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## Dialects into Films----The Element of “Dialect” in Chinese Films

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**DIALECTS INTO FILMS—THE ELEMENT OF “DIALECT” IN CHINESE FILMS**

A Thesis Presented

by

SHUN YAO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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CHINESE

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## **ABSTRACT**

DIALECTS INTO FILMS----THE ELEMENT OF “DIALECT” IN CHINESE FILMS  
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In recent years, using dialects in Chinese films has become more and more popular. By observing this phenomenon and investigating its history, I find out three functions that dialect has in cinema: severing as fun maker, indicating the identity of the speaker, helping to describe the speaker’s characteristics.

In order to understand why dialects have these functions in cinema, semiotic analysis and discourse analysis are employed in finding the reasons.

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## **TWO MAINLAND GUYS MET IN HONGKONG**

“From the sound of your accent, you guys seem to come from Shandong Province”

“Yes, you are right” “Then we are fellow townsmen, which part of Shandong do you come from?”

This is a conversation in the Hong Kong-made comedic film *From Beijing with Love* (guo chan ling ling qi 1994). The director, the actors, and the workers who made this film are all from Hong Kong. While the content of this film is somehow about mainland China: When an extremely precious dinosaur skull is stolen in Shenyang and then sold to a tycoon in Hong Kong, many funny situations happen to a joyful James Bond type character from mainland China, who is sent to Hong Kong to recover the skull. From the content of this conversation, we can see that these two guys are from Shandong province. While different from what we hear, the subtitles in the bottom of screen show:

“From the sound of your accent, you guys seem to come from Hunan Province”

“Yes, you are right” “Then we are fellow townsmen, which part of Hunan do you come from?”

Here we can see “Hunan” replaced “Shandong”. In the mainland version, Mandarin narrated the whole film except this conversation, where dialect is used. What

surprises us is that indeed the dialect spoken by these two guys here is not Shandong dialect, nor Hunan dialect, but Henan dialect.

This example brings up lots of issues, such as: the misidentification of dialects in China, the relationships between Mandarin and those dialects, how Hong Kong films are introduced in mainland China, and even how to translate those texts (The original version of this film is in Cantonese).

To understand these relationships better, we may need to gain a more systematic understanding of the dialects in Chinese films.

## CHAPTER 1

### A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Scope

In recent years, using dialects in films is becoming more and more popular. We can see the ubiquitous Tangshan dialect in *Aftershock* (tang shan Da di zhen 2010), and the unique complete Sichuan dialect version of *Let the bullets fly* (rang zi dan fei 2010). We can also see the hodgepodge of Chongqing dialect, Qingdao dialect, Henan dialect in *Crazy Stone* (feng kuang de shi tou 2006). These films are all important parts of this new dialect trend. Sometimes the dialects in these films give people a real-life picture, sometimes they indicate the speaker's identity, and sometimes they make the audiences laugh out loud.

There are several linguistic definitions related to our discussions. We should clarify them. The first one is *dialects*. A dialect is a variety or variant of a language<sup>1</sup>. Dialects can be divided as regional dialect and social dialect. Here the dialects I refer to are mainly regional dialects. Within the Chinese language, there are ten major dialects. They are Northern dialect, Jin dialect, Wu dialect, Hui dialect, Xiang dialect, Gan dialect,

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<sup>1</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, *Hanyu fangyanxue daolun* 汉语方言学导论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 1.

Hakka, Cantonese, Min dialect and Pinghua dialect. We call them the Ten Major Dialects<sup>2</sup>.

The second one is *Mandarin*. It is also called Putonghua or Guanhua. It is a standardized variety of Chinese and the official language of the People's Republic of China. The phonology of the standard is based on the Beijing dialect. There are two meanings of Mandarin Chinese: 1. The official language of China. 2. The language generally used by the public<sup>3</sup>. These two meanings are very closely connected with each other. Because of the language barriers caused by different dialects will prevent the official administration in many dynasties the governments enact some regulations to promulgate Mandarin. For example, in Qing dynasty, Emperor Yongzheng enacted the regulation that all the officials had to have the ability to speak Mandarin<sup>4</sup>.

The third one is Northern dialect. We also call it Mandarin dialect or Northern Mandarin because it is mainly used in the north part of Chinese spoken area. Different from Mandarin, Northern dialect is not the national language of China. It is also a dialect.

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<sup>2</sup> About how many kinds of dialects in China, there are many different views: "From Zhang Taiyan's 'Ten groups' saying, Li Jinxi's twelve categories, Chao Yuenren's theory of 9 dialect areas in 1930s, Li Fanggui's viewpoint of eight dialect partitions, Wang Li's five major dialects theory, to Ding Shusheng, Li Rong's purpose of eight dialect areas, Zhan Bohui's saying of seven dialect areas, until recently Li Rong's theory of ten dialect areas!" See Liang Jinrong 梁金荣, Gao Ran 高然, Zhong Qi 钟奇, "Guanyu fangyan fenqu de jigewenti" 关于方言分区的几个问题, *Guangdong shehui kexue*, no. 1 (1997). Here we adopt Li Rong's saying of ten dialect areas.

<sup>3</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Chinese Department of Peking University, *Modern Chinese* 现代汉语 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), 4.

It can be divided into Beijing Mandarin, Northeastern Mandarin, Jiaoliao Mandarin, Jilu Mandarin, Zhongyuan Mandarin, Lanyin Mandarin, Southwestern Mandarin, Jianghuai Mandarin<sup>5</sup>. These sub-dialects are spoken in the vast land of China, by a population of 0.66 billion, which is 64.51 percentages of Chinese populations<sup>6</sup>. Different from other major dialects, Northern dialect is the basic dialect of Mandarin.<sup>7</sup> This means that compared to other dialects, there are more similarities between the Northern dialect and Mandarin.<sup>8</sup>

For these major dialects, they can be further divided into smaller groups: dialect—sub-dialect—vernacular—accent. For example, as You Rujie says, Min dialect can be divided as six sub-dialects. They are Southern Min, Northern Min, Eastern Min, Middle Min, Puxian, Qiongwen sub-dialects. Southern Min sub-dialect can be divided as Quanzhang, Datian, Chaoshan vernaculars. Quanzhang vernacular can be divided as Zhangzhou, Quanzhou accents etc.<sup>9</sup> This thesis will mainly focus on the social functions of dialect, in the context of film. It isn't a linguistic research. To facilitate my

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<sup>5</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 11.

<sup>9</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, *Hanyu fangyanxue daolun* 汉语方言学导论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 1-2.

investigation, I will generally call all dialects, sub-dialects, vernaculars, accents as just dialects. We may also “define dialects by different geographical decisions”<sup>10</sup>. For example, Southwestern Mandarin is a branch of Northern dialect, Guizhou and Sichuan dialects are branches of South-west Mandarin, and Chengdu dialect and Deyang dialect are under Sichuan dialect.

What kind of films should be discussed in this article? We need to stress two criteria. First, these films should be melodramas. There are many other kinds of films in China which are dominated by local dialects such as the films adapted by many kinds of operas in different regions such as Sicuan Opera, Shaoxing Opera, Huangmei opera and Cantonese Opera. In fact, *The Butterfly Lovers* (liang shan bo yu zhu ying tai 1954), which is also an adaption of an opera, is the first color film made in P.R.C. Although these adapted films occupy a very important status in Chinese film history (in Hong Kong there is a long-standing tradition of making Cantonese Operas into films), we don't intend to discuss these dialect opera-based films because of their uniqueness. The second: The main examples in this study will come from the films produced and distributed in mainland China. So, films from Hong Kong and Taiwan are not in the scope. Because of the many geographical particularities, and unique social and political elements in Hong Kong and Taiwan, which are so different from the mainland, dialects have been intrinsic

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<sup>10</sup> Wang Fang 王芳, “Qianxi fangyan zaidianying zhong de yun yong” 浅析方言在电影中的运用, *qingnian wenxuejia*, no.18 (2010).

to the traditions in the films of these two places. If I include these films into the research scope, it would be impossible to manage.

## **1.2 A Brief History**

In fact, using dialects in films is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1930s, dialect was used in Chinese movies. The *White-Golden Dragon* (bai jin long 1934), a film directed by Xue Juexian and Gao Liheng, was the first Cantonese film in China. It is mainly about a modern romantic story between a man and three women. One scene of this story, where a man finds out that his new bride is in fact his ex-wife, is full of modernist absurdities. This film caused a sensation after screening. In the 1940s, in the movie *The Spring River Flows East* (yi jiang chun shui xiang dong liu 1947), Pang Haogong uses Wu dialect to make jokes “Crab, aircraft, floating in the air with eight feet” as humor and embellishments for film. We can say that dialect’s being used in films is a phenomenon that appears even at the beginning of the Chinese film industry.

Since 1949, when the Communists took over mainland China, and especially after the *Instructions on the Promotion of Putonghua* was enacted and promulgated by the State Council in 1956, dialects were rarely seen in films. In 1963 a prominent dialect film called *Forced recruitment* (zhua zhuang ding) was produced. This film is adapted from a famous farce play at that time. It tells a story about the KMT’s forcibly recruiting men into the army to fight Japanese invaders in the Sichuan-Chongqing region. Throughout the film Sichuan dialect is used as the main spoken language. There’s no Mandarin in this

film. This film is full of all kinds of local gags and jokes, such as “The land you’ve built belongs to village officer, the son you’ve born belongs to Chiang Kai-shek” (修的房子归保长，生的儿子归老蒋) “Now, present, at the present time, at this moment, we are fighting the Japanese”(现在而今眼目下打抗战) “I will force him to send it to you willingly”(我强迫他心甘情愿的给你送上门来) etc. This film set off an upsurge of public viewing.

In the same year, dialects also play important roles in other films, such as *Satisfied or Unsatisfied* (man yi bu man yi 1963) which is also adapted from a farce play of Suzhou farce play troupe. It is mainly about the Suzhou restaurant industry workers’ activities of learning from Lei Feng, under Chairman Mao’s call. This film has a Mandarin version and a Suzhou dialect version. The Mandarin version was screened in the whole country while Suzhou dialect version in Wu dialect area. After screening, the dialect version was popular with the local audiences. Some refrains, such as “Rib is pork, pork is rib”(排骨就是漏，漏就是排骨) would even become the most striking childhood memory for many who grew up watching that film. This film even prompted the development of other local catering industries.<sup>11</sup> However, this trend of using dialect in

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<sup>11</sup> At that time, not only domestic travelers, but also Hong Kong, Macau, Southeastern Asian Chinese all thought "De yue lou", a fictional restaurant in that film, was a must-go place to taste delicious food when they were traveling in Suzhou. The results are without exception fruitless. The fame of De yue lou even exceeded Song he lou, a time-branded restaurant of Suzhou. Until 1982, when people's market consciousness was enforced, they suddenly found that "Fame" was great capital. So they built an ancient restaurant at the corner between the liveliest Guanqian Street and Taijian Alley, called "De yue lou". When

films failed to sustain. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the Cultural Revolution was sweeping the country, the film production industry was heavily wounded.<sup>12</sup> Eight Model Plays ruled people's cultural life, including on the silver screen. There is even a saying to describe this period of time "8 model operas, 8 billion people watched for 8 years"<sup>13</sup>. Film where dialect was used almost went extinct.

After the Cultural Revolution, under the impetus of the fifth generation of film directors, the film industry began to recover its lost momentum.<sup>14</sup> Directors focused their lenses on the countryside, history, and the traumas suffered by the Chinese people. They told "China Stories"<sup>15</sup> in a way that has never existed before. Even though many of the early works of these directors, such as *Yellow Earth* (huang tu di 1985), *The Horse Thief* (dao ma zei 1988), *Children King* (hai zi wang 1989) and *Red Sorghum* (hong gao liang

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this restaurant was opened for business, so many people came here to eat food. This story had become a legend of film and business.

<sup>12</sup> During the decade, only seventy-nine features were distributed, including six remakes and thirty-six foreign titles. Under the deranged circumstances, nationwide exhibition incurred a deficit of over RMB20 million between 1947 and 1976. See Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 217.

<sup>13</sup> Chen Yu 陈煜, *Zhongguo shenghuo jiyi—jianguo 60nian minsheng wangshi* 中国生活记忆-建国60年民生往事 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingongye chubanshe, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Annual feature productions grew steady, from 67 in 1979 to 1444 in 1984. Then, after dipping to 126 in 1985, they reached 151 in 1986. See Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 227.

<sup>15</sup> The fifth generation directors were eager for exploring national culture and history, exploring the meanings of life, and probing in national psychology. In their works, various skills, such as legend, fair, realism, romantic describing, were used to demonstrate Chinese traditional culture. See Liu Hao 刘浩, 2009. *Lun zhongguo diwuddai daoyan dianying zhong de wenhua zhuiqiu yu wenhua chuanbo* 论中国第五代导演电影中的文化追求和文化传播. MA Thesis, Jilin University.

1987) set in remote rural areas where Mandarin is not commonly used, dialects were rarely used by these directors. However, in the later works of this fifth generation Chinese film makers, the use of dialects are much more important. For example Zhang Yimou's *The Story of Qiu Ju* (qiu Ju da guan si 1992) where the local Shaanxi dialect is used to great comic effect. And heavily Shaanxi accented lines "Anhong, I love you" in *Keep Cool* (you hua hao hao shuo 1997).

From the 1990s onward, dialect can be found in various films, for example, Hebei dialect in *Xi lian* (xi lian 1996), Northeastern Mandarin in *Er mo* (er mo 1994), Shaanxi dialect in *The story of Ermei* (jing zhe 2004), Henan dialect in *The Orphan of Anyang* (an yang ying hai 2001). Dialects are especially common in the works of sixth generation (urban generation) directors. The themes in their works are mostly about the vicissitudes of the common people's lives. Thus, the energy of dialect is released. We see Shanxi Fenyang dialect in Jia Zhangke's *Platform* (zhan tai 2000), *Unknown Pleasure* (ren xiao yao 2002), *The World* (shi je 2004), Guizhou dialect in Lu Chuan's *The Missing Gun* (xun qiang 2002) etc.

