

1995. "Tian Zhuangzhuang, the Fifth Generation, and Minorities Film in China" *Public Culture* Vol. 8 no. 1: 161-75. <http://www.uchicago.edu/research/jnl-pub-cult/backissues/pc18/gladney.html> full text: <http://www.hawaii.edu/dru/articles/horsethief.pdf>

Tian Zhuangzhuang, The "Fifth Generation," & "Minorities Film" in China: A Review Essay

Dru C. Gladney*

Tian Zhuangzhuang, one of China's most controversial of the so-called "Fifth Generation" filmmakers, recently garnered the highest awards in both the Tokyo International Film Festival and the Honolulu International Film Festival for his newest film, The Blue Kite (1993). Tian's reputation was established by two earlier films that have been described as "ethnographic" and "documentary" in nature, despite their being feature films, due to their minority subjects and locations in Mongolia and Tibet. As Tony Rayns noted in his review of origins of the "New Chinese Cinema," these two earlier films, On the Hunting Ground (Liechang Zhasa, 1985) and Horse Thief (Daomazei 1986), were important departures from the earlier "minorities films" tradition in China in that they showed "the physical and spiritual lives of 'national minorities' in Inner Mongolia and Tibet, minus the usual mediating presence of Han Chinese" (Rayns 1991: 112). This article will suggest that the deliberate silencing of the Han Chinese voice in Tian's "minorities films" represents an important shift at the inception of the so-called "Fifth Generation" films -- a shift away from national narrative toward cultural critique. By moving his films to the geographic and national borders of China, Tian and many other filmmakers were able to effectively address critical issues gnawing at the heartland.

Although Tian's "minority" films have been by now overshadowed by his recent award-winning Blue Kite, we would do well to take another look at what became known as the "Chinese Westerns" in China, precisely because they show the earlier efforts of a young, relatively unknown filmmaker to address subjects both critical of Chinese culture and society, as well as highly visual in nature (both films were famous for their stunning cinematography and minimalist dialogue,

didacticism, and narrativity).¹ Though Tian's films have been compared to the "minorities films" genres which preceded them, I will argue here that Tian's work and the role they played in influencing and helping to form the Fifth Generation represent a significant departure, or to use Gayatri Spivak's terms, a "strategic intervention" in apprising the state of the Chinese nation-state and film in China.

Tian's most recent film Blue Kite represents a more direct and devastating critique of the policies of the totalizing and vacillating Chinese state that led to such radical periods as the Great Leap Forward (1959-61) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and the demise of three marriages (a state apparatus that Tian, if I read him right, still believes is susceptible to similar shifts of political pendulum -- which perhaps indicates why Tian is being sued by the central authorities for distributing the film abroad after it had been banned in Beijing). What is significant about Tian's earlier work is that he chose minority subjects to engage in a similar cultural and political critique, only more obliquely. In the political climate of the mid-1980s, it was still more acceptable to stand on the margins (literally, the geographical borderlands of Tibet and Mongolia), than to critique the state from the center. One may argue that Blue Kite is still a "safe" attempt at critical intervention, since it takes as its subject the officially excoriated Cultural Revolution. Even though Tian in almost soap-operatic style reiterates the now accepted themes about the mistreatment of intellectuals and the dissolution of families, it is still a topic not widely dealt with in the public sphere in China, and one that got the film banned and Tian sued by the state. By selecting such "marginal" and "safe" subjects, Tian clearly knew what he was doing.

