Allegories and Appropriations of the “Ghost”:
A Study of Xu Xu’s *Ghost Love* and Its Three Film Adaptations

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2010

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of Xu Xu’s (1908-1980) novella *Ghost Love* (1937) and three film adaptations made in 1941, 1956 and 1995. As one of the most popular writers during the Republican period, Xu Xu is famous for fiction characterized by a cosmopolitan atmosphere, exoticism, and recounting fantastic encounters. *Ghost Love*, his first well-known work, presents the traditional narrative of “a man encountering a female ghost,” but also embodies serious psychological, philosophical, and even political meanings. The approach applied to this thesis is semiotic and focuses on how each text reflects the particular reality and ethos of its time. In other words, in analyzing how Xu’s original text and the three film adaptations present the same “ghost story,” as well as different allegories hidden behind their appropriations of the image of the “ghost,” the thesis seeks to broaden our understanding of the history, society, and culture of some eventful periods in twentieth-century China—prewar Shanghai (Chapter 1), wartime Shanghai (Chapter 2), post-war Hong Kong (Chapter 3) and post-Mao mainland (Chapter 4).
Dedication

To my parents and my husband, Zhang Boying
Acknowledgments

This thesis owes a good deal to the DEALL teachers and mentors who have taught and helped me during the past two years at The Ohio State University, particularly my advisor, Dr. Kirk Denton, and my committee member, Dr. Patricia Sieber, also my first readers. Without their invaluable suggestions, inspiring comments and patient corrections, this thesis by no means could come into being. I am grateful to my friends Wang Yanyan and Liao Lin, who assisted me to collect materials from the China Film Archive and the Hong Kong Film Archive, respectively. I could not have written the thesis without their support. My thanks also to Debbie Knicely and the DEALL colleagues Yang Qiong, Ni Yaohui, Bai Yifan, He Man, Evelyn Huang, Kana Abe, Erik Christensen, Anne M. Henochowicz, etc. They gave me help, suggestions and encouragement in the research and writing of the thesis. My deepest gratitude is owed to my parents and my husband, Zhang Boying; to them this thesis is dedicated.
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Introduction

In October 2008, Huaxia chubanshe 華夏出版社 in Beijing published a book entitled *Gui lian: Xu Xu daibiao zuo* 鬼戀：徐訏代表作 (Ghost Love: Representative Works of Xu Xu) as part of the series *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue baijia* 中國現代文學百家 (A Hundred Masters of Modern Chinese Literature), compiled by the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature. On the back cover, it was sensationaly recommended as follows:

Lin Yutang once pointed out that Xu Xu and Lu Xun were both the greatest writers in twentieth century China. In critic circles of Hong Kong and Taiwan, Xu Xu is regarded as a “world-class” writer. He is the *gandie* 乾爹 (daddy) of Sanmao, and he is more “Eileen Chang” than Eileen Chang.¹

In this short fifty-word paragraph, four literary celebrities of different writing characteristics are juxtaposed to recommend this writer: he is eulogized by Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976), the leader of liberal literati at Republican era; he is as great as Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936), “Father of Modern Chinese Literature” and the spiritual mentor for the League of Left-wing Writers; he has a certain affinity with Sanmao 三毛 (1943-1991), one of the most popular writers in 1980s China; and his writing style is similar to, and even surpasses, Eileen Chang 張愛玲 (1920-1995), the idol of the “fever for Eileen

Chang” since the 1990s. This sensational recommendation, however, implicitly suggests the fact that Xu Xu is not famous and popular on the mainland today: the less known he is, the more recommendation he needs. But from another perspective, if we look back to the history of the Republican era, we will find that the recommendation has some truth to it: Xu was indeed very popular during the Republican period, and *Ghost Love* was one of his representative works. In fact, this novella was reprinted many times and adapted into film three times, in 1941, 1956 and 1995.

The variety of literary labels used in the above passage, Xu Xu is a writer who defies narrow categorizations. The complex nature of his writing and the ambiguous/ambivalent emotions exuded in his view of literature and politics make him different from any the writers mentioned above. It is arbitrary to simply tag him a leftist or rightist writer, or place him in the same category of popular writers as Eileen Chang or Sanmao. His writing certainly has elements of the popular, but as I demonstrate in this thesis, it also embodies serious psychological, philosophical, and even political meanings.

To get a more panoramic understanding of Xu Xu’s protean nature and in his particular place in the larger literary field, I first recount Xu’s literary career from a nobody to a national celebrity in the Republican period, and examine existing scholarship (mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West) on him.

Xu Xu 徐訏 (1908-1980) was born in Cixi 慈溪, Zhejiang province. His original name was Xu Chuancong 徐傳琮 and his courtesy name Xu Boxu 徐伯訏. Like most of his contemporaries, Xu first received a traditional and classical education, and did not come into contact with modern ideas until high school. He got a bachelor’s degree in
philosophy from Peking University in 1931 and studied psychology there for two more years. Then he went to Shanghai where he worked as an editor for the *Lunyu pai* 論語派 (Analects School) journals. In March 1936, Xu started his own bimonthly journal, *Tiandi ren* 天地人 (Heaven, Earth, and Man) which unfortunately folded after five months. In the fall of the same year, Xu left Shanghai for Paris to further his studies.

*Ghost Love*, his first well-known work, was first serialized in the January and February issues of the journal *Yuzhoufeng* 宇宙風 (Cosmic Wind) in 1937, while Xu was still in Paris. The story was later published in book form by Yechuang shuwu (夜窗書屋, Night Window Bookstore) in 1938 after Xu returned to Shanghai. This novella immediately attained great popularity both in Shanghai and the interior during the war, and by March 1947 had gone through its 19th printing.

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2 The Analects School is a literary group centered around the journal *Analects Fortnightly* (Lunyu banyuekan 論語半月刊) founded by Lin Yutang in 1932. It is a journal promoting apolitical and humorous writings, especially in the form of *xiaopin* essay. Lin later founded two other similar journals *This Human World* (Renjianshi 人間世) and *Cosmic Wind* (Yuzhoufeng 宇宙風) in 1934 and 1935, respectively.


4 The original version was in *Yuzhoufeng* 32 (1937): 444-448 and *Yuzhoufeng* 33 (1937): 488-493. In the book version, Xu made some alterations to the original text, changing the chronology in some places and adding length to the dialogues—e.g., an embedded ghost story narrated by the male protagonist when he accompanies the female protagonist to Xietu Road. The text I am referring to in this thesis is the book version based on the Yechuang shuwu version, published by Huaxia chubanshe in 2008, unless otherwise stated.

5 See Joseph Schyns 善秉仁 et al., ed., *1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays* (Hong Kong: Lung Men Bookstore, 1966), xxi; the original edition was published by Catholic University Press in Beijing in 1948. Also see Isabelle Rabut and Angel Pino, eds., *Le Fox-trot de Shanghai et Autres Nouvelles Chinoises* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 308.
However, *Ghost Love* was not Xu’s literary debut. As early as August 1933, Xu had made his fictional debut in the Shanghai literary field with a short story entitled “Xiao ci’er men” 小刺儿們 in *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 (Oriental Miscellany). In the following years, he also wrote poems, essays, and dramas for various journals, and worked as an editor for the Analects School journals as well. However, during this period, he was usually labeled simply an editor of the Analects School or a disciple of Lin Yutang, and not considered a particularly successful writer. Not until he left Shanghai for Paris and serialized his novella *Ghost Love*, did his reputation as a writer in Shanghai begin to rise. In Sima Changfeng’s 司馬長風 (1920-1980) words, “the miraculous success of *Ghost Love* unleashed a wellspring of writing,” and encouraged him to concentrate more on his own writing, especially the writing of fiction. He followed *Ghost Love* with a series of novellas characterized by a cosmopolitan atmosphere, exoticism, and recounting fantastic encounters. They were published during

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7 Xu worked as editor for *Lunyu* and *Renjianshi*.

8 For example, in a letter to Cao Juren 曹聚仁, Lu Xun once used “Yan (Hui) and Zeng (Zi) of Lin School” to refer to Xu Xu and Tao Kangde 陶亢德—another editor for *Renjianshi*—and commented that they were “much inferior to their master.” Quoted in Wu Yiqin 吳義勤 and Wang Suxia 王素霞, *Wo xin panghuang: Xu Xu zhuang 我心彷徨——徐訏傳* [My heart is wandering: the biography of Xu Xu] (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2008), 66.

the Solitary Island period (1937-1941) and all of them were popular in Shanghai. Xu hence came to be known as a writer of “demon inspiration” (guicai 鬼才), and his works were “seen on all the bookstalls of Shanghai.” This fantastic writing culminates in Xu’s first novel *The Rustling Wind* (Feng xiaoxiao 風蕭蕭; 1943), a work that infuses the popular spy genre with a certain literary elegance and aesthetic sensibility. When it was serialized in Chongqing’s *Saodang bao* 掃蕩報 throughout 1943 and then published in book form by Chengdu Dongfang shudian 成都東方書店 in 1944, it is said “almost everyone had one copy on the ships in Chongqing” and it immediately became popular in the interior, which made Xu a national celebrity. Since it was a bestseller in 1943, that year was even dubbed by some as the “Year of Xu Xu.” Xu’s success in terms of circulation even made it possible for him to establish his own publishing house—Yechuang shuwu—to primarily publish his own wartime works that had never appeared in print, and works written after 1945. Xu left Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1950, where

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10 E.g. *Goddess of the Arabian Sea* (Alabo hai de nüshen 阿剌伯海的女神; written before *Ghost Love* but published after it in 1937), *Gypsy’s Enticement* (Jibusai de youhuo 吉布賽的誘惑; 1938), *The Flower Spirit of the Gambling Den* (Duku li de hua hun 賭窟裏的花魂; 1939), *The Absurd Dover Channel* (Huangmiao de yingfa haixia 荒謬的英法海峽; 1940) and *The Elegy of a Neurotic* (Jingshenbing huanzhe de beige 精神病患者的悲歌; 1940). Most of them were first serialized in journals such as *Xifeng* 西風 (West Wind), and later published as books by Yechuang shuwu.

11 Schyns, *1500 Modern Chinese Novels and Plays*, xxi.

12 Peng Ge 彭歌, “Yi Xu Xu” 憶徐訏 [In memory of Xu Xu], Chen Naixin, *Xu Xu ersan shi*, 249.


14 Ibid., 9.
he spent the rest of his life writing and teaching in some universities. He also taught for a while in Singapore. In postwar Hong Kong and Taiwan, Xu’s popularity of the 1940s Shanghai continued. Many his works were adapted into films and TV dramas, and *Ghost Love* is his only work to three film adaptations.

In his 1978 book *A History of Chinese New Literature*, Sima Changfeng regards Xu Xu a prolific and “multi-talented” writer, because “his achievements in poetry and literary criticism are no less than his fiction, though he is famous for fiction. In addition, he also writes numerous plays.” For readers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, most of Xu’s works can be found in the 15-volume *The Complete Works of Xu Xu* published by Zhengzhong shuju in Taibei in 1966. When Xu passed away in 1980, a collection of commemorative essays about him was published in Taibei, entitled *A Few Things about*

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15 Xu’s writing style and themes in fiction experienced great change in post-war Hong Kong (e.g. third-person narrative substituted for first-person narrative, the most salient narrative characteristic in his early writings; romantic, exotic encounters between handsome men and beautiful women gave place to quotidian life of common people; etc.).

16 Xu successively taught in Nanyang University 南洋大學 in Singapore, New Asia College 新亞書院 (one of the four constituent colleges of the Chinese University of Hong Kong), and Hong Kong Baptist University 香港浸會學院.

17 Xu’s popularity in postwar Hong Kong and Taiwan is a complicated issue, because existing criticism and reminiscence heretofore have different narratives. Generally speaking, Xu’s popularity in readership actually began to ebb after the 1960s, though he still maintained certain position in the Hong Kong literary field—I will further introduce Xu’s popularity in 1950s Hong Kong in Chapter 3. Xu and his works were also controversial in Taiwan: some critics highly praised his writing either from Xu’s anti-communist standpoint or his ingenious writing skills; other critics attacked him for his ambiguity and ambivalence between the leftist and rightist—I will discuss Xu’s political standpoint in Chapter 1.

18 See the appendix.


20 *Xu Xu quanji* 徐訏全集 [The complete works of Xu Xu], 15 vols. (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1966).
Xu Xu (Xu Xu ersan shi 徐訏二三事); all the contributors were from Taiwan and Hong Kong.

At the same time, in the mainland academic world, Xu’s name and his works were completely swept away from both the history and corpus of modern Chinese literature. From the 1950s to the 1970s, tagged as a “porn writer” (*huangse zuojia* 黃色作家) and “reactionary literati” (*fandong wenren* 反動文人), Xu was marginalized in the literary field and academia, and his oeuvre was buried in oblivion. Not until the late 1980s and early 1990s was Xu rediscovered by some scholars. In his 1989 book *A History of Schools in Modern Chinese Fiction*, Yan Jiayan 嚴家炎 labeled Xu a “post-Romantic” (*houqi langman zhuyi 後期浪漫主義*) writer, together with another 1940s writer Wumingshi 無名氏 (Bu Naifu 卜乃夫 1917-2002). Wu Yiqin’s 吳義勤 *A Wandering Urban Spirit: A Study of Xu Xu* is the first monograph on Xu Xu on the mainland, in which he comprehensively discusses Xu’s fiction, essays, dramas, poetry, and literary thoughts. Wu also published a biography of Xu in 2008, co-authored with his Ph.D. student Wang Suxia 王素霞. Since the 1990s, more scholarly attention has been paid to

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21 Wu and Wang, *Wo xin panghuang*, 215. Also see Shen Ji 沈寂, “Manman funü qing: Xu Xu he ta de nü’er” 漫漫父女情——徐訏和他的女兒 [The father-daughter affinity: Xu Xu and his daughter], preface to Ge Yuan 葛原, *Canxyue guxing: wo he wo de fuqin Xu Xu* 残月孤星——我和我的父親徐訏 [Crescent moon and isolated star: my father Xu Xu and me] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua chubanshe, 2003), 4-5.


Xu Xu, with Chen Xuanbo 陳旋波, Wu Fuhui 吳福輝, and Geng Chuanming 耿傳明 as prominent representatives of studies in this field. They either adopt the appellation of Xu as a post-Romantic writer, or label him a haipai 海派 (Shanghai School) writer; and explore various tensions and ambivalence in Xu’s writing between romanticism and modernism, between the individual and society, and between elite/serious literature and popular/entertainment. Of particular attention is Wang Pu’s 王璞 research. In her book (originally her Ph.D. dissertation) A Lonely Storyteller: A Study of Xu Xu’s Fiction, Wang identifies Xu as a lonely storyteller: he is lonely and unwelcome in both the mainland and Taiwan, due to his impartial liberal standpoint between the left and right; he is also an excellent storyteller for his ingenious plot design and masterly narrative techniques. Wang also discusses Xu’s adeptness in confusing the boundary between reality and illusion, as well as the similarity between Xu’s Ghost Love and Magical Realism.

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25 In Wang’s opinion, Xu is an unwelcome writer in the literary field and scholarship in post-war Taiwan, though he does receive more attention and recognition there in comparison with his fame (from infamous to marginalized/unknown) on the mainland in the Mao era. He was attacked by Taiwanese critics in the 1950s for his short story “Malunkefu taitai” 馬倫克夫太太 (1953) that was lacking in “anti-Communist consciousness” and “spirit of the times,” and attacked by scholars such as T. A. Hsia in the 1960s. In A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, Xu was also ignored by C. T. Hsia, T. A. Hsia’s brother.
(represented by Jorge Luis Borges’s writings), etc.\textsuperscript{26} Also, in some new historical narratives of modern Chinese literature, Xu and his works are rehabilitated into the genealogy of modern literary canons.\textsuperscript{27} In 2008, Sanlian shudian published the 16-volume \textit{The Complete Works of Xu Xu}, heretofore the most complete collection of Xu’s works on the mainland.\textsuperscript{28}

In his essay, Chen Naixin argues: “For thirty years, [Xu Xu] has been the most favorite writer for oversea readers and critics.”\textsuperscript{29} This argument, however, is not valid, at least in the American academia. In the 1960s, C. T. Hsia rediscovered Eileen Chang, a popular Shanghai writer who had been erased from the official narration of modern Chinese literature; and in the 1990s, Leo Ou-fan Lee added five more representative modernist writers—Shi Zhecun 施蜇存 (1905-2003), Liu Na’ou 劉呐鷗 (1905-1940),


\textsuperscript{28} Xu Xu quanjji 徐訏全集 [The complete works of Xu Xu], 16 vols. (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2008).

\textsuperscript{29} Chen Naixin, “Xu Xu er san shi” 徐訏二三事, in \textit{Xu Xu ersan shi}, 20.
Mu Shiying 穆時英 (1912-1940), Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (1906-1968) and Ye Lingfeng 葉靈鳳 (1905-1975)—to perfect this genealogy of “Shanghai School literature” (haipai wenxue 海派文學). However, Xu Xu, who had been a popular Shanghai writer during the Republican era was always invisible both in American scholarship and readership. Even in Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945, a monograph on the literature in occupied Shanghai and Peking, Edward Gunn simply introduces Xu as a “playwright, novelist, and editor of several magazines with Lin Yutang” without any discussion of his works. And in his book The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fiction Writing in Twentieth-Century China, David Der-wei Wang mentions Xu’s Ghost Love in one sentence, and does not further analyze this story. The only existing English research about Xu and his works are, to my knowledge, two Ph. D. dissertations: Christopher John Rosenmeier’s Shanghai Avant-garde: the Fiction of Shi Zhecun, Mu Shiying, Xu Xu, and Wumingshi, and Frederik Hermann Green’s A Chinese Romantic’s Journey through Time and Space: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Nostalgia in the Work of Xu Xu (1908-1980). Rosenmeier views the

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30 Although Lee is not the first scholar to rediscover those writers—he did this study well after mainland scholars had in the late 1980s—considering his impact in the Western scholarship, his book in English, in comparison with those studies written in Chinese, has helped Western scholars and readers to know the “Shanghai School” writers of the Republican period.

writing of Xu Xu and Wumingshi in the 1940s as “echoes of the avant-garde” epitomized by the works of Shi Zhecun and Mu Shiying.\(^{32}\) Green’s study is the first English-language monograph on Xu Xu. He challenges conventional notions about the nation, the self, the popular, and émigré identity by recontextualizing Xu’s works in different contexts (Republican-period travel writing, urban modernism, wartime popular literature and drama, and Hong Kong postwar literature). Furthermore, Green not only examines Xu’s work in the framework of Romanticism, labeling Xu as a “Romantic” writer in terms of the similarities between Xu’s aesthetics and those of the European Romantics, but also in the framework of Modernism, arguing that Xu’s oeuvre constitutes “a highly original response to modernity that not only places Chinese modernism into a global framework of literary Romanticism,” but also influences the development of a modern Chinese literature in post-war Sinophone communities (Hong Kong, Taiwan and Sinophone).\(^{33}\)

In the aforementioned scholarship on Xu’s writings, only a few scholars mention and discuss film/TV adaptations of Xu’s works.\(^{34}\) The only related article hitherto is Huang Ren’s 黃仁 “A Study on Film Adaptations of Xu Xu’s Fiction,” in which he

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discusses film adaptations by groups of different themes. The last section of his article is a comparative study of three adaptations of *Ghost Love*. Yet it seems that Huang did not watch the first one, and only compares the last two adaptations in terms of plot design, performance, and shooting.  