In recent years, the trend of using various dialects in Chinese films has grown to be quite popular: Director Gu Changwei used Henan dialect in his *Peacock* (kong que 2005), Henan dialect in his *And the Spring Comes* (li chun 2007), "Mixed dialect"<sup>16</sup> in

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<sup>16</sup> About this kind of "Mixed dialects", see Xiong Li 熊丽, Chen Huifang 陈慧芳, "Cong fanyan kan guchangwei dianying zhong de xinxiandai zhuyi fengge" 从方言看顾长卫电影中的新现实主义风格, *Dianying pingjie*, no. 19 (2011), 4.

his *Love for Life* (zui ai 2011). Ning Hao used Chongqing, Henan and other different dialects in *Crazy Stone* (feng kuang de shi tou 2006). Feng Xiaogang used hebei dialect in *A World without Thieves* (tian xia wu zei 2004), Henan dialect in his *Assembly* (ji jie hao 2007), Tangshan dialect in his *Aftershock* (tang shan da di zhen 2010). Li Yu used Sichuan dialect in her *Dam Street* (hong yan 2005). We see Shandong dialect in Yang Yazhou's *Loach is Fish Too* (ni qiu ye shi yu 2006), Northeastern Mandarin in Xue Cun's *The Jimmy Hat* (xin jie kou 2006), Shanghai dialect in Hou Yong's *Jasmine Women* (mo li hua kai 2004). We also notice Wuhan dialect in Wang Chao's *Luxury Car* (jiang cheng xia ri 2006) and Shanxi dialect in Qi Jian's *The Forest Ranger* (tian gou 2006) etc. The number of films featuring dialect is too many to make a complete list here.

### **1.3 A Short Analysis**

Why have dialects become so popular in films? The reasons are multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. One reason may be brand effect or signature style. An example is Jia Zhangke's success with the movie *Pickpocket* (xiao wu 1998), which used Fenyang dialect as its main characters' spoken language. This film was so popular that it became a series that eventually became a trilogy. And since, later dialects are used in almost all his films. These dialects have clearly become his signature style. Thus, once his style of using dialect is established, a unique brand effect is also established<sup>17</sup>. His current films

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<sup>17</sup> Asahi Shimbun, the most influential mainstream newspaper in Japan appraised *Still Life* (San xia hao ren 2008) and elected it as *The Annual Best Foreign Language Film*. The same month it appraised Jia Zhangke

gain more attention by using dialect.

Another reason is that the film makers cater to the popular tastes. This phenomenon is especially obvious in commercial films. One example is the success and subsequent imitations of *Almost Perfect* (shi quan jiu mei 2008). This film is based on the history of the Ming Dynasty emperor Zhu Youjiao. In the film history is deconstructed and reconstructed by lots of postmodern ironic jokes. Various kinds of dialects are used, such as Sichuan dialect, Hunan dialect, and Henan dialect. With a mere cost of 3 million RMB, this film earned an impressive forty-six millions at the box office. After the success of *Almost Perfect*, many similar films such as *Visitor from Sui Dynasty* (sui chao lai ke, 2009), *Panda Express* (xiong mao da xia, 2009) came out. These films emulate the techniques and share many similar characteristics with *Almost Perfect*.

Another reason is the appearance and flourishing of the urban middle and lower classes in the city in recent years, or the emergence of marginal groups in the society.<sup>18</sup>

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as the most successful cultural brand of contemporary China. See *Dongfang zaobao* 东方早报, “Sanxiahaoren, niandu zuihao” 《三峡好人》, 年度最好, 11 Jan, 2008.C4.

<sup>18</sup> The “Margins” of the society include those students who could not get permanent residency permits of city after graduation, those farmers who lost their lands because of the city expansion or other reasons, those migrant farmer workers who abandoned their own land to work in the city. Etc. They see the prosperity of the city at present while cannot see their own future. The glittering lights of the city attract them, at the same time confused them. They felt proud of living in city while they also felt the confliction from the city. They are the urban rootless people. Such as New Generation of migrant workers : New Generation of migrant workers refer to the agricultural household population who were born in the 1980s or later, older than 16, and employed in non-agricultural industries in cities. They account for more than 60% of migrant workers and play an important role in economic development and the city construction. However, due to historical, economic, institutional and other reasons, they work and live in the city but can’t integrate into the city well. They dissociate between city and rural place and become peasant in city.

There are great conflicts between these people's dreams and their reality, great tension between these people and the city. And dialect rightly provides a tool to depict these struggles.<sup>19</sup> "The sixth generation directors focus on these people in the margins of the society. These people include the youth who pursue their dreams, the proud thieves, prostitutes who desire true love, incapable but kind-hearted laid-off workers."<sup>20</sup> For example, *Dam Street* (hong yan 2005), directed by Li Yu is mainly about the special feelings between Xiao Yun, a female Sichuan Opera singer who struggles to make ends meet on a small income and Xiao Yong, a little boy. Women, children, and poverty, are all indicators of "Social Margin" or "Non-mainstream" in the context of film. The character Xiao Yun, who gets pregnant in her teen years and later is abused by her husband, mostly embodies this identity. When asked why she did not use Mandarin in this film, director Li Yu said: "Dialect changed the whole temperament of the film. Sometimes I think that it is dialect that let the whole film find its reality....In the process of creation, dialect is a tool for actors to play their roles more easily...for actors,

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New Generation of migrant workers made outstanding contributions for social progress and city development but suffered from all kinds of unreasonable and unfair differential treatment and can't enjoy equal treatment as citizens of the country. See Zhu Guoping 朱国萍, 2011. *Woguo xinshengdai nongmingong pingdengquan wenti yanjiu* 我国新生代农民工平等权问题研究. MA Thesis, Shandong University.

<sup>19</sup> Jin Danyuan 金丹元, Xu Wenming 徐文明, "1990nian yilai zhongguo dianyin 'fangyanhua xianxiang' jixi" 1990年以来中国电影“方言化”现象解析, *Xiju yishu*, no. 4 (2008), 104-108, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Guo Chunyan 郭春燕, 2007. *Jia Zhangke yu diliudai daoyan de 'pingminhua' shenmei fengge yanjiu* 贾樟柯与第六代导演的“平民化”审美风格研究. MA Thesis, Shandong Normal University.

especially none-professional actors, dialect is vitally helpful. For example the boy acting Xiao Yong, without using dialect, would not have been able to act.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the rise of consumer culture also fuels dialects’ being used in films. Dialect brings new elements into films. The strangeness developed by dialect attracts people’s attention, and then promotes more and more people to attend the movies.<sup>22</sup> *Silver Medalist* (feng kuang de sai che 2009), directed by Ning Hao, is a comedy mainly about a silver medal winning track cyclist, an unscrupulous merchant, two amateur killers, several professional drug dealers, and two mediocre police. In this film, various kinds of dialects are used, such as Qingdao dialect, Hakka, Shaanxi dialect, Wuhan dialect, Sichuan dialect etc. The fantastic plot, black humor, local jargon, and offbeat characters, together with the dialects, form a grand banquet of strangeness. Audiences are attracted by these elements therefore this film is a huge box office success.

In this article, in order to explain the reasons for the popularity of dialects in films, I will begin with the three functions of dialects in films, and focus on the relationships between dialect and people’s everyday life, the relationships between dialect and cinema. I will also explore various relationships and discourses between film and reality, Mandarin and dialects, and the manifestations, and mutual interactions between them.

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<sup>21</sup> Guan Yadi 关雅荻, “Nvxing shijiao xia de shisu yanshuo—Li Yu fangtan” 女性视角下的世俗言说—李玉访谈, *Dianying yishu*, no. 1 (2006), 34-37.

<sup>22</sup> Jin Danyuan 金丹元, Xu Wenming 徐文明, “1990nian yilai zhongguo dianyin ‘fangyanhua xianxiang’ jixi” 1990年以来中国电影“方言化”现象解析, *Xiju yishu*, no. 4 (2008), 104-108, 70.

## CHAPTER 2

### THREE FUNCTIONS OF DIALECT IN FILMS

By observing different dialect films and comparing the films with dialects to those without, I find that there are mainly three functions that dialects have in a film. They are: serving as fun maker, indicating the identity of the speaker, and helping to describing the speaker's characteristics.

#### 2.1 Fun maker

By using dialects into a film the director makes the film more compelling by enhancing the comic effect of the film. I call this function *fun maker*. As Professor Yang Haiying of Beijing Film Academy points out, when dialect is used in film, an “enhancing comic effect”<sup>23</sup> can be achieved. This means that some plain words can be funny and some jokes are actually funnier when told in a dialect. Moreover, dialect can be used to “make dialect comedies”<sup>24</sup>. As Ma Ke further points out: “In the beginning, people got familiar with some local dialects by crosstalk shows and sketch comedies on television, such as Tianjin and Tangshan dialect in Ma Sanli's crosstalk”<sup>25</sup>. Since the comic elements of these kinds of shows themselves are strong and memorable, when dialects are applied to films, audiences feel the same way as they do when watching a crosstalk show.

<sup>23</sup> Wang Xin 王鑫, “Lun dianying zhong de fangyan” 论电影中的方言, *Dianying Pingjie*, no. 13 (2007).

<sup>24</sup> Jin Danyuan 金丹元, Xu Wenming 徐文明, “1990nian yilai zhongguo dianying ‘fangyanhua xianxiang’ jixi” 1990年以来中国电影“方言化”现象解析, *Xiju yishu*, no. 4 (2008), 104-108, 70.

<sup>25</sup> Ma Ke 马可, “Fangyan dianying: wenhua yishi de suxing yu shenhua” 方言电影: 文化意识的苏醒与深化, *Guancha yu sikao*, no. 18 (2006), 60-61.

In short, by using dialect in a film, the lines originally plain become funny and the lines originally humorous become hilarious.

One example of this fun maker function of dialect is in *Crazy Stone* (feng kuang de shi tou 2006). This film uses various dialects to tell a story in Chongqing. When, in a factory demolition, a valuable piece of jade is found, an interesting battle of wits occurs between the factory security guards, a group of thieves from other provinces, and a major international thief whose boss is a rich CEO in Beijing. After thieves manage to come in and then leave the exhibition hall undetected, someone proposes to one of the local security guards, Bao Shihong, who speaks Chongqing dialect, that the thieves might have used “drift on the water (shui shang piao)”, a kung fu technique to get out of the hall. Bao replies, “Is there something wrong with your brain? You read those novels about ‘ghost fighting’ (gui da jia) all the day!” The word “ghost fighting” is a local saying in Chongqing, which refers to something fantastic or the mental state of daydreaming. Here using this saying to describe the martial arts, which are in martial arts novels gives the audiences a chance to laugh out loud. Furthermore, Bao Shihong’s complacency and his contempt towards the martial arts are fully represented. Another example of dialect functioning as fun maker is seen when Bao’s light truck crashes into a BMW automobile driven by the CEO’s assistant, who speaks Chengdu dialect. The assistant says in Chengdu dialect “Haven’t you seen the brand ‘Don’t touch me’ (Bie Mo Wo, BMW)”.

Since Chengdu dialect itself gives people a feeling that is smooth or fluent in its sounds.<sup>26</sup> Using Chengdu dialect here, not only makes the linguistic landscape more interesting but also this character's sleekness and sophistication are highlighted. Among the thieves, Hei Pi speaks Qingdao dialect, Dao Ge speaks Henan dialect, and the major international thief, Mike, speaks Mandarin with a Hong Kong accent. The director mixes various dialects together, thus creating unique comedic characteristics for each role.

If Mandarin replaced dialects in all such dialogues, the entire movie could have lost its comic effect. We see this clearly in *Let the Bullets Fly* (*rang zi dan fei* 2010), directed by Jiang Wen. Two versions of this film are screened in mainland China. One uses Sichuan dialect, screened in Southwestern China. The other in Mandarin is screened in the whole country. The media comment on these two versions, "This story took place in Sichuan. The author of the original novel for this film's screen scripts comes from Sichuan. For some local expressions, such as 'suan qiu', 'ni gui er', we cannot find correspondence in Mandarin. Only Sichuan dialect can bring out the comic potential and the original connotations."<sup>27</sup> The director takes advantage of this function of dialect to create a unique comic effect.

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<sup>26</sup> The uniqueness make Chengdu dialect sound more fluent:"There are many rhotic pronunciations in Chengdu dialect. Except for that, the stressed syllables of Chengdu dialect are almost in the front of each word. Furthermore, those stressed syllables are prolonged in time and those prolonged syllables are much faster than the syllables in front and back of these syllables. " See Liao Qing 廖庆, "Chengduhua yanchangci zhongyin xianxiang yanjiu" 成都话延长词重音现象研究, *Deyang jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao*, no. 3 (2005), 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> *Nanfang Dushi bao* 南方都市报, "Let the Bullets Fly paochu 'shuanyu ban', you fengxian yi you qiantu" 《让子弹飞》抛出双语版, 有风险亦有前途, 17 Dec.2010.

