

The Captive Audience and Albanian Films in Mao's China

Xiaoning Lu

Abstract

The ironclad alliance between the People's Republic of China and Albania during the 1960s is often taken as the unquestioned starting point of transnational film exchanges between the two fraternal socialist states. This article delineates the presence of Albanian cinema in the People's Republic of China (PRC) from 1949 to 1976, when geopolitical realignments reconfigured the socialist camp, with special attention to Albanian cinema's position within the filmscape in Mao's China. Drawing on official news reports, movie reviews and recently published personal reminiscences, and employing the lens of the captive audience, it teases out the multifaceted reception of Albanian films, including the types of engagement that deviate from and challenge the then-prevailing revolutionary discourses. The study thus helps to demystify a reductive understanding of the socio-political significance of Albanian cinema in China.

Keywords: Albanian cinema, film reception, captive audience, Mao's China

In Xiao Jiang's 2005 film *Electric Shadows*, a Chinese answer to *Cinema Paradiso*, there is an unforgettable flashback to the female protagonist's encounter with the Albanian film *Ngadhjim mbi vdekjen /Victory over Death/Ningsi buqu* (Piro Milkani and Gëzim Erebara, 1967) amid the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). As the voice-over tells us, having been labelled as a counter-revolutionary and abandoned by her lover, this young female character is about to leave her small town to give birth to her lovechild in secret. However, an open-air screening of a foreign film—a temptation no ordinary person could resist—delays her departure. The core of the flashback, the outdoor screening of the above-mentioned film, not only provides a good glimpse of cultural life in Mao's China (1949-76), but also depicts a pivotal moment in the young woman's life. Accompanied by a hummed lyrical tune emanating from the Albanian

film being projected, the camera slowly moves from the audience, a transfixed crowd of standing audiences under the night sky, toward the white screen in front of them. Finally, it stops on the flickering image of the protagonist of *Victory over Death*, whom the voice-over introduces as “a beautiful and strong-willed partisan fighter called Mira.” We hear Mira, with a melancholy undertone in her voice, say to her male comrade “I’ve never expected that a revolutionary could play the guitar”—the memorable line from that movie that at once foregrounds sentimentalism and aestheticizes revolution. As soon as the young Chinese cinephile manages to find a good spot among the throng to watch the movie, she is mesmerized by the film’s portrayal of the revolutionaries. Her face lights up and her eyes sparkle with delight. Following her gaze, we then see in the next shot full-screen images of Mira, an innocently beautiful young woman with bows in her loosely tied hair, and her handsome male comrade gently playing the guitar. To the guitar accompaniment, they softly sing, “Brave people, hurry up and go into the mountains; We will join the guerrillas in the spring.” When the camera moves back to the young Chinese woman, a look of pain soon sweeps across her face, signalling the onset of her premature labor. As we hear her cry, a commotion amongst the audience, and the Albanian song dying away, the voice-over narrator, in a calm and composed voice, says, “This is how I came into the world, into an open-air cinema. My arrival, like a detonated bomb, blew up my mother’s life.”

As a form of mediated memory, this film sequence both activates and perpetuates the collective memory of a cultural life configured by a particular socialist internationalism during the allegedly most isolated and isolating period in the history of modern China. To be sure, the immense popularity enjoyed by Albanian films in China from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s is an acknowledged fact (Williams 2012; Mëhilli 2019). However, the iron-clad alliance between China and Albania during this period, albeit an asymmetrical one,¹ between China and Albania during this period is often taken as the unquestioned starting point of transnational film

exchanges between the two fraternal socialist states.² The cultural consumption of Albanian films in Mao's China also remains under-explored, partially because a top-down Cold-War-studies approach to Sino-Albanian relations has precluded an examination of actual experiences of Albanian films in China, and partly due to the dearth of historical documents untainted by ideological bias.³ This article delineates the presence of Albanian cinema in the People's Republic of China (PRC) from 1949 to 1976, when geopolitical realignments reconfigured the socialist camp. Employing official news reports, movie reviews and recently published personal reminiscences and blog posts, it synthesizes historical and ethnographic information currently available on the Chinese reception of Albanian cinema while recovering submerged narratives grounded in ordinary Chinese audiences' lives and experiences. In particular, the article discusses how distinct historical and material conditions in China's era of high socialism created a captive audience who gained enormous pleasure from their multifaceted engagement with Albanian films. By calling attention to discrepancies between intended and deviant film reception, the article hopes to complicate any reductive understanding of Albanian cinema as a tool of political education in China and to uncover another kind of revolutionary potential of transnational socialist cinema.

Albanian Films in Socialist China: From Obscurity to Prominence

Film import and export were an integral part of building a new cinema for the workers, peasants, and soldiers in Mao's China. From the 1949 founding of the PRC to the 1966 onset of the Cultural Revolution, China imported numerous films from the Soviet Bloc, accounting for 77% of the 866 foreign films from 42 countries imported during that period.⁴ The importing, translating and exhibiting of films from fraternal socialist states constituted what Tina Mai Chen has termed "filmic geographies," that not only served as nodal points in the geopolitical mapping of a film exchange network but also shaped social imaginaries that helped the Chinese

populace to make sense of their social existence and moral obligations in the newly established socialist state as well as in the wider socialist world (Chen 2009, 150). Not merely imparting progressive political lessons, imported films provided an expedient solution to the general paucity of domestic film production during the Mao era and thus played an important role in satisfying the cultural needs of the masses.⁵ More than any other national cinema imported into China, Albanian cinema experienced a dramatic ascendancy within China's filmscape from the formative years of the PRC to the Cultural Revolution era as China navigated the tortuous path of defining its position within the international socialist community.

The People's Republic of Albania, a small Balkan country, was one of the first countries to officially recognize the newly established PRC in 1949.⁶ On October 14, 1954, a Sino-Albanian Cultural Cooperation Agreement was signed, stipulating that the signatory states should introduce and promote each other's political, economic, and cultural achievements, reciprocally organize theatrical performances, concerts and film screenings, and promote film-related co-operation.⁷ The introduction of Albanian films to Chinese audiences was greatly facilitated by intermediaries such as the PRC's Ministry of Culture, the Albanian embassy in Beijing and the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Association. Due to the relatively late start of a national film industry in communist Albania,⁸ a limited number of Albanian films were imported into China in the 1950s, and these remained inconspicuous by comparison with films from other Eastern European countries, and in particular Soviet films.

The first Albanian film or, to be more precise, the first film about Albania, introduced into China was *Albania*, a color documentary co-produced by the Central Studio for Documentary Film in Moscow and New Albania (Kinostudio) in Tirana. Occasioned by the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Albania's liberation, this documentary was screened on November 28, 1954, at a ceremonial event hosted by the PRC's Ministry of Culture, with high-ranking Chinese government officials including vice premiers Chen Yun and Chen Yi, minister

of culture Shen Yanbing, as well as Albanian ambassador to Beijing Nesti Nase, in attendance.⁹ At the same time, *Albania* was screened at four movie theatres in Beijing, including the famous Capital Cinema.¹⁰ To help Chinese audiences to gain a good understanding of the documentary, which was claimed to be “a truthful depiction of glorious achievements that the Albanians have made in building a new life,” China’s leading newspaper, the *People’s Daily*, specifically included in its screening announcement a succinct introduction to this rather obscure Balkan country:

Albania is one of the oldest nations in the Balkans. Her entire history is a history of struggle against foreign oppression. On 29 October 1944, with the USSR’s military assistance, the Albanian people drove away armed troops of fascist Germany, liberated all the occupied territories, and established the People’s Republic. Over the last ten years, the Albanian people under the leadership of Hoxha have made fundamental changes in the social and economic realms. Having nationalized all major economic sectors, the country is triumphantly carrying out its first Five-Year Plan (1951-1955).¹¹

By that time Chinese audiences had already been exposed to the cinema of various Eastern Bloc countries. As early as in December 1950, the People's Democratic Countries Film Week, the PRC’s first film festival, was hosted by the International Liaison Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing, with the stated aims of enhancing solidarity, promoting friendship and strengthening cultural exchanges among nations. Of the nine films featured in the film week, six came from Eastern European countries: *Nemá barikáda/The Silent Barricade/Wusheng de fangyu* (Otokar Vávra, 1949) from Czechoslovakia, *Talpalatnyi föld/A Foot of Land/Yicun tu* (Frigyes Bán, 1948) from Hungary, *Răsună Valea/The Valley*