However, considering that Xu’s career expands critical periods in twentieth century China, his popularity in the 1940s Shanghai and 1950s Hong Kong, and his experience in Shanghai and Hong Kong, two cities that had a most profound influence on modern Chinese literature and film, Xu deserves much greater recognition, both from literary and film studies, than has been accorded him so far. In other words, a case study of Xu Xu and his works/film adaptations offers a textual venue through which to observe and understand the complex interactions among society, literature and film in some eventful periods in twentieth-century China.  

In fact, this thesis is inspired by Xiaofei Tian’s method in dealing with “textual variants.” In her book *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table*, Tian points out that “underneath the smooth, fixed surface of a modern printed edition is a chaotic and unstable world,” the world of manuscript culture, in which a text usually undergoes transformation and produces a number of textual variants when it is out of the hands of the author. Tian argues that the method we should keep in mind is not to try to find out which variant is the original or genuine one used by the author. Rather, it is always more interesting to trace the trajectory of a work, to see how people perceive

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it and use it differently over time.\textsuperscript{36} Tian’s method can be applied to cases beyond imperial manuscript culture, such as different editions of the same text, different film adaptations of the same piece of literature, different narratives of the same historical event, different biographies of the same person, etc. When we deal with these issues, we should suspend such traditional quests as “which edition is the original one? which film is the best adaptation of literary text? what is the truth?” Instead, we should examine the social, historical and cultural factors behind these “variants” and how people create and use them to serve different purposes. Xu’s novella and its “variants” (film adaptations) which were produced in prewar Shanghai (1937), wartime Shanghai (1941), postwar Hong Kong (1956) and post-Mao mainland (1995), respectively, offer a perfect textual avenue through which to better understand those periods.

The focus of this thesis is neither to examine how Xu applies literary techniques of the post-Romanticism/neo-Romanticism or Modernism labels given to him in current scholarship, nor how he tactically combines both entertainment and literary elegance in a piece of popular writing. This is also not a comparison of film adaptation best captures the intention of Xu’s novella in terms of plot design. As Dudley Andrew points out, there are several possible relations between a film adaptation and the original literary text, which can generally be categorized into three modes: borrowing, intersection, fidelity of transformation. “Borrowing” is the most frequent mode of adaptation, in which the film “employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally

\textsuperscript{36} Xiaofei Tian, “Introduction,” \textit{Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 3-22.
successful text,” and the audience is “expected to enjoy basking in a certain pre-established presence and to call up new or especially powerful aspects of a cherished work.” By contrast, “intersection” is the opposite mode of “borrowing” because it “presents the otherness and distinctiveness of the original text, initiating a dialectical interplay between the aesthetic forms of one period with the cinematic forms of our own period.”\(^{37}\) If we apply Andrew’s theory to the three film adaptations of *Ghost Love*, we find that the 1941 and 1956 versions are in the mode of “borrowing.” Although in some details, they differ from the original text, they strictly “borrow” Xu’s novella, from the title to the basic elements of the plot, while they also reflect particular historical and social contexts they are situated in. *Evening Liaison*—the 1995 adaptation, which re-titles the story and greatly alters the original text—however, can be viewed as an example of the “intersection” mode. It is not merely an adaptation of Xu Xu’s novella, but also a vehicle for the expression of the director’s own art philosophy and aesthetic pursuit. In other words, Xu’s story is only the skin of the film, and the kernel/spirit of the film belongs to its director.

Therefore, I am not concerned here with the issue of fidelity, but with how each text reflects the particular reality and ethos of its time. For example, what elements influenced Xu’s creation of his female ghost? What allegories are hidden behind his ghost story? What social and historical contexts shaped and are mirrored in the 1941 adaptation? What social factors contributed to the redesignation of the ghost and the

special characteristics of the 1956 adaptation? What historical, political, economic phenomena are reflected in the 1995 adaptation? And what cultural and psychological patterns underlie the language, art and other cultural expressions in this film?

In other words, the approach I apply to this thesis is semiotic. This approach has been applied by Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott to Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero, which situates the figure of Bond “in the diverse and changing forms in which it has been produced and circulated,” and discusses beyond the Bond novels and films to “take account of the broader range of texts and coded objects through which the figure of Bond has been put into circulation as a popular hero.”38 Inspired by their study, this thesis also attempts to go beyond Xu’s Ghost Love and its film adaptations. As Umberto Eco jokingly suggests, “semiotics is a discipline for studying everything which can be used in order to lie,”39 this thesis not only tries to explain what is presented and reflected in these four texts, but also to reveal what is screened, hidden and alluded to beneath social and cultural phenomena.

Because Xu’s Ghost Love is “ghost love story,” I examine how each text constructs (reconstructs) this ghost story, designates the identity of the “ghost,” and what kind of allegories and approbations are hidden in the various ghostly presentations of different historical periods. As David Wang argues, the narrative of the ghost is part of modern Chinese literature and culture. In the Republican era, “although ghosts appear to have been kept at bay by enlightened literati, chances are that they still lurked not far


behind the façade of the new literature. More intriguingly, modern Chinese writers and intellectuals cannot carry on their enlightened discourse without invoking, or even inventing, new ghosts.”⁴⁰ And there is a “vigorous return of ghosts to elite and popular Chinese culture in the 1980s.”⁴¹ The haunting of revenants reflects the vicissitudes of society, the mental dilemma and historical scars entangled with issues of ideology, modernity, and identity. Wang’s argument is also applicable to Xu’s novella and its film adaptations, though actually there is no real ghost in the frame story of Ghost Love.

In addition to David Wang’s The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fiction Writing in Twentieth-Century China, this thesis is also indebted to many other studies concerned with the image of the ghost in Chinese literature. Judith T. Zeitlin’s The Phantom Heroine: Ghost and Gender in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature,⁴² a study on pre-modern ghost fiction, broadened my knowledge and understanding of traditional ghost narratives—zhiguai 志怪 (recording the strange) tradition. Jianguo Chen’s The Aesthetics of the “Beyond”: Phantasm, Nostalgia, and the Literary Practice in Contemporary China,⁴³ the first English-language monograph on the discourse of the phantasm/ghost/spirit in contemporary Chinese literature, provides “an alternative mode of reading, thinking, and representing the intricacy of human experience in Chinese

⁴¹ Ibid., 265.
literature of the late twentieth century.” It inspired me to examine the interactive relation between literature and cultural (both traditional Chinese and Western) philosophy in Xu’s writing. Ann Wedell-Wedellsborg’s article “Haunted Fiction: Modern Chinese Literature and the Supernatural” investigates the function of fantastic elements in relation to characters in modern and contemporary Chinese fiction, as well as their role in the constitution of Chinese literary modernity. It helped me to think about the relationship between fantasy and reality in Ghost Love and to discuss the appropriations of the ghost in the film adaptations.

David J. Skal’s The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror also motivated me to study the image of the ghost. The Monster Show examines various monstrous images (vampire, Dracula, werewolf, freak, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, etc.) in Western, especially American, cinema from the perspective of cultural studies. Although his study does not cover any image of ghosts in Chinese cinema, Skal’s argument on the relationship between horror films and culture helps me to consider film adaptations’ decoding and recoding the image of the female ghost—the most common and peculiar image in Chinese horror films—in the Chinese cinematic genealogy of ghosts. In other words, the three film adaptations of Ghost Love—though they are not,


45 "There may be more to monstrous images than cultural degeneracy, or that they may contain a rich, if hidden, culture of their own.” David J. Skal, The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 22.
strictly speaking, ghost films—can be examined intertextually with other ghost films that share the same cultural codes.

Some scholars notice Xu’s allusion to traditional zhiguai narratives in *Ghost Love*; some read *Ghost Love*, a work that echoes Shi Zhejun’s “Yaksha” (Yecha 夜叉), as recapturing an uncanny experience from the perspective of Freudian analysis; and some compare it to the Magical Realism of Jorge Luis Borges’s writing. Yet not much attention has been paid to the intertextuality and dissimilarity between Xu’s novella and the traditional ghost narrative (represented by the embedded ghost story), between his stereotyped Chinese ghost story and Western Gothic fiction, between his view of reality/illusion in *Ghost Love* and Western philosophy such as Bergsonism, between Xu’s ghost story and other typical tropes of the ghost during the Republican period. Chapter 1 of this thesis not only discusses *Ghost Love*’s continuity with and divergence from traditional narratives; it also explores social, cultural, and historical reasons for this divergence. By discussing Xu’s special understanding of memory and illusion in *Ghost Love*, I outline Xu’s perception and appropriation of Bergsonism. By contextualizing *Ghost Love* in the broader social context from 1927 to 1937, in intertextuality with Bai Wei’s 白薇 famous 1927 drama *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* (Dachu youling ta 打出幽靈塔) and Ma-xu Weibang’s 馬徐維邦 1937 horror film *Song at Midnight* (Yeban


gesheng 夜半歌聲), as well as discussing the political connotations of Longhua 龍華, a setting repeatedly referred to in *Ghost Love*, I unmask the fallacy that Xu’s writing is apolitical, and indicate the complexity, ambiguity, and ambivalence in the binary trope of human/ghost in Republican period. I finally challenge the conventional idea of Xu as a neo-Romantic writer, by examining Xu’s unique view of the ghost, as well as the themes of illusion and disillusionment. In other words, I point out that not only is the female protagonist in *Ghost Love* disillusioned with society, revolution and life, Xu himself is also entangled with disillusionment.

As François Truffaut argues, adaptation is not a monolithic practice to be avoided but an instructive barometer for the age. The choice of the mode of adaptation depends on the aesthetic system of the cinema in a particular era and on that era’s cultural needs and pressures. While sharing a basic storyline, the three adaptations of *Ghost Love* actually reflect different social, historical, and cultural issues of their times. Limited by the availability of related materials of the 1941 and 1956 films, my analysis for these two films are inevitably deficient and tentative. Chapter 2 mainly discusses the war/culture intersection, through the case study of *Ghost Love* in Shanghai cinema during the “Solitary Island” period (1937-1941), which is rarely discussed in scholarship, due to the lack of materials or ideological reasons. Through analyzing the re-designation of the

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49 The only copy of the 1941 film *Ghost Love* now is housed in the China Film Archive in Beijing, which lasts only 56 minutes, compared with the original 81-minute copy; whereas the Hong Kong Film Archive only houses two special issues and a film flyer of the 1956 film *Ghost Love* without any copy of the film.
ghost’s identity (as an anti-Qing revolutionary) and allusions to other films with resistance messages, I discuss how the 1941 adaptation tactically combines a national allegory and a ghost story, which helps us to better understand those so-called “apolitical” commercial films during this period. I further examine the affinity and interactions between film and drama in wartime Shanghai. It is not only embodied in the dramatic style in this adaptation—a common feature of early films— but also in its reconstruction of the image of the “ghost” (female protagonist) and the use of mood music.

Chapter 3 is centered around the 1956 adaptation made in Hong Kong. On the one hand, I outline the Hong Kong/Shanghai relationship in twentieth century China and examine how this relationship influences the adaptation. On the other hand, through intertextual studies with other ghost-cum-love films and spy films, I explain how Tu Guangqi, the director of this adaptation, turns the original ghost love story into a spy film that reflects the ethos of the Cold War period. In other words, Tu’s designating the ghost as an anti-Japanese spy, can be viewed both as his personal preference and a reflection of the Cold War ambience. In fact, if we situate Tu’s film in relation to other cultural phenomenon in Hong Kong, such as the popularity of martial arts novels since the latter half of the 1950s, we can find that the horror (through the embedded ghost story) and stimulation (through the frame story of the thrilling life of the female ghost/spy), is a kind of remedy that helps the audience escape from the reality of Hong Kong’s struggle between the socialist and capitalist camps, Communist mainland and Nationalist Taiwan, Chinese and colonial identities.
Chapter 4 discusses the 1995 remake of *Ghost Love*, entitled *Evening Liaison* and directed by Chen Yifei, who is more famous for his paintings than his films. While the two other film adaptations were made when Xu Xu was still popular and well known (1941 Shanghai and 1956 Hong Kong), Chen’s film was produced in a period when the name Xu Xu was pretty new and strange for most people on the mainland. In other words, Chen’s adaptation does not borrow any prestige from the original text to attract the audience. Chen’s reinvention of Xu’s story not only lies in his borrowing from other Hong Kong ghost films (e.g. 1987 Hong Kong film *A Chinese Ghost Story*) to recode the image of the enchanting ghost, but also in his strong nostalgic representational style that overwhelms the story itself. In fact, “enchantment/disenchantment” and “nostalgia” can be viewed as two key words to understand this film. At the plot level, on the one hand, the ghost’s haunting/revenge against murderers who killed her lover, realize the “nostalgic allegory” in terms of spatiotemporal nonsynchronism—a potentially generic feature of ghost films, which usually position past revenants and present people in the same time and space. On the other hand, through recalling the love with an enchanting “ghost,” the male protagonist constructs his own memorial archive with a nostalgic tone. At the filmmaking level, Chen’s choice of Xu’s *Ghost Love* for his first feature film, as well as his aesthetic philosophy and artistic pursuit embodied in this film, reflect “Shanghai nostalgia,” a national fad in the 1990s China. The figure of the enchanting ghost is also the symbol of the fascination for Shanghai of the Republican period, and the male protagonist’s chase after the “ghost” is echoed in Chen’s effort to restore the heyday of old Shanghai in his films and paintings. Furthermore, I discuss the complicated social,
historical, economic, and cultural factors for “Shanghai nostalgia,” and examine how Chen presents the key ideas of “Shanghai nostalgia” (i.e. “farewell to revolution” and “reconstruct identity”) through some close analysis of *Evening Liaison*. Thereby, I not only reveal the correspondence between roles in the film (the enchanted man and the enchanting ghost) and roles in reality (the enchanted producer/audience of the film and the enchanting old Shanghai), but also point out the transitory nature of this enchantment and the inevitability of the disenchantment.

In summary, this thesis centers the discussion around the question of continuity and dissimilarity amongst the literary text and its film adaptations. In other words, what are the shared concerns of the story and its adaptations and how does each reflect something particular about the period it was produced. As Hsiu-Chuang Deppman argues, “adaptation succeeds best when the source text inspires complex character psychology.”

The figure of the “ghost” created by Xu Xu is an ambiguous hybridity that allows many avenues for readers and adapters to understand and present: she shifts between human and ghost identities, as well as male and female identities; she is endowed with feminine beauty and elegance, but she also has unmatched masculine skills and prowess; she lives a peaceful isolated life in the present, though her past was thrilling and full of danger and adventures; she is disillusioned with the ugly human world, yet she is still inevitably attracted to this secular world and is even touched by the love of the male protagonist. The three film adaptations explore the characteristics of the ghost and redesignate her

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identity to respond to different cultural needs of each period. In analyzing how Xu’s original text and the three film adaptations present the same “ghost story,” as well as different allegories hidden behind their appropriations of the image of the “ghost,” the thesis seeks to broaden our understanding of the history, society, and culture of some eventful periods in twentieth-century China.
Chapter 1: Illusion and Disillusionment in the Name of the “Ghost”: A Close Reading of Xu Xu’s *Ghost Love*

**Introduction**

Since the rediscovery of Xu Xu by scholars on the mainland in the late 1980s, considerable scholarly attention has been paid to his writing style, his narrative technique, and his appropriation of Freudianism. He is either labeled a “neo-Romantic” (*xin langman zhuyi* 新浪漫主義) or “post-Romantic” (*hou langman zhuyi* 後浪漫主義) writer, together with another 1940s writer Wumingshi;\(^{51}\) or an “avant-garde” writer, juxtaposed with the modernist writers Shi Zhecun and Mu Shiying.\(^{52}\) While the majority of these critics prefer to examine his works in the framework of Romanticism (neo-Romanticism) or Modernism, or to discuss the cosmopolitanism in his writing and life, or to emphasize the fusion of both entertainment and literary elegance in his fiction,\(^ {53}\) I would like to, as mentioned in “introduction,” present a close reading of *Ghost Love* with a focus on the image of the “ghost.” How does Xu organize his story around the theme of “ghost love”—a stereotype in traditional fictional narratives—and appropriate it in a modern

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52 See Rosenmeier, “Shanghai avant-garde.”

space and modern time? What other elements of Western thought—apart from Freudianism, which has been discussed a lot by scholars—have influenced Xu’s understanding of and writing about the ghost? Are there any similarities or differences between Xu’s trope and the typical allegory of the ghost at that time? What are the historical, social, and cultural issues behind Xu’s allegories?

