Piracy/Privacy: The Despair of Cinema and Collectivity in China

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China's "barbarous" copyright offenses are generally considered one of the manifestations of the country's emerging threat to the established world order. According to some estimates, 91 percent of desktop software used in China in 1999 was pirated, and 95 percent of transactions in audio-visual materials were carried out in the black market.[1] The millions of copies of pirated intellectual property sold in China can easily be translated into American dollars to represent the alleged loss to the copyright owners. According to a report in the *New York Times*, pirated video compact discs (VCDs)[2] of *Dr Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas* were found all over

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the three anonymous reviewers of *boundary 2* for their wonderful insights and constructive comments on the essay's earlier versions. I am particularly thankful to Chris Connery for his encouragement and support of this project. All mistakes and imprecise analyses are, of course, mine.

1. SIIA (Software and Information Industry Association), "Report on Global Software Piracy," 2000, http://www.siia.net/piracy/pubs/piracy2000.pdf. Yang Guang, "95 Percent of the Audio-Video Market Is Out of Control According to Statistics," 1999, http://www.fzen.com.cn/991206/8_4.html.

2. The video compact disc (VCD), an audio-visual technology unheard of by many people

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China within a week of the film's debut release in the United States, and pirated copies of *Titanic* outsold legitimate ones by about thirty to one. "The [piracy] trade has made it almost impossible to sell legitimate video discs [in China], and dampened the lure of Hollywood films in movie theaters."[3] The common understanding in the international business world is that this piracy is nothing but robbery, which the Chinese government tacitly ignores, and which the Chinese people fervently and shamelessly support.

In this article, I examine the participation of the Chinese State and the Chinese people in the flourishing movie piracy market, but not with the aim of endorsing the stereotypical view of the Chinese people's uncivilized disrespect for intellectual property. Rather, I aim to challenge the notion that piracy is an ethical issue, and I will take up the question of whether intellectual property is simply a matter of individuals' rights and assets that must be protected at all costs. As both concept and reality—cutting across divergent social, cultural, political, and economic discourses—movie piracy in China is largely the result of the global diffusion of consumerism under an unequal distribution of world wealth, on the one hand, and the result of a specific national politics, on the other. Focusing on China's movie piracy as a case study, I will discuss two larger cultural problems: the internal contradictions of globalization manifested in contemporary Chinese culture, and the impact of movie piracy on a collective identity, or Chineseness, which has been forged in cinema as a national representation and public event.

My purpose here is not to add another sweeping generalization to the current globalization discourse. Rather, in this essay, I want to investigate one specific cultural manifestation of the conflicts between the global and the national through a careful study of the recent development of Chinese cinema. Two concepts may need clarification here. In terms of globalization, I refer specifically to China's integration into global media consumption, which is contingent upon the tensions between the call by the World Trade Organization (WTO) for an open market and the Chinese State's will to control information flow. The notion of China as a collective agency is, I believe, a widely circulated assumption and description about contemporary China

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in the West, is a 4.72-inch disc that can store still/moving images, two soundtracks, and digital information files. This technology was first launched in 1993 by Sony and Philips, and soon became vastly popular in Asian countries, excluding Japan and Korea. The VCD is now the dominant movie format in China, both in the legal and pirate markets. See Laikwan Pang, "Mediating the Ethics of Technology: Hollywood and Movie Piracy," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 19–32.

3. Craig S. Smith, "A Tale of Piracy: How the Chinese Stole the Grinch," *New York Times*, December 12, 2000.

in scholarly and journalistic discourses that has not been substantiated by careful analysis. While the West continues to see China as a unified cultural "other" for easy comprehension and political polarization, Chinese intellectuals and politicians also need this formulation of a united Chinese people to substantiate a collective agency to realize various national/nationalist projects.[4] Chinese cinema's metamorphosis from a collective public event to a piracy-privacy activity, from a highly controlled mode of production and distribution to a completely underground operation with numerous sites of power and systems of distribution, is one recent social transformation among many that brings the set of cultural problematics created by the dynamics between globalism and nationalism into focus.

Under such dynamics in the new global age, the impossibility of conceptualizing a national cinema, in reference to both production and distribution, implies the increasing difficulties of conceptualizing "Chineseness" as a unified notion in other areas. Following Rey Chow's call for a productive erasure of the concept of a unified Chineseness,[5] I hope to reconceive a contemporary China that is no longer a totality moving along a linear historical trajectory. While piracy demonstrates how difficult it is for the State to call for a homogeneous Chinese collectivity, this problematic also reminds us not to fall into the same ideological trap and fantasize that piracy itself represents the unified action and experience of a "Chineseness" that counters the political hegemony of the State, or that of globalization. Any imagination of a totalizing oppositional collective action and experience is doomed to collapse under the current consumerist indifference and fragmentation that China is now experiencing.

The Current Plight of the State and China's Film Industry

The PRC's recent turn toward marketization by no means suggests the wholesale embracing of a laissez-faire capitalism that honors small government and liberalism. The Chinese State, like many other developing states, has been playing and continues to play a central role in the country's economic reform, which infinitely complicates such seemingly univer-

4. For the popular but problematic description of a unified Chineseness from both sides, see two examples among many: Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2000); and Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, Qiao Bian, Tang Zhengyu, and Gu Qingsheng, *Zhongguo keyi shu bu* [China Can Say No] (Beijing: Zhonggua Gongshang Linahe chubanshe, 1996).

5. Rey Chow, "On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 24.

sal terms as *capitalism* and *market*. In an essay discussing China's march toward "postsocialism," Arif Dirlik argues that socialism is only a disposable instrument China employs in the search of wealth and power.[6] Dirlik reminds us that as early as 1951, Benjamin Schwartz already argued that the Chinese communism that took over China in 1949 was just an expression of Chinese nationalism.[7] Today's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" can then be seen as a reconnection with the central ideology of the earliest days of the PRC, when socialist ideologies were selectively and strategically used for the empowerment of the State. With national power and autonomy as the highest aims, the "postsocialism" that China is now engaging in, as Dirlik concludes, is definitely not a complete embrace of capitalism but, on the contrary, can be envisioned as a new form of socialism that strategically uses capitalism for China's national growth.[8] Although written more than a decade ago, Dirlik's analysis is still a provocative one, reminding us that capitalism and the market economy have always been severely policed in China, and that the Chinese State by no means would forgo national autonomy and unity for the sake of capitalism. The State is willing to give up and distort many components of capitalism, in the same way that it has always distorted many components of socialism, in order to ensure the protection of the ruling power of the party and the stability of the nation.

