zhang's invention of ritual in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou*, and the responses to them, in a more complex way.

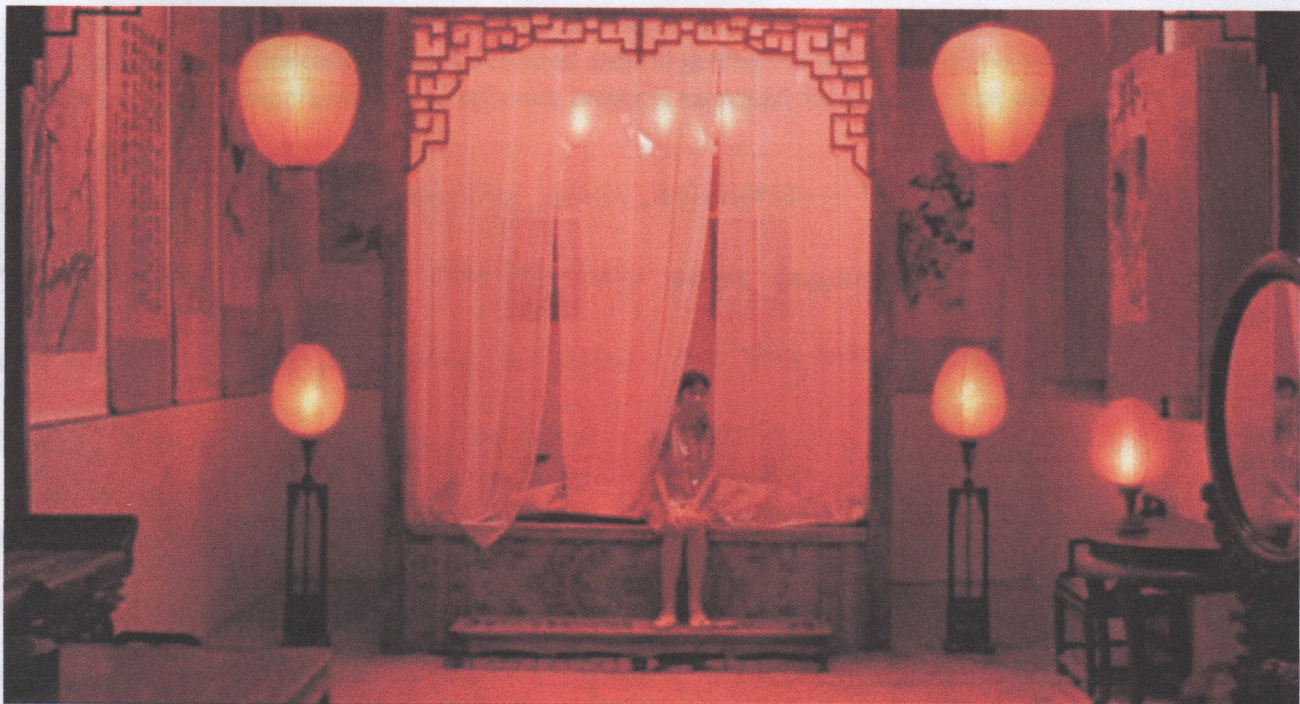
Social rituals of family and community are the focus of many scenes in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou*. These rituals are highly aestheticized within the films and have also become iconic representations of the films. These filmic ceremonies tend to employ some elements familiar to historical Chinese rituals, such as the use of the celebratory colour red and the colour of mourning white, bridal sedan chairs and funeral processions, the lighting of paper lanterns, and the use of dragon symbolism. However, these familiar features are combined with elements specific to these films, such as cloaking lanterns in black cloth bags, foot massages and the repeated prostration of relatives beneath the coffin during the funeral procession. Further, in these films the rituals are used in highly specific social contexts, to signify certain shifts in social standing or punishment within a particular family or village. Some familiar elements are used in ways that seem to contravene tradition, for example Dai Qing argues that it was taboo for anyone other than the Chinese Emperor to use the dragon symbol.¹⁰ The rituals in the films are thus commonly criticised for not following historical precedent, and this is why I refer to them as invented. American professor of History Donald Sutton noted that traditional rituals were altered or subverted in the films as a means of summing up power relations and critiquing the old society (prior to the Republic of China).¹¹

Does a repeated action become a ritual because of it organizes social roles?

