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**In the Name of Internationalism: The Cinematic Memorialization of Norman Bethune in Socialist China**

Xiaoning Lu

Comrade Norman Bethune, a member of the Communist Party of Canada, was around fifty when he was sent by the Communist Parties of Canada and the United States to China; he made light of travelling thousands of miles to help us in our War of Resistance Against Japan. He arrived in Yenan in the spring of last year, went to work in the Wutai Mountains, and to our great sorrow died a martyr at his post. What kind of spirit is this that makes a foreigner selflessly adopt the cause of the Chinese people’s liberation as his own? It is the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism, from which every Chinese Communist must learn.

Mao Zedong[[1]](#endnote-1)

Heroes and heroic deaths hold a special place in the collective memory of communist nations. This is particularly true in the early years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embarked on a systemic project of nation building. Although suffering, death and grief were still fresh, the brutality of war and the massive loss of human life in the decades preceding the founding of the PRC in 1949 had to be re-narrated and remembered with a collective optimism in order to create a sense of historical continuity and to enhance a forward-looking revolutionary vision for the newly built political community. There emerged in this process a new culture of commemoration—substituting the traditional culture of ancestor worship with the public honoring of China’s “heroic daughters and sons” (*yingxiong ernü*). Throughout the 1950s, a large number of military cemeteries, memorial halls, and monuments were built; state funerals of Chinese communist leaders and reburials of Chinese revolutionary pioneers were staged as public spectacle;[[2]](#endnote-2) and print media and cinema were utilized to tell the stories of the “people’s heroes” and to manufacture memorable revolutionary icons. All these are constitutive of what Chang-tai Hung has aptly termed as “the cult of the red martyr”—state-instituted commemorative practices with the aim of extolling “war’s glory and warrior’s sacrifice to the lofty political goal of socialism.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Due to its heavy reliance on visual means, the cult of the red martyr became an important part of visual culture in socialist China, leaving material traces in everyday spaces and etching distinctive icons on people’s minds. Being integral to the CCP’s political culture, it also played a significant role in cultivating civic responsibility, forging national cohesion, and legitimizing the Chinese path to communism. However, political vision encoded in the cult of the red martyr is by no means constrained by national boundaries or restricted by parochial nationalism. Outward orientation, political imaginaries of internationalism, and even technologies of the self are also stimulated by this cult, particularly, by foreign martyrs who died for “the Chinese revolutionary cause.” The cult of Norman Bethune in socialist China is an intriguing case in point.

Born in Gravenhurst, Ontario, Norman Bethune was a Canadian doctor who gained great distinction as a chest surgeon and pioneer in the treatment of tuberculosis in Montreal in the late 1920s. In 1936 when the Spanish Civil War erupted, he travelled to Spain as a volunteer with the Canadian Red Cross where he conceived and provided mobile blood transfusion service for front-line treatment and became committed to communism. Soon after, in 1938 he answered a call by the American and Canadian League for Peace and Democracy to travel to China. Amidst the Second Sino-Japanese War, Bethune worked as a medical consultant in the Jin-Cha-Ji (Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei)border region in the Chinese communist base area, training Chinese medical personnel and providing medical treatment to the sick and the wounded. Unfortunately, he contracted septicaemia while operating on wounded soldiers and died at his post in 1939.[[4]](#endnote-4)

In the Chinese pantheon of red martyrs, Dr. Bethune occupies a unique position. Immediately after his death, Mao Zedong wrote “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” extoling the virtues of this “foreign martyr” and holding him up as an exemplar of “the internationalist fighter.”[[5]](#endnote-5) On the fifth anniversary of Bethune’s death in 1944, Chinese writer Zhou Erfu published a literary reportage “A Few Fragments from Norman Bethune’s Life” in *Liberation Daily*, which was to exert great influence on the ensuing creation of novels and screenplays on Bethune.[[6]](#endnote-6) Public commemoration of this Canadian doctor persisted throughout China’s era of high socialism, including the turbulent ten years of the Cultural Revolution despite an ever-shifting political climate. In 1953 Dr. Bethune’s remains were reinterred in the Cemetery of Martyrs, a military cemetery in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province.[[7]](#endnote-7) In 1967 the Bethune Museum was built on the site of a former wartime medical center in Shanxi province and in 1974 Bethune Memorial Hall was set inside the Bethune International Peace Hospital in Shijiazhuang.[[8]](#endnote-8) On every anniversary of Bethune’s death from 1949 to 1979 commemorative essays were published in *People’s Daily*, the official newspaper of the CCP. In addition, visual representations of Bethune proliferated, encompassing a wide range of visual genres and media such as sculpture (fig.1), poster, postage stamp, painting, embroidered picture, woodcut, and film.[[9]](#endnote-9) All these helped cement Norman Bethune’s status as the ultimate icon of internationalism in socialist China.

[INSERT LU-FIGURE 1 HERE]

Compared to the iconographies of Chinese revolutionary martyrs including Zhao Yiman, Liu Hulan and Dong Cunrui, which center on the defining moments of the revolutionaries’ heroic acts and are saturated with the artistic style of socialist realism, the iconography of Bethune is marked by an eclectic formal expression and thematic focus, thus displaying a kind of imaginary indeterminacy. Among Bethune posters which were circulated in the 1970s, some are painted in watercolor with broad strokes; others are rendered in condensed composition with bright color in accordance with the Chinese folk-art convention; still others use the *gongbi* style, meticulously contouring the main characters. These posters not only highlight Bethune’s professional identity (an experienced surgeon performing operation in a makeshift hospital; a conscientious army doctor in a daring dash on horseback to rescue the injured), but also present this Canadian doctor’s connection with the Chinese people—Bethune meets and chats with Chairman Mao; Bethune conducts a physical check-up on a sturdy peasant boy in a boisterous village; Bethune even appears as a mental image conjured up by a hardworking young Chinese woman who aims to emulate his dedicated spirit and to advance her technical skills and knowledge for the revolution.[[10]](#endnote-10) Rather than indicating the boundless possibilities of representing an international friend or attesting to the difficulty of crystalizing Bethune’s spiritual legacy, this imaginary indeterminacy manifests artists’ active responses to the ideological interpellation, or more precisely, of their engagement with the urtext of Bethune—Mao’s essay “In Memory of Norman Bethune.” Ironically, due to their textual proximity to the authoritative Mao canon, visual representations of Bethune accommodate different artistic styles and stimulate variant political imaginations of internationalism while perpetuating Mao’s verdict on the foreign martyr. Such visual practices are a manifestation of exegetical governmentality,[[11]](#endnote-11) a mechanism of power that relies on political exegesis of revolutionary canons to reinforce the power of political figures and to constitute the socialist subject by involving individuals in this exegetical process.