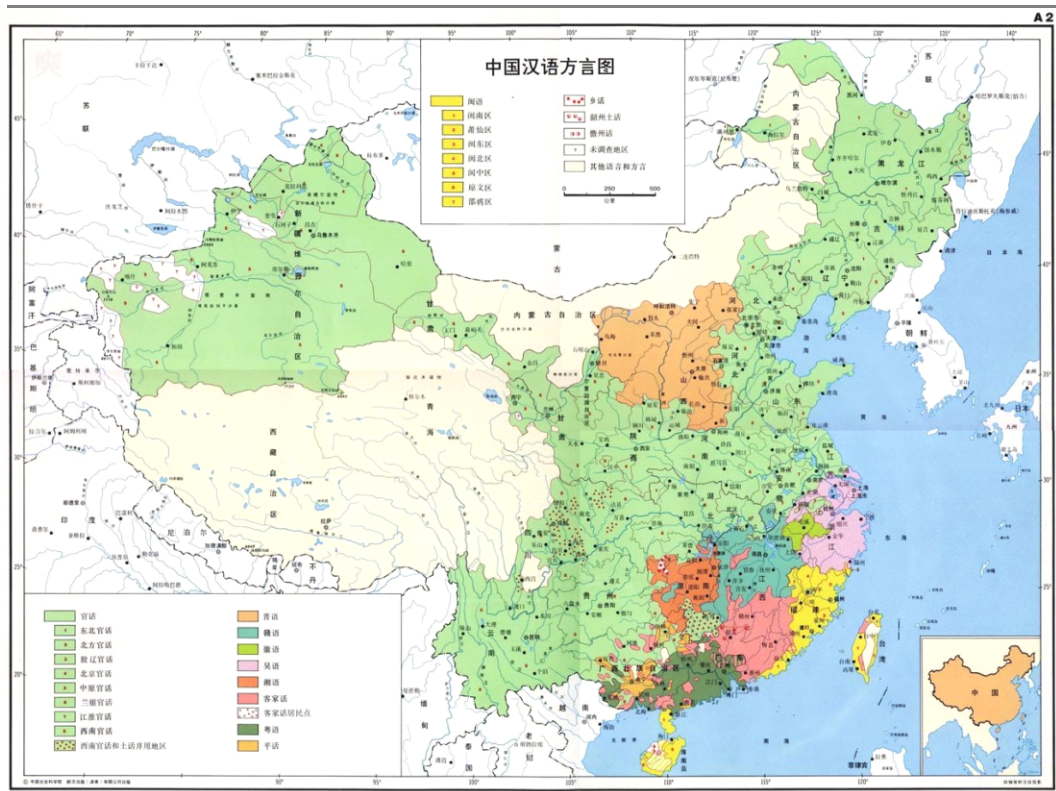
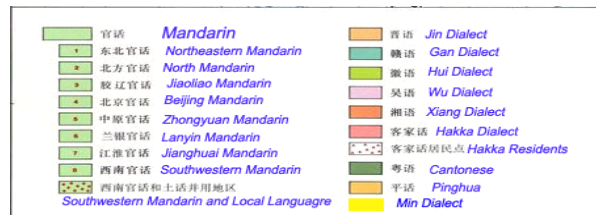
## **2.2 Identity Indicator**

Dialect in film acts as a symbol of identity. I call this function *identity indicator*.

There are three facets to the meaning of this function: Region imagination, characteristics imagination, social class imagination. We will discuss these three facets of meaning separately.

### **2.2.1 Region Imagination**

The first facet, or the way that the use of dialect in film functions to inform identity is “region imagination”. People from different places speak different dialects, we can figure out which part of China he/she comes from, by the dialect he/she speaks. A web search for the words *dialect* and *identity* as keywords in Baidu.com, the biggest public search engine in China, results in 2,570,000 entries. Articles with titles such as: “The usage of dialect and the construction of identity” “A dialect word exposed the escaped criminal” “Dialect exposed the identity of human trader”. Also found was “A man escaped prison successfully for three times in 23 years, during which time he learned dialect to conceal his identity” and “Wuhan College entrance examination immigrants: Dialect exposed their identities”. From these examples we see that in Chinese media in general, negative connotations tend to accompany the notion of dialect. Furthermore, a concrete picture of dialects also provides people with imagination of certain region. The following map provides us a visual guide to information that can be inferred by region imagination indicator cues:



This map is selected from many maps in the *Language Atlas of China*<sup>28</sup>. The map above divides China's land using the standard of dialect. We can figure out what dialects are spoken in a given area, just as easily as we can figure out which areas are dominated by a given dialect. Thus, this map more or less embodies the region imagination facet of identity indicators. In other words, each dialect and the correspondent geographical region of origin that they identify are all accessible to the discerning listener.

<sup>28</sup> Li Rong 李荣, Xiong Zhenghui 熊正辉, Zhang Zhenxing 张振兴, *Zhongguo yuyan ditu ji*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Longman (Far east) Company, 1990).

When discussing the dialects in Gu Changwei's films, Xiong Li, Chen Huifang point out that dialect "is powerful in indicating the subject's identification and standpoint"<sup>29</sup>. In his paper, Ma Ke said, "Dialect reflects the local culture. It breeds a kind of recognition and local complex."<sup>30</sup> The idea of local culture or local complex is based on the identity of the speaker and related to the imagination of a certain region. Huang Bo, the actor who portrayed Hei Pi, an important role in *Crazy Stone*, said, "Qingdao dialect provides the environment where I grew up. I know some interesting connotations and wonderful points of this language. At the beginning of preparing for the role, I'd thought of using some other dialects, but finally I chose Qingdao dialect, which I am more familiar with, as a person from Qingdao. The results are positive. Audiences feel the humor of Qingdao dialect, and think about the city Qingdao itself."

This region imagination is observed in almost all the dialect films. Directors use this characteristic of dialect to achieve the artistic effect they want. In *Love for Life (zui ai 2011)*, directed by Gu Changwei, Gu uses the Henan AIDS village as the prototype for a small village where AIDS runs rampant among the villagers. These patients live together in a elementary school which the healthy villagers deserted. There are a variety of entangled bonds between these patients, and between them and healthy villagers. The spoken language in the film combines northern Shanxi dialect, Henan dialect together as

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<sup>29</sup> Xiong Li 熊丽, Chen Huifang 陈慧芳, "Cong fangyan kan guchangwei dianying zhongde xinxiandai zhuyi fengge" 从方言看顾长卫电影中的新现实主义风格, *Dianying pingjie*, no. 19 (2011), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Ma Ke 马可, "Fangyan dianying: wenhua yishi de suxing yu shenhua" 方言电影: 文化意识的苏醒与深化, *Guancha yu sikao*, no. 18 (2006), 60-61.

a “mixed dialect”. Thus, the boundaries between dialects are blurred. The audiences cannot infer the identities of the speakers directly from the dialects. Gu himself says that he dealt with dialects in this way in order to blur the location where this story takes place. He hopes that this story takes place in a mysterious, decadent, fantastic, and faraway place, instead of any specific place in China<sup>31</sup>. This mixed dialect indeed achieved the goal Gu stated above by drawing the audiences’ thoughts to a unknown small village that is faraway from any urban area.

### **2.2.2 Characteristic Imagination**

In Feng Xiaogang’s *A World without Thieves* (*tian xia wu zei 2004*), major roles all speak standard Mandarin except the one from the countryside called “Shagen” (blockheaded root). He speaks Hebei dialect. His dialect is so different from others’ spoken language. It not only distinguishes him from other people’s urban identity, but also shows his honesty, kindness and ruggedness. These characteristics are in stark contrast to the shrewdness and craftiness of thieves or police around him. His unique characteristics and dialect all impress the audiences.

From “region imagination” audiences can guess where the speaker grows up, and then they can make assumptions about some personal features or personalities of this person. The public often equates a person from a given place to all the people from that

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<sup>31</sup> Xiong Li 熊丽, Chen Huifang 陈慧芳, “Cong fanyan kan guchangwei dianying zhongde xinxiandai zhuyi fengge” 从方言看顾长卫电影中的新现实主义风格, *Dianying pingjie*, no. 19 (2011), 4.

place, and categorizes different people by different places. This kind of identity formation classifies people by specific geographic areas. “Stereotypes”<sup>32</sup> about people from specific geographic areas decide characteristics and personalities of people, as imagined by audiences. A regional stereotype is a cognitive structure concerned about the knowledge, attitude and anticipation toward the people who live in a certain region.<sup>33</sup> This is the reason why people think that the French are romantic, Germans are rigorous, and British are conservative. In our daily life, regional stereotype is a common cognitive phenomenon in almost every occasion, and widely exists in human being’s ideology. In a survey about regional stereotype regarding people from Shanghai adjectives people mostly thought of are “shrewd (66.1%), mean (43.9%), fashionable (27.0%)”<sup>34</sup>. Regional stereotype is related to implicit stereotype, implicit self-esteem and implicit attitude. It is the generalization of people’s mind.

This “identity-geographic-characteristics” model is particularly evident in the films where dialects are used. One example is *Crazy Stone*. In that film Chengdu,

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<sup>32</sup> Stereotype is a set of conceptions related to the characteristics, attributes, activities of a specific group. It widely exists in activities of social communication and social cognition. It can greatly influence individual's judgment to social groups. See Xu Man 徐曼, 2011. *Jiyu dongbeiren de neiyin diyu keban yinxiang wendingxing de shiyan yanjiu* 基于东北人的内引地域刻板印象稳定性的实验研究, MA Thesis. Harbin Normal University.

<sup>33</sup> Zou Qingyu 邹庆宇, 2006. *Diyu keban yinxiang yanjiu* 地域刻板印象研究, MA Thesis. East China Normal University.

<sup>34</sup> Li Chunkai 李春凯, et al. , “Shanghairen keban yinxiang de jiegou jiqi dongtai bianhua” 上海人刻板印象的结构及其动态变化, *Journal of Ningbo University(Liberal Arts Edition)*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2009), 140-144.

Chongqing and Qingdao dialects, as well as Mandarin with Hong Kong accent all create expectation of their speakers consistent with broadly understood identity stereotypes about people from Chengdu, Chongqing, Qingdao, and Hong Kong. The characteristics of these characters are more or less determined by these identities. So Hei Pi who speaks Qingdao dialect naturally has Northerners' characteristics: straightforwardness and sloppiness. While discussing how to steal the jade, he shouts "In my opinion it isn't a problem to get the jade. Just use a hammer to smash the display case, and then run away with the jade!" Mike's Hong Kong accent cues people to think about Hong Kong, the international metropolis, and its unique mix of Chinese and Western culture. This is also consistent with his identity as a major international thief.

### **2.2.3 Social Status Imagination**

The third fold meaning of the identification indicator function of dialects in Chinese film is social status imagination. In the reality, as standard language, Mandarin has two main usages: political usage (the official departments, the formal occasions, media, education etc.) and communicational usage<sup>35</sup> (for outsiders to communicate with the local people in dialect areas, for people from different dialect areas to communicate with each other). This phenomenon has roots in history for a long time. As early as in the Ming dynasty, in Matteo Ricci's *Reading Notes about China*<sup>36</sup>, he mentions that dialects

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<sup>35</sup> Hou Jingyi 侯精一, *Xiandai fangyan gailun* 现代方言概论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Matteo Ricci, *Limadou zhongguo zhaji* 利玛窦中国札记 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983).

are used as everyday spoken languages in different provinces in China while Guanhua (Mandarin) is the official language for civil use and court use, very popular in educated class. Now there are modes of communication that didn't even exist in the Ming Dynasty, yet the use of Mandarin as standard language for the whole country hasn't changed a lot. In film, Mandarin is in the center and dialects are in the margins of politics and society. Dialects are used in everyday life of outer provinces, by the workers who have migrated to the big cities, like migrant farmer workers (see our discussion about "social margin" in the chapter "A Brief Introduction"). Thus, dialects can cue people's imagination to a lower social class or a marginal social status.

Director Gu Changwei's films, which depict many characters who live in the margin of the society, feature the use of dialect in a way that creates a beautiful and profound sort of phonic scenery. In his *And the Spring Comes* (li chun 2007), which uses the life of a still unmarried opera singer and music teacher, Wang Cailing as the central story line to show the difficult living situations of artists in the countryside and their conflict between pursuing their arts and the cold hard reality. This film takes place in a fictional place "Heyang". The main characters in this film, such as Wang Chailing, young arts lover Huang Sibao, and male ballet dancer teacher Hu, all use a dialect spoken in Guyang (a small county in Baotou, Inner Mongolia)<sup>37</sup>. Their dialect properly fits the

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<sup>37</sup> See related discussion in Xiong Li 熊丽, Chen Huifang 陈慧芳, "Cong fanyan kan guchangwei dianying zhongde xinnxianshi zhuyi fengge" 从方言看顾长卫电影中的新现实主义风格, *Dianying pingjie*, no. 19 (2011), 4.

small-county residents' identification set by the director. These passionate artistic characters are identified as the *other* by people living in this small town which is not conducive to art. These poor living conditions can not sustain their dreams, which eventually lead Wang Cailing to uproot her root and replant herself in the big city in the hope of becoming a Beijinger. To get a household registration, this aspiring singer goes to pray and pay money to the unscrupulous traders. From the obvious contrast between Wang Cailing's Guyang dialect and the trader's Beijing Mandarin, we feel a distinct identity difference between this small town and the capital--the margin and the center. Ironically, even though Wang's crazy love for arts makes her an outsider in Heyang, when she goes to Beijing where her sensibilities should be more mainstream her identity as an outsider seems unchangeable. She is unable to merge into the city. Her small town roots are unshakeable. This fact is underlined by her dialect as it appears against a background of Beijing Mandarin. We see the unbridgeable chasm in the lives of these two kinds of people who have totally different social statuses.