In this chapter, I try to provide some tentative answers to the above questions from three perspectives. First, through examining the intertextuality between Xu’s story and traditional fictional narratives about the ghost, I discuss how Xu intentionally alludes to and diverges from the typical stereotype and common scenarios in the zhiguai tradition, tactically combines it with elements in Western gothic fiction, and sets this ghost story in a modern city involving modern issues. Second, taking into account the influence of Bergsonism on Xu Xu, I explore Xu’s understanding of memory and illusion that closely related to Bergson’s conception of the “real time” and intuition, through a close reading of the novella. Finally, by situating the novella in the broader social context of Republican era, especially in 1927 and 1937—two remarkable years in Chinese history—I examine the similarities and dissimilarities between Xu’s ghost and other popular tropes of the ghost at that time.

A Chinese Ghost Story in a Modern City: Continuity with and Divergence from Traditional Narrative

As its title suggests, Ghost Love is a “ghost story.” Its storyline is based on the traditional romance/stereotype of “a man encountering a female ghost.” On a chilly winter night, the
first-person narrator by the name of Xu 徐—identical with Xu Xu’s surname—is encountered by a beautiful young woman dressed in black in a tobacconist on Nanjing Road 南京路, and she approaches him with the following words: “Human being, please tell me the way to Xietu Road 斜土路.”

The narrator is astonished by her beauty and the manner in which she addresses him. Yet she insists that her way of addressing him as “human” is appropriate, since she is indeed a ghost. Full of curiosity, he agrees to accompany her to Xietu Road and persuade her to meet him again. In the following year, they meet at night every three days. The narrator becomes more and more infatuated with this nameless woman, though he remains suspicious of her claimed “ghostly” identity. The turning point comes with a sudden rainstorm, in which the woman finally invites him into her house in a village on the outskirts of the city. There, he finds some man’s clothing that she claims to belong to her husband when she was still alive. Then he confesses his love to her, but in return, is mocked by her. For her, love is an absurdity of the human world, and it is ridiculous to have love between a man and a ghost. Frustrated but still clinging to some faint hope, the narrator returns to the house during the daytime, trying to learn more about her true identity. He finally finds out that the woman who lived there died three years ago.

The first installment in Yuzhoufeng suddenly terminated at this point, keeping readers in suspense as to whether or not the woman was really a ghost. In a manner reminiscent of traditional Chinese storytellers and *huaben* 話本 fiction, the publisher announced that the second part would appear in the next issue.
In the second installment, the narrator meets the woman again, still suffering from the same obsessive love. After he and the woman finally make a compromise to maintain a Platonic love, he accidently meets her one day during the daytime dressed as a Buddhist nun. He questions her ghostly identity again, and this time she has to admit that she is a human being—a woman who used to be a revolutionary assassin yet feels disillusioned with this human world and prefers to be a ghost. At the end of the story, the woman hopes the narrator will go on with his life as a human ("haohao zuoren" 好好做人), and she disappears from his life forever as a “ghost.”

As mentioned above, the basic storyline of this novella is not new; encounters with supernatural phenomena are part of the tradition of the spectral that can be traced back to the earliest period of Chinese civilization. These types of stories developed through the zhiguai 志怪 (accounts of the strange) anecdotes of the Six Dynasties, Tang chuanqi 傳奇 (tales of the strange and the bizarre), Song zhiguai stories, and most spectacularly, Ming and Qing Biji 筆記 (jottings) of ghosts and phantoms, with Qu You 瞿佑 (1341-1427), Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797), and Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805) as conspicuous representatives of this genre. To this day, among various supernatural phenomena and spectral images, the female ghost remains as much a source of fascination in Chinese media, including fiction, movies and TV series, as the vampire/werewolf in Western popular culture. A prominent example is the Hong Kong film A Chinese Ghost Story (Qiannü youhun 倩女幽魂) directed by Ching Siu Tung 程小東 and produced by Tsui Hark 徐克 in 1987, an adaptation of “Nie Xiaoqian”
聶小倩, a ghost story in *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異 (*Stranger Stories from a Chinese Studio*, hereafter referred to as *Liaozhai*). This hit film perfectly visualizes this traditional stereotype of the female ghost (see figure 1).\(^{54}\) Therefore, in this section, when I use the term “a Chinese ghost story” to refer to Xu’s novella, I apply it not only for its literal meaning in Chinese, but also for its cultural implication in terms of the intertextuality between Xu’s story and the Chinese *zhiguai* 志怪 narrative tradition visually epitomized by the film *A Chinese Ghost Story*.

Figure 1. A man encounters an enchanting woman (ghost); they fall in love with each other. From *A Chinese Ghost Story*, 1987 Hong Kong film.

\(^{54}\) Judith T. Zeitlin also uses this film as a typical presentation of traditional fictional narratives of the female ghost. See *The Phantom Heroine*, 1-2.
Intriguingly, when the male protagonist in *Ghost Love* accompanies the female protagonist to Xietu Road, he tells her a traditional Chinese ghost story to prove his courage.\(^{55}\) It is about a fearless man who encounters a beautiful female ghost in a valley at midnight, and pursues her despite her attempts to scare him away with her horrible appearance. There is an interesting and salient correspondence between this embedded story and the frame story.

Both stories start with an encounter at night between a man and a beautiful woman. The man pursues the woman and falls in love with her; she claims to be a ghost and tries her best to scare him away, but fails to get rid of him; she has to bring him back home and serve him with food and drink; he demands shelter for the night; yet finally when he wakes up from this “dream,” he finds that everything has been an illusion and can not find her. The man in the embedded story confesses that he “really wants to meet the female ghost again, but he can only find a tomb during the daytime, whereas he can never find her place at night.”\(^{56}\) Likewise, at the end of the frame story, the first-person narrator—the protagonist—sighs: “Now it is winter… Winter comes again, yet the encounter in winter will never come. I always miss her, and yearn for everything about her all the time. However, in this vast earthly world, where can I meet her again?”\(^{57}\)

\(^{55}\) In the book version, Xu made some alterations to the original text, changing the chronology in some places and adding length to the dialogues—in which he adds an embedded story narrated by the protagonist when he accompanies her to Xietu Road.

\(^{56}\) Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 11.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 43.
What interests me the most is the fact that the protagonist himself clearly realizes this correspondence between the embedded story and his own story. When he is telling the traditional ghost story, he feels that he himself is “seemingly involved in this story with the woman at his side in the role [of the ghost].”\(^{58}\) And when he lights a cigarette for her, his hands are actually trembling because he is afraid that she may suddenly change her appearance to that of a horrible ghost in the light of the match, much like the female ghost does in the embedded story. When he finally successfully enters her house, he notices that her curtains have three layers: the one closest to the window is white, next is grey-green, and the innermost is made of black wool, which coincides with the color of the tomb in the embedded story. He wonders, “Is it really a tomb? I guess the white one should be the stone fence, the grey-green one the grass, and the black one the dirt.”\(^{59}\) Furthermore, what makes him decide to return to her house during the daytime also comes from his knowledge of traditional ghost stories in which “houses made by ghosts through magic in the night become tombs during the day.”\(^{60}\) Therefore, he believes that he can prove her to be a human being if her house does not change into a tomb during the day. Yet his test fails with the news she had died three years ago, and he continues to suffer in his hopeless love. When he becomes so gaunt that all his friends and relatives

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\(^{58}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 22.
begin to worry about his health, he recalls that it is a typical symptom for “men bewitched by ghosts” in stories in *Liaozhai*.\(^{61}\)

In this sense, the ending of the embedded story actually becomes a prediction for the tragic ending of the frame story. On the one hand, he cannot help making allusions to traditional ghost stories to analogize his experience; yet on the other hand, he tries to get rid of this stereotype through such efforts as arguing that his illness is not caused by her bewitching him, and that she lives in a house rather than a tomb, etc. However, all his efforts turn out to be useless. He finally repeats the same disillusionment of the man in the embedded story who wakes up in the morning “finding himself sleeping near a stone fence in front of a tomb,” since he also wakes up one day outdoors, “dabbling in the dew,”\(^{62}\) and never has a chance to meet the female “ghost” again.

While there are many similarities, we can also find some divergences between Xu’s novella and traditional fictional narratives. First of all, Xu’s story is a modern ghost story, fantastic yet *modeng* 摩登 (modern and fashionable).\(^{63}\) The story is set in a modern city—Shanghai, a national metropolis—and the protagonist encounters the woman in a tobacconist on Nanjing Road, one of the busiest commercial streets in the city. As the protagonist says, even if one day he will believe in ghosts, “it certainly will not be on

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{62}\) Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 11, 35.

\(^{63}\) The word *modeng* 摩登 is originally an equivalent to the English word “modern” (along with the French *moderne*) in Shanghai during the Republican period. Yet this “Chinese word *modeng* in popular parlance has the meaning of ‘novel and/or fashionable.’” See Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 5. When I use this term here, I am trying to explore both two dimensions of this word: fashionable and *xiandai* 現代 (a word that emphasizes the temporal dimension).
Shanghai’s Nanjing Road, and in a beautiful woman who walks into a tobacconist asking for *Era* Cigarettes and then having the courage to ask a stranger for directions.” Yet the erudite ghostly woman solves this ridiculous dilemma with an interesting binary: for her, Nanjing Road represents the “bustling” (*renao de* 熱鬧的) human world (*renjian* 人間), while the area west of the Xietu Road represents the “secluded” (*pijing de* 僻靜的) ghost world (*guiyu* 鬼域). She can wander in the human world at night if she so desires, but during the day lives only in the ghost world, where she refuses his company. Therefore, whereas in traditional narratives the two worlds coexist in the same geographic area but are separated temporally—day belongs to human beings and night belongs to ghosts (a principle applied for both ghosts in Chinese culture and vampires in Western culture)—the distinction between the human world and ghost world in Xu Xu’s novella is embodied through the distinction between the urban and suburban spaces. The former is the area represented by Nanjing Road or Avenue Joffre 霞飛路, which is full of shops, tobacconists, cafés and other modern icons, and the latter is the area represented by the west of Xietu Road as well as the Longhua area, which was at the time secluded from the modernized city.

But at the same time, these two worlds are not absolutely incompatible. Readers may notice that in their nocturnal meetings, the protagonist and the woman either roam about the deserted area, enjoying the beautiful night landscape, or sit in a café downtown, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, and chatting through the night. Their shuttling

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64 Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 5.
between the human world and the ghost world suggests a movement between modernity and tradition. Furthermore, in the plot development, readers get the opportunity to visit the woman’s house through the protagonist’s eyes. The reader is perhaps surprised to find that her “secluded” house is a mixture of Chinese and Western (traditional and modern) styles. In the words of the protagonist, “the room layout is very weird.”

Above the traditional redwood bed there is a round black bed-curtain that he “never saw before” (whereas it is a typical Gothic looking decoration in the West, see figure 2); a Bible is laid on the redwood bookshelf next to a piano and a violin; and Chinese-style and Western-style pictures hang together on the wall. When the woman comes out, she serves him whiskey, hot coffee, milk with sugar, and cake—a series of exotic and fashionable Western food and drinks. This hybrid life style is also embodied in her knowledge, since “she almost knows a little of everything, whether metaphysics or physics, astronomy or entomology,” which indicates that she has received a modern education. All of these make the story more like an urban (westernized) Gothic romance than a traditional narrative. This similarity lies not only in the fact that it includes some basic elements from the popular Gothic novel (e.g., a house that hides a secret, a gloomy room with thick curtains, a character role, enchanting yet mysterious), but also in its form,

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65 Xu Xu, Gui lian, 16.

66 Interestingly, if we examine the embedded story in Ghost Love again, we will find that in this seemingly traditional ghost story, when the man visits the ghost’s family, what her mother serves him is also “coffee”—something by no means exist in traditional Chinese culture. This small “flaw” challenges the integrity of this embedded story as a “pure” traditional ghost story, which can also be viewed as an intentional literary tactic adopted by Xu Xu to indicate its peculiarity as a reinvention of the traditional ghost story.

67 Xu Xu, Gui lian, 15.
which provides some “facts” that “are not given, but must be discovered” by the protagonist. In comparison, traditional zhiguai stories rarely pay attention to the process of slowly exposing a secret through the protagonist’s active, intentional investigation. Rather, protagonists usually know the identity of the ghost from the beginning, through observation/common knowledge, or being told by other people; or accidentally find the horrible truth after being bewitched. Also, different from the gloomy charnel room, houses of ghosts in traditional ghost narratives are usually beautiful and comfortable where humans are easily bewitched and lost.


Other differences with traditional ghost tales can be found at the level of plot. One day, the protagonist encounters an even stranger event that further breaks the boundary between the human world and the ghost world. Ghosts usually dare not appear during daytime, a concern expressed by the female ghost in the embedded story: “I will become water when the dawn comes.” The ghostly woman in the frame story is once seen walking on a street during the daytime, dressed as a Buddhist nun. This serious violation of the norms of ghost narratives enhances the male protagonist’s suspicion of her identity, and finally dispels the mystery around the woman—she has to confess that she is actually a mortal.

Secondly, in traditional ghost stories, female ghosts usually try to hide their ghostly identity and pretend to be human beings in their relationship with man, especially while they are in love with a man. The most typical and horrible story of this sort might be “The Painted Skin” (Hua pi 畫皮) in Liaozhai, in which a female ghost has created the perfect disguise of a painted human-skin, which she has removed from her victims, in order to project an identity as a mortal woman. In addition, a repertoire of the ghost-love story is the fantasy of a ghost’s resurrection or rebirth with the help of man also prominently figures in the repertoire of traditional ghost-cum-love stories. The Liaozhai tales entitled “Lady Jade Locket” (Lian Suo 連鎖) and “Lady Wu Qiuyue” (Wu Qiuyue 伍秋月) contain detailed descriptions of this resurrection procedure as well as the celebration of the happy ending when the ghost finally turns into a human being and lives
together with her lover.\textsuperscript{69} However, in Xu’s novella, when the woman’s true identity has been confirmed to be that of a human being—an identity dreamed of by numerous female ghosts—she only feels sad and complains “Why can’t you forgive me? (Why do you) insist on arguing that I’m a human being, pulling me out from being buried in a tomb to the human world, and forcing me to be a mortal in this ghostly human world?”\textsuperscript{70} In other words, she prefers to be a ghost rather than a human being. This insistence greatly differentiates her from the image of the female ghost in traditional narratives, since she retreats from human society and lives a ghostly life by her own volition rather than being compelled by an irresistible external force (disease, accident, murder, etc.).

This difference is worth considering, because it is related to different views of the hierarchy of beings in the world. In traditional narratives, being a human being is the existence between deities and ghosts.\textsuperscript{71} The dichotomy between the human being and the

\textsuperscript{69} The embedded story narrated by the protagonist in the novella may be the only exception in this sort of ghost-cum-love stories, since the female ghost has no interest in the identity of human being, and tries to drive away the man with her horrible ghostly appearance. However, it is a reinvention by Xu Xu which combines several archetypes of traditional ghost stories. At least, the \textit{zhiguai} narratives I have examined so far, including \textit{Soushen ji} [In search of the supernatural; ca 350], \textit{Youming lu} [Records of the hidden and the visible world; 403-444], \textit{Youyang zazu} [Miscellaneous morsels from Youyang; 803–863], \textit{Jiandeng Xinhua} [New stories written while trimming the wick; 1378], \textit{Jiandeng yuhua} [More stories written while trimming the wick; 1420], \textit{Liaozhai zhiyi} [Strange stories from a Chinese studio; 1679], \textit{Zi buyu} [What the Master would not discuss; 1781], \textit{Jiandeng caotang biji} [Jottings from the thatched cottage of examining the epigrammatic utterances; 1800] and \textit{Yeyu qideng lu} [Writings done in the rainy nights and under the autumn lamp; 1877], do not feature a story exactly the same as this one. I will analyze the embedded story later in the next section.

\textsuperscript{70} Xu Xu, \textit{Gui lian}, 31.

\textsuperscript{71} “All creatures are destined to die. Once dead they must return to the earth: this is what is referred to as a ghost. The body rots away beneath, becoming the wild earth; while the spirit rises to the sky, becoming the bright deities.” See \textit{Liji} [The ritual canon].
ghost is associated with their relatively opposite essence of *yang* 陽, (e.g. bright, elevated, good and beautiful) versus *yin* 阴, (e.g. dark, base, evil and ugly). However, in the logic of the female protagonist, the ghost is superior to the human being, and the ghost is not necessarily the same as an ugly corpse and base nature. This argument actually reflects Xu’s special philosophy and aesthetics of the “ghost” developed through an appropriation of Western ideals such as Bergsonism, which I analyze in the following section.

**Memory and Illusion in the Name of the “Ghost”: An Appropriation of Bergsonism**

As mentioned above, before leaving Shanghai for Paris to further his studies, Xu got his bachelor’s degree in philosophy from Peking University and studied psychology there for two more years. During this period, he became quite familiar with various philosophical trends, especially Freidianism, which allowed him to build a solid foundation for his later writing in terms of philosophy and psychoanalysis. He was also an adherent of Marxism at that time, and wrote some realistic short stories and poems in the early 1930s to portray the hard lives of the lower class and attack the darkness and inequities in society. However, he began to doubt and reconsider Marxism after 1936 when he

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72 Besides Freidianism, Xu later also became interested in Lacanian theories of epistemology and ontology. Since much scholarly attention has been paid to Freidianism in Xu’s writing in terms of psychoanalysis and the notion of uncanny, in this thesis, I would like to turn attention to Bergsonism, another Western philosophy that greatly influences Xu’s writing, something rare among his contemporaries, as Leo Ou-fan Lee argues.

accidently read a report in Paris about how Stalin purged the Trotsky School in Russia as well as André Gide’s *Return from the U.S.S.R*. He abjured his beliefs in Marxism, including materialism and the materialist conception of history, and turned to Bergsonism, a mystical philosophy popular in early twentieth-century France.\(^{74}\)

Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was as well known among early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals as he was in France. His works were introduced into China as early as 1913, when Qian Zhixiu 錢智修 (1883-1947) discussed his philosophy in *Dongfang Zazhi*.\(^{75}\) In interpretations by scholars such as Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1889-1927), Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990), Fang Xun 方珣 (1899-1977), Li Shicen 李石岑 (1892-1934) and Zhang Dongsun 張東蓀 (1886-1973), Bergson’s theories of time (duration) and life (vital impulse) were usually associated with the concept of evolution in the service of enlightenment and nation building.\(^{76}\)

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\(^{74}\) “I first abjured Marx’s materialism, then his materialist conception of history. Meanwhile, I began to like the philosophy of Bergson. As such, my Marxist era ended and was gone forever.” See Xu Xu, “Wo de Makesizhuyi shidai” 我的馬克思主義時代 [My Marxist period]. It is the appendix to his book *Xiandai Zhongguo wenxue guoyanlu* 現代中國文學過眼錄 [A transient record of modern Chinese literature] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1991).


that Bergsonism exercised on Western literature, most famously on Proust (1871-1922) in the early twentieth century, it seems that, as Leo Ou-fan Lee argues, “few [Chinese] creative writers had drawn much inspiration from Bergson,” while Chinese thinkers “apparently had no trouble incorporating the mystical and metaphysical side of Bergson.” Xu Xu is an exception; most of his works are greatly influenced by Bergsonism, especially in terms of memory (illusion and reality) and intuitionism.

