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**BELARUSSIAN CINEMA AS A CHANNEL OF FORMING THE IMAGE OF
BELARUS IN CHINA**

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1895, cinema has been an art form with a dual function of entertainment and commerce. Later on, due to the emergence of different ideological state regimes, it was in turn incorporated into the soft power of many countries due to its rapid dissemination properties. It is undeniable that all major film producing and exporting countries are currently producing films with a greater or lesser degree of ideological discourse representing their own countries. This is both an exchange, a communion and a possible invasion in today's international cultural environment. The construction and communication of national images in film is therefore a hot topic in current communication research. A better use of the film market is an invisible enhancement of the country's cultural soft power, while the inability to use film to express ideas effectively is a lack of cultural exchange with other countries today. This is determined both by the nature of cinema and by the laws of cultural development

In the article the basic situation of Belarusian cinema and the main factors influencing its development are analysed.

- 1) The history of Belarusian cinema, its development
- 2) the historical experience and the reasons for the current situation
- 3) the current problems of the Belarusian film industry and how to solve them

The logic of the article follows the history of Belarusian cinema from the macro to the micro level. Firstly, it integrates the history of Belarusian cinema in order to observe the trends in its development as a whole and the creative characteristics of each period. This is followed by a historical overview of the creation of Belarusian films on historical themes. Finally the historical event of Chernobyl is used as an example to analyse the role of its films in changing the international image of Belarus. The following chapters are presented.

The first chapter is a history of Belarusian cinema. That is, it frames the concept of Belarusian cinema and delineates the chronological junctures of its different periods of development.

The second chapter is a comparative analysis of Belarusian and Chinese cinema in relation to the creation of films on historical themes. This section is the most important, as both countries produce a significant proportion of their cinema output on this subject and share the same historical experience of building a socialist state culture. The analysis of the history and future direction of both countries is therefore of great relevance.

The third chapter analyses the history of Chernobyl and the films

adapted from it, with a focus on their dissemination. The soft power of Belarusian film culture is explored in the light of the cultural product of this historic disaster.

Film is an indispensable cultural component of a modern nation. Film creation is the starting point for the export of national culture and national discourse, and film dissemination is the aim of creation. A film in dialogue with the audience in the cinemas of each country is the perfect result of cinema and a shortcut to cross-cultural communication in today's world. According to the author's knowledge, there are relatively few studies on the history of Belarusian cinema, film culture and film diffusion in various countries, and very few studies have discussed them systematically. This negative state of research and creation should be woken up to. This is also the greatest application of this thesis.

Research methods used in the thesis.

1. study of literature and film history sources: clarifying the history of Belarusian cinema
2. comparative analysis method: comparing the creative experience of Belarusian and Chinese historical films
3. Case study method: analysis of the creative focus of a classic Belarusian film

MASTER THESIS SUMMARY

KEYWORDS: FILM HISTORY, BELARUS, NATIONAL IMAGE, WORLD WAR II, CHERNOBYL, ETHNIC CULTURE, SOVIET CINEMA.

The subject of the study is based on the creative characteristics of Belarusian cinema since its inception. It is well known that cinema is a cultural product that plays an important role in the formation of the country's cultural soft power. During the Soviet era, the central government maintained control over the production of films and Belarusian cinema followed in the footsteps of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarusian cinema was in a period of decline and confusion until recent years when a number of new film directors emerged and brought Belarusian cinema back to international attention. In this context, the key question to be explored at this stage is how Belarusian cinema can be transformed and developed.

The aim of this master's thesis is to demonstrate how Belarusian cinema once used its national strengths to shape the image of the country, what successful national images were created and the current stage of Belarusian cinema's problems.

The object is the dramatic events of the 20th century in Belarusian cinema.

The subject is the creation and impact of Belarusian cinema on the Second World War and the Chernobyl disaster.

In the course of the research the author obtained the following results: important turning points in Belarusian cinema; the national psychology and the national essence in Belarusian cinema. The author also argues for the similarities and differences between Chinese and Belarusian creations on the same subjects: showing the weaknesses of Belarusian development in the early years of the cinema's existence; the importance of the WWII subject in the ethnography of Belarusian cinema.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the longitudinal comparison of the creation of Chinese and Belarusian films on historical themes and in the conclusion of the differences in the final development results.

The structure of the master's thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography.

The author confirms that the work was done independently, where comparative analysis and questionnaires are cited to correctly and objectively analyse the situation in the research process. All theories, methodological prescriptions and concepts borrowed from the literature and other sources are attached to the author for reference purposes.

ОБЩАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА РАБОТЫ

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: ИСТОРИЯ КИНО, БЕЛАРУСЬ, НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ИМИДЖ, ВТОРАЯ МИРОВАЯ ВОЙНА, ЧЕРНОБЫЛЬ, ЭТНИЧЕСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА, СОВЕТСКОЕ КИНО

Тема исследования основана на изучении особенностей белорусского кинематографа с момента его создания. Общеизвестно, что кинематограф - это продукт культуры, играющий важную роль в формировании национальных традиций страны. В советскую эпоху контроль за производством фильмов был под государственным контролем. После распада Советского Союза белорусское кино находилось в состоянии упадка и неразберихи вплоть до последних лет, когда появились новые кинорежиссеры, вернувшие белорусское кино в ряд мировых достижений. В этом контексте ключевым вопросом, который необходимо рассмотреть на данном этапе, является вопрос о том, каким образом можно трансформировать и развивать белорусское кино. И как китайский народ воспринимает Беларусь через кино.

Цель магистерской диссертации – показать роль и значение белорусского кино как канала формирования имиджа Беларуси для представителей других культур.

Объект - драматические события 20-го века в белорусском кинематографе.

Предмет – белорусское кино как канал формирования имиджа Беларуси.

В ходе исследования автором получены следующие результаты: изучены этапы развития и трансформации в белорусском кинематографе; описаны признаки, определяющие национальные традиции и менталитет белорусского народа. Автор также аргументирует сходство и различия между китайским и белорусским кино: выявление слабых сторон белорусского кино в первые годы существования кино; значение темы Второй мировой войны в белорусском кинематографе и др.

Научная новизна данной работы заключается в выявлении сравнительных аспектов китайских и белорусских фильмов на историческую тематику.

Структура магистерской диссертации состоит из введения, трех глав, заключения и библиографии.

Автор подтверждает, что работа выполнена самостоятельно, где приведены сравнительный анализ и анкеты для правильного и объективного анализа ситуации в процессе исследования. Все теории, методические указания и концепции, заимствованные из литературы и других источников, прилагаются к работе автора в справочных целях..

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF BELARUSIAN CINEMA

1.1 The concept of Belarusian cinema

A study of the history of Belarusian cinema in the 20th century cannot be separated from its relationship with the Soviet Union, which means that the concept of Soviet cinema and Belarusian cinema must be clarified.

Soviet cinema is 'the sum of the films produced in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics from 7 November 1917 to 22 December 1991'. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, its cinema became history. This definition is based on the fact that literary and artistic production during the period of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic had taken on an incipient communist overtones after the October Revolution of 1917. Therefore film historians usually include it in the common category of Soviet cinema. Belarusian cinema refers to the sum of all the films ever created by the Belarusian people.

However, the use and understanding of this concept in the study of Belarusian cinema raises a number of problems. The main reason for this is that the connotations and extensions of Soviet cinema, Belarusian cinema and even Russian cinema have changed many times. This change is due to their intricate historical relationships. In simple terms, the concept of a set in mathematics can be invoked. Soviet cinema in the Soviet period was the set, while Belarusian cinema and Russian cinema were subsets. In terms of synthesis, four dimensions need to be elaborated:

1). Belarusian cinema in the Soviet period was part of Soviet cinema. At this particular stage of history, the concept of Soviet cinema was larger than Belarusian cinema.

2). Russian cinema was the main successor to the mantle of Soviet cinema. Scholars and readers also often equate the two, while little mention is made of Belarusian and Ukrainian cinema.

3). Russian cinema was the main constituent of Soviet cinema, as well as playing a leading role in its development, and had a decisive influence on both Soviet and Belarusian cinema. Thus, it can be said that during the Soviet period Belarusian cinema existed and developed under the enormous influence of Russian cinema. And this influence continued for a considerable period of time to come. It will hardly die out in the near future.

4). Belarusian cinema existed after joining the Soviet Union. It continued to exist and develop independently after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That is, Soviet cinema was the parent phase in the development of Belarusian cinema. In terms of the length of development, the concept of Belarusian cinema is in turn larger than that of Soviet cinema.

Therefore, a study of the history of Belarusian cinema must distinguish and

contrast it between the Soviet period and the post-Soviet period. It is also important to use the different periods of the Soviet leadership and the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a basis for the division of stages.

1.2 Main stages in the development of Belarusian cinema

A look at the early stages of film development around the world. the cinema entitled *Monkeyshines, No. 1*, may have been born in the United States in June 1889[1]. However, the world's first "Train Coming in" is recognized by academics as having been shown in 1895 in a French café basement. The first Chinese cinema entitled *Ding Jun Shan* was born in 1905 at the Fengtai Photo Studio. In Europe, the beginnings of Avant-garde movies in 1917. It can be seen that within just 20 years of the birth of cinema, the major cinema producing and exporting countries and regions of the today's world have seized the opportunities offered by new technologies. The introduction and production of cinema technology was pioneered, and even an early wave of revolution in cinema aesthetics was ushered in.

The view goes back to Belarus. Despite being in Eastern Europe, the real introduction and popularity of cinema came a few years after its birth, and production progress was relatively slow. In 1909, in the classroom of a railway school in Gomel (Гомель), the first course on cinema in the city's history was held[57,p140]. Since then many cities in Belarus have established their different types of cinemas, relying on imported foreign films and the latest projection technology to attract audiences. Only a very few large cinemas being able to make a profit from capital investment.

The history of Belarusian cinema can be divided into two main phases: the Soviet period and the post-Soviet period. Cinema production in the Soviet period can be divided according to the period in which the leader was in power. Marked by Stalin in particular, artistic production is divided into three distinct periods: the Lenin period, the Stalin period, and the post-Stalin period. In the post-Stalin period, the reigns of Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Gorbachev were also marked by minor changes in Soviet artistic production. Therefore the development of Belarusian cinema can be nested in a comparative study of the stages of development of Soviet cinema.

1.2.1 Belarusian cinema in the Soviet period

The Lenin-times (1917.11.07-1924) - Socialist cultural undertakings

The period from 7 November 1917 (25 October) to October 1922 was a Soviet Russia Civil war . On 27 August 1919, Lenin signed a decree on the nationalisation of the Soviet cinema industry. This marked the birth of the Soviet cinema industry.

Pre-cinema production began with newsreels. Due to the limitations of scriptwriting, the professionalism of the actors and the technical equipment, it was not possible to produce a feature cinema in line with the revolution and construction. On the other hand, Newsreels were easy to produce and had a wide range of content. It then became the most suitable choice for the early stages of production. It was not until the demands of the revolutionary war that the "propaganda and agitation film" appeared on

the Soviet screen as a new form of cinema. This genre of cinema was highly combative, and reflecting the important realities of the revolutionary struggle of the time. From 1918 to 1920, approximately 80 films were produced in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union also produced a number of films based on classical works, such as *"Father Sergii"* and *"Borykushka"* based on Tolstoy's novels, *"Grassin and Mumu"* based on Turgenev's novels, *"Mother"* and *"The Three"* based on the works of M. Gorky, and *"The Magpie Who Stole"* based on a middle-grade novel by A. Herzen.

From 1922, when the Soviet Socialist Republic was officially founded. The old cinema studios were transformed into new ones. Specialised studios for the production of documentaries, children's films and animated films were branched out, and professional training for directors and actors and other trades was added to professional school films. These moves marked a period of rapid development for Soviet cinema.

During this period, Belarus was influenced by years of imported cinema culture and took on the influence of the Avant-garde movies. In 1920, the slogan "Let's make films together" became popular. In the same way as in Soviet Russia, the first generation of Belarusian filmmakers experimented with documentary cinema to capture and record reality, and produced the first newsreels. As a result, the title "Belarusian cinema" was created for the first time in the history of cinema.

The Stalin-times (1924-1953) - The Birth of the Montage School

The Soviet cinema industry base was fully developed from the inside out thanks to the benign investment in the cultural industry under Lenin. In the early years of the Stalin-times, by 1937 the Soviet Union was the third largest producer of cinema in the world.

In 1932, the Soviet literary circles proposed the "socialist realism" method of creation, that is, "realism as form and socialism as content". In the era of silent cinema, the expression of themes depended on the expressive power of images. Therefore the Soviet government brought together Eisenstein, Kulishov, Pudovkin, Vertov and a host of other filmmakers to explore the possibilities of visual expression in order to match the highest ideology with cinematography. That is to say, the multiple functions of montage.

Before the birth of the montage school, Griffith was the first director to use montage consciously, and no other school or scholar had ever articulated montage. Griffith concentrated mainly on how to deal with the relationship between two dramatic scenes, and as Eisenstein says in his essay *"Dickens, Griffith and Us"*, Hollywood's master filmmakers used parallel montages to compare and contrast events, ultimately just connecting them[13]. Instead, the Soviet director thought more about the relationship between single shots and sequences, and the meanings and implications that this relationship conveys. A revision of the original parallel montage from a more specific camera unit. A reversal of the traditional passive presentation of life narrative procedures in previous cinema and an active use of montage to recreate

the reality of the screen. This principle became the basic model of Soviet cinema in the 1920s. It was this compositionalist and cubist approach to the reorganisation of the tearing apart of reality that gave cinema great temporal and spatial freedom. For filmmakers living in the 1920s, this extension of narrative space and time through montage was highly experimental.

To this day, Eisenstein's use of montage in *Battleship Potemkin* remains a textbook model for cinema schools around the world, Kulishov's experiments explain the mystery of space creation in cinema, and Vertov's "cinematic eye" theory inspired Italian neo-realist filmmakers. It can be said that the Soviet concept of montage was a pioneering idea for the entire cinema industry at the time. It greatly influenced the technical perception and aesthetic thinking of cinema artists at the time and even later.

The theoretical foundations of the Soviet montage school were put into practice in many ways and resulted in the most complete system of montage theory in the history of cinema. At the same time the Stalinist model gradually brought about political confinement and artistic stereotyping. It was Stalin's role as supreme censor and producer that led to the gradual stagnation of Soviet cinema until it fell into difficulties. Although there were sporadic cinema of outstanding artistic merit like Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* and Ivan the Terrible, and the Malkdens' *Rainbow*, they could not resist the damage done to literary and artistic creation by the unhealthy political environment. By the early 1950s, only six or seven films were being produced each year. Characters were symbols of political symbols, and Zhdanov's literary idea of "combining the most tangible realities of everyday life with the most heroic realms" completely invaded the cinema. Soviet cinema entered the most miserable years of the "film famine" in the late Stalinist period.

In the 1920s and 1930s Belarusian cinema went from nothing to a simple newsreel to a feature film with a creative concept and an autonomous narrative.

In the 1920s, in December 1924, the Belarusian government decided to set up the "Belarusian State Film Studio", which became the beginning of Belarusian cinema as an independent art[58,p140]. At its inception, everything from supplies to staffing was inadequate, even the cinema laboratory was not established, and cinema negatives had to be sent to Moscow for development. The objective conditions for making feature cinema were necessarily not available, and only newsreels could be made to start with, as in Soviet Russia during the civil war. Thus, in 1925, a newsreel was made about the Sixth Belarusian Congress. Over the next five years Belarusian cinema studios produced a series of feature documentaries, including "*Belarusian Village*", "*Kibbutz*", "*Gomel Oblast*" and many others.

In 1926, the Belarusian studios were almost ready to produce a feature film after more than a year's preparation. the first feature-length cinema, "*The Story of the Forest*", was produced, sparking a trend in Belarusian "revolutionary history" that lasted until the end of 1929.

Another work that must be mentioned is Oleg Frelikh's *The Whore* from the same period, which was released even earlier in cinemas across the Union, while *The Story of the Forest* was the first to be released in Minsk. In terms of chronological juncture, both works should be considered the starting point of Belarusian feature film production, and each represents two very different narrative subjects and creative philosophies. The prostitute was long and brutally removed from the history of Belarusian cinema because it was labelled by Soviet critics as a "politically incorrect" "bourgeois pseudo-scientific German film". Even in the later Soviet period, film artists were hesitant and afraid to even mention the film, making it impossible to place it in the history of Belarusian cinema for a long time.

At this time Belarusian filmmaking was not formally integrated into the Soviet system. But if one is a politically sensitive artist, one can already smell the signs of political power being exerted. From its inception, Belarusian cinema was undoubtedly charged with a range of political, educational and commercial tasks. It was a political and cultural educational tool aimed at the countryside, serving workers, peasants, soldiers and students.

The 1920s also saw the creation of regional Belarusian cinema such as *Kastus Kalinowskiy* by Vladimir Gardin, *Your Excellency* by Grigori Roshal, Yuri Tarich's *Zavatra*, Aleksandra Khokhlova's *Sasha* and many others were produced in the region. . It is no surprise that all these cinema, have the highest ideals of Soviet communism whether they are about soldiers, people or children. There is a very deep Soviet imprint.

With the 1930s as the boundary, and with the deepening of the Stalinist model, the development of cinema in the rest of the Soviet Union was fully integrated into the general process of Soviet socialist development. All art forms had to be created with the communist world view as the supreme guiding ideology. The most interesting film of this period is Rachel Millman Kramer and Boris Shpis directing and writing *The Return of Nathan Becker*, "the only Soviet sound film made in Yiddish". *Pervyy vzvod* by Vladimir Korsh, *Lieutenant Kier* by Aleksandr Faintsimmer, *Men of the Sea* and *Late for an Appointment* by Mikhail Verner and *The Pursuer of Happiness* by Isif Shapiro. "The most obvious impact of the strengthening of the Stalinist model was the return of the narrative subject from the macrocosmic combat hero to the socialist class.

During the Second World War, Belarusian cinema production came to a complete halt. When the war ended, Belarusian cinema production gradually resumed. Following the Soviet-led creative direction, revolutionary historical cinema were made on themes related to the Patriotic War, such as *Flames of Fury* in 1949.

Khrushchev-times (1953-1964), Brezhnev-times (1964-1985), Gorbachev times(1985-1991.12.05) - The gradual thawing of Soviet cinema

Here, the 38 years from Khrushchev to the dissolution of the Soviet Union can be divided into one big generation of Soviet cinema. The author argues that in fact after

Stalin's death, Soviet cinema went through a gradual process of shedding some of its political shackles. It inherited the film concepts of its predecessors and relied on the most powerful economy in the world. From the creative concept to the technical means, the Soviet Union entered a "golden age" in the true sense of the word. Of course, the relaxation of control over cinema was slow and tortuous, and there was even a tendency to tighten it again under Brezhnev. But the Soviet film artists were unable to resist leaving a legacy of images that were emblematic of the times in the history of world cinema.

The 1950s and 1960s were a watershed for cinema. In France, the New Wave movement was launched and the Left Bank emerged. In Italy, the neo-realist movement had just come to an end. In the Soviet Union, it was the beginning of the end of the Stalinist era, which was hinted at in Khrushchev's report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956. The ice gradually melted in the art world in the context of de-Stalinisation.

In the film world reflection on the war became a creative breakthrough. During the Patriotic War, seven million people died in the Soviet Union, 16 million were wounded, four million children were orphaned, and millions were trapped by hunger and disease. If Stalin's films portrayed the war as a hero's training ground, Khrushchev's war reverted to its original form as a plague. Anti-war films such as *The Flight of the Geese*, *What Happens to a Man*, *The Soldier's Song* and *The Silent River Don* reached heights previously unmatched by Soviet cinema in their portrayal of the souls suffering in war. Their thoughtfulness was also admired in the West.

In addition, with the advent of the peace years, Soviet film-makers turned their attention back to the lives of ordinary people in films such as *My Father, Is That You*, *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* and *Red Berries*, which focused on the spiritual growth of children after the war, the confusion and turmoil of adults in love, and the self-pull of prisoners in their moral reintegration into society.

In the following period numerous Soviet directors continued the tradition of poetic cinema of the montage school of the 1920s. Specialising in visualising reflective philosophy, they brought the audience into the mood of cinematic poetry. As the number of lyrical, confessional and diary-like films focusing on the inner and spiritual world increased, the trend towards "poetic cinema" was born. This led to the birth of another of the Soviet Union's greatest cinematic talents, after Eisenstein - Andrei Tarkovsky.