## **2.3 Authenticity Makers**

### **2.3.1 Dialect and Reality**

The third function of dialects in film is making the story more authentic or closer to reality. The tradition of realism has run in film for a long time. According to Italian Neo-Realists, film should be authentic. They stress that every scene in a film should be real, to achieve an effect of "anti-dramatic". They believe "A film doesn't have to have a

‘story’, a kind of fictional story...It is a record, a spirit of documentary.”<sup>38</sup> Films should not be stories narrated by artists, but the reappearance of everyday life based on the original appearance of life. To represent the original appearance, not only real images, but also real voices from the real world are needed. For Chinese films that are set in locations where Mandarin isn’t used as the everyday language and dialects dominate people’s lives, dialects can be used as a documentary element of expression. In this kind of film, the appearance of dialects can make the film seem more real. We will refer to this function of dialects as authenticity maker. China’s sixth generation directors, who take neo-realism for the foundation of their works, naturally draw heavily from the authenticity maker function of dialects. “They changed the flamboyant expressions of fifth generation director and use the rough, real, chaotic documentary means of expression.” “They express their pertinacious and sincere attitude to film and life---talking about the real life. Facing the reality and recording the reality have become the true essence and rule for sixth generation directors”<sup>39</sup>

When referring to Jia Zhangke’s films, film critic Cheng Qingsong says, “Jia Zhangke’s using Shanxi dialect in film is to achieve an authentic effect....to pursue the documentary aesthetics.”<sup>40</sup> Ning Hao, the director of *Crazy Stone*, says: “After I chose

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<sup>38</sup> Bai Xue 白雪, “Faguo chaoxianshi zhuyi he yidali xianxianshi zhuyi de zhenshi guannian bijiao” 法国超现实主义和意大利新现实主义的真实观念比较, *Wenxuejie: lilunban*, no. 7 (2011), 131,133.

<sup>39</sup> Guo Chunyan 郭春燕, 2007. *Jia Zhangke yu diliudai daoyan de ‘pingminhua’ shenmei fengge yanjiu* 贾樟柯与第六代导演的“平民化”审美风格研究. MA Thesis, Shandong Normal University.

<sup>40</sup> Wang Xin 王鑫, “Lun dianying zhong de fangyan” 论电影中的方言, *Dianying Pingjie*, no. 13 (2007).

Chongqing as the place to film, I immediately chose dialects. Because for each different place, there will be a unique way for its inhabitants to grow up. When you are going to tell a story about this place, surely you should choose the local dialect, which can fully represent the local atmosphere.”<sup>41</sup> Huang Bo says: “There are many films where dialects are used as the main spoken language. I think common people love these films because almost no one speaks Mandarin in everyday life outside Beijing. We are living in the dialect language environment. The wonderful effects of dialects can’t be expressed by Mandarin.”<sup>42</sup> Also, Zhou Xing, the Associate Dean of Art and Media at Beijing Normal University says: “When a film is to represent the situation of a specific geographic area, only dialects can make the performances seem natural to the audiences.”<sup>43</sup>

Dialects in film make a film “approach the reality in sounds”<sup>44</sup>. Such as Lu Chuan’s film *The Missing Gun* (xun qiang2002). This story takes place in a remote mountain town which is almost isolated to the modern society and the rest of Guizhou province. This is essentially a film in three acts: A policeman loses a gun, he searches for the gun, and he finds the gun. All the characters speak Guizhou dialect. In such a far

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<sup>41</sup> CCTV xinwen huiketing, “Chai Jing fangwen Ning Hao: Yibu guochan dianying de fengkuang piaofang biaoqian” 柴静访问宁浩：一部国产电影的疯狂票房表现，

<http://tv.people.com.cn/GB/61601/4706289.html> (accessed 14 April. 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Wang Xin 王鑫, “Lun dianying zhong de fangyan” 论电影中的方言, *Dianying Pingjie*, no. 13 (2007).

<sup>43</sup> Wang Xin 王鑫, “Lun dianying zhong de fangyan” 论电影中的方言, *Dianying Pingjie*, no. 13 (2007).

<sup>44</sup> Jin Danyuan 金丹元, Xu Wenming 徐文明, “1990nian yilai zhongguo dianying ‘fangyanhua xianxiang’ jiexi” 1990年以来中国电影“方言化”现象解析, *Xiju yishu*, no. 4 (2008), 104-108, 70.

away town, only a few people come and go. So, this town is a relatively enclosed society, where Mandarin is not only unsuitable, but also unknowable to the local people. In this case, if Mandarin is used as the main spoken language, audiences would be insulated from the strong smack of everyday life--the usage of dialect precisely embodies real dialogues as they would in that place. Another example is Jia Zhangke's 24 city (er shi si cheng ji 2008), a film featuring interviews of workers at an old state-owned engine factory in Chengdu, as the factory is about to be pulled down to make way for a new commercial building. Mandarin, Chengdu dialect, Wu dialect, and Northeastern Mandarin are used. They are pertinent to the authentic identities of the roles. For example, "the flower of the factory" who comes from Shanghai speaks Wu dialect. This character is played by Cheng Chong, who also comes from Shanghai. Using an actor from Shanghai to perform a role from Shanghai and speak Wu dialects in films makes the perception of this character credibly. There is also a unique dialect in this film that originated in the real world. When Jia Zhangke was talking about the actual factory, he said "They have their own 'factory dialect', which is the mix of Shenyang dialect and Chengdu dialect because this factory was moved from Shenyang to Chengdu. All the workers in the factory all had the same accent and voice. "Even the workers who arrived later adopted this dialect." <sup>45</sup> In the film, he retains this unique dialect, to represent a

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<sup>45</sup> "Jia Zhangke fangtan: Yong jingtou bang tamen zhaohui shiqu de guxiang" 贾樟柯访谈：用镜头帮他们找回失去的故乡, Xiandai kuaibao, 26 Apr. 2009, A8.

more authentic world to the audiences. Dialect itself is a part of the real world. So, when it is used in film, it allows a film maker to offer the audiences a more realistic experience.

According to Jean Baudrillard, when the world has become pure characterizations through visual mechanism, there will be no difference between essence and phenomenon, reality and representation. The representation itself is reality, or “hyper-reality”, which is more real than reality. He calls it “simulation”<sup>46</sup>. A film can create such a simulation. Especially documentaries or documentary films, often give people an illusion that “This is true” “This is what’s happening in the world”. While this realistic illusion is also the simulation of pictures, which are connected together by the artist’s imagination and ideas, in the art form of film. This simulation does not only exist in the visual aspect of film. From the example of dialect, simulation also exists in the phonic level. Dialects in films are a kind of simulation. This is especially obvious in dialect s’ authenticity maker function. The dialects in films do all they can do to remain similar with the dialect in everyday life in terms of articulation, speech habits, and attempting to obscure the boundaries of reality and fiction. Moreover, it lets people feel infinite realism and think that the dialect is narrating in an honest voice. “Believe me believe my dog”, the real way of speaking also leads people to deeply believe the content of these words, which will amplify the reality unlimitedly. However, a dialect in a film is not real in itself. It is not a real social language, but the tool or skill for artists to achieve certain tasks (such as “fun

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Lacan, et al., *Shijue wenhua de qiguan 视觉文化的奇观*, trans. Wu Qiong 吴琼 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2005), Preface.

maker”, “identity indicator”, and “authenticity maker”). In order to create simulation in voice, directors carefully consider which dialect to use, and where to use it. Just like Disneyland, a simulation where American spirit is more strongly expressed than any real places in the United States, the “reality” included in dialects in films also exceeds the real world. Take Jia Zhangke’s films as an example, When Jia Zhangke uses Shanxi dialect to talk about the life of a pickpockets which Xiao Wu feels difficult to sustain in the new era (Xiao Wu, 1999), as audiences, we seem to really experience the pains of the nobody in Fenyang who lives in the edge of the society. When Shanxi dialect is used to tell the split life on and off the stage of Zhao Xiaotao in the World Parks (The World, 2005), we seem to hear the piercing voice of immigrant workers in Beijing. When Chengdu dialect is used to narrate the collective memories of the workers in old aero engine factory in Chengdu before the new house estate is to be built up (24 city, 2008), the audiences also loiter in the past and present of the Chengdu workers.... Everything is exactly “real”, in terms of dialects. As for the real Fenyang people, migrant workers, Chengdu workers and their lives, they are fabricated by our imagination. The content expressed by dialects is a microcosm. In this microcosm, some elements of reality are naturally included. Nevertheless, in this microcosm, by artistic treatment, some parts belonging to the real world have been omitted. This microcosm has already goes beyond reality, and cured into people’s minds.

### **2.3.2 The World in and out Film---A Case Study**

This simulation is represented perfectly in *The World* (shi jie 2004), directed by Jia Zhangke. This story takes place in a “World Park” in the outskirts of Beijing. In this park, we see famous buildings around the world, such as the Eiffel Tower of Paris, Tower Bridge of London, skyscrapers of Manhattan, the Colosseum of Rome etc. All the miniatures of these famous buildings are mingled in the same space, in a small park. The appearance of these buildings in the park itself is not the presentation of real landscape, but the reproduction for the purpose of entertainments and tourism. The originality and novelty of the original buildings disappears. In addition, the original buildings have many functions, such as inhabiting, visiting, transportation. Although these miniatures have the symbolic function for touring, other functions of the original buildings disappear. The visitors are also not able to experience the unique surroundings of each original building.

From another aspect, at the same time this mixture also creates new space. The slogan for World Park is “Travel all around the world, in Beijing”. The World Park itself is like a table full of the world’s famous dishes. It brings together famous landscapes all over the world, to satisfy a fast food type of consumption experience. In such a consumption experience, people are able to experience the human essence of the world buildings, better than at any single real famous building. It has formed simulation.

The plot and story of this film is also a “simulation”. The main plot of this film revolves around the female lead Zhao Xiaotao. She is a migrant worker in the outskirts of Beijing. The places she works every day are Paris, Spain, the United States, etc. She

wears very gorgeous and exquisite clothes, in the parading car, on the stage where there are first-class lighting and sounds. But after the show is over, she comes back to the narrow dorm shared by many people. Life becomes very dark, full of pains which can not be experienced in the gorgeous stage. As a migrant worker works in outskirts Beijing, living in city Beijing is a dream of hers, let alone “travel all around the world”. The experience of the character in the film is a portrayal of the migrant workers in city, but is different with people’s experience in the real world. The actress Zhao Tao, who plays Zhao Xiaotao says: “In November 1996, after I graduated from drama school, I worked in Shenzhen Window of the World (a real park similar to the ‘World Park’ in the film) as a dancer. After finished the film Platform, once I chatted with director Jia Zhangke and unintentionally talked about this life experience. Life in those days influences my life a lot, because there were a lot of my classmates together with me to do internship in the “Window of the World”. Many things happened between my classmates, which touched me greatly. These things are deeply rooted in my mind. I’ve never thought that these things could also be attractive to director Jia Zhangke, let alone our casual chatting becomes a film at last”.<sup>47</sup> We see clearly that the story came from the real world while it was not really a total reflect of the reality, but the adaptation after processing and handling, to be more coherent, more representative, to be “simulation” in film.

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<sup>47</sup> “Wangyi zhuanfang Jia Zhangke's shijie nvzhujue Zhao Tao” 网易专访贾樟柯《世界》女主角赵涛, 07 Jan. 2004. [http://ent.163.com/ent\\_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117\\_215541.html](http://ent.163.com/ent_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117_215541.html) (access on 14 Apr. 2013).

In the aspect of language and dialogues, in this film there are Shanxi dialect, Northeastern Mandarin, Hunan dialect, Wenzhou dialect and Mandarin. As a person from Shanxi, actress Zhao Tao also spoke Shanxi dialect in the film. She says, “In this film, people from different areas lived together in Beijing. When we are facing the outside world, we use the same language—Mandarin. When we are facing ourselves, we use dialects of our hometowns.”<sup>48</sup> All those measures are to achieve the purpose of getting close to reality. Even though those measures are taken to emulate reality, but they are not truly reality. Zhao Tao said “There was no script for this film. It was merely an emotional need which the director wanted to achieve. In accordance with the overall atmosphere the director would overthrow his own script in the field and re-enact the schedule. And at this time it was necessary for the actors to re-adjust their performances, according to the new ideas of the director. The most important thing was the lines between the actors, which were all improvisation on the scene.”<sup>49</sup> The dialects and lines in film strive to be close to the real world while it was adapted by art processing, typified, to form the “simulation”.

The World perfectly presented the “simulation” from the background to the plot, to the lines and language. When this simulation is used in films, which was a bigger

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<sup>48</sup> “Wangyi zhuanfang Jia Zhangke's shijie nvzhujue Zhao Tao” 网易专访贾樟柯《世界》女主角赵涛, 07 Jan. 2004. [http://ent.163.com/ent\\_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117\\_215541.html](http://ent.163.com/ent_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117_215541.html) (access on 14 Apr. 2013).

<sup>49</sup> “Wangyi zhuanfang Jia Zhangke's shijie nvzhujue Zhao Tao” 网易专访贾樟柯《世界》女主角赵涛, 07 Jan. 2004. [http://ent.163.com/ent\\_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117\\_215541.html](http://ent.163.com/ent_2003/editor/movie/movienews/040117/040117_215541.html) (access on 14 Apr. 2013)

simulation, it expresses the director's intention, at the same time it gives people an impression of reality.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MANDARIN AND DIALECT, MOVIE, REALITY**

Through the analysis above, we get a general idea of the functions dialects have in films. Given these features of dialects, around the corner is the question “why dialects have these functions?” We may use different methods of analyzing to arrive in different conclusions. Here I will find the reasons from the interrelationships between Mandarin, dialects, films, and reality.

#### **3.1 Dialects and Mandarin in the Reality**

Since Mandarin, dialects, the reality, films are the four supports for us to explore this problem, it is very important to make the relationship between each two of the four clear. First of all, for a better understanding of how dialects can interact with Mandarin in the art of film, we need to understand the relationships between dialects and Mandarin in the reality.