Horse Thief is also worthy of another look because it represents an important, if not last, contribution of China's Fifth Generation filmmakers. The Fifth Generation filmmakers are widely attributed as having created a new era of films that deliberately chose the genre of minority and rural regions as useful canvasses on which to paint their larger constructions and deconstructions of Chinese society. Wu Tianming did it best perhaps in Old Well (Xi'an Studio, 1986), but Chen Kaige was most dramatic in Yellow Earth (Guangxi Studio, 1984). Zhang Yimou, perhaps the most

famous of the Fifth Generation, accomplishes much the same kind of distancing through moving his films to rural and for the most part, pre-revolutionary China.² In similar fashion, Tian takes us to minority areas set in 1923 to paint his devastating critique of Chinese society and the roles its subject peoples play in that cultural criticism. It is significant that Tian may have been the last of his "Fifth Generation" to have done so. Professor Zhou Chuanji, the teacher of many of the Fifth Generation filmmakers who studied with him in the early 1980s at the Beijing Film Academy, stated that he believed Horse Thief was the last of the Fifth Generation films.³ This was primarily due, Zhou argues, to the film's artistic quality, non-commercial nature, and reliance upon state funding. Later films by Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang were made with substantially larger funding, much of it foreign (from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan), and with a view to international distribution and profit-making. Horse Thief, therefore, may very well be the last of its Fifth Generation.

Horse Thief and its Critics

Horse Thief was very controversial in China. Not, however, for the reasons one might expect. It was not the subject matter that most found upsetting. The faraway, exotic minority subjects in On the Hunting Ground and Horse Thief not only confused his urban audiences, it bored them. So much so that they stayed away in droves and wondered loudly why the state supported such obscurantism. The uproar in the popular press was not over controversial content, it was that Tian's films made so little money. They were duds. Chris Berry (1991b: 114ff) informs us in his article: "Market Forces: China's 'Fifth Generation' Faces the Bottom Line" that most films in China make money not so much by box office sales as by the ordering of prints by state-run theaters. An average film sells over a 100 prints. Tian's Hunting Ground film sold two. Horse Thief did only slightly better with 7. Both films were mainly purchased by the head offices of the China Film Corporation, who were already under contract to do so. The director Zhang Junzhao (maker of One and Eight, Come on, China!, and The Lonely Murderer), justified his more conservative and straightforward films as necessary for political and financial survival. "Horse Thief

and On the Hunting Ground lost tens of thousands of yuan between them, and no one went to see them," Zhang noted, and then asked: "Do you think the Xi'an Film Studio will dare to use him again?" (in Gao 1991: 131). Zhang was apparently right in that Tian's next film was not until 6 years later, and it was financed by outside sources.

Tian, and more importantly, his boss Wu Tianming, the head of Xi'an Film Studio from 1983 to 1989 and widely regarded as the father of the Fifth Generation filmmakers, argued that these were art films and deserved to be made "for art's sake." In Tian's defense, Wu Tianming explained: "There are three audiences that have to be satisfied in China. One is the government, one is the art world, and one is the ordinary popular audience" (cited in Berry 1991b: 122). He goes on to say that for the government it is "reform films" that are shot, for the art world it is "exploratory" films, and for the popular market, it has been "Kung Fu" films." Tian's work was clearly too exploratory for China's audience. In an interview with China's widely read film journal, Popular Cinema, Tian defended himself: "I shot Horse Thief for audiences of the next century to watch" (translated in Yang 1991: 126). Quoting Wu Tianming, Tian says he would rather "a film didn't sell a single copy, just so long as the quality is good." At least Tian's Hunting Ground sold two copies. "[T]he main problem," in Tian's opinion, "was the audience" (in Yang 1991: 126). Tian's Horsethief, therefore, may mark the end of the Fifth Generation, not only due to its content, but also as a result of the post-Horsethief institutional shift away from State funding dissociated from profit concerns, to films funded by transnational film corporations (in Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) geared for financial success on the world market.