One of the most famous arguments made by Bergson is that “real time”—duration—is a non-mechanical, yet intuitive and subjective concept of continuous and ceaseless flow, which is mobile and always incomplete. On the one hand, memory is the agent through which we can capture the “immediate data of consciousness” and prolong the past into the present. On the other hand, since memory does not imply that everyone possesses the same experience(s) but different ones, only the experience of the individual is the true measurement of the real.

In his novella *Hallucination* (Huanjue 幻覺; 1942), Xu once expressed a similar idea through the mouth of a protagonist: “illusions and reality are very difficult to tell apart, for reality may consist of the common illusions of the majority, while an illusion can be one person’s reality.” This idea also runs through his novella *Ghost Love*. The novella starts with a flashback (“It was ten years ago”) and the whole story is presented

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through the recollection of the protagonist “Xu.” Interestingly, this reminiscent tone and flashback narrative in *Ghost Love* appears again in Xu’s last novella *Inside the Garden* (*Yuan nei* 园内; 1979) which begins: “It was three years ago.” *Inside the Garden* tells a story of a man who peeks at and subsequently bears a secret love for a mysterious lady, Miss Liang, yet finally gets the news that she had died half a year earlier—it creates a similar shock as the ending of the first installment of *Ghost Love*.79 Both stories start with flashbacks, but it seems that Xu’s understanding of human beings and ghosts, as well as reality and fantasy, has been furthered in *Inside the Garden*. In other words, if Xu solves the suspense set by the first half of *Ghost Love* with a realist and rational explanation in its second installment, through which the reality is distinguished from the fantasy, then the distinction between reality and fantasy is obscured in *Inside the Garden*, marking a return to the traditional narrative of supernatural phenomena. In this sense, *Inside the Garden* can be viewed as an intentional rewriting of *Ghost Love*, through which Xu confirms the existence of marvelous occurrences. In his words, “(if we admit that) human beings are creatures of three-dimensional space, then we have no reason to deny the possibility of a four-dimensional space [which belongs to the ghost]. We walk to the present through the past, but we have no reason to doubt that the past still exists.”80


80 Quoted in Wu Yiqin and Wang Suxia, *Wo xin panghuang: Xu Xu zhuang*, 102. In fact, Xu Xu believed in the existence of the ghost, and once told his friends a real ghost story he experienced when he was a child. See Zhong Ling 鐘玲, “San duo hua song Xu Xu” 三朵花送徐訏 [Three flowers for Xu Xu], Chen Naixin, *Xu Xu ersan shi*, 174-175.
Xu’s argument of existence and memory may appear abstract and metaphysical, yet it is quite clear and understandable when he applies it to his writing. In the first installment of *Ghost Love*, when the protagonist remains suspicious about the woman’s ghostly identity, he plays some tricks to verify his memory of and existence in the “ghost house”—for instance, putting a pipe at the gate, or a watch in the room. When the watch—a symbol for mechanical time—mystically disappears from where it was, it seemingly affirms the woman’s identity as a ghost. Readers, along with the protagonist, are presented with two different narratives about the watch: on the one hand, the owner of the house tells the protagonist: “Even if you had a watch here, now that years have passed by, it must be rusty and broken. You see, the woman you are looking for already died, so how could your watch still work?” On the other hand, in the next meeting, the woman returns his watch to him, saying: “I kept it for you, and it is still working.” This comparison indicates the parallelism between the human world and the ghost world in terms of space, as well as the parallelism between the present and the past in terms of time. It also readily reminds us of the story of Wang Zhi 王質 in the Jin dynasty, a famous allegory of time and a traditional narrative of encounters with immortals. In the story, Wang Zhi, a woodchopper, one day accidently sees some children play chess and sing in the Shishi Mountains 石室山. He stays with them, watching the chess game and listening to their songs. When he decides to leave, he finds that his ax handle had completely rotted in the interim.82

81 Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 27.
82 See Ren Fang 任昉 (460-508), *Shuyi ji 述異記 [A collection of bizarre stories].
In the second installment of *Ghost Love*, when the protagonist discovers the woman’s human identity, he still feels that she is a phantom, intangible, wandering, and unpredictable. He does not know her whereabouts on several occasions, and cannot meet her unless she so desires. Therefore, the Egyptian cigarette branded “*Era*” is not only a clue that runs through the whole story, with which he meets her and with which she bids him farewell, but also the only material evidence for his encounter with this mysterious woman. Like the role of the madeleine in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, it unlocks the seal of his memory at the beginning of the story, witnesses his experience, and represents her existence in various scenes. When he begins to doubt that perhaps his encounter with her in those years is no more than an illusion (“a spring dream”), he decides to rent her room in the house (sold by her to another man), where he can smoke *Era* and indulge in the memory of her. He also often wanders in front of the tobacconist where they met for the first time, smoking *Era* and hoping she will suddenly appear again.

The protagonist’s love for the woman also reminds us of Bergson’s theories on intuition, as when he confesses: “Love is intuitive. I just love you, without reason; I just idolatrously feel your beauty.” Bergson argues that the “vital impulse” (*élan vital*) is the original common impulse for the creation of all living beings and that there are two main diverging tendencies that account for evolution—one is instinct and the other intelligence. While we get knowledge through the form/structure of intelligence, which is analytic, external and practical, we can only attain to the essence of life in its duration through

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83 Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 33.
intuition. It allows us to place ourselves back within the original creative impulse to overcome the numerous obstacles that stand in the way of true knowledge.\(^{84}\)

In the case of the male protagonist, it seems that both instinct and intelligence are involved in his love for her, yet the former prevails. When they meet for the first time, he already intuitively feels that her beauty has no “human spirit” (renqi 人氣) before she claims to be a ghost. He uses a series of images such as “silvery-white,” “jade-like” face, “sword-sharp” teeth, and “cold icy” voice to depict this quality, which reminds him of a “silvery mannequin in the shop.”\(^{85}\) Then they engage in a discussion about beauty and ugliness, which are stereotypically associated with human beings and ghosts respectively. When the woman says that she is the ugliest in the ghost world, the protagonist responds by saying that if it is true, he definitely will agree that ghosts are far more beautiful than humans. The woman responds that the so-called ugliness of the ghost is a discourse used by human beings, who always associate “ugly corpses” with ghosts, though the corpse is not the shape of the ghost. Rather, the corpse is the final material form of any beautiful human being in this world. In other words, there is no beauty in this human world.\(^{86}\) Later,

\(^{84}\) “While intelligence treats everything mechanically, instinct proceeds, so to speak, organically…The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life.” “Intelligence and instinct are turned in opposite directions, the former towards inert matter, the latter towards life…But it is to the inwardsness of life that intuition leads us.” Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923), 165, 176.

\(^{85}\) Xu Xu, Gui lian, 4, 6.

\(^{86}\) Obviously, this idea resonates with the Buddhist metaphor of the human body—“a leather bag holding various filth” (gelang zhonghui, 革囊眾穢)—and also embodies certain common view in neo-romanticism that we can equally find in Wumingshi, a popular writer and imitator of Xu Xu’s style in the 1940s. In a memoir of his friend, Wumingshi has a special interest in collecting skulls and views them as a kind of mirror for human beings: no matter how pretty when they are alive, once dead, the brain will be vacuated, eyes will become two holes, face will like a cliff and the enticing mouth will become a horrible black hole.
the woman further presents her ideas in arguing that “Anything excessive can be horrible…hence excessive beauty can also scare people just as excessive ugliness does.” This transformation from beauty to horror is not understandable in terms of analytical intelligence, since the protagonist already knows this argument contains a paradox: anything excessive is not beauty, and the essence of beauty already excludes the possibility of excess. However, when they part, he eventually intuitionally recognizes her “horrible beauty” (kepa de mei 可怕的美) and “terribly beautiful face” (mei de kepa de mianrong 美得可怕的面容). In fact, in the embedded story, which was added by Xu in the book version of the Ghost Love, this ideal is correspondingly embodied in the plot when the female ghost changes into her “ghostly appearance” (guixiang 鬼相) to scare the man. Instead of finding her horrible, the man insists she is beautiful.

This type of plot does not exist in traditional narratives. We can find stories of a man falling in love with a female ghost with a human appearance, or ghosts horrifying people with their terrible appearance, or fearless men successfully beating ghosts; but we cannot find any story that mingles all of them. The most similar narrative to Xu’s embedded story is an anecdote recorded in Ji Yun’s Jottings from the Thatched Cottage of Examining the Epigrammatic Utterances, in which a man chases a beautiful woman, as well. Quoted in Yan, Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo liupai shi, 304. Actually, this association between the beauty and the skull is a traditional metaphor—“beautiful skeleton” (hongfen kulou 紅粉骷髏)—in Chinese ghost stories such as “Mudan deng ji” 牡丹燈記 [The peony lantern] in Qu You’s Jianpeng Xinhua 剪燈新話 [New stories written while trimming the wick].

87 Xu Xu, Gui lian, 12.

88 Ibid., 15.
yet escapes in haste once she shows him her horrible ghostly appearance. When Xu reinvents the traditional narrative, the embedded story coincides with the female protagonist’s argument on beauty and horror, and echoes the protagonist’s manifesto on his intuitional love for her and her beauty. Again, this reminds us of Xu’s views on illusion and reality, which are “very difficult to tell apart, for reality may consist of the common illusions of the majority, while an illusion can be one person’s reality.” The horror/ugliness in the eyes of the majority may be an illusion for one person, and the beauty of the ghost can be one person’s reality. It is unfair to judge whether it is beautiful or ugly through certain standards defined by the majority. Rather, one can only see the essence of beauty when one abandons rational knowledge and grasps it through intuition. As Bergson argues “we can only attain to the essence of life in its duration through instinct.”

Now, we have to ask, why does Xu spend a chunk of discussion on beauty and ugliness (horror) as well as the binary between the human being and the ghost? What

89 “There is a servant Wei Zao, who is profligate and voyeuristic. One day, he met a girl outside the village, who looked familiar, but he did not know her name and address. He flirted with her. The girl did not respond but glared at him, and went to the west directly. Zao was looking at her back, while she suddenly turned back, seemingly flirting with him. Then he followed and approached her…The girl stood against him, and suddenly turned into a ghostly appearance, with saw teeth, hook claws. Her face was blue and her eyes were glaring, just like lights. He was scared and escaped, and the ghost chased after him.” Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724-1805), “Luanyang xiaoxia lu” 瀆陽消夏錄 [A record of spending the summer at Luanyang], in Yuewei caotang biji 閱微草堂筆記 [Jottings from the thatched cottage of examining the epigrammatic utterances] (Beijing: Kunlun chubanshe, 2001), 50-51.

90 In the film adaptation of Ghost Love in 1956, labeled as a horror film, this embedded ghost story was also shot to add to the horrible atmosphere of the film. And this plot was later echoed in other Hong Kong ghost films such as A Chinese Ghost Story II (Qiannü youhun xujian Renjian dao 倩女幽魂續集人間道; 1990) and A Wicked Ghost (Shancun laoshi 山村老屍; 1999), in which the male protagonist hugs and kisses the ugly and horrible female protagonist who has been possessed by a ghost, and she will consequently turn to her normal beautiful appearance when he is not frightened by her “ghostly appearance.”
does he indicate in the name of the ghost? In the next section, I would like to examine the deeper historical, social, and cultural issues behind this discourse in terms of intertextuality with other relevant texts.

**Ghost Tower, Deserted Tomb, and Haunted Theater: Revolution and Revulsion in 1927 and 1937**

When the mysterious woman in *Ghost Love* is revealed, through the protagonist’s dogged investigation, to be a human being, she insists on the difference between the human being and the ghost, and complains “Why can’t you forgive me? (Why do you) insist on arguing that I’m a human being, pulling me out from being buried in a tomb up to the human world, and forcing me to be a mortal in this ghostly human world?”⁹¹

Intriguingly, Bai Wei, one of the most important female writers in modern China, used a similar trope to depict herself in a letter to her beloved in 1924:

You are just occasionally like a ghost emerging from a deserted tomb, yet the deserted tomb is where I rest forever. I don’t know how long I have been here and I don’t care what year this is. I meant to completely forget this human world where the pretty and the ugly are competing with each other. It makes no sense to inquire about my past. Who do you take me for? Why do you like me? You may have made a mistake. Are you in a dream? The difference between you and me is that between life and death.⁹²

This similarity between the *Ghost Love* and Bai Wei’s confession deserves our attention on two levels. On the one hand, Bai Wei’s representative drama *Fight out of the Ghost*

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⁹² Bai Wei 白薇 and Yang Sao 楊騷, *Zuo Ye* 昨夜 [Last night] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 3–4. It is a collection of love letters, which was first published by Shanghai Nanqiang shudian in 1933. In Bai Wei’s words, “it is extremely senseless and miserable to sell love letters because of poverty.”
*Tower* (Dachu youling ta 打出幽灵塔; 1927) has usually been viewed as a typical allegory of the ghost in Republican-era literature. In the case of *Ghost Love*, however, the allegory is totally reversed, similar to Bai Wei’s confession in her love letter, which I explain later. On the other hand, the year 1927 is also remarkable. For Chinese readers who are familiar with Republican-era history, this year is the watershed of the Great Revolution when the Kuomintang (hereafter, KMT) breaks with the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter, CCP) in the Northern Expedition, and represents the failure of the Great Revolution, the bloody massacre and white terror launched by Chiang Kai-shek who betrayed the Great revolution.93 Intriguingly, both *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* and *Ghost Love* set their stories in 1927.94

In the Republican period, as David Wang points out, “although ghosts appear to have been kept at bay by enlightened literati, chances are that they still lurked not far behind the façade of the new literature. More intriguingly, modern Chinese writers and intellectuals cannot carry on their enlightened discourse without invoking, or even inventing, new ghosts.”95 A haunted house, an evil ghost, or a cannibalistic banquet can

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93 The Northern Expedition (*beifa* 北伐), also known as the Great Revolution (*da geming* 大革命), is a military campaign led by the KMT from 1926 to 1928. Its main objective was to unify China under the KMT banner by ending the rule of local warlords. It led to the demise of the Beiyang government and the Chinese reunification of 1928. The KMT and the CCP formed an alliance at the beginning of the expedition, yet Chiang Kai-shek decided to purge all Communists from the KMT in 1927. In the Shanghai massacre on April 12, 1927, thousands of Communists were executed or went missing, while others were arrested and imprisoned. The purge caused the confrontation between the KMT and the CCP, as well as a split between the KMT’s left and right wings.

94 According to the flashback by the protagonist—“it was ten years ago”—the setting of the story in *Ghost Love* starts approximately in 1927.

be used as icons to symbolize the oppressive society, the cannibalistic traditional culture, even the damnable national character in the May Fourth period. Hu Shi’s condemnation of the “five ghosts” in the 1930s—poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption, and chaos—can be viewed as one of the most representative discourses about ghost at that time.  

Similarly, in Bai Wei’s *Fight out of the Ghost Tower*, a drama with references to both the Chinese legend about the White Snake imprisoned by the Leifeng Pagoda 雷峰塔 and to Ibsenian ghosts, the traditional patriarchy is compared to a ghost tower that suppresses the whole family and finally breaks down at the expense of the life of the heroic daughter. The drama develops its plots around how the female protagonist fights against, and finally fights her way out of the “ghost tower” when she kills her “father.”

By contrast, in *Ghost Love*, the aforementioned binary discourse (of the evil ghost and the good man) is completely reversed. The female protagonist was a revolutionary assassin before she meets the male protagonist; she did secret revolutionary work and killed several people with her dagger in the name of the revolution. Yet when she returned from exile abroad one day, she first found her lover executed, and then most of her revolutionary companions betrayed. She gradually felt disillusioned with her love, her work, her belief, and indeed with the entire human world. Thus, the novella tells us a

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97 An interesting combination of both themes in *Ghost Love* and *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* is Wumingshi’s *The Woman in the Tower* (Ta li de nü ren 塔里的女人; 1944), in which a woman willingly
story of how a human being is turned into a ghost, and willingly buries herself in a “deserted tomb.” And the ghost in this story is not the symbol of evil as in the play *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* and most works of the Republican period.

However, as in the letter I quoted at the beginning of this section, we can find an interesting similarity between Bai Wei’s early thought and *Ghost Love*. Bai Wei confessed that she often asked herself, “Am I a ghost or a human?” and sometimes felt that she had a certain Buddhahood (foxing 佛性), a term also used by the female protagonist in *Ghost Love*, gained through her harsh life and meditation in prison. But the difference lies in the fact that Bai Wei’s self-portrait as a ghost is more self-pitying; she still has a faint hope to return to the normal human world from her “deserted tomb” with the help of her “angel-like” lover. This kind of “neurotic and melancholy temperament,” as a Nationalist critic Hong Ruizhao 洪瑞釗 commented in 1928, easily makes women “tend to fail to recognize the nature of lovers” and easily “throw themselves in the arms of their beloved.” Obviously, Bai Wei is one of these women, and the female protagonist in *Ghost Love* is not. Her dwelling in the “deserted tomb” is her choice, because she already feels disillusioned with everything in the human world. Even though the male protagonist swears that he loves her and she finally admits that she secludes herself from her former lover and society as well. At the end of the story, the narrator argues that: “Women are always in the tower, which was probably built by others, or by herself, or by some unknown power!”