This chapter takes two commemorative films—the documentary *In Memory of Norman Bethune* (dirs. Jiang Yunchuan and Duan Hong, 1962) and the biopic *Doctor Bethune* (dir. Zhang Junxiang, 1964)—as samples among a diversity of visual representations of Bethune to examine the specific mechanism of cinematic exegesis of Mao’s canonical essay on Bethune and to investigate how these practices, by transforming Bethune from a historical figure into a political signifier, probe the ideological boundaries of “internationalism” as well as the limits of the artists’ creative freedom. Given the importance of Mao’s obituary for Bethune, I will first explain why this particular foreign figure held specific significance for Mao and then conduct a historically informed textual analysis to investigate how Mao’s text is quoted, evoked, reframed, and appropriated in the above-mentioned films and how other cinematic strategies are utilized to create this foreign martyr. Through these case studies, I hope not only to challenge the conventional understanding of communist propaganda as a transparent mouthpiece but also to call attention to aesthetic imaginaries inspired by the imbrication of the national and the international in Chinese revolutionary politics.

**Canonizing Bethune: from a Marxist Humanitarian to the Great Proletarian Internationalist Fighter**

In general, commemorative texts, whether verbal, written or visual, are all products of memory work. The urtext of Bethune, Mao’s “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” despite its foundational status in the making of Bethune’s martyrdom, is based on Mao’s rather elusive memory of this Canadian doctor. Mao confesses in the essay that he only met Dr. Bethune once and wrote to him once only in response to the doctor’s many letters.[[12]](#endnote-12) Although being hardly acquainted with Bethune, Mao wrote in a decisive tone praising the doctor profusely and calling all Chinese communists to emulate this great martyr. He emphasized that Bethune had travelled from afar to support China’s War of Resistance against Japan, exalted his hard work, selflessness, and his great warm-heartedness towards all comrades and held him up as the embodiment of “the spirit of internationalism and the spirit of communism.” [[13]](#endnote-13)

Why was Norman Bethune of particular interest to Mao? He was by no means the only foreigner who had travelled from afar and offered dedicated services to the Chinese people during the second Sino-Japanese war. Among the famous “international friends,” a designation conferred by the CCP to foreigners who have made considerable contribution to the Chinese revolutionary cause,[[14]](#endnote-14) there were the Lebanese-American Shafick George Hatem, who joined the CCP in 1937 and served as a long-term health advisor to the Party, the skilled Korean physician Dr. Bang Wooyong, who offered six-year medical services in Yan’an and whose kindness and patience won him the nickname of “mama doctor” among patients and nurses, and Indian doctor Dwarkanath S. Kotnis, who treated the wounded soldiers at battle fronts, delivered medical lectures to students, and died at his post in 1942.[[15]](#endnote-15) There were also unsung heroes, including Jean Ewen, Dr. Bethune’s interpreter and nurse, who trekked across war-torn China and braved air raids to save injured Chinese and to collect much-needed medical supplies on her way to Yan’an.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Indeed, international support for China during the 1930s and 1940s were provided by people of different political persuasions but mainly existed in the form of humanitarian assistance. For instance, as Stephan Craft’s historical study reveals, thousands of American missionaries were heroic peacemakers during the early years of the Sino-Japanese War. Risking their own lives, these missionaries spared no effort to provide educational, medical, and spiritual relief and established refugee camps and war relief programs for widows, orphans, and the Chinese population at large. They also waged peace movement in both China and the United States to stop the Sino-Japanese War “in the interest of saving Chinese lives, expanding the Christian enterprise in China and preventing a greater conflagration.”[[17]](#endnote-17) There were also numerous non-religious aid workers from all parts of the world who strove to provide effective and swift humanitarian assistance to Chinese people who were suffering from the atrocities committed by Japanese troops. For instance, the Canadian-American Medical Aid Team, which consists of Norman Bethune, Jean Ewen and the American doctor Charles Parsons, was initially formed in response to an appeal by the American journalist Agnes Smedley for doctors and nurses to assist the Chinese people. All three members were received by representatives from the Chinese central government and soon Ewen and Bethune were sent off to work for a Red Cross unit attached to the Eight Route Army in the communist region in observation of the United Front agreement.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Among all those aid workers, Norman Bethune stood out as a great humanitarian and a committed communist. In fact, he was one of very few people who had set their feet on two battlefronts of the worldwide anti-fascist war. The doctor’s hot temper, irascible personality, arrogance, coupled with excellent surgical technique and devotion to work made him a very controversial figure during his lifetime.[[19]](#endnote-19) But he never failed to impress people as a dedicated humanitarian. In her memoir, Jean Ewen relates many incidents of Dr. Bethune providing care for the sick, the wounded, and the poor at the risk of his own safety on their trek to Yan’an, the capital of the communist base area. The doctor bound the wounds of all who came to him disregarding the imminent air bombings. He fed abandoned hungry children himself and went to the quartermaster to secure trousers and jackets for them.[[20]](#endnote-20) To Ewen, Dr. Bethune “was a gifted physician with a manner that gives patients confidence. At heart he was a missionary.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Bethune’s remarkable humanitarian compassion also seeps into his own writing. A passage from his essay “Wounds” reads:

Any more? Four Japanese prisoners. Bring them in. In this community of pain, there are no enemies. Cut away that blood-stained uniform. Stop that haemorrhage. Lay them beside the others. Why? They’re alike as brothers! Are these soldiers professional mankillers? No, these are amateurs-in-arms. Workman’s hands. These are workers-in-uniform.[[22]](#endnote-22)

What is revealed here is a great love of humanity that knows no national boundaries and transcends differences in gender and political creed. However, this essential aspect of Bethune’s internationalist spirit was obscured by Mao’s focus on valorizing the doctor’s communist spirit, and with the popularization of Mao’s text, it has become forgotten.