Minority Representation in China

I noted earlier that Tian's films indicated a significant departure from earlier "minorities films" in China. "Minorities Film" includes a wide-range of state-sponsored educational and feature films in China set in minority areas from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, which almost exclusively emphasize not only the "color" and beauty of their "traditional" cultures, but also their "backwardness" (lounhou) and the oppression minorities experienced under the old "feudal" system, and their "liberation" by the communists. As such, they represent "civilizing projects" of the State not only for the minorities, but for the cinematic public at large who learn to distinguish between primitivity and modernity by viewing the "plight" of the minorities. In the 1950s "documentary" films were made in minority areas depicting strange and sometimes erotic customs, including matrilineal marriage and extramarital sex, often using minority and Han actors to "act out" what was thought to be "primitive" minority customs leftover from the "feudal" era.⁴ Clark (1987a: 22-5) argues that in the 1960s, feature films depicted the "soft" southwestern minorities such as the Yi, Miao, Zhuang, Dai, and Bai as the "happy, smiling" natives, including Ashma (Ashima, directed by Liu Qiong, Haiyan studio, 1964), Third Sister Liu (Liu Sanjie, directed by Su Li, Changchun studio, 1960), Five Golden Flowers (Wuduo Jinhua, directed by Wang Jiayi, Changchun studio, 1959), and Menglongsha Village (Menglongsha, directed by Wang Ping and Yuan Xian, August First studio, 1960). Northwestern minorities, such as the Uighur, Tibetans, Mongols, and Kazakhs were featured in films that tended to stress "harder" themes such as class and political struggle in harsh and exotic environments, including Visitor on Ice Mountain (Bingshan shang de laike, directed by Zhao Xinshui, Changchun studio, 1963), Red Flower of Tianshan (Tianshan de Honghua, directed by Cui Wei, Chen Huaikai, and Liu Baode, Xi'an and Beijing studios, 1964), and Son and Daughter of the Grassland (Caoyuan ernü, directed by Fu Jie, Beijing studio, 1975). The disruption of the Cultural Revolution and the re-introduction of Western Films into China in the late 1970s and early 1980s meant the decline of this traditional exoticization in service of

the state. Chinese audiences could once again turn to imported films to satisfy curiosities about things foreign, and the minorities began to appear in Tian's and other films for difference reasons.

Since the subject of Horse Thief is Tibet, an excellent contrast illustrating this transition in "minorities film" is provided by another film on Tibet, the classic Serfs (Nongnu, directed by Li Jun, August First studio, 1963).⁵ In this film, as in so many others, the minorities become useful subjects for illustrating the evils of social oppression in feudal society that the communists liberated in 1949. In this film, a Tibetan serf, Jampa, is abused and mistreated by the son of his Tibetan landlord, who goes so far as to make him serve as his footstool, and even as his horse, with the son occasionally riding around on Jampa's back. Most of the film details this abusive relationship and the harshness and poverty of life on the Tibetan plateau, prior to direct Chinese Communist control.

Things change dramatically when the 1959 revolt takes place and the rebels who include Jampa's Tibetan overlords are forced to flee (presumably with the Dalai Lama who is leading the "oppressors" away from the "liberating" army). Once again Jampa is forced at gun point to serve as his master's beast of burden, carrying him on his back as they flee. When Jampa resists this mistreatment, literally flinging off his oppressor, his master attempts to shoot him and just then a PLA soldier intervenes, giving his own life to protect Jampa. Jampa returns to help the PLA soldiers suppress the rebellion in Lhasa, even unearthing caches of arms in a temple statue of a Bodhisattva, becoming himself a metaphor of both liberated and subjugated -- an unwitting servant of now yet another master, this time in a PLA uniform. Serfs, of course, makes it clear that the green uniform is to be preferred over the saffron.

Serfs shares some key similarities with Horse Thief but even more important differences. Both films exoticize the minority subjects, their lands, and life-worlds, but for very different reasons. One is in service to the state, the other in resistance to it. One represents a "civilizing project", the other the suggestion of radical alterity, though both claim to be ethnographic.⁶ Jampa turns against his oppressor,

and becomes subjugated to the state. The horse thief turns against his people, by preying upon them, and his retribution is then dealt to him by his people and their system of natural justice: abandonment to an ecosystem that he has violated by stealing from his own people, a nature that finally turns against him. The first film makes religion a part of the feudal oppressive system, the second film naturalizes Tibetan religious experience, making it part of both the exotic and harsh nature that administers blessing and retribution among his people. Both films use the minorities in their quest to be politically and socially relevant to the majority audience who gaze at these minorities and their surroundings in all its exoticized splendor.