Resounds/Shangu zai hongming (Paul Călinescu, 1949) from Romania, *Ivan Susanin /Yifan susanin* (Anton Marinovich, 1949) from Bulgaria, the East German documentary *Immer bereit/Always Prepared /Yongyuan zhunbei zhe* (Kurt Maetzig, 1950), and Polish director Wanda Jakubowska's pioneering and influential film on Auschwitz, *Ostatni etap/The Last Stage/Zuihou jieduan* (1948).¹²

In 1951 and 1952, China signed individual cultural cooperation agreements with Poland, Hungary, the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria in order to enhance cultural exchanges and trade in films (Chen 2005, 15).¹³ As a result, ten Chinese feature films including *Zhonghua ernü/Children of China* (Shen Xiling, 1939), *Guangmang wanzhang/ Lights Return to City* (Xu Ke, 1949), *Baimaonü/The White-haired Girl* (Wang Bin and Shui Hua, 1950), and *Zhao Yiman* (Sha Meng, 1950) were exported to these Eastern European countries in 1951.¹⁴ By the end of 1952, China had imported and dubbed into Chinese *Ulica Graniczna/Border Street* (Aleksander Ford, 1948) from Poland,¹⁵ *Felszabadult föld/The Emancipated Earth* (Frigyes Bán, 1951) from Hungary,¹⁶ *Unser täglich Brot/Our Daily Bread* (Slatan Dudow, 1949) and *The Council of the Gods/Der Rat der Götter* (Kurt Maetzig, 1950) from the GDR.¹⁷ Reportedly, these films together with numerous Soviet films, drew 300 million attendances in the year 1952 alone,¹⁸ and played an important role in “driving those poisonous British and American movies out of China.” (Chen 2005, 15)

Before long, Film Weeks dedicated to films from a particular socialist state were launched.¹⁹ Hungarian Film Weeks, Czechoslovakian Film Weeks, Soviet Film Weeks, and Bulgarian Film Weeks were held across more than a dozen Chinese cities in 1953.²⁰ As a prevalent cultural form in the socialist camp, Film Weeks not only provided ordinary Chinese people with much-needed and culturally diverse entertainment, but also familiarized them with different film genres and styles, thus broadening their film knowledge and taste. Moreover, these film events functioned as a primary vehicle for encouraging the exchange of films, ideas,

and the expertise of film professionals. In his article on Czechoslovak Film Weeks, published in 1953, film critic Zhong Dianfei specifically urged Chinese film professionals to pay attention to the art of Czechoslovak cinema: “Since its nationalization in 1945 Czechoslovak cinema has made many developments. In particular with regard to the depiction of a working-class subject matter and Czechoslovakia working-class characters, it has fared better than our cinema and is thus worth our learning.”²¹ Whether consciously or unconsciously, Zhong evaded the risk of pursuing the “art for art’s sake” argument by reframing the artistic merits of foreign films as applicable, if not exemplary solutions to common questions that arose in the creation of socialist art.²²

As China’s film imports in the 1950s were embedded in a larger project of building socialist internationalism (understood here as a pragmatic project of stabilizing the new transnational socialist system centered around the Soviet Union in the realm of everyday life rather than as a political project of world revolution), the public discourses surrounding foreign films highlighted the multiplicity and heterogeneity of “progressive cinema” from different nations in order to affirm the cultural vitality of the socialist bloc and ideological cohesion among all progressive forces in the world. It was against this backdrop that the internationally acclaimed Soviet-Albanian co-production *Velikii vojn Albanii Skanderbeg/Sitandebie’erke*²³ (Sergei Yutkevich, 1953),²⁴ an action-packed historical epic about an Albanian national hero, the 15th-century warrior Skanderbeg, was introduced into China in 1954, along with Soviet animated shorts such as *Krashenyj lis/The Painted Fox/Ranse de huli* (Aleksandr Vasilyevich Ivanov, 1953) and *Neposhushnyj kotionok/The Disobedient Kitten/Bu tinghua de xiaomao* (Mstislav Pashchenko, 1953), the Czechoslovak political thriller *Únos/Kidnap/Bangjia* (Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, 1952), the Hungarian film comedy *Civil a pályán/A Civilian on the Football Field/Yundong chang shang* (Márton Keleti, 1952), the Japanese period-film *Rising Storm over Hakone/Xianggen fengyun lu* (Satsuo Yamamoto, 1952), and the Italian neo-realist

classics *Rome, Open City/Luoma bu shefang de chengshi* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945) and *Bicycle Thieves/Zixingche de qiezei* (a.k.a. *Tou zixingche de ren*) (Vittorio De Sica, 1948).²⁵

Careful exhibition scheduling proved to be effective in striking a balance between the particularity of and cohesion between the cinemas of various socialist states. Regarding Albanian films, diplomatic film events occasioned by Albanian anniversaries regularly preceded commercial screenings of Albanian cinema up until 1965. For instance, to celebrate the 15th anniversary of Albanian liberation, on November 27, 1959, the International Liaison Office of the PRC Foreign Ministry and the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Association hosted the Chinese premiere of *Furtuna/Storm/Fengbao* (a.k.a. *The Song of the Eagle/Shanying zhige*) (Andrei Blaier and Sinisa Ivetici, 1959), a Soviet-Albanian joint production about the Albanian people's heroic struggle against the fascists during World War II. The same evening saw the screening of Kinostudio's first feature film *Tana* (Kristaq Dhamo, 1958) at a special event dedicated to celebrating Albanian music and literature, co-organized by the Chinese-Albanian Friendship Association, Chinese Writers' Association, and Chinese Musicians' Association.²⁶ *Tana*, whose eponymous protagonist is a female activist in an agricultural cooperative, soon greeted the general public. In Beijing alone, the film was screened in early December 1959 in six movie theatres, including the Guanganmen Cinema, the Peking Workers' Club Cinema, and the Dahua Cinema.²⁷

In the 1960s, the cracks in the unity of the international socialist community, which pivoted on the all-round cooperation between the USSR and the other socialist states, became visible. The widening ideological disagreements between China and the Soviet Union on de-Stalinization and Khrushchev's rapprochement with Yugoslavia brought China and Albania to form an unusual alliance under the revolutionary banner of opposing revisionism within the socialist camp and defending Marxism-Leninism.²⁸ In July 1960, the Soviet authorities decided to withdraw all their experts from China and to stop shipments of equipment and materials,

including film stock.²⁹ In response to the shortage of film stock, China's Ministry of Culture immediately issued *Directions to Film Production Control and Reduction of Film Exhibition Copies*, which instructed that the exhibition of foreign films be limited to major cities.³⁰ From 1960 to 1962, Chinese distributors suspended cinemas' right to exhibit 288 films from the USSR and allied nations.³¹ In the meantime, cultural exchanges between China and Albania grew increasingly close. The 11th 1961 issue of *Dazhong dianying (Mass Cinema)*, the most influential Chinese film magazine during the Mao era, introduced the Albanian film, *New Life/Xinsheng*, which had just been completed to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Party of Labor of Albania.³² In the same year, *Socialist Albania Marches On/Shehui zhuyi de Aerbaniya zai qianjin*, part of the *Global Sights and Sounds* newsreel series, was produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Studio from raw filmic materials supplied by Albania.³³ Before long, *Furtuna/Shanying zhi ge* was screened across China amidst a political campaign against American imperialism. It was also spotlighted in the 2nd 1962 issue of *Mass Cinema*. A semi-abstract film poster showing the female and male protagonists against a backdrop of Albania's wild landscape in order to underscore the Albanian people's dauntless spirit, graced the cover (Fig. 1), while a pictorial insert of movie stills and two movie reviews, as well as an artistic critique of the aforementioned movie poster, were also published in that issue.³⁴ Later in the same year, *Debatik /They Also Fought/Tamen ye zai zhandou* (Hysen Hakani, 1961), an Albanian feature film that tells the story of how a group of youngsters helping the guerrillas fight against the Italian fascists,³⁵ and *Tried and Tested*, a documentary recording the Albanian people's struggle for freedom in the last hundred years, were screened to celebrate the anniversaries of Albanian independence and liberation.³⁶ By the time when the Cultural Revolution erupted in May 1966, three more Albanian feature films, *Detyrë e posaçme/Extraordinary Mission/Teshu renwu* (Kristaq Dhamo, 1963), *Toka jonë/Our Land /Women de tudi (Dhimitër Anagnosti, 1964)* and *Vitet e para/In the Early Days (a.k.a. First*

Years)/*Zuichu de niandai* (Kristaq Dhamo, 1965),³⁷ had been seen by Chinese audiences, and the first Sino-Albanian co-production, full-length documentary *Krah për krah/Forward, Side by Side/Bing jian qianjin* (Endri Keko and Hao Yusheng, 1964), had been completed.³⁸

Fig. 1 Film poster of *Furtuna* featured on the cover of the 2nd 1962 issue of *Dazhong dianying* (*Mass Cinema*).

After Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, Albania, as China's only remaining ally in Eastern Europe, acquired more symbolic significance as the Chinese Communist Party endeavored to assert its leadership role in Third World socialist revolution in the face of growing isolation from European socialists. In his message of greetings to the Fifth Congress of the Albanian Party of Labour, dated October 25, 1966, Mao called Albania "a bosom friend afar," praised it as "a great beacon of socialism in Europe," and promised that the parties and peoples of China and Albania will always be united, would always be united and always fight together against imperialism and modern revisionism (Mao 1966, 5). These words were soon adapted into a "quotation song," based on quotations from Chairman Mao, to be widely sung by the revolutionary masses.³⁹ Due to the radicalization of politics in China and the changing international relations within the socialist world, the Cultural Revolution era saw a drastic contraction of the filmscape in China. On the one hand, the number of domestic films available to Chinese audiences dropped sharply. Most Chinese films produced since 1949 were now labelled as "poisonous weeds" and banned from public screening in general. Occasionally some "poisonous-weed" films received an extended lease of life when screened specifically for the audience to engage in "study and critique." What was available were Chinese newsreels and documentaries, selected pre-1966 war films and their remakes, as well as model opera films (*yangbanxi*) and a small number of new feature films such as *Huohong de niandai/The Fiery Years* (Fu Chaowu, 1973), which were all produced in accordance with the political-aesthetic principle of the "three prominences" (*san tuchu*) prevalent during the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁰

On the other hand, China's international isolation and political stance imposed practical restrictions on film import and exhibition. Films from the few remaining non-revisionist socialist states such as North Korea, Romania,⁴¹ and Albania, along with a selection of Soviet films produced during the Stalin era now constituted the staple diet of international cinema available to Chinese audiences.

With the dwindling variety of films, distinctions among different cinemas appeared so prominent that they were characterized in the popular saying: "A Chinese film: news and reports; a Vietnamese film: planes and canons; a Korean film: crying and laughing; a Romanian film: hugging and cuddling; and an Albanian film: puzzling and baffling." From 1966 to 1976, about twenty Albanian feature films of different genres were imported to China and dubbed into Chinese. The majority of these films were antifascist war films, for instance, *Njësiti Gueril/Underground Guerrillas/Dixia youjidui* (Hysen Hakani, 1969), *Prita/The Ambush/Fuji zhan* (Mithat Fagu, 1968) and *Udhëtim në Pranverë/A Journey to Spring/Chu chun* (Qerim Mata, 1975). Several other films, including *Horizonte të hapura/Clear Horizon/Guangkuo de dipingxian* (Viktor Gjika, 1968) and *Rrugë të bardha/White Road/Jiebai de daolu* (Viktor Gjika, 1974), depicted various aspects of Albanian society at that time and portrayed exemplary socialists. Still others, such as *Guximtarët/Brave People/Yonggan de renmen* (Gëzim Erebara, 1961) and *Beni ecën vetë /Beni Walks by Himself/Xiao Beini* (Xhanfize Keko, 1976), through their depiction of the lives of urban Albanian children, including outdoor camping, provided pleasant entertainment. During this turbulent decade, the Albanian Film Week held in 1969 was the only Film Week dedicated to films from Europe.

A Captive Audience and Its Multifaceted Engagement with Albanian Films

Despite being both constitutive of and constituted by the Sino-Albanian political alliance, these imported Albanian films cannot be reduced to a tool of political education and a symbol of

revolutionary solidarity. Personal reminiscences of film experiences during the Cultural Revolution which have emerged in the past two decades give a far more complex picture of the Chinese reception of Albanian films than that painted by the official media had painted in the 1960s and the 1970s. This multifaceted reception needs to be understood through the lens of the captive audience. I use the term “captive audience” in a metaphorical sense, to refer to historical audiences whose engagement with films was significantly restricted by the inhibiting media environment in self-isolated China. Centrally planned film distribution and exhibition, a limited number of movie exhibition venues, impoverished film options, and the highly homogeneous and politicized interpretation of films disseminated by the official media all helped to create distinct historical and material conditions that constrained and shaped the responses of Chinese audiences to Albanian films.

The impoverishment of cultural life was acutely felt in the years between 1967 and 1969, the peak of the Cultural Revolution. A record of films screened during this period in Zhejiang Province, a relatively prosperous coastal province of China, provides a good glimpse of a drastically contracting film world. In 1966, 30 feature-length Chinese films, eight documentaries and nine foreign films from North Korea, Vietnam, and Albania were screened in Zhejiang. In the next year, only two domestic feature films, *Wuxun zhuan/The Life of Wu Xun* (Sun Yu, 1951) and *Qingong mishu/Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (Zhu Shilin, 1948), were briefly screened as part of the campaign of “criticizing poisonous weeds.” The rest of the films that greeted the audience consisted of the Albanian feature film *Oshëtimë në bregdet/Storm and Thunder along the Seashore/Hai'an fenglei* (Hysen Hakani, 1966), and three documentaries, including *Wansui, Zhong Ah youyi /Long Live, the Sino-Albanian Friendship* made by China's Central Newsreel and Documentary Studio. In 1968 and 1969, aside from a limited number of Chinese documentaries, the Albanian features *Horizonte të hapura/Clear Horizon*, *Plagë të Vjetra/Old Wounds/Chuangshang* (Dhimeter Anangnosti,

1968), and *Ngadhujim mbi vdekjen /Victory over Death/Ningsi buqu* (Piro Milkani and Gëzim Erebara, 1967) were the only films available to Chinese audiences.⁴²

Despite, or perhaps because of, these constraining material conditions, the *event* itself of watching a movie became a source of fascination and pleasure. Constant reruns of domestic films centered around class struggles and featuring “lofty, great and perfect” (gaodaquan) protagonists created no small amount of fatigue and boredom among Chinese audiences, especially among the educated youths.⁴³ Chen Huijing, who spent his prime years in the Daxinganlin Forest in north-eastern China, reminiscing in his essay titled “Our Film Life,” states that he and other educated youth all craved movies because “film, with image, performance, colour, music, plot, cinematography, and not to mention exotic scenery, provided rare artistic enjoyment” at a time when the model revolutionary operas were the prevailing entertainment (Chen 2007, 114). Extracts from his film journal dating from 1971 to 1977 provide a glimpse of an educated young man’s movie-going activities and the range of films on offer. Throughout those years, Albanian films were a familiar presence. In the mountainous region where Chen was based, he watched *Storm and Thunder along the Seashore* (thereafter referred to as *Storm and Thunder*), *Clear Horizon* and *Ambush*, in addition to Chinese newsreels and documentaries, and North Korean melodramas such as *Kkot P’anŭn Ch’önyö/The Flower Girl/Mai hua guniang* (Ch’oe Ik-kyu and Pak Hak, 1972). He describes taking advantage of his business trips to watch more movies. During a trip to Shanghai in November 1971, he watched the newly dubbed Albanian film *Gjurma/Footprints/Jiaoyin* (Kristaq Dhamo, 1970). When he visited Qiqihaer in May and June in 1973, he attended a screening of *Underground Guerrillas and Old Wounds* and re-watched *Clear Horizon*, along with some old Chinese revolutionary war films (Chen 2007, 114-115).