Peter Slater once suggested the reason why Dr. Bethune held enormous significance to the Chinese communists is that he was the right man at the right time in the right place: the doctor’s occupational prestige in the Western world made him a vital sign of international recognition and tangible support to the CCP at a time when the Chinese communists had been betrayed by the Russian communists and had little current contact with America and Europe; and Mao appreciated Bethune’s rare combination of idealistic dedication and technical excellence.[[23]](#endnote-23) What should not be neglected is a genuine spirit of comradeship between Bethune and Mao, two staunch communists. As Ewen recalls, at Bethune’s first meeting with Mao, the doctor formally presented his credentials from the Communist Party of Canada. “His card was printed on a square of white silk, signed by Mr. Tim Buck, secretary of the party, and adorned by the party seal. Chairman Mao took the credentials with great ceremony, bordering on reverence, and said, ‘We shall transfer you to the Communist Party of China so that you will be an inalienable part of this country now.’”[[24]](#endnote-24) This account offers us a glimpse into the organizational practice of the Communist International (Comintern), which was committed to anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, and self-determination of nations. It also turns our attention to the emergence of a new type of internationalism within the realm of international politics, an internationalism—anti-imperialism on the global scale—that is aligned with national interests.[[25]](#endnote-25)

To a large extent, Mao’s interpretation of Bethune’s extraordinariness is heavily influenced by his political vision of the path of the Chinese revolution. In the same year when Dr. Bethune arrived in China, Mao delivered speeches and reports advocating a long-term national united front against Japan in order to fight a protracted war and proclaiming that the Chinese communist must be “an internationalist, at the same time a patriot.”[[26]](#endnote-26) With an understanding of China’s War of Resistance against Japan as at once a national war for independence and part of a worldwide proletarian revolution, Mao injected much-needed optimism into the beleaguered Chinese communist force and pointed out the wider significance of the Chinese war effort. As he claimed, “only by achieving [our] national liberation will it be possible for the proletariat and other working people to achieve their own emancipation. The victory of China and the defeat of the invading imperialists will help the people of other countries.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Because of Bethune’s political credential and unique experience in the anti-fascist war in Spain, his arrival in the Chinese communist revolutionary base areas not only attested to the possibilities of establishing the widest united front but also made him the perfect poster child of communist internationalism, which, in practice, requires the proletariat of the capitalist countries to support the struggle for liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples and the proletariat of the colonies and semi-colonies to support that of the proletariat of the capitalist countries.

Mao’s political conviction also led him to offer a reductive causal explanation of Dr. Bethune’s deeds, emotions, and thoughts. In his funeral oration, Mao conveniently interpreted the doctor’s remarkable moral qualities including self-dedication, incessant pursuit of technical excellence, and warm-heartedness to comrades and ordinary people as external manifestations of his lofty political commitments, thereby asserting the communist ideology’s transformative power in shaping good socialists. This is the start of the political reification of the spirit of Bethune, which disregards the complexity of human nature and writes off Bethune’s humanitarianism for the sake of promoting “proletarian internationalism,” an international spirit that is based on proletarian solidarity, rather than the universal idea of humanity, and that has a specific aim of advancing a worldwide communist revolution. Such a reification in fact betrays Mao’s understanding of humanism informed by classical Marxism. In *Communist Manifesto* and *Anti-Dühring*, Marx and Engels repudiate the view that holds freedom, equality, and justice as eternal truths and instead treat them as historical products.[[28]](#endnote-28) Similarly, humanism needs to be understood as a socio-historically conditioned idea. Since alienation not only defines labor activity but also characterizes social relations in a class society, particularly, capitalist society, man cannot achieve true self-realization and emancipation. Thus, fully-developed humanism is only possible with the realization of communism.[[29]](#endnote-29) From this Marxian perspective, the views that embrace an abstract notion of human nature and champion universal love for human beings can only be labelled as bourgeoise humanitarianism, which is naïve and hypocritical. Mao made a similar point by advocating class-bound emotion in his famous Yan’an Talks in 1942. He states, “There will be genuine love of humanity—after classes are eliminated all over the world […] but not now. We cannot love enemies, we cannot love social evils, our aim is to destroy them.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Throughout the early years of the PRC, humanitarianism and communism were still regarded as incompatible, if not mutually exclusive. The modifier, “socialist” or “proletarian,” regularly preceded the term “humanitarianism” to indicate that humanitarian love in a transitional historical stage to communism could only be extended to the proletariat and their allies.

Suffice it to say, Bethune became a vehicle for Mao to develop his political thought. Mao’s commendation of the doctor not only set the tone for ensuing public discourse and cultural memorialization of Bethune but also created conditions under which political exegesis of Mao’s foundational text on Bethune could be pursued.

**Documenting Bethune: Cinematic (Re)Citation of the Mao text**

Among visual representations of Bethune, the black-and-white documentary *In Memory of Norman Bethune* best illustrates the intertwinedness between performing political exegesis of the Mao text and preserving the visual memory of Bethune. Produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio (CNDS) in 1962, the film bears the imprint of the ongoing nationwide campaign of “Learning Chairman Mao’s Works,” which was first initiated by Lin Biao, the minister of defense, in the military in 1959. With the increasing deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship at the turn of the 1960s, Lin opposed bookish worshiping of Marxist classics and slavish following of the Soviet model. Instead he promoted Mao’s writings as a shortcut to Marxism-Leninism as they united Marxism-Leninism with the Chinese revolutionary experience and so, he argued, were most relevant to the Chinese.[[31]](#endnote-31) In particular, he called on People’s Liberation Army soldiers to “lively study and apply the Mao Zedong thought” (*huoxue huoyong*), encouraging them to memorize short passages relating to Mao’s political concepts. “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” “Serve the People,” “A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire,” and other pieces written by Mao during the most difficult years of the Chinese communist revolution, became what was considered the optimal study materials as they had recently been collected into the newly canonized first four volumes of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*.[[32]](#endnote-32) Taking account of this historical context and the fact that the documentary bears the exact same title as Mao’s canonical essay on Bethune, this cinematic memorialization of the Canadian doctor could well be regarded as another “recitation” of the Mao text, an example of the flexible use of Mao’s works, and an active engagement with and popularization of Mao’s political concepts.