From the aspect of scope, Mandarin is the standard Chinese that is used in all the regions of mainland China. Outside of mainland China, standard Chinese also exists in other areas, but the names for standard Chinese varies from place to place. Mainland China calls it “Putonghua”. Taiwan area calls it “Guoyu”. Southeastern Asia names it “Huayu”. Though the names in different areas vary, they are both referred to standard Chinese and are based on Northern Mandarin. Dialects are mainly used in different dialect areas respectively, as we discussed in the section about dialect’s identity indicator

section. At the same time, outside a dialect area, the local dialect can also be used as between townsmen as well. Comparing the ranges of dialects and Mandarin, in general, one is the “national” and the other is “local”.

From the aspect of historical origins, both Mandarin and dialects have a long history. In the Western Zhou dynasty, concepts such as ‘Ya yan’<sup>50</sup>, ‘Xia yan’<sup>51</sup> had already existed. Ya yan was used in the governmental occasions and diplomatic occasions.<sup>52</sup> Since then the tradition of common national language remained but not until Qing dynasty was it formally enacted and officially propagandized. The milestone is the Pronunciation Unification Meeting in 1913 which reviews and approves standard pronunciations for about 6,500 characters.<sup>53</sup> And dialects, formed gradually as natural language along with the historical development. In the ‘wind’ (feng) part of The Book of Songs some traces of spoken language and dialects were preserved. During the Han dynasty Yang Xiong’s book Dialect (fang yan) a lot of spoken languages in different dialect areas were recorded. Matteo Ricci also records that in various provinces of China

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<sup>50</sup> “Ya yan, Shi, Shu, Zhili, which were told by Confucius, are all Ya yan”(子所雅言诗、书、执礼皆雅言也) See Confucius, The Analects of Confucius 论语译注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 93-94

<sup>51</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, Hanyu fangyanxue daolun 汉语方言学导论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 8.

<sup>52</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, Hanyu fangyanxue daolun 汉语方言学导论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 8.

<sup>53</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, Hanyu fangyanxue daolun 汉语方言学导论 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 8.

spoken languages are different.<sup>54</sup> Dialects are derived from natural languages and are deeply rooted in history. They are a part of history.

In reality and society, we know that Mandarin holds the status as mainstream. But this status isn't innate, but gradually obtained. Take the policies of implementing Mandarin in mainland China as an example: In October 1955, the Chinese Academy of Science held a conference and established the definition of Mandarin "Based on Beijing dialect as standard pronunciation, Northern dialect as the fundamental language." In 1956, State Council of China promulgated Orders on Propagandizing Mandarin. In January 1986, the State Language Commission of China proposed "Make all effort to propagandize Mandarin, actively popularize and spread it, gradually achieve a great progress" and set popularizing Mandarin as one of the basic state policies. In this conference, the goal for future propagandizing was set: before 2010, Mandarin should be fundamentally popularized and spread in most places in China. Before 2050, Mandarin should be popularized in the whole country. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001, The Law of the National Commonly-Used Language and Script was enacted. The legal status of Mandarin was ensured by law. This law is also the summary for the experiments and practices in the language revolutions since the late Qing dynasty, especially after the Communists' takeover of the mainland. In a word, this law established Mandarin's status

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<sup>54</sup> Matteo Ricci, *Limadou zhongguo zhaji 利玛窦中国札记* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 30.

as mainstream in the aspects of legal, politics, and history<sup>55</sup>. After the enactment of The Law of the National Commonly-Used Language and Script, Mandarin merged into people's daily life as national ideology. Many provinces also enacted corresponding practices and rules to implement this law, for example, in June 2004 Chongqing enacted The Methods for Chongqing to Implement <The Law of the National Commonly-Used Language and Script>. This document provided regulations that the government officers born after January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1954 should achieve first rate in grade three in the National Mandarin Proficiency Test. In this document there are also regulations about the punishments for not using Mandarin: If not using Mandarin is the action of an official department, the division related to character and language will order this department to correct its mistake. If this department refuses to correct this mistake, there will be a public criticism for that. If it is a individual action, the department this person working in will criticize and educate him. If this person doesn't correct his mistake, he will be fired from the official department. "Not speaking Mandarin" even became a reason for losing one's job. From this example we can see that Mandarin's mainstream status has generated a series of tough regulations.

In the aspect of usage, Mandarin and dialect are used in different places. Mandarin provides people an official way to communicate in formal occasions. For example, according to a survey in Shanghai area, when someone is to express his point of

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<sup>55</sup> Sang Zhe 桑哲, "Xin zhongguo de yuyan guihua ji weilai gongzuo zhanwang" 新中国的语言规划及未来工作展望, *Yuwen yanjiu*, no. 3 (2011), 8-14.

view seriously, most people will choose Mandarin. This shows that in Shanghai, Mandarin has the characteristics of a higher style language.<sup>56</sup> Mandarin also provides a way for mutual communication between people from different regions. Because it is standard language, known by most Chinese, Mandarin makes up for the poor exchange of information in the vast land of China, caused by the variations between different areas. Dialects are the reasons of these variations. Dialects bear native culture and history. They are the everyday languages for different regions in daily life. They also have the communication function and often appear to be informal and used everyday, which is different from Mandarin. For example, also in Shanghai area, the daily talks between adults are almost all in the use of Shanghai dialect.<sup>57</sup> This daily and informal communication function has regional exclusivity: a dialect is only used in the dialect area or between its people. In different region dialects are so different from each other that sometime it is difficult to communicate across dialects, as the old saying of Chinese: “Ten li away the dialects are different, one hundred li away the customs are different”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, “Fangyan he Putonghua de shehui gongneng yu hexie fazhan” 方言和普通话的社会功能与和谐发展, *Xiuci xuexi*, no. 6 (2006), 1-8.

<sup>57</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, “Fangyan he Putonghua de shehui gongneng yu hexie fazhan” 方言和普通话的社会功能与和谐发展, *Xiuci xuexi*, no. 6 (2006), 1-8.

<sup>58</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, “Fangyan he Putonghua de shehui gongneng yu hexie fazhan” 方言和普通话的社会功能与和谐发展, *Xiuci xuexi*, no. 6 (2006), 1-8.

For some places, it is hard for the people to communicate with each other even only a river or a mountain between their residences.<sup>59</sup>

In real life, dialects and Mandarin exist together in China. Each of them has their own characteristics and different usages. Between them, there is a kind of symbiotic relationship. A dialect is the first language of most people and the ability of speaking mandarin is acquired. Mandarin is very popular around China. According to Matteo Ricci's record "(in Ming dynasty), the official Mandarin is very common, even the children and women can understand."<sup>60</sup> After the founding of Communists' China, with the strengthening in policies and the media's propaganda, the number of people who can't speak Mandarin was strongly lowered. This phenomenon is common in China, such as in Wu dialect area Shanghai, most people can speak both Wu dialect and Mandarin. Most Chinese choose mandarin or local dialect in different situations.<sup>61</sup>

### **3.2 Mandarin and Dialects in Films**

Outside the context of reality, in films, can Mandarin and dialects represent other relationships?

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<sup>59</sup> Wang Qing 王庆, "Jiangjiu guifan shenzhong gengxin—Shilun Putonghua zai xinshiqi de yanhua yu fazhan" 讲究规范 慎重更新—试论普通话在新时期的演化与发展, *Jiangxi jiaoyu: jiaoxue ban*, no. 4 (2005), 19-20.

<sup>60</sup> Matteo Ricci, *Limadou zhongguo zhaji 利玛窦中国札记* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 30.

<sup>61</sup> You Rujie 游汝杰, "Fangyan he Putonghua de shehui gongneng yu hexie fazhan" 方言和普通话的社会功能与和谐发展, *Xiuci xuexi*, no. 6 (2006), 1-8.

Sound was first introduced in cinema in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), since then it serves as a basic element in the art form of film. In China the first sound film *Sing Girl Red Peony* (ge nv hong mu dan) appeared in 1931. Cinema has changed from a purely visual medium to a multimedia which combines audible and visual elements together. It is sound that turns the relative space-time represented by vision into the relative space-time represented by audio-visual elements. In film sound dialects belong to human voice. Human voice has the following narrative functions: ①To convey information (rational information or emotional information); ②To portray the characteristics of people; ③To promote the development of event or story; ④To render the atmosphere (time and location). Both Mandarin and dialects have all the above characteristics of “human voice” in a film. They both contain qualities of “human voice”.

By using dialects in films, two totally different effects can be achieved. On one hand, when dialects are used in comedies, they can enhance the comic effects. The image of a character can be exaggerated or distorted. Thus, a description of the non-reality can be achieved, similar to the images in a distorting mirror. This effect is like “dramatization” in literature. On the other hand, as previously discussed, dialect can also be a very documentary technique of expression. It can represent a seeming true identity and make the entire film authentic.

Then how about Mandarin? Does Mandarin have the same expressive effects as dialects? In most circumstances, Mandarin can act as ‘human voice’ in the films. In addition to that, compared to dialects, it has no other functions. The “functionalization”

of dialects is very significant, which becomes a stark contrast to Mandarin's relatively mundane properties. Searching key words like "dialect, film on CNKI on January 2, 2013, in total we can find 141 articles, about 40 of which are related to dialects' functions in films. While only 125 articles are found, only five of them are really about Mandarin in films when the keywords are changed as "Mandarin, films'. This difference shows that in films when referring to the unique functions, scholars' attentions are mainly on dialects. Mandarin's functions in films are absent.

In addition to that, even though in recent years the number of dialect films has increased a lot, the number of those films on the market is far less than Mandarin films. It can be said that Mandarin films are still the mainstream of the Chinese films. Mandarin is definitely the main 'narrative language' of Chinese films.

### **3.3 Two Contrasts---A Spectacle**

From the analysis above, we can see that in the context of reality and the context of film, Mandarin and dialects show us different states. These differences are reflected in two aspects: 1. In real life, Mandarin and dialects can both be used as communicational language while in films dialects have more functions than Mandarin (discussed in detail in the previous section). Compared to Mandarin a distinguishing characteristic of dialects is functionalization. 2. In real life, dialects coexist with Mandarin. Mandarin occupies the fields of formal communications and cross-regional information exchanges while dialects

occupy everyday life. However, in films the coexistent relationship breaks down.

Mandarin almost gets a monopoly and dialects only act as a minor supplement.

This contrast present us completely different feelings about Mandarin and dialects, in and out of films. Due to the Mandarin's absolute advantage in number in film making, the films people watch are mainly Mandarin films. Listening to Mandarin when watching a film has become a part of people's film-watching habits. These film-watching habits form a great centripetal force, which has a large assimilation effect. It even drives many originally non-Mandarin films to be dubbed in Mandarin in order to adapt to these film-watching habits. The Hong Kong films that are introduced into mainland China can be taken as an example: "Hong Kong films should be totally changed (in sound). Then they can really merge into the mainstream film market in mainland ... If Mandarin dubbing is missing and original sound are used in these Hong Kong films which are excellent in lines, such as Stephen Chow's films, I am afraid that Mainland audiences will exclaim what a shoddy version."<sup>62</sup> This shows a special phenomenon of "One country, two versions".

For the audiences, dialects' being used in films is more likely to be a spectacle. Spectacle has existed since ancient times, such as the various rituals of primitive society---many kinds of statues in temples, carnivals, the Caishikou where prisoners were executed in China in the Ming and Qing dynasties. They distinguish secular space and

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<sup>62</sup> Tubingen Mujiang 图宾根木匠, "yiguo liangban'de wenhua yiyi" "一国两版"的文化意义, Dongfang dianying, no. 03 (2012).

sacred space, and bring people a sensory pleasure. Today, in a mass consumption society, the boundary between secular and the sacred spaces has been blurred. The concept of spectacle is proposed by the postmodern theorist Guy E Debord: “In a society where modern industry productions spread, people’s whole life shows a huge accumulation of spectacles. Those once really existed here all became purely symbols.”<sup>63</sup> Film itself is a kind of modern spectacle, as British film theorist Laura Mulvey points out<sup>64</sup>. By referring to psychoanalytic theories, She analyzed that the spectacle in films “controls an erotic visual way of watching”<sup>65</sup> to achieve visual pleasure. Film images reshape and transform people’s normal memory and experience. Zhou Xian points out that in recent years Chinese films are more and more like spectacles. He also lists out several main elements in spectacle films: physical spectacle, action spectacle, speed spectacle and scene spectacle.<sup>66</sup> Except these spectacles he listed in the visual aspect, dialects also demonstrated their many functions as ‘sound spectacle’ in the audible aspect. When being used in the films, dialects are like a distorted mirror image, becoming mere symbol for regional identity or a funny element. The real world becomes the images or sounds that can be perceived by the audiences—the perceivable debris, which philosophize

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<sup>63</sup> Jacques Lacan, et al., *Shijue wenhua de qiguan 视觉文化的奇观*, trans. Wu Qiong 吴琼 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2005), Preface.

<sup>64</sup> Zhou Xian 周宪, “Lun qiguan dianying yu shijue wenhua” 论奇观电影与视觉文化, no. 03 (2005), 18-26.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang Hongjun 张红军, *Dianying yu xinfangfa* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1992), 206, 208, 212, 215-220.

<sup>66</sup> Zhou Xian 周宪, “Lun qiguan dianying yu shijue wenhua” 论奇观电影与视觉文化, no. 03 (2005), 18-26.

reality. The meanings and significance for these dialects have overflow. Their symbolic significance become more important than their original significance, twisted in debris of concrete narration. They also give audiences an auditory pleasure, and become the “spectacle” in the “spectacle” of film. Dialects are abstracted out as special representations, which are similar to, as we mentioned earlier, simulation. I call it sound spectacle.