仪式会在这里标记一个人的身份、地位变化。

A thorough examination of the rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* shifts focus from their relationship with Chinese history to their position in China and the world at the time the films were made. I argue that the rituals depicted in these films may symbolise the dominant practices of social power in PRC in the 1990s. Further, I explain how the invention of ritual in these films disrupts the citationality of ritual's performative mode, thus disturbing traditional practices and conceptions of cultural representation. In these ways, *Judou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* can be read as critical of post-Tiananmen PRC and can be seen to engage in cross-cultural politics, two matters with which the Chinese authorities were profoundly uneasy. Although we readily situate many contemporary Chinese films as global and cosmopolitan, these films mark the emergence of this trend, indicating a shift in cultural production, consumption, aesthetics, politics and attitudes.

How a family's cultural elements make a ritual feel traditional? Maybe because people are already familiar with symbols.



(<http://sensesofcinema.com/assets/uploads/2018/09/2RTRL-Bed.jpg>)

Dahong Denglong Gao Gao Gao (*Raise the Red Lantern*, 1991)

Ritual: Allegory of Power 礼的寓意

We cannot begin to understand how ritual works on screen without a grasp of how it works in society. I outline here some of the more important aspects of Confucian ritual, which is the basis of modern Chinese conceptions of ritual. The Chinese character for ritual, *Li*, actually refers to a comprehensive concept, which includes ceremonies, social propriety, ethics and etiquette. In line with this, I have also adopted a very broad definition of ritual practice. In their analysis of the Confucian *Analects*, David Hall and Roger Ames define "ritual action" as an integral part of becoming a person in a social context: "In the *Analects*, it is repeatedly stated that it is 'ritual action' (*Li*) . . . which enables one to determine, assume and display his personal stance." ¹² *Li* thus plays a central role in an individual's personal expression, and indeed their essential character development and constitution. While it is important to note that *Li* is a key factor in identity formation in this way, its significance is actually broader than this because of its impact on all interpersonal relations. ¹³ This stems from the Chinese notion that the construction of persons is relational, as opposed to the modern Western conception of the elementary individual. The relational conception of personal identity is more fluid, as it is based on the flux of social relationships. ¹⁴ The rituals depicted in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* govern interpersonal relations and reinforce social hierarchies, highlighting how power is exerted through everyday social practice.

The characters in *Raise the Red Lantern* are strictly controlled by ceremonies such as the raising of the red lanterns, and also by "family customs." Liyan Qin notes how, "Zhang makes the phrase 'old rules' (*lao guiju*) a recurring theme." ¹⁵ The spatial confinement of characters is defined by custom (each wife has a separate house within the compound) and emphasised at the level of cinematography, constantly framing characters within architectural structures. Customary forms of address in the film ("First Mistress," "Second Mistress," and so on) serve to remind the wives and the audience that characters are defined by their position in the family, reinforcing position within a hierarchy.

Songlian is soon introduced to the family's, and arguably the film's, most important ritual: the raising of the red lanterns, which announces a shift in the social hierarchy of the family compound. Every day the concubines are assembled with their servants in a central courtyard and the master decides with whom he will spend the night. This decision is symbolised by lighting a red lantern in front of the chosen wife. A crew of servants then carries several red lanterns to the chosen wife's courtyard, where they are raised, to be hung from the eaves and lit for the night. Back in her house, the chosen wife is then treated to a foot massage from an elderly 'aunt.' The entire elaborate procedure is a rather ostentatious way of signalling who is in favour with the master, which in turn signals which of the wives can wield power over the others in different ways, including setting the menu for the household. It is interesting to note that this key symbol, both within the film and for the film, is specifically about power relations in sexual relationships. Much of the lives of the concubines are centred around getting the red lanterns and a foot massage. The symbol here seems to be more important than its referent: power is exercised through the ritual rather than the act of sex itself.