Two filmmakers Jiang Yunchuan and Duan Hong shouldered the task of communicating and portraying “the spirit of Bethune” for their documentary project. By ingeniously weaving archival photographs and film footage into the narrative framework of the Mao text and by using political commentary to inject new meanings into source images, they fulfilled the dual task central to the memorialization of Bethune—recovering authentic traces of Bethune as a historical figure and consolidating the ideological hegemony of proletarian internationalism. [[33]](#endnote-33)

The documentary opens with a close-up of the cover of the second volume of *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, which gradually zooms in and then cuts into another close-up of the text of “In Memory of Norman Bethune” once the volume is opened. These shots are complemented by an emphatic male voice-over narration: “Among Chairman Mao’s writings, there is a memorial to Bethune.” When the lighting focus is cast on the essay title, the well-known beginning of the text is read out, “Comrade Bethune, a member of the Labor-Progressive Party in Canada,[[34]](#endnote-34) was sent by the Labor-Progressive Party in Canada and the Communist Party of the United States; he made light of travelling thousands of miles to China to help us in our War of Resistance Against Japan.” As Mao’s writing is presented as an integral part of the voice-over narration, a full-body statue of Bethune fades in. It is first superimposed onto Mao’s essay in the volume and then zooms out to replace the text as the sole focus of the frame. This sequence is echoed in the ending of the documentary. After presenting footage of Bethune’s simple funeral and news reports on the immediate reactions to Bethune’s death, the film returns to the opened volume of Mao’s works and quotes the most important passage from Mao’s eulogy as the ultimate and most authoritative comment on this remarkable doctor: “What kind of spirit is this that makes a foreigner selflessly adopt the cause of the Chinese people’s liberation as his own? It is the spirit of internationalism, the spirit of communism, from which every Chinese Communist must learn.” As the running intertitle which is superimposed onto the opened book rolls out, a shot of the standing statue of Bethune fades in until it occupies once more the center of the frame and commands the sole attention of the audience.

Referencing Mao’s essay offers an expedient framing device which enables the filmmakers to construct a coherent narrative of Norman Bethune out of an assemblage of randomly taken photographs and often fragmented historical footage. Sandwiched between Mao’s quotations are, among others, a rare photograph of Bethune meeting Chinese general Nie Rongzhen shot by famed photographer Sha Fei (Fig. 2) and an iconic footage of Bethune performing a medical operation under the eaves of a small temple filmed by Wu Yinxian, a prominent cinematographer and one of the founding members of the Yan’an Film Group in the late 1930s.[[35]](#endnote-35) These images by themselves are a vital attraction as they offer a rare glimpse into the Chinese communist community in its germinal stage and present valuable visual records of Norman Bethune’s medical work in the rugged Jin-Cha-Ji military district. Aside from their historical value, they are material testimony to the international solidarity among communist filmmakers—film footage was shot with a 16mm movie camera and the precious filmstock donated by the Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens to the Yan’an Film Group in 1937.[[36]](#endnote-36)

[INSERT LU\_FIGURE 2]

Those original photographic images had not been produced for specific documentary projects, as Wu Yinxian once said that he used his photos only to record life and to capture the unique spirit permeating the young Chinese communist community.[[37]](#endnote-37) But they were carefully selected and skilfully edited in such a way that they not only present a chronological narrative of Bethune’s life in the CCP-controlled areas but also resonate and constitute the political exegesis of the Mao text in the military medical circle since the founding of the PRC. For instance, after the CCP decided to send the Chinese People’s Volunteer Force to the Korean War in 1950, Bethune’s spirit of internationalism was invoked in the mobilization drive to encourage Chinese doctors and nurses to take “the cause of the Korean people’s liberation” as their own and to support “the great war to resist America and aid Korea.”[[38]](#endnote-38) During peacetime, Bethune was mainly held up as an inspirational figure to encourage medical workers to improve their work attitude towards patients, to enhance their professional skills, and to combine technical excellence and political responsibility in order to facilitate the professionalization and formalization of military hospitals.[[39]](#endnote-39)As the documentary places much emphasis on Bethune’s great contribution to China’s military-medical services, the spirit of self-reliance, revolutionary optimism, and wholehearted dedication to the Chinese revolutionary cause—part of the Chinese communist army’s revolutionary legacy—were held as the essential constitutive elements of the spirit of Bethune.

Through their creative editing of sound and image, the filmmakers transform the raw archival footage of a historical past into visual evidence for a political argument, which either augments or alters the original signification of the source materials. For instance, footage of the architectural layout of the Songyankou Model Hospital and the daily activities of hospital staff are spliced together with footage of Bethune demonstrating surgical techniques and doing administrative work, thus fleshing out the narrative of his contribution to health infrastructure development in the Chinese communist base area. The voice-over narration added to this group of disparate shots further hammers home this message: “Thanks to Comrade Bethune’s initiation and leadership, a model hospital was established with the aim of improving medical services in the border region and cultivating military-medical cadres.”

In addition to providing basic historical information, the episode on the Model Hospital delivers a clear political message, as evidenced by this visual unit that consists of several shots focusing on various kinds of manual labor: medical staff setting up a large steamer in the kitchen, hospital workers shaking sieves and cutting medicinal crops, a patient paired with a health worker doing leg-pushing exercises. The complementary voice-over narration comments, “When there is great shortage of essential material during the wartime, we must be self-reliant. Everything depends on our hands.” This interior scene quickly cuts to an outdoor scene where Dr. Bethune and Chinese medical staff clad in military uniform busy themselves with carpentry work, and then to a wooden traction device attached to a patient’s broken leg inside a hospital ward, with a commentary running on the soundtrack: “Comrade Bethune has said that a battlefield surgeon has to be a carpenter, a tailor, a blacksmith, and a barber at the same time. Only by mastering the other four skills can he be an excellent battlefield surgeon.” Undoubtedly, this segment augments the original meaning of the historical footage as it aligns Bethune’s expertise and professionalism with self-sufficiency and self-reliance, the key qualities of the Yan’an spirit which lies at the heart of the Chinese communism.

In other instances, voice-over commentary with the support of carefully selected music significantly alters the neutrality encoded in the original documentary footage. Take, for instance, the footage of Dr. Bethune bandaging the wounds of an injured solider in the open air. Sandwiched between shots of Bethune receiving an enthusiastic welcome from the Eighth Route Army and another set of shots showing the marching communist soldiers and supplemented by the upbeat drumming and lively tune of *The Song of Guerrillas* as the background music, this ordinary scene of medical service is now imbued with revolutionary optimism. The overlapping voice-over narration in fact obliterates humanitarianism and celebrates the fighting spirit of proletarian internationalism:

[Comrade Bethune] said, “Right now I am at the heart of the center of the [Sino-Japanese] war. Now I can truly understand the magnificent and sublime spirit of this earth-shaking revolution.” Many soldiers who have recovered after receiving Comrade Bethune’s treatment can now return to the frontline to make their contribution to the Chinese nation’s liberation cause once again.