Indeed, *watching* movies was sometimes more important than understanding them. As Chinese writer Xu Hui recalls, when he was a teenager in the early 1970s, a movie theater was

being built in his hometown, a small town in Anhui Province. Even before the construction was completed, the movie theater started showing a new Albanian film, *I Teti në Bronx/The Eighth in Bronze*/*Di bage shi tongxiang* (Victor Gjika, 1970) and during the few days when it was being screened there was a festive atmosphere. The film was screened continuously, and the square outside the cinema was always filled with boisterous people waiting for the next screening (Xu 2008, 258). The enthusiasm conveyed by such recollections helps to explain why the highly experimental *The Eighth in Bronze* was one of the most widely watched movies during the Culture Revolution, although its use of flashbacks and parallel montage were beyond the comprehension of most Chinese viewers. Adapted from Dritëro Agolli's novel *Commissar Memo*, this film constructs the enlightened partisan hero Ibrahim not through direct portrayal of his deeds, but through memories of him narrated by seven people who are carrying a bronze bust of this revolutionary martyr to his hometown. Drastically departing from the aesthetic principle of the "Three Prominences," *The Eighth in Bronze*, with its Rashomon-like narration bewildered the Chinese audience and gave rise to the epithet mentioned earlier and commonly used with reference to Albanian films—"baffling and puzzling." The older generation of audiences indeed revelled in recounting how utterly "incomprehensible" this film was. One spectator recollected that when the film projectionist in his local movie theater screened this movie, he had to insert explanations—"Such and such's memory ends; such and such's memory begins"—in an attempt to make the storyline more comprehensible to the local audience.⁴⁴ Despite the projectionist's efforts, most attendees could not figure out the film's plot, which is told from multiple perspectives, and were disappointed that there were no fight scenes in the film.⁴⁵ Another viewer remembered that he could recite all the dialogues from *The Eighth in Bronze*, although he only watched the film twice and did not understand it.⁴⁶ The film was so deeply etched on the memory of Jiang Wen, the famous Chinese actor and filmmaker, that in his directorial debut film *Yangguang canlan de rizi/In the Heat of the Sun*

(1994), a film that narrates his generation's experience of growing up during the Cultural Revolution, he made his film characters speak the same secret code that is used in *The Eighth in Bronze*.

Due to the particular historical and political conditions under which Albanian films were exhibited, there existed considerable differences and tension between the officially championed interpretation and the actual reading and social use of these films. Take, for instance, the anti-fascist war film, the most popular genre among imported Albanian films. Major national and local newspapers and film magazines regularly published movie reviews aimed at shaping the public reception of certain films. Although the Albanian anti-fascist films discussed here were produced at different times and have distinctive aesthetics, these articles invariably trumpeted only their ideological messages about the imperatives of armed struggle, the importance of the communist party's leadership, and the close relationship between the partisans and the people, in such a way that these were most supportive of Maoist revolution.

A case in point is a movie review of *Storm and Thunder* published in the *People's Daily* on November 29, 1967. Couched in highly politicized terms, the article comments on the film as follows:

The film specifically depicts the indomitable fight of underground communists against the Italian fascists under the leadership of Dini, second son of Jonuz. With the assistance of Jonuz, the partisans, Dini and his comrades intercept the enemy's vehicle and rescue all their comrades who were going to be sent to Italy. These vivid facts fully evidence our great leader Chairman Mao's perceptive statement—all reactionaries are paper tigers. (Fang 1967)

A former navy officer put it more bluntly, “This film makes me further realize the truism of (Mao’s words) “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”⁴⁷ Such film viewers were as ideal an audience as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could have wished for. Having internalized the Party’s political teachings, they approached films as pedagogical texts for revolutionary politics. Their interpretation of *Storm and Thunder* may seem naïve and reductive. However, the fact that they adeptly quoted Mao to elucidate the political significance of a foreign film bespeaks their awareness of the commonality of Albanian and Chinese revolutions, and more importantly their cultural confidence encouraged by a new kind of militant socialist internationalism.

Overshadowed by officially sanctioned interpretations were varied and multifaceted audience engagements with Albanian anti-fascist films. While an awareness of common goals and aspirations of the Chinese and Albanian communist parties helped to prepare the audience with appropriate expectations of narrative progression, Chinese revolutionary war films also supplied a cultural frame of reference enabling Chinese movie-goers to develop their interpretive strategies with regard to Albanian films. For Chinese audiences in the 1960s and 1970s, much of their pleasure in viewing *Storm and Thunder* came from the push and pull between the familiar and the unfamiliar that they recognized on the silver screen. Dubbed into Chinese by the Shanghai Workers-Peasants-Soldiers Dubbing Studio in October 1967 (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2),⁴⁸ *Storm and Thunder* revolves around Jonuz, a quick-tempered, hardworking and patriotic fisherman, and his four sons. The second and fourth sons, Dini and Vehipi, are a communist leader and a partisan fighter, respectively. The third son, Petriti, is a selfless doctor who risks his own life to save a communist whom is being hunted down by the Italian fascists. The eldest son, Selimi, in contrast, seeks comfort and pleasure and finally degenerates into a contemptible traitor. These proletarian heroes engaging in underground activities and sabotage resonated well with similar characters and plotlines depicted in Chinese revolutionary war

films such as *Dilei zhan /Mine Warfare* (Tang Yingnian, Xu Da and Wu Jianhai, 1963). The poverty of the fisherman's family suffers, invoked by a disgruntled Selimi in the words "You can't even afford a rope to hang yourself," was all too familiar to ordinary Chinese citizens since material scarcity and rationing were a part of their everyday experience.

Figs 2.1 and 2.2: Opening credits of Chinese dubbed version of *Oshëtimë në bregdet*.

The pleasure of viewing *Storm and Thunder* not only involved recognizing the socioeconomic and cultural affinities between the two socialist countries, but also derived from relishing the differences between Chinese and Albanian socialist cinemas. The use of a fisherman's family to crystalize the conflict between revolutionary and reactionary forces was very refreshing to the viewers because Chinese revolutionary films, including *A Geming jiating/Revolutionary Family* (Shui Hua, 1961) and *Zi you houlai ren /There Will Be Successors* (Yu Yanfu, 1963), customarily treated a proletarian family as an organic whole and inevitably cast every family member in a positive light. Thus, the characterization of Selimi aroused particular interest. His screen image is a familiar one of moral degeneration: he is often dressed in checkered tweeds, with a cigarette dangling from his lips. His moment of weakness, which is well captured in a montage sequence, was popularized in a Chinese rhyme: "Selimi, the elder son, drinks beer and grabs a buck; a big pair of Italian shoes tramples on his hands!" (Laoda Salimu, jianqian he pijiu, yidali de da pixie, caizhu ta de shou!).⁴⁹ Even the old fisherman's reprimand of Selimi, "How could you have sunk so low?" (Ni juran duoluo dao zhezhong dibu?), entered popular parlance and was often repeated by youngsters, not without a sense of irony.⁵⁰ For more critical viewers, this characterization in *Storm and Thunder* offered tacit support to the dissident voice of Yu Luoke, a young Chinese martyr who boldly opposed the "bloodline theory" at the outset of the Cultural Revolution and argued that there was a minimal connection between the class from which an individual came and his or her political behavior.⁵¹ Toward the end of the film,

partisan fighters, with Jonuz's assistance, take a shortcut across the sea. They place dynamite under a bridge connecting parts of a road running along a cliff in order to rescue a group of Albanian fighters arrested by the Italian fascists. Selimi, accompanying an Italian officer in the first vehicle of the convoy transporting the arrested fighters, plunges to his death as the car drives straight off the cliff. This ending resonated particularly with the Chinese audience particularly well because it fulfilled the demands of both socialist politics and traditional Chinese moral values. The sequence not only celebrates the triumph of Albanian partisans, but also highlights Jonuz's heroic deed in a way that bears out the traditional Chinese moral principle of *dayi mieqin*— to sacrifice the bonds of kinship for the sake of a higher cause.⁵²