Ritual : ceremony, social propriety, ethics, etiquette...

Ritual expresses who we are, also help people become produce who we become.

- ① When people continue performing a ritual, are they also reproducing the social hierarchy embedded within it, even if they do not consciously support it?
- ② Does describing a rule as "old" or "traditional" give it authority, even when its origin is unclear or invented?
- ③ The master's choice of which wife to spend the night with is originally a private act, but rituals such as the red lanterns and foot massages turn "who is favored" and "who holds power" into social fact that the entire household can recognize.

④ 如果一种惩罚拥有固定的程序,反复出现,而且所有人都预期它会发生,它是否会因为这种“仪式化”而显得更加正常?进一步来说,惩罚是否也会因此显得更加合理、理所当然?仪式是否可以成为组织和执行惩罚的一种有效方式?

If a punishment follows a fixed procedure, happens repeatedly, and is expected by everyone, does its ritualisation make it seem more normal? Could this also make the punishment appear more legitimate, taken for granted, or harder to question? Can ritual become a way of organising and carrying out punishment?

Using a symbol reserved for a specific social position can challenge the boundary of that position.

2018/09/3RTRL-FootMassage.jpg

Gao Gua (*Raise the Red Lantern*, 1991)

why is appropriating the symbol of power treated as more threatening than the act that the symbol represents? 为什么擅自占用权力的象征,比这了象征所代表

When Songlian first catches the master in bed with her servant, Yaner, she is upset and reproaches him, but the affair continues. Yaner is only punished when Songlian reveals that Yaner secretly has her own collection of red lanterns in her bedroom. This demonstrates that sexual relations with the master are approved of tacitly, but appropriating the ritualistic symbol of power is not. Although the other wives feel it harsh, Yaner is punished according to family custom and must kneel in the snow until she apologises. The stubborn servant dies. It seems particularly morbid that even the punishment of servants is ritualised. However, considering that punishment is such a forceful exertion of power, its ritualisation is not entirely surprising in this context.

When Songlian announces about halfway through the film that she is pregnant, the lanterns are lit at Songlian's house constantly, according to custom. After it is discovered that Songlian is not actually pregnant and has been lying, she is ritually punished. The red lanterns in her courtyard are extinguished and covered with special black bags. When the third wife is discovered in a compromising position with the family doctor, she is taken to the "house of death," where two women from previous generations have come to grief for their 'illicit affairs'. The ultimate illustration of the power of ritual in *Raise the Red Lantern* is the final scene. While it is summer again and the master is marrying his fifth wife, Songlian wanders around the compound and we learn from one of the servants that she has gone mad. Songlian is defined as mad and can no longer be accepted as a legitimate member of the family because she no longer actively participates in the family's rituals.

To what extent does belonging depend on continued participation in shared rituals? The regulation of interpersonal relations and social hierarchies through these rituals draws attention to how power is exerted, performed and enforced. In particular, the ritualised control of sexual practices highlights the exercise of what Michel Foucault called "bio-power," which exerts power over the biological bodies of individuals, and also over the body of the population. ¹⁶ Mayfair Yang observed that many elements of state power in the PRC conform to the disciplinary and normative techniques of Foucault's "bio-power." ¹⁷ The rituals in these films can thus be read as allegorical manifestations of power relations within twentieth century PRC. Further, Shelly Kracier noted that Songlian's madness at the end of the film can be considered an act of political resistance: "As Foucault argued in 'Madness and Civilization,' in a world where 'reason' is completely colonized by power, 'madness' can be a strategic refusal to submit to power's hegemony, the only possible gesture of defiance." ¹⁸

当人们反复参与一种仪式时,他们也在帮助表演并维持这一仪式背后的权力结构。

When people repeatedly participate in ritual, they are also helping to perform and enforce the power structure behind it.