These words clearly stress the mutually beneficial relationship between Bethune and the Chinese soldiers as both intellectually and physically regenerative. The inseparability between Bethune and the Chinese revolutionary cause is finally monumentalized in Bethune’s death. Toward the end of the documentary, the filmmakers invoke many sorrowful moments. Newspaper obituaries and funeral footage are followed by repeated close-up shots of the big brownish marks on Bethune’s forearm, a result of the doctor’s excessive blood donation to Chinese patients and the ultimate symbol of his selflessness. Mao’s eulogy on the soundtrack once again invites sensorial immersion and incites mourning while affirming the greatness of Bethune’s spirit of communist internationalism.

**Humanizing Bethune: An Auteurist Approach**

Whereas the documentary *In Memory of Norman Bethune* is a cogent cinematic treatise on the *spirit* of Bethune, the 1964 biopic *Doctor Bethune* is a dramatized portrayal of Bethune’s life in the Jin-Cha-Ji border region until his death. The latter film demonstrates the conscious effort of the director Zhang Junxiang to humanize the deified martyr via a creative engagement with the Mao text. Among Chinese filmmakers who were active in the 1950s and 1960s, Zhang is quite an exceptional figure. He graduated from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at China’s prestigious Tsinghua University in 1931 and then studied dramaturgy at Yale University in the United States in the late 1930s. After returning to China, Zhang first established himself in China’s drama circle and then turned to more lucrative filmmaking in response to financial pressures during China’s civil war (1945-49).[[40]](#endnote-40) Soon after the establishment of the PRC, Zhang, a member of Chinese communist party, was appointed to important leadership positions including deputy head of Shanghai Film Studio, head of Shanghai Film Bureau, and later deputy head of the Film Bureau under the Ministry of Culture. This rare combination of English proficiency, artistic acumen, and political commitment not only made Zhang Junxiang particularly receptive to Joris Ivens’ suggestion that Chinese film workers should make a biopic about Bethune when the latter visited China in 1958,[[41]](#endnote-41) but also made him the most qualified Chinese filmmaker to embark on this project.

The fact that Bethune had received Mao’s endorsement soon proved to be a double-edged sword for the aspiring director. On the one hand, such an endorsement ensured that the subject matter of this film project was considered appropriate. In 1963, the screenplay *Doctor Bethune*,[[42]](#endnote-42) which had been co-written by Zhang Junxiang and Zhao Tuo, was shortlisted by the Film Bureau as one of ten excellent screenplays, which held the promise of yielding high-quality films suitable to be screened during the 15th National Day Celebration in the following year.[[43]](#endnote-43) On the other hand, Mao’s essay posed considerable constraints on the filmmaker’s artistic creativity. At the inception of his film project, Zhang was fully aware that “the main task of a biopic of Bethune is, of course, to eulogize what Chairman Mao has pinpointed in his memorial to Bethune: this great internationalist fighter’s selfless spirit, his exceptional dedication to work and his extreme enthusiasm towards comrades and towards the people.”[[44]](#endnote-44)

As a well-trained dramatist, Zhang also understood that a fleshed-out character was the soul of any biopic and that the spirit of Bethune had to be manifested in the concrete life details, including Bethune’s personality, words, and deeds.[[45]](#endnote-45) Eager to disclose the inner logic of Bethune’s selfless dedication to the Chinese revolutionary cause, Zhang and his co-author dedicated the first third of their screen screenplay *Doctor Bethune* to depicting Bethune’s advocation of a social medical system in Montreal and his medical services during the Spanish civil war. “I’m afraid that without this prologue,” Zhang wrote in his recollection of the production of film, “audiences wouldn’t understand that it is the immense hatred towards the fascists that prompted him [Bethune] to come to China and to the battlefront in the Jin-Cha-Ji region… and that the rest of the screenplay in fact narrates how Bethune perfects himself as a communist.”[[46]](#endnote-46) Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, these foreign scenes were not materialized. In the finalized version of the film, the prologue is a prominent quotation of the best-known passage from Mao’s essay on Bethune, which appears as white intertitles printed on a crimson background and is reinforced by a male voiceover recitation.

Nevertheless, Zhang found other ways to flesh out the main character. In order to create a sense of authenticity, the film cast Gerald Tannebaum, an American who resided in the PRC at the time, as the protagonist. It uses bilingual dialogues for a substantial part of the film and embeds Bethune within a network of characters, including the doctor’s entourage, villagers, Chinese army doctors, and Chinese communist leaders, thus providing multiple perspectives on the protagonist. A more important cinematic strategy is the employment of dramatization, especially dramatic conflicts between Dr. Bethune and the Chinese people in the revolutionary base area, in depicting Bethune as a great internationalist hero in the making. This is the director’s ingenious solution to the seemingly insurmountable difficulty in narrating the story of Bethune, which he had identified at the outset of this film project: given the fact that Bethune, who wielded a scalpel instead of a weapon, had no direction confrontation with Japanese invaders, there seemed to be a lack of conflict that could sustain narrative drive.[[47]](#endnote-47) By introducing narrative conflicts among “the people of our own rank,” Zhang fulfilled the generic expectations of Chinese biopics on revolutionary martyrs, namely, disclosing social causes that engender heroes. [[48]](#endnote-48) Moreover, his conscientious conception of a dynamic and mutually benefitting relationship between Bethune and the Chinese people not only helped him tactfully avoid the politically undesirable portrayal of the Chinese as passive beneficiary of communist internationalism, but also domesticated Bethune as one of our heroes.

Treading a fine line between political appropriateness and artistic effectiveness, Zhang employs various kinds of dramatization and narrative conflict to present both the ordinariness and extraordinariness of Bethune. Some are politically innocuous quotidian confrontations revolving around Bethune’s foreignness. These conflicts not only introduce ordinary aspects of Bethune’s life but also inject light humor into this otherwise serious cinematic memorialization project. For instance, upon entering a village on the Loess Plateau with his medical team, Bethune aroused much suspicion and was stopped in the middle of the road by a vigilant peasant boy scout holding a red-tasselled spear. His appearance also presents a spectacle of strangeness to curious Chinese villagers. An elderly woman says with a puzzled expression, “He looks so strange: a full-head of grey hair and a carrot-coloured complexion.” She goes on wondering why this foreigner has come to her mountain village. In another scene, Bethune, who has little knowledge of the Chinese language, relies on gesticulation and guesswork to communicate with a young soldier who serves him a chicken dish for dinner. After a little argument, Bethune decides to eat this special dinner but admonishes the soldier not to treat him differently from the Chinese soldiers in the future.