Such efforts are not always effective, however. In our increasingly globalized world, national unity and State power are becoming more and more difficult to hold on to, a phenomenon not as apparent in 1989 when Dirlik's essay was first published. The Chinese government has constantly faced the dilemma of both desiring economic development and fearing ideological pluralism, being on the verge of losing its political control of the country in the disarray of a global market economy. The State's position with cinema is an exemplary case of this problem: the government holds on to the ideological purity and unity of the national cinema by creating tight restrictions on film production and distribution, but such stringent controls encourage a new form of cinema activity—piracy—which totally evades the control of the government.

In order to understand the current predicament of Chinese cinema,

6. Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,'" in *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 365.

7. Dirlik, "Postsocialism?" 269.

8. Dirlik, "Postsocialism?" 380–81.

we need to review its history. As early as the 1930s, the then young and underground Communist Party had already decided to use cinema as its major pedagogical tool to spread its political messages, and it was largely due to its extremely successful cinema campaign—the Left-wing Cinema Movement—that the party was able to gain popular support in the 1930s and 1940s, which ultimately led to its success in the civil war.[9] Right after the party liberated China in 1949, one of the first tasks of the new republic was to solidify its reign over cinema, reorganizing all existing production studios and centralizing the distribution network into a highly regulated system.[10] All the moviemaking production units were moved from Shanghai to Beijing for more effective centralized control. On the distribution level, China Film Corporation (Zhongguo dianying gongsi) was set up and assigned the role of coordinating all film-related units in China as well as the selected foreign distributors, who supply films to the Chinese people. The entire movie enterprise, from production to distribution, was under the party's complete control soon after 1949, and cinema, more than any other mass media, would become the most powerful propaganda machine of the party in the turbulent years to come.

The power of China Film Corporation in China's film market was absolute, as it had exclusive control of film imports, exports, and national distribution.[11] Under this system, a network of distribution lines was constructed. China Film Corporation, which was positioned at the top of the distribution triangle, purchased completed films from studios and distributed them to several large provincial agencies. These companies dealt with smaller distribution companies at the municipal level, which in turn coordinated with exhibition units in different cities, towns, and villages.[12] Originally designed to maintain the central government's absolute surveillance, this triangular and hierarchical network gradually evolved into a huge, inefficient, and bureaucratic system detached from the real audience. While China Film Corporation had little data on where its films ended up, information concerning actual

9. For historical details and cultural analyses of the first phase of this film movement in the 1930s, see Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932–37* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

10. Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 34–45.

11. George Stephen Semsel, "Film in China: An Introduction," in *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic*, ed. George Stephen Semsel (New York: Praeger, 1987), 3–6.

12. Wu Xuanong, ed., *Shanghai dianying zhi* [An Account of Shanghai's Cinema] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue yuan, 1999), 604.

screenings could not be reported back to production houses, as there were just too many agencies involved. Many intermediate distribution companies survived only on the small profit the films made at the local box offices, putting all participants involved in the production-distribution-exhibition line into precarious positions.

In spite of the obvious defects of the system and the dangers posed to the national cinema, the State has shown relatively little enthusiasm for relaxing the policy of cinema centralization, while other mass media are given more freedom to carry out their own commercial experiments.[13] This uneven imposition of control might largely be due to the State's strong conviction about the collectivist ideology and function embodied in cinema. I will return to this point later.

In 1993, the government finally began to allow local production units to sell their films directly to regional distributors, but China Film Corporation continues to be solely responsible for the importing of foreign films. At the exhibition level, cinemas can now group themselves together to develop separate cinema chains, but the existing structure has reacted to the changes with a great deal of reluctance. Larger provincial distribution companies have cooperated with some of the smaller ones in their regions and prevented others from purchasing films directly from the studios, thus continuing to maintain the existing structure in a more or less unaltered mode. Some mainland filmmakers characterize the decade of reform as having achieved nothing but the creation of a number of regional monopolies out of the earlier China Film Corporation's single national monopoly.[14] As a result, most of China's cinemagoers still have little choice in the movies they see because the films continue to come from the same regional distribution source. The government ignores the situation because the existing structure, however problematic, prevents the formation of a free film market, and this failure indirectly helps the State maintain its control.

While the distribution network is certainly constrained, the production units are also under tremendous pressure. Within the competitive environment where capitalist logic reigns, almost none of the film companies in China, which are required to produce "politically correct" films, is making a profit. The production manager of Emei Film Studio reported that the

13. For the recent media reform in China, see Yuezhi Zhao, *Media, Market, and Democracy in China: Between the Party Line and the Bottom Line* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

14. Kang Jianmin, "Zhendui wenti xunqiu tupo" [Looking for breakthrough from the core of the problem], *Dianying yishu* [Film Art] 272 (2000.3): 14–15.

total sum of national investment in film production in 1999 was about 300 million RMB,[15] but the revenue returned was only 30 million RMB in total, which comprised only one-tenth of its investment.[16] According to recent Web-based research, over 90 percent of fifty thousand interviewees found movie ticket prices too high, and respondents were reluctant to pay such a high price to see a movie.[17] The national standard price for a movie ticket is 15 RMB,[18] while the price of a pirated VCD can be as low as 5 RMB. In order to survive, some film companies, such as Shangdong Film Company and Beijing's Forbidden City Film Company, produce television programs (which are always more profitable) to pay off the debts incurred by their films. Some studios, such as Nanjing Film Company, cut their production costs immensely; many more rely on government subsidies.