Ironically, films imported from Albania, a staunch ally and upholder of orthodox Marxism-Leninism, helped to carve out a legitimate space for the captive audience to creatively engage with foreign “revolutionary films” for personal pleasure. In a sense, these viewers can be regarded as, in Janet Staiger's words, “perverse spectators,” a term that aims to foreground the willfulness of the spectator in interpreting films in a non-normative way while “also avoiding the implicit, but false, conjunction that doing something different is necessarily politically progressive” or subversive (Staiger 2000, 32). For instance, some audiences took delight in building a fashion repertoire based on the clothes worn in Albanian films. As a research paper co-authored by Chris Berry and Zhang Shujuan shows, although Albania is an Eastern European country, Chinese audiences tended to fixate upon its European identity and thus for them Tirana substituted for Paris as an unlikely fashion capital during the Cultural Revolution. **Roza Anagnosti, who stars as Vera in *Old Wounds*, became a de facto trend setter. Her back-combed, bouffant hairstyle was much talked about and invited imitation** (Fig.3). According to the scholars' interviewees, young Chinese women were particularly interested in *Old Wounds* because of the clothes Vera wears. As one interviewee vividly recalled, “We counted that the young woman doctor had more than twenty changes of outfit in the film”

(Berry and Zhang 2015, 14-15). Similarly, Shanghai writer Cheng Naishan notes that soon after the screening of *The Eighth in Bronze*, Shanghai women began knitting copies of the protagonist's black-and-white woolen coat (Li 2019, 68).

Fig. 3 Roza Anagnosti as Vera in *Plagë të Vjetra*. Her bouffant beehive style was known in 1970s China as “Vera’s Updo.”

Perhaps, the reception of *Victory over Death* best illustrates the audience's non-normative interpretation. Centering on two young women, Mira, an innocent high school student, and Alferdita, a seasoned partisan fighter, the film tells the story of how they endure the tortures by the Gestapo and display their dauntless fighting spirit until their deaths. The main plot line is interspersed with Mira's recollection of how she embarked on a revolutionary path, especially how she gradually grew closer to Perlat, an undercover communist living as a tenant in her home. A few days after *Victory over Death* opened the 1969 Albanian Film Week,⁵³ the *People's Daily* published an article propagating a “good and correct” interpretation of the film. The article drew attention in particular to the confrontations between the two heroines and the Gestapos, frequently quoting Mira's defiant statements such as “Those who trample over my motherland won't end well” to extol the spirit of devotion of the resistance fighters (Jing 1969). However, essays and blogposts emerging in recent years that reminisce about this period reveal that many spectators at the time relished a different way of watching or, to borrow the words of one cinephile, the “gongfu zai shiwai” (mastering true poetry beyond the prosody) method of watching.

Eschewing a political reading of the film, some viewers interpreted *Victory over Death* as a movie about friendship (between Mira and Alferdita) and love (between Mira and Perlat) and took particular pleasure in the release of imagination provoked by the sensuous scenes. At a time when Chinese revolutionary cinema resorted to de-feminization and militarization of

female bodies in order to construct a revolutionary female subjectivity,⁵⁴ the scene where Mira takes off Alfredita's shirt to check her wound afforded the audience a rare opportunity to gaze at the body of a young female in her underwear. Cinephiles enjoyed singling out the frame of a scantily clad Alfredita to indulge in their own sexual fantasies (Fig. 4). Similarly, Mira's sensual, feminine beauty—her innocent eyes, her long curly hair tied with ribbon bows and her slim figure in a one-piece dress (bulaji), accentuated by the use of soft lighting—mesmerized many viewers.⁵⁵ Eglantina Kume who played Mira, apparently channelled the glamor of Hollywood movie stars and became the biggest Western female star in China at the time. As Kume recalls, when her husband visited China as a member of an Albanian cultural delegation, he was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of movies fans, who eagerly asked him to sign Kume's name on behalf of his wife.⁵⁶

Fig. 4 Injured Alfredita in her underwear in *Ngadhujim mbi vdekjen*.

Fig. 5 Eglantina Kume as Mira in *Ngadhujim mbi vdekjen*.

Victory over Death also demonstrates such a distinct revolutionary imaginary that it prompted interpretations quite antithetical to the state-sanctioned reading of the film. Take, for instance, the most memorable scene, which is quoted in *Electric Shadow*. Perlat, an underground communist who has enlightened Mira and will soon join the guerrilla fighters in the mountains, persuades her to stay behind in the city for the sake of the revolutionary cause. In the scene described earlier, sensing Mira's disappointment, Perlat begins to play his guitar and sings her a soft, melodic song about guerrillas and their longing for the nation's liberation. Mesmerized by the song, Mira speaks out her inner thoughts, "I've never thought that a revolutionary can play guitar." (Rather than translating "guitar" as the Chinese word "jita," the dubbing actress says the word in English, thus accentuating the foreignness of this musical instrument). Perlat replies by asking why she thinks the revolutionaries would be different from the ordinary people. Interestingly, it was through this very scene that many young Chinese

audiences got to know this Western musical instrument, the guitar, for the first time, and Perlat's song quickly became a popular tune (Tan 2014, 65). What is particularly striking is that Mira's revolutionary epiphany is depicted through such as quotidian and highly romantic scene. While Chinese revolutionary film classics such as *The Red Detachment of Women* (Xie Jin, 1961) often sublimate romantic love into proletarian feelings and strive for the aesthetic effect of the sublime, *Victory over Death* conveys the desirability of revolution through a lyrical mode as well as through romantic sentiment, and affirms that the personal pursuit of happiness can be complementary rather than detrimental to the revolutionary spirit.

Coda

The constant presence and increasing popularity of Albanian cinema throughout the Mao era was certainly predicated upon China's self-positioning in the Cold War geopolitical order in general and in a changing socialist community in particular. Ideological alliance and political interest, an important yet often neglected contributing factor to transnational flows of images, played a crucial role in shaping the filmscape in socialist China and in forging fluid cinematic connections between socialist states that were geographically distant and culturally distinct. Although Albanian cinema was promoted by the Chinese state in the 1960s and 1970s in order to consolidate its friendship with the "bosom friend afar" and to help radicalize its domestic politics, films from this small Balkan country were by no means just didactic political texts. They afforded ordinary yet creative Chinese audiences, who were constrained by a relatively limited range of domestic and international films, good opportunities to be dazzled by cinematic modernism, to obtain fashion ideas and tips, to indulge in romantic fantasies, or simply, to dare to live as they might wish to live.

In the Chinese film *Electric Shadow* the female protagonist's second encounter with *Victory over Death* comes at a time when she is losing the will to live, having suffered through

numerous political struggle sessions following her alleged debauchery. Wanting to take a final look at the beautiful female lead, Mira, the young mother comes once more to the open-air cinema carrying her bundled-up baby, only to find herself once again being shamed in public by narrow-minded, hostile townswomen. Intercut with the scene of commotion among the audience are scenes from the Albanian film of Mira and Alferdita, shoulder to shoulder, calmly walking to the place of their execution. This viewing experience exerts such a great influence on the young mother that she resolves to bring up her child, against all odds, aspiring to be like Mira, brave and unflinching.

More than half a century after the introduction of Albanian cinema to China, memorable images extracted from socialist Albanian films, together with the remembered film experiences of Chinese movie-goers during the Mao era, have become powerful sources of new cultural production and nostalgia. The asymmetrical Sino-Albanian alliance clearly had its manifestation in the realm of culture, as well as in the political and economic sphere.

REFERENCES

- Babiracki, Patryk and Austin Jersild, ed. 2016. *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Berry, Chris and Zhang Shujuan. 2015. "Film and Fashion in Shanghai: What (Not) to Wear During the Cultural Revolution," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 13 (1): 1-25.
- Berstein, Thomas P. and Hua-yu Li, ed. 2010. *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Cai, Shusheng. 1953. "Xiang 'Xiongyali dianyingzhou' huanhu" (Cheering for Hungary Film Week). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 15: 3-4.