Other dramatic conflicts are designed specifically to foreground the development of the character and to illustrate the spirit of Bethune. For example, a conflict between technical excellence and political “redness” undergirds a subplot revolving around Bethune and a self-taught Chinese army doctor named Fang Zhaoyuan. Bethune first meets Fang on one of his medical inspection tours. When checking a patient’s suppurating leg, Bethune is shocked to find out that sorghum stalks instead of splints have been used to immobilize the patient’s leg. Infuriated, Bethune confronts Fang who performed the operation and bluntly criticizes his extremely poor surgical technique. Deeply concerned with the shortage of medical equipment and supplies and appalled by local doctors’ inadequate medical techniques, Bethune proposes that the Chinese commander should set up a model hospital and have the best doctors from each sub-district sent there for professional training. Unsurprisingly, when Fang comes to enrol in the training program at the Model Hospital, Bethune sternly rejects this “quack doctor” in order to safeguard the dignity of his profession. It isn’t until Health Commissioner Yu makes a special case for Fang that the Canadian doctor decides to offer Fang an opportunity out of his respect for the Party’s recommendation. Before long, Bethune is impressed by Fang’s great diligence. In his answer to Bethune’s question why such a hard-working doctor has such poor medical technique, the Health Commissioner explains that Fang, who was born into a poor family, joined the Chinese communist army at a young age and had no chance to receive formal medical training. However, he trained himself to be a surgeon over an eight-year period of self-study. These revelations draw Bethune into deep thought.

These dramatic conflicts endow Zhang’s exegesis of the Mao text with a dialectical flavor—the spirit of Bethune is understood not as a moral quality intrinsic to the doctor, but a noble nature fostered and tempered by Bethune’s encounter with the great Chinese revolutionary war. Hence, the director arranges the blood transfusion scene, an iconic moment of internationalism to succeed the above-mentioned episode between Bethune and Fang. In order to rescue the life a Chinese war hero who has suffered several gunshot wounds to the abdomen, Bethune insists on the nurse drawing his type O blood to prepare for an emergency blood transfusion. With music swelling in the background, the camera zooms in and out from a syringe piercing through the blood vessel in Bethune’s forearm. It then shifts back and forth several times from Bethune to the wounded solider into whose arm the doctor’s blood is being injected. (Fig.3) Interspersed are occasional reaction shots of the anxious Chinese medical workers. The scene ends with the solider regaining his consciousness. In this deeply moving scene, Bethune is metaphorically welded into the collective Chinese national body as his blood slowly flows into the Chinese soldier’s body. The fact that this scene is bookended by a military combat sequence and a shot of a jubilant crowd of Chinese soldiers cheering thunderously for their hard-won victory further cues the audience to politicize the doctor’s humanitarian act as a great contribution to the Chinese war effort: the transfused blood not only helps to extend the life of a Chinese war hero but also replenishes the vitality of the Chinese revolutionary force.

[INSERT LU\_FIGURE 3A and LU\_FIGURE 3B]

Since not a single conflict among “the people of our own rank” is able to sustain the narrative or drive the plot forward, Zhang resorted to an episodic structure to emphasize Bethune’s accumulated experiences gained from encountering the Chinese people. The director foregrounds a symbiotic relationship between the self and the Other as the foundation of Bethune’s spirit of internationalism. Another important episode which illustrates how the foreign doctor is bound still closer to the Chinese people is set in a makeshift clinic housed in a peasant’s home at the center of a battle zone. Disguised as an old Chinese peasant and braving enemy’s gunfire, Bethune arrives at this clinic. To his great surprise, his recuperating patients have received excellent care from local villagers and a plain-clothed female army doctor named Feng. He marvels at the ordinary people’s wisdom as he is guided through a well-disguised entrance to a hidden pharmacy underneath the floorboards; he becomes ever more overwhelmed to find out that despite the harsh and dangerous situation, doctor Feng has taught herself the current battlefield medical techniques by learning from the textbooks that he had written for the Chinese communist army doctors. The emotional impact of this visit on the doctor is manifested in the next scene which shows Bethune writing his diary under the feeble light of a kerosene lamp, deep into the night. Seemingly addressing his interpreter Tong who is drifting to light sleep, Bethune’s words reveal his inner thoughts and excitement:

You know, Tong. When I decided to come to China, Dick O’Brien, one of my colleagues thought I was crazy. He said that the Japanese were equipped with the most modern arms, but the Eighth Route Army was nothing but a bunch of peasants with spears. I told him that I’m going to China just to find out how this army he called peasants can stop the rampant fascists. I think I’ve found the answer now.

The scene culminates in a highly emotional moment full of internationalist connotations. As the melody of the “Internationale” surges onward, the camera zooms in on Bethune, who utters with a deep emotion, “This is my country; this is my people!” This close-up shot which shows Bethune’s bright eyes looking offscreen is an excellent example of Zhang’s skilful negotiation of political demand and individual artistic aspiration. (Fig.4) It can be read at once as a very intense personal moment of this specific character and an anti-individual socialist-realist gaze. The socialist-realist gaze, which Stephanie Donald identifies as “a fixed stare out to a horizon, beyond the diegetic world, and apparently also beyond the world of the audience,”[[49]](#endnote-49) is a distinct stylistic feature of Chinese revolutionary films and a quintessential romanticized expression of socialist realism. Bethune’s gaze, understood in the narrative context, is a gaze not meant to be returned but to be shared with the audience, fellow compatriots of the Chinese nation. Hence, it projects proletarian internationalism as a common desire.