Today, the majority of China's film companies relies less on the market than on government aid—which ranges from loans and financial awards to government mass ticket purchasing—for survival. As a result, the films produced have become more and more compliant with the official ideology, which further discourages Chinese productions that cater to the tastes and values of the masses. Government funding and involvement, according to Ana M. López, might be important for any national cinema competing with Hollywood;[19] but instead of leading to the examination of structural failures, these interventions in reality usually provide only a protectionist shield against foreign competition or sustain financially deteriorating businesses, and these funding activities only attest to and preserve the structural problems of a failing system. In fact, various kinds of financial aid to the film industry are essential for the government to stay in control. The

15. US$1 is equivalent to approximately 8 RMB.

16. Li Kangsheng, "Shenceng wenti zaiyu shichang" [Buried problems in the market], *Dianying yishu* [Film Art] 272 (2000.3): 10–11.

17. This research was conducted by China's Sina Web site in November 2000, http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/22840.html. According to recent statistics provided by the New China News Agency, the standard movie ticket price equals 2 percent of the average monthly income in China, while the corresponding figures in the United States and India are only 0.5 percent and 0.25 percent respectively. *Ming Pao Daily News*, December 16, 2000.

18. After Chengdu's fifteen major cinemas reduced their ticket price to 5 RMB in 2000, a heated debate was triggered nationwide in China about whether the fixed national cinema ticket price should be lowered. For two sides of the debate, see, http://202.106.184.141:89/gate/big5/www.chinanews.com.cn/2001–01–15/26/66503.html; and http://202.108.249.200/life/pop/wangyou007.html.

19. Ana M. López, "Facing Up to Hollywood," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 419–37.

current dilemma of cinema's position—as both a political apparatus and a commodity—is a major problem for film producers, as they are faced with the impossible task of balancing profits with ideology. This predicament has generated a whole set of structural problems that is now leading to the collapse of the national film industry.

Although some filmmakers, such as Feng Xiaogang, are trying their best to make commercial films for the market, their sporadic success is far from typical. A purely commercial cinema is still only an imagined concept for China's film industry. This irreducible distance between the film industry and its audience directly promotes the popularity of Hollywood and Hong Kong commercial films in China.[20] However, China Film Corporation has been extremely selective in the films it imports; most Chinese audiences can see only the pirated versions of foreign films. The flourishing pirated VCD market gives the mainland audience the chance to see many films that are not allowed to be screened publicly. For example, to his great surprise, the Hong Kong director Herman Yau has discovered that he is extremely well known on the mainland, due largely to the popularity of his famous exploitation films of 1993, *Taxi Hunter* (*Deshi pan'guan*) and *The Untold Story* (*Baxian fandian zhi renrou chashaobao*).[21] These films are circulated only as pirated VCDs, because they are extremely violent and contain illicit material such as rape, murder, and cannibalism. China's conservative cinema censorship therefore directly fosters the development of a prosperous black market, creating two streams of parallel yet highly divergent exhibition traffic. While the official cinema outlet shows "clean" movies, the prohibited yet more entertaining movies circulate widely on the VCD black market, which more accurately reflects the popular tastes of today's Chinese moviegoers, who prefer pirated films because of their lower price and large variety of films available. Thus, a more vigorous, thriving Chinese cinema market cannot be developed unless censorship is extensively relaxed, but this is not likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

As previously mentioned, there have been many accusations against the Chinese government for its clandestine support of the piracy industry. However, in reality, the PRC has always been concerned about the pro-

20. For an analysis of Hong Kong films in China, see Laikwan Pang, "The Global/National Position of Hong Kong Cinema in China," in *Media in China: Consumption, Content, and Crisis*, ed. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Michael Keane, and Yin Hong (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 55–66.

21. Herman L. T. Yau (Hong Kong film director), interview with the author, October 31, 2000.

tection of intellectual property, largely due to the anxiety of simultaneously yearning to join the international community and fearing the loss of national control. On the one hand, accession to the WTO, which forces the State to comply with international business rules, had been at the top of the government's priority list. The United States, a leading source of intellectual property and a net exporter of copyrighted works, has been one of the most strident critics of China's intellectual property enforcement. From 1994 to 1996, China was put on the priority watch list under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974. The recent WTO negotiations became a political platform for the American government to force China's legal and enforcement systems to comply fully with the WTO's Agreement for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs).[22] On the other hand, from the perspective of internal control, the VCD piracy market deprives the government of its power to control and allows its subjects to experience the world without any filtering. The government can keep an eye even on the unruly Internet, but it remains relatively helpless in screening or blocking the unwelcome messages brought to the Chinese people through pirated movies. Under the dual pressure of outside commercial interests and inside political demands, the PRC is anxious to demolish the piracy market, as is evident from the several big antipiracy propaganda campaigns that the government has carried out. For example, in 1999, the semiofficial Chinese Audiovisual Association (Zhongguo yingxiang xiehui) invited reporters from five major newsgroups in China on a trip to investigate piracy. The event was widely publicized, and many articles were published to document the well-developed piracy network in the country.

On the legislative level, the PRC is one of the most committed countries in the world to protecting intellectual property. Since the 1980s, China has enacted an impressive body of intellectual property laws and ratified most major international intellectual property treaties, including the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions and the U.S.–China Intellectual Property Rights Agreement.[23] Law enforcement does not lag behind legislation.

22. The recent WTO negotiations triggered hot debates within China's film circles. People worry that with the government's promises of increasing the imported film quota and allowing a larger share of foreign investments in China's film exhibition market, Hollywood will soon dominate the entire national film market. See, for example, the special issue of the Chinese film journal *Film Art* devoted to the WTO debate, *Dianying yishu* [Film Art] 272 (2000.3).

23. See Jeffrey Layman and Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, "IPR Protection After WTO: Copyright Law and Enforcement under the TRIPs Agreement," in *China WTO: Shaping the Future*, ed. David Packer (Hong Kong: Asia Law and Practice, 2000), 129–39.