- Chan, Jessica Ka Yee. 2019. *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Chen, Bo, ed. 2005. *Zhongguo dianying biannian jishi: zhipian juan* (Film Distribution and Exhibition, Book One, Vol. 4 of Annals of Chinese Cinema). Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.
- Chen, Huijing. 2007. “Women de dianying shenghuo” (Our Film Life). In *Daling qinghuai: Huzhong zhiqing huiyilu* (Feelings for the Daxinganlin Forest: Memoirs of the Educated Youth in Huzhong District), edited by Yan Guorong and Gao Wenxiang, 114-115. Harbin: Heilongjiang chubanshe, 2007.
- Chen, Simon and Cho-kiu Li. 2015. “The Cultural Side Effects of the Sino-Soviet Split: The Influence of Albanian Movies in China in the 1960s.” *Modern China Studies* 22 (1): 215-231.
- Chen, Tina Mai. 2009. “International Film Circuits and Global Imaginaries in the People’s Republic of China, 1949-57.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 3 (2): 149-161.
- Du, Weijia. 2015. “Beyond the Ideology Principle: The Two Faces of Dubbed Foreign Films in PRC, 1949-1966.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 9 (2): 141-158.
- Fang, Ming. 1963. “Ying zhi ge: Aerbaniya yingpian Teshu renwu guanhou” (The Song of the Eagle: Afterthoughts on the Albanian Film *Extraordinary Mission*). *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily). November 28.
- Fang, Weidong. 1967. “Wuzhuang geming de songge” (A Paean to Armed Revolution), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily). November 29.
- Ge, Baoquan. 1962. “Aerbaniya renmin yingyong douzheng de huihuang shipian: Yingpian Shanying zhi ge guanhou” (A Splendid Poem about the Heroic Struggles of the Albanian People: An Afterthought on *The Song of the Eagle*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 2: 7.

- Griffith, William. 1963. *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
1962. “Gushi pian Shanying zhi ge” (Feature Film *Furtuna*), *Dazhong dianying (Mass Cinema)* 2: 4.
- Gu, Yizhong. 2011. “The Three Prominences.” In *Words and Their Stories: Essays on the Language of the Chinese Revolution*, edited by Ban Wang, 283-304. Leiden: Brill.
- Hai’an fenglei lianhuan hua zu. 1973. *Hai’an fenglei* (Storm and Thunder along the Seashore). Shanghai: Shanghai meishu chubanshe.
- Hao, Yusheng. 1964. “Jiyu bingjian qianjin de zhanyou” (Messages for Our Comrades-in-arms), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), October 12.
1953. “Huanying ‘Baojialiya dianyingzhou’” (Welcome Bulgaria Film Week). *Dazhong dianying (Mass Cinema)* 22: 3-4.
- Jing, Yibing. 1969. “Yingyong wuwei ningsi buku: Aerbaniya gushipian *Ningsi buku* guanhou” (Brave and Fearless, Victory over Death: Afterthought on the Albanian Feature Film *Victory over Death*), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily). November 30.
- Li, Jie. 2019. “Gained in Translation: The Reception of Foreign Cinema in Mao’s China.” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 13 (1): 61-75.
- Liu, Dishan. 2015. *Xin zhongguo yizhi pian shi: 1949-1966* (A History of Dubbed Films in New China: 1949-1966). Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe.
- Lüthi, Lorenz M. 2011. “Sino-Soviet Relations during the Mao Years, 1949-1969.” In *China Learns from The Soviet Union, 1949-Present*, edited by Thomas P. Bernstein and Huayu Li, 27-60. Lanham, KY: Lexington Books.
- Ma, Ran. “A Genealogy of Film Festivals in the People’s Republic of China: ‘Film Weeks’ during the ‘Seventeen Years’ (1949-1966).” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14 (1): 40-58.

- MacFarquhar, Roderick and John K. Fairbank, eds.1992. *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 15: The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution, 1966-1982*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mao, Zedong. 1966. "Comrade Mao Tse-tung's Message of Greetings to the Fifth Congress of the Albanian Party of Labour." *Peking Review* 46:5.
- Marku, Ylber. 2017. "China and Albania: The Cultural Revolution and Cold War Relations." *Cold War History* 17 (4): 367-383.
- Mëhilli, Elidor. 2017. *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 2019. "Globalized Socialism, Nationalized Time: Soviet Films, Albanian Subjects, and Chinese Audiences across the Sino-Soviet Split." *Slavic Review* 77 (3): 611-637.
- Peking Review editors. 1962. "On the Cultural Front." *Peking Review* 49: 21.
- . 1962. "What's On in Peking." *Peking Review* 49: 23.
1969. "Qingzhu Aerbaniya jiefang ershiwu zhounian, Aerbaniya dianying zhou zai Beijing juxing kaimu shi" (The Opening Ceremony of the Albanian Film Week Is Held in Beijing to Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Independence of Albania). *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), November 26.
1954. "Qingzhu Aerbaniya jiefang shi zhounian, shoudu gejie juxing qingzhu dahui" (All circles in Beijing hold ceremonious meetings to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Albania), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), November 29.
1959. "Qingzhu Aerbaniya jiefang shiwu zhounian" (Celebrate the 15th Anniversary of Albanian Liberation), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), November 28.
1961. "Qingzhu Aerbaniya Laodong dang jianli ershi zhounian, Aerbaniya paishe wancheng yingpian Xinsheng" (To Celebrate the founding of the Party of Labor of Albania, Albania Completed the Film *New Life*). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 11: 21.

1951. “Renmin minzhu guojia dianying zhou jieshao” (Introduction of the People's Democratic Countries Film Week). *Renmin huabao* (People’s Pictorial) 1: 36-38.
- Shen, Zhiyuan. 2007. “Aerbaniya dianying: ‘Xiaomie faxisi, ziyou shuyu renmin’”(Albanian Films: “Death to the Fascists, Freedom to the People”), *Haerbin ribao* (Haerbin Daily), August 10.
- Shi, Tianding. 1967. “Yong qianganzi gaizao zhengge shijie” (Use Guns to Change the Whole World), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), November 29.
- Shi, Yanping. et al. 1952. “Sulian dianying gei women de jiaoyu” (What Have Soviet Films Taught Us). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 13: 2-11.
1961. “Shijie jianwei di 14 hao: Shehui zhuyi de Aerbaniya zai qianjin” (No.14 of Global Sights and Sounds: Socialist Albania Marches On). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 12: 2-3.
- Staiger, Janet. 2000. “The Perversity of Spectators: Expanding the History of the Classical Hollywood Cinema.” In *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, 28-42. New York: New York University Press.
1954. “Su A hezhi caise yishupian ‘Aerbaniya weida zhanshi sikande’erbeike” (Soviet-Albanian coproduction The Great Warrior of Albania Skanderbeg). *Shijie dianying* (World Cinema) 3: 87-89.
- Tan, Hui. 2014. *Zhongguo yizhi dianying shi (A History of Dubbed Films in China)*. Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe.
- Tang, Jia. 1962. “Yu Chongshan gong buxiu: tantan Shanying zhige de dianying xuanchuan hua” (Stay Immortal with Lofty Mountains: *The Song of the Eagle* Movie Poster). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 2: 9.

- Williams, Bruce. 2012. "Red Shift: New Albanian Cinema and its Dialogue with the Old." In *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, edited by Anikó Imre, 224-243. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
1954. "Woguo jinnian jiang yizhi sishi duo bu sulian deng guo de yingpian" (Our Country Will Translate and Dub over Forty Films from the Soviet Union and Beyond), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily). April 5.
- Xu, Hui. 2008. *He ziji de xinqing dandu zai yiqi* (To Be Alone with My Feelings). Hefei: Hefei keji daxue chubanshe.
- Yang, Yang. 1964. "Yingzhe jieji douzheng de fenglang qianjin: Aerbaniya yingpian *Women de tudi* guanhou (Riding the Waves of Class Struggle: Afterthoughts on Albanian Film *Our Land*), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), December 8.
- Yao, Shi. 1962. "Ni yongyuan gaoxiang ba, Shanying!: Cong Shanying zhige zhong suo kandao de (Forever Fly High, the Eagle! What I Have Seen in *The Song of the Eagle*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 2: 8.
- Yu, Chuangshuo. 1953. "Sulian Dianyingzhou"(Soviet Film Week). *Renmin huabao* (People's Pictorial) 12: 2.
- Yu, Ying. 1952. "*Huasha yitiao jie de gushi*" (The Story of *Border Street*). *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 4: 22.
- . 1952. "Qiaoshika he Malika de xin shenghuo kaishi le: Ping Jiefang le de tudi" (Jóska and Marka start their new life: On *The Emancipated Earth*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) 7: 12.
- Yuan, Qingfeng. 2015. "Aerbaniya yu zhongguo dalu dianying moshi de yitong ji shisu dujie: Yi 1967 nian yizhi de *Hai'an fenglei wei li*" (Secular Readings of the Similarities and Differences between Albanian Films and Mainland Chinese Films: The Case of 1967

Dubbed Film *Storm and Thunder along the Seashore*), *Yuxi shifan xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Yuxi Normal University), 31(6): 5.