The representation of the "minority" in these films and other public portrayals in China reflect an objectivizing "majority" nationality discourse that parallels the valorization of social and political hierarchy.⁷ The widespread definition and representation of the "minority" as exotic, colorful, and "primitive" homogenizes the undefined majority as united, mono-ethnic, and modern. Thus, both Serfs and Horse Thief, though using ethnographic subjects, have little to do with Tibet, or the minorities themselves; they have much to do with the Han majority, and issues concerning their audience. The ethnic subjects in these and other minority films become useful venues for addressing controversial and sometimes taboo issues among the majority. The politics of representation in China reveal much about the State's project constructing in often binary minority/majority terms an "imagined" national identity (Anderson 1983). Through reading the representation of minorities in China, this film suggests that we might learn much, perhaps more, about the construction of majority identity in China, and the state of society in general, by back-tracking to the larger issues lying behind the film and the choosing of minorities as its subjects.

China scholars have critiqued the often colorful and exotic portrayal of minorities in China as demeaning and of use to the state (Diamond 1988; Thierry 1989), which extends to imperial times (see Eberhard 1982). Minorities have also played an important role in the formation of art history in the PRC (Chang 1980; Laing 1988; Lufkin 1990). I would like to suggest here that the representation of the minorities in such exotic romanticized fashion has more to do with constructing a

majority discourse, than it does with the minorities themselves. Significantly, and here this study moves beyond Edward Said's Euro-centric "orientalist" critique, the representation of minorities and the majority in Chinese art, literature, and media has surprising parallels to the now well-known portrayals of the "East" by Western orientalists, providing an alternative "oriental orientalism." This Eastern "orientalism," and the objectification of the minority Other and majority Self in China, is a "derivative discourse," in Partha Chatterjee's (1986:10) terms, stitched from not only from Chinese imperial traditions, but also Western (namely Marxist), and Japanese ideas of nationalism and modernity. This approach rejects the dominant idea that anyone who came into China, foreigner, minority, or "barbarian," was subject to assimilation, or "Sinicization" (Ch'en 1966, Lal 1970). In these typical configurations, Chinese culture was said to have absorbed and dissolved foreign cultures. The commodification and objectification of minorities in China is more than a response to consumer tourism and world capitalism, although the market is certainly an important fact here, particularly with the Fifth Generation films that followed Horsethief. Appropriation of the minorities provides the state with symbolic and hard capital (Bourdieu 1977:6). The exoticization and representation of minorities is an enterprise that takes on an enhanced salience with the rise of the Chinese nation-state and is central to its nationalization and modernization project: A homogenized majority at the expense of an exoticized minority.⁸

Backgrounding "Minorities Film"

The genre known as "Minorities film" has played an important role in reforming certain accepted norms of Chinese taste. Paul Clark (1987a:20), noted critic of Chinese film, argues that it is the "propensity of minorities film to explore normally avoided subjects" that made them so successful and influential. In a Channel Four documentary on "New Chinese Cinema," Wu Tianming, the director of the now famous Xi'an Film Studio, where many of the influential "fifth generation" filmmakers were working (including Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Chen Kaige), quoted a Chinese proverb: "When there's no tiger on the mountain, the

monkey is king," indicating that it is distance from the centers of power such as Beijing and Shanghai which allowed his studio the freedom for exploration.