Starting in 1997, the government called on the Ministry of Public Security to aid the National Copyright Administration in cracking down on compact-disc pirates. Hundreds of plants have been closed, and thousands of people involved in illegal production have been imprisoned. Instances of counterfeiting production in China have decreased dramatically.[24] The government has also organized many raids on retail piracy markets, but corruption at the provincial level tremendously reduces the effectiveness of the antipiracy campaign. After all, it is always more difficult to control retailing than production. The market still flourishes, although many of the discs are no longer "made in China" but are imported from other areas. Many pirates moved their factories to Hong Kong and Macau in 1997, from where millions of counterfeit and bootleg VCDs are imported back to the mainland each year. In turn, the Hong Kong government also started fierce piracy raiding in 1999, and plants moved to other sites in Southeast Asia to continue their business.[25] Like transnational corporations that will move anywhere in the world to gain the most favorable business conditions, many pirates also have the transnational mobility to go to places where anticounterfeiting legislation and enforcement are weak. The work the Chinese State must engage in to stop piracy on the vast mainland, thereby pleasing the international community as well as maintaining the control of the nation's information trafficking, is much more difficult than most critics of information piracy assume.

The State, ultimately, becomes the victim of its own policy. On the one hand, in order to maintain a unified and clean cinematic representation of China, the government forces the national cinema to ignore the tastes of the masses, who turn to the black market of pirated movies to satisfy their entertainment demands. The shift of the movie market from official sources to underground channels results in great financial loss to the government in terms of taxation, and the government is also forced to surrender its cultural control to foreign popular cultures, particularly those of Hong Kong and the United States. On the other hand, in spite of its painstaking attempts to please the international business communities, the Chinese government is constantly condemned by the world for its inefficient policy on the protection of intellectual property. In the cinema scene, the many policies made as a result of the PRC's intense desire for entering into the global capitalist order and maintaining ideological control turn into specters, only to haunt the government itself.

24. *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, January 12, 1998.

25. Sam Ho (assistant director, Asia/Pacific Anti-Piracy Operations, Motion Picture Association International), interview with the author, July 4, 2001.

Piracy, Cinema, and Globalization

The concept of intellectual property is always fraught terrain. Copyright is originally a concept and policy made to balance public and private interests, so that a limited freedom should be granted to the public for "fair use" of intellectual materials; at the same time, creativity must be protected and rewarded.[26] But recent legal developments in the United States are so protective of the copyright owners that this legislation can hamper creative freedom and discourage cultural reproduction and dissemination. Sampling in rap music is now a dangerous act that might invite lawsuit; parody and homage, so commonly present in cultural products, are discouraged by hidden legal threats. Copyright has become a form of censorship; the rights of the users are sacrificed to those of the owners. When this criticism of copyright protection is put into a globalized context, the problems are even more obvious. It clearly has been the case that the sheer bulk of very broad and very basic patents and copyrights has created many barriers to the development of national industries.[27] Today's international copyright laws are major and powerful tools that perpetuate and reinforce the historically constructed uneven distribution of global wealth, as the developed world has become home to the intellectual property owners, while the developing world houses the users. As Siva Vaidhyanathan writes, "Although the [American] film industry has pushed for thicker copyright protection to protect its dominant place in the global cultural marketplace, it should be clear that thin copyright protection . . . made the American film industry powerful and creative in the first place."[28] The present copyright laws aimed at protecting the present global power structure are clearly blind to the historical conditions that fostered this system.

Vaidhyanathan's criticisms may not seem applicable to piracy, because his concerns refer to the borrowing and adaptation of ideas rather than the direct cloning of products. The current copyright controversies are mostly centered on the support of cultural freedom against the monopoly of ideas that all people should have the right to access. Movie piracy seems to raise no ambiguities here, since it entails the direct copying of cultural

26. Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001).
27. For the case of biotechnological products, see, for example, John H. Barton, "International Intellectual Property and Genetic Resource Issues Affecting Agricultural Biotechnology," in *Agricultural Biotechnology in International Development*, ed. Catherine L. Ives and Bruce M. Bedford (Oxon, N.Y.: CAB International, 1998), 273–84.
28. Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*, 115.

products in terms of both ideas and expressions, and it involves no exercise in creativity. In other words, product piracy seems to be entirely a commercial matter. However, the cultural significance of movie piracy resides less in the production side than in the reception side, which involves people's rights and desires to access diverse cultural materials. Moving into the terrain of cultural studies, the recent development of film studies shows that commercial cinema is an important cultural text for us to understand modern culture, not because of the filmmakers but because of the large audience it reaches. The case of movie piracy in China is particularly pertinent for examining the relationship between the right to copy and the right to receive. We also have to notice that the country's film distribution does not operate in the ideal "free market" from which the notion of intellectual property supposedly derives its meaning. The use of today's international copyright laws in a highly regulated market governed by an authoritarian government poses a double threat to cultural diversity, less in terms of the freedom to create than the freedom to obtain information and cultural products. On the one hand, the international copyright laws make legal video copies very expensive. While constantly lured by Western entertainment and cultural productions, most Chinese lack the financial ability to purchase these commodities. On the other hand, the PRC's tight control of both the production of national cinema and the distribution of international films further cramps the video market and theater screenings. The people are therefore under double control: the lure of Western commodities and the denial thereof. Desires for imported entertainment are only reinforced, and the inevitable result is piracy, which in turn hampers development of the national cinema. Paul Willemen characterizes two potential types of national cinema: one benefits the homogenizing top-down project of nationalism, the other opposes it.[29] In China, piracy threatens both of these possibilities.

James Donald and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald argue that some Chinese films manifest a publicness—a shared experience of the cultural present—to provide spectators "an inventive, creative and mundane engagement with the dense symbolic [they] now inhabit."[30] In her own book, Stephanie Hemelryk Donald more elaborately demonstrates how Chinese cinema in the 1980s successfully constructed an imaginary space for people

29. Paul Willemen, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: BFI; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 212.