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99 Hong Ruizhao 洪瑞釗, *Geming yu Lian’ai* 革命與戀愛 [Revolution plus love] (Shanghai: Minzhi shuju, 1928), 84.
also loves him, she still refuses to return to the human world. In her eyes, the human world is already full of *guiguai liqi* 鬼怪離奇 (apparitions), alluding to the saying “in times of peace, men and ghosts are kept apart; in a (chaotic) world like ours, men and ghosts mingle freely.”  

And the human world is as dizzying as the ghost world: the ghost can easily be lost due to *rendaqiang* 人打牆 (man building the wall), an ironic parody of the term *guidaqiang* 鬼打牆 (ghost building the wall). The ghost world is at least as good if not better than the human world. Sometimes, the former is even easier to understand.

This difference between the woman in *Ghost Love* and Bai Wei further leads to their different attitudes toward the disillusionment. If we compare the former’s claim in the story with the latter’s claim in her later autobiographical fiction *My Tragic Life* (Beiju shengya 悲劇生涯)—which was a response to her lover’s betrayal and desertion after their “honeymoon” period—we find that while these texts again share dramatically similar expression of disillusionment at the beginning, they contrast sharply in their endings (the italicized part):

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But since then, we failed time after time. Some of them betrayed, some of them informed, some of them worked as government officials, whereas others were
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101 Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 5-6. *Guidaqiang* 鬼打牆 (ghost building the wall) is an idiom in Chinese folk culture. It is said that people easily get lost in suburban or deserted area at night. No matter how far they walked, they finally find that they still stay in the same place. The explanation for this phenomenon is *guidaqiang*: ghost(s) build an invisible wall to enclose human(s), so humans circle around at the same site.
arrested or executed, and I am the only one left in my company! I thoroughly experienced this world, absolutely exhausted my life, and totally recognized the human heart. *I want to be a ghost, a ghost... Yet I don’t want to die—death will make me lose everything, but I want to dispassionately witness the change of this human world. So I live in the guise of a ghost here.*  
—Xu Xu, *Ghost Love*  

Humanity loses its heart, and the universe is in chaos. I can no longer stand the blows of a stormy life. I am going crazy... I feel suffocated, I weep, I jump, I want to die. *Death, no! I want to declare war against all the evils in the world. I want revolution, I want revolution, and I swear that I will dedicate my life to revolution!*  
—Bai Wei, *My Tragic Life*  

Both of them declare that they will not die. But the female protagonist in *Ghost Love* rejects death only because it will make her lose the chance to witness the vicissitudes of society. It easily reminds us of the story of Wu Zixu 伍子胥, a loyal minister who was framed and sentenced to death. Before the execution, Wu swore that he would witness the collapse of the state of Wu through his eyes hung on the city wall. Yet in the logic of the female protagonist, death can only produce a corpse, not a ghost—again, this is an idea different from the traditional narrative. Therefore, when she feels disillusioned not only with love, but also with revolution, life as a ghost is the best remedy for her past spiritual scars. Yet for Bai Wei, who only feels disillusioned with love at that moment, revolution remains effective as a good remedy and becomes an alternative expression for her wild passion. She does not want to die, because she wants to fight against all the evils...

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102 Xu Xu, *Gui lian*, 33. The italicization is added by me.  
103 Bai Wei, *Beiju Shengya* 悲劇生涯 [My tragic life] (Shanghai: Shenghuo shudian, 1936), 217. The italicization is added by me.  
104 See the biography of Wu Zixu (722 BC-481 BC) in Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145 or 135 BC-86 BC), *Shiji* 史記 [The Grand Scribe’s records].
in the world. Her life trajectory again supports Hong’s presentation for depressed youth at that time: “for those who do not wish to be trapped by lack of sexual fulfillment, they had better heighten their desire to a love for truth, goodness, and beauty, to a love for family, society, and nation, so that they will contribute to academic construction and Nationalist Revolution.”

Ironically, when the female protagonist in *Ghost Love* declares that she wants to live as a ghost, she actually cannot stand the absolute seclusion from the human world: she wanders in the city at night, meets and makes friends with the male protagonist, and later she even walks out during daytime as a Buddhist nun—though it too is a traditional calling for a secluded life, we have to admit that the contrast between secular life and monastic life is not as sharp as that between the human world and the ghost world. In other words, she fails to be a ghost who only dispassionately witnesses the change of this human world. The 1995 film adaptation of *Ghost Love* explains her wandering in the guise of a ghost or a nun as a strategy to find the murderer who killed her lover, which actually weakens the tension of her mental struggle between the secular human world and the secluded ghost world.

On the other hand, when Bai Wei zealously declares in her autobiographic fiction that she will completely devote herself to the revolution, she actually harbors certain suspicions about the revolution. In her drama *Fight out of the Ghost Tower*, Bai Wei expresses a similar disillusionment as the female protagonist feels in *Ghost Love*, through

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105 Hong, *Geming yu lian’ai*, 51.
the accusation from a protagonist, the revolutionary Ling Xia 凌侠, who has been set up by the evil figure Hu Rongsheng 胡榮生 and betrayed by his revolutionary companions:

Previously, I could not stand the darkness and oppression in society. I fought back and ran away, ran into the group of rebels, jumped into the revolution. Now I cannot stand the darkness, oppression and filth in the revolution. I fight back and I want to escape and jump again. But the whole human world is totally dark and filthy, where can I escape to? 

The victory at the end of *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* is an illusionary one because the death of Hu Rongsheng does not mean the end of darkness in society, while the seclusion of the female protagonist in *Ghost Love* is nothing but a kind of escapism, a fake seclusion. The “illusionary victory” reminds us of the year 1927—not only the year when Bai Wei’s *Fight out of the Ghost Tower* was created as well as the temporal setting for Bai’s play and Xu Xu’s *Ghost Love;* but also the year of the KMT coup against the Communist in the Northern Expedition/Great Revolution. And the “fake seclusion” reminds us of the year 1937—not only the year when Xu Xu’s *Ghost Love* was created and the horror film *Song at Midnight* was released, but a year of peculiar significance in modern Chinese history, when the war began and Shanghai started its “Solitary Island” period (1937-1941), a safe yet “fake seclusion” from the war. As such, literary and filmic texts are inevitably interwoven with history, violence, monstrosity, and traumas. As David Wang argues, “fiction may be able to speak where history has fallen silent.”

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106 Bai Wei, *Dachu youling ta* 打出幽靈塔 [Fight out of the ghost tower] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1985), 303.

First, let’s look at the historical background of 1927, which may be viewed as a hidden political connotation for the setting of both Bai Wei’s play and Xu Xu’s novella. What I want to point out is, although Xu did not explicitly write about his disillusionment with the KMT government, he was “just as disillusioned with the proto-fascism of Chiang Kai-shek’s government as he was with communism.”

A pivotal clue for Xu’s disillusionment is the repetition of the setting of Longhua in *Ghost Love*, as a site (in addition to Xietu Road) where the ghost lives, an important landmark for the ghost world. On the one hand, Longhua had been famous for the Longhua Temple and related legends of spirits since the Ming dynasty, thus making it a natural setting for a supernatural fantasy. On the other hand, Longhua had been occupied by warlords since the Xinhai Revolution in 1911 and taken over by the KMT government in 1927, becoming the site for the Shanghai Garrison Command (Shanghai jingbei silingbu 上海警備司令部) and an execution ground to kill leftists. On the night of February 7th or the morning of February 8th, 1931, twenty-four leftist writers (Roushi 柔石, Hu Yepin 胡也頻, Yinfu 殷夫, Li Weisen 李偉森, Feng Keng 馮鐿, etc) who had been arrested by the KMT government in January, were secretly executed in Longhua. In a mourning essay for those martyrs “In Memory of the Forgotten” (Weile wangque de

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109 See Chen Boxi 陳伯熙, “Longhua zhi shenhua” 龍華之神話 [The legend of Longhua], “Longhua si ta zhiyi” 龍華寺塔志異 [Records of the bizarre in Longhua Temple and Longhua Pagoda], *Shanghai yishi daguan* 上海軼事大觀 [The grandview of anecdotes in Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1999), 369. The original edition was published by Taidong shuju in 1924.

110 Chen Boxi, “Longhua cangsang tan” 龍華滄桑談 [On vicissitudes of Longhua], “Longhua dao shang zhi jinxi” 龍華道上之今昔 [The past and present Longhua], Ibid., 128-129.
Lu Xun expressed his sorrow and frustration by saying “during the past thirty years, I have witnessed the blood of many youths, silted layer by layer, burying me and making me unable to breathe. I have to use such kind of pen and ink, write some articles, like digging a hole from the earth, barely breathing.”\(^{111}\) For Lu Xun, Longhua was a place where he lost his friends, a place full of sorrowful memories, an icon of the dark world and the long night, thus he would not go to there, though he liked peach flowers, for which Longhua was famous.\(^{112}\) Undoubtedly, it is arbitrary to say that Xu Xu had exactly the same feeling as Lu Xun, and expressed the same indignation when he mentions Longhua in his writing. But we need to take into the consideration the remarkable year 1927 (the setting of the story) and plot elements in *Ghost Love* like the revolutionary past of the female protagonist; her lover, also a revolutionary, was executed by the government; and she then found that most of her revolutionary companions had betrayed; it is reasonable to conclude that the setting of Longhua has decided political connotations in the story. This execution ground is not only the perfect setting for ghosts and haunting like the site of the massacre in the *Liaozhai* tale “Gongsun jiuniang,” but also a memorial place for those spirits who died for their ideals, though Xu Xu only generally and vaguely call them “revolutionaries.” Is it possible that the female protagonist wanders in this deserted and macabre place because her beloved had been

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\(^{111}\) Lu Xun, “*Weile wangque de jinian*” 為了忘卻的紀念 [In memory of the forgotten], *Lu Xun quanji* [The complete works of Lu Xun], 20 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), 5:72-85. It was originally published in *Xiandai* 現代 (Les Contemporains) 2.6 (1933).

\(^{112}\) Lu Xun, “*Zhi Yan Limin*” 致顏黎民 [A letter to Yan Limin], *Lu Xun shuxin ji* [The collected correspondence of Lu Xun], 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976), 2: 982-983.
executed here? Does she believe that she can meet his spirit some day? Or does she hope to become one of those real ghosts, secluded from this ugly human world?

Now, let’s turn our attention from 1927 to 1937. On July 7, 1937, Japan launched its all-out war against China. In November 1937, half the territory of Shanghai was occupied by Japanese troops, while the other half enjoyed a certain safe “seclusion” under the auspices of the International Settlement and the French Concession, yet it was only a fake seclusion. In December 1941, Japanese troops stormed in immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, which spelled the end of the so-called Solitary Island period in Shanghai.\footnote{More information about the Solitary Island period will be offered in Chapter 2.}

Yet at the beginning of 1937, before the outbreak of the war, people in Shanghai still enjoyed a relatively leisurely urban life style. In January and February, Xu’s Ghost Love was serialized and quickly became a best-seller; at the same time, on February 20\textsuperscript{th}, the Chinese film world saw its first horror film—Song at Midnight (Yeban gesheng 夜半歌聲) was released and would become the most profitable film of the year. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the similarity between the novella and the film, despite their shared fascination with the macabre and the ghostly: how the dark society distorts human nature and makes a woman/man a living “haunting ghost,” a trope that was later picked up by the CCP in the play White-haired Girl (Baimao nü 白毛女; 1945)—“The old society turned human beings into ghosts, the new society turns ghosts
into human beings.” 114 I do not give a comprehensive comparative study here, since abundant attention has been paid to Song at Midnight. 115 Rather, I focus on the semiotics of the culture both the novella and the film reflected in 1937.

In the 1930s, there were two prominent trends in the literary field—indeed, they pervaded the entire cultural atmosphere. On the one hand, the romanticism that flourished in the May Fourth period had ebbed since the later 1920s. Realistic “revolutionary literature” and leftist thought began to occupy both literary and film circles. Remarkable events such as the “Left Turn” of the Creationists, the formation of Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng 左翼作家聯盟 (League of Left-wing Writers, 1930-36) as well as the famous polemic between ruanpian 軟片 (soft films) and yingpian 硬片 (hard film) and the intensive attack on the films Humanity (Rendao 人道; 1933) and The Pink Dream (Fenhongse de meng 粉紅色的夢; 1933) by leftist film critics, all indicated the great influence of leftism and realism at that time. 116 On the other hand, the nostalgia and imagination of revolution...

114 It is a statement first made by He Jingzhi 賀敬之, one of the co-writers of the Yan’an version of Baimao nü 白毛女. See Meng Yue 孟悅 “Baimao nü yanbian de qishi: jianlun Yan’an wenyi de lishi duozhixing” 《白毛女》演變的啟示——兼論延安文藝的歷史多質性 [The transformation of White-haired Girl and its significance: on the polyphony of history in Yan’an literature], in Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵 ed., Zai jiedu: dazhong wenyi yu yishi xingtai 再解讀: 大眾文藝與意識形態 [Rereading: mass literature and ideology] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68-69.


116 For more information about the “League of Left-wing Writers,” see Wang-chi Wong, Politics and Literature in Shanghai: the Chinese League of Left-wing Writers, 1930-1936 (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991). For the polemic between “hard films” and “soft films,” see Meng Jun 孟君, “Huayu quan, dianying benti, guanyu piping de piping: ‘yingxing dianying’ yu ‘ruanxing dianying’ lunzheng de qishi” 話語權·電影本體：關於批評的批評——“硬性電影”與“軟性電影”論爭的啟示 [The right to discourse, the essence of film: a criticism on criticism—the apocalypse of the controversy...
after the failure of the Great Revolution in 1927 led to the flourishing of the “revolution-plus-love” (geming jia lian’ai, 革命加戀愛) formula from the later 1920s to the 1930s. As Liu Jianmei argues, “love contains irreducible components of the individual’s sexual identity and bodily experience, relationship between man and woman, and a sense of self-fulfillment; revolution is related to the trajectory of progress, freedom, equality, and emancipation. These two categories constitute, clash with, or otherwise influence each other in the mainstream narrative of modern Chinese literature.”\(^\text{117}\) This “revolution-plus-love” formula not only offers a chance for writers and readers to both reminisce about the past and look forward to the future,\(^\text{118}\) but also links gender identification to class identification, “the subordinate position of women in the binary sex/gender system is reconsolidated through a preestablished position or a uniform entity on the political landscape.”\(^\text{119}\)

Obviously, *Song at Midnight* does not depart from the “revolution-plus-love” formula. Song Danping’s 宋丹萍 love for his beloved Li Xiaoxia 李曉霞 is as strong as his hatred for Tang Jun 湯俊, a symbol of the evil power in society. The scar on Song’s

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\(^{118}\) For more information, see Xiong Quan 熊權, “Lun Dageming yu zaoqi zuoyi wenxue de xingqi: yi dui ‘geming jia lian’ai’ chuangzuo fasheng de kaocha weili” 論大革命與早期左翼文學的興起——以對“革命加戀愛”創作發生的考察為例 [The Great Revolution and the rising of the early leftist literature: taking the example of the writing of “revolution plus love”], *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 中國文學研究 [Research of Chinese literature] 1 (2007): 97-101.

\(^{119}\) Liu, *Revolution plus Love*, 104.
face is both evidence of his sacrifice for love, and an icon of revolutionary virtue, marking his struggle against the feudal forces. Although he claims that “I am a demon, I am a beast, I can no longer stay together with you!”—just as the female protagonist in Ghost Love insists that the barrier between her and the male protagonist is the difference between ghost and human being—he does not thoroughly seclude himself from the outside world, since he always sings at midnight, causing Sun Xiao’ou’s investigation of the phantom in the theater. The process of unmasking his identity is both a process of expressing his love for his beloved through Sun Xiao’ou and communicating the revolutionary message and his ideological authority to the younger generation. At the end of the film, he perishes together with the villain in the raging flames, recapitulating the last scene of Fight out of the Ghost Tower, in which the good daughter and the evil father die together. Sun Xiao’ou’s explicit declaration can be viewed as the elevation of the theme of the whole film: “We must strive harder to struggle against these dark forces, smash them, and fight for the freedom of the masses.” As such, this horror film won appreciation both in terms of ideology as well as box-office success.

Ghost Love presents a different take on the “revolution-plus-love” formula. Xu subverts the motif by plotting the story in an “anti-revolutionary plus anti-love” mode. The story reveals not only the disillusionment of the male protagonist from love, but also the disillusionment of female protagonist from revolution. When Song Danping secludes himself in the theater’s attic because of his facial deformity, the female “ghost” in Ghost Love, who is as beautiful as a deity, also willingly secludes herself from the outside world.

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120 For more analysis about the film in terms of ideology, see Braester, “Revolution and Revulsion.”
Again, compared with Song Danping, she not only loses hope for love, but also for the revolution. The ending of the story leaves much space for readers to freely imagine whether she will come back one day or whether she will rekindle her hope for love and revolution. Readers are left as empty and lost as the male protagonist in the story.