Tian Zhuangzhuang defended his using minorities as important film subjects precisely because they were exotic and different. He argued that people misunderstood his film because of the "foreign" subject: "It's an alien culture" (Yang 1991: 129). In a Channel Four documentary interview, Tian Zhuangzhuang noted that both On the Hunting Ground and Horsethief, though dealing with exotic minorities, were "actually about the fate of the whole Chinese nation [New Chinese Cinema 1988].

Paul Clark (1987b:101) argues it is the search for both "the exotic," and a "national style" (*minzu fengge*), that drove minorities films. Through the medium of officially approved film, Chinese national identity becomes clearly objectified in Tian's films. By going to minority areas and objectifying the constructed minority Other as radically alterior, unrestrained, virile, beautiful, and at times brutally violent, the repressed, bounded Han majority self becomes subject to cultural critique.

Borderless Crossing: Exoticization in Chinese Film

There are important parallels here to the National Geographic tradition of the exoticized and eroticized portrayal of the Other for a conservative readership which generally regards such portrayals of its "own" as too extreme or even pornographic.⁹ As Clark (1987a:15-16) explains: "Film audiences could travel to 'foreign' lands without crossing the nation's borders." But there is more here than just fascination with the exotic or National Geographic-style romanticization of the primitive, which one might argue is found in almost any society. In China, the State is intimately tied to, in control of, and provides funding for the politicized process of portraying the Other (or in Tian's case, attempts to sue for its financial return). The real issue here is why the state should choose to explicitly support such an enterprise. I argue that the politics of this representation of minority Other is both an extension of power-relation practices in the traditional Chinese state, as well as a product of China's recent rise as a nation-state in this century.

In Horse Thief, Tian takes us to a faraway land to reveal the moral depravity of an over-bureaucratized, urbanized Chinese core, which lacks beauty, vigor, and ritual. The pageantry, natural justice, and in the end, brutality of Horse Thief sends a message to China's alienated urban populace. A message that many of them might not have been ready for. It succeeds in convincing them that their lives are less spiritual, less natural, and bound by the vicissitudes of the modern condition. Yet, in the end the film also fails, precisely because its subjects become over-exoticized, too alien for its audience to understand or become attracted to. The message is too ambiguous. It was thus ultimately rejected by the broader population. Just as the singing and dancing, squeaky-clean minorities of an earlier genre failed to convince its audience that these people really were "liberated" by the party, and not just playing parts for a new director, so Tian's minorities films are fundamentally disappointing. Disappointing in that they both break with earlier representations of minorities and simultaneously re-constitute them.

The exoticized and even romanticized images of the harsh Tibetan landscape serve as vehicles for widening the gulf between the audience and the subjects of the film. Few in China could relate to the open territory, uncrowdedness, lawlessness, and isolation of Tibet or Mongolia as they are portrayed in Tian's films. The distance between majority Self and minority Other is made unbridgeable; the absence of the Han in the films, and anything to which they can relate, makes the film alien, and alienating, to the viewer. This is deliberate. Tian's motive is not ethnographic; he does not want his Han viewers to understand, establish empathy, or reach any commonality with his foreign subjects. His purpose is that of alterity: by contrasting naturalized, "primitive," and even "barbaric" minority life with the viewer's own domesticated, "modern," and "civilized" existences, Tian calls into question the very basis of that contrast.¹⁰ By mid-1980s China, intellectuals had begun to openly re-address issues of urban alienation, democratization, sexuality, and cultural criticism that had been raised during the 1979-80 "democracy wall" movement, leading to the 1986 and 1989 student democratic protests (Gladney 1990). The horse thief's freedom, disregard for the state and its laws, loyalty to his family and clan, and his close

attachment to nature call into question the primitive/modern assumptions of his viewers: Is the modernized, urbanized, civilized life any better? Only through driving the Self/Other wedge as deeply as possible in this film can Tian begin to force these issues on his audience. He certainly could not raise them directly.