[INSERT LU\_FIGURE 4]

Upon its completion in 1965, the biopic *Doctor Bethune* was immediately banned from public release because of Jiang Qing (aka Madame Mao)’s final verdict: “This subject matter should not even be touched upon. Mao has already written the article [about Bethune]. What else do you want to do [with the subject]?”[[50]](#endnote-50) While implicitly acknowledging all narrative productions of Bethune as exegeses of the Mao text, Jiang Qing’s decision was informed by the rapid political radicalization which soon led to the eruption of the Cultural Revolution. Humanism, which is central to both Bethune’s spirit of internationalism and the biopic’s narrative strategy, was simply deemed as out of step with a new age of revolutionary fanaticism and proletarian violence. It was not until Jiang Qing and her political clique lost power after the Cultural Revolution that the film *Doctor Bethune* greeted the Chinese audience on National Day in 1977 and received critical acclaim.[[51]](#endnote-51)

**Conclusion**

Intersecting visual culture and political culture in socialist China, public commemoration of the red martyr not only inspired the people to emulate those extraordinary revolutionaries through creating memorable iconographies and honoring the red martyr’s moral values, it also played an instrumental role in promoting the legitimacy of the Chinese communist revolution and consolidating the political power of central authorities. Norman Bethune, a renowned Canadian doctor who died during his selfless support of China’s anti-imperialist war against Japan, is a unique red martyr as his martyrdom was sacralized by Mao as the ultimate symbol of internationalism. The canonization of Mao’s funeral oration of Bethune on the one hand reduced and reified the remarkable spirit of Bethune, which comprises of his profound love for humanity and his resolute faith in communism, into militant proletarian internationalism, a spirit deemed desirable for the specific phase of the Chinese communist revolution. On the other hand, it demanded the visual production of Bethune to be an exegetical practice of the Mao text, thus ironically accommodating diverse artistic styles. The compilation documentary *In Memory of Norman Bethune* and the biopic *Doctor Bethune*—two examples of the cinematic memorialization of Bethune—evoke, quote, and appropriate Mao’s text on Bethune in their distinct ways. Whether propagating Bethune’s internationalism as an unequivocal political idea or humanizing Bethune as an internationalist in the making, both films domesticate this great internationalist by emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between Bethune and the Chinese communist revolution. In so doing, they perpetuate the reification of the spirit of Bethune as ideologically oriented proletarian internationalism incompatible with universal humanitarian love. It was not until 1979 that People’s Publishing House published a beautifully designed memorial volume on Bethune containing the doctor’s correspondence and literary works, such as the aforementioned essay “Wounds.” For Chinese readers who finally had an opportunity to learn about Bethune’s thoughts from his own writing, their discovery of humanitarianism as an integral ingredient of the spirit of Bethune proved to be enlightening, if not shocking.[[52]](#endnote-52)