⑤ 什么时候,“把一个角色表演好”会变得比真正相信这个角色所代表的价值更重要?
When does performing a role become more important than actually believing in?
仪式列的要求正确地执行行为,却不要求真正认同它。

Ritual may require correct performance without requiring genuine belief.



(<http://sensesofcinema.com/assets/uploads/2018/09/4Judou-Naming.jpg>)

Judou (1990)

Like *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Judou* is once again the story of a young bride, played once more by Gong Li, who is married off to an abusive master, Jinshan, by her insensitive family. The complex power relations at work within the film stem chiefly from the secret incestuous relationship between the new bride and her 'nephew,' Tianqing, who together have a son, Tianbai. The rituals of family custom and family law again make their presence felt on the characters in *Judou*, perhaps even more prominently than in *Raise the Red Lantern*, which features more ceremonial rituals. Throughout the film, the village elders meet several times to make major decisions for the household according to family custom. The meetings always comprise several old men in black robes, whose identities are never made explicit, but whose chief function is to define the relations and identities of the film's major characters. They do this in their ritualistic meetings through prescriptions concerning the characters' roles and conduct within the family. 仪式可以直接赋予一个人某种社会

The first time we see the elders meet is after Judou's baby is born, when they decide on the young boy's name "According to ancestral laws." The name chosen is 'Tianbai,' as it relates the new boy to his older 'cousin,' Tianqing. That Tianqing is actually Tianbai's father (as well as his cousin), makes this inscription of identity all the more powerful, since it reinforces the fact that the child will have to grow up as Tianqing's cousin. After the cruel Jinshan dies, the elders meet again to decide on mourning, funeral and subsequent living arrangements. As wife and nephew of the deceased master, Judou and Tianqing must dress in white mourning costumes. In the funeral procession they must wail, beat the coffin fifty times to try to 'awaken' their master, then lie under the coffin as the pallbearers carry it over them. Ritual can assign a social role to a person.

⑤ Judou and Tianqing bicker throughout the ceremony about who is best performing the filial role. When the elders meet after the funeral, they dictate that Judou may never remarry, and that as a bachelor, Tianqing must now live separately from his widowed aunt. The family customs and the dictates of the village elders in *Judou* define the family structure

and rule over births, deaths and marriages, exerting techniques of "bio-power," which are analogous to practices within 1990s PRC. *Judou* and *Tianqing* even create their own rituals to play out their affair, using deliberate, repetitive gestures, depicted through repeated camera angles and sound effects. *What else, besides repetition, is needed for a ritual?* 即使没有传统或社会认可, 仅仅通过有意识的重复, 一个人的行为是否可以变成仪式? *Something to become a ritual?* Yang illustrates that the Chinese state's use of "bio-power" is a major form of government control through the regulation of "the health, wealth, size, quality (*suzhi*), movement and thoughts of the population." ¹⁹ The PRC government exercised power over these areas of life through institutions such as the party and the work unit, and practices such as the enforcement of the one-child policy, although this diminished notably throughout the 1990s ²⁰. Regulation of food, families, sex and work were all concerns of the state, under the guise of the redistribution of wealth in the socialist system, though the focuses shifted during this period. Therefore, the representation of "bio-power" through the rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* manifest analogues to power structures in PRC at the time the films were made. Many critics have argued that the criticism of power in these films is levelled at the patriarchy through the figures of the cruel feudal masters. ²¹ The impotent masters in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* can be seen to stand for the old men of the Chinese Communist party, but this can be interpreted either as a criticism of patriarchy or more specifically as a criticism of the Chinese political situation. *It is important to remember when addressing representations of ritual, that the world of ritual is always already a politicised arena.* ²² Through its role in the formation of both personal identity and a wider social structure, ritual signifies a marriage of the public and private. Therefore, although *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* are set in pre-revolutionary China, they can be understood as allegories of modern China. The rituals in these films make them readable as critical of the way power is exercised in PRC at the time these films were made. This politically unpopular stance has made these films the target of censorship in PRC. It may also go some way towards explaining the contrast between their lack of success in the politically sensitive atmosphere of their home country, and their critical success in Western cultures.