30. James Donald and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, "The Publicness of Cinema," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 127.

to observe, experience, and reflect on rural dislocation in the wake of economic reform.[31] To Donald and Donald, although this engagement takes place through the individual viewing experience of different spectators, a publicness is nevertheless created by the films; movies establish a public memory through which the audience is reminded of the present and its predicaments. Their reading of contemporary Chinese cinema is a moving one, because it gives cinema a very specific and important political position to allow people to perform counterhegemonic cultural activities. However, the film texts Donald and Donald refer to are the canonical Fifth Generation texts, such as *The Big Parade* (*Da yuebing*, 1985), *Red Sorghum* (*Hong gaoliang*, 1987), and *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984), which were all made with a specific political agenda in a specific historical period. These particular films may indeed define a singular and unified viewing experience of the people, which Donald and Donald celebrate. However, entering the late 1990s, with the Chinese film industry on the verge of complete destruction, and the Chinese people clearly preferring to watch pirated movies from Hollywood and Hong Kong, Donald and Donald's specific reading of the national cinema seems no longer applicable.

While we can no longer imagine how Chinese cinema could embody any subversive ideology or forms of people's collective antihegemonic action, neither can we imagine the State using cinema conveniently as its ideological mouthpiece. The present embarrassing position of the government in relation to its film industry indirectly reveals the State's flawed conception of cinema as a representation of collective Chinese consciousness. As previously mentioned, cinema has always been dear to the CCP, mostly due to the medium's publicness and therefore its usefulness as a means of publicity. When made in an intelligent way, a film text can be a powerful tool to indoctrinate the audience in any form of ideology, but it is the collective viewing experience that most effectively promotes the ideological infiltration. Public film screening can be seen as a collective ritual, which has much more power than the film text alone can provide. And it is the publicness of cinema, rather than its visual and audio features, that most uniquely defines its political position.[32]

31. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 67–83.

32. For two different ways to relate cinema to the public sphere, i.e., cinema as an activity and cinema as text, see Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Wimal Dissanayake, "Cinema and the Public Sphere: The Films of Oshima Nagisa," in *In Pursuit of Contempo-*

In contrast to the publicness of cinema, movie piracy belongs to the private sphere. In the West, the introduction and quick popularity of video rental in the 1970s "democratized" cinema's previously Fordist consumption patterns and unsettled the public sphere formed by movie watching.[33] The age of video rental, however, never reached China; instead, pirated movies swept the nation in the early 1990s. The organized public movie-watching experiences suddenly became domesticated and intractable. Experiencing the outside world through film became an activity belonging to individuals' own time and space. They could relax at home, taking their time and making their own choices about which part of the "West" and which aspects of "modernity" they wanted to consume. Recent research on Beijing film audiences indicates that most Beijingers go to the cinema fewer than five times a year, while over 60 percent of the interviewees watch at least one film a week at home, probably mostly on pirated VCDs.[34] Very few Chinese see movies in theaters, an activity now almost exclusively relegated to the realm of dating. In fact, the blooming pirated VCD market is publicly acknowledged in the country: most of China's film magazines introduce and analyze films not screened in China but available only in VCD and DVD formats, and many of these films are pirated. The new movie culture introduced by piracy developed more rapidly and created greater cultural disturbances than the video culture that started in the West in the 1970s; piracy is destructive to the status quo largely because it is illegal. In this case, no one group is in control of the films being pirated, distributed, and watched, and no one identifiable form of power—political, civil, or commercial—can manipulate movie-watching activities in China, since numerous people participate in this low-tech, low-cost business. It is this implication of "privacy" that most threatens the PRC's governing ideology, which demands unity and harmony to legitimate its own rule.

The flourishing pirated VCD market and the failing Chinese film industry may demonstrate that scholars can no longer define Chinese cinema as "political" in the usual sense, because film-watching has now become

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rary East Asian Culture, ed. Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), 139–56.

33. However, as Richard Dienst reminds us, this visual "democratization" ultimately benefits the entertainment conglomerates that profit from this immense expansion in the volume of overall televisual time. See *Still Life in Real Time: Theory After Television* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 165–66.

34. Dai Degang, "Dui Beijing dianying guanzhong guanying qingkuang de tiaocha baogao" [A report on current Beijing audience], *Beijing dianying xueyuan xuebao* [The Journal of Beijing Film Academy] 33 (1999): 90–91.

an activity alienated from any form of control. If Linda Williams is right in her argument that contemporary cinema disciplines the audience into a docile body,[35] movie piracy is nondisciplinary. Spectators of pirated movies do not need to follow the time schedules of theaters or television broadcasts; neither do they need to return the watched films to video rental stores.[36] Pirated movies cannot control, nor be controlled by, any identifiable source of power.

Movie piracy in China, therefore, might be seen as a classic example of Michel de Certeau's "strategy vs. tactics" model, in which a top-down "strategy" transforms the uncertainties of history into stability that sustains one's own power, while the bottom-up "tactics" respond to the strategy in transitory and noncohesive ways, subverting its organization and rationality.[37] But there are major differences between de Certeau's theorization and the actual scene of China's piracy business, and movie piracy is far from a romantic form of guerrilla warfare to fight hegemony. Obviously, it is naïve to assume that piracy is an egalitarian effort of the people to oppose some authoritative policy, because what the people desire is entertainment in the form of commercial Hong Kong and Hollywood films, which are hegemonic in their own discursive structures. The popular commercial films being pirated are often invested with various forms of prejudices, ranging from racism, chauvinism, and homophobia, to capitalist greed. The so-called tactics involved in piracy are neither humanistic nor democratic in nature but are carried out in their own system of exploitation, through which some gangster tycoons earn astronomical profits. Most frighteningly, piracy demonstrates the potent penetrating power of Capital, which is now gained by the pirates instead of the Hollywood studios, to break down boundaries blocking Capital's expansion; in our case, what is being challenged is the ideological control of the now mighty Chinese State. Unlike de Certeau's "strategy vs. tactics" model, in which tactics are just feeble disturbances in the inexorable domination of strategies, the flourishing piracy market seems to suggest that the force opposing despotism is now gaining an upper hand and overwhelming the State's control. On the other hand, it would also be a mistake to consider piracy as solely governed by capitalist logic, in which

35. Linda Williams, "Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 351–80.
36. There have always been VCD rentals all over Asia, but sales dominate the VCD culture and economy, probably due to the discs' low price and durability.
37. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

the free market provides the ultimate regulations, since piracy operates outside any legal system. As the capitalist market cannot survive without the protection of a powerful system of legislature and enforcement, the criminal pirate market's violence and unmanageability only harm the orderliness of capitalism. Although movie piracy sanctifies the culture industry by circulating its products to areas beyond its usual scope of control, the culture industry is very vocal in its fight against piracy, claiming that it has the most at stake.