### **3.4 A Glimpse of the Reasons**

Then why do dialects and Mandarin show us such a contrast in and outside of films? Why do dialects perform a status as “spectacle” in film? The reasons are various, which can be provided and interpreted from different angles, different aspects. For example, the varieties of dialects themselves provide a source to generate such a spectacle and many functions. Films as a specific art form also play a role in transforming the forms of dialects and Mandarin. It seems impossible to comprehensively analyze these phenomenons from all aspects. Dialects’ being regarded as “spectacle” in films are related to Mandarin. I will mainly explore these issues by probing the power relations and interactions between Mandarin and dialects.

In Michel Foucault’s genealogy, the social settings under the influence of culture are not equally conducive to each individual or force. On the contrary, these settings or arrangements come from the demands and interests of a particular social class, ethnic

group, occupation or male groups under specific conditions.<sup>67</sup> According to Foucault the discourse is represented in specific ways of using languages, specific methods of using symbolic forms such as visual images or other representations. In the aspect of sound in Chinese films, Mandarin has established the dominant position, or status as mainstream discourse.<sup>68</sup> In other words, Mandarin has occupied the central position in the internal system of Chinese films. Whenever it comes to “Chinese film”, people’s first impression is always that the characters all speak very fluent Mandarin. Therefore, Mandarin’s appearances in the movie are taken for granted. The principle is similar to the “conditioned reflex” Pavlov and Descartes mentioned: When a dog is habituated to eating after the sounds of the ringing of a bell, the dog will automatically salivate when the bell rings. The legal discourse in a system is the mainstream discourse. It occupies a central position and represents the interests and values of specific gender, race or class.<sup>69</sup> Some other discourses may be excluded because they are on the peripheries of the discourse field. Dialects are the non-mainstream or peripheral discourses in the discourse field of Chinese films. However, as previously mentioned, in reality, Mandarin’s appearance in

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<sup>67</sup> Wu Yuemin 吴越民, “Fuke de jiangouxing huayuguan yu nvxing zhuyi meijie piping de zhenghe” 福柯的建构性话语观与女性主义媒介批评的整合, Chinese Media Report, no. 01 (2010).

<sup>68</sup> “‘Mainstream’ refers to those who over number others in a certain realm or the one who occupies the dominant position in power relations” “The legal discourse inside a system is the mainstream discourse. It occupied the position of the center and represents the interests and values of certain race, gender, and class” See Wu Yuemin 吴越民, “Fuke de jiangouxing huayuguan yu nvxing zhuyi meijie piping de zhenghe” 福柯的建构性话语观与女性主义媒介批评的整合, Chinese Media Report, no. 01 (2010).

<sup>69</sup> Wu Yuemin 吴越民, “Fuke de jiangouxing huayuguan yu nvxing zhuyi meijie piping de zhenghe” 福柯的建构性话语观与女性主义媒介批评的整合, Chinese Media Report, no. 01 (2010).

informal daily life is not a normal thing (Mandarin is mainly used in formal occasions, but not in informal occasions). It has its own range for use. No evidence shows that Mandarin has occupied a dominant status as mainstream discourse. The situation in reality is in contrast to that in the particular context of film: Whether in formal or everyday occasions, Mandarin can often perfectly implement the task of communication. On the other hand, dialects are in a suppressed status and their importance has become extremely minor. This phenomenon of Mandarin's overreaching and dialects' retreating can be interpreted as the operation of powers.

When comparing film to literature, Mandarin in films is like the general narrative language (the language used to narrate the story and describe the images of characters). When the readers are reading materials in the right form, their attentions are mainly on the content, without noticing the form or language itself. On the opposite side, dialects are more likely to be a rhetorical method, a type of innovative activity in language communication<sup>70</sup> within the film. They surprise the audiences and achieve special effects by their unconventional expression. People can recognize them immediately from the context at first glance, as languages different from the narrative language--Mandarin. They can retouch and describe the objects visually and vividly. It becomes obvious that this discourse under the discipline of the mainstream discourse will generate some extra functions: compared to mainstream discourse, in the same context it can have some

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<sup>70</sup> Lu Jianming 陆俭明, "Xiuci de jichu—Yuyi he xielv" 修辞的基础—语意和谐律, *Dangdai xiuci xue*, no. 01 (2010), 13-20.

features which are not possessed by the mainstream discourse. But the non-mainstream discourse doesn't originally feature these features. These features derive from such a system on which such power relations are formed.

The basic content of art comes direct from nature and the reality, as well as people's spirit world. The concrete forms of an art, the specific regulations for that art didn't establish at once. There is a long procedure to slowly hone and modify these forms. The Gorgias philosophy believes that there is no form that is "absolutely right", but only forms that have established "absolute rule". As individuals, we all live under the rules of certain kinds of authority, or the environment created by mainstream discourse. Under these rules and environment, hardly can we be aware of the existence of the characteristics of this "discipline of power", which is self-disguised in ordinary life. In Roland Barthes' opinion, power is hidden in any kind of discourses as "dominant interests": "The place for power to disguise itself is the language."<sup>71</sup> Here the power refers to discourse power. Only after finding the heterodoxy under the authority or contrasting the whole discourse system with another heterogeneous civilization can one go on to explore more, to give a more detailed analysis to the characteristics and details that were concealed under the authority of a power system. This is the reason why heterogeneous civilizations and heterodoxy are so important and precious for culture studies.

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<sup>71</sup> Susan Sontag, *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Specific to the history of Chinese cinema, how does Mandarin establish its status as the mainstream discourse? And how do dialects and Mandarin interact with each other in such a discourse system? We will discuss these questions in the next section.

### **3.5 Discourses and Changes between Dialects and Mandarin**

#### **3.5.1 Dialect and Code—A Semiotics Analysis in Dialect**

First I will focus on the function of dialects of indicating the identity of the characters in films. Dialects indicate the people who speak these dialects and furthermore they indicate the characteristics inherent in their specific identities. In his book *Semiotics*, Roland Barthes points out “Context always leads to some codes which contain knowledge or wisdom. We call them cultural codes in a very broad manner (though generally speaking all codes are cultural codes). Because of these codes, we are able to rely on the prestige of science and morality. We can further call these codes ‘code de references’.”<sup>72</sup> Dialects are also a kind of cultural codes. They contain different local cultural elements, which vary for different people. To local speakers, these cultural elements may be a genial consonance generated by the same identity, a re-examination of local life, and the satisfaction of local’s life being screened. For people from places other than the local region, these cultural elements may be an adventure of mind to an exotic place and a verification of the stereotype of certain geographical places. For example, in

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<sup>72</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Tu Youxiang 屠友祥 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), 82.

many Chinese films, Cantonese indicates the identity of Cantonese people. When Cantonese people watch these movies, they will feel warm and genial because this is the way they speak. They can also easily tell the similarities and differences between the screen language and their real-life language. To the audiences from other places, Cantonese indicates Guangdong, the most economically developed regions in China and various characteristics of Cantonese people (in people's stereotypical imagination), such as the ability to make money and do business, being internationalized, smart, sometimes even sleek. These two ways of viewing basically meet Laura Mulvey's definition about pleasure in films. Mulvey believed that the visual pleasure of cinema is constituted by narcissism and voyeurism<sup>73</sup>. The former one is to achieve self-construction by watching themselves (as the natives watching local dialect films) while the latter gets pleasure by watching others (as outsiders watching local dialect films). She particularly stressed the importance of visual pleasure. Thus the primary task of cinema becomes providing visual pleasure for the gratification of narcissism and voyeurism.

As a kind of cultural codes, dialects indicate the identity of the speaker and contain extremely rich meanings related to local history and culture. The meanings in these cultural codes often flow with the changes in the socio-economic context. The changes in meaning of this type of cultural code in a socio-economic context can also be represented in films. For example, prior to China's economic reform, Northeast China is

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<sup>73</sup> Wu Yuemin 吴越民, "Fuke de jiangouxing huayuguan yu nvxing zhuyi meijie piping de zhenghe" 福柯的建构性话语观与女性主义媒介批评的整合, Chinese Media Report, no. 01 (2010).

the base for industrial development as well as the leading region of the national economy. The cultural meanings of the Northeast stand for state-owned enterprises, economic development, and economic vitality.<sup>74</sup> *Start An Undertaking* (chuang ye 1974) was produced by Changchun Film Studio. It shows the hardships in the development of petroleum industry during the 1950s and 60s in Northeast China. Though there are many difficulties in the early stage of industrial development, this film is full of a positive and optimistic atmosphere to face the difficulties. The final establishment of petroleum industry base also represents a leading position in the country, the joyful completion of modernization. This film clearly shows a nature of advancement and priority in the whole country. It is one of the few films which were produced and screened during the Cultural Revolution. This also shows the priority of Changchun Film Studio in China's film industry.

But subsequently the development of the Northeastern economy encountered lots of problems and declined dramatically in comparison with other provinces.<sup>75</sup> The meanings of State-owned enterprises, Advanced, and Economic development gradually evolved into the opposite meanings, say old mechanism, backward and recession. Yet, the talk shows based on Northeastern Mandarin, the dialect in Northeast China, became

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<sup>74</sup> According to statistics, in the year of 1952, three provinces in Northeast China's GDP and ranking: Liaoning (4.138 billion, Top 4), Heilongjiang (2.6, T10), Jilin (1.655, T15). They mainly held a leading place in national economy.

<sup>75</sup> In the year of 2007, three provinces in Northeast China's GDP and ranking: Liaoning (1102.173billion, Top 8), Heilongjiang (707.72, T14), Jilin (522.6, T21). They mainly held a middle-lower place in national economy.

popular in the whole country. In CCTV Spring Festival Gala, the most important annual television show in China, Zhao Benshan's Northeastern Mandarin talk shows appeared 16 times, from 1990 to 2006. These shows are well received and voted as the most popular programs several times. Some dialect lines in these talk shows are regarded as comedic classics, such as "my heart poor cool poor cool" ("wo de xin ba liang ba liang de") (Heart Disease, 2003), "Who says my typical pig kidney-liked face, looks like a shoehorn" (shui shuo wo de lian zhang de xiang xie ba zi, zhe shi dian xing de zhu yao zi lian) (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow, 1999). Northeastern Mandarin slowly becomes a much more comic code in the social context and mass imagination. The film *The Piano* (gang de qin 2011) perfectly shows the combination of these two up-to-date characteristics represented by Northeastern Mandarin. The story of this film, which takes place in the 1990s, in a heavy industrial city in the Northeast, is also industry-related. But compared to the high-spirited atmosphere in *Start An Undertaking* (chuang ye 1974), this film is much more decadent and low-spirited. Compared to the grand group portrait in *Start An Undertaking*, this film is more private. Compared to the formal and official descriptions in *Start An Undertaking*, this film is more humorous and grass-root: After being laid off by a steel plant, the worker Chen Guilin suffers many difficulties of life. His wife divorces him. A divorce agreement is issued between them that whoever is able to buy the beloved daughter a piano will get custody. In order to compete for custody, he and his worker friends come up the idea to make their own "steel piano" (gang de qin, comparing to gang qin, means piano) and use what they have to make it in the dilapidated

workshop where generations of steelworkers had spent their youth. This film was mainly filmed in Anshan, Liaoning, where there is lots of declining steel factories. Northeastern Mandarin is used as the spoken language for all the characters in this film. In this film there are also many humorous even vulgar local patois, such as “rough men, rough words, rough thing (cao ren, cao hua, cao shier).” These dialogues make the audience laugh, feel the hardship and sadness of life, and vaguely see the golden age of state-owned enterprises backing away. From Chen Guilin’s seemingly joking words “My father gives me the name--Chen Guilin, in the hope that I am like the landscape of Guilin (a place in China) being best in the world (jia tian xia). The result turns out that I haven’t achieved the best (jia), but to be half-cooked (jia sheng)!” “The dilemma for the working class’s loss of identity as subjectivity and their effort in breaking out of their spiritual dilemma and rescuing themselves”<sup>76</sup> can be fully represented. The representation of these certain connotations or meanings in arts should be agglomerative: this agglomerative characteristic represents the features of the whole area, the grand period by only focusing on one of two aspects, and then shows them to the public, merges them into the public imagination. As for the mass media, these features are strengthened within the public imagination by more and more practices.

At the same time, after being used in the special context of cinema, or the concrete context of arts, the signifier and signified of cultural codes are not only

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<sup>76</sup> Wang Bing 王冰, Li Zhongyang 李忠阳, “Gang de qin: Gongren jieji zhutixing de kunjing yu zhengjiu” 《钢的琴》：工人阶级主体性的困境与拯救, *Dianying wenxue*, no. 07 (2012).

influenced by the society and time, such as the example of *The Piano*, but also influenced by the context of cinema. They change with the plot, the development of the story. By various skills and techniques, directors can make changes to the cultural codes in dialects, in film-specific context. For example, the film *Lost on Journey* (ren zai jiong tu 2010) tells a story about a rich businessman and a poor worker. The rich businessman, Li Chenggong wants to go back home to Hunan from Beijing to celebrate Spring Festival with his family. All the way home he is accompanied by Niu Geng, an ignorant but naïve milkman. These two people, with totally different personalities and backgrounds, make a series of jokes on the way. The Mandarin Li speaks and Hebei village dialect Niu Geng speaks precisely demonstrates the differences between their identities, as the way cultural codes endow these spoken languages. One example is when they are checking in for the airplane in the waiting hall. Niu Geng abruptly speaks some words in his dialect. Everybody in the waiting hall looks at him strangely. People's focuses are all concentrated on this heterogeneity. This scene matches the normal and conventional cultural codes included in dialect. In the common sense of Chinese society, the airport is thought to be a decent place, where wealthy people use airplanes to go to other places. In this occasion Mandarin is always used for communication between people. So the appearance of dialect seems abrupt and strange, under the censorship and gaze of Mandarin, both in and out of cinema. However after these two people arrive in a small village in Hubei, where everyone speak a dialect, the Mandarin which Li speaks becomes the minority, and becomes vulnerable surrounded by dialect. Compared to those in the

context of society, the cultural codes changes in the context of film and new meanings generate from the plot and story.