This anti-revolutionary tendency, which first appeared in *Ghost Love* and flourished in Xu’s later writing, clearly does not match the standard of “revolutionary literature” at that time; and the escapism lurking under various romantic encounters with the cosmopolitan also aroused the caution of leftist critics. This can be exemplified by Shi Huaichi’s criticism of *Ghost Love*:

> It will invariably cause you to forget the cruel reality of the world, cause you to ignore the hideous scars our nation is inflicted with, and cause you to distance yourself from that cruel struggle between old and new that is currently being carried out all around us…Instead, it will invite you to enter a world of illusion.¹²¹

The term “world of illusion” here is quite intriguing. It is a characteristic of most of Xu’s fiction, which resuscitated Romanticism and has been defined by later critics as “neo-Romanticism” along with Wumingshi’s fiction of the 1940s. But different from his earlier Chinese Romantic predecessors, Xu’s fiction does not only emphasize individualism, but also tries, as Novalis put it in a very different context, to “give a lofty meaning to the vulgar, a mystical countenance to the events of the everyday, the dignity

¹²¹ Shi Huaichi 石懷池, “Bangxian de mengyi Gui Lian: Xu Xu de shu zhi yi” 幫閒的夢囈《鬼戀》——徐訏的書之一 [The trashy rigmarole in *Ghost Love*: one of Xu Xu’s books], in *Shi Huaichi wenxue lunwenji* 石懷池文學論文集 [Shi Huaichi’s anthology on literature] (Shanghai: Gengyun chubanshe, 1945), 152.
of the unknown to the known.” In other words, he romanticizes the quotidian life and builds a “world of illusion” for the reader. What is more, since most of his stories are narrated by the first-person narrator “Xu,” it is easy to read the narrator as the author himself. Shao Xiaohong, daughter of Shao Xunmei, a famous decadent writer and editor in Shanghai at that time, recollects: “Almost all his fiction is popular. The plots are extraordinary and gripping, and the love between the protagonists is entangled and amorous. Ignorant girls, including my classmates, all mistook the author Xu Xu for the male protagonists in his books, a young and handsome Prince Charming.” In this sense, Xu not only romanticizes the object he wants to depict, but also romanticizes himself—the subject in his writing. The “world of illusion” is not only a world for readers, but also a refuge for himself from the real world, where he had an ordinary appearance, an unfortunate marriage with a disloyal wife, and had been rejected by his dream girls; where he felt both disillusioned with Communism as well as the proto-fascism of Chiang Kai-shek’s government at that time; where he also felt disillusioned with the mainstream enlightenment and utilitarian role for literature.


123 Shao Xiaohong, Wode baba Shao Xunmei 我的爸爸邵洵美 [My father Sinmay Zao] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2005), 243-244.

124 Unlike those male protagonists who have the same surname of him in his fiction, Xu Xu is not a charming prince in his real life. Xu once had an unabiding romance in France with Asabuki Tomiko, a Japanese girl. In the fall of 1937, Xu proposed to her, but she declined and reminded him of the fact that their countries were at war, and he was going to return China to join the war of resistance against Japan. Xu divorced his wife in 1941 when he found her having an affair with Su Qing’s husband when they were neighbors. He remained single before he met Shao Xiaohong, the daughter of his friend Shao Xunmei. He tried to chase her, who was 24-year younger than him, yet was rejected by her and severely blamed by Shao Xumei when he got to know it.
In Xu’s view, history is made by powers other than literature, and literature is only something swept forward by history. Xu believes that it is an illusion to think that literature can change the era.\textsuperscript{125} Therefore, the only function remaining for literature is “entertainment.” “No kids would like candy if it were not sweet,” by the same token, no reader would enjoy a literary work if it could not entertain him/her.\textsuperscript{126} Works like \textit{Ghost Love} are incarnations of this literary view, in which he helps readers to escape daily life at that time and temporarily enter into a world of illusion. In other words, literature plays a similar role as film, which Jackie Stacy describes as: “The physical space of the cinema provided a transitional space between everyday life outside the cinema and the fantasy world of the Hollywood film about to be shown.”\textsuperscript{127}

In \textit{Unwelcome Muse}, Edward Gunn labels writers such as Eileen Chang, Yang Jiang 楊絳 (1911- ) and Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (1910-1998) “anti-Romantic” writers, because “no idealized conceptions appear in their works, not of heroic characters, revolution, or love. Instead there are disillusionment, the exposure of fraud, and compromise with reality. The climactic gives way to the anticlimactic. Emotionalism gives way to restraint, irony, skepticism. Slogans are replaced with wit. Unlike other writers before them who stayed well outside the bounds of romanticism, they propounded no social goals or panaceas.”\textsuperscript{128} This argument offers another avenue to understand Xu’s

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{125}] Zhong Ling, “San duo hua song Xu Xu,” Chen Naixin ed., \textit{Xu Xu ersan shi}, 175.
\item[\textsuperscript{126}] Xu Xu, “Tan yishu yu yule” 談藝術與娛樂 [On arts and entertainment], \textit{Xu Xu Gui lian}, 250.
\item[\textsuperscript{128}] Gunn, \textit{Unwelcome Muse}, 198.
\end{itemize}
"Ghost Love," which expresses a similar sense of disillusionment with heroism, revolution, and love. In this sense, Xu’s writing is closer to “anti-Romanticism” than “neo-Romanticism,” a tag usually given him. To label Xu an “anti-romantic” writer, however, also oversimplifies the situation, because Xu prefers romanticizing the quotidian life to “exposing the fraud”; and the woman in his novella prefers living a reclusive life to “compromising with reality.” In other words, Xu might have the same disillusionment felt by those “anti-Romantic” writers, but his solution was to build a world of illusion (presented by romantic encounters) to comfort the common people struggling with a reality interwoven with war, violence, death, and fear. In this sense, it shares the function of earlier Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly fiction, which, as Perry Link argues, offered a form of comfort to the overwhelmed modern subject.129

From another perspective, since “illusions and reality are very difficult to tell apart, for reality may consist of the common illusions of the majority, while an illusion can be one person’s reality,” who can declare that the “world of illusion” in Xu’s fiction is not the embodiment of the real world, or one person’s reality? Who can deny that there are also some serious concerns in the guise of entertainment, in the name of ghost and fantasy? As Xu Xu argues at the end of his 1938 poem “Confession,” “now I become a madman/ because I suddenly realize that/ all the colorful dreams are lives/ and all the bizarre stories are aural and visual histories.”130 Xu’s novella Ghost Love is the product


of his unique view of the “ghost” and his philosophical questioning of the strict division between illusion and reality.

Conclusion

The “ghost-cum-love” story presented in *Ghost Love* is a stereotype in traditional *zhiguai* fiction. The correspondence between the embedded ghost story and the frame story indicates that Xu not only borrows the stereotyped model of “a man encountering a female ghost” from traditional *zhiguai* narratives, but also consciously alludes to and appropriates some typical scenarios from those narratives. However, there are also many salient differences between *Ghost Love* and *zhiguai* fiction—not only because of Xu’s adaptation of Western Gothic elements, but also his special understanding of the ghost/illusion influenced by Bergsonism, as well as his efforts to intertwine some social/historical issues into a romantic love story.

On the one hand, Bergson’s concepts of “real time” and “memory” help Xu build a fictional world in which fantasy and reality are interwoven—this characteristic is more typical in his *Inside the Garden*, a novella that echoes and rewrites *Ghost Love*. The designation of the male protagonist in *Ghost Love*, an intuitionist, also explicitly reveals the impact of Bergson’s intuitionism in Xu’s writing.

On the other hand, in my discussion of *Ghost Love*, I also highlight its connecting to the history and culture of the decade 1927 to 1937. 1937 is the year when this novella
was created and serialized, whereas 1927 is the temporal setting of the story. Meanwhile, 1927 is also the year when the “Great Revolution” becomes a historical trauma for many intellectuals, while 1937 is the year of the eruption of full-scale war with Japan, a war that brought inestimable loss to China and a turning point that greatly changed the fate of China in the twentieth century. Through an intertextual analysis of *Ghost Love*, *Fight out of the Tower*, and *Song at Midnight*, we can find many intriguing aspects: (1) the trope of the ghost/human is not consistent during the Republican period, since the binary of the evil ghost and good man sometimes is reversed, even by the same writer, such as Bai Wei; (2) although Xu’s novella expresses a certain disillusionment with love and revolution, it actually still can be categorized into the “revolution-plus-love” formula, since revolution and love are still keywords to organize the plot and express Xu’s philosophy; (3) through analysis to his allusion to Longhua, we can find that Xu’s writing is not apolitical as some critics criticized; (4) There is a certain correspondence between roles in *Ghost Love* and Xu Xu himself. While the male protagonist experiences illusion and disillusionment in this sad love story, Xu experiences a move from belief to disillusionment (e.g. his belief in Communism, the function of literature, etc.). However, although he might have experienced the same disillusionment as Gunn’s “anti-Romantic”

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131 Because this novella was serialized on January and February of 1937, Xu might have finished the first installment at the end of 1936 and the second one in January 1937. There are also some scholars assume that Xu already created the whole story at the end of 1936.

132 Before 1937, CCP could not be compared with the KMT both in the political impact and military power, and had to launch the “Long March” to avoid extinction under KMT’s military assault. After the second Sino-Japanese War, however, CCP successfully built its great reputation in the society and strengthened military power that make it qualified to negotiate with KMT in 1946 and began to compete with the KMT for control of the nation.
writers, he selected a different way to face his disillusionment. He expresses a certain metaphysical philosophy and social concerns through a popular romantic story, on the one hand; and use this romantic illusionary world to comfort/entertain those suffering in reality, on the other hand. In other words, ya 雅 (elegance) and su 俗 (vulgarness) are fluidly combined in his writing. Therefore, it is arbitrary to simply label Xu a “neo-Romantic” or “anti-Romantic” writer, because there is a complex ambiguity in Xu’s writing, as well as in his political standpoint.
Chapter 2: A National Allegory behind A Ghost Story: The 1941 Adaptation *Ghost Love* and the Shanghai’s Solitary Island Period

Introduction

In his book *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*, Chang-Tai Hung addresses an important but often ignored issue—“the rise and spread of urban popular culture during the War of Resistance, particularly how this culture was politicized and popularized by Chinese resisters to wage a concerted battle against the invading Japanese.”\(^{133}\) He further discusses how resisters made use of popular culture—highly politicized spoken dramas, patriotic cartoon images, and combative newspaper language—to convey and propagandize resistance in the second Sino-Japanese War. But there is a cultural form, also a wartime popular culture that Hung does not mention—wartime cinema, especially films made in occupied Shanghai.

On August 13, 1937, Japanese troops attacked Shanghai. After three months of strenuous resistance, the Chinese army withdrew from Shanghai on November 12. Except for the International Settlement and the French Concession, which remained neutral, Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese.\(^{134}\) This is the beginning of the so-called

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\(^{134}\) In 1854, a united Municipal Council was created to serve the British, French and American foreign concessions in Shanghai. In 1862, the French concession dropped out of the arrangement, and the following year the British and American concessions formally united to become the Shanghai International Settlement. In 1940 the French Concession accepted allegiance to Vichy France—the puppet government under the occupation of Germany, thereby retaining a semblance of autonomy from the Japanese by
“Solitary Island” period: from then on semi-colonial Shanghai became a semi-occupied city.

In the opening years of the war, the Japanese spent a lot of time and effort to find or induce literary celebrities to write propaganda works for the Japanese imperial cause. Yet their efforts were largely unsuccessful. Many famous writers, poets, and dramatists left Shanghai for Hong Kong, others went to interior cities such as Guangzhou, Guilin, Hankou, Chongqing, and Yan’an.\(^{135}\) Most of the writers who stayed in Shanghai, continued writing resistance literature, in journals and newspapers, from the relative safety of the International Settlement. Xu Xu was one of these writers. He joined in the anti-Japanese *Wenyi jie tongyi zhanxian* 文藝界統一戰線 (united front in the circle of literature and art) and engaged in literary debate in 1939 with Wang Renshu 王任叔 (Ba Ren 巴人), an editor of the journal *Lu Xun Feng* 魯迅風, *Lu Xun Current* on the criteria for “resistance literature.”\(^{136}\)

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\(^{135}\) The only success for the Japanese’s instigation might be the foundation of the propaganda machine for the Wang Jingwei (Wang Ching-wei) peace movement in Hong Kong in late 1939 and early 1940. Some editors of newspapers (such as *Wenhui bao* and *Zhonghua ribao*) under Wang’s collaborationist regime came from the old Creation Society and from the more recent modernist group *Xin ganjue pai* 新感覺派 (New-Perceptionists) that centered around the magazine *Les Contemporains*. Liu Na’ou and Mu Shiying, two New-Perceptionists were assassinated as collaborators by secret agents of the KMT in 1939 and 1940, respectively. See Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 4; also see Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 191-192.

\(^{136}\) Xu objected to the factionalism (represented by *Lu Xun Feng*) in resistance literature. Ba Ren attacked Xu on his individualism and nihilism. To avoid further hostility, Xu and five other writers signed “*Dui xin jieduan wenyi jie tongyi zhanxian de yijian*” 對新階段文藝界統一戰線的意見 in the second issue of *Dongnan Feng* 東南風, *Southeast Wind*. For more information about this debate, see Wang Yixin 王一
After years of occupation, overt resistance faded and Shanghai citizens became accustomed to the Japanese presence. Mixed feels of hatred for the Japanese, despair about the future, cynicism and escapism interwove and shaped the special character of literature and art in Shanghai during this period. As Edward Gunn points out, “by 1941, the population too was wearying of patriotic war stories. The literature of disengagement—escapist works and themes unrelated to fighting the Japanese—were common not only to Shanghai and Peking, but to the interior as well.”¹³⁷ Perhaps this can help us to understand why Xu’s novellas that followed Ghost Love and are characterized by a cosmopolitan atmosphere, exoticism, and recounting fantastic encounters, were so popular in semi-occupied Shanghai.

War in 1937 almost totally destroyed the film industry in Shanghai. The Mingxing 明星 and Lianhua 聯華 studios were shut down, and Tianyi 天一 transferred its capital and equipment to Hong Kong.¹³⁸ Some famous filmmakers (such as Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, Situ Huimin 司徒慧敏 and Tan Youliu 譚友六) went to Hong Kong, and cooperated with the local film community to make resistance-related films. During the first half of 1938, only Xinhua 新華 led by Zhang Shankun 張善琨 (S.K. Chang)

¹³⁷ Gunn, Unwelcome Muse, 5-6.
¹³⁸ Mingxing, Lianhua and Tianyi were the three biggest film studios before 1937, during which time they competed with each other for control of the industry.
resumed making films. Also, in August 1938, the Liu brothers (Liu Zhonghao 柳中浩 and Liu Zhongliang 柳中亮) founded Guohua yingye gongsi 國華影業公司 (Guohua Film Company) and hired many filmmakers and stars from the old Mingxing company. In June, 1939, Zhonghua dianying gufen youxian gongsi 中華電影股份有限公司 (abbr. Zhongying 中影) was established under the control of the Japanese. Despite the political pressure and economical turmoil of the war years, the film industry actually had “a monstrous blossom” during the period between 1939 and 1941, with an average of sixty films produced per year. The success of Sable Cicada (Diaochan 貂蟬; 1938) and Mulan Joins the Army (Mulan congjun 木蘭從軍; 1939) initiated a guzhuang pian re 古裝片熱 (fever for historical film) from early


140 Yihua was a film company established by Yan Chunhua 嚴春華 in October 1932. It was shut up in December 1941 after the Pacific War broke out.

141 For example, Zhang Shichuan 張石川, Zheng Xiaojiu 鄭小秋 (son of Zheng Zhengqiu 鄭正秋), Shu Shi 舒適, Yan Jun 嚴俊, Lü Yukun 呂玉堃, Gong Jianong 龔稼農, Zhou Xuan 周璇 and Zhou Manhua 周曼華. See Li, Zhongguo dianying shi (1937-1945), 37.


143 Li, Zhongguo dianying shi (1937-1945), 159.
1939 to 1940. This fever ebbed by the end of 1940, and *shizhuang pian re* 時裝片熱 (fever for contemporary costume film) swept the cinema in 1941.¹⁴⁴

The first film adaptation of *Ghost Love*, also the first and only adaptation of Xu’s works in the 1940s, was made by Guohua in 1941. The film, also called *A Woman in Black* (*Heiyi nü lang* 黑衣女郎), starring Zhou Manhua (Chow Man Wah 周曼華, 1922-) and Lü Yukun 呂玉堃 (1921-2004), was adapted by Cheng Xiaoqing 程小青 (1893-1976) and directed by He Zhaozhang 何兆璋 (1915-).¹⁴⁵ It is said that Xu Xu was satisfied with this film when he previewed it.¹⁴⁶

The only extant copy of this film is housed in the China Film Archive in Beijing. The film originally had a length of 9 *ben* 本, 9 minutes each; yet the current copy (edited by Liaoning Film Studio in 1981) is about 56 minutes long. Because my analysis of this adaptation depends only on the incomplete copy and reviews at that time, it is inevitably deficient and tentative.

**From Dark to Dawn: An Allegory Not Only About the Ghost**

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¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 34, 159-160, 177.


¹⁴⁶ Zhao Shihui 趙士薈, “He Zhaozhang tan gui lian” 何兆璋談《鬼戀》 [He Zhaozhang’s talk on *Ghost Love*], *Yingtan gouchen* 影壇鉤沉 [The forgotten history of film circles] (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 1998), 290.
During the Solitary Island period, Kawakita Nagamasa 川喜多長政, the vice president of Zhongying Studio, oversaw filmmaking in Shanghai.\footnote{The nominal president of Zhongying Studio was Chu Minyi 褚民誼, the minister of Foreign Affairs in the puppet regime. See Tsuji, Chūka den’ei shiwa: ichi heisotsu no Nitchū eiga kaisōki, 1939-1945, 19.} According to Satō Tadao 佐藤忠男, Kawakita Nagamasa was generally quite tolerant of Chinese films, except those with obvious resistance messages. And he did not compel members of the Chinese film community to make propaganda films for Japan.\footnote{Satō Tadao 佐藤忠男 (1930- ), Zhongguo dianying bainian 中國電影百年 [A hundred years of Chinese film] trans. Qian Hang 錢杭 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2005), 47.} Meanwhile, the administrations in the International Settlement and French Concession maintained a cautious and ambivalent relationship with the Japanese occupiers; their film censors sometimes cut plots or directly banned films with strong and obvious resistance themes. Therefore, given these conditions, it is utterly unrealistic to expect Chinese filmmakers to openly challenge the Japanese in their films. But as Poshek Fu points out, films produced at that time, including popular commercial entertainment films, reflected the tactic of “involving calculated risks, enormous resourcefulness, and political ingenuity,” and “apolitical entertainment that was deliberately depoliticized became significantly political.”\footnote{Poshek Fu, Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 131.}

Since the 1990s, critics have begun to pay attention to these popular films, as well as to historical films such as Mulan Joins the Army and Ge Nenniang (葛嫩娘; 1939), which are usually seen as good examples of “using the ancient to allegorize the present” (jieguuyujin 借古喻今). For example, Ma-Xu Weibang’s films, such as The Lonely Soul
(Lengyue shihun 冷月詩魂; 1938), Song at Midnight II (Yeban gesheng xuji 夜半歌聲續集; 1941), Night Rain on a Cold Mountain (Hanshan yeyu 寒山夜雨; 1942), and Begonia (Qiuhaitang 秋海棠; 1943), have been interpreted as hinting at the turmoil and darkness of society under occupation. Because Ma-Xu tactically expressed desperation and humiliation in his films, they are, according to Tadao Satō, “artistic works full of horror and sorrow.”