Therefore, the cultural meanings of movie piracy in China are precisely not its implications of (anti)capitalist will and discipline but its dissemination and disorder. Movie piracy can be seen as the largest crime collectively committed by the Chinese people against the authority of both the State and the global culture industry. But this piracy by no means creates a self-empowerment of the people, as it does not promote the development of a cinema or a new culture belonging to the Chinese people in the new global era. Movie piracy does not provide for the cultivation of a thriving, vigorous film industry in China, one that can survive foreign competition. The decreasing ticket revenues of the nation directly hamper the film industry's ability to reinvest, which causes the national cinema to lose its competitiveness to foreign industries.

The most illuminating aspect of movie piracy in our understanding of contemporary Chinese culture is its fluidity and disorder, as it indicates that no major political or commercial party can single-handedly condition the people's everyday life at the moment. Piracy demonstrates a lack of authorship, and a lack of authority, rules, and discipline. Trying to tackle the increasingly impossible project of theorizing a national Chinese cinema, particularly in view of the inclusion of Hong Kong and Taiwanese productions, Chris Berry suggests a performative model of collective agency, through which Chinese films can exceed the problematics of a unified collectivity. "Rather than arguing for the total abandonment of the concept of national agency in regard to national cinema, [we should] argue for recasting national cinema as a multiplicity of projects, authored by different individuals, groups, and institutions with various purposes, but bound together by the politics of national agency and collective subjectivity as constructed entities."[38] While Berry's proposal can help us to rethink Chinese

38. Chris Berry, "If China Can Say No, Can China Make Movies? Or, Do Movies Make China? Rethinking National Cinema and National Agency," *boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 132.

cinema as a fluid and noncoercive entity, this model is based on a pluralistic and productive film scene that has the capacity to incorporate projects with different styles, contents, and ideologies, which can hardly apply to the mainland cinema at the moment. A more pressing question among filmmakers today may be whether the film market on the Chinese mainland is becoming so pluralized and mobilized as a result of piracy that no more mainland Chinese films, or any form of collective cinematic agency, will be made in the future.[39]

Like many other phenomena caused by globalization, piracy is created and participated in by many local/international players who are both architects and victims. But the case of movie piracy does not simply show the evil impact of globalization in a developing country such as China. The internal contradictions of globalization revealed here are not based on simple unidirectional West/non-West hegemonies and appropriations, but are more specifically generated within a (post-)Socialist State trying hard to hold on to ideological control of its people in a globalizing age. The contradictions of globalization are shown here less as defects of a coherent structure than as responses of a government and a people to the threats and lures of globalization. The Chinese State is particularly caught in the dilemma between ideological control and economic activities, as the country's economic success is a major pillar legitimizing the State's authoritative sovereignty. Almost all legal and illegal commercial activities taking place in the country are directly or indirectly linked to the topsy-turvy political reality cocooned in layers of ideological contradictions. The party's desire for national power, as prophesied by Schwartz and Dirlik, makes these ideological contradictions of the Chinese State only more apparent and unsolvable.

Not One Less and Collective Chineseness

The case of movie piracy in China proves not only the State's difficulties in maintaining political control but also the increasing impossibility of defining a national cinema/identity. An interesting case in point that can demonstrate this predicament is the cinema market in May 1999, when NATO bombed Belgrade's Chinese Embassy. At a time when China's collective anger toward the United States was at its peak, Zhang Yimou's *Not One Less* (*Yige dou buneng shao*) took in the highest box-office receipts in all

39. The threat of pirated movies is also clearly felt in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where many feel that movie piracy is the leading cause of the decline of the two film industries.

major Chinese cities that month and ultimately became the highest grossing domestic film of the year.[40] The film describes the journey of a dogged thirteen-year-old substitute teacher who travels all the way from a remote rural village to the bustling and alienating city to find a dropout, who is not much younger than the teacher. When the young teacher is interviewed on a television news program, details about her trip and the plight of rural education touch the hearts of many in the city. Through a collective effort between the people and the media, the missing boy is finally reunited with the faithful teacher and, ultimately, their village. The title *Not One Less* clearly suggests the film's collectivist ideology, and it can be seen as a sentimentalist representation and celebration of the traditional populist ethos of mutual help and the unyielding loyalty of the authorities to the people.

In February of 1999—when the film was finishing its postproduction—media coverage focused on the purchase of the film's national distribution rights by the newly established semigovernment organization China Film Group (Zhongguo dianying jituan), who paid 11.8 million RMB[41]—an extremely high figure—showing the government's high-profile approval of the film's ideology. The film was officially released in late April of 1999, and an accompanying nationwide campaign used the film to promote rural education and national cinema. With such obvious support from the government, the film became embroiled (very soon after its public release) in the furious anti-American sentiments spreading rapidly across the nation. During this time when the government, through the mass media, was organizing the entire nation to say "no" to the United States, this film conveniently became a part of the ideological machine shaping and endorsing the sizzling nationalist sentiments of the time. Its success at the box office demonstrates the audience's strong participation in the civil-cum-state nationalist campaign. All these historical and political factors combined to make the film one of a handful of contemporary Chinese films that have enjoyed the endorsement of both the government and the people. Its success also revived a cultural legacy in which films provide a public space and crystallize collective emotions in China, even at the turn of the twenty-first century.

A large-scale antipiracy campaign accompanied the public screening of *Not One Less*. For the first time in history, the government launched

40. For detailed box-office records of major Chinese cities in May 1999, see *Zhongguo dianying shichange* [China Film Market], July 1999, 38.