This icon of Soviet cinema left behind only seven feature cinema and two short cinema during his 30-year reign. His cinema are poetic, but he was bored with the existence of 'poetic cinema'. Tarkovsky himself explained his perception of the nature of cinema as follows: "When I talk about poetry, I don't see it as a genre, poetry is an understanding of the world, a particular way of narrating reality. So poetry is a kind of philosophical guide to life." [44,p16] At the same time his deep cultural Russian

ethnicity was a decisive influence on his writing, as he himself says: "... For me, the connection with classical Russian culture, which continues even today, is very important. There are people who are trying (perhaps unintentionally) to bridge Russia's past and future, and I am one of them." Thus, at a time when the world is in a crisis of faith and facing a nuclear threat, Tarkovsky's films are poetry and he himself is the embodiment of the "human artist". Each person in his films is an embodiment of himself, and each person's life is linked to his childhood, his family, his people and his land. The content of this connection is different in each of the characters, but the essence is the same. Ultimately, it is the crisis of the soul that one is born into and cannot avoid forever. His perception of the nature of cinema is very much in the Russian tradition and culture. It is only when one breaks free from the crisis of the mind that one can bring about a revival of self-knowledge, a reconciliation with one's own nation, country, land and culture, and this universal value will eventually transcend ideology and lead to his philosophical universe of cinema.

However, as with Tarkovsky or Sergei Paradjanov's original surrealist cinema *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. There remains the probability of luck or otherwise in the birth of such a stunning work of world cinema. The thaw of the Khrushchev period only brought with it the possibility of a slight loop. Brezhnev's approach to government was slightly more dogmatic than Khrushchev's. Although not as tough as under Stalin, film artists still had to contend with the censorship authorities. Given the official disregard for the cinematic form, artists had to shift their focus to innovation.

In contrast to the creative trends of the 1930s, Belarusian cinema did not include revolutionary historical themes or classical literary adaptations, nor did it explore "poetic cinema", but rather parted company with the Soviet-dominated cinematic mainstream. In 1972, the production of children's films and animations began. In 1975 Leonid Nechayev directed *The Adventures of Buratino* and in 1977 Leonid Nechayev directed *About Little Red Riding Hood*. Only a handful of filmmakers were concerned with realism during this period, and Elem Klimov was one of the very few Belarusian filmmakers who fought against the Soviet censorship. His film *"Come and See"* was finally released in 1985 after eight years of censorship. He probably did not anticipate that the next Soviet leader, who was about to come to power, would push Soviet cinema into a completely new creative environment.

In 1985 Gorbachev became the new leader and in May 1986 the fifth congress of the Soviet Film Association was convened. This brought Soviet cinema to another turning point. The new leader quickly set up a "Review Committee" to reconsider films that had been blocked under the previous leaders. On the one hand, this was a leap forward in the policy direction of Soviet cinema; on the other hand, the complete public unsealing of the literary sphere did not bear the fruits of the last period of Soviet cinema, except for the release from prison of Sergei Parajano, the last legend of Soviet cinema. It was also the last years of the embattled master of the art of cinema before the

collapse of the Soviet Union. During this time he created films with a national aesthetic such as *The Legend of Suram Fortress*, *Ashok Kerib* and *Confessions*.

In a time of literary stagnation, cinema did not stagnate, and in a time of openness, it lost its strong backbone, one of the last paradoxical cinematic phenomena of the Soviet Union.

1.2.2 Belarusian cinema after the collapse of the Soviet Union

After Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet Union underwent a comprehensive reform and opening. Externally, there was an unprecedented infiltration of Western ideas, and internally, historical nihilism, which completely denied and distorted the Soviet socialist revolution and construction, prevailed. The intertwining of internal and external contradictions eventually led to the disintegration of the powerful socialist state, and the era of "US-Soviet" hegemony was officially over, as countries began to sort out the remnants of their former dynasties in the political, economic, cultural and physical spheres.

The break-up of one of the most powerful countries in the world meant that the authority of the Soviet government fell from grace. Countries such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus were left to their own devices to build up their economies and politics, not to mention their culture and morality. For some time afterwards, the national mood was so low and pessimistic about the future that the citizens who had lived in the Soviet Union unconsciously fell into a kind of moral vacuum and cognitive disorder. The impact on literary and artistic creation, whether from a political or economic perspective, or from the national mood, is self-evident, as is the case with cinema.

If this post-Soviet reflection on the scars of the post-Soviet era is expressed in literature as "the ideal is dead", in cinema it is more a question of "where is the future". For Belarusian filmmakers, especially the independent filmmakers of the 21st century, this creative mood has continued to the present, from feature films to documentaries, from reflections on the war to the pathologies of contemporary society. They have excelled at portraying the national ethos of the Patriotic War and have also learnt how to express the uncertainty of the way ahead for young people.

A selection of the best Belarusian films made since 1991 can be divided into four main film genres according to their subject matter and creative philosophy.

Military history

This subject matter is a unique advantage for Belarusian filmmakers. Most of them are descendants of those who lived through the war and grew up in cities that have an inextricable historical link with the two world wars. For example, *I Am Ivan, You Are Abram* (1993) about World War I, *Red Cherry* (1995) about World War II, *From Hell to Hell* (1995), *More About the War* (2004), *Chaklen and Rumba* (2007), *The Dnieper Border* (2009), the documentary *Brest Fortress* (2006) and many others. Of course, there is no shortage of co-productions with Russia, one of Belarus' most productive film genres.

Urban comedy

In contrast to the heavy military genre, Belarusian filmmakers are clearly trying to capture the commercial entertainment that was the genesis of cinema.

The 21st century has seen a gradual increase in the creation of light comedies such as *Salute Fresh* (2001), *Little Out of Control* (2004), *On the Back of a Black Cat* (2008), *At the Crossroads* (2011) and *This is Love* (2014). In *Lady for a Day* (2002), prostitutes and drunks are transformed into New York's elite, and private jets land in the streets in grand style. The director follows the hyperbolic and satirical narrative of the 1930s in Hollywood. Certainly not a perfect film, more a commercial attempt by the director to interpret the American gangster spirit with a Belarusian mindset. The creation of a light comedy proves that Belarusian directors can express more than just heavy history and brutal war; popcorn films can also have a darkly bitter satire.

Post-Soviet scar cinema

The concept of scarred cinema comes from scarred literature. Scar literature is a literary phenomenon that dominated the literary scene in mainland China in the 1970s, during the "new period" after the Cultural Revolution, and was established by Lu Xinhua's short story "Scars", which changed the tone from bright to sad. [14,p58-48 [15,p58-62]. The literature of scars is a critical reflection of the social stage experienced by writers in a specific historical situation, and a timely expression of individual suffering. Later, Chinese filmmakers introduced the concept of "scars" into film production, parallel to the "New Age" scars literature.

In the author's view, this is not a specific genre, but a creative trend and mode of creation in a particular historical period, as well as an expression of the author's individual emotions. If we trace the history of cinema, the concept of "scarred reflection" is almost always included in the film movements of every period of major social change. They are timely and proliferate, easing people's wounds and social pain. Italian neo-realism, French New Wave and American New Hollywood cinema are all examples of cinema artists who, after experiencing great social changes, poured their dissatisfaction with reality, individual trauma and pessimism about the future into the creation of their films.

Therefore, the concept of "scar" is not necessarily limited to the scarred literature and films of the post-Cultural Revolution period in China, but can also be applied to the post-Soviet Belarusian art scene. The post-1991 Belarusian cinema is also full of reflections on the scars of the Soviet era. In *The White Lake* (1992), the irreparable regrets of a child's childhood are interpreted from the perspective of a child's view of the dramatic changes in society. In *Father's Son* (1995), the resilience of two generations of fathers and sons to social change is expressed more visually.

The "new cinema" of Belarus after 2010

There is no universally accepted definition or generational division of the concept of "new cinema" in Belarus. However, in terms of creative tendencies and

investment, it can be considered as independent cinema created by young filmmakers after 2010, which does not parallel the mainstream values of the government and which analyses the socially irrational situation and focuses on youth issues.

In 2012, Andrey Kureichik's *Higher than the Sky* can be seen as the starting point of a 'new cinema' in Belarus. The film was made with the financial support of the UN AIDS organisation. The story is uncomplicated and the topic revolves around the social reflection on AIDS. It is a realistic film with a typical national discourse, using a language and context that is specific to the Belarusian people and may be difficult for non-Belarusians to understand.

The real shining moment for Belarusian "new cinema" at the international level was the release in 2018 of *The Crystal Swan*, a musical girl's dystopian drama about a desperate escape from Minsk to the freedom of America in her heart after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Chinese writer Wang Xiaobo put it, "I wanted to love, to eat, and to become a half-bright, half-dark cloud in the sky for a moment." A love/hate relationship with her conservative family, a boredom with her boring hometown, and a strong sense of excess self-awareness are all elements that every "small town youth" will find resonance in this film. The cold but realistic reality of *The Crystal Swan* will strike a chord with every ordinary young person who has attempted to leave, or is in the process of leaving, their home country or homeland. One of the strengths of this film is that it uses a universal template.

With the release of films such as *"Galash"* and *"Counting Oranges"* in 2015 and *"II/2"* in 2019, Belarusian film creators are inching closer to a unique yet authentic expression of their country, nation and society.

CHAPTER 2

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BELARUSIAN AND CHINESE HISTORICAL CINEMA

2.1 Overview of historical cinema

2.1.1 Definition and classification of historical cinema

Historic films have been important since the beginning of cinema. According to Yin Hong's Introduction to Contemporary Film Art, historical films can be defined as epic films that represent major historical themes, as they mainly present historical events and figures [54, p218]. This definition visually specifies the scope of the historical film, i.e. it is required to represent the political, economic, cultural and social customs of a certain period in history. However, this definition does not distinguish between historical films and epic films, but rather classifies historical films as epic films. In 2006 the Academy Awards recognised epic films as one of the genres of historical films. The current classification of historical films is therefore quite diverse and there is no strict category that is widely accepted by most people.

Historical feature cinema and historical documentaries

The two main categories of historical feature films and historical documentaries can be divided on the basis of their creation. Historical feature films present the real situation in history, but allow for a certain amount of artistic fiction in the description of subplots and details. It is required to be based on historical facts and to present historical events and characters in a way that is historically accurate. For example, the change of dynasties that took place must not be altered, the reigning monarchs of history must not be disordered, etc. The Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin, released in 1925, was a pioneer in the creation of historical narratives. Based on the historical events of the Battleship Potemkin uprising, the film doubles as a montage of the tyranny of the Tsar's rule. Although the film's representation of the Tsar's tyrannical rule is intense and realistic, it is not a true-to-life replica of the historical scenes.

In the case of historical documentaries, the vast majority of documentaries that contain documentary content can be included in the category of historical documentaries in a broad sense. Compared to historical feature films, which are not overly artistic and subjective, they are more objective reproductions of historical facts. Therefore, historical documentaries are also known as documentary films, which are essentially a type of documentary.

Epic and biographical cinema

There are two important branches of the historical film - the epic and the biopic.

While the current production of historical films is modest in comparison to other commercial genres, the epic has had a remarkable run in Hollywood as an important

branch of the historical genre. The term "epic" first appeared in the Iliad and the Odyssey, which depicted the historical destinies and events of a group of heroic characters[14]. Epic films are also often based on classical literature and depict the exploits of an ancient hero. Panoramic shots are often used, full exterior shots are shot, and huge sums of money are spent on replicating ancient costumes and artefacts, bringing the audience to the senses in an immersive and imposing way with magnificent scenes.

In 1914, D.W Griffiths filmed the biblical story "Queen of Bethlea", opening the curtain on the creation of epic films in Hollywood. The 1950s and 1960s were the height of Hollywood epic cinema, with 1959's *Ben-Hur*, 1960's *Spartacus*, 1962's *Lawrence of Arabia* and many more presenting the spectacle of ancient Western empires to audiences until 2001's *Gladiator*, which is now 20 years old and is known as the last of the Hollywood epics. The film is also known as the last high point of the Hollywood epic.

In addition, epic films have often used the latest technology for the aesthetic needs of a magnificent epic and for the infinite visual stimulation of the audience, such as *Ben-Hur*, which swept the 32nd Academy Awards in 1960 for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor, using the new technology of stereo sound and 70mm wide film to provide the audience with a visually driven and immersive experience. The film's history is described by American film historians. This is how American film historians describe the popularity of the epic: "In the heyday of the historical drama, few things excited and calmed audiences more than a wonderful map of the old world in terms of their impact on the front row on Saturday afternoons. The old world was there for them to choose from". And Hollywood epics portraying the heroic paradigm were heavily influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment since the Renaissance, with heroes on screen either favouring the outside of the system or committed to breaking the shackles of the world [9,p33-37]. The already generous epic film is augmented by individual heroism, an epic romance that transforms an otherwise classical myth or legend from an American cultural perspective into an "American story" in which blood rushes through the mundane.

Biopics are much less expensive to produce than epics. The subject matter is the rise and fall of prominent figures in history. The main plot is governed by the events of the historical figures themselves, allowing for imagination, inference and hypothesis to portray typical circumstances and characters based on objective historical information. It therefore has a certain historical, literary and educational value. The United States, for example, is home to Hollywood, the world's largest producer and exporter of films, and has always focused on the expression of the "American spirit". With a relatively fixed institutional model, dramatic narrative structure and fixed film language, Hollywood filmmakers have gradually shaped a unique biographical aesthetic in the process of interpreting the aesthetic proposition of historical truth and artistic truth.

2.1.2 The social function of historical cinema

Subliminal science function

"Film is ice cream for the eyes and a sofa chair for the soul", as described by the "soft filmmaker" Jamie Wong. This is a perfect illustration of how cinema can soothe an audience, and explains why people have gravitated towards a widescreen for over a century since the birth of cinema. As a commercial art, cinema's communication is far more effective than that of many art forms, and its position as a channel for value building is self-evident in politics and religion. A 1998 study in the United States showed that 81% of the 1,500 people interviewed had seen a historical film or television in the previous year, while only 53% had seen a historical book in the same period[50,p11]. This old data shows that at the end of the last century the public relied more on films than books for their historical knowledge. Historical films gave audiences a God's-eye view of the margins of the times, and increasingly limited their understanding of history to a screening room and a big screen, guided by the scenes and montages of directors and editors. Historical films place historical stories and figures in front of the audience in the most three-dimensional way possible and lead them into a vast vault of space.

While we undoubtedly benefit from the cheap and immediate popularisation of the historical film, this art form, which is both commercially entertaining and didactic, also presents us with the problem of having to look at the subjective reproduction of objective historical facts in a dialectical way. This is a topic that is most often discussed in the creation and study of historical films. In historical cinema, we consider both how history enters history and how it is carried by film. Film artists use artistic techniques and aesthetic concepts to review 'history', which inevitably involves the use of 'methodologies' that belong to film-making. Regardless of the artistic effect of these "methodologies" and the psychological orientation they bring to the audience, two dimensions of judgement cannot be avoided - historicity and authenticity. In short, it is the question of 'historical authenticity' in cinema.

According to the definition of a historical film, it can be seen that a historical film in the popular sense can be based on historical truth in details or subplots that are artistically created. For example, in the negative reviews of historical films made in China since the 21st century, it is easy to see that the most talked about aspect is that they are "not historically true". How to balance historical truth and artistic truth becomes a crucial step for film artists to consider carefully when creating their work. This issue can be analysed in three ways.

First, the question of how to restore the essence of history. This is not only a question for directors, but also for historians, who are constantly researching it. For historiography, the reference discipline of historical cinema, historical authenticity is a relative concept. Theoretically, historians are never able to enter into history in space and time, but are able to piece together fragments of history with the help of written

sources and archaeological artefacts on paper. Scholars get infinitely closer to history without being able to restore 100% of the historical truth. If this is the case with the current state of historical research, then film is based on history, just as art is based on life, reflecting history but above historical facts. Moreover, the perception of history is inevitably influenced by the context, social environment and ideology of the time in which it is made, just as the differences between *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *The Three Kingdoms* predispose us to different interpretations of different historical texts. For artistic creation, then, it is destined to be impossible to avoid subjective artistic processing of subjects taken from reality.

Secondly, the relationship between the historical film and the historical material. If the historical material is the skeleton, then the artistic expression of the filmmaker is the blood, and ultimately the historical weight of the film is the soul. It can be seen that the relationship between the historical film and its source material is a one-sided one. The historical film needs to rely on enough historical material to reproduce the thickness of its history, but historical facts do not need to be authenticated by a historical film. In other words, the historical film is a derivative of the historical material with an artistic component.

Thirdly, the classification of the historical film's properties. It uses the degree of involvement and the nature of participation in 'history' as a criterion to determine its attributes, and to draw a line between this and documentary films. A good historical film must present history in an appropriate way; a film that boasts a high level of historical content is not necessarily a good historical film, and the merits of a historical film must be judged on the basis of a combination of historical material and artistic expression.

It is not just a cold review of history, but a blend of contemporary deconstruction and restructuring of history, giving historical events a contemporary meaning. The film is not just a cold retrospective, but a blend of contemporary deconstruction and reorganisation of history, giving contemporary meaning to historical events.

Intercultural communication of national and ethnic images

It is not easy for a historical film, which is slightly scientific and unentertaining, to appeal to audiences in the contemporary cinema market. Such a question is also an ontological one that has always been explored in the aesthetics of cinema, namely that the art of cinema should infect audiences through a system of softened images rather than force them. One of the tasks of the historical film is to export the history of the country to the world in a soft way, and to bring about a magical experience of cross-cultural exchange. In other words, there are two things that historical films must do if they are to achieve a positive communication of the image of the country and its people.

The first is the search for universal values across cultures. Differences in culture and values are unavoidable in intercultural communication and are an important

obstacle to all intercultural communication. For countries with a strong cultural discourse, the search for universal cultural values is like a hidden task planted in the creation while shaping national cultural differences. If we look at film production in the world's major film-producing countries, we can see that almost all commercial films in Hollywood, for example, have a role in shaping the 'soft image' of national culture. "Individualism", "independent spirit" and "liberalism" are omnipresent in the value output of Hollywood films, and it cannot be denied that these "American spirits", which have full universal value, have been the subject of many years of debate. The "American spirit" has continued to influence the values of young people and even adults in many countries around the world for many years. If the news is clearly ideologically different, then the ideology of films and other literary works is relatively subtle or even weak.

Secondly, the entertainment of universal values. Hollywood is an empire of commercial cinema, and profit is one of the main objectives of its output, which inevitably makes its films entertaining. The ubiquitous propaganda of the "American Dream" in the films is mixed with the sugar coating of entertainment, which insidiously crosses the cultural barriers between countries. Even in the case of Eastern and Western cultures, which are very different from each other, the American cultural ideology is still able to run rampant.

It cannot be denied that the US has created a textbook image and ideology of the country through its films, and in doing so has secured the largest share of the international cultural market. Audiences around the world have been convinced by the "American spirit" represented by Forrest Gump, Shawshank and various superheroes, and in the process of this conviction, the US has achieved its economic and political goals, building the "American spirit" into the public consciousness again and again. In this process, the United States achieved its economic objectives and political goals, building the "American spirit" into the public consciousness again and again. Many viewers have never been to the United States, but are more or less familiar with it, and are even keen to analyse it. It is in this process that the image of America as a nation and a people becomes known to audiences.

Back to the historical film, this type of film is a historical recreation and cultural awakening of the country, an awakening and transmission of national memory, as well as a cross-cultural transmission of ethnography. This form of ethnography is three-dimensional, vivid and multi-faceted, and is evocative of the image of the nation and persuasive of the image of the country. It can even be said that films going abroad and having an international impact can be directly related to the construction and dissemination of a nation's image, and occupy an important place in the evaluation system of a nation's cultural image.

2.2 The creation of Belarusian historical cinema

2.2.1 Overview of Belarusian historical cinema

Historical films are the starting point of Belarusian film production and the main subject of film output. As early as 1926, *The Story of the Forest* was about the partisan struggle of the Belarusian people during the civil war, with revolutionary historical themes typical of the Stalinist narrative tradition of the "heroic genealogy". Since then Belarus has followed the Soviet Communist-dominated ideology of literary creation until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when Belarusian filmmaking became completely independent.

Due to its unique national history and Soviet dominance, Belarusian historical cinema is based on the dramatic events of the 20th century, including the October Revolution, World War I, World War II and the Chernobyl nuclear accident. As the main battleground in the Second World War, the battles, heroes and events of the Patriotic War (Soviet-German War) have rightly become the creative matrix. Whether it is individual or collective memory, the desire to express the national trauma of a suffering nation is inevitable. Of course, history and historical memory often present two different faces: history is based on the objective 'past', while historical memory tends to selectively and purposefully construct and narrate the 'past' according to current ideas, interests and needs [17,p119-127]. Especially after the Second World War, when the Soviet Union and the Western world were engaged in a 'war of memory' over a range of issues from the Second World War, the shaping of historical memory became central to the creativity of all filmmakers.