Likewise, if we examine Ghost Love at the allegoric level, we find that although it lacks the mystery and suspense of a “ghost” story, it strategically relates the allegory of the “ghost” to contemporary society. The story begins at night. The man goes into a tobacconist where he meets a woman in black. The woman asks him to escort her to Xietu Road when they meet again at a street corner. On the way, the man tells her a ghost story on a bridge. The background color for this scene is black: The man wears a black coat, and the woman is dressed in a black dress, wearing a black scarf. A crescent moon in the dark sky can be seen through the leaves of a tree behind the bridge (see figure 3).

The woman tells the man that she likes the night because it belongs to the ghost. The man insists that she belongs to the day because she is a human. The distinction between day and night—one of the most important principles for a ghost—indicates the unbridgeable gulf between the human and the ghost.

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150 See Satō, Zhongguo dianying bainian, 47. Although Begonia is not, strictly speaking, a “horror film,” it continues the deformity of the male protagonist in Song at Midnight series, as well as his harrowing suicide at the end of the film.
However, we later learn that the woman is after all a human, who was once an anti-Qing revolutionary. In a flashback, dressed as a peasant woman, she waits outside a yamen 衙門 (official office). When an official leaves the yamen in a sedan chair, she assassinates him, with the help of her companions. Compared with the ambiguous identity of the revolutionary in Xu’s novella, this specific designation of the woman as an “anti-Qing” revolutionary is safer in terms of passing the film censorship. However, the Chinese audience, who is accustomed to the use of historical dramas as allegories about the present, could easily read between the lines. The analogy between the Qing and the Japanese is obvious: both are yizu 異族 (other ethnicities) that invaded China, enslaved
the Chinese people, and carried out bloody massacres; and both put the survival of China and Chinese culture at stake. The history of the Qing occupation of China clearly resonates with an audience living under Japanese occupation. The film *Ge Nenniang*, for example, portrays the title character as a heroine, a loyal Ming courtesan who stoutly fights against the invading Qing troops and finally sacrifices herself for the nation. The film gives the audience much more than a history lesson; it suggests the need for such heroic resistance in the present. At the end of the 1941 film adaptation *Ghost Love*, the woman leaves a letter for the man, telling him to “live well as a human” (this sentence is the same as that in Xu’s novella) and to “fulfill his mission” (this is added in the film). When the nurse, who has fallen in love with the cross-dressing ghost, visits the man, he repeats the woman’s words to her. He says: “Right, we should listen to her words. Let’s drink up, and we have our mission to fulfill, don’t we?”

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151 Following the occupation of the central China and jiangnan area, Manchus forced Chinese Han people to tonsure their hairs to the Manchu-style plait. This *liufa bu liutou, liutou bu liufa* 留發不留頭, 留頭不留發 (keep hair or head) policy greatly hurt the traditional belief and dignity of Chinese Han people, and was usually viewed as a humiliation for the enslaved Han people. Although during the late reign, the Manchus continued many Chinese political and cultural traditions to sustain their reign, they were consistently viewed as barbarians who invaded China. In the anti-Qing revolution, “*quchu dalu, hufu zhonghua*” 驅除鞑很, 恢復中華 (expel Tatar barbarians and revive China) was equally used with “*chuangli minguo, pingjun diquan*” 創立民國, 平均地權 (establish a republic and distribute land equally among the people) as a political platform for *zhongguo tongmenghui* 中國同盟會 (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) led by Sun Yat-sen in 1905. As for the Japanese invaders, although they saw themselves as inheritors and protectors of Chinese tradition, they actually implement a “de-sinification” policy in occupied areas. For example, in Manchoukuo—the puppet government in Northeast China—Japanese language was taught as the official language whereas Chinese language was categorized as a “foreign language.”

152 In the novella, there is a nurse character who takes care of the male protagonist and falls in love with his friend, a young man who sent him to hospital to recuperate. But the young male friend is actually the female ghost dressed as a man. When the ghost vanishes, the nurse tries to find “his” whereabouts through the male protagonist.
nurse home. On the way, they hear a rooster crow in the distant. In the final scene, the woman, dressed in black, walks slowly out from the bright rays of the morning sun. This ending reminds us of the children’s song in the film *Mulan Joins the Army*—“the sun rises and shines over the world. Let’s practice our Kung-fu. We don’t fear bandits and robbers. Once they come, we send them home.”

The film starts with the night/black/dark, but ends with the dawn/white/bright. While for a ghost the dawn normally represents perdition, it also indicates a brightness that will drive away the forces of darkness and evil. Of course, we already know that the woman is not really a ghost and does not fear the sunshine, but the significance of this ending lies in its perfect combination of national allegory and ghost story. No matter how long the dark is, the sun will eventually rise and success will be achieved. Although the film does not give a clear explanation for her behavior at the end—why does she want to retreat from society, while asking the man to fulfill his mission? does it mean that she will also resume her mission rather than continue her seclusion?—the film still works at the allegorical level.

**The Affinity and Interactions between Film and Drama at Wartime Shanghai**

As the first work of He Zhaozhang, the 1941 adaptation has a strong dramatic style. This style is not only embodied in its setting and shooting, but also in the film script

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154 He Zhaozhang used to be a sound engineer in Guohua film company. Because Guohua was short of directors at that time, He got the chance to direct *Ghost Love* by Zhang Shichuan’s recommendation. Xu
and the performance. Cheng Xiaoqing, the adaptor of _Ghost Love_, and a famous detective writer of the _Libailiu pai_ 禮拜六派 (Saturday School),\(^{156}\) not only strictly followed Xu Xu’s storyline, emphasizing the same scenes as the novella and citing its dialogue verbatim, but also retained most of the lengthy dialogues in the original text over whether the female protagonist is a human or a ghost. However, as Dudley Andrew points out, “the material of literature (graphemes, words, and sentences) may be of a different nature from the materials of cinema (projected light and shadows, identifiable sounds and forms, and represented action), both systems may construct in their own way.”\(^{157}\) Xu’s novella is filled with metaphysical polemic on concepts such as beauty and horror, the human and the spectral, and one would expect these dimensions to be less pronounced in a film.

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\(^{155}\) Both indoor and outdoor scenes in this film were shot in a studio. No rear-screen projection was applied to the background scenery, and the outdoor scenes are more like a stage set. In a scene on a bridge, when the man tells a ghost story to test the woman’s response, it is patently clear that the tress and the moon are fake. Moreover, the film does not make much varied use of camera angles or camera movement; instead, the camera is static most of the time, thus further underlying the film’s resemblance to a stage play.

\(^{156}\) _Saturday_ was a popular weekly magazine in Shanghai in the 1920s that serialized “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” fictions. It is therefore said to be affiliated with the “Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School.” Representative writers of Saturday School include Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵞, Fan Yanqiao 範煙橋, Cheng Xiaoqing 程小青, etc. Both Fan and Cheng worked as adaptors for Guohua in the Solitary Island period. See Ma Guoliang 馬國亮 (1908- ), _Liangyou yijiu: yijia huabao yu yige shidai_ 良友憶舊: 一家畫報與一個時代 [Young Companion in retrospect: a pictorial and an era] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2002), 15-16.

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\(^{157}\) Andrew, _Concepts in Film Theory_, 101.
adaptation. Cheng’s film script fails to create much suspense for the audience, something he did well in his own detective fiction. The first half of the film is dominated by these garrulous discussions on the human and the spectral, which makes the plot tedious and deliberately mystifying. In other words, because the plot of the film is mainly developed through dialogue rather than action, it is more like a stage play than a film, and it is difficult for the audience to feel/believe the woman’s mysterious quality as a ghost merely from their metaphysical discussions.

The performance of Zhou Manhua and Lü Yukun are also dramatic and exaggerated. Zhou tries to convey the mystery and apathy of the ghost-character, yet she sometimes over does it in a dramatic way. She mostly keeps her face expressionless, though the quality of apathy is not necessarily best represented through this kind of expressionless expression. In one scene, when the man questions the woman about why she prefers to be a ghost rather than a human, the woman dramatically flies into a rage, rebuking him for knowing nothing about her past. This drastic change of emotion from indifference to rage is too abrupt, and the scene lacks psychological realism. Lü, who used to be a stage actor, also overacts sometimes in the film. In some scenes, his performance and lines are overly dramatic, his expression exaggerated, and his gestures artificial. For example, when the man goes to the woman’s house for the first time, he takes off his wet clothes and puts on the dry clothing she gives him. Then she serves him some food and drink. The man holds a cup of wine with his right little finger raised—a theatrical gesture similar to lanhua zhi 蘭花指 (orchid finger) in Peking Opera—that comes across as artificial in the context of a film drama (see figure 4). Later he zealously
confesses his love to the woman with stilted parallel sentences that make the scene sound more like a stage play than a film.

Figure 4. An indoor scene in *Ghost Love*: the man holds a cup of wine with a theatrical gesture.

Of course, Chen Xiaoqing’s film script, which is too faithful to the “letter” of the original text, is one reason for *Ghost Love*’s dramatization,\(^{158}\) yet if we situate the film in the larger context of Chinese cinema, we can find that its dramatic style is not an isolated

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\(^{158}\) The “letter” and the “spirit” are two dimensions in film adaptation. In Dudley Andrew’s words: “Fidelity of adaptation is conventionally treated in relation to the ‘letter’ and to the ‘spirit’ of the text, as thought adaptations were the rendering of an interpretation of a legal precedent.” See Andrew, “Adaptation,” *Concepts in Film Theory*, 100.
case. Therefore, I would rather treat this “dramatized” *Ghost Love* as a typical Chinese film of that time than a dramatic style product of an inexperienced director. In fact, the “dramatization” was the basic characteristics of Chinese early films, and “the film performance was regarded as a new form of drama performance” at that time.\(^{159}\) Features such as *kuazhang hua* 誇張化 (exaggeration), *leixing hua* 類型化 (stereotype) and *wenyi qiang* 文藝腔 (literary tune) which are deficient from today’s perspective, were commonplace and popular at the early stage of Chinese cinema.\(^{160}\) Even in his film *Begonia* (1943), which brought Lü Yukun a great reputation in film circles, we can still see the trace of theatrical lines and dramatic performance.\(^{161}\)

In addition to this inherited affinity between film and drama, if we situate He’s *Ghost Love* in the larger context of occupied Shanghai, we can find more interactions between film and drama. As mentioned above, despite the political pressure and economical turmoil of the war years, the commercial cinema actually had a “monstrous

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\(^{160}\) Ibid.

\(^{161}\) Many actors and actress at that time had this common defection. For example, Yuan Muzhi’s 袁牧之 performance in *Fate of Graduates* (Taoli jie 桃李劫; 1934) has “a strong, unpleasantly stilted, dramatic style”; and Bai Yang’s 白楊 performance, in Shao Mujun’s 邵牧君 (1928-) view, is more natural in her film *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (Baqian li lu yun he yue 八千里路雲和月; 1947) than in *A Spring River Flows East* (Yijiang chunshui xiang dong liu 一江春水向東流; 1947). See ChenYi et al., eds., *Dianying biaoyan juan*, 32. Also see Zhang Lifan 章立凡, “Qiasi yijiang chunshui xiang dong liu: shangge shiji de yichang minying dianying meng” 恰似一江春水向東流——上個世紀的一場民營電影夢 [Like a spring river flowing east: a dream of the privately owned filmmaking in the last century].

blossom” during the Solitary Island period. Similarly, as Edward Gunn argues, “it was during the war that modern professional theatre in Shanghai grew to proportions unprecedented in China. As commercial theatre, it has never been matched since.”

During this period, films were often inspired from popular dramas, and plays built on the film scripts. For example, the film Ge Nenniang is an adaptation of A Ying’s 阿英 (Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨 1900－1977) famous play Sorrow for the Fall of the Ming (Mingmo yihen 明末遺恨; 1939), also known as Jade Blood Flower (Bixue hua 碧血花). Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩 (1889-1962), who wrote the film script for Mulan Joins the Army, wrote a play of the same title. Zhou Yibai 周貽白 (1900-1977) also wrote a play Hua Mulan in 1941. In fact, compared with the woman in Xu Xu’s novella, who is disillusioned with everything in life, the woman in He’s Ghost Love seems to be much more in the genealogy of patriotic courtesans and women warriors that were so common in historical films and dramas in occupied Shanghai: Hua Mulan, Ge Nenniang, Li Xiangjun 李香君, Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉 and Yang E 楊娥, etc. Edward Gunn points out this character type in plays at that time: “These plays took on frequent resemblances

162 Gunn, Unwelcome Muse, 110.

163 Zhou was also the screenwriter for Ge Nenniang and Li Xiangjun (李香君; 1940). Li Xiangjun is the heroine in Kong Shangren’s 孔尚任 (1648-1718) opera The Peach Blossom Fan (Taohua shan 桃花扇), a courtesan who is loyal not only to her lover, but also to the Ming court. Zhou adapted this opera into the film Li Xiangjun in 1940. See Li, Zhongguo dianying shi (1937-1945), 217-218.

164 Liang Hongyu is the heroine in Gu Zhongyi’s 顧仲彝 play Liang Hongyu, who helps her husband fight against the Jin army in the Song dynasty. Yang E is the protagonist in A Ying’s play Yang E Zhuan, a female knight-errant who wants to assassinate Wu Sangui 吳三桂, a traitor to the Ming court. Both of these plays were written in occupied Shanghai.
to each other. The central character is a young woman who is patriotic and assertive, outgoing, and generous. She has acquired masculine skills, but is endowed with feminine beauty as well.”\textsuperscript{165} The woman in \textit{Ghost Love} is beautiful, and she definitely has “masculine skills” since she used to be an assassin. Furthermore, she is patriotic and assertive, because it is she—a “ghost”—who shows the bright way to humans (the man and the nurse). Chang-Tai Hung argues that the heroines of the wartime spoken drama differed from their May Fourth sisters in two significant way: they “expounded collective goals and devotion to the nation” rather than “individualism and subjectivism;” and they “called loudly for love of country” rather than “romantic love and free marriage.”\textsuperscript{166}

Interestingly, this is also embodied in He’s \textit{Ghost Love}. In the scene when the woman tells the man her past, the man reiterates his love for her, and requests her to be a happy person who enjoys life. This is the same as what the man says in Xu’s novella. However, the woman responds with a rhetorical question: “Do you only have happiness and enjoyment in your mind?” The man hesitates and answers: “No. I just want to be with you. We will be happy, and meanwhile we can strive together.” This conversation is added in the film, whereas in Xu’s novella the woman does not respond, and the man only emphasizes “love” and his philosophy—“live for today, not tomorrow” (\textit{jinzhao youjiu jinzhao zui} 今朝有酒今朝醉).\textsuperscript{167}

Therefore, the gulf between the man and the woman is not that between human and ghost—as Xu’s novella and the first half of this

\textsuperscript{165} Gunn, \textit{Unwelcome Muse}, 126.

\textsuperscript{166} Hung, \textit{War and Popular Culture}, 76.

\textsuperscript{167} Xu Xu, \textit{Gui lian}, 34.
film stress—but the one caused by their different beliefs. She rejects his love, not because love is an absurdity of the human world, but because he should fulfill his mission as a human rather than just bask in happiness and enjoyment. In other words, love for country is more important than personal romantic love. As such, the “ghost” becomes a typical female symbol of resistance—gentle, feminine, enchanting and endowed with unmatched beauty, but also patriotic, brave, determined and blessed with unmatched military/masculine prowess. This juxtaposition makes her more attractive and striking than her male counterpart, who is irresolute and only pursues romantic love, and “more effective in cultivating patriotism among the populace.”

Therefore, Xu’s ghost story becomes, to a certain extent, an illuminating national allegory for the audience, through which certain patriotic sentiments and national aspirations are tactically expressed.

Another interesting affinity between wartime film and drama is the use of Western references. The 1941 *Ghost Love* makes obvious allusions to the West. On the one hand, the male protagonist has a friend who has just returned from Europe, and they often discuss politics. Stimulated by what his friend experienced abroad, “they encourage each other to serve the country”—a plot also added by the film, as the “mission” plot. In other words, the advanced West is the model for the future of China, and they should work to realize this ideal. This may coincide with what the woman calls “mission.” On the other hand, the theme song for the film is the Scottish folk song “Auld Lang Syne.”

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168 Hung, *War and Popular Culture*, 77.

169 *Guihua benshi* 鬼話本事, on a film flyer for the *Golden Castle* (Jindu xiuyuan 金都戲院) housed in the China Film Archive.
borrowed from the Hollywood film *Waterloo Bridge* (1940), a sad love story set during WWI, in which the female protagonist finally leaves the male protagonist. This plot coincides with the ending between the man and the woman in *Ghost Love*, as well as the suggestive wartime setting in China. In fact, *Waterloo Bridge* was shot when Europe was embroiled in WWII.