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1. Mao Zedong, “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” December 21, 1939. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_25.htm> (retrieved in 15 January 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Chang-tai Hung provides a detailed account of such commemorative practices in his article “The Cult of the Red Martyr: Politics of Commemoration in China,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43:2 (2008):279-304. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 302. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Loren Lerner, “The Unmasking of Dr. Norman Bethune,” *Journal of Canadian Art History*, 31:1 (2010): 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Mao Zedong, “In Memory of Norman Bethune,” December 21, 1939. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_25.htm> The text was to become a part of “Three Constantly Read Essays” (lao san pian) and was recited by millions of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. This reportage serves as the basis of Zhou Erfu’s novel “Dr. Bethune,” which was serialized in *Fiction Monthly* in Hong Kong in 1946. The novel became an important reference source for Bethune’s biographers and playwriters. For detailed publication information, see Qi Li, “From Political Propaganda to Academic Study: Seventy Years of Research on Bethune in China” (Cong zhengzhi xuanchuan dao xueshu yanjiu: woguo Baiqiuen yanjiu qishi nian gaikuang,” *Journal of Shangrao Normal University*, 30:4 (2010):29-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart, *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 334. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu shi keyan guanlibu, *Overview of Important Revolutionary Sites in China* (*Quanguo zhongyao geming yizhi tonglan*), vol.1 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2013), 167; Zhang Guangyu and Han Hongquan, *Cultural Heritage of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army* (Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi wenhua yichan) (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe, 2007), 163. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Many Chinese artefacts and artworks related to Bethune including ceramic figure and woodcut also found their way to the Bethune Memorial House in Canada. See Loren Lerner, “The Unmasking of Dr. Norman Bethune,” 100-121. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. These examples are taken from the Gallery of Chinese Propaganda Posters, available on https://chineseposters.net/themes/bethune.php (Accessed 15 February 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For detailed introduction of the concept of “governmentality,” see Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Graham Burchell, et al. eds, *The Foucault Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104. David E. Apter and Tony Saich ’s work on revolutionary discourse in Mao’s republic already touches upon exegetical governmentality. According to their observation, Mao was the master storyteller who created new narratives of Chinese history. His words were turned into sacred texts that would be ritually reiterated. This process not only inculcated political ideas but also created the “exegetical bonding,” which was instrumental in making a revolutionary community. See David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Mao, “In Memory of Norman Bethune.” Mao’s memory may not be reliable. According to Jean Ewen’s memoir, Mao received Bethune twice in Yan’an. See Jean Ewen, *China Nurse* *1932-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1981). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Newly uncovered materials in a recent biography of Bethune by the Stewards suggest that what motivated Bethune to work in China was rather complicated. In addition to his commitment to communism, his irascible personality, restless energy, psychological breakdown, and expulsion from Spain could all be contributing factors to his decision to lead a wanderer’s life. Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart, *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Zhang Wenlin compiles life stories of more than forty “international friends” in professions such as journalism, medicine, and law from countries including Austria, Germany, Japan, and the United States. See Zhang Wenlin, *International Friends and the Red China* (Guoji youren yu hongse zhongguo) (Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin chubanshe, 2000). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 474-480, 497-500. Bang Wooyong is known by his Chinese name Fang Yuyong and Dwarkanath S. Kotnis is known as Ke Dihua in China. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ruth Wright Millar, *Saskatchewa Heroes and Rogues* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2004), iii, 95-96. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Stephen G. Craft, “Peacemakers in China: American Missionaries and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1941,” *Journal of Church and State*, 41:3 (1999): 575-591. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. To resist the Japanese invasion the ruling Chinese Nationalist Party and Communist Party of China formed a united front during 1937-41. According to Ewen, after arriving in Hankou, Dr. Parsons decided to go back home rather than trek to northern China. Jean Ewen, *China Nurse 1932-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1981), 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Both Jean Ewen’s memoir and a recent biography of Bethune by Stewarts point out the doctor’s complex personality traits. See Roderick Stewart and Sharon Stewart, *Phoenix: The Life of Norman Bethune* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Jean Ewen, *China Nurse 1932-1939*, 66, 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Quoted in Shen Jiawei, “Wounds,” in *Painting History: China’s Revolution in a Global Context*, ed. Mabel Lee (Amherst, New York: Cambria, 2018), 57. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Peter Slater, *Religion and Culture in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1977), 301. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Jean Ewen, *China Nurse 1932-1939*, 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. This form of internationalism is different from what precedes it, a type of internationalism exemplified by the Second International. As the double connexion—capital/the national, labour/the international—characterized the economic-political alliances in the 19th century, the Second International took upon itself to oppose nationalism for the interests of the proletariat worldwide. For a brief introduction to the political development of internationalism, see Perry Anderson, “Internationalism: A Breviary,” *New Left Review*, 14 (2002): 5-25. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. The most important two speeches are “On Protracted War” made in May 1938 (available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm>) and “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War” delivered in October 1938 (available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_10.htm>). [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Mao, “The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War,” October 1938. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engles, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992); Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877 available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Kar Marx claims that “This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man.” See Kar Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art,” May 1942, available on https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3\_08.htm [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China’s Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 100; Huang Yao, “Why Did Lin Biao Promote Leaning Mao’s Works?”(Lin Biao tichang xuexi Mao Zedong zhuzuo suowei he shi), *Dangshi bolan*, no.12(2009):42-47. Lin played an important role in canonizing Mao’s works and building up the personality cult of Mao. The intimate relationship between canon and cult cumulated in the so-called little red book, Quotations from Chairman Mao, which was widely disseminated, recited and quoted during the Cultural Revolution. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. The first three volumes of *Selected Works of Mao*, which cover the history of the Chinese communist movement up to the end of the war against Japan, came out in quick succession between 1951 and 1953, and the fourth volume was published in 1960. See Helmut Martin, *Cult and Canon: The Origins and Development of State Maoism* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1982), 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Apparently, the two filmmakers chose the most appropriate film form for their project. As Jay Leyda suggests, the film form of compilation is an ideal vehicle for a cinema of ideas. Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1964). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. The text in this version is slightly different from Mao’s 1939 essay which specifies that Bethune is a member of the Communist Party of Canada. The Communist Party was banned in 1940 in Canada and it re-founded itself as the Labor-Progressive Party in 1943. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Trained at the Shanghai Art Academy, Wu Yinxian established himself as a professional photographer in the 1930s. He also worked as cinematographer for such well-known Chinese films as *Sons and Daughters of the Storm* (1935) and *Street Angel* (1937). In 1937 he travelled to the Chinese communist revolutionary base area in Yan’an, where he helped found the Yan’an Film Group. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Joris Ivens made his documentary *The 400 Millions* in Yan’an in 1937. After completing this project, he presented his movie camera and unused film stock as presents to the beleaguered Yan’an Film Group. See Ian Aitken, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (London: Routledge, 2006), 400. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Zhong Dafeng, *Reflections on Images and Ideas: Collection of Zhong Dafeng’s Essays on Film History* (Huoxue siying lu: Zhong Dafeng dianying shilun ji)(Beijing: Dongfang chuban she, 2015), 349. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Ye Qingshan 叶青山, “Work Hard for the Health of Our People and the People’s Army: Commemorating the Twelfth Anniversary of Dr Bethune’s Death” (Wei renmin jiankang, wei renmin jundui de jiankang er nuli gongzuo: jinian Baiqiuen daifu shishi shier zhounian), *Renmin ribao*, 12 November 1951. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Mei Ling梅岭, “Learn from Bethune’s Great Hardworking Spirit, Build Formalized People’s Army Hospitals” (Xuexi Baiqiuen weida gongzuo jingshen, jianshe remin jundui zhenggui hua yiyuan), *Renmin ribao*, 29 October 1949. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Rao Shuguang, “Zhang Junxiang’s Biography and Filmography” (Zhang Junxiang shengping yu chuangzuo nianbiao), *Dangdai dianying,* no.7 (2005): 31. *Diary on Returning Home* (Huanxiang riji, 1946) and *The Lucky Son-in-Law* (Chenglong kuaixu, 1947), the two light comedies that Zhang made in the late 1940s both contain stylistic norms common in the classical Hollywood cinema. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Zhang Junxiang, “About the film *Doctor Bethune*” (Guanyu yingpian *Baiqiuen*), in Zhang Junxiang and Zhao Tuo, *Screenplay: Doctor Bethune* (Dianying wenxue juben: *Baiqiuen daifu*) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1978), 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. The film script was conceived as an adaptation of the popular biography of Bethune *The Scalpel, the Sword: The Story of Doctor Norman Bethune* written by Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon. The book was translated into Chinese under the title “The Story of Doctor Bethune” in 1954. According to the original plan, Allan and Gordon would draft the script and Zhang would complete the screenplay. However, Allan only offered some suggestions and Gordon wrote a preliminary draft. The screenplay was completed by Zhang Junxiang and Zhao Tuo. See Zhang Junxiang, “Baiqiuen daifu: dianying wenxue juben,” *Renmin wenxue*, 1 (1963):52. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Chinese Film Association, “The Current Situation of Film Production (Excerpts)” (Dangqian dianying chuangzuo de qingkuang), December 1963, in Wu Di, ed., *Chinese Cinema Research Materials (1949-1979)* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), volume 2, 415-418. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Zhang Junxiang, “About the film *Doctor Bethune*,” 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Other examples include *Dong Cunrui* (dir. Guo Wei, 1955) and *Lei Feng* (dir. Dong Zhaoqi, 1964). [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 62. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Zhang Junxiang, “About the film *Doctor Bethune*,” 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid. See also Zhang Junxiang et al. “Film Symposium on *Doctor Bethune*” (Zhuotan yingpian Baiqiuen), *Renmin dianying*, no.11 (1977): 2-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Young painter Shen Jiawei was one such reader. As Shen recalls, his encounter with this 3,000-word essay “was the unforgettable basic training in internationalism for me.” See *Painting History: China’s Revolution in a Global Context*, 56-57. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Mr. Shen Jiawei who generously shared his experiences in Mao’s China with me through email correspondence. His 1984 oil painting *Wounds: The Story of Dr. Norman Bethune*, a powerful statement on Norman Bethune and humanism, provides inspiration for this project. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)