During the Soviet period, the production of revolutionary history continued until the Second World War, when the war forced a hiatus. Film production resumed in the 1950s, but by this time the focus in the Belarus region had shifted towards the production of children's films. Some of the historical films produced before the collapse of the Soviet Union were not comparable to the standard of production and output of children's films. It was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Belarusian film studios were given full freedom to produce their own films, that the genre diversified, including a resurgence of historical films. It was not limited to the 'memory-making' of the Patriotic War, but directors began to deal with non-positive historical subjects such as Chernobyl and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Of all the historical subjects, Chernobyl is undoubtedly the other one that has received the most attention. As the most widespread and profoundly man-made disaster in human history, it has inevitably invited numerous artists to re-examine its historical situation, to draw attention to its relationship with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to reflect on the lessons to be drawn from it.

In short, Belarus was the victim of a passive experience of theatrical events in the 20th century. All this nation can do is to preserve the story and tell future generations about the suffering their ancestors endured. In this there is both bravery and loyalty.

2.2.2 Belarusian historical cinema - World War II

The Patriotic War has always been the focus of Belarusian cinema, and the 1950s, in the immediate aftermath of the war, were a time of dogmatism and personal superstition. Belarusian film studios followed the highest Soviet ideological directives and adapted the military facts of the Patriotic War. In addition, the realistic war film and the children's film have always been the favourite genres of Belarusian directors. The combination of these two genres has had a "one plus one" effect in the history of Belarusian cinema.

In the 1950s, the Belarusian film studio Lev Golub directed *The Girl in Search of Her Father*, based on the story of the same name by Kastus Hubarevich. The film is a unique Belarusian innovation in the genre of children's films with military themes, or an extension of military historical films to children's films, as opposed to the traditional military-historical genre, in which the narrative subject is completely replaced by children as the protagonists in a war context. The film is set against the backdrop of the "guerrilla war" of the recent Patriotic War, and is a reflection on the war, recreating the world war as seen by ordinary people through the eyes of children. The film contains all the elements expected of a military historical film, such as chases, shoot-outs, guerrilla warfare, patriotism, etc. All the apparent killings and crimes are turned into playful banter. But the transformation of the bloody and horrific scenes of war from a child's point of view does not diminish people's distaste for war; "laughter with tears" is the ultimate goal of the film's creators.

This was followed by *The Street of the Little Son* (Улица младшего сына) (1962) and *The Brave Five* (Пятёрка отважных) (1970), both of which adopted the 'children's film + military history' format. Just as Chaplin's stick-figure banter reflects the harsh realities of the capitalist meat grinder, it is the purity of a child's heart that reflects the human greed of war. As a fusion of cinematic art forms, this type of film has a significant artistic value in the history of Belarusian cinema.

At this time military-themed historical films began a four-decade long production run with *The Third Rocket* (Третья ракета) (1963), *Through the Cemetery* (Через кладбище) (1964), *Man Doesn't Give Up* (1960), *The Ballad of the Mountain* (Альпийская баллада) (1965), *Wolfsrudel* (1975), *Black Birch* (ЧЕРНАЯ БЕРЕЗА) (1977), *Signs of Trouble* (Знак беды) (1986). These are all masterpieces of the period.

Go See for Yourself (Иди и смотри) (1985) is undeniably the pinnacle of Belarusian cinema at the end of the Soviet era. As mentioned earlier, this was a time when Soviet war cinema was transitioning from heroic hymns and collectivism to rational thought, and when Belarusian cinema was at the height of its obsession with children's films, so this film is one of the very few successful fusions and innovations of Belarusian and Soviet pioneering cinematic ideas. Of course, it draws on poetic cinematography and reflections on war, but it is a far cry from previous humanitarian war films such as *Here Comes the Silence of Dawn* and *They Fought for the Fatherland*, which focused on 'small events' and 'small people'. These films follow a

traditional narrative framework. These films follow a traditional narrative framework and have a collective idealism, which can be described as a kind of collectivism with a small expression of individuality, while "See for Yourself" has a more "individual point of view" of spiritual images. However, in contrast to the more purely poetic films such as *The Flight of the Wild Geese*, *What Happens to a Man*, *The Soldier's Song* and *Ivan's Childhood*, *Go See for Yourself* undoubtedly surpasses the brutality of the former in its depiction of the side effects of war, nor does it have the aim of being a film that should be like a lyric poem. Its content, form and style lie roughly between traditional Soviet 'socialist realist' cinema and Tarkovsky, and it is a very independent being.

The film has long been described as 'the most brutal war film ever made'. In fact, there is not much direct gore, no focus on any frontal battlefield, and no panoramic view of the soldiers or the people, meaning that the director is never interested in deliberately creating a 'visual pain' for the senses. However, behind the "mild" screen images, the sadness and fear of war lingers in the depths of memory. This is due to director Elem Klimov's use of group close-ups, which are a particular artistic structure in this film (Figure 2.1; Figure 2.2; Figure 2.3; Figure 2.4).

The actors are constantly looking into the camera, and the camera is no longer hidden behind the scene. Although this is not strictly "breaking the fourth wall", the audience is no longer "viewing" or "peeking" at the lives of the actors from God's perspective, but rather The constant downgrading is a process of emotional bridging and empathy. The closer the viewer gets to the characters, the deeper the shadows of human purgatory become engraved. In any case, the unique language of the camera, the sharpness of the avant-garde, and the form of expression that lies between realism and poetic aesthetics, make this film the most complete work of Belarusian cinema in the Soviet period.



Figure 2.1 – Staged photo1



Figure 2.2 – Staged photo2



Figure 2.3 – Staged photo3



Figure 2.4 –Staged photo4

When the 1990s came, Belarusian cinema separated itself from the Soviet system and began to produce its own films, with 1995's *from hell to hel* (Из ада в ад) being the first attempt at the historical subject of war. Set against the backdrop of the occupation of Poland in 1941, the film centres the narrative on a Jewish family and the upbringing of a young Jewish girl by a Polish family. The narrative theme is quite polysemous and does not dwell on the joy of human peace after the victory in World War II. The little girl, as a Jew growing up in a Polish family, is not spared the destruction of the Jews in the wider context of the times, but returns from the hothouse-like Polish family to the Jewish family and becomes a witness to the massacre. The film does not end with a happy ending like the one most often used in Hollywood, where the Jew and the girl do not reconcile with the "anti-Semitic" society. From the moment she leaves her Polish parents' home, the girl becomes an ethnic victim of the same "anti-Semitic" attacks as her Jewish mother. This unhappy ending is perhaps the film-maker's most desperate protest against "anti-Semitism". The artistic quality of the film as a whole is not outstanding, but the different perspectives of Belarusian filmmakers on the war are evident.

Moreover, war and love are two of the most regrettable situations in life, where the most beautiful human emotions are born out of the most brutal circumstances, which are often the best scenarios for discussing the simultaneous existence of human rationality, irrationality and inferiority, and are the focus of Belarusian cinema. This is also in line with the Belarusian narrative tradition, which has a clear memory of the details of war, where family, love, strategic mistakes, the lives of animals, etc. are all expressed in their films, without being bound to the hailing of a great victorious battle. *More about the war* (Еще о войне) (2004), *Chacren and Rumba* (ЧАКЛЮН И РУМБА) (2007), *Dnepr Border* (2009) are all expressions of love in the midst of war. Whether it is love destroyed in the midst of war or emotions budding in the midst of war, the scenes of war in these films are merely a prologue; it is the placement of human emotions that is a philosophical proposition worth discussing. It is the national identity of the Belarusians that determines their passion for discussing emotional growth in a hostile environment and their ability to reflect on the dehumanising effects of violence.

In addition to national independent productions, co-productions are also an important part of Belarusian filmmaking. Films on the theme of the Patriotic War include *red cherry* (Красная вишня) (1995), *Height 89* (2006), *Franz + Polina* (2006), *Enemy* (2007), *Soldier* (2018) and many others, most of which were made in collaboration with Russia, although there were also a number of co-productions with Ukraine, Poland, Germany and other countries. *Brest Fortresst* (2010) is one of the most successful and internationally influential films of recent years.

The film is based on the Soviet writer Sergei Sergeyevich Smirnov's documentary of the same name, completed in 1957 and updated in 1964, which was

made into the Soviet film "*Fortress*" in 1957. The film is based on the story of the undeclared German war. The film begins with the undeclared war by the Germans, takes place from the point of view of the protagonist, Peter Kreba, and ends with the complete fall of the fortress and the destruction of all the Soviet troops defending it. In fact, for a long time people have been used to seeing films about war heroes, and it is rare to see a film depicting a battle that has been taken, even if it was defeated.

There is no denying that, based on a novel written in 1957, the film is inevitably heavily ideological. The storytelling is weak and the war scenes are the main focus of the film, which is shot in the manner of a Hollywood commercial blockbuster. In short, this is not a literary film that discusses human nature to any great extent, but a commercial film that recreates history and speaks to the brutality of war.

2.2.3 Belarusian historical cinema - Chernobyl

Firstly, there is no getting around the fundamental issue of 'location' for a film on Chernobyl. As most of the Chernobyl exclusion zone is still closed off by the government and the amount of radiation in some areas can cause serious damage to humans, it is extremely dangerous to go to the site of the accident and shoot on location. As a result, most films and TV productions on Chernobyl have relied on set construction and special effects, which inevitably increases the cost and difficulty of filming.

Chernobyl is currently the subject of relatively few films in Belarusian cinema, with *The Black Stork* (Чёрный аист) (1993), *Atomic Zone Ranger* (1999), *I Remember* (Я помню) (2005) and *Control Zone* (Запретная зона) (2020). None is more talked about than this last one, a Belarusian-Russian collaboration that followed the American drama Chernobyl in creating a wave of local interest in Chernobyl.

The film has a similar plot to previous films on the same subject, with several young men breaking into Chernobyl surrounded by empty buildings, abandoned dolls on the floor, a stalled Ferris wheel and the constant barking of wild dogs, surrounded by partners who are constantly in trouble or even disappearing. The director tries to portray a mysterious killer, to make the youngsters in the forbidden zone feel self-conscious and suspicious of each other, thus expressing a kind of human inferiority and the absurdity of reality, and almost all the elements and patterns of a thriller are present in this film. It is easy to see that this film is an attempt by Belarus and Russia to get closer to the production standards of Hollywood. Unfortunately, the addition of many thriller elements does not play into the horror that is characteristic of Chernobyl and would have had a similarly terrifying effect if the story had been re-set in a derelict building or an old mansion hidden by a mist.

In response to the imperfect outcome of *Control Zone*, Belarusian filmmakers should wonder whether being in a real Chernobyl disaster zone should follow Hollywood in making commercial films of this sort. Chernobyl is a vast subject with

political greed, human ignorance, God's compassion and torn values behind it - a creative mother lode with many themes. The creation of this should not stop at pleasing the audience and the market's curiosity, and Alekseevich is a good example of this in literature.

Belarus is more familiar with documentary filmmaking on Chernobyl than with the constraints of drama filmmaking. Along with the scientific exploration of the exclusion zone by Belarusian scientists, a constant stream of film crews entered together to make films about it during this period. Most of the films take the form of true accounts, with 2011's "*Chernobyl Radioactive Wolves*" (Радиоактивные волки Чернобыля) released on the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident. The film follows a scientific team as they ascertain the extent of the effects of radiation on animals, observe possible phenomena in the natural world abandoned by humans, and film the majority of the large animals living in the exclusion zone, recreating the real ecological recovery of the exclusion zone objectively.

The Chernobyl documentary is not a new subject for Belarusian audiences, but for more European, American or Asian audiences it is still the only way to satisfy a sense of unknown territory and history.

2.3 The creation of Chinese historical cinema

2.3.1 Overview of Chinese historical cinema

The history of China contains ancient, modern and contemporary histories. The historical themes of different generations are reflected in the creation of Chinese historical films with great variation. They can be broadly divided into three categories according to the material taken.

- 1) Costume films that tell the ancient pre-history of China.
- 2) Revolutionary historical films that tell the story of the modern revolutionary wars.
- 3) Biographical films about historical figures.

The development of Chinese cinema has always followed the trend of modern Chinese history and can be divided into five stages.

The first stage was after the end of the First World War, when Chinese cinema entered its first industrial period in the 1920s, when the social environment and the industry were ripe and the unprecedented rapid development of national industry and commerce led to the privatization of the Chinese film industry. Zhang Shichuan, Zheng Zhengqiu, Luo Mingyou, Lai Minwei and the Shaw Brothers were among the filmmakers who set up film companies during the cradle of Chinese cinema. Marked by the establishment of Star in 1922, the number of film companies grew rapidly, reaching a peak in 1924 - 1926. Star, Tianyi and Lianhua multiplied into a triumvirate. One of them, Tianyi, was mainly engaged in the production of "barnyard films" and "mystery films". The "barnyard films" of this period were the prototypes of costume films or historical films, such as "The Painful History of Liang Zhu", "The Legend of

the White Snake" and "Meng Jiang Nu", starring Hu Die in 1926, which were based on folk tales, classical novels and traditional operas and songs. definition. However, Jin Yimeng, a scholar of historical films from this period, mentioned in his study on the postmodern representation of Chinese historical films since the new century that most audiences at the time preferred works that were more detached from real life in terms of aesthetic preference, and that historical films were loved by audiences because of their contrasting story settings and costumes and scenes[53]. However, due to commercial factors such as the box office, historical stories were presented in an entertaining manner, and therefore a lot of drama or folklore was included to satisfy the audience's curiosity.

The second stage was during the Second World War, when the 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of the left-wing movement under the influence of the Second World War, and the left-wing cinema movement as an offshoot of it quickly attracted patriots to join the movement and led to the emergence of the "soft cinema" and "hard cinema". This led to a debate between "soft cinema" and "hard cinema". This debate was fought between left-wing film critics and soft filmmakers over the nature of film art, content and form, artistry and tendency, and the benchmarks of criticism. The debate ended with the marginalisation of the soft film critics' discourse, as their "ivory tower" ideas ran counter to the socio-political environment of the time, the nationalist cinema of the national government and the ideas of the emerging film movement. The overall trend of Chinese cinema at this time was to shift away from the 'entertainment' of the twentieth century and towards the 'transmission of ideas', with historical films being popular among film-makers for their ability to 'draw on the past to satirise the present'. Historical films were popular with film makers because of their ability to "draw on the past to satirise the present". For example, the 1940 film *Confucius*, directed by Femu, was a great success. The film uses the historical figure of Confucius to convey the political views of its creator's time, with the aim of educating the audience. "It cannot be denied that Chinese cinema during this period attracted a large number of left-wing intellectuals and received a great deal of financial support from the government, and took a great step forward in terms of technical innovation and artistic achievement.

The third stage was the period from 1949 to 1966, after the founding of New China. This period is known to film historians as the "Seventeen Years" period. As a result, the two most important creative genres were the anti-security thriller, which focused on the detection of Kuomintang spies, and the minority films, which expressed national unity. In order to promote our nationalism and the image of a great ancient nation historical themes were also one of the themes of this period. Two types of material were included: 1 - the pre-history of China's modern revolutionary history, such as *Li Shizhen*, *Song Jingshi*, *Lin Zexu* and *The Sino-Japanese War*, which expressed the accumulation of social difficulties in modern China under feudal autocracy, the shame of national invasion and the resistance of the people to

imperialism; 2 - revolutionary historical themes, with output reaching 87% of the total number of historical-themed films in the 17 years of cinema [22,p46]. Revolutionary historical themes present more visually the important war periods such as World War I, World War II, the Communist civil war and the resistance to the United States and Korea, as well as the story of the Chinese Communist Party leading the people to pile up the three mountains of feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism, focusing on the expression of heroism, optimism, collectivism and revolutionary humanism. Historical films of this period brought battlefields to the big screen under a strong ideology to achieve political propaganda significance. In contrast to these two historical film genres, historical-related costume films fell into a years-long silence after the early years of the founding of the country with *Red House Two Yo* and *Colourful Phoenix Double Fly*, which were made by two private companies, Cathay and Datong [40,p24-28]. It was not until 1956-1959 that Shanghai, the birthplace of the Chinese costume genre, produced a series of costume films, including *The Story of Qiu Weng's Encounter with the Immortals*, *The Legend of Lin Chong*, *The Legend of Lu Ban*, and *Master Qiao's Sedan Chair*, that this series of costume films broke away from the political directive of the "Seventeen Years Period", and instead of forcing political education into the films, chose to tell an interesting folk tale.

The fourth stage was the Cultural Revolution period. At this time, historical films were mainly about revolutionary themes, and all film production was integrated into the production of "model plays". The emergence of the "model play" represented the peak of the will of power over literary and artistic works, and all of China's literary and artistic creations during this period were caught up in the whirlpool of "politics and class struggle".

The fifth stage began in the late 1970s. At this time, the third, fourth and fifth generations of Chinese film directors took to the creative stage in turn. Especially since the 21st century, the technical and stylistic differentiation of Chinese cinema as a whole has become prominent. More filmmakers subscribe to the idea that the symbolic image of cinema cannot be equated with reality, and as for historical films, they are no longer limited to the single telling or changing of a historical story, but tend to diversify and subjectively express themselves from the selection of content to artistic forms. In Cai Xianfu's "Historical Film and Television Works and the Public's Psychological Demands", it is mentioned that "it is not easy for ordinary people to understand history, nor is it necessary for them to study and research history as scholars do, and what ordinary people need more in their daily lives is entertainment. In the age of consumption, consumption and enjoyment are already part of the new aesthetic concept of the masses; therefore, only by secularising, popularising and entertaining history, and giving the masses sensual satisfaction, can their interest in serious history be aroused" [48,p11-12]. This creative consciousness sprang from the 20th century

costume films to the new century when it was more widely applied to historical films in the broadest sense. However, this creative phenomenon was not the first to be applied to modern Chinese cinema, but was used in a variety of ancient Chinese literary forms. For example, ancient Chinese storytelling and theatre were used to some extent to 'entertain' historical stories and to play on serious history to appeal to audience preferences. In the early days of Chinese cinema, Chinese filmmakers were already drawing from operatic works, so in the first costume films and later historical films, Chinese filmmakers were skilled at adding wild history and folklore to add to the mystery of the plot.

2.3.2 Chinese historical cinema - the creative characteristics of costume cinema

A distinction needs to be made here between costume films and historical films in the traditional sense; they are not exactly equivalent. We can distinguish between the two through the explanations given by scholars of Chinese film history. In the Dictionary of Chinese and Foreign Film and Television, edited by Wang Liu, it is stated that, unlike historical films, costume films are defined as a genre of films in which the means of cinematic expression rework ancient popular fiction, opera stories and folklore [27]. In the History of Chinese Cinema, edited by Li Shaobai, vintage films are defined as films that "in the early period were mostly based on historical and legendary tales and classical novels, as opposed to the fashion films that represented modern life with different costumes" [41,p45]. In the light of the "historical film debate" of 1926-1927 and the definition of this subject matter by academics in the early history of Chinese cinema, the ancient costume film is generally defined differently from the historical film, but the internal logic of the two is not denied.

In the author's view, it is films about ancient life or pre-history that take a broader range of material, are less rigorous and more entertaining than historical films. Compared to epic films, costume films are not about the grand production of big scenes or necessarily about the great achievements of ancient heroes. Compared to historical films in the popular sense of the word in other countries, costume films are a uniquely Chinese commercial genre that represents ancient China. Its scope and expression overlap with, but are not identical to, those of historical films in the broad sense, and can be understood as a distinctive branch of Chinese historical cinema.

The 1920s

The 1920s saw the first rise of costume films, the first commercial boom in Chinese cinema, and the first commercial genre in China. As the film market at the time was largely monopolised by the United States, Chinese production companies had to stay in the lower class cinemas, and the mainstream audience, which patronised the lower class cinemas, was of low financial and cultural level, and was influenced by traditional Chinese literature and art, preferred stories with a complete narrative, twists and turns, closed structure and strong characters. In this case, only dramas based on

folk tales and wild histories could satisfy their entertainment needs. For example, the 'Four Great Legends of Ancient Chinese Folk Tales' - *The Legend of the White Snake*, *The Cowherd and the Weaving Maiden*, *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, and *Meng Jiang Niu*.