41. Cao Baoping and Yi Ren, "Cong *Yige dou buneng shao* kan dianying shushi" [Reading cinema narrativity from *Not One Less*] *Dianying yishu* [Film Art] 268 (May 1999): 77–81.

a series of highly publicized raids to hunt down pirated copies of the film.[42] The message was clear: this film belonged to the official culture, and its wholesome message would not be contaminated by pirated reproductions. There are reports that the film's success at the box office did not accurately reflect audience opinion, as the number of government-purchased tickets surpassed the number of individual tickets sold.[43] Although the film was comparatively more popular than other "main melody" films—those supported or sometimes commissioned by the government to convey the party's ideologies—the success of the film as an event film that displays the collective emotions of the people was not purely egalitarian but partly constructed.

Underlying this national campaign for a unified Chinese cinema was the pirated movie market, which, at that time, was flooded with such Hollywood films as *Armageddon*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Antz*, movies loaded with overt Americentric ideologies. *Antz*, for example, clearly presents a strong condemnation of communist regimes, which are described as advocating collectivist ideology for their own political interests. In other words, *Antz* criticizes precisely the kind of collectivist ideology glorified by *Not One Less*. It is impossible to verify whether it was the American *Antz* or the authentically Chinese *Not One Less* that captured a larger Chinese audience around the time when NATO bombed the Chinese embassy. However, it is clear that the wide circulation of pirated movies complicates not only the State's top-down media control but also the formation of any unified collective experience of the people from the bottom up. Even with the government's tight control of cinema, movie piracy nevertheless gives the Chinese masses a tremendous range of choices. Complete control of the film market is impossible. In the age of piracy, any structured form of cinematic identification with nationalism is at stake, whether it is engineered by the State or formed among the masses. And the success of *Not One Less* in crystallizing collective Chinese emotions remains a rare and fleeting example in a contemporary Chinese cinema pushed hard by the government, yet tremendously corroded by piracy.

The volatile relationship between Zhang Yimou, the director of *Not One Less*, and the Chinese State is an interesting yet typical example of the confusing ideological position of the government toward cinema. While some of Zhang's prior Fifth Generation films, such as *Judou* (*Judou*) and *To*

42. "*Yige dou buneng shao*" [*Not One Less*], http://living.sina.com.cn/yige/.
43. Cao, "Cong *Yige dou buneng shao* kan dianying shushi."

Live (*Huozhu*), were banned in China, and he himself was seen as a political dissident, he is now embraced by the State as its prodigy, or even its mouthpiece, which is clearly observed in the national distribution privileges his most recent film, *Hero* (*Yingxiong*), enjoyed. The film premiered in the Great Hall of the People and monopolized almost the entire national film market during the 2002 Christmas holiday season. With the accompanying media frenzy, not surprisingly, the film has enjoyed box-office success around the country. Sixth Generation directors have experienced similar treatment. Zhang Yuan's 2000 production *Seventeen Years* (*Guonian huijia*) was triumphantly promoted by the government as the national educational film that all Chinese students should see, but his erotically and politically provocative *East Palace, West Palace* (*Donggong xigong*), made just three years before *Seventeen Years*, was not allowed to be shown until today.[44] While the Chinese government no longer stigmatizes individual filmmakers as troublemakers and exhibits an astonishingly wide range of responses to the different works of the same filmmaker—to the degree that is impossible to predict how they will respond—the filmmakers themselves seem uncommitted to any particular political point of view and are willing to compromise much more than we expect. We can celebrate such phenomena as a kind of postmodern pluralism that resists grand narratives; it is, however, precisely this kind of chaos manifested in Chinese cinema that make difficult Berry's call for the spirited development of Chinese cinema.

Not One Less also provides us an example with which to understand the impact of television on collective Chineseness. When the substitute teacher finally arrives in the city, she is too tired to search on her own for the boy. She successfully persuades the manager of a television station to allow her to broadcast her plight on television. The program rouses the entire city, and people rally to help find the student. The film postulates a new public experience for Chinese people—television watching, which might now replace cinema in its position of representing the collective Chinese experience. While *Not One Less* may be the most representative recent film to glorify cinema's role in forging a collective Chinese identity, in the end, the narrative relies on television to fulfill this ideological aspiration.

As Zhang Yimou would know very well, television production is much more profitable than moviemaking is in today's China, partly because the government exerts a fierce single-handed, centralized control over cinema, while it gives television more commercial freedom. In China today, in spite

44. Thanks to Dai Jinhua, who reminds me of this case of Zhang Yuan.

of intense television censorship procedures, "television drama production still exhibits a greater degree of freedom and flexibility than cinema, which is subject to the administrative centralization of state power."[45] For television, centralized censorship is replaced by regional inspection. While nontelevision companies can produce television drama, television companies are also allowed to accept nonstate funding, investment from foreign and overseas enterprises, as well as joint funding arrangements.[46] Such relatively lax controls are only a dream for film companies. As statistics show, the development of cinema lags far behind that of other media under China's open-market policy. In 1985, 127 feature films were produced, yet in 1998, only 82 films were made.[47] However, the number of hours of television programs increased from 6,957 to 118,343 within the same thirteen-year period,[48] representing a seventeen-fold increase. Rapid development can also be seen in traditional print media, such as books (an increase of 311%), magazines (an increase of 174%), and newspapers (an increase of 141%), in the same period,[49] demonstrating that the mass media, in spite of the government's ideological control, flourish under economic reform as a whole. Watching television is becoming the favorite pastime of the Chinese people, so it is not surprising that *Not One Less* uses television to represent the new collective Chinese experience.