### **3.5.2 Between Reality and Cinema**

As for dialect films, their existence can be regarded as a resistant voice to Mandarin. They are the heterodoxy in society. There are different situations for dialects' being used in films. In the first situation, Mandarin is used as the main narrative language. In other words, most of the main characters in the film speak Mandarin. Dialects only appear on a few occasions in these films. Inside the context of the film, Mandarin holds the mainstream status and the dominant discourse, as in the larger context of reality. As we discussed in the section about dialects' functions, dialects' three functions, and the status of dialects as rhetorical language, Mandarin's status as narrative language can be fully represented. As in the case of the film titled, *The World without Thieves*, which we have previously mentioned, a couple of thieves are moved by a naïve child's dream that "there's no thief in the world" and turn to protect the child from other thieves on the train. Most of the dialogues in this film are conducted in Mandarin, except those words of this child named Shagen, which are in a Hebei dialect. When the audiences hears what Shagen's speaking, they are immediately aware of the child's identity because everyone else in the film, including the thieves and the police, speak in Mandarin. The child's spoken dialect in the film reveals the connotations about the characteristics of this character, as previously discussed. Shagen's innocent and naïve features are heterodoxy

in the film as well as in society. In contrast, to the use of Mandarin in the film represents the universal sophisticated and slick features of society, as Lu Xiaopeng says “The director Feng Xiaogang, who speaks Mandarin, defends Shagen, who speaks a local dialect.”<sup>77</sup>

There are numerous films that are primarily narrated by dialects rather than Mandarin. In such films, the dialects occupy the mainstream status and the majority of main characters speak dialects, while Mandarin doesn't appear in this kind of films or it is only used in few occasions. This kind of dialect film is the heterodoxy in the social media environment. In contrast to the social media environment, in the context of these films, dialects become the formal narrative language, while Mandarin takes the heterodoxy or marginal role. In these films dialects lose some functions while Mandarin obtains some more functions which they typically do not have in ordinary films. In this situation Mandarin is functionalized. For example, the film *Blush* (hong fen 1995) was adapted from Su Tong's novel with the same name. It was awarded Silver Bear in Berlin International Film Festival. In this film, after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) takes over a small town in Jiangsu, it takes action to reform the prostitutes there through labor. When Qiu Yi, Xiao E, Lao Pu, three main characters in the film, communicate with other local people in the town, the local Wu dialect is used and becomes the main spoken language in the film. When audiences hear dialects in the film, it is not out of the

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<sup>77</sup> Lu Xiaopeng 鲁晓鹏, “21shiji hanyudianyingzhong de fangyan he xiandaixing” 21世纪汉语电影中的方言和现代性, *Shanghai daxuexuebao: Shehuikexue ban*, no. 4(2006), 13-18.

ordinary, as would be expected in the films dominated by Mandarin. On the other hand, in this film, when Mandarin is spoken, which only happens when PLA officers give cold lectures at the reform camp, the viewer senses the difference in tone. The main characters in this film also speak Mandarin only when they are asked questions by the PLA officers. Mandarin becomes a symbol of identity, a seeming distant force which can also repress people at any time. This force comes from the absolute power of revolution, from the central government and the army. In this film, dialect is spoken a majority of the time, while Mandarin is found in the minority, and Mandarin is functionalized. Despite this, in the larger societal context, Mandarin still holds the mainstream status. This film itself is heterodoxy. So even in this dialect-dominant film, we can see a trace of the larger context: those who speak dialects are still ruled by those who speak Mandarin. The inversion of discourses in different contexts makes such subtle and complex relationships between dialect and Mandarin.

In some commercial films, these differences between different contexts (or discourse systems) are more obvious. For example, in the film *Crazy Stone*, many kinds of dialects are mixed together and become the main spoken language, especially via the Chongqing dialect, which is the local dialect for Chongqing, where the story takes place. Mandarin also appears in this film. The boss of real estate, acted by Xu Zheng, speaks Mandarin. Mandarin here also signifies his identity---he has the money gained from living in a “more developed area”, working for an “upper level” company, which accords to Mandarin’s mainstream status in the larger context. Xu Zheng’s sophisticated and

tactful performance makes the originally formal and serious Mandarin possess the comical characteristic. This role comes from Beijing, where many Chinese are filthy rich, but despite his distinguished identity, he cannot escape being tied up in this small place, when his rivals are some rural and illiteracy people. This seems to be a satire to the use of Mandarin, to the serious Chinese film tradition. In this film, Mandarin is not always a voice of absolute power as in *Blush*. It functions like that of one of the various dialects in the film, such as Qingdao dialect, Henan dialect, Mandarin with a Hong Kong accent, together with Peking Mandarin. The dialects in this film, all function in the same way: 1) To signify an identity, no matter whether it is the boss from Beijing or a thief from Hong Kong; 2) To represent the characteristics of people from different areas, no matter if it is the frankness of Qingdao people, or the high-tech and international characteristics of Hong Kong people; and, 3) To add the comic elements of the film, no matter if it is vulgar Chongqing dialect jokes or decent Mandarin pranks. These three characteristics the main functions of dialects in films are fully represented and gradually articulated, or inherited, no matter the form of dialects or Mandarin. Simply from the aspect of function, here Mandarin seems to be degraded to be “another dialect”, not the narrative language but a rhetorical language which has no unique difference with any other dialect in this film.

In another kind of film in China, called Main Melody Film<sup>78</sup>, dialects and Mandarin represent another kind of relationships. Main Melody Films are a tool for the Communist central government to propagandize its ideology and “mainstream” political attitude. As are presentation of central political power and ideology, Mandarin, the standard spoken language of China, should, of course, be the spoken language used in this kind of film. And in these films absolutely there should be no heterodox discourse like dialects. But, this is not always the case. The struggle between Mandarin and dialects in this kind of film is especially interesting. The film *Decisive Engagement: The Liaoxi Shenyang Campaign* (da jue zhan zhi liao shen zhan yi 1991) was produced as a Main Melody film to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. It tells how the Communist army beat the Nationalists in Northeast China to lay foundation for overthrowing the Nationalist government in China. In this film, Mandarin is the mainstream language, however, the “accent” of certain dialects, an

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<sup>78</sup>Main Melody Film is a specific concept. In 1978, the Feature Film Creation Conference, which was held by the National Film Department, a slogan of “propagate the main theme of the time, advocate the diversification” was proposed. This is the origin of the word “Theme Movie”. See Zhang Han 张含, “Qiantanzhuxuanlvdiyinyingyujingshenwenmingjianshe” 浅谈主旋律电影与精神文明建设, *Dazhongwenxue: xueshu ban*, no. 11 (2009), 98-99.

For contemporary China, the main characteristic of theme movies is to promote the dominant ideology: “The core of ‘theme’ is insisting on socialist system, believing in communism, and setting communist part as the backbone. These contents form the dominant ideology of socialist China”. Later the elements about inheriting the ancient traditions, patriotism, learning from the excellent contents from any other cultures have been added into the concept of “dominant ideology”. See HaoJian 郝建, Deng Shuanglin 邓双林, “Zhuxualvdiyinyingchuangzuoyuchanshi de ‘zhulihua’ quxiang” 主旋律电影创作于阐释的“主流化”趋向, *WenyiyANJIU*, no. 06 (2010), 26-32.

intermediate status between dialects and Mandarin, can be heard, which can be regarded as a compromise between the use of Mandarin and dialects. For example, Mao Zedong, who comes from Hunan Province, speaks Mandarin with a Hunan accent and Chang Kai-shek speaks Mandarin with a Zhejiang accent in this film. These accents seem new in the film.

Why not use standard Mandarin as the spoken language of all the characters, as is typical of Main Melody Film? First, we should make sure to determine which language these leaders actually spoke in the past. There are few papers about whether they spoke Mandarin or dialects in their everyday lives. But from some written documents or video recordings, we can infer that these leaders who come areas where major dialects besides those of the north were spoken, indeed spoke Mandarin for communication, but their Mandarin was not standard, and always had a heavy accent. For example, in *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*<sup>79</sup>, in the video about Mao Zedong's speech at the ceremony of the founding of the PRC, it is apparent that he speaks Mandarin in the public occasions, with a heavy Xiang dialect accent. Real-life circumstances are surely reason enough to merge dialect elements into this film in a form of an accent. Before filming, someone asked if dialects or Mandarin would be used, and Li Jun, the director of this film said: "Listening to the leaders' dialects has become a habit of people. And dialects convey a more cordial

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<sup>79</sup>Li Zhisui 李志绥, *Mao Zedong siren yishenghuiyilu* 毛泽东私人医生回忆录(Taipei: Shibaowenhuachubanyiqiyouxiangongsi, 1994).

feeling than Mandarin. So it is better to use dialects.”<sup>80</sup> His words emphasized the importance of authenticity. “Having considered the suggestions of some General Political Department leaders, experts, some old comrades, on the basis of repetitive discussions and researches, we finally decided that some leaders speak dialects in the film and other people speak Mandarin.”<sup>81</sup> This process is interesting, because the question about whether to use dialects in a film were dependent on the opinions of the General Political Department leaders. The ideological feature of Main Melody Film is evident here. But what is more interesting is the decision made by General Political Department leaders’, that states: “Some leaders speak dialects”. Here, the director defines those who speak “Mandarin with accents” in this film as talking in “dialects”. This deviation is also a representation of discourses between dialects and Mandarin, however, this topic will not be further explored here.

In this film, we also find that only leaders have the privilege to speak Mandarin with accents. Other people, such as the guards, the soldiers, or other minor characters, all speak very standard Mandarin. This maybe a challenge to the director’s assertion about authenticity, for these minor characters may not have been able to speak Mandarin, let alone such standard Mandarin. The “authentic” illusion created by the director is in fact also a representation of Mandarin’s dominant status in social media. In what form should

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<sup>80</sup>“Yang Shangkunyu *Da jue zhan*”杨尚昆与《大决战》, 1 Sep.

2009. <http://ent.worker.cn/c/2009/09/01/21030633990640.html>(accessed 22 April. 2013).

<sup>81</sup>“Yang Shangkunyu *Da jue zhan*”杨尚昆与《大决战》, 1 Sep.

2009. <http://ent.worker.cn/c/2009/09/01/21030633990640.html>(accessed 22 April. 2013).

Mandarin and dialects appear in the film? Who should speak Mandarin and who should speak dialects? How do we achieve the authentic effect, letting viewers understand the contents of the dialogues in the film as well as highlighting the characteristics of the leaders? Finally, this film provides “accented Mandarin”, as an answer, and a compromise. Underling this phenomenon is the complex relations between dialects and Mandarin. Dialects act as not only the opponent of Mandarin, forming the opposite side of Mandarin, but also the ambiguous assistant of Mandarin. In such cases, dialects help Mandarin form into “accented Mandarin”, which can express authentic feeling and be understandable to viewers. The effect of this “accented Mandarin” is quite successful. It balances Mandarin and dialects. It was well received by audiences, and the accents of leaders have become people’s favorite topic. Later, in other theme movies, such as *Decisive Engagement: Huaihai Campaign* (da jue zhan: huai hai zhan yi 1991), *Decisive Engagement: Beiping Tianjin Campaign* (da jue zhan: ping jin zhan yi 1992), this tradition of “accented Mandarin” is well preserved. As time has passed, however, this tradition has not been passed down. In *The Founding of A Republic* (jian guo da ye 2009), which is a Main Melody film in commemoration of 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of People’s Republic of China. *The Funding of A Party* (jian dang wei ye 2011), which is a Main Melody film in commemoration of 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CCP, we can find neither traces of dialects, nor “accented Mandarin”. In these films, we can only hear the standard Mandarin of all leaders. Mao Zedong’s well-known Hunan accented Mandarin is no longer used.

The disappearance of dialects in Main Melody films is a reflection of the popular culture at that time. In 2005, in a governmental document *The Notice about Repeating the Importance of Using Mandarin in TV Dramas*, there were regulations as “The main language for TV dramas (except local drama films) should be Mandarin, and the spoken language of TV dramas about important historical events must be Mandarin. All leaders in TV drama should speak Mandarin.” As the representation of central ideology, Main Melody films should also use Mandarin as the spoken language. Related central departments also enacted four principles for TV dramas based on important historical events. In these principles there are specific principles for Main Melody films: One notes that there should be no literary description about the leaders of CCP and PRC. The characters of these leaders in any art form must speak Mandarin instead of dialects.<sup>82</sup> Zhang Guoli, the actor of Chang Kai-shek in *The Founding of A Republic* says: “I intended to add some ending syllables of Zhejiang dialect into the dialogues, for a more authentic effect. After all we can’t use dialects, so we can only keep eyes half shut on this issue.” Even the “accent” from dialects cannot be preserved. Dialects only appear as a form of “ending syllables”, due to the cautious application of them by actors. Politics, reality, Mandarin, dialects interact with each other in such subtle relations. Mandarin and dialects attract each other, and at the same time they expel each other.

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<sup>82</sup>Yang Weiguang 杨伟光,

“Zongjiejingyanzaichuanghuihuang—Zaiquanguozhongdageminglishiticaichuangzuohuiyishang de jianghua”总结经验再创辉煌—在全国重大革命历史题材影视作品创作会议上的讲话,*Zhongguodianshi*, no. 9 (1997).