Generally speaking, early Chinese costume films drew on the creative experience of both China and abroad. Internally, they drew from the history of the tales, the play, and the theatre, taking on the classical Chinese narrative system and relying on the unique Chinese religious system and folk and civic culture. Externally, it learns from the Hollywood narrative formula and works with the narrative reading stereotype familiar to Chinese audiences, i.e. a stable story structure and an easy-to-understand plot, resulting in a costume film with a "Chinese gene" and a fixed pattern of assembly lines. It was an effective way of communicating with audiences at the time and was a guarantee that a commercial film would sell. For example, "*Liu Guan Zhang defeats the Huangjin*", "*Three Kingdoms - Cao Cao's Forced Palace*" and "*Three Kingdoms - The Seven Captures of Meng Huo*" based on the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. And "*Sun Xing Ren vs. the Money Leopard*", "*Journey to the West - Sun Wukong's Great Trouble in Heaven*" and "*The Red Boy Comes of Age*" based on *the Journey to the West*, all showed a simple, formulaic production model in the early stages of film development.

In order to satisfy the audience's demand for entertainment, the film production company would also add fantasy plots such as superhuman magic, sword and sorcery, etc. to give the audience the visual enjoyment of being in a world of chaos and spectacle. Themed with the addition of some of the plots of helping the strong and the weak, the good and the evil were rewarded, and the difficult times of China's internal and external problems gave the audience some spiritual support. For example, *The Dream of Qingxu*, a film by the Film Department of the Commercial Press, was adapted from *The Taoist Priest of Laoshan* in *Title of a Collection of Bizarre Stories* by *Pu Songling of The Qing Dynasty*, and tells the story of "a Taoist scholar whose greed for money leads to the complete failure of the Taoist arts he has learned"[8,p19].

Of course, most costume films at this time lacked professional historical evidence, which directly led to a lack of precision in grasping the specific plot of historical events, and there were even elements of historical parody in them. Coupled with the lack of regulation and rational competition in the market, and with the studios' main aim of mass production and quick shooting and screening for profit, costume films entered a vicious circle of high production and low quality after a brief period of unprecedented creative prosperity. This also provided a precedent for how Chinese commercial films would later develop on a large scale and into a system.

The 'Island' Period in Shanghai

Between the loss of Shanghai in November 1937 and the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, Shanghai entered a period of 'isolation', when the political,

economic and social environment often changed the standards and methods of artists and their work recorded the material and spiritual activities of a generation. An interesting phenomenon in the country's cinematography during this period was the struggle between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party to use cinema as a means of ideological domination, shifting the main task of Chinese cinema to match the war effort to the theme of "resistance to war". If one were to assume that the policy would have supported the emergence of a large number of realistic anti-war titles, the number of such films was actually not as high as one might expect throughout the middle of the war.

According to a statistical survey conducted by the Chinese Educational Film Association on the national production of films between 1937 and 1940, the four years following the start of the war did not see the majority of films in the true sense of the word, but rather a significant increase in the number of costume, mystery and wuxia films around 1939. The entertainment function of cinema was brought into play during the war, as people took refuge in the ivory tower of the cinema to relieve stress and numb their nerves in the serious and tense environment of the war. At the same time, the film industry regulated supply and demand according to the market, ushering in the second commercial climax of Chinese cinema by virtue of the special wartime demand.

On 9 December 1938, Shanghai's Translation, Herald and Huamei Morning Post jointly published a letter from 51 editors and writers entitled "A Letter to the Shanghai Film Industry", which clearly and seriously stated that "isolated island cinema" adhered to the principles of patriotism and democracy and criticism[11]. At this time, Chinese filmmakers on the "isolated island" created a series of historical films based on traditional Chinese stories, using ancient characters and historical events as a metaphor for the present, implicitly expressing their determination to win the war against Japan. *Mulan's Army* is based on the story of Hua Mulan, an ancient Chinese heroine who fought for her elderly father in the battlefield. The film revolves around national justice and patriotism, implicitly expressing the wartime ideology of expelling the Tartars and serving the country.

In addition, with the introduction of foreign film technology and the development of domestic technology, this commercial wave saw the more widespread emergence of sound films. The intervention of sound subverted the narrative mode of silent films and was the biggest difference from the first commercial climax. Sound technology was also used in *Mulan from the Army*, where dialogue and subtitles allow the audience to understand character relationships more clearly. The increased narrative power weakens the traces of the exaggerated acting style taken over from opera in silent films, which is one of the signs of the maturing of Chinese film language and narrative style. In addition, other historical costume films of this period include *Wu Zetian*, *Liang Hongyu*, *Confucius*, *Chu Ba Wang*, *Su Wu Shepherd*, *Yue Fei Dutiful to the Nation*, etc. Compared to the 1920s, these films already had the initial

characteristics of a historical drama, i.e. the scripts were written according to the Twenty-four Histories, official sources and the mainstream viewpoint, with specific, real historical heroes and events as the objects of expression. The plays were written according to the official sources and the mainstream viewpoints of the Twenty-four Histories, with specific, real historical heroes and events as the objects of expression, supplemented by appropriate artistic processing from the real viewpoint[32]. It can be said that at this time, historical costume films were already consciously created on the basis of historical facts, i.e. they insisted on the primacy of historical existence and the second nature of the artistic creation process, in contrast to the previous practice of the costume film of arbitrarily falsifying history and subverting historical facts.

The two commercial climaxes of the film industry before the founding of New China in the creation of historical themes embodied the national self-identity of Chinese people in images in the new cultural era, and although this attempt was limited by the time and the industry's own shortcomings and eventually fell into a "bottleneck", it was still a successful attempt and innovation in early Chinese genre cinema.

The "Seventeen Years" Period

With the founding of New China, Chinese cinema went through the ups and downs of the "Seventeen Years" period, the Cultural Revolution and the New Era along with the political situation. The guiding ideology of the principles With the victory of the New Democratic Revolution, the once vociferous consciousness of film for national salvation came to an end, and the guiding ideology of this congress logically became the creative philosophy of film art at the time. Filmmakers from the former National Unification Area and the liberated areas formed the first group of film creators in the Republic, and under the uncertain political climate of a new regime, no one ever told these film artists how to create the films of a new era. They could only continue some of their previous creative ideas, relying on their accumulated artistic experience to test their knowledge through practice, just as they had done in the past.

It was not until the first historical film after the founding of New China, *The Legend of Wu Xun*, that the industry and the nation were first shaken. The film is based on Wu Xun, a man who "begged and raised a school" in the late Qing Dynasty, and is therefore regarded as "a pioneer of modern Chinese civilian schooling". The director, Sun Yu, follows the narrative strategy of pre-state historical films, highlighting the characters' traditional character of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trust", and bringing to the screen the story of the struggle of the common man who set up a righteous school without any desire for fame or fortune.

The film's use of metaphorical montage to render emotions, contrasting montage to show conflict and scenes to distinguish the inner activities of the characters is of great aesthetic value. It provoked a major public outcry after its release in 1951. "Wu Xun typifies the sublime quality of the hard work and bravery and wisdom of the Chinese nation"; "The name Wu Xun should be a banner of the great working people,

the attempt of this class to turn over from culture, in the history of China"; "To say that he was a revolutionary archetype is of course even more unacceptable, if we say that he was a wise organizer of a righteous school accustomed to resilient warfare, which is permissible, because that is the real Wu Xun"[45]. "The revolutionary significance of Wu Xun's schooling was somewhat the same as that of the Tianping Tianguo - both for the liberation of the working people, but with one emphasis on revolutionary armament and the other on popular culture and education" [56, p102]. It can be seen that in the early days of the film's release, the community's assessment of the film was relatively objective, realistic, positive, and within the realm of academic discussion.

In a literary environment full of political ideology, director Sun Yu tried his best to present the old-time intellectuals as anti-feudal and to highlight the revolutionary spirit of the new democratic revolution against the "Three Great Mountains". It can be realised that these 'anthropomorphic' changes are not so much for the sake of artistic creation, but more for the sake of gaining political leeway and seeking room for artistic creation within politics. Despite all these efforts, five months after the release of *The Legend of Wu Xun*, Mao Zedong himself wrote a public criticism of the film in the People's Daily, "*The discussion of the film should be taken seriously*". In a reversal of his previous pertinent positive attitude, he dismissed it out of hand. The commentary reads: "People like Wu Xun... do not touch a single hair of the feudal economic base or the superstructure at all, but instead fervently propagate feudal culture... To admit or tolerate such glorification is to admit or tolerate the vilification of the peasant revolutionary struggle... It shows the extent of the ideological confusion in our cultural circles!" In this editorial, Wu Xun's refusal to use violence against the feudalist ruling class was intolerable, even as an ancient man constrained by historical limitations. All of the director's 'anthropomorphic' changes, such as throwing the emperor's yellow coat to the ground to express his disdain for feudalism, do not meet the standards of the period.

The old-fashioned film, once a metaphor for loyalty and patriotism, became an unworkable subject in the Republic, but it triggered the first literary and artistic criticism of the new China, and became a turning point in the development of Chinese literature and art during this period. It can be said that the criticism of *The Legend of Wu Xun* was the result of the will of the country's highest revolutionary leader to dictate the positioning of literary works and to shape the creation of historical films throughout the '17 years'.

The early Chinese costume films were mostly based on the "lone wolf" model of Hollywood cinema, with biographies as the narrative structure of a "heroic drama", typical of individual heroism. After the founding of the state, China, under the influence of its alliance with the Soviet Union, borrowed and copied political and literary theories. The Soviet government was also very supportive of Chinese literature and art, so Chinese cinema was copied from the Soviet Union in every way, from

models to ideas. A paradox emerged in the creation of the typical character, according to Soviet theory: "Typicality is the basic scope of the expression of party spirit in realist art, and the question of typicality is at all times a political question. This eloquently illustrates the characteristics of realist art and specifies that literary art must create typical characters with distinctive personalities if it is to accomplish the task of educating people with socialism." [11,p283]. However, no historical figure can meet such a standard under the requirements of this standard of literary creation under the test of "true history". Therefore, in order to solve this problem, the traditional heroic image with its historical limitations can only be recast as a 'karisma archetype', i.e. an original and sacred model of discourse in a given society that represents the central value system and is charismatic in its own right, acting as a model and becoming a pivotal or central structural element in the social structure. It is a central structural element and a powerful vehicle for the implementation of moral conflict [16,p305]. The heroic figure in the film is thus required to overcome his own shortcomings and historical limitations and become a 'super figure' with a revolutionary heart that transcends reality.

In the wake of *The Legend of Wu Xun*, filmmakers have learned from their predecessors and have taken great pains to select scripts and portray characters. The greatest test for directors was how to express their artistic vision and at the same time achieve political redemption during the "17 years" period. Even so, four historical costume films, *Song Jing Shi*, *The Sino-Japanese War*, *Li Shizhen* and *Lin Zexu*, were produced.

As a result, almost all historical films in early New China practised the spirit of New Democracy, transforming historical figures who belonged to the feudal society into people's heroes who were worthy of being set as benchmarks by the people, in line with the universal values of New China. Film creators had to both follow mainstream values in seeking political patronage and to shape classics through artistic concepts.

The New Period - The 1980s

After the traumatic periods of the "Seventeen Years" and the "Cultural Revolution" in the early years of the country, Chinese filmmakers have finally reached another peak in the creation of historical films after the 1930s.

The "New Period" is a commonly accepted concept of the post-Cultural Revolution period in China. We can clearly see the trajectory of historical themes in the 1980s by following the creative time of the New Period: 1981-1986, with the realistic biographies of *Bi Sheng*, *Li Qingzhao*, *Li Bing*, *Zhang Heng*, *Tan Sitong* and *Sun Yat-sen*; 1986-1989, with the commercial historical films *The Last Empress*, *The Two Empress Dowagers* and *The Last Imperial Concubine*. court films with a slightly mock-historical connotation.

These films show the gradual abandonment of old ideologies and the reintroduction of new ideologies and humanism. The directors involved in the new

period were educated in film theory at professional institutions before the Cultural Revolution, and spent ten years in the Cultural Revolution until they began to work independently afterwards. He began to direct films independently after the Cultural Revolution. As a result, their creative work was "people-oriented, seeing things in people", i.e. recognising the value and dignity of human beings, treating them as human beings and not as tools, and retaining a critical realist ideology. They began to try to dismantle such "Karisma" heroes as Lin Zexu and Deng Shichang during the "Seventeen Years" period, and did not revive the Hollywood-style heroes, but chose such ancient cultural celebrities as Zhang Heng, Li Bing and Li Qingzhao, using a documentary aesthetic to show a gentle humanism. The film uses a documentary aesthetic to reveal a gentle humanistic approach. The film also uses an open-ended, spatially spanning dramatic structure to integrate the idealistic narrative of "talent and beauty" and "punishment of evil and promotion of good", turning the painful encounters of intellectuals in the political struggle into the encounters of historical figures, forming a "scarred" reflection unique to this generation of filmmakers. The "scars" reflections are unique to this generation of filmmakers.

Reflections on the "scars" were the first important creative link in the new era to emerge from the shadow of the Cultural Revolution, meaning that at the end of the 1980s, Chinese cinema began to return to the attributes of cultural criticism and merchandising, and was integrated into the operation of the market economy. This began a revolution in film aesthetics that lasted nearly a decade and propelled Chinese cinema through an era of spontaneous reflection and improvement, to a certain extent shortening the gap between Chinese and world cinema. It was not until the 1990s that the two value systems of the era, the authority of the political ideology of the "Seventeen Years" and the elite consciousness of the new period, were dissolved.

The New Period - 1990s to the Present

The 1990s ushered in a period of great social change in China, with the full implementation of reform and opening up and the market economy leading to a shift from elite culture to popular culture, and the fifth generation of directors taking full control of the discourse in film production.

This is when the concept of "New Historicism", a literary criticism that originated in the United States in the 1980s, entered the realm of Chinese film production. This concept emphasises the discontinuity and interruptionism of history, and focuses on the reinterpretation of history, which means that it can be reconstructed, parodied and even parodied through "family history", "village history" and "wild history". This means that history can be reconstructed, flirted with, parodied and even subverted and structured through 'family history', 'village history' and 'wild history'. This influenced the creative mode of the second generation of directors to a great extent, and was first reflected in the films of Tian Zhuangzhuang and Chen Kaige, among others. They were keen to dismantle the sense of historical responsibility that

artists carry, and to use their own vision of history to create films about it that neither fully follow nor dramatise it. It can also be described as a kind of costume film that looks like a "historical subject". For example, Chen Kaige's *"The Assassination of King Jing Ke"* and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *"The Great Eunuch Li Lianying"* seem to have a real historical background, but are merely interpretations of the director's inner world in the guise of history. They borrowed the images of famous characters from history, and that's all. Of course, this does not correspond to the definition of a historical film in the popular sense, but is more like a form of costume film.

The fifth generation of directors has explained this reconstructive approach to history by saying that even a proper history such as *The Records of the Grand Historian* can be a story compiled by ancient historians, so if they are making up stories, why can't we? In addition, when Chen Kaige talked about his intention to create *"The Assassination of King Jing Ke"*, he said: "We can't let the thousands of years of Chinese culture be replaced by hamburger culture", which means to break the shackles of traditional storytelling and strengthen the director's inner experience in order to make Chinese cinema more "cinematic". In other words, it is only by breaking the bonds of traditional storytelling and strengthening the director's inner experience that Chinese cinema can become more "cinematic". The classical flavour of the costumes, props and sets greatly satisfies the aesthetic pleasure of the audience, making them linger in the visual feast of antiquity, while a large number of traditional Chinese elements at times reveal the mystery of the ancient East, which is enough to attract international attention.

New historicism has led fifth-generation directors to commit themselves to piecing together stories that express the personal emotions of their creators from the fragments of history and to compete for a voice from mainstream historical narratives, which has also given them the possibility to break through historical stumbles. Under their leadership, the Chinese film market witnessed a commercial feast of costume films that lasted for several years. With *Hero* in 2002 as the starting mark, the new decade was marked by the successive productions of *A City Full of Gold*, *The Night Banquet*, *Confucius* and *The Orphan of Zhao*, as well as the Chinese and Hong Kong co-productions *Red Cliff*, *Ink Attack*, *Mulan* and *Seeing the Dragon*. They came with a mountainous influx of costume extravaganzas, from the Golden Goblet to the Qionglou and the Jade House, from the Golden Witch to the Sword, not only reaping high box office profits, but also injecting horsepower into Chinese cinema internationally. It can be said that historical themes have flourished in the commercial film market with the help of grand narrative images.

The fifth generation of filmmakers in the 1990s had a similar approach to historical themes to that of the early costume films of the 1920s. After nearly a century of theoretical exploration and practice, Chinese filmmakers have inherited the experience of their predecessors and are still obsessed with the creation of spectacle on

the screen, i.e. using "pseudo-historical" stories to create an aesthetic spectacle, using visual spectacle to please the audience, with the box office as the ultimate goal.

This new storytelling in the guise of history has led to the fact that the first decade of the new century has seen the production of almost one blockbuster film on historical themes. Many audiences criticised them for being "unrealistic" and not conforming to what they knew about real historical figures. The discussion of historical films, then, has to return to the old topic of social and commercial value, or the question of film-making and historical authenticity. How can filmmakers maintain a balance between the literary value of historical themes in a commercial film where box office is paramount. Historical films are driven by the box office, by audiences, by capital, and by the desire of film artists to express themselves.

In terms of how to use images to tell historical stories, we can take Mr Fei Mu's *Confucius*, created during the "isolated island" period, as an example, as a film that maintained aesthetic exploration and respect for traditional Chinese culture during the Japanese siege of Shanghai.

In both 2010's *Mulan* and *Confucius*, the contemporary Chinese filmmaker's faithfulness to historical narratives is also occasionally seen. This is more of a partial open narrative than a deconstruction of history, i.e. a reinterpretation of historical events and characters from a contemporary perspective, so that the connotations of the historical events are preserved and the historical and cultural values in the films stand up to scrutiny. By using ancient celebrities like Confucius and Hua Mulan to tell the story of the traditional Chinese core values of family and country and Confucianism, and to express the universal values that Chinese people are willing to accept, the film is also more likely to stay alive in the eyes of the Chinese.

2.3.3 Chinese historical cinema - characteristics of the creation of revolutionary historical cinema

Revolutionary historical films are a genre of films that are uniquely subordinate to historical films in China. The accepted academic definition of the genre is the creation of films based on the revolutionary struggles led by the Party after the Opium War, especially around the time of the founding of the Party in 1921 to the time of the liberation of the country and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The emergence of revolutionary historical themes was the result of a new regime's urgent need to grasp the country's mainstream ideology and national interests, and therefore revolutionary historical material became the inevitable choice of film artists during the "Seventeen Years" period, given both practical and political factors. The film artists' choice was inevitable.

The "Seventeen Years" Period

The four major film studios that produced films after the founding of New China were Changchun Film Studio, Bayi Film Studio, Beijing Film Studio and Shanghai Film Studio, with Changchun Film Studio producing the largest concentration of

revolutionary historical subjects. According to rough statistics, more than 70 revolutionary historical films were made between 1949 and 1991, spanning the period of the Seventeen Years, the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and Opening-up period [20,p34-39].

The protagonists in these films were usually not the individualistic heroes of Hollywood films, but ordinary people who were deeply oppressed by the old society and class enemies and who had a deep hatred of feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism. They do not possess the natural talents or life turnaround of Hollywood superheroes, but rely on the education of the Communist Party and the support of the people to become heroes who belong to and lead the people, for only such a mode of growth is educational and inspiring. Mr. Chen Araki describes it more precisely: "What interests the audience is not that the character you write about is a born hero, but how the character becomes a hero. [18, p105]" This quote can summarise the mode of the film creators in the early days of the new China to portray heroic characters in a progressive manner, i.e. to go through some hardships before the protagonist becomes a hero, and at the end of the road, by setting up the two scenes of "joining the army" and "joining the Party", the film is a good example. The two important rituals of "joining the army" and "joining the Party" are the turning points, and the heroes finally achieve a revolutionary cause through the correct command of the Party. For example, this model is used in *"The Hui People's Detachment"*, *"The Red Lady's Army"* and *"Dong Cunrui"*.

In this model, the birth of the hero also means the dissolution of the individual, the meaning of the individual must be realised through the meaning of the collective, and the hatred of the individual can only be returned through the success of the revolutionary cause. This is well reflected in the first literary work of the new China, *The White Maiden*. The heroine, Xi'er, first has her father killed by a landlord, then is coerced into marrying the landlord, and is forced to hide in the mountains, where years of weather and snow turn her hair white, hence the name White Hairy Girl. In the end, Xi'er gets her revenge by overthrowing the landlords through the revolutionary team that comes to the village. The logic of the whole story revolves around the people regaining their freedom through revolutionary struggle, elevating individual hatred to collective revolution, and the individual love of Xi'er and Dachun to collective love.

