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Q: I did want to ask during the discussion, why war cinema may be less popular in China. Is it due to TV drama market or is general tension around war a bad topic for open discourse for cinemagoers, government, etc.? I was trying to contrast with US movies like Hurt Locker, Platoon, Saving Private Ryan, and even the flops like Pearl Harbor movie. Although the US has been on center stage in conflicts, I do think it is depicted in films retrospectively.

*A: To answer your question, why war films are not popular in China. Well, first, I have to say that during the Mao era, there were many, many war films and they were popular. So, the question now is why war films have lost their appeal now. I have two speculations. First, there is something less genuine about the popularity of war films during the Mao era because back then people did not have alternative forms of entertainment, they would watch anything. Today, there are more forms of entertainment: television shows, computer games, etc. So, unless you make really good war films, you are not going to attract a lot of people. Secondly, since you mentioned Hollywood, I have to say, Hollywood has something to do with the decline of war films in China because Americans make much better war films and have raised the bar - so to speak. The Chinese audience will now measure their war films against Hollywood standard (at least in terms of production quality, audio-visual effects and etc.). To be sure, there are still many war films, but they are just not drawing audiences to the theaters.*

Q: You mentioned your friends and scholars in China. How is the current censorship affecting their research and work? I am wondering if because of the great flexibility of readings some movies offer, censorship is not affecting them at all? I recall Leni Riefenstahl's "Tiefeland," approved by Hitler as popular culture when it was very clearly against any abuse of power.

*A: On the issue of censorship, the government seems more concerned with what goes on at the "popular" level than with what is being said at the elite level. For instance, in 4 star hotels across China, you can watch CNN and other international channels directly and uncensored. Of course, if something just happened (say, a riot or anti-government demonstration), then they may shut down those broadcastings; but normally, they are available. For similar reasons, scholars and intellectuals can say pretty much everything they want in their professional journals and within their professional circle. But once what you have said gets circulated on the internet, then you risk being muffled.*

*Your reference to Riefenstahl is interesting. Often times, the oppressive regimes (Hitler, Mao and their likes) don't see themselves as oppressive. Whether they are pretending otherwise, or they genuinely believe otherwise, quite often they do things that would surprise us. Recently, many people outside China are puzzled by the Chinese government's approval of V for Vendetta for release in the country.*

Q: Your lecture and discussions were perceptive and gave us several ways to view the function of film.

I was wondering if you see a sixth generation emerging -- the heirs of Zhang Zimou? Also what themes seem to predominate in contemporary film? What themes have yet to be pursued? You also seem to suggest that an additional influence on film of all countries in financing and distribution networks. Do you see this global effect as a limitation on film's independent vision? How do you assess the contributions of Chinese opera and classical dance to Chinese cinema?

*A: First, if there is a sixth generation emerging? Yes, definitely. In fact, they are eclipsing the fifth generation. Key differences between them are: 5th generation tends to focus more on history and society, 5th G focuses on a more individual and personal world; 5th grand narrative, 6th "trivial" and fragments aspects of life; 5th G nationalistic, 6th G more cosmopolitan; 5th more serious and 6th is more cynical; 5th G more about rural life, 6th G more about urban life.*

*Dominant theme in contemporary Chinese films, filmmakers (especially the 5th G) used to see themselves as intellectuals and want to share their thinking with the masses through films. Nowadays, most filmmakers see themselves as craftsmen in the business of making money. Judging by the box office hits of the last few years, there doesn't seem to be any consistent themes or common concerns - all seems to be very driven by commercial considerations.*