But this new rendering of Chinese collectiveness through television is by no means "public" in its traditional sense. The television episode featured in *Not One Less* was clearly modeled after *Time and Space of the Orient* (*Dongfang shikong*) and *Interviews in Focus* (*Jiaodian fangtan*), arguably the two most popular television programs on CCTV (China Central Television) in China in the late 1990s. The popularity of these two programs led to copycat interview-type shows, in which the focus is on revealing and sentimentalizing the lives of ordinary people. These programs, although presented as such, could by no means be considered news programs, since they did not report on or investigate incidents or individuals of current public interest. The interviewees were always ordinary and common, so many viewers could personally identify with them. There were no big stories to

45. Yin Hong, "Meaning, Production, Consumption: The History and Reality of Television Drama in China," in *Media in China: Consumption, Content, and Crisis*, 36.
46. Yin Hong, "Meaning, Production, Consumption," 36.
47. National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China, *China Statistical Yearbook 2000* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2000), 711.
48. National Bureau of Statistics, *China Statistical Yearbook 2000*, 712.
49. National Bureau of Statistics, *China Statistical Yearbook 2000*, 714.

tell, no social themes guiding the programs; these shows aimed at presenting a quasi-realist, although largely sentimentalized, account of ordinary lives.[50] In other words, the popularity of these interview programs may in fact do more harm than good to the development of Chinese journalism, since people no longer conceive of news programs as the medium through which to interrogate public issues and supervise the government but only as a forum to expose and come to terms with an individual's personal life. The audience is inscribed back within their own horizons and emotions, instead of being encouraged to participate in the public sphere. If *Not One Less* demonstrates a new publicness being developed in China, this publicness is introverted and, in the end, privatized.

As the famous writer Su Tong describes the television culture in 1990s China, "Those watching television have no fervent devotion to the machine. Lazily they lie on the sofa, with sunflower seeds and a cup of green tea at hand, their eyes and ears are captured by the television screen and sound. At this moment, Bill Clinton and Andy Lau, Xing Zhibin and Maggie Cheung, Hangtian airplanes and Huiyuan fruit juice obtain an astonishing chance for equality."[51] Su Tong's description seems to suggest that if television unifies China, it will produce a stabilizing effect, flattening hierarchy and reducing meanings into unstable yet equivalent floating signifiers. This sense of indifference calms all the excitement developed around the media that characterizes the earlier decade when television was first popular with the masses. Even for the television historical dramas so popular in China around the PRC's fiftieth anniversary, the reception is not unified. Although most of these dramas spread ideologies of people's loyalty to and the ultimate righteousness of the emperors or high-government officials, the audience's frenzy lies less in the collective yielding to authority than in individual viewers' personal identification with the power celebrated. A mainland audience comments on the popularity of these television series in a disdainful tone: "When watching these dramas, most audiences identify themselves with the major characters and reveal their desire for power."[52] According

50. Zhang Jinli, *Jiemi Zhongguo dianshi* [Unravel the Secrets of Chinese Television] (Beijing: Zhongguo Chengshi, 1999), 1–36.

51. Andy Lau and Maggie Cheung are famous Hong Kong movie stars, while Xing Zhibin was arguably China's most popular female television news anchor in the 1990s. Su Tong, "Dianshi shidai" [The television era], in *Richang Zhongguo—jiushi niandai laobaixing de richang shenghuo* [Everyday China—The Daily Life of the Common People in the 1990s], ed. Wu Liang and Gao Yu (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1999), 64.

52. Fang Lei, "Zhiyi 'lishiju' de lishiguan" [Questioning the historical sense in "historical dramas"] *Dianshi yanjiu* [TV Research] 134 (October 2001): 43.

to this view, in spite of the vast popularity of this television genre, collective yielding is replaced with personal desires, as more people identify with those who hold power than with docile subjects, and the resulting effects do not forge, contrary to some commentators' ideas, but indeed challenge any nationalist projects.

There are now 3,593 television stations operating in China, the highest number of any country in the world.[53] Although programs repeat on different stations, the diversity of content now offered to Chinese people is hard to ignore. In addition to the high number of television stations, there are 2,049 newspapers, 8,149 magazines, and more than 3,500 radio stations operating in China.[54] Any fantasy of a single collective Chinese experience consolidated through the mass media is obsolete and unconvincing. Cinema might have failed to dominate the public experience of the Chinese people, but no other form of mass media can succeed at this impossible task either. These media might be less policed by the government, and therefore economically more vigorous, but the impact of market diversification on these media is more obvious. In other words, tight ideological control, as in cinema, leads to piracy, while looser regulations, as in television, bring forward uncontrollable market diversification and complacent consumerist ideology. In both cases, a unified national identity manifested through mass media is a myth.

The presumed reading of China as a collective entity—in which all Chinese share a singular collective history and identity—is not only a fiction created for political manipulation but is also a concept widely circulated among scholarship of contemporary Chinese culture. Most studies are informed by phenomena that characterized the PRC before the 1990s, when it might still have been possible to speak of collective experiences and attitudes, as very few people were immune to the fierce political turbulence and wide-scale national healing that followed. But the 1990s saw an increasing depoliticization of people's everyday lives as the nation achieved a more stable political and economic condition. The pluralization of the "Chinese experience" not only reflects a late-capitalist globalized fragmentation of life in China but is also a fact of political reality. No other major national event since June Fourth can be said to mark a linear historical progression of China; the massive political meetings and decisions made are gradually losing their meaning in the people's lives, as are any collectivist ideologies

53. Zhang Haichao, *Dianshi Zhongguo: Dianshi meiti jingzhen youshi* [Television China: The Favorable Conditions of the Competitiveness of Television] (Beijing: Beijing Guangbo Xueyuan, 2001), 27.
54. Zhang, *Dianshi Zhongguo*, 29.

that the national cinema supposedly embodied. With the double reinforcement of economic stability and political authoritarianism, China has now gradually entered the phase where complacency and indifference are the sociopolitical norm.

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Movie piracy, therefore, is only one cause and manifestation, among many, of a dissolving Chineseness. In the age of globalization, both the State's desire for hegemonic control and scholars'/artists' fascination with collective egalitarian reactions are destined to go bankrupt, a phenomenon easily observed in the current Chinese cinema scene, which has been detrimentally affected by piracy. In fact, piracy is a unique case of cultural disarray among many other activities as a demonstration of the characteristics of globalization, since piracy is engendered by globalization but remains outside of, or even subversive to, globalization's control and interests. The end result of globalization does not always serve to maintain the mechanism's interests and continual expansion. Being caught in the power network of China merging with the world, of an authoritarian government struggling to cope with globalization, piracy reveals itself as an interesting force that threatens both the prevalent political ideology of the Chinese State and the emerging global order. Yet the people are not necessarily empowered, nor is any concept of a unified Chineseness.