As Mr Dai Jinhua puts it, "The search and pursuit of individual lives must be integrated into the class, the collective and the revolutionary ranks if they are not to be mercilessly banished by history, and must be dedicated to the revolution and the Party's cause. In the classic narrative of the seventeen years of revolution, this is by no means a sacrifice or a price; on the contrary, it is the acquisition of values and the proof of life. [23, p280]" These words perfectly sum up the most fundamental connotation of the 17 years of revolutionary historical cinema regarding the portrayal of heroic characters.

In addition to the "nurturing" revolutionary heroes, the film creators often set up

two types of secondary characters to guide and assist the protagonists, namely the "guide" and the "helper". The "guide" is a typical representative of the Communist Party, and this role is created to demonstrate more fully that the birth of a people's hero is dependent on the correct leadership of the Party and the organisation. The "helpers" can come from all walks of life and are there to help the heroes in the course of their tasks. Both of them will help the hero to grow and, if necessary, use the sacrifice of the "guides" to further awaken the hero to the revolutionary cause.

In short, there is a definite tendency to elevate the hero's role under the auspices of mainstream values, and a definite commonality in the hero's role under a unified mode of creation. All of the above constitute the most characteristic features of the revolutionary historical themes of this period.

The Cultural Revolution

Until the advent of the Cultural Revolution, the only genre left in film production was the model play. The term "model drama" was a specific term used during the Cultural Revolution, and originated from a commentary in the People's Daily on 31 May 1967 entitled "An excellent model for revolutionary literature and art", meaning a "model" for theatre art. A film adapted and made from a model play is called a model play film, a genre of film unique to China that links the "Seventeen Years" period with the new period of cinema, and the only genre of film available to the Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution. It takes the narrative model of the "Seventeen Years" period to its extreme, evolving the "Karisma-style" hero into a "tall and big" hero (meaning that the main character is tall, broad-minded and dedicated to serving the people). The "Karisma" hero has been completely transformed into a "tall" hero (meaning that the hero is tall, broad-minded and dedicated to serving the people), with a unified creative model that can be seen everywhere. In general, the characteristics of the times can be interpreted in terms of both narrative mode and characterisation.

Firstly, there are two narrative modes in model opera films: one is the "heroic battle" mode, i.e. revolutionary heroes who are loyal to the Party and admire Chairman Mao endlessly, such as Yan Weicai in *The Strange Attack on the White Tiger Regiment* and Yang Zirong in *The Wise Taking of Weihui Mountain*; the other is the "suffering people turn over a new leaf" mode, i.e. those who suffered during the old society. The other is the model of the "suffering people turning over", that is, the people living at the bottom of the old society turning over to become masters in the fire of the revolution, such as Xi'er in *The White Maiden* and Wu Qiong Hua in *The Red Army of the Maiden*.

Secondly, in terms of characterisation, whether of revolutionary heroes or masters, all the creations were guided by Mao's goal of "pursuing the idealism of a new world for the new man", which was also one of the motives of the Cultural Revolution. In Mao's view, the "new man" should, firstly, focus on his job and learn various things

at the same time, that is, participate in labour and military training, learn engineering, agriculture and the army; secondly, he should "criticise the bourgeoisie". The "New World" refers to "a society based on the class struggle, the restriction and gradual elimination of the division of labour, the restriction and gradual elimination of commodities, a society that is roughly even in distribution, a self-sufficient or semi-self-sufficient, small and closed society." [30,p5]. This set of ideals, based on the ultimate aim of building communism, was both political and literary, ultimately constructing a system of literary aesthetics for the Cultural Revolution period.

Through the elaboration of the blueprint of the 'New World for the New Man', we can imagine a certain tendency that will inevitably emerge when this set of political ideas is applied to the creation of literature and art - the 'three prominences'. By "three prominences", we mean highlighting positive characters among all characters, highlighting heroic characters among positive characters, and highlighting major heroic characters among heroic characters. These heroic figures share several social functions [12, p69-73].

1. the representative function, i.e. representing the proletariat and the oppressed classes in their will to resist and in their demand to turn over and be liberated.

2. the wizard function, i.e. as a wizard who communicates with the gods and a cleric who conveys the oracles of the Saviour, here conveying Mao Zedong's thought and the teachings of the Party

3. the indoctrination function, i.e. as statist, collectivists, ascetics, with no other desires than revolution

4. a devotional function, i.e. as the embodiment of revolutionary heroism and the carrier of revolutionary idealism, fearless in the face of difficulties and even death

5. relief function, i.e. as the executor of Mao Zedong's thought and the will of the Party.

Here it is easy to see that the above paradigm of production achieved the aim of "creating a god" by creating the "perfect hero" on the screen and leading to the "cult of the individual". At this particular time, Chinese audiences had no emotional or ideological barriers to viewing such films and could easily substitute themselves for the heroes. This gave the "model opera film" an aesthetic character of "religious art".

The emergence of the genre was a special phenomenon at a special time in history, and when Chinese film historians evaluate genre films, they usually choose to judge them from a dialectical perspective. Objectively, there is no denying the positive aspects of the model theatre film as a socially-motivated film-going movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which was a combination of compulsory, voluntary and positive responses. In the article "Ten Years of the Peking Opera Revolution" it is written that "the struggle between occupation and counter-occupation in the Peking Opera Revolution was from the very beginning centred around the revolutionary model film The process of the birth of each revolutionary model film has a thrilling

history of struggle [19, p62]. The "model opera film" was marked by the full use of Mandarin and the simplification of the traditional Peking opera stage professional program, constructing a set of universal texts based on modern film technology and art, and creating a wider social effect through the act of nationalised communication [29, p91-102]. This is an important and undeniable contribution to the development of Peking Opera in modern society.

In addition, the 'eight' (the eight most iconic films of the model opera) were shown non-stop for six years before and after the Cultural Revolution, when China's total population of 800 million was almost entirely its audience, with each person seeing an average of three films, making the total number of viewers as high as 2.4 billion. As films that circulated throughout the country, most of them were seen more than once and the number of viewers was immeasurable. So there are inevitably high standards of innovation and practice in terms of the technical and aesthetic values of cinema.

The question of how to bring opera performances to the big screen was the primary issue that film creators needed to address at this time. In this regard, Jiang Qing proposed the two principles of "restoring the stage and raising it above the stage". In order to meet this requirement, the film and television production of opera became the first threshold to be overcome. As a traditional Chinese literary form, opera is comprehensive, virtual and programmatic in nature, which differentiates it from the realistic nature of film. In response, the film's creators used film techniques such as flashbacks and overprinting, and changed the flat scenery of the stage into three-dimensional scenery, while using a large number of "long shots" to ensure that the overall effect of the opera remained unchanged, and through various means to visualise the virtual nature of the opera. In the end, the "model opera film" combines both the "interplay effect" of opera art and the "restoration of material reality" nature of film art. The audience is kept in a state of mind that is both real and unreal for a long time, prompting them to undergo a baptism of the mind and emotions.

When political groups attempt to control the creation of art, the aesthetic values are also tainted with political shadows, and this is no exception in the case of model films. The films are guided by a stereotypical template of artistic creation, resulting in a "false, big and empty" political fantasy that appears on the screen. The two narrative modes of creating "tall and big" characters through the "three prominences" do not create vivid, humanistic classical characters, but rather typical characters without flesh and blood. Instead of telling a story that critiques reality and inspires people to awaken, they tell a highly distorted fairy tale of the regime. It can be said that the failure of the model narrative model lies in the fact that it is "beautiful in its falsity". After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the "model opera film" lost its power and naturally became an obsolete art form.

The New Period - 1980s to 1990s

In December 1978, with the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China as the starting point, the focus of China's work began to shift from everything to the class struggle to economic construction. This signified a watershed in the transformation of ideology and the gradual arrival of an era of pluralistic expression. This shift in ideology was gradually evident in the creation of historical films in the 1980s and 1990s. Here I would like to introduce the concept of "melodramatic cinema", which was first proposed by the Film Bureau during the National Conference on the Creation of Feature Films held in Beijing in February 1997, under the slogan of "highlighting the main theme and insisting on diversity"[26, p23-27]. In the same year, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China approved the establishment of a "Leading Group for the Creation of Films on Major Revolutionary and Historical Subjects". The so-called "main theme" is in fact the mainstream national discourse, representing the most important ideology of a state regime. Under this guidance, Chinese films on revolutionary historical themes from the "Seventeen Years" period gradually took shape in the 1980s, and flourished in the 1990s, influencing the creative trends of the last few years of the last century. The following can be roughly divided into four stages.

The first period: the budding period of historical legend. At this time, the screen narrative of revolutionary historical events was not the greatest restoration of historical facts, but rather the legendisation and dramatisation of historical events and characters. It can be understood that the films at this time were still influenced by the creative consciousness of the Cultural Revolution period and lacked a conscious sense of "documentary" in historical films, with obvious transitional characteristics. For example, in the creation of *Dawn* and *From Slave to General*, the heroes were still unconsciously made to look like "big, big men".

The second period: the initial establishment of documentary and documentary style. The conscious use of documents of historical figures as a basis and the abandonment of fictional story frames in form made the narrative of mainstream values more authoritative. Starting with the production of *The Nanchang Uprising* and *The Xi'an Incident*, this led to the 'great man fever' on the screen that started in the 1980s and continued for many years. This initial creation was a mixture of documentary and drama, for example, the portrayal of the leaders was slightly added to the expression of their personalities while still appearing formal and pale. The portrayal of middle-aged Mao in *The Xi'an Incident* is characterised by conceptualised language and formulaic performances, and the impression of the leader remains flat at the end of the viewing.

The third period: a poetic telling of history. At this time, film creators have consciously created films strictly in accordance with historical records, so that characters and events are historically traceable. On the other hand, they began to recreate historical events and characters through the use of cinematographic language, sound elements and stylistic elements, which was a groundbreaking step in the creation

of revolutionary historical subjects. This is a very important step for a historical film, as it no longer indulges in the illusions and false stories of a particular period, but looks at a history with a real sense of discernment and conveys to the audience the sense of responsibility of an artist. The struggles and regrets of an era. In the author's opinion, this way of expression is more in line with the traditional Chinese dialectical thinking, where the grandeur of history is made up of the regrets of each individual, and acknowledging the regrets of the times is the greatest respect for the history being told. Such a film is written and philosophical.

The fourth period: the epic narrative. This period coincided with the 40th anniversary of the founding of New China in 1988-1989, and with the encouragement of the state ideological authorities, a number of historical-themed tribute films emerged. At this time, the pursuit of grand narratives and the creation of an epic atmosphere was pursued. Take *The Founding Ceremony*, *The Lofty Kunlun* and *The Baishe Uprising* as examples. The creators of the films looked at history from the height of the 1980s, and the artistic style sought to be sublime and magnificent, with dramatic war scenes. At this time, the films began to expand their artistic capacity and ideological strength, and had a preliminary sense of mega-film.

The above four stages loosened the constraints on the creation of historical themes, and in the 1990s the 'human expression' of the civilianist perspective entered the picture. This led to the recognition of the human dimension in mainstream ideology. This was an essential shift from the revolutionary values of the pre-1980s, and a turn towards more universal ideas.

As a simple comparison can be made, film scholar John Baker has pointed out that "American cinema's war narratives have a distinct set of war ethics at their disposal, namely the expression of cultural values of anti-warism, the main thrust of which is the efficient use of the war genre's anti-war discourse to promote its own American mythology, relying on this culture to reshape a certain common consciousness and derive a particular aesthetic outcome." This is the fundamental difference in values between the American war film and the Chinese revolutionary historical films of the pre-1980s. Chinese revolutionary historical films were created to show how the Chinese people, from the time of the Opium War when they were forced into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society to the time of the founding of New China, emerged victorious from a hard-fought struggle at a life-and-death moment of national peril. It is impossible to criticise the struggle to regain freedom and rights, whether at the institutional level or in artistic creation, in the face of the crisis of a nation's destruction. For this is an ethical dilemma in itself.

When the time came in the 1980s, the instability of the nascent state was gradually removed, the international environment facing China changed, the coercive power of the state gradually withdrew from its control over literary and artistic creation, and an inclusive creative environment was ushered in for artists. The creative

intentions of revolutionary historical themes at this time began to shift towards universal values, showing hesitation towards the sacrifice and dedication of the revolutionary movement. *The Gathering*, for example, in 2007, is a gaze at individual values and destiny in the midst of a grand historical event. By placing the sacrifice of 47 soldiers on the big screen to explore the value of their sacrifice, at the end of the film the audience feels not only the killing of war but also the special wartime beliefs that war brings. The result of this gaze on individual lives is a complete reversal of the senses of cinema. The film allows the viewer in a civilised world to look through the screen and observe the self-destruction of individuals in war and reflect on the inhumanity of the viewer.

We can clearly sense that previous films on revolutionary history expressed a straightforward proletarian collective consciousness, where the glory and responsibility that comes with revolution is the sublime feeling generated by the sacrifices of the characters in the film. The process of creating heroic characters is accompanied by the need to "create gods", which dissolves their normal human identity, so that the sacrifices and devotion of both heroic and secondary characters appear to be great, bright and righteous. It is as if their sacrifice is not an individual death, but a fusion with the revolutionary movement, and as long as the fire of the revolution is still burning, then their lives will never die. However, when the perspective of the narrative is brought closer from a revolution or a war to the expression of individuals, the belief and nobility of collectivism is easily dissolved in the face of individual lives, and the audience can more easily experience the loss of ordinary human lives brought about by the war, from the original tragic heroes to the tragic heroes; the original admiration and reverence in the audience becomes a downward look and pity. This causes a complete displacement of the audience's senses.

In the author's view, this ideological shift based on revolutionary history has brought about a shift from inspiring revolutionary enthusiasm to reflecting on war, a progression that accommodates more universal values for a film depicting war and revolutionary history.

Commercial transformation in the new century

As mentioned earlier, in 2000 revolutionary historical films entered a new phase of attempted commercial transformation. The old dominant ideas of revolutionary inspiration were no longer suitable for the market economy of the new century, and film creators began to take the initiative to incorporate genre experiences and to carry out a more thorough reflection on the war.

At this time, the creation of revolutionary historical films presented two types of situation. One was the commercial blockbusterisation of melodramatic films, from *The Founding of the Republic* and *The Founding of the Party* to *The Founding of the Army*, which was a move from the inside out to bring grand themes and national subjects to the commercial screen. Such films often face the same problem, that is,

government-led filmmaking is more like a top-down political mission to convey ideological consciousness such as communist beliefs, patriotic sentiments and revolutionary romanticism, with satisfying the audience's entertainment needs being the least important, with over-emphasis on the film's missionary function, causing the film to fall, consciously or unconsciously, into the hollow tedium of preaching, ultimately leading audiences to "respectful and distant". This has led audiences to turn away from such films, giving them the negative impression of being "fake, big and empty" and "political preaching".

Another type of film is a commercial film with melodramatic elements, such as *"The Gathering"*, *"The Siege of October"* and *"Taking the Tiger Mountain"*. These films are closer to national consciousness in their expression of themes, and take the initiative to add some legendary clips to neutralise the dullness of melodramatic elements and consciously weaken the ideological preaching, which actually respects the audience's viewing experience. In addition, the pre-production to the post-production marketing of the film follows the production line of mainstream commercial blockbusters, except that the themes expressed are no different from those of common commercial genre films. Therefore, this production model based on the laws of the market has been successful to a certain extent, and provides a case study for how revolutionary historical films can survive in the market.

All in all, revolutionary historical films have grown as a genre unique to China from the birth of the new China to the present. As it enters the new century, it faces the market erosion of domestic blockbusters on the one hand and the cultural impact of Hollywood blockbusters on the other.

2.3.4 The creative characteristics of Chinese historical cinema - biopics

The classic biopic recreates a deep historical context and is the genre that best combines history, humanistic connotations and cinematic art. Standing in contemporary times to reinterpret history and characters, giving them a new contemporary connotation, as the famous structuralist scholar Foucault said "What matters is not the time in which the story is told, but the time in which it is told." It can be said that the appeal of biopics lies in the re-creation of historical figures by contemporary film artists. In the history of China's cinematic development, film creators of different periods have poured out different contexts for their biographical masters.

The "Seventeen Years" Period

A century ago, Marx discussed the difference between "Shakespeareanisation" and "Schillerisation" in creative writing, and Chinese biopics are often "Schillerised". This habit of creation began in the 1950s and 1960s, when, on a macro level, the ideology of biopics took precedence over art and needed to serve the purpose of edifying the masses and building their confidence in communism. The film was given a political purpose, leading the creators to complete a work as if they were primary

school students completing a 'composition' required by their teacher, but ignoring the real and three-dimensional expression.

This period of film-making was destined to show more optimism, health and clarity. Therefore film creators, for the purpose of political primacy and the aesthetic reflection of ideological enlightenment, directors naturally favoured historical celebrities, especially non-controversial, positive figures such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai, or young revolutionary heroes and model workers (meaning the outstanding representatives of the working class, the elite of the nation, the pillars of the state, the backbone of society and the role models of the people; model workers are the eternal leader of the times[28]. For example, Jiao Yulu, Kong Fangsen, Ren Chanxia and so on. The narrative is also placed in a grand historical context, telling ethical and moral stories with didactic connotations, and underlining the sublime spirituality of the biographer through major events in history. The construction of an ideology through cinema, while regulating public behaviour and speech, was perhaps not a perfect start to the overall ecology of biographical film production in the country.

If one compares Chinese cinematography with that of other major film-producing countries, Chinese cinematography is already beginning to look fixed and theoretically backward. A Chinese film scholar once wrote: "At the same time, with the onset of the world's aesthetic thinking, world cinema ushered in a new period of major change, with film theories and creative schools of thought highlighting the ideas of academics and directors' styles arriving like rain and tide, profoundly influencing the future development pattern of world cinema, but for various reasons this vast aesthetic revolution did not extend touched China." [28, p35-41].

We can clearly contrast that at this time Chinese cinema was still heavily influenced by the narrative logic and presentation of theatre. That is, the plot was arranged according to the formula of production, development, climax and ending, with concentrated events, strong emotions, clear praise and criticism, and clear expression of subjective ideas. The characters are "typified", with distinctive personalities, in black and white, or more like flattened three-dimensional archetypal characters. The audiovisual language is a traditional montage and flat audiovisual modelling, and so on and so forth, so as not to be held hostage by the theatre but to fit in with the dominant cultural form. For example, the close-up of Dong Cunrui holding a dynamite pack in his hand in the final moments before his death, and the close-up of Liu Hulan's expression during his generous sacrifice are all in line with the straightforward expression of the mainstream ideology of the time.

In his book *The History of Chinese Cinema and Its Roots*, scholar Zhong Dafeng mentions that "shadow play-style cinema was resurrected in a new form in the revolutionary lyrical drama at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s." It is also clear that the tone of the Chinese biopic was set in the 1950s and 1960s, when the politically rigorous environment and the traditional Chinese narrative mode of "shadow theatre" worked in

tandem.

The New Century

After the foundations of the "Seventeen Years" period, the development of the biopic was somewhat weaker than that of other genres. Until the 1980s and 1990s, forty years of development did not allow Chinese biopics to break out of the logic of superficially stating historical facts, a fatal weakness when compared to the classic biopics of Hollywood and Europe. It was not until the fifth generation of directors in the new century that biopics in Chinese cinema brought some signs of innovation and multi-faceted depiction, mainly in three areas.

First, the expression of multiple perspectives. The character is no longer confined to externalising good character, setting an example for people and setting a benchmark for the times for political needs, nor is it limited to giving "him" a similar appearance and the same trajectory of life, but there can be a psychological and spiritual portrayal. A character with a spiritual world is the first step in bringing to the screen a biographical sketch that exists on a few pages in a history book, and the first step towards entering the heart of the audience. In the film *Mei Lanfang*, directed by Chen Kaige, the main character's childhood "paper shackles" are used as a symbol to build up his psychological history. The audience is put into the "paper chains" along with the film.

Secondly, the 'de-mystification' of the legendary character. Once Chinese biopics were so closely linked to ideological discourse that the will of the individual was submerged beneath the will of the group, just as the slogan of the times once read "The collective is above all", and all the characters' actions were motivated by a lack of individual thought, all their actions representing the collective. The greatest progress of the fifth generation of directors in the new century is the neutralisation of the macroscopic collective narrative with individual expression, where the will of the individual is no longer ignored and the small feelings of the characters are told in the context of the times. This means that the habit of creating gods in Chinese biopics has been consciously broken, and that film-makers are more willing to respect historical facts and the diversity of people, presenting the ordinary side of historical celebrities for audiences to read together.

Thirdly, the transition to a star system. This is similar to China's revolutionary historical films. In the face of the commercial tide, with competition from Hollywood blockbusters, Japanese and Korean films, and domestic commercial entertainment films, it is difficult to get audiences to buy into melodramatic expressions, and the only way out of the market competition is to entertain political melodrama. The tradition of star-based production comes from Hollywood, where stars mean market and audience, and a guarantee of box office and success. For example, in *Mei Lanfang*, Leon Lai and Zhang Ziyi starred, and in *Confucius*, Zhou Yunfa played Confucius. The addition of stars does give biopics a good sign of coming back in the new century.