Zhejiang sheng dianying zhi bianwei hui (Zhejiang Film Chronicle Editorial Committee).

1996. *Zhejiang sheng dianying zhi* (Zhejiang Film Chronicle), Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshen.

Zhong, Dianfei. 1953. “Zhu Zhong Jie liangguo dianying yishu de jiaoliu” (Congratulations on Sino-Czechoslovakia Film Exchange), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), April 19.

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao bu (PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs). ed. 1957.

Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiaoyue ji (Collected Treaties of the People's Republic of China), Vols.1 and 2. Beijing: Falü chubanshe.

-----, 1958. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiaoyue ji* (Collected Treaties of the People's Republic of China), Vol.3. Beijing: Falü chubanshe.

¹ Although China is a much bigger country than Albania and Mao Zedong wanted to challenge the Soviet leadership, Albania carried political importance that is disproportionate to its geographical size and served as an advocate for China’s membership of the United Nations in 1971.

² This Sino-Albanian alliance has recently rekindled much scholarly interest among Cold War historians as it offers extraordinary access for studying not just Cold-War antagonism but also ideological antagonism within the socialist world. See Elidor Mëhilli’s monograph *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Mëhilli 2017) and Ylber Marku’s essay “China and Albania: The Cultural Revolution and Cold War Relations” (Marku 2017).

³ There are very few studies on Albanian films in China. Simon Shen and Cho-kiu Li provide a survey of Albanian films in 1960s’ China, mainly from the perspective of Cold-War politics, in their essay “The Cultural Side Effects of the Sino-Soviet Split: The Influence of Albanian Movies in China in the 1960s” (Chen and Li 2015). The list of Albanian films provided in the article is very useful. Unfortunately, there are many mistakes in the original Albanian movie titles because the authors replicate the already erroneous titles from the DVD covers. Jessica Ka Yee Chan provides a very brief discussion of Sino-Albanian coproduction in her monograph *Chinese Revolutionary Cinema: Propaganda, Aesthetics and Internationalism 1949-1966* (Chan 2019, 65-166). See also Jie Li’s essay “Gained in Translation: The Reception of Foreign Cinema in Mao’s China” for a brief analysis of the Chinese reception of Albanian cinema (Li 2019, 67-68).

⁴ Statistics are from Liu Dishan, *Xin zhongguo yizhi pian shi: 1949-1966* (A History of Dubbed Films in New China: 1949-1966) (Liu 2015, 2-4).

⁵ As Weijia Du points out, the volatile political environment and severe censorship resulted in a constant dearth of domestic films for the Chinese audience and imported films became an indispensable filler in film exhibition programs in the 1949-66 period (See Du 2015, 142).

⁶ Following the USSR, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Albania established diplomatic relations with China on November 23, 1950.

⁷ The Sino-Albania Cultural Cooperation Agreement came into effect on February 21, 1955 and was set to be renewed automatically every five years. For details of the agreement, see *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiaoyue ji* (Collected Treaties of the People's Republic of China), Vol.3 (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao bu 1958, 160-162).

⁸ The inauguration of the Soviet-built New Albania film studio on the outskirts of Tirana in 1952 marked the take-off of a film industry in communist Albania. See Albanian Cinema Project. Accessed March 10, 2020. <https://www.thealbaniancinemaproject.org/albanian-history.html>

⁹ “Qingzhu Aerbania jiefang shi zhounian, shoudu gejie juxing qingzhu dahui” (All circles in Beijing hold ceremonious meetings to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Albania), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), November 29, 1954.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Renmin minzhu guojia dianying zhou jieshao” (Introduction of the People’s Democratic Countries Film Week) *Renmin huabao* (People’s Pictorial) No. 1(1951): 36-38. It is very likely that these films were translated live during screening as they are not included in the dubbed film catalogue for 1950.

¹³ These agreements are collected in the first two volumes of *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo tiaoyue ji* (Collected Treaties of the People’s Republic of China), compiled by PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1957. Different forms of reciprocal trade included barter deals, licensing, and distribution agreements (See Chen 2005, 15).

¹⁴ Twenty-four copies of ten Chinese feature films were exported to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovak, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Burma, and Indonesia. The specific number of films exported to individual countries remains unclear (See Chen 2005, 15).

¹⁵ Yu Ying, “Huasha yitiao jie de gushi” (The Story of *Border Street*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema), No.4 (1952): 22.

¹⁶ Yu Ying, “Qiaoshika he Malika de xin shenghuo kaishi le: Ping Jiefang le de tudi” (Jóska and Marka start their new life: *On The Emancipated Earth*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema), No.7 (1952):12.

¹⁷ For introduction to these films see Liu Dishan, *Xin zhongguo yizhi pian shi:1949-1966* (Liu 2015, 242, 247-249).

¹⁸ The “Learning from the Soviet Union” campaign may account for such as a high attendance. The 13th 1952 issue of *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema) carried a special column entitled “What Soviet Films Have Taught Us.” Fifteen audience members from Beijing, Shanghai, Putian and Taizhou contributed to this column, reflecting upon the lessons they had learnt from watching Soviet films such as *The Unforgettable Year 1919*, *The Miners of Donetsk*, and *The Village Teacher* (Shi et al. 1952).

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion of Film Weeks in Mao’s China, see Ran Ma’s essay “A Genealogy of Film Festivals in the People’s Republic of China: ‘Film Weeks’ during the ‘Seventeen Years’ (1949-1966)” (Ma 2016).

²⁰ Cai Shusheng, “Xiang ‘Xiongyali dianyingzhou’ huanhu” (Cheering for Hungary Film Week), *Dazhong dianying*, No.15 (1953): 3-4; Anon. “Huanying ‘Baojialiya dianyingzhou’” (Welcome Bulgaria Film Week), *Dazhong dianying*, No.22 (1953): 3-4; Yu Chuangshuo, “Sulian Dianyingzhou”(Soviet Film Week), *Renmin huabao*, No.12 (1953):2.

²¹ Zhong Dianfei, “Zhu Zhong Jie liangguo dianying yishu de jiaoliu” (Congratulations on Sino-Czechoslovakia Film Exchange), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), April 19, 1953.

²² Aside from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia was an important training ground for Albanian film technicians.

²³ Variations in Chinese renderings of the film title include Sikandepei, Weida zhanshi, and Weida de zhanshi Sikandepei.

²⁴ The film was imported into China shortly after it had been screened in the Soviet Union and Albania. See “Su A hezhi caise yishupian ‘Aerbania weida zhanshi sikande’ erbeike” (Soviet-Albanian coproduction *The Great Warrior of Albania Skanderbeg*), *Shijie dianying* (World Cinema), No.3 (1954): 87-89.

²⁵ According to the *People’s Daily*, all these films would be dubbed into Chinese by the Northeast Film Studio and the Shanghai Film Studio in 1954. “Woguo jinnian jiang yizhi sishi duo bu sulian deng guo de yingpian” (Our Country Will Translate and Dub More Than Forty Films from the Soviet Union and Beyond), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), April 5, 1954.

²⁶ “Qingzhu Aerbania jiefang shiwu zhounian” (Celebrate the 15th Anniversary of Albanian Liberation), *Renmin ribao* (People’s Daily), November 28, 1959.