Next, it is important to further explore the issues about fifth generation film directors. Large amounts of their early works are based on true stories and take place in rural areas. But dialects or local language never appears in these films, such as Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (huang tu di 1985), Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (hong gao liang 1987), Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* (dao ma zei 1986), and He Ping's *Red Firecracker* (pao da shuang deng 1994). From our analysis, dialects can be an effective way to express the rural atmosphere, the authentic settings, the far away mystery, which are important aspect film seek to convey to viewers. But dialects were not adapted by any of these directors. This absence of dialects and native languages is also the result of discourse between Mandarin and dialects. Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief* is a good example. This film tells a story that takes place in 1923 in Tibet. The Tibetan Luo Buer makes a living by stealing horses. He and his companions steal the government's gift, a horse, to give to the temple. He intends to use the gift as a sacrifice to pray for his weak child at the temple. Then his crime is revealed. The headman expels Luo's family, which is forced to lead a vagrant life on the prairie. His child finally dies though he tries any way he can to seek redemption for his crime and pray for the child. Later, his wife becomes pregnant again. But the hardship of life has not eased up on them.

When asked why he chose not to use the Tibetan language as the spoken language in the film, Tian Zhuangzhuang said:

Actually, there is one print of the film in the original Tibetan, which is in France. At the time, there was a rule that all films submitted to the censors must be in Mandarin Chinese; not even dialects were permitted. Lately there have been

several films by directors like Zhang Yimou and Jiang Wen filmed in dialects, but in the early eighties that was still not permitted. Everything had to be in Mandarin, so we had a Mandarin audio track dubbed specifically for the purpose of getting the film past the censors.<sup>83</sup>

Even dialects were banned, let alone the Tibetan language. The process of censoring and distributing is also interesting. Tian continues:

Initially I wanted to remove it (the Mandarin soundtrack) once the film was approved, but the Inner Mongolian Film Studio refused to put any more money into the film, maintaining that the current version was good enough. During the filming of *Horse Thief* I stood fast to using Tibetan exclusively. So we used Tibetan actors. The titles were translated by a Tibetan translation group who did a really wonderful job, but the film was rejected by the censors, so it was sent to Shanghai Film Studio for dubbing. The Mandarin track was simply atrocious. I figured that we would simply use the Mandarin track to get past the censors and then replace it with the original Tibetan-language track. However, the film studio wouldn't let the director have any say in the prints, so they made four or five prints with the Mandarin-language track. A buyer in France heard there was another version, so they purchased the sole Tibetan-language version of the film, which was distributed in France and the United States<sup>84</sup>.

Given the high degree of censorship in China, the use of dialects and other languages in film is now giving way to that of Mandarin. Their use is essentially prohibited in China. But they can be originally dubbed in foreign countries. To conclude, the choice of whether or not to use dialects or Mandarin in films is not a simple question that is only related to cinema itself.

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 63.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 64.

### 3.5.3 The Interaction between Dialects

The relationships between dialects and Mandarin are meaningful. The interactions between different kinds of dialects in films are also worthy of research. What kind of dialects can be used in film? Some scholars, such as Wang Fang, found that dialects other than Northern dialects, such as Cantonese, rarely appear in films.<sup>85</sup> One of the reasons for this is that such dialects cannot be shown in a large area beyond where the dialect is spoken: The differences in pronunciation between them and Mandarin are too great. Thus, they cannot be well understood in places other than the indigenous area. If these dialects are used in films, supplementary aids, such as subtitles, must be provided for national audiences to understand the meanings.

On the opposite side, the dialects belonging to the Northern dialect, such as Northeastern Mandarin, Southwestern Mandarin have more similarities with standard Mandarin in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. They can be understood by audiences from different areas. If a film wants to become a box office hit all over the country, using these dialects will be a better choice. For example, Zhou Xing, the vice president of Beijing Normal University's School of Art and Communication, says "It is difficult for Shanghai dialect and Cantonese."<sup>86</sup> "The least requirement for domestic films is that they should be understood by the majority of people...If dialects are here

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<sup>85</sup>Wang Fang 王芳, "Qianxifangyanzaidianyingzhong de yunyong" 浅析方言在电影中的运用, *Qingnianwenxuejia*, no.18 (2010).

<sup>86</sup>Wang Fang 王芳, "Qianxifangyanzaidianyingzhong de yunyong" 浅析方言在电影中的运用, *Qingnianwenxuejia*, no.18 (2010).

and there in films, the audiences will feel aesthetically tired. The purity of Mandarin will also be polluted.”<sup>87</sup>

For audiences, the secluding characteristics of dialects influence the reception of dialect films in different areas. For example, some early works of Feng Xiaogang, such as *The Dream Factory* (jia fang yi fang 1997), *Be There or Be Square* (bu jian bu san 1999), where Beijing Mandarin and other branches of Northern dialect are used, were “hot in the North and cold in the South”<sup>88</sup>, which means that they were box office hits in north China but duds in south China. In recent years, Feng used standard Mandarin to replace these dialects. This action may be one reason for the success of his recent works at the box office around the whole country. These films include: *The Assembly* (ji jie hao 2007), *A World without Thieves* (tian xia wu zei 2004), and *If You Are The One* (fei cheng wu rao 2008).

To what extent can secluding characteristic of dialects influence the distribution and reception of dialect films? Or how important is the role of dialects and understandability in films? From the volume of production at the box office, we find the importance of “understanding by hearing”: Though there are films where dialects not belonging to the Northern dialect are used, such as *Shanghai Fever* (gu feng 1994) (Shanghai dialect), and *Satisfied or Unsatisfied* (man yi bu man yi 1963) (Suzhou dialect),

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<sup>87</sup>Wang Xin 王鑫, “Lundianyingzhong de fangyan”论电影中的方言, *DianyingPingjie*, no. 13 (2007).

<sup>88</sup>Shi Ying 石瑛, “Dianyingzhongfangyan de wenhuaxushigongnengjixi”电影中方言的文化叙事功能解析, *Dianyingwenxue*, no. 17 (2011), 30-31.

the production of this kind of film is very little. Most of the dialects in films are branches of Northern dialects, such as the Sichuan dialect, Henan dialect, or Northeastern Mandarin.

This phenomenon of Northern dialect's outnumbering other dialects is also the result of discourses operation. These branches of Northern dialect are more similar to standard Mandarin, which is adopted by the government. While the similarities between standard Mandarin and other dialects are minimal, the standard Mandarin is like the center of spoken language in films. Branches of Northern dialects are concentric circles with a short radius, while linguistic dialects can be treated as concentric circles with a much longer radius. Non-Northern dialect dialects cannot be well understood by national audiences, let alone the cultural codes, the connotations, and the other information contained in the content of these dialects. The functions of dialects in films will be undermined. Though there are some disadvantages, these non-Northern dialect dialects can also signify an identity of heterodoxy and convey the information about the speakers' characteristics. Subtitles cannot convey all the emotions, all the connotations. But at least it can achieve the task of narrating. Thus, these linguistic films with subtitles convey an eclectic effect.

As mentioned previously, Mandarin is the main narrative spoken language in films while dialects can have different functions, such as serving as a "rhetorical" spoken language. What if dialects, especially these non-Northern dialects, could act as narrative spoken languages in films? The Hakka films in Taiwan and Cantonese films in Hong

Kong provide models for us. Take Hong Kong film as an example, in these films Cantonese issued as the narrative spoken language. There is no rhetorical characteristic of these dialects in films. But for the Cantonese films in Hong Kong, they are mainly consumed by the Hong Kong people. They have a relatively stable audience group and narrative tradition<sup>89</sup>, which are not owned by most dialects on the mainland. Before the forming of audience tradition in these dialect areas, non-Northern dialect films can only live in the narrow space between Mandarin films and Mandarin branch dialect films.

### **3.6 Mandarin or Dialects—Which is China?**

No simple or static relationship between dialects and Mandarin exists. The relationships between them are dynamic, complex, and always changing. Dialects are consistently resisting and compromising with Mandarin. Their relationships are always undergoing processes but not reaching conclusions. Some phenomena generated by these relationships are easy to be observed, but not so easy to understand.

In today's globalized environment, a central problem for Chinese film is "Which language can represent China in cinema or media, Mandarin or dialects? What is the Chinese language on screen?" Mandarin seems to be the answer. It is the national language of China, and foreign language films introduced to China have to be translated into Mandarin. While dialects have many advantages which Mandarin does not have,

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<sup>89</sup> "China, Taiwan and Hong Kong are the three primary hubs of the international Chinese-language industry" See Michael Berry, *Speaking in Images* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

they are more grass-roots, more various in expressions, and more well-known to local people. As in the aspect of the narrative language, Mandarin also occupies the mainstream position in regard to translating. But this status is also open to the consistent challenges from dialects.

For example, *Tom and Jerry*, a cartoon TV show produced by Metro-Goldwyn Mayer tells jokes between a cat called Tom and a mouse named Jerry. This show was introduced to China in 1980, when it was translated and dubbed into standard Mandarin. This version has been well received. From 2004 and on, *Tom and Jerry* various has been dubbed into various dialects, including a Northeastern Mandarin version, Hubei dialect version, Lanzhou dialect version, Sichuan dialect version, Tianjin dialect version, Yunnan dialect version, Henan dialect version, Shaanxi dialect version, and a Shanghai dialect version. These new versions of *Tom and Jerry* caused a new popular trend of watching this TV show. Different from the Mandarin version, these dialect versions not only accomplish the simple task of translating. In the original English version, there are few dialogues between the main characters. These characters just make some sounds, for example screaming to express fear, laughing to express happiness. Their exaggerated expressions and absurd actions are enough to express the meaning. The Mandarin version preserved this feature of having little dialogue, sticking to the original style. However, in the various dialect versions, the style turns from speechless to talkative. Many unique domestic expressions which have no relationships to the original version or the Mandarin version were added into these new versions, which localized the foreign cartoon. Almost

every action in these new versions is accompanied with a dialect expression. These local proverbs and patois' recreated the original one (or Mandarin one). For example, in the 18<sup>th</sup> episode of the original and Mandarin versions, called *Go Fishing*, the first scene is a peaceful pond, besides which stands a plate with words "Keep out, no fishing, beware of dog". Then a mild violin sound rises, a sleeping dog comes into the picture. There is no human voice heard. But in the Sichuan dialect version, as the audiences see the pond, there is a funny dialect voice of Tom, saying "Go deep into the mountains, knowing well that there are tigers there. You don't allow me to fish, I insist on". When the violin sound appears, the sleeping dog comes into the image, still Tom's monologue continues: "This stupid stock sleeps so soundly". The silent scene becomes interesting and talkative. In the Sichuan version, even the name of Tom was adapted as "Jia lao lian" (meaning pretending knowing something in Sichuan dialect). Jerry's name was adopted as "Feng che che" (an ancient toy in Sichuan). The dog in the cartoon was called "Mang dun" (rude, fat stock in Sichuan dialect). From these examples, we can see dialects' magic power to transform and "dialect-lize" the foreign language films.

This storm of translating foreign films into dialects blew all over China in 2004. The creators of these dialect versions made a great number of works. Mandarin's status as the standard language for translations was greatly challenged. For example, in the same year, besides *Tom and Jerry*, Sichuan dialect versions of *Bugs Bunny*, *Crayon Shin-chan*, and *Popeye the Sailor* appeared. The Chongqing TV station even launched a new channel, called "Comic Channel" to translate many Mandarin TV series,

such as *Flirting Scholar*, into the Sichuan dialect. But most of the later translations were directly from the Mandarin version. Little was done to recreate these works like *Tom and Jerry*. Here not only Mandarin's translating function was challenged, but also Mandarin itself became the object to be translated. While this trend of dialect translation did not last long, Mandarin beat back in a political way to protect its mainstream status. At the end of 2004, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television enacted an official notice, requiring that no TV station show the foreign programs translated into dialects. This dialect translation trend died out on TV but has remained active on the internet.

An obvious trend has occurred in which, any time a film impedes on the mainstream status of the Mandarin, it typically has start from the film arts industry, that is from the bottom on up (no matter in the example of Main Melody films or translating foreign films). Meanwhile, efforts to maintains the status of Mandarin as the standard national language to be used in film typically comes from outside of the film industry via the law or politics, that is from the top down. The issue about Mandarin and dialects and their competition in social media is never a simple issue only related to art itself. The central government's view of the people, the people's intention to show themselves are all important issues to be considered.

As we look at the world today, which language best represents China and Chinese culture, dialects or Mandarin? Antonio Gramsci said: "If any language in the world contains the ideological elements and cultural elements, then we can evaluate the

complexity of their ideology from their language”<sup>90</sup> To introduce Chinese films to the world is a problem related to hegemony and anti-hegemony. The regulation of Mandarin over dialects is also related to another level of hegemony discourse. Can dialects, which are at the bottom of discourse, directly speak to the world? The dialect films, such as Jia Zhangke’s films’ frequently obtaining international awards and praises, let us see a possibility. When Chinese films are introduced to foreign countries, as foreign films in China, they will be translated by adding subtitles or dubbed. In fact, for foreign audiences, there is no difference between hearing dialects and Mandarin. Because just by hearing the audio, neither of these two can be understood. One problem for dialects’ translation is that the number of translators who understands both a foreign language and a dialect is too few. And there’s no established rule for directly translating a dialect into a foreign language. If a dialect is first translated into Mandarin then into foreign languages, then there is a problem of secondhand translation. Some original meanings will be undermined. It is like the classical concept “Ge” (isolation) and “Bu ge” (not isolation) in Wang Guowei’s aesthetical theories.

To conclude, in this article we discuss dialects in films, their relationships to Mandarin, and many other related issues. The relationship between dialects and Mandarin is in the state of flux given their unique, dynamic roles. It is my hope that this thesis

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<sup>90</sup>Yang Xingrong 杨兴荣, “Fangyanyingshirebo de wenhuachengyin” 方言影视热播的文化成因, *Xinwenshijie*, no. 06 (2010), 50-51.

contributes to the understanding of the complexity of the issue of dialects in Chinese film and media.

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