How to create three-dimensional, in-depth biopics rather than character propaganda films is a question that Chinese film creators still need to think about and break through. Any artistic expression needs the tolerance of the social environment and the concession of political objectives to protect its natural development. For historical films, it is all the more necessary to explore history with a cold and deep philosophical vision, to reconstruct the connotation of the times with the thinking of contemporary people, and to face the glory and shame, success and failure of the nation. People are the builders of history, history is the bearer of people, and humanistic connotations are the soul of historical films.

2.4 Similarities between Belarusian and Chinese historical cinema - the example of a film on the Second World War

2.4.1 Characterisation - typical characters to non-heroic

Belarus and China have undergone roughly the same process of transformation in the mode of creation of historical films with military themes, particularly with regard to the characterisation of the protagonists, both of which have gone through the process of moving from the portrayal of typical characters to non-heroisation. Soviet cinema had a major impact on China in terms of the mode of creation of films. It has been a model for Chinese military historical films to study and learn from for a long time, and it has also profoundly influenced the values of several generations of Chinese people. Belarus was in the same position as China, having been heavily influenced by the Soviet Union's literary and artistic outlook before its collapse, and with its gradual departure from the former 'Soviet model', it also began to think independently about the Soviet state ideology.

During the Soviet era, 'political service' was a long-standing principle of literary and artistic creation. In Soviet anti-fascist films, Stalin, Zhukov and other leading figures were often the main protagonists of the films, and the narrative and filming techniques were based on their images. They were magnificent, far-sighted and brilliant, leading the people to win the Great Patriotic War and defend the glory of the Soviet regime. In addition to the leaders, the heroic deeds of national and ethnic heroes are also drawn upon, i.e. pioneering heroic films. The film focuses on the heroes' wisdom and courage, as they are guided by the highest Soviet ideology, and their hard-fought victory against a cunning and difficult enemy. Even when the hero gives his life or his partner dies, it brings a sense of sublime tragedy to the audience.

In Belarus, the 1960 film *Men Don't Give Up* (Человек не сдаётся) and the 1964 film *Through the Cemetery* (Через кладбище) are both very typical of heroic films in which the heroes struggle against the Germans. The former has the theme of "not giving up", with the hero obsessed with protecting the flag of the tank division at all costs. The main character is a face, the motivation for his actions is schematic, the narrative is formulaic, and the theme is in line with the military ideology, principles

and tactics of the time, which is also the inevitable trend of literary creation under the 'Stalinist model'. The latter is set in the context of the partisans completing their mission, with the addition of an old man and a young boy as narrative support, the ending of which is perhaps deliberately arranged by the director. It was also a common narrative device at the time to use the survival plight and even death of the underdog in the war environment to urge the growth and elevation of the hero and to add pathos to the ultimate fighting faith.

After the end of the war against Japan and during the 'Seventeen Years Period' (1945-1966), the Soviet influence continued in the style of filmmaking, focusing on the themes and dominant ideologies of the new era, with a fixed process and template for the portrayal of heroic characters. For example, the heroes in films such as *Dong Cunrui*, *Zhao Yiman* and *Eternal Life in Fire*, as supreme venerators of the revolutionary cause, transformed from ordinary labourers into heroes for the sake of the revolution, and physically inspired ordinary people to strive for advancement, occasionally using sacrifice and dedication to add to the tragic atmosphere and epic feel of the films. These films share much of the characterisation and themes of the Belarusian films mentioned above.

It was only in the years before the collapse of the Soviet Union that the solid creative patterns developed under the Stalinist model were gradually abandoned. The transformation of the creative mode of Belarusian cinema was an extremely long process, beginning after Khrushchev's rise to power, and only under Gorbachev's administration did it usher in a free creative environment different from that of the past, a period of ice melting in Soviet literature and art (1954-1991). At the same time, the end of the Cultural Revolution ushered in a new era for Chinese cinema (beginning in the 1980s). The film creators of the two countries, one after the other, experienced a similar historical situation in close proximity to each other, rethinking the nature of cinema and reconsidering the modes of filmmaking.

While the policy direction was one reason for this, the needs of the audience were another, particularly important aspect. From the end of the twentieth century to the twenty-first century, audiences' demand for films, especially those dealing with military and historical themes, was no longer satisfied with elite discourse. The long-standing domination of the screen by "typical heroes" and "pioneering heroes", and the uncritical eulogising and praising of revolution and battle, have long made audiences visually fatigued. Such a creative ecology makes films political first and entertainment optional, which not only bores the people of this country, but also makes it difficult to convey national values and culture to foreign cinemas, and the elite discourse from on high is unable to establish long-term good communication with the majority of ordinary audiences. Some scholars have elaborated on this: "Through the situation of ordinary people in historical events, the individual's participation in the history of the nation is expressed, thus drawing the audience into

history through the writing of personal destinies, participating in the shaping of history and creating a sense of presence, so that the audience's perception of history can alleviate their anxiety and fear of reality and generate hope and faith in the future of the nation in the depths of collective memory. faith in the future of the nation[21]." This cultural philosophy applies equally to Belarus and China.

If at one time Belarusian and Chinese historical films were keen to serve the dominant ideology and ideology, keen to portray revolutionary pioneers and people's leaders. At the turn of the new and old centuries, however, film-makers began to learn and think about what narrative perspective was of universal value. The return of historical narratives to the common man, to the greater number of witnesses to history. Returning history to the historical film was both a way of following objective reality and a universal aspiration to accompany the viewer through the chaos of history and construct contemporary historical meaning.

Belarusian films from this period include *The Black Birch Tree*(ЧЕРНАЯ БЕРЕЗА)(1977), *See for Yourself* (Иди и смотри) (1985) and *Signs of Trouble* (Знак беды) (1986), among others. Belarusian films *from hell to hell* (Из ада в ад) (1995), *More about the war* (Еще о войне) (2004), *Chaklen and Rumba* (ЧАКЛЕН И РУМБА) (2007), etc., after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chinese films such as *One and Eight*, *Red Sorghum* and *Yellow Earth*. These films no longer focus on the grandeur of war heroes, but rather on the plight of civilians in war as a new subject of reflection.

In line with this aesthetic transformation, these films also began to abandon their narrow classism and broaden their definitions and perceptions of benevolence and national justice from a more humanistic and historically informed multi-layered narrative. *From hell to hell* (Из ада в ад) in Belarus and the Chinese films *The Thirteen Hairpins of the Golden Horde* and *Nanjing! Nanking!* are all examples of this kind of feature. The focus of the film is on the different situations of the underclass during the war and the link between the underclass and the political system through the director's guidance, which allows for the linking of classes within the country. The film also draws on the multiple perspectives of the different cultural values of Poles and Jews (or Jews and anti-Semites), Chinese and Americans, which in turn link the war and politics of two peoples, two civilisations, two countries or two parties. Such representations undoubtedly add a multiplicity of meanings to historical figures and events, and an ambiguity to historical truth.

The non-heroic creation of historical films in Belarus and China is largely based on the fact that historical rationality is generally perceived. The inherent inevitability or rationality of history itself is the ultimate goal of human beings in their quest for historical truth, and historical films only do what they can to guide the viewer out of the fault lines and to accommodate the diversity and possibilities of history with a calm and open mind. It is only with such a realistic and inclusive

attitude of perception that it will be easy to connect and resonate with the audience's heart.

2.5 Differences between Belarusian and Chinese historical cinema - the example of a cinema on the Second World War

During the Second World War, Belarus and China were part of the two main theatres of war. Belarus was part of the Soviet-German War (1941-1945) between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and the Allies on both sides, also known as the "Patriotic War". China, on the other hand, was part of the Chinese War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945), the main battleground in the East against Japanese aggression. The nature of both wars is recognised by historians as just wars against fascist aggression to defend the country and the nation. After long and brutal battles and great sacrifices, victory was eventually achieved and both countries played a decisive role in the defeat of the fascist Axis.

Although Belarus and China fought in the same World War II, they faced many different circumstances.

1) Different national strengths: Belarus was part of the Soviet Union and was a socialist industrial country with developed productivity; China was a semi-colonial, semi-feudal agricultural country with a non-stop civil war and backward productivity.

2) Different forms of warfare: The Soviet Union fought against the strong, and most of the battles were large-scale, coordinated battles between various military forces; China fought against the weak and the strong over a large area, and most of the battles were defensive and protracted, with small victories becoming large victories.

3) Different national conditions: the Soviet Union did not have a domestic united front; China needed to establish a national united front between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang to fight against Japan.

Although Chinese films on the subject of the war were mostly influenced by the Soviet Union, the two countries ended up reflecting WWII differently in their films, based on their different social backgrounds, war conditions, political factors and the cultural psychology of the film-makers.

2.5.1 National values - good nationality and the awakening of national consciousness

For the creation of films on the subject of World War II, the timing of creation was slightly different between Belarus and China.

At the beginning of the war, Chinese filmmakers were quick to respond and began to create films about the anti-fascist war. The call of the times was to "wake up and save the country", and from 1932 onwards they began to release anti-war films. In the 1930s, they produced films such as *"To the Nation Together"* (1932), *"The Same Vengeance"* (1934) and *"Children of the Wind and Cloud"* (1935), and in the 1940s, *"Baptism of Fire"* (1940) and *"Blood in the Lonely City"* (1942). These films

were imbued with the artists' spiritual conviction of "one inch of film, one shell", and all the anti-war films were clearly aimed at promoting the national spirit of killing the enemy and serving the nation[7]. At the end of the war, *Eight Thousand Miles to the Clouds and the Moon* (1947) and *A River of Spring Water Flows East* (1947), which were made with the huge values of a screen epic, spoke of the hardships and brutality of the fourteen-year war.

Unfortunately, however, film production in Belarus was halted for the duration of the war, and all resources and manpower were devoted to the Patriotic War. It was not until the end of the war that Belarusian film studios resumed film production. Belarusian filmmakers used the Soviet Union's supreme guiding philosophy as the basis for a series of pioneering heroic films, such as *The Street of the Little Son* (Улица младшего сына) (1962), *The Brave Five* (Пятёрка отважных) (1970) and many others.

Both during and after the war, the portrayal of the people in Belarusian and Chinese films on the subject of the Second World War differed considerably, with marked differences in the national psychology, national values and conceptions of the state embodied in them. This is mainly based on the fact that the two countries are at different stages of the historical process.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviet Union was an independent and free socialist state, but in 1942 the German fascists treacherously broke the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, causing the people of Belarus to be the first to be attacked by the Blitzkrieg and having to interrupt the process of nation-building. The process of building the country had to be interrupted. Belarusians who lived in the Soviet Union in the 1940s had read "How Steel is Made" and "Chabayev", and had been educated about the October Revolution. "Rather than live in slavery, it was better to die in struggle" was the conviction of the Soviets in the face of fascist cruelty, a spirit of struggle nurtured by the Bolshevik Party and a boundless love for Soviet power. Historical experience, a developed economy and an excellent education made the Belarusians absolutely loyal to Moscow and, without the need to go through the painful ordeal of blood and fire, they had the initiative to resist from the very beginning of the aggression.

In Belarusian cinema, therefore, there are few scenes in which the war is fought with luck and the illusion of salvation by other countries. Even in films like *The Brave Five* (Пятёрка отважных), the five children who take part in the guerrilla warfare have the autonomy to fight, to free Soviet prisoners and blow up enemy ammunition depots in concentration camps without adult guidance, a conscious loyalty to the Soviet regime. Similarly, in *Signs of Trouble* (Знак беды), Stepanida, who lives in a village far from the city and higher education but is deeply influenced by the political manifesto, begins a silent resistance at the time of the German invasion, eventually preferring to burn down her hut with the invaders.

It can be said that the film follows the moral code of hate for the enemy and love for comrades, from women and children to soldiers. A sense of duty to the country and the nation, and a reckless commitment to the fight are not only essential characteristics of patriots, but also of the psychological state of the entire nation. For a long time afterwards, the films of the Belarusian Patriotic War showed the spirit of the times and the war morality of all classes of the population in all its aspects. At the same time the victories and defeats of the campaign, the national psyche and the contradictions of reality were explored.

Such national self-consciousness is rarely reflected in Chinese films of the war against Japan. Although film-making in the wartime National Unification Area, the liberated areas and the fallen areas had their own emphases, they were almost similar in terms of the national values of the people in the films. This is also the case with films made after the founding of New China. In modern China, the people have long been oppressed and exploited, with warlords at war, a closed environment and a narrow, backward peasant mentality making up the majority of the Chinese population. Thousands of years of feudal rule, traditional Confucianism and feudal hierarchy were ingrained in their subconscious, and they were numb and unaware when the invasion came and the nation was in peril. This is in complete contrast to the characters in Belarusian cinema, who take it upon themselves to rise up and fight back. From the protagonists to the masses, it is common that when disaster is imminent and their lives are threatened, they are called upon by the revolution to resist and act, and eventually join the revolutionary tide.

In *On the Songhua River* (1947), for example, the protagonist, originally a peasant from the north-eastern region who sought only to live in peace and contentment, comes to his senses after the Japanese invasion of his village and witnessing the devastation of his family, and takes up the path of resistance against the Japanese to save his country. This is also the case in *Lillian's Walk* (1949), in which three women with different personalities living in the fallen areas of Shanghai during the war have no intention of joining the fight, but their revolutionary convictions grow after experiencing the atrocities of the Japanese and the pain and suffering they endure. In these films, some live in the city with some education, others in the countryside. Apart from the protagonists, many of them do not have a concept of justice, nor do they have a clear idea of national independence and liberation, but rather they are forced by the Japanese atrocities to resist instinctively, and the revolution gives them the possibility to survive. Of course, this national inferiority is much tinkered with by the creators in the films and even more ironically and hopelessly in the literature.

In Chinese anti-war films, especially literary adaptations, the concern for the peasants about the future of the country and the nation often begins with the downward spiral of their personal circumstances. This is the simplest kind of peasant

consciousness, starting from the individual's own position and then thinking of the threat to the nation's survival. This is completely different from the loyalty of the Belarusians to the Soviet regime during the Patriotic War. The peasants of modern China do not have the spirit of collectivism, nor the so-called contemporary spirit of individualism.

This is particularly well portrayed in Jiang Wen's *The Coming of the Demons*, in which Ma Dasan, a peasant from the village of Hangjiatai in Hebei, China, lives a quiet life under Japanese rule. One night, the guerrillas kidnap a Japanese army soldier, Kosaburo Hanaya, and an interpreter, Dong Hanchen, and place them in a sack in Ma Dasan's house, tying them up and instructing Ma to watch over them and take them away after a few days. Many days passed, but the guerrillas did not take the men away. Gradually Ma Dasan was persuaded by Dong Hanchen that he intended to send Hanaya and the interpreter to the Japanese military police station in exchange for food. Eventually, after the whole village is massacred, he learns that Japan has long since surrendered. The peasants in this film do not even have any awakening. Although some Chinese critics have argued that this is a vicious vilification of the Chinese peasantry, it does not negate the film's satire of the inferiority of the small peasant consciousness. The author agrees with director Jiang Wen's own explanation: "Lu Xun's satire and sarcasm about certain problems in his own nation and culture is also full of love. This high state of Lu Xun I understand is the national soul." [35, p22]

The two peoples had completely different perceptions of reality under the same war, which led to the vast differences in the national psyche between Belarusian and Chinese cinema, and the differences in the director's heart when creating the film. Whereas Belarusian cinema reflects the good national character of the Soviet people, a code of national existence that they should be proud of and believe in, Chinese cinema is more about the process of awakening national consciousness, which is not without its share of invective and satire from artists.

2.5.2 Narrative perspective - individual trauma/ feelings of nation and country

War and tragedy exist in the same breath, as Lenin once noted, "The Social Democratic Party firmly condemns war as a barbaric solution to human disputes." Artists are well aware that the struggle to portray the tragedy of war is to hold the tragedy's perpetrators accountable for their crimes. To contemplate "pacifism" within the tragedy of war, to discuss with audiences how to assign blame and how to provide lessons for future human processes, is the essence of "anti-war" cinema, and a macro expression. If we look deeper, we will see that a war is a hellish picture made up of millions of ordinary people, who are in pain and confusion in the face of war, and as ordinary people who do not even know why they are in war. It is a confusion of human identity, which in the film can only be understood through the dissection of

individual trauma.

Since 1991, Belarus has been separated from the Soviet Union and filmmaking has drifted away from the Soviet model. The painful period of dramatic social change often prompted a group of artists to pull themselves away from the macro-narrative of the state, to reflect on the state, on the polity, on society, on human nature, and to focus on practical, concrete, current things and issues at a time when both society and people were confused. On the other hand, Belarus, as a 68% Orthodox religious country, has in itself a national consciousness of self-reflection and truth-seeking. This national consciousness has led Belarusians to focus on historical mistakes and 'original sins', and even on everyday life under war, rather than on a simple dichotomy of class and politics, especially after being removed from the control of the powerful regime's dominant ideology.

See for yourself(Іди и смотри)(1985) is the first film to point the finger of guilt at the German fascists and to focus the pain on every Soviet victim of the war, with each close-up of a war victim looking directly at the camera hitting the viewer's visual pain points. The film is the beginning of a pinnacle of Belarusian cinema in the World War II genre. *From hell to hell* (Із ада в ад) (1995) shifts the focus to the post-war era after the victory in the Patriotic War. The conflict between the "Jewish girl" and the "violence of humanity" does not end after the war, and history is repeated in the film, as it is in reality. The reality and destination of the Jewish people is seen through the growth and future of a girl. In films such as *More About War* (Еще о войне) (2004), *Height 89* (2006), *Franz + Polina* (2006), *Chacren and Rumba* (ЧАКЛЮН И РУМБА) (2007), there are few direct depictions of the brutality of war, although the protagonists are involved in it. There is less blood and less hunting on the battlefield. For a brutal war against fascism, the symbols of the nation and the archetypal hero are absent from the film, meaning that more mirrored sides of the war are focused on by the filmmakers.

Richard Macbeth has expressed the critical view of formalism that "the viewer's search for motivation is such that they prefer to use all possible information to figure out the narrative significance of the events being depicted. In this mode, even realism is inclined to be understood as narrative realism. . formalist elaboration usually constructs an order of meaning in the process by which the film gives pleasure to the viewer [38,p430]." Richard argues that the audience may refuse to buy into the 'order of meaning' being offered. This is understandable in the context of the United States, which claims to be "liberal" and "democratic" and has always been a market economy, where Hollywood, as the world's largest film industry, has always been committed to satisfying the needs of audiences and trying to make them unwittingly. It is easy to understand that Hollywood, as the world's largest film industry, has always been committed to satisfying the needs of audiences, and that the formalistic approach of trying to make audiences unconsciously accept the 'order of

meaning' is risky for the profit-oriented major Hollywood studios and incompatible with American national culture. But in the context of one of the world's largest socialist developing countries, this approach makes sense.

Resistance films in China are confined to two realistic traditions. The first is the long tradition of collectivism under socialist construction, which has made the concept of collectivism not offensive to most Chinese people. Secondly, for certain films set against the backdrop of major historical events, Chinese directors are accustomed to adopting a group narrative, telling the story of a period of revolutionary war when the Chinese nation was in peril and the Party led the people to break through many hardships and push through the Three Great Mountains to usher in liberation. In order to fit the fixed template of the macro-narrative, "family and country sentiment" becomes a dimension that most films cannot cross. From Bayi Film Studio's Armageddon series, *South to North*, and *Shangganling to Nanjing! Nanjing! ,Nanjing Massacre* and *The Gathering*, Chinese films have transcended the stage of simply using grand scenes to create patriotism and collectivism, but the "human sea" tactic of using the sacrifice of millions of people is still the usual narrative technique used by directors. In the film, for the audience, the scenes of war, where millions of people kill each other and fire from the sky, become more and more a commonplace "violent aesthetic", and the uncountable sacrifices silently cover up the loss of individual lives, and then the strong "family feeling The "individual pain" is then overwhelmed by the strong "family feeling". At this point, Richard's judgement of the 'order of meaning' becomes invalid.