(<http://sensesofcinema.com/assets/uploads/2018/09/5Judou-Funeral.jpg>)

Ritual: Citing Authenticity

Examining the diegetic meaning of the rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* has proved useful, however these rituals should not be read exclusively within the terms of their narratives. I offer a reading of the invention of ritual in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* through the notion of performativity, in order to explore issues of cultural representation. In

the introduction to their book, *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick note that since the work of Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, the concept of the performative has been expanded to include not only certain forms of language, but also "all ritual, ceremonial, scripted behaviors." ²³ **Ritual is fundamentally a performative form, because it relies on quotation and repetition, which produces transformation.** ²⁴ Esteemed anthropologist Victor Turner notes that he thinks of ritual primarily as performance, and Tom Driver defines rituals as "performative actions." ²⁵ Reinforcing the performativity of ritual, Watson notes that in Chinese ritual, "Performance ... took precedence over belief." ²⁶ *Can someone fully participate in a ritual without actually believing in it?*

一个人即使并不真正相信一种仪式,但是否仍然可以完整地参与其中?
What does it mean to examine representations of Chinese ritual through the notion of **performativity**? Performativity is a Western concept created by linguists to explain the function and power of acts. ²⁷ This has been extended by theorists of gender and sexuality, with notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality. The paradigm of **naturalisation**: performativity is generally effaced by naturalism. Performativity highlight performances in an endeavour to **denaturalise** them. If a performance is naturalised and shown to be performative, that is, something performed, performances can be changed. Applying these ideas to non-Western texts is not widely understood to function in a performative manner and does not mean that performativity is more up-front in the Confucian model than in the West. It does not require denaturalising. Western poststructuralist reasoning, which is consequently inappropriate in the Chinese situation. What is required is a re-examination of performativity, as this notion may still be used to different ends. The performative will illuminate our understanding of the invention of ritual on its own terms.

⑥ performativity:

不是说普通意义上的“表演”,不是说一个人在装,更接近于:某种身份,规范或社会现实,是通过反复做某些行为才被建立和维持的。

比如 gender, 如果 femininity 不是一种天生固定的本质,而是通过穿着,说话方式,姿态等不断被“做出来”,那么 gender 就有 performative 的性质。

Through focusing on the role of citation in performativity, we can explain the ideas of cultural representation. Repetition is an integral component of rituals and performatives. However, it is not pure repetition that enables the performative, and therefore the ritual, to function, but its citationality. ²⁹ According to Judith Butler, citation is what gives the performative its power: *仪式是否需要一个明确的起源,还是“在我之前的人也这样做过”就已经够了?*

If a performative provisionally succeeds ... [it is] only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. What this means, then, is that a performance "works" to the extent that it draws on ... the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. ³⁰

Does a ritual need identifiable origin. Is the feeling that "before me did this" already enough?

Likewise, the power of ritual stems from its citation. James Watson's argument for the primacy of orthopraxy in Chinese ritual reminds us that Chinese rituals 'work' because they have 'worked' before. ³¹ *Can repetition produce its own loop. 它之所以有效,是因为它以前有效,而以前有效又成为它今天继续有效的理由。 Justification? 重复是否即为自身? 还是是否即为自身? How, then, does citationality work in the invented rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou*? It does not. The rituals in these films are performed assuming the pattern of citationality of all rituals. However, because they are invented, they in fact have no precedent. This means that these rituals are references without referents, or, to use Jean Baudrillard's term, **simulacra**. ³² Invented rituals cite nothing. I contend that the invention of ritual in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* deliberately disrupts the citationality of performativity. Rituals are so prominent in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* because they form the basis of Chinese cultural identity. James Watson notes that the performance of ritual played an integral part in unifying Chinese identity. ³³ In addition, the co-editor of the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, Donald Sutton, suggests in his discussion of Zhang's films that "ritual, it can be said, embodied the unity and diversity of China - Chineseness in all its complexity." ³⁴*