In both the early "minorities film" genre and Tian's use of minorities in film, the minority subjects are still just that: subjects of a colonizing regime with a civilizing project. And this project of civilization, and modernization, may be just as alien to the minorities as they are to the majority. Though Tian's film is more direct, and critical of the state, it reaffirms the minority as a colonized, orientalized subject. As in earlier films, here the minorities speak Mandarin, though with a slightly Qinghai or northwestern accent. They have no "voice", literal or otherwise, of their own. Tibetan is only spoken in song, greeting, or curse.¹¹ The Tibetans deal strictly in Chinese currency, language, and bureaucracy, readily accepting the Chinese administrative apparatus -- the foreign overlordship of their land.

This issue, of course, is never politicized in these film genres (lest they be even likelier candidates for the censor's knife), but in Tian's film, there is no device that would even suggest it is problematic for him. In both the earlier state-run minorities films and Tian's work, the minorities are merely useful subjects (compliant, like an "orientalized" female) in larger projects that have more to do with issues concerning the majority *watching* the film than the minorities *in* the film.

Representing Horse Thief's Minorities

In two cameos from Horse Thief, we see minority representation for Tian at its best, or perhaps worst. I refer here to the scenes featuring the only other non-Tibetans in the film, both cases involving Hui Muslim traders. Frequent travelers to Tibet have noted the extraordinary number of Muslim traders plying the Tibetan markets with their wares. These Hui merchants come from as far away as Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, and Xinjiang, exchanging tea, religious objects, and manufactured items from inland China for hard currency, Tibetan handicrafts, and imported goods

from India that are brought in by Nepalese and Tibetan relatives in India. As elsewhere in China, the Hui become the ethnoreligious mediators, the middlemen in a small private economy that "fills the cracks of Chinese socialism" with Muslim entrepreneurialism (see Gladney 1991: 149-60). And as one finds for Muslims throughout China, the same stereotypes apply. In case the viewer has forgotten, Tian repeats them. The film portrays the Muslims as crafty, sly, stingy, and untrustworthy, especially in the first scene where they sell Tibetan goods at a handsome profit. The camera focuses on the bearded Muslim in white hat clanging the silver coins to be sure they are real, indicating his lack of trust for his clients. It is also noteworthy that the Hui merchant, though Muslim, does not hesitate to sell Buddhist religious objects to Tibetans -- anything, for a profit.

In the second more dramatic encounter, three Muslim traders are surprised by Norbu and his accomplice on a distant trail and robbed by knife-point of their goods and money. After being robbed, one Muslim makes a feeble attempt at attacking Norbu with a small knife, slightly wounding him in the leg (which Norbu later describes as being inflicted by a "dog"), and Norbu severely cuts him with his much longer Tibetan sword. Yet Norbu is compassionate in his victory, offering money to each Muslim as a means of survival, and turning the majority of the goods over to the temple as an offering. For their part, the Muslims appear weak, cringing, and vindictive. The Tibetans, by contrast, are strong, ruthless, and possessing a distinctive "honor among thieves." In a stateless region where the police are nowhere near and all that matters is the laws of nature and clan (to which Norbu ultimately succumbs), the Tibetans are clearly the masters of their brutal environs. Norbu may be a horse thief (dao ma ze), Tian seems to imply, but he has more honor than these larcenous Muslims (zei huihui).¹²

Conclusion: Majority Agendas/Minority Subjects

Horse Thief begins and ends with close-up scenes of one the most harshest realities encountered on the Tibetan plateau: the funerary rite of "sky burial." In

both scenes we are given an intimate look at the Tibetan ritualized practice of presenting the prepared remains of the recent dead to carrion to be fully consumed, hastening one's eventual reincarnation or possible escape into the afterlife. While we are not told who the victim is in either scene, the final scene implies that it is Norbu himself being consumed, after being caught a last time at stealing horses and punished by his kinsmen, and indeed, nature itself. Despite his guilt at breaking the laws of the land, it is clear the film ultimately portrays Norbu as a victim, not only of the carrion, but of the harsh environment in which he is forced to steal if he is to survive and support his family.