Both the long-standing social and cultural and creative habits of the Chinese film market at this stage predetermine that a large number of Chinese audiences will pay for the 'order of meaning'. This has led to the stumbling of Chinese directors when it comes to the creation of military history. Although the new century has seen the production of films such as *The Gathering* and *The Ballad of Yunshui*, the expression of 'humane' auxiliary elements does not represent a philosophical reflection on human history. The first half of *The Gathering* is devoted to the grand scenes of war, while the second half concentrates on the creative intent, with the protagonist, Gu Zi, obsessed with finding out whether the Gathering has blown or not, and with digging up the remains of his comrades. Feng Xiaogang consciously uses Gu Zi's individual pathos to advance his thoughts on the war, but the mainstream values of heroism and revolutionary ideals still go hand in hand with the value of individual existence. For example, in the film, soldiers who do not hear the "rallying call" cannot retreat, and this episode can be considered as a reflection on the conflict between individual and collective interests. The logic of the "national view of war" is not lost.

Despite the fact that China has Jiang Wen's *The Coming of the Demons*, Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum*, all classics that

have graced the Chinese cinema, the limitations of political perceptions remain commonplace. It is not difficult to have a few exceptional students in a class, nor does it represent the average for the whole class. In the case of China, Belarus does not produce many films of outstanding quality, but the attention to the fate of ordinary people, the observation of human nature in particular circumstances, and the reflection on ideology are things that Chinese directors should learn from. Even though the two countries have developed a similar history of military films, Belarus has gradually moved away from a macro-national narrative for political and religious reasons. Glorification and glorification are not the ultimate goal of such films; it is a sign of a strong national culture that a country and a nation learn to dissect themselves and disdainfully explore the national psyche.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF CHERNOBYL-THEMED BELARUSIAN CINEMA IN SHAPING THE COUNTRY'S IMAGE

3.1 The image of Belarus in the twentieth century

3.1.1 A brief history of twentieth-century Belarus

Belarus is a landlocked country bordered by Russia to the east, Poland to the west, Ukraine to the south and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest. Its many rivers and lakes have led to it being called the "Land of 10,000 Lakes".

In the 20th century, the people of Belarus took part in the 1905-1907 Revolution, the February Revolution of 1917 and the October Socialist Revolution, and in the First World War of 1914-1918, when western Belarus was occupied by the Germans in 1915. After the end of the Second World War, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic was established on 1 January 1919. From 1919 to 1920 it was occupied by the Polish bourgeoisie. On 30 December 1922, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic joined the Soviet Union.

During the Second World War, the Soviet-German War, also known as the Patriotic War, was waged between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Due to its location on the plains of Eastern Europe, Belarus was the first to bear the brunt of Hitler's "Blitzkrieg" against the Soviet Union in 1941 as a strategic stronghold of the Soviet Union. The Patriotic War was the largest, most violent and deadliest battlefield of the world's anti-fascist war. A quarter of the population of Belarus was killed during the three years of German occupation, and the population of Minsk was reduced from 250,000 to 40,000. However, the Belarusian people never showed any pro-German tendencies, but remained loyal to Moscow and fought a widespread guerrilla war on the country's territory, ensuring that 60% of Belarus was not lost. Minsk became known as the "City of Partisans". This painful national history leaves behind the memory of suffering and the spirit of the Belarusian people's patriotic war.

On 26 April 1986, Belarus was again devastated by the Chernobyl nuclear

meltdown. The town of Pripyat, around which the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is located on the border between northern Ukraine and Belarus, was home to 49,000 scientific staff and their families who worked at the plant. The accident turned what was once a model Soviet city into a completely abandoned one. Due to the weak and variable low-level winds at the time, with 8-10m/s south-easterly winds at 1500m altitude, contaminants were deposited mainly in the north-western parts of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine [58,p321-335]. However, two-thirds of the radioactive fallout was in Belarus, which suffered far more than Russia and Ukraine, the so-called "Ukrainian disaster, Belarusian disaster".

The accident not only brought Belarus to great international attention, but also caused irreversible damage to the ecology of its territory. According to expert assessments, the economic damage to Belarus for the period 1986-2015 was US\$235 billion, equivalent to the fiscal budget of 32 1985 years [25,p93-96]. The first and foremost accompanying rainfall radioactive substances entered the soil and were transferred to the root system of plants, leaving more than 88% of the forests and 55 farms in Belarus still contaminated to date. At the same time the radioactivity in the air has increased hundreds of thousands of times and there is nowhere to hide from it leading to a surge in illness among the local population. According to local medical data from Belarus, within five years of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, thyroid cancer in children increased 22 times, and the incidence of kidney cancer, tumours of the lymphatic and haematopoietic tissues and bladder cancer were all higher. In the most contaminated regions, Gomel and Mogilev, the local authorities have spent huge sums of money on relocation alone.

The negative environmental, social, economic and health effects of the nuclear accident on the entire Soviet Union were so enormous and so long-lasting that, as Mikhail Gorbachev said: "My life is divided into two periods - before Chernobyl and after Chernobyl. " When the Soviet Union finally collapsed in 1991, the present Belarus declared its independence on 15 August of the same year by passing a law on state independence, and on 19 September the name of the country was changed from the "Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic" to the "Republic of Belarus" The name of the country was changed from "Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic" to "Republic of Belarus" on 19 September [55,p59-63]. Throughout the history of Belarus in the 20th century, from its independence in 1919 for 69 years during the Soviet period, through the Second World War, the Chernobyl accident, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and finally becoming a fully independent state, one cannot deny reading in this ethnography the struggle against the fate of the nation in silence.

3.1.2 Ethnographic profile

Ethno-culture is an important bond that makes a nation create a sense of attachment, belonging and loyalty among individuals to it. The Belarusian nation has undergone a number of complex geopolitical changes, which have led to many real

problems with its national self-perception. In particular, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarusian national cultural identity has been reconstructed, and the country is at a crossroads in its history, with a depressed national language, a plurality of cultural symbols, a mixed history and the infiltration of multiple foreign cultures.

According to the 2009 official Belarusian census, there are currently 130 ethnic groups in Belarus, of which 83.7% are Belarusians[33]. The majority of historians and anthropologists agree with the "Ancient Rus' origin" theory of Belarusian ethnicity. In addition to this, the "Krivitsi origin", "Polo origin" and "Polish origin" are also supported to varying degrees. According to the "Ancient Rus' origin" theory, the Eastern Slavic tribes were formed in Belarus and the surrounding area in the first half of the 10th century BC, and the modern Belarusian people are Slavs with an ancient Rus' dialect.

Language is the benchmark for the cultural perception of a people, and it can be said that the development of language and the destiny of a people are often community. The history of a people's language development can be traced through the history of a people's development. The Belarusian language belongs to the East Slavic branch of the Slavic family of Indo-European languages, along with Russian and Ukrainian, due to their common ancestry. At the same time, the geographical position of Belarus has led to strong ties with the Poles and Lithuanians. This complex historical situation has led to a rather turbulent history of language development in Belarus.

When the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was founded in 1240 AD, the Belarusian principalities, led by Polotsk, voluntarily joined the Grand Duchy of Lithuania by signing an agreement. Although this vast territory reduced the ethnocultural jurisdiction over the Belarusian region, the development of the national culture was limited by economic, political and subordinate constraints. It was not until the 14th-15th centuries AD that the Belarusian language was separated from Old Russian.

By the 16th century, the Belarusian national language was officially formed. The translation of the Bible into Belarusian by Francesca Scalina, a prominent social activist of the time, in 1517, was the official language of Old Belarusian. Unfortunately, this 'golden age' did not last long, and from its inception Belarusian began a long history of coexistence with other languages.

Originally part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Belarusian region had a relatively relaxed ethnic environment until 1567, when the Lublin Agreement was signed between Lithuania and Poland, and since then the "Polonisation" reforms within the Grand Duchy were initiated. The Polish language was used as a second language in the Belarusian areas, and was sought after by the majority of the Belarusian gentry at the time. Polish then gradually replaced Belarusian as the official language.

In the late 18th century, the Russian Empire became a huge state in the European region and the once powerful Polish Republic gradually lost its national power. Eventually Ekaterina II, together with Austria and Prussia, partitioned Poland three

times and gradually acquired the Belarusian region from 1772 to 1795. For 145 years, until the October Revolution in 1917, Belarus was under the rule of Tsarist Russia. In 1867, the Russian government banned the Belarusian language from schools, newspapers, state institutions and other places, and Belarusian lost its written use and was relegated to the oral language of rural areas. At this time the national language of Belarus did not differ from the period of Polish rule.

It was only in the early days of the Soviet Union, when Lenin pursued a policy of indigenisation, that the Belarusian national language and culture developed for a short time. Unfortunately, this did not last long, and in the 1930s Stalin's administration carried out a "purge" of other national cultures in the Soviet Union, targeting the Belarusian nation with a boycott of the Belarusian language, at which time the active Belarusian intelligentsia was wiped out. According to the 1988 census, 83% of the Belarusian population identified themselves as Belarusian, but only 50% considered Belarusian to be their mother tongue, and only 20% used it regularly in their daily lives [52, p18-21].

During the centuries of its development, the Belarusian language was not provided with a healthy social environment in which to grow. A glance at the history of the Belarusian nation reveals a close mixing process with other ethnic groups such as Russians, Poles and Ukrainians around them, almost constantly being subsumed and naturalised over the course of several thousand years of development. This historical trajectory has made the preservation of their own culture an almost impossible task, and as a result the formation and development of Belarusian national identity has been very slow compared to that of neighbouring Poland and Lithuania.

As a result of this history of annexation and naturalisation, the Belarusian nation has also developed its most important national culture - inclusiveness. Belarusian ethnographer and linguistic and cultural researcher Karski also points out that the Belarusian nation is extremely tolerant of other peoples and cultures.

If one reads the history of the Belarusian nation, one will find that there has never been any large-scale migration for ethnic or religious reasons, but on the contrary, it has often become a refuge for persecuted groups from other countries [51, p104-143]. The national character of the people who have taken things as they come has continued to accommodate elements of the surrounding Russian, Ukrainian and Polish peoples, eventually creating elements of homogeneity in material culture, spiritual culture and everyday life that are quite close. For example, traditional housing structures, traditional dress (men's and women's shirts, men's long coats, women's headgear), traditional rituals, etc., all have common East Slavic elements. In addition, the folk creations of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples (stout songs), as well as the plastic arts - embroidery and various wood carvings - show a necessary historical homogeneity[34]. Peoples who have experienced hardship and suffering are more and more able to understand the pain of other peoples as they endure devastation and

suffering. Despite the long period of annexation and assimilation of the Belarusian people, it is this historical situation that has led to greater national empathy.

3.1.3 The geopolitics of Belarus

Since Belarus and Russia have a long history of common or close ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic ties, most of the CIS countries took a precautionary approach to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, keeping their distance and even moving towards an antagonistic relationship. Belarus was markedly different, with ruling President Lukashenka highlighting that the "highest priority" in diplomacy was "union with Russia".

On 20 April 1996 Belarus and Russia became a community, and the following year the Russian-Belarusian Union was formed.[37] In 2000 the Treaty on the Union State was signed, in 2009 the Agreement on the Unification of the Russian-Belarusian Regional Air Defence System was signed, and in 2010 the Customs Union was formally launched, which saw a step-by-step and generally positive integration of the two countries. Of course, during the first years of the Russian-Belarusian alliance, there were also many who were not convinced. For example, Dmitri Trenin, a Russian academic who was then deputy director of the Carnegie Centre in Moscow, questioned the forthcoming union and its prospects in a 1999 New York Times interview, saying: "We can have a union, we can have a unified council of ministers. But these would still be merely ceremonial bodies, without any real power. [5]" It is evident that there was also a conservative attitude among Russian officials at the time as to the solidity of this alliance and the degree of cooperation.

In addition to the conservative views of personnel officials within the Union. Western scholars were even more consistently pessimistic about the Russian-Belarusian alliance, with one researcher stating during the 2007 Russian-Belarusian conflict over energy supplies that "the Union State is doomed to be a myth. [6]" These negatively-minded Western experts and scholars are more worried than sceptical. In the case of neighbouring countries such as Poland and Ukraine, which surround Belarus, they openly expressed their fears that the alliance would affect the stability of other parts of the former Soviet Union. And for the traditional Western countries, led by the US, the move looks more like a structural arrangement to try to counteract NATO's influence.

Many Russian officials and experts deny this suspicion and emphasise that the alliance path is based on the interdependent economic interests of the two countries and the consent of the Belarusian side. Russia has generously provided large quantities of cheap oil and gas, from which the Belarusian side has received economic relief and has become a transit country for Russian oil and gas supplies to Western Europe. It has to be said that in a continuing multipolar situation, it is indeed wiser to forge alliances, to help each other and to live in a community of destiny.

In the author's view, the geopolitics of Belarus provides a convenient force to

rely on in terms of the current situation of general peace in the world. Although the alliance is still a paper treaty, and there are important undecided links in between such as the model of the alliance, the distribution of power and the circulation of currency, what is important is that the process of building the alliance has benefited the nationals of both countries, and the political games of the leaders of both sides are based on nothing more than finding a more secure way out for their people,.

3.2 The changing effect of Chernobyl on the impression of Belarus

The 20th century was a century of disasters for Belarus, with two world wars, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, Stalin's boycott of the Belarusian language and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The word "trauma" seems to haunt this troubled nation. The impact of the Chernobyl accident in 1986 continues to be felt in Belarus today, as literary artists continue to construct their own individual representations of the national tragedy to the world, giving new meaning to the disaster in their multiple creative identities and gradually portraying Belarus as a nation. Of all the art forms, the most visible are the visual memories of the country and the literary accounts of Alekseevich, respectively.

3.2.1 Belarusian artistic representations of Chernobyl

Literature - the example of Alekseevich

Svetlana Alexandrovna Alekseevich, winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize for Literature, was born in Ukraine and grew up in Belarus, used to write in Russian and inherited the tradition of Russian literature of suffering. Her accounts span the entire Soviet period through to the post-Soviet period, including the Second World War, the Chernobyl accident and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In works such as *No Women in War*, *Voices from Chernobyl*, *Secondhand Times*, *People Seduced by Death*, *The Last Witness*, and *Zinc Skin Doll Soldiers*, she uses oral history as a vehicle to describe and explain trauma, without neglecting the individual and collective trauma of each disaster, and this way of writing forms Alekseevich's unique model of trauma and redemption.

In *Voices from Chernobyl*, Alekseevich uses his pen as a voice for the victims, writing in the polyphony of the collective narrative of the victims, consciously rejecting the personal judgement of the bystanders. It is understandable that this disaster, which spanned a century and caused tens of thousands of people to leave their homes to escape the radioactivity, may not be judged from the perspective of those who did not suffer.

In the author's view, Alexievich's treatment of how to portray the trauma of Chernobyl is better understood through Freud's psychoanalysis. Freud explains it in more detail in his *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*: "An experience is said to be traumatic when, for a very brief period, the mind is so highly stimulated that it cannot seek to adapt itself in the normal way, so that the distribution of the effective faculties of the mind is permanently disturbed. [42] "On the other hand, the discourse of

suffering memory has the more important ethical significance of helping the suffering individual to heal, as far as possible, from long-repressed mental trauma [47, p91-93].

It is clear from this that Alexievich, in using Chernobyl as his subject matter, has a subtle insight into the psychological demands of the victims. While others are concerned with the huge financial losses, the abandonment of farmland and the contamination of water caused by the nuclear disaster, she is concerned with the long-lasting psychological wounds of the man-made disaster.

Alekseevich's oral history writing is also different from the so-called journalistic style of interviewing. Her narrative is not focused on the 'why' and 'how', but rather on the common sense questions and answers that can only scratch the surface of disaster writing. Only by exploring the unique physical and psychological experiences and emotional changes of each traumatised subject can we reach an unprecedented depth and breadth of understanding of this disaster. One scholar has expressed this about narrative diversity in literature: "I found that life offered so many versions and interpretations of the same event that neither novels nor documents could present this diversity alone, and I felt that I had to find new narrative strategies"[4]. Alekseevich searched for a way to get close enough to the truth in the countless voices of those who suffered, eventually incorporating the ideas of Soviet documentarians such as Ales Adamovich, or 'documentary literature'. The genre is made up of multiple voices, confessions, testimonies and testimonies of people's hearts and minds, and is a true expression of the "universal tragic harmony" of the Chernobyl tragedy.

In terms of structure, over 500 people were interviewed before the creation of *Voices from Chernobyl*, and 107 interviewees were retained. Their accounts are divided into three sections: 'The Land of the Living', 'The Land of the Dead' and 'The Shock After the Grief', which form a cluster text structure of 38 chapters. The narratives complement each other, and several oral narrators may appear within each chapter. This narrative arrangement allows the internal and external aspects of the chapters to double compensate for the thinness of the narratives from individual perspectives, so as to ensure the integrity and systematization of the narratives, such as the chapters "Those Who Returned" and "The Soldiers' Words". The chapters, such as "Those Who Returned" and "The Soldiers' Words", all possess Alekseevich's cleverness in structuring the narrative.

In terms of narrative style, the entire book is told in the first person, i.e. the victims of Chernobyl are the main subjects. In addition, the accounts of the victims are recorded in detail, including their movements and expressions as they talk. For example, in an interview with the wife of a firefighter after the explosion in the prologue, it is described as "accompanied by demented and insane remarks such as 'I killed her, I was saved' when talking about the child in her womb that also died at birth." In parentheses, it is added that "her words began to become jumbled and incomprehensible" and "her breathing began to become difficult". This

three-dimensional description is the author's attempt to use a microscopic view to retrace objective historical scenes and to realistically represent the interviewee's extremely distressed and divided mental state in the face of the confrontation between love and death.

Also, oral accounts of the sufferers' dreams are presented in abundance: dreams of puppies with spiky-tailed heads, as if in fear of biological mutation caused by nuclear radiation; dreams of being evacuated to strange places, even off-planet, in a desperate attempt to escape the place where that terrible nuclear explosion took place. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the traumatised subject is constantly dreaming of scenes from the trauma, i.e. "trauma neurosis". This complex traumatic movement of the victim is difficult to analyse in depth in documentary literature, and this limitation is compensated for by detailed descriptions and dream depictions. She knows how to induce the reader to empathise with the helplessness of history by portraying the mental and physical wreckage of the individual, and she also gives the cold and indirect form of written literature the warm and direct effect of oral literature.

As a native Belarusian author, the depiction of Chernobyl successfully moves from the 'land of the dead' to the 'land of the living', where the dead do not necessarily suffer more than the living, and where the government and officials are most ashamed of the people who continue to suffer in the aftermath of the disaster.

Undoubtedly, Alekseevich focuses her narrative on the 'others' who have been forgotten or marginalised by mainstream history, from the frontline firefighters to their wives to the hospital nurses. Each participates in the reconstruction of the 'de-othering' of her historical subject, which is fair to everyone who lived through the disaster. From the macro-narrative of mainstream history to the single individual emotion to the collective memory of grief, polyphonic writing is indeed an appropriate expression of the emotional history of humanity and the most affectionate means of understanding this sad history of the Belarusian nation that one cannot deny.

3.2.2 Tourism development at Chernobyl in Belarus

The Chernobyl contaminated area is a heavily contaminated area within a radius of 30 km around the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, where Unit 4, which was "sarcophagus" cast in reinforced concrete in 1986, is now located in Ukraine, just 3 km from the Belarusian border, where Ukraine meets Belarus. After the nuclear accident, Pripyat was evacuated from the vicinity of the plant and after 35 years of neglect, the once model Soviet city became a 'ghost town'.

The area around Chernobyl is full of Soviet architecture, texts, slogans, books and drawings from the 1980s, as well as Lenin's slogans and headshots, all with a communist flavour. Walking through this historically abandoned city is like stepping back in time. The only difference is that there is no trace of the prosperity of the past, no trace of human life, but rather the imagination of what was once the most youthful and vibrant city of the Soviet Union. And yet, 35 years later, this uninhabited area is

now a nature reserve. As if witnessing the hand of nature regaining its territory from man, traces of human life have been erased. This is the closest thing to a ruined city in the world.

As time went on, scientists continued to enter this area to investigate it regularly. They found that this forbidden area, where humans could not live, was gradually being taken over by wildlife. Many wild animals that are not commonly found elsewhere in Europe can be found here, such as: wolves, deer, bears, turtles, beavers and even wild horses. According to the researchers, a long-term census of mammals in the area shows that there are now "far more wild animals than before the nuclear accident".

The reasons for this phenomenon can be traced in a number of studies and reports. Professor Jim Smith of the University of Plymouth in the UK, who was responsible for the study, stresses in particular that such results "do not suggest that radiation is good for wildlife", "it simply suggests that human settlement has caused more damage through hunting, livestock and deforestation" [2]. [2]. From the point of view of the decay patterns of radioactive materials, time has indeed diminished the lethality of the air and soil in the exclusion zone. The half-lives of the main radioactive substances of the day have expired. Radioactive iodine played a large role in that nuclear contamination. But the half-life of this element is very short, and soon after the accident it broke down naturally into harmless substances. Today, radioactive contamination in Belarus consists only of substances such as strontium and caesium, which have a half-life of 30 years [3]. In time, the lethality of radioactive substances has been cut down considerably.