²⁷ “What’s on in Peking,” *Peking Review*, No.48 (1959): 23; “What’s on in Peking,” *Peking Review*, No. 49 (1959):23. The film enjoyed a re-run in the following October.

²⁸ Aside from ideological disagreements, secondary factors such as changed needs within the alliance, territorial conflicts and the role of the United States helped accelerate the Sino-Soviet split (Lüthi 2011). Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign also prompted Albania’s Communist leader Enver Hoxha to reconsider Albania’s position of leaning-toward-Moscow position in order to defend his domestic and foreign policies (Griffith 1963, 22-26).

²⁹ See *Zhongguo dianying biannian jishi: faxing fangying juan juan* (Film Distribution and Exhibition, Book One, Vol. 4 of Annals of Chinese Cinema) (Chen 2005, 47).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 48.

³² The article only provides the translated Chinese title of this film, which was probably a documentary. “Qingzhu Aerbania Laodong dang jianli ershi zhounian, Aerbania paishe wancheng yingpian *Xinsheng*” (To Celebrate

the Founding of the Party of Labor of Albania, Albania Completed the Film *New Life*), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema), No. 11 (1961): 21.

³³ “Shijie jianwei di 14 hao: Shehui zhuyi de Aerbaniya zai qianjin” (No.14 of Global Sights and Sounds: Socialist Albania Marches On), *Dazhong dianying* (Mass Cinema), No.12 (1961):2-3.

³⁴ “Gushi pian *Shanying zhi ge*” (Feature Film *Furtuna*), *Dazhong dianying*, No.2 (1962):4; See also essays written by Ge Baoquan (Ge 1962), Yao Shi (Yao 1962) and Tang Jia (Tang 1962) published in this issue.

³⁵ “On the Cultural Front,” *Peking Review*, No.49 (1962):21.

³⁶ The original Albanian movie title for *Tried and Tested* was not provided in “What’s On in Peking,” *Peking Review*, No.49 (1962):23.

³⁷ Fang Ming, “Ying zhi ge: Aerbaniya yingpian Teshu renwu guanhou” (The Song of the Eagle: Afterthoughts on the Albanian Film *Extraordinary Mission*), *Renmin ribao*, November 28, 1963; “New Year Holiday Attractions,” *Peking Review*, No.1 (1966):31; Yang Yang, “Yingzhe jieji douzheng de fenglang qianjin: Aerbaniya yingpian *Women de tudi* guanhou (Riding the Waves of Class Struggle: Afterthoughts on Albanian Film *Our Land*), *Renmin ribao*, December 8, 1964.

³⁸ See Jessica Ka Yee Chan, 165. For Chinese director Hao Yusheng’s reminiscence about his experience in making this co-production in Albania, see Hao Yusheng’s essay “Jiyu bingjian qianjin de zhanyou” (Messages for our Comrades-in-arms) (Hao 1964).

³⁹ Refers to songs composed for *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*. These were popularized in the early stage of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969.

⁴⁰ This political-aesthetic principle prescribes that “among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters; among the main characters, give prominence to the most important character, namely, the central character.” The principle not only organized the narrative structure of the Cultural Revolution narrative arts but provided an approach through which mass audiences formed a mutual proletarian consciousness of a society characterized by endless class struggle. See Yizhong Gu, “The Three Prominences” (Gu 2011).

⁴¹ Romania remained neutral toward the Sino-Soviet split.

⁴² For a list of films exhibited in Zhejiang province from 1966 to 1970, see *Zhejiang sheng dianying zhi* (*Zhejiang Film Chronicle*) (Zhejiang sheng dianying zhi bianwei hui 1996, 205-209).

⁴³ Educated youth refers to the millions of college and high school students, many of them former Red Guards, who were sent to the countryside or remote regions of China to be re-educated by the peasants. Between 1968 and 1978 around 12 million urban youths were sent to the countryside during the rustication campaign. See Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (1992, 666).

⁴⁴ Chaboshi, Discussion board of *Dibage shi tongxiang* (*The Eighth in Bronze*), April 4, 2011.

https://movie.douban.com/subject/1821148/comments?start=20&limit=20&sort=new_score&status=P (accessed June 18, 2020)

⁴⁵ Mabei shang de shuishou, Discussion board of *Dibage shi tongxiang* (*The Eighth in Bronze*), March 18, 2020. https://movie.douban.com/subject/1821148/comments?start=20&limit=20&sort=new_score&status=P (accessed June 18, 2020)

⁴⁶ Xiaogang, Discussion board of *Dibage shi tongxiang* (*The Eighth in Bronze*), November 25, 2010. https://movie.douban.com/subject/1821148/comments?start=20&limit=20&sort=new_score&status=P (accessed June 18, 2020)

⁴⁷ Shi Tianding, “Yong qiangganzi gaizao zhengge shijie” (Use Guns to Change the Whole World), *Renmin ribao*, November 29, 1967.

⁴⁸ At the height of the Cultural Revolution, the Shanghai Dubbing Studio was renamed as the Shanghai Workers-Peasants-Soldiers Dubbing Studio. *Storm and Thunder* enjoyed such a popularity that the Shanghai People’s Publishing House in 1973 printed 1 million copies of its lianhuanhu version (palm-sized picture book), which contains 130 sequential illustrations of the film story. See Hai’an fenglei lianhuan hua zu, *Hai’an fenglei* (*Storm and Thunder along the Seashore*), Shanghai meishu chubanshe, 1973.

⁴⁹ Shen Zhiyuan, “Aerbaniya dianying: ‘Xiaomie faxisi, ziyou shuyu renmin’”(Albanian Films: “Death to the Fascists, Freedom to the People”), *Haerbin ribao* (Haerbin Daily), August 10, 2007.

⁵⁰ Xiaoduxing, “Aerbaniya erzhan jingdian ‘Sidajingang’: Shanying, Hai’an, Mira he Yibulaxin” (Four Classic Second World War Films from Albanian,: Eagle, Seashore, Mila and Ibrahim) <https://movie.douban.com/review/9650043/> (accessed on June 1, 2020).

⁵¹ According to the blood lineage theory, those born into the families of workers, peasants, soldiers, or cadres were from a “red,” revolutionary background and could thus be trusted; those born into the families of landlords, capitalists, counter-revolutionaries, and intellectuals were considered to be from a “black” background and were therefore enemies of the people. Yu Luo, in his 1966 essay “On Family Background,” demanded that all revolutionary young people descended from diverse class origins should be treated equally. He was executed in 1970 because of his dissident views.

⁵² For general popular interpretations of the film at the time, see Yuan Qingfeng's essay "Aerbanिया yu zhongguo dalu dianying moshi de yitong ji shisu dujie: Yi 1967 nian yizhi de *Hai'an fenglei wei li*" (Secular Readings of the Similarities and Differences between Albanian Films and Mainland Chinese Films: The Case of 1967 Dubbed Film *Storm and Thunder along the Seashore*) (Yuan 2015).

⁵³ The Albanian Film Week was held in major cities across China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Wuhan and Guangzhou. "Qingzhu Aerbanिया jiefang ershiwu zhounian, Aerbanिया dianying zhou zai Beijing juxing kaimu shi" (The Opening Ceremony of the Albanian Film Week Is Held in Beijing to Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Independence of Albania), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), November 26, 1969.

⁵⁴ Notable examples include films portraying female revolutionary martyrs such as *Liu Hulan* (Feng Bailu, 1950) and *Zhao Yiman* (Sha Meng, 1950).

⁵⁵ Aliaosha, "Aerbanिया dianying yu Zhongguo guanzhong he lao shangyi" (Albanian Films, Chinese Audiences and the Shanghai Dubbing Studio),

<http://www.newsmth.net/bbsanc.php?path=%2Fgroups%2Fliteral.faq%2FNostalgia%2FMedia%2FMovie%2FM.1188549334.s0> (accessed June 12, 2020)

⁵⁶ Interview with Eglantina Kume in *Dianying chuanqi: Ningsi buqu* (Story of Movie: *Victory over Death*) produced by Cui Yongyuan, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1RPodXJJ7g> (accessed June 16, 2020)