This play between individual victimization and group survival, personal guilt and social exoneration, private attachment and public betrayal, thematically relates to a cataclysmic event intimately known by every viewer of the film in China: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Indeed, Zhou Chuanji and others have argued that it is the Cultural Revolution that has set the Fifth Generation apart from its predecessors and successors. Tian joined the army during the Cultural Revolution and would have seen direct evidence of its excesses due to the usage of the army to finally curb the escalating violence. Although the 41 year-old director was raised in a film family with both parents as actors and later officials in China's film industry, Tian did not enter the filmic world until he trained in the army as a still photographer, and then later as a cinematographer at the Beijing Agricultural Film Studio after he left the army at the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1975 (Berry 1991b: 194-5). This is perhaps why his films stress the visual over the narrative. It also may suggest why the Cultural Revolution may serve as an important background to the film.

The Cultural Revolution is certainly a major theme that many of the younger directors have only recently begun to address, as in Chen Kaige's Farewell, My Concubine and Tian Zhuangzhuang's Blue Kite (both of which were banned in China). It may very well be that Horse Thief, which at the time could not deal with the Cultural Revolution explicitly, addresses it implicitly, serving as a grand metaphor for the brutal victimization of the Cultural Revolution, where the drastic

shifts in party politics led to the attacks not only between political factions, but between husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend.¹³ The harshness of the ecological environment of Tibet can be mapped against the brutality of the political territory of internal China, indicating to its audience that victimization is a natural expediency. And indeed, the vulture scene might even indicate final exoneration. At one point during the film one of Norbu's clan members states that Norbu is so evil that not even the carrion would consume his flesh. The last scene's featuring a sky burial, with Norbu the most likely victim, may indicate that in the end he too will experience ritual re-birth. A hidden message of hope for Chinese society in general? If so, it was too subliminal for its critics to note.

We are left with a deeply complex film that few in China understood and even fewer attended. It became somewhat of a cult classic abroad for its revealing location footage of life on the Tibetan plateau, but few have noted its significance either for China or for minority representation. Minorities are represented on film much as they are exoticized and stigmatized in the public sphere. It is just that Tian's exoticization has a point: cultural intervention at the center of Chinese society. Issues such as the Cultural Revolution, alienation, criminality, identity, religiosity, and spirituality were pressing concerns in mid-1980s China, and may still be today. But at the time, in order to address these issues, Tian and other filmmakers, artists, and even tourists, have had to travel to the margins -- distant borderlands, which, as this film shows us, can reveal much, even of the heartlands, of China.

* This paper was first presented at the symposium: "Changing Representations of Minorities -- East and West", jointly sponsored by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and the East-West Center, 30 November 1993. I would like to thank the organizers of the conference, particularly Larry Smith, as well as the commentators, Wimal Dissanayake and Cynthia Ning, for their insightful contributions to this paper. The author is currently on-leave from the Anthropology Department of the University of Southern California and jointly affiliated with the Asian Studies Department, University of Hawai'i at Manoa and the Program for Cultural Studies, the East-West Center.

¹ Tony Rayns groups Tian's films with other "Fifth Generation" films, including Chen Kaige's Yellow Earth (Guangxi Film Studio, 1984), Zhang Zeming's Swan Song

(Pearl River Studio, 1985), Wu Ziniu's The Last Day of Winter (Xiaoxiang Studio, 1986), and Huang Jianxin's The Black Cannon Incident (Xi'an Studio, 1985). He argues they are all "new wave" for the following reasons: "They all minimize dialogue and trust their images to carry the burden of constructing meaning. They deliberately seek out subjects and angles of approach that have been missing from earlier Chinese films....a distinctively Chinese cinema, free of Hollywood and Mosfilm influences alike. Most important of all, though, they stand united against didacticism. They interrogate their own themes, and they leave their audiences ample space for reflection. After three decades of ideological certainty in Chinese cinema, they reintroduced *ambiguity*" (Rayns 1991: 112, emphasis in the original).