In addition, there is a special group of 'stalkers' in the Chernobyl exclusion zone, explorers who defy government bans and the horrific radiation levels to trespass in no-man's land. In the early days they were mostly criminals, trying to escape the police or to steal goods from the exclusion zone in exchange for money. Later, as the supplies available in the city became scarcer, more people broke into Chernobyl just to experience the thrill of entering No Man's Land. Other stalkers were residents of the Chernobyl neighbourhood or descendants of those who lived through it, hoping to see Chernobyl for themselves and get a closer look and experience of that history. From a human point of view, there is a popular saying among Chernobyl stalkers: "No detection, no radiation". They might be interpreted as a reinterpretation of history from the standpoint of human emotions. Like the wild animals that ignore nuclear radiation, the absurdity of the no-go zone is deciphered.

In any case, for reasons of both economic and historical significance, both the Belarusian and Ukrainian governments have opened tourist experiences in the exclusion zone one after the other. In contrast to the Belarusian government, the Ukrainian government opened parts of Chernobyl as early as 1 January 2011. According to the Russian media, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky signed a decree on "Several issues concerning the development of the Chernobyl nuclear

accident area", stating that "this will be the beginning of the transformation of the exclusion zone into one of the new Ukrainian growth points"[49]. and received the support of the United Nations Development Programme. The latter argued that a visit to the Chernobyl region would allow people to understand the history of the tragedy and recognise the importance of nuclear safety. After receiving an official boost, local tourism companies continued to promote the tour as being absolutely safe, and even more commercial companies saw the opportunity to launch entertainment peripherals, such as the shooter game *Stalker - Shadows of Chernobyl*. Multiple parties have used this chilling and mysterious piece of history as a selling point to increase tourism promotion while boosting local financial revenue.

In May 2019, following the broadcast of the US HBO miniseries *Chernobyl*, searches by English-speaking users worldwide for information related to visiting Chernobyl increased more than 30-fold. This phenomenon has led the Belarusian government to think about how to uncover the remaining value of the Chernobyl site. As the core area is in Ukraine, tours in Belarus do not include the technical area and the 'dead city', but the 95 abandoned villages are tourist sites. Visitors can see the sarcophagi from a distance through the observation tower.

As for the effects of entering the restricted area on the human body, Poleski, deputy manager of the Belarusian State Radiation and Ecological Reserve, said that the price for a group of five people in the area is less than 340 Belarusian roubles and that a day's visit to the open area would expose visitors to less radiation than a day's flight in an aeroplane [30]. As the head of the scenic area, he constantly emphasised that sightseeing in the open area would not cause any damage to the health of visitors. It would indeed be a relief for visitors to compare the radiation exposure with that of a plane ride.

The decision of the Belarusian government to open parts of Chernobyl is of historic importance for Belarusians and foreigners alike. For Belarusians who have been affected by the disaster since birth, for young people who have heard the stories of various people who lived through it, and for tourists from other countries who have never experienced it, being there is the best form of human understanding of the disaster that resonates.

3.3 Analysis of the communication of the Chernobyl accident in Belarusian cinema

3.3.1 The current state of dissemination of Chernobyl-themed films and videos

For a long time, intercultural communication in Belarus has been in a state of equanimity. The intercultural communication scientist Edward Hall divides cultural areas into strong-context cultures and weak-context cultures. A culture with a long history is a strong culture, while a culture made up of a mixture of cultures, which is the result of constant conflict and compromise, is a weak culture, such as the American

culture. Belarus, on the other hand, is typically a weak culture. In this sense, Belarusian culture is a universally acceptable cultural element that does not easily fall into self-talk in cross-cultural communication. The United States, for example, also belongs to a typical weak cultural context. American values, which have a strong universal character, are quietly peddled around the world through film exports, while using cross-ethnic and cultural themes to absorb and integrate the best material from various countries, and then using its powerful film industry system and American thinking to repackage various national and ethnic themes in order to export them to the countries of the world that provide the material, which in effect enhances The United States' influence in countries with different cultural backgrounds has been enhanced. Belarusian culture, which is also in a weak cultural context, does not make effective use of localised historical information to create a good interactive Belarusian value in film and television, nor does it efficiently accommodate cross-ethnic and cross-cultural themes from other countries, thus failing to build an internal cultural identity and a national discourse in the film industry as a whole.

The current situation with regard to Chernobyl is an example of Belarus' failure to encode the international language of the nation. As the country that experienced the worst of the disaster, the film industry is poor in this area, and this negative response to intercultural communication is clearly not conducive to changing its weak position in cultural exchange. Films, documentaries and TV dramas, as cultural vehicles and means of communication, have the task of shaping the image of the country and its national connotations. In the current situation of a huge 'cultural deficit', it is imperative that these means are used effectively to engage in intercultural communication.

The only available information on the Chernobyl disaster from the Belarusian perspective is through documentaries, literature or specialist academic research. The preservation and dissemination of documentaries about major disasters is the customary practice of most film creators and is the simplest and most orthodox means. Therefore, at present, film and television productions on the subject of Chernobyl are mainly documentaries, relying on the form of authentic records to systematise and symbolically present the forms of collective memory. This collective memory is not only the 'social construction' of the past by the state and the nation, but will also be constantly reconstructed in the future through memory and reflection, which is often the first step towards the preservation of evidence of the nation's major historical facts. Unfortunately, in terms of filmmaking other than documentaries, Belarus is currently under the discourse of the US, Russia, the UK, Ukraine and even Israel and Poland.

Since the accident in 1986, there has been no break in the production of Chernobyl documentaries in various countries. With the development of Chernobyl tourism, people were no longer satisfied with finding out the only truth, which in turn prompted film creators to gradually turn their attention to the creation of films and even

television series. Chernobyl has since become the subject of Intellectual Property, a commercial concept that has emerged with the rise of the internet, using popular literature, games, anime and video adaptations to create a range of creative operations and derivatives. Like two sides of the same coin, there are advantages and disadvantages to such IP development, and when the familiar Chernobyl theme is used, it is inevitably accompanied by a more discerning aesthetic and consumer judgement. But no matter how one chooses to flip this coin, it is a positive move towards international discourse.

On 6 May 2019, the US HBO miniseries *Chernobyl* rekindled the curiosity and frenzy about Chernobyl. Based largely on the oral history of the Chernobyl tragedy, the drama presents the story of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in the Soviet Ukraine in 1986 and its aftermath through a combination of reality and fiction. With the slogan "What is the cost of lying? Chernobyl has not only been a hit with fans since its launch, but from its premiere on 6 May to its finale on 3 June, *Chernobyl's* ratings have risen to over 50% on-demand. When the audience for *Chernobyl* is broken down, 35% are linear, 13% are hardcore fans and a whopping 52% are viewers on other platforms. This last figure is the trump card in HBO's hands and a record-breaking one. No other HBO series has yet contributed more than 50% of its figures. That means that *Chernobyl* broke this record held by *Game of Thrones*[43]. With the momentum of packing and word of mouth going all the way to the top, it deservedly swept numerous world awards of all sizes, including the Golden Globes for Best Motion Picture and Television and Best Actor.

In 1991 the film *Chernobyl: The Last Warning* was made, and although it was not a great film in every respect and did not do as well at the box office as it should have, Hollywood has not let up on the interesting subject of Chernobyl since then. Several documentary documentaries have been made in the intervening 30 years, *Heart of Chernobyl* (2003), *Rescuing Chernobyl* (2006), *Echoes of Chernobyl* (2011), *Chernobyl Bolshoi* (2015), *Chernobyl Babushkas* (2015) and many more, several with ratings of 7 or more on IMDB.

Russian productions of Chernobyl date back as far as the 1987 documentary *Chernobyl.khronika trudnykh nedel*, and subsequent productions on the subject have been similarly documentary-based. In 2014, a Russian science fiction television series entitled *Chernobyl - The Forbidden Zone* was broadcast and became an instant hit. It used science fiction elements such as a time machine and the butterfly effect to speculate on other possibilities for the disaster from different perspectives. Many people fantasise that if they could travel back in time before the disaster, they would change the course of history with their ingenuity. The show shows us that even if the delusion were to come true, the whole timeline of the world would change with it, and that everything would not just turn out for the better; the spiral of history would not change. This kind of drama satisfies the fantasy of a large part of the audience about the

different consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, while at the same time it defuses the horror of the "unspeakable" history with a Russian romance.

The current environment of frequent intercultural exchanges between countries around the world presents both opportunities and challenges for national discourse in Belarus. On the one hand, globalisation has brought about the phenomenon of cultural homogenisation, with national cultures facing the loss of their individuality at any time in a common Internet environment, as scholars have said: "Communication in the age of globalisation is characterised by the compression of the world into a plane without locality by means of communication that eliminates time gaps[46,p11-14]." On the other hand, the globalisation of communication is also characterised by a "cultural backlash", i.e. the resistance and struggle of local cultures (or national cultures) against foreign cultures. As the American sociologist Roland Robertson has pointed out ": global capitalism promotes both cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity, and is subject to both cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity[39]." The interaction between cultures in the context of globalisation is therefore necessarily a two-way process. In the face of such strong cultural exports from the United States and Russia, perhaps Belarus cannot completely ignore them, nor is it entirely satisfied with the discourse of others. Indeed, the motives of the creators of Belarusian cinema can already be seen in the film *Forbidden Zone*, which was released in 2020. Although it is difficult to claim that the creation of a certain type of film subject is successful from the very beginning, it is rare to see that in the context of intercultural communication, Belarus is awakening to a cultural consciousness to fight for the right to speak. All this provides a possible opportunity for Belarusian films to participate in intercultural communication.

3.3.2 Intercultural communication strategies for Belarusian films

Belarusian cinema is currently facing a double situation of low quality in general and insufficient international distribution. On the one hand, the so-called "new cinema" of Belarus after 2010 has made a breakthrough in both commercial and artistic terms, with the emergence of "phenomenal" films such as *The Crystal Swan*, which have successfully entered the mainstream film festivals after attracting a wave of international attention. The film has also been a major part of the international art scene. On the other hand, the small splash of Belarusian cinema on the international art scene has failed to generate a big wave, and the general trend of collective anonymity persists, with no major productions such as "*Go See for Yourself*" appearing since the 1990s. All of this is a reminder that Belarus should face up to its irrevocable "cultural deficit" in the short term, and that Belarusian filmmakers need to develop a strategic mindset that effectively addresses this dilemma: "stimulate creativity internally, promote communication externally". There is no doubt that there is no way of reversing the reality of the long-standing international cinematographic deficit in the short term, except to gradually expand the domestic creative environment, strengthen the

expression of the national language and adapt thinking and methods to the advanced film concepts.

The first step out of this dilemma is to resolve our own contradictions, i.e. the "structural adjustment" of film production. There is currently no demand for Belarusian films in the international film market, especially among mainstream Western audiences. The US market, for example, is a "foreign language film" for all non-English language films, which are classified as art house releases and have difficulty entering the mainstream North American cinema market. In the current North American film market, American films alone account for 92% and European films for 6%, leaving only 2% for other countries such as India, Japan, Korea and China to compete for [33]. In terms of global film market share, for example, in 2014, the global box office was US\$37.5 billion, of which the US domestic and overseas film markets were US\$10.3 billion and US\$14.6 billion respectively, already accounting for 66% of the global market share [10]. As can be seen, the market for Hollywood films is by no means limited to North America, and audiences around the world are generally receptive to Hollywood films.

The competition for a share of the international film market may appear to be a game of economics, but in fact it is a "dark war" over national values. Hollywood, led by the United States, is undoubtedly the biggest winner, but this cultivation of national audiences' taste for Hollywood films is not a spontaneous act of the market. As early as the 1920s, the US government had already incorporated Hollywood films into its national strategy, analysing in detail the viewing behaviour and aesthetic tastes of audiences in different countries and establishing a detailed evaluation and judging system for the dissemination of American films abroad. Since then, American cinema has been able to enter the international film market in a flexible and inclusive manner, and has remained invincible to this day.

Returning to the long-term strategy for the development of Belarusian cinema, structural adjustment is an inevitable and effective tool to be drawn upon. This involves two steps. Firstly, it is inevitable to increase the production and quality of films, which in turn will lead to the development of a mature film production industry and a sufficiently efficient film business system as a basis for capturing international film market share. The second step is to consider not only whether it can be exported to other countries and how well it will do at the box office in overseas markets, but also the overall cultural significance, i.e. whether Belarusian culture has been effectively disseminated abroad. In terms of cultural significance, soft power is more important than box office and is more strategic and valuable for the reshaping of the image of the country and the nation. Therefore, it is necessary to do a comprehensive and in-depth research on foreign markets in different countries and regions. Based on data analysis of the viewing habits of different audience groups, diversified creative strategies are adopted and differentiated marketing tools are developed. With the backing of national

history, cultural re-creation of dramatic events such as the Patriotic War and Chernobyl can be used to satisfy different aesthetic habits while effectively grafting the national discourse on.

A healthy and sound film market requires the co-existence of commercial and independent films, each releasing its own discourse system. In cross-cultural communication, there is one type of film that has always attracted the attention of domestic and international filmmakers, namely independent films by new generation directors. These films are often born in the early stages of production by young filmmakers, without the large financial investment of a studio, and have an independently run production style and narrative pursuit. Independent filmmakers from various countries generally focus their attention on the marginalised characters of society, from thieves, troubled youths, prostitutes, working people and so on. After 2010, films such as "Higher than the Sky", "Galash", "Counting Oranges" and "II/II" are undoubtedly young Belarusian directors who tell the harsh and realistic problems of a society from an individual perspective and unique life experiences. Although such films are difficult to market in mainstream international cinemas, they are an important part of the national image in international communication and an effective means for foreign audiences to see a country and nation in all its diversity and wholeness.

There is reason to believe that in a globalised cultural system, Belarusian cinema has the opportunity to reconstruct its own national discourse, and that innovating traditions and transforming good experiences in the context of globalisation is the way to go. There is also reason to fear that Belarusian cinema will remain out of touch and out of tune with the ever-changing film market and cinematic ideas in the surging battle for the international film market in the future. Therefore, Belarusian cinema should not only move from a one-sided and passive acceptance of the cultural dissemination of other countries' films to an active and comprehensive participation in the dissemination, but also grasp the international dynamics in the dissemination strategy and follow the laws of artistic communication, which is the long-term solution for cultural development.

CONCLUSIONS

Since its inception, cinema has had a communicative character and has played an important role in modern society, forming an asymmetrical relationship with the audience through its stories, thus exerting a 'subtle' influence on their values and ideologies. This particular attribute has given cinema a special political significance, whether it be the Soviet montage school or American Hollywood films, which are all characterised by national image-making and ideological communication. This is also illustrated by the fact that. The films of a country or nation should reflect its own universally accepted values and, through the international film market, achieve cross-cultural communication with audiences from different countries, so as to "influence the audience invisibly". The main methods used to study the artistic and communication values of cinema in this paper are: documentary analysis, comparative analysis and case studies.

The structure of the text consists of three chapters. The first chapter defines the concept of Belarusian cinema through the literature, and compares the stages of cinema development. The second chapter is a comparative analysis with Chinese cinema to obtain the overall characteristics of Belarusian cinema. The third chapter is an analysis of the national image of Belarus through dramatic events of the 20th century, as well as an analysis of the role of Belarusian cinema in shaping the image of the country and the nation through cinematic cases and cases from other countries.

The findings of the study are as follows.

1. For 69 years of the 20th century, Belarus was part of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was an important centre of output for world cinema, giving birth to the school of montage headed by Eisenstein, Kulishov, Pudovkin and Vertov, which contributed greatly to the history of world cinema and the development of the film idea. However, the Soviet Union's literary and artistic activities, including film production, were mainly concentrated in what is now Russia. Belarus established its first studio in 1924 with the help of the Soviet regime, and with a late start, insufficient investment and a lack of professional staff, the level of film production in Belarus initially differed markedly from that of the Soviet Union as a whole.

Belarusian cinema during the Soviet period was heavily influenced by the supreme ideology of the Soviet regime, and in terms of the mode of creation, narrative themes, creative aims and filming methods it conformed to the features of Soviet-era cinema, namely the portrayal of typical characters and the telling of stories of pioneering heroic figures or great leaders. Especially during the Stalinist period, cinema as a political weapon had an extremely strong mainstream ideology and ideology. Film production based on the Patriotic War was the mainstream of Soviet cinema until the end of the Second World War, when the overall creative direction in the Belarusian region differed slightly from that of the Soviet Union and began to

focus on the production of children's films. From the Khrushchev period to the Gorbachev period, film concepts diverged from the overall Soviet trend of poetic filmmaking, but there was also a shift towards individual narratives rather than elite discourses for films on the subject of the Patriotic War.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Belarus gradually moved away from the Soviet model, and although it did not produce or export many films overall, it began to diversify and multiply its creative genres, with urban comedies and military historical films being the most popular, in addition to children's films. In addition to national productions, the country is also actively experimenting with co-productions with Ukraine, Poland, Russia and Germany, mainly on the theme of the Patriotic War. 2010 saw the emergence of a 'new cinema' in Belarus, with a number of young filmmakers experimenting with independent productions and gradually coming to the forefront of international cinema.

In a comparative analysis of Belarusian and Chinese cinema, it is clear that there are significant differences in the creation of the same subject matter in different countries, social environments and national psychologies. In the case of World War II, Belarus and China belonged to the Patriotic War and the War of Resistance against Japan. During the same period, Belarus was a politically and economically developed Russian socialist country, while China was a feudal, backward, semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. There are therefore two main narrative differences in the film.

Firstly, the narrative subjects differ significantly. The nationals in Belarusian films are basically educated to a certain extent, retaining the highest ideals and loyalty to the Soviet regime and having an advanced ideology. The attitude towards the war against fascism is positive and united, with a collectivist spirit and a national concept. The nationals in Chinese films are often numb to the state of their country being invaded, a very primitive expression of small peasant ideology. Even the heroic characters, whose original perceptions of the country and the nation are confused, are guided by the Party through blood and tears before they realise the importance of the revolution and join the revolutionary trend. Most of the characters joined the revolution out of a need to survive, for example, to be fed and clothed by the army, and to receive a pension upon discharge. This is quite different from the national spontaneity of Belarus.

The difference in national spontaneity leads to a completely different narrative focus in Belarus than in China. Belarusian WWII films are more commemorative and national pride, and for Belarus the Patriotic War is a concentrated expression of national cohesion, with less reflection on national shortcomings. Chinese WWII films, on the other hand, contain reflections on the pain of a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and on the inferiority of the nation. In contrast, Chinese WWII films have more reflective and critical overtones of ethnography

Secondly, the narrative perspective is completely different. After the collapse

of the Soviet Union, Belarusian cinema focused almost exclusively on the microscopic expression of individual trauma, reflecting on the brutality and sacrifice of the war, and this narrative concept is highly humanistic. In contrast, Chinese narratives tend to be macro-narratives, and all films about the war against Japan are no more than expressions of the 'national view of war'. Even though individual traumas have been added to the films of the 21st century, the use of national righteousness and heroism to move the audience is still the mainstream of creativity.

In comparison with American and Russian cinematography, Belarusian cinema is currently at a disadvantage. This is especially true for Chernobyl, where it is clear that Belarusian cinema has a weak grasp of the national discourse and is largely dependent on American and Russian interpretations.

The reasons for the collective loss of Belarusian voice in the international cinema can be divided into two main areas.

Firstly, in contrast to the Hollywood film industry, Belarus does not have a well-developed film industry and lacks a healthy market environment, and the lack of profitability has led to a low level of investment. This is not only a drawback for Belarusian cinema, but a problem that exists in many countries. This is why it is essential to learn from the Hollywood model in order to develop a good ecology for the industry.

Secondly, the lack of a structurally adjusted creative habit and cultural consciousness is one of the main reasons for the weak voice of Belarusian cinema in the international arena. The key to the internationalisation of local cinema is how to achieve efficient communication between national cultures and national ideas in cross-cultural communication. What Belarusian cinema needs to do now is not only to improve quality and production, but also to transcode the national language internationally, to diversify the expression of the national discourse and to use forms of expression that are universally accepted in different countries.

For the United States, Hollywood has long been a national strategy for international image-building and the export of American values, rather than a cultural industry for financial gain. This is an important lesson for the development of Belarusian cinema, where rational analysis, rational planning and steady practice of cultural industries such as cinema is a necessary step for the country's cultural soft power, and an imperative for the sustainable and stable development of Belarusian cinema and the struggle for a national discourse.

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