In this way, the filmic re-presentation of ritual is also a form of cultural representation, a signal of "Chineseness" that is heightened by international attention. *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* probably had a greater audience abroad than they did at home, and Zhang and his critics seem painfully aware of the fact that he "has redefined the way the world visualises China." ³⁵ I propose that the disruption of the performative mode's citationality in these films marks a disturbance of cultural representation at work: how can one re-present something, which is invented? What appears to upset

媒体和视觉再现能否参与制造历史感? *Can media and visual representation participate in creating a sense of history?*

critics is not that Zhang Yimou shows Chinese identity to be performative, as this is taken for granted, rather that he performs Chinese identity *incorrectly*. Zhang does not cite the proper forms, he invents them, flouting orthopraxy. Two different readings of the effects of this disturbance may be inferred, according to the films' two main audiences. The disruption of citationality, I contend, has different effects for audiences abroad and in PRC.

接⑥

“我本来就是这样的，所以我这样表现”

↓
社会确认

“我这样表现，所以我是这样的人”

naturalisation:

一个原本被社会塑造出来的东西，久而久之被人当成“天然如此”。比如一种性别行为如果被重复得太久，人们可能就不再觉得“这是社会教出来的”，而觉得“女性天然如此”。

然如此。”

西方很多performativity理论的工作，就是denaturalise: 把这种看似“天然”的东西拆开。

按照作者的说法: Chinese identity 在儒家文化中本来就比较明确地通过角色、关系和 ritual performance 来形成。所以“一个人通过正当地扮演以孝、忠、礼等角色来成为某种社会身份”这件事，并没有像西方essentialist 观念那样被完全塑造成“天生的事情”。所以作者认为西方理论工作的“揭幕”这一系列

中国语境并不一定合适，因为这里“身份”和“关系”形成这件事本来就比较显性。

(<http://sensesofcinema.com/assets/uploads/2018>

“假仪式”不一定要“错误地表现中国”。

Raise

In the cross-cultural context, Zhang's disturbance of cultural authenticity. The invention of ritual connotes that these films occupy as they “speak as China with a cultural misrepresentation, rather an explicit disavowal of any notion of authenticity in cultural of Sneja Gunew, “the whole notion of authenticity” fabricated rituals in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judo* and the history that informs such representations gaze. However, unlike Dai Qing, I do not see Zhang's films as an appeal to the “foreign devil,” rather as an attempt to engage in discourses of transnational exchange.³⁷

⑦ “引用性”不仅取决于一个行为引用了什么，也取决于观者能否识别出它在引用什么。

Citationality depends on not only on what an action cites, but also on whether the audience can recognize what it is citing.

同一个灯笼对于一部分观众是“中国传统”，对于另一部分观众则是“灯笼”。

Chinese reception. Zhang's films acknowledged the Orientalist gaze. However, unlike Dai Qing, I do not see Zhang's films as an appeal to the “foreign devil,” rather as an attempt to engage in discourses of transnational exchange.³⁷

The rejection of the notion of authenticity complicates the very structures that have formed the Orientalist gaze, specifically, the dichotomy between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ which inherently privileges the ‘West.’ Presenting China as inauthentic implicitly undermines notions of authenticity on the other end of the binary: the West is displaced from its privileged position, along with the effects of the imperialist project. The very issue of Zhang's representation of China to the world complicates the dichotomy between ‘East’ and ‘West’: Rey Chow argues that, “the ‘ethnicity’ of contemporary Chinese cinema – ‘Chineseness’ – is already a sign of cross-cultural fetishism.”³⁸ In this way, Zhang's invention of ritual implicitly suggests that there are numerous ways to view and represent ‘China.’ “China” 不是一个文化本质。

This reading of the effects of the invention of ritual relies on the fact that audiences acknowledge the rituals as fabricated. While the invention seemed obvious to Chinese viewers, Zhang's substantial foreign audiences may have missed this. Without resorting to Dai Qing's charges of ‘deception’ and cultural misrepresentation³⁹, how can we interpret the invention of ritual in this context? Firstly, I would like to suggest that ‘deception’ is not such a significant issue in the Western reception of fiction films, as it is more generally taken for granted that films invent. Secondly, through this

熟悉感可能伪装成传统 familiarity masquerade tradition.