² Until his most recent Qiu Ju (1993), set in rural Shaanxi, Zhang Yimou's films all took place in pre-revolutionary China, including Hong Gaoliang (Red Sorghum, Xi'an Film studio, 1988) set in the Sino-Japanese war; Ju Dou (1989), set in rural Sichuan; and Raise the Red Lantern (Hongdeng Gaolou, 1991), set in the early 20th century. For an excellent review of Red Sorghum that sets out themes oft-repeated in Zhang's later work, see Wang Yuejin (1989: 31-40).

³ Personal interview. I am grateful to Huang Hai-yen for arranging this interview with Prof. Zhou Chuanji during his recent visit to Honolulu.

⁴ These films are no longer publicly shown and now located in the archives of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute for Nationality Studies (Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Yuan, Minzu Yanjiusuo). They include such films as Zouhun ("Moving Marriage") shot among the Naxi (Nuoso), and other films on the Yi, Wa, and Miao in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. For an excellent overview of "Minorities Film" in China, see Clark (1987a).

⁵ This film is described in detail by Paul Clark (1987b: 96-9).

⁶ I am grateful to Michael Fischer for drawing my attention to the contrast in these strategies.

⁷ For a more extended discussion of minority/majority representation in China, see Gladney (1994).

⁸ This project has apparently met with success not only in China, whose census regularly divides the population into 56 distinct "nationalities" (minzu, a multi-vocal and problematic term, see Gladney 1991: 306-21), but also with Western scholars who readily accept the Han as China's 94 percent majority. See Eric Hobsbawm's classic restatement in his authoritative work, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780 (1990:66): "...China, Korea, and Japan, which are indeed among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous." Hobsbawm continues: "Thus of the (non-Arab) Asian states today Japan and the two Koreas are 99% homogeneous, and 94% of the People's Republic of China are Han" (p. 66, nt. 37).

⁹ For an excellent deconstruction of the eroticized, exoticized image of the "primitive" in National Geographic, see Lutz and Collins' (1993) Reading National Geographic.

¹⁰ Tian reveals his deliberate ethnocentrism when he justified the horse thief's lawlessness as being part of his "alien" nature. When his interviewer points out that "horse-stealing is always wrong," Tian responds: "Horse-stealing is very common in Tibet, to the point where it's almost a profession. For reasons of physical geography and lack of economic development, horses are a form of currency in Tibet, and so horse-stealing happens a lot. For me to become a horse thief would be the same as becoming a carpenter, and I wouldn't feel there was any difference" (in Yang 1991: 130).

¹¹ When I complained of the over usage of voice-over and dubbing in Chinese films, Zhou Chuanji suggested that the high rate of illiteracy in China meant that subtitling was not possible. Chinese characters on screen would not work because many Chinese could neither follow them, nor read them fast enough to keep up with the

dialogue (even though in Hunting Ground and Horsethief there is almost no dialogue). Perhaps to help correct this problem and reach a wider audience, recent Hong Kong films have begun to use not only English subtitling, but Mandarin characters *and* special Cantonese characters as well, differing slightly from China's national script. These three lines of subtitling take up nearly one-third of the screen. One can only imagine what would be left of the screen if Tibetan or other indigenous languages were added.

¹² This may be a play on the term for "thief", zei, which rhymes with, and is frequently combined with, Hui (pronounced whey). Hence the "horse thief" (daoma zei) is more crafty (zei) than the larcenous Hui (zei Huihui) with whom he interacts in the border regions.

¹³ See Anne Thurston's (1987) dramatic depiction of victimization in her account of the personal experiences of several prominent individuals and their families during the Cultural Revolution.