什么叫“真实地代表中国”？
我们并不拥有唯一正确的形式或方法。
我们认为某些更真实、更复杂、更有政治性的人。
我们被留下的是 positional we are left not
ing's invention of ritual that, in the words
tonic voices.”³⁶ The
be represented,

reading of the disruption of ritual citationality and the consequent disturbance of notions of cultural authenticity, I have attempted to bring forth an understanding that there is no such thing as cultural 'deception,' just as there is no 'authentic' way to represent 'China.'

This disruption of citationality must also have implications within China itself. Rey Chow notes that the many readings which focus solely on the implications such representations have in the cross-cultural arena implicitly reinscribe Orientalism.⁴⁰ We must also consider more localised implications of these arguments, as well as different readings available to these rituals in the Chinese context. The refusal of notions of cultural authenticity can also be read in terms of the PRC's relationship with the other Chinas: Hong Kong and Taiwan. Of course, here it also has the effect of destabilising cultural oppositions: the complication of cultural authenticity undermines the PRC's international political position that it is the only "true" China. Thus, Zhang challenges the authenticity of contemporary constructions of Chinese history and power. This prompts a rethinking of the way representations of traditional China are used in the government-controlled cultural production of PRC, suggesting different ways to use and interpret "traditional China" in shaping its present and future. These readings of the implications of the disturbance of the performative form remind us that, rather than a primary emphasis on "the struggle against the West", what some parts of Chinese culture oppose most is their own government, their own traditions and their own history. These films manifest an inward ambivalence to contemporary as well as traditional Chinese culture.

Conclusion

Does inventing a ritual make the structure of ritual more visible?

人为创造一种仪式，是否会让仪式本身的结构更可见？

The invention of ritual in *Judou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* disturbs the citationality of the performative form. In the context of cultural representation, this disturbance has significant implications. It can be read as a disavowal of conceptions of authentic cultural representation, thus actively engaging in issues of cross-cultural representation. Further, it can be understood as critical of contemporary PRC and its uses of Chinese history. Both of these understandings of the invention of ritual would be uncomfortable for Chinese authorities, who banned and censored *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou*. The social climate of the PRC has changed since these post-Tiananmen films were made, and the success of Zhang's blockbuster *Hero* points to some of the key cultural transitions emerging as China embraces a market economy in the twenty-first century.

The role of ritual in *Judou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* has previously been disregarded because of the 'falsity' of the rituals represented in the films. However, this examination of ritual in these films has proved fruitful in a number of ways. The depiction of ritual in these films draws attention to techniques of "bio-power" and allegorically critique social power relations in contemporary PRC. Further, the disturbance of performative citationality, created by the invention of the rituals in these films, disavows notions of authentic cultural representation and invites a rethinking of established Chinese cultural practices. This focus on the role of ritual in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *Judou* has therefore demonstrated how these films engage critically in issues of contemporary Chinese culture and cross-cultural politics. In this way, these films might be considered "Cosmopolitan Cinema," which Felicia Chan argued is articulated not through the world that the film represents, rather by the film's mode of engagement with its own cultural practice.⁴¹ Indeed, Zhang's early films have now set a precedent that has been cited by subsequent Chinese films.⁴² Thus, far from being overlooked as a result of their fabrication, the rituals in these films warrant specific attention because they are invented. These films mark a significant shift in the way China increasingly creates films that address their global context in complex ways.

This article has been peer reviewed.