Interestingly, Xia Yan 夏衍 (1900-1995), in his 1942 play *The Fascist Bacillus* (Faxisi xijun 法西斯細菌), a play with a clear anti-Japanese/anti-Fascist theme, also has a scene in which a character sings “Auld Lang Syne.” In this play, Yu Shifu 俞實夫, the main protagonist who used to be an apolitical bacteriologist, is inevitably entangled with the events of the second Sino-Japanese War. In order to avoid the wartime turmoil and carry on his bacteriological research, he and his family have to keep moving from one city to another. Qian Yu 錢裕, the brother-in-law of Yu’s friend Zhao Antao 趙安濤, a patriotic music student, repeatedly tries to persuade Yu to join the resistance. One day, after comparing Fascism to the severest bacillus threatening people by citing Hans Zinsser’s speech on the relationship between typhoid and politics, Qian gently whistles the song “Auld Lang Syne” (see Act IV, end of scene 1). In the next scene, three Japanese soldiers crash into Yu’s house and shoot Qian when he tries to fight against

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170 Hans Zinsser (1878-1940) is a famous American bacteriologist, also the mental idol of Yu Shifu in the play.
them. Yu is greatly shocked by Qian’s words and death, and finally joins the resistance as
a doctor in the Red Cross.  

The origins of “Auld Lang Syne” are very old and go way back before the film
Waterloo Bridge. But it seems that the film helped make it popular in China, and it was
in the air during wartime China. The sad love story of Roy and Myra is touching and
regretful, thereby the war that leads to their tragedy is impressive and abhorrent. What the
film (as well as its theme song “Auld Lang Syne”) inspires is not only tears and sighs
from its audiences, but also their anti-war emotions. Therefore, when Qian Yu in The
Fascist Bacillus whistles the song, it is neither merely his nostalgia for the past, nor his
talent show as a music student, but a method to express his hatred against the Fascist war,
as well as a signal to inspire the anti-war emotions of protagonists in the play and
spectators who are indentified with them. Similarly, when Ghost Love cites this song in
the scene when the man receives the woman’s letter asking him to “fulfill his mission as a

171 Liu Housheng 劉厚聲 and Chen Jian 陳堅 eds., Xia Yan quanji 夏衍全集 [The complete works of Xia

172 “Auld Lang Syne,” which may be translated literally as “old long since” or more idiomatically “long
long ago,” is a Scottish poem written by Robert Burns (1759-1796) in 1788 and set to the tune of a
traditional folk song. It is well known in many English-speaking (and other) countries and is often sung to
celebrate the start of the New Year at the stroke of midnight. The song was used in the film Waterloo
Bridge (1940)—under the name of “The Farewell Waltz”—starring Vivien Leigh and Robert Taylor.

173 Waterloo Bridge was released in America on May 14, 1940, and was shown in China, entitled Hunduan
langqiao 魂斷藍橋 in the November of the same year. It immediately prevailed in Shanghai, first being
adapted for two forms of Chinese traditional opera—“Yue opera” (yueju 越劇) and “Shanghai opera” (huju
滬劇)—later adapted for a film Hunduan langqiao in 1941, directed by Mei Qian 梅阡. See Cheng and Li,
Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, 2: 448. Also see George Stephen Semsel, Chinese Film: The State of the Art
man” and the scene when the man repeats her words to the nurse, it not only reminds the audience of the love tragedy in *Waterloo Bridge*, but also links the fate of the protagonists in *Ghost Love* to that in *Waterloo Bridge*, the fate of China (suggested in *Ghost Love*) to that of the West (suggested in *Waterloo Bridge*). In other words, if we say that the man and the woman share the sad ending (separation) of Roy and Myra in *Waterloo Bridge*, then is it possible that the music also reminds the audience of the fate China shares with Britain and France at that time? In this sense, although *Ghost Love* does not openly develop the resistance theme in the way Xia Yan’s play does, it is not arbitrary to categorize it as a “resistance” film, as Shen Ji does in his book *Shanghai Film*.

### Conclusion

For quite a long time, cinema and literature in Shanghai during the occupation, except for those works with obvious resistance themes (such as *Mulan Joins the Army*), was for political reasons taboo in the study of Chinese film and Chinese literature. Mao-era discussions of occupation film or literature usually began and ended with such tags as “traitor” or “collaborator.” Yet, since the 1990s, abundant attention has been paid to

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174 Shen categorizes this film in the chapter “Gudao dianran kangri huoxing” [Resistance sparks in the solitary island]. But Shen only mentions its title without any introduction or analysis. See Shen Ji’s 沈寂 (1924-), *Shanghai dianying 上海電影* [Shanghai film] (Shanghai: wenhui chubanshe, 2008), 152.

175 For example, Cheng Jihua spends only twenty-five pages, of the 1215-page long book *Zhongguo dianying shi (1937-1945)*, on occupation films, including those produced in the “Solitary Island” period and those made after 1941. Films produced by Zhonglian 中聯 and Huaying 華影 from 1942 to 1945 are categorized as “collaborationist” films and absolutely excluded from the genealogy of Chinese film.
films and literature in occupied Shanghai and video copies of classic old films have been reproduced.\textsuperscript{176} After half a century of oblivion, audiences can now watch some “forgotten” films and read some “forgotten” books again.\textsuperscript{177}

However, as mentioned in the “Introduction,” while Xu Xu and his fiction have been newly rediscovered by mainland scholars and publishers since the 1990s, film adaptations of his works (most of which are produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan) are mostly unknown on the mainland. And in various history books and materials of Chinese films, this 1941 film adaptation of \textit{Ghost Love} is always an absent “being.”\textsuperscript{178} Therefore, in this chapter, I introduce the 1941 adaptation of Xu’s \textit{Ghost Love}, and try to highlight in my analysis some social, cultural, and political phenomena and issues current during the Solitary Island period.

\textsuperscript{176} For films in occupied Shanghai, see Li, \textit{Zhongguo dianying shi} (1937-1945); Fu, \textit{Between Shanghai and Hong Kong}; Satô, \textit{Zhongguo dianying bainian}. For literature in occupied Beijing and Shanghai, see Gunn, \textit{Unwelcome Muse}, and Hung, \textit{War and Popular Culture}.

\textsuperscript{177} For films, \textit{Beauty} (\textit{Qiao jiaren 倩佳人}) Media Inc., a Guangzhou program production and distribution company, started collecting and publishing a series of products of Chinese old films shot between the 1930s and the 1980s. Also, the Film channel of CCTV selectedly replays some old films, including those made at wartime Shanghai. Nowadays, the internet also helps to spread some old films through video website such as “Youtube” or “Tudou.” For the literature, works of Eileen Chang in occupied Shanghai are rediscovered since the 1990s and the “fever for Eileen Chang” swept major cities on the mainland during that decade.

\textsuperscript{178} It is listed in the filmography of Cheng Jihua’s \textit{Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi} (2: 453), at one time the most authoritative history book of Chinese film on the mainland, yet there is no introduction or analysis of it at all. In fact, in doing the research for this thesis, I could find very little information about it in various books/articles and pictorials of Chinese film. Besides Zhao Shihui’s \textit{Yingtan gouchen}, the only book that mentions the title of \textit{Ghost Love} in one sentence is Shen Ji’s \textit{Shanghai dianying}. Shen got acquainted with Xu Xu in 1946, and once called for writings from Xu for the magazine he edited. See Shen Ji, “Manman funü qing: Xu Xu he ta de nü’er,” preface to Ge Yuan, \textit{Canyou guxing}, 2.
Due to the difficult environment under occupation, filmmakers had to cautiously and tactically “depoliticize” their films, but they still found subtle ways of conveying their political intentions. In the case of *Ghost Love*, the designation of the woman’s identity as an anti-Qing revolutionary, the bright dawn ending, and the mood music borrowed from another wartime film evoke feelings of resistance from the audience. In this sense, the film reflects the particular political climate of the war period. As such, it is a film that should be remembered, despite the fact that we have no record about its success or failure at the box office, and it has been almost completely ignored by film historians.

The affinity and interactions between film and drama in wartime Shanghai are also remarkable. Films and dramas often interact with and adapt from each other. *Ghost Love* is clearly influenced by the wartime dramas, especially historical dramas featuring heroic women warriors as symbols of resistance. An interesting paradox of *Ghost Love* is: on the one hand, the film is very faithful to Xu’s novella, because the film script retains most of the lengthy dialogues in the original text that should partly be responsible for the film’s dramatic style; on the other hand, the film adaptation actually rewrites the personality of the female ghost who is disillusioned with everything in the secular world, fitting her into the genealogy of patriotic courtesans and women warriors that were so common in historical films and dramas in occupied Shanghai. If we use Dudley Andrew’s theory on the distinction of “letter” and the “spirit” in film adaptations, we can conclude that the 1941 film adaptation is a work faithful to the “letter” rather than the “spirit” of Xu’s novella.
Chapter 3: Ghost in a Spy Tale of Two Cities:
The 1956 Adaptation Ghost Love and 1950s Hong Kong

Introduction

In 1946, one year after the surrender of Japan, Xu Xu returned to Shanghai from America, where he had been a foreign correspondent for the newspaper Saodang bao 掃蕩報.

During the Civil War period (1946-1949), Xu stayed in Shanghai, republishing his fiction, such as The Rustling Wind, Ghost Love, Goddess of the Arabian Sea, Gypsy’s Enticement, as well as collections of short stories and poetry anthologies. The Rustling Wind was an immediate and resounding success and was acclaimed as “the only great work that describes the anti-Japanese struggle of patriots in occupied Shanghai.”\(^{179}\) However, with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 after the success of the CCP in the Civil War, Xu became more and more anxious and suspicious about his future under the new regime. On the one hand, as a liberal intellectual, after 1936 he had abjured his beliefs in Marxism and Communism and was deeply affected by Stalin’s purge of the Trotsky School in Russia. On the other hand, although his works had earned him a great reputation in KMT-controlled areas, he was chastised by leftist critics as a “porn writer” (huangse zuojia 黃色作家) and “reactionary literati” (fandong wenren 反動文人).\(^{180}\) In May 1950, Xu left Shanghai for Hong Kong as a refugee, as many of his

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\(^{179}\) Shen Ji, “Manman funü qing: Xu Xu he ta de nü’er,” preface to Ge Yuan, Canyue guxing, 2.

\(^{180}\) Wu and Wang, Wo xin panghuang, 215.
contemporaries did at that time. Two years later, Eileen Chang, another popular writer in wartime Shanghai, also arrived in Hong Kong from Shanghai. Later, Chang would leave Hong Kong for America. Neither Xu or Chang ever got chance to return to the mainland.

Because of his previous popularity in Shanghai and in the KMT-controlled areas, Xu arrived in Hong Kong as a literary celebrity. Many of his readers also immigrated to Hong Kong, and Xu continued to be popular through the 1950s. His books were republished by Dagong Press (Dagong shuju 大公書局), the only literary publishing house at that time, and his newest works were serialized in the literary supplement of the Hong Kong Sing Tao Evening Post (Xingdao wanbao 星島晚報). Some readers (especially young girls) often came to Gloucester Café, where Xu hosted friends, clapping his books and asking him for a signature. Many of Xu’s works were adapted into films, nearly half of which were produced by the Shaw Company (Shaoshi zhipianchang 邵氏製片廠), the most important and largest film production company in Hong Kong.

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181 “Hong Kong’s population expanded from about 600,000 in 1945 to over 2 million in 1950, and to 2.5 million in 1955…Whether they had lived in Hong Kong before the war or not, they went to this British colony again as either refugees or economic migrants.” Quoted in Steve Tsang, A Modern History of Hong Kong (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 167.


183 Xu’s popularity became to fade in the 1960s, a change that can be seen in film adaptations of Xu’s fiction in Hong Kong. In the 1950s, there were 8 film adaptations, while there were only two in the 1960s (1960 and 1961) and one in 1973. See the appendix. “Before the middle 1960s, fiction of Hong Kong writers such as Xu Xu, Yang Tiancheng 楊天成, Ouyang Tian 歐陽天, Du Ning 杜甯, Houren 後人 and a Taiwanese writer Wang Lan 王藍 had been adapted a lot by Shaw Company; yet since the middle 1960s, the Shaw Brothers favored fiction by the Hong Kong writer Yida 依達 and the Taiwanese writer Qiong
film *Back Door* (Hou men 後門), an adaptation of Xu’s pseudonymous work, starring Hu Die (Butterfly Wu 蝴蝶, 1907-1989) and directed by Li Hanxiang (Lee Hon-Cheung 李翰祥, 1926-1996), garnered 12 awards, including the Golden Harvest for Best Film at the seventh Asian Film Festival in Tokyo.\(^{184}\)

*Ghost Love*, Xu’s first well-known work, was reshot in 1956, with the title *Ghost Love* (Gui lian 鬼戀), but it was also known as *The Black Window* (Hei guafu 黑寡婦).\(^{185}\) It was directed by Tu Guangqi (Tu Kuang-chi 屠光啟, 1914-1980), starred Li Lihua (Teresa Li 李麗華, 1924- ) and Zhang Yang 張揚 (1930- ), and was produced by the Lidu Film Company 麗都影業公司.\(^{186}\) Many cineastes who were active in the 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong film world came from the Shanghai film industry. Therefore, although the second film adaptation appeared fifteen years after the first one, most members of the film cast and crew were part of the same generation that had made the first film.

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\(^{184}\) Ge Yuan, “Bei banshang yinping de Xu Xu xiaoshuo.”

\(^{185}\) The title of the 1956 film adaptation listed on the website of the Hong Kong Film Archive 香港電影資料館 is *Guilian*, with an English title *A Phantom’s Love Affair*. To make it easier to recognize, I still use *Ghost Love* to refer to this film. The title listed in Ge Yuan’s article “Bei banshang yinping de Xu Xu xiaoshuo” and on the website of The Chinese University of Hong Kong is *Hei guafu*. See http://ipac.hkfa.lcsd.gov.hk:81/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=30126SU871835J4.295&profile=hkfa&uri=full=3100018@8848@0&menu=search&submenu=advanced&source=192.168.110.61@!horizon; http://www.modernchineseliterature.net/writers/XuXu/films_gb.jsp (accessed June 29, 2010).

\(^{186}\) I checked related materials in the Hong Kong Film Archive, and it seems that this is the only film produced by the Lidu Film Company.
adaptation. For example, Li Lihua had been a popular actress in Shanghai in the 1940s. She once co-starred with Lü Yukun, the actor of the 1941 *Ghost Love*, in *Begonia* (Qiuhaitang 秋海棠), a famous tragedy film directed by Ma-xu Weibang 马徐维邦 (1905-1961) in 1943 (see figure 5). Zhou Manhua, who played the woman in the 1941 *Ghost Love*, starred in *To See the Clouds Roll* (Chuhai yunxia 出海云霞; 1950), directed by Tu Guangqi, the director of the 1956 *Ghost Love*. As for Tu Guangqi, he had won his reputation in the film world with *Spy Number One* (Tianzi diyihao 天字第一号), a spy film that smashed box office records in 1946. Tu also directed *The Mortal Wind* (Feng xiaoxiao 风萧萧), another film adaptation of Xu’s most famous work and produced by the Shaw Company in 1954. Li Lihua played the role of Bai Ping 白蘋, one of the female protagonists.

Figure 5. A still from *Begonia* (Qiuhaitang 秋海棠; 1943): left is Li Lihua, the actress in *Ghost Love* (1956); right is Lü Yukun, the actor in *Ghost Love* (1941).
There is no evidence to indicate whether Xu was satisfied with this 1956 film adaptation, as he was with the 1941 adaptation after he previewed it.\textsuperscript{187} My focus in this chapter is not, however, to compare adaptations in order to make a claim for which better captures Xu’s novella. Rather, I would like to focus on how the 1956 adaptation reflects the culture, society, and politics of 1950s Hong Kong.

A Tale of Two Cities

In the epilogue to his book \textit{Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of A New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945}, Leo Ou-fan Lee raises the concept of “a tale of two cities”—which he obviously borrows from the title of Dickens’ novel. Whereas Dickens sets his novel in the “two cities” of London and Paris before and during the French Revolution, the two cities Lee refers to are Shanghai and Hong Kong in the twentieth century. In Lee’s opinion, there is “a symbolic link between the two cities through a kind of semiotic self-reflexivity.” In the past, Hong Kong was “a poor copy of the fabled metropolis (Shanghai),” whereas nowadays new Shanghai “looks like the reflection of a reflection—a modern or postmodern replica of a Hong Kong that has for so long modeled itself after old Shanghai.” The two cities become each other’s “other,” and “it takes one city to understand another.”\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{187} Zhao, “He Zhaozhang tan gui lian,” 290.

\textsuperscript{188} Lee, \textit{Shanghai Modern}, 334, 330, 341, 338.
Lee’s argument is very insightful, because it not only sketches the social and cultural contours of Hong Kong society in the 1950s, which helps us to analyze the 1956 adaptation of *Ghost Love*, but is also suggestive for understanding the wave of “Shanghai nostalgia” in Hong Kong cinema in the 1990s that I discuss in the next chapter.

As a city that shared a similar colonial (semi-colonial) history with Shanghai, Hong Kong encountered the same drastic collision between the West and China, between modernity and tradition. Yet for quite a long time, it lived under the shadow of Shanghai: the best recognition for Hong Kong as a metropolis was to be called “Small Shanghai.”

The highly modernized Shanghai before 1949 was not only a metropolitan paragon for Hong Kong, but also a rival it wanted to surpass and supplant. The continuous war and the change in regimes from the Nationalists to the Communists, as well as the subsequent Cold War, however, brought Hong Kong great opportunity. In other words, the prosperity of Hong Kong greatly benefited from the occupation and decline of Shanghai. As Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 (acted by Maggie Cheung 張曼玉) says in the film *Center Stage* (Ruan lingyu 阮玲玉; 1992), “The shoe is on the other foot (*fengshui lunliu zhuan* 風水輪流轉). Once Shanghai is bombed, Hong Kong flourishes.” Just as the fall of Hong Kong in 1941 led to the fulfillment of Bai Liusu 白流蘇, the female protagonist in Eileen Chang’s

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189 In his 1995 essay “From Shanghai to Hong Kong (1946-1949),” Wu Zuguang 吳祖光 (1917-2003) recalls the common impression of these two cities in the past: “Before the 1940s, the most modern metropolis in China was Shanghai. Other cities such as Hong Kong and Tianjin…were called ‘Small Shanghai.’ Hong Kong people generally called people from mainland ‘Shanghainese’ without exception, from which you can see the reputation and influence of Shanghai. Also, people who went to Hong Kong were not so enviable as today.” See *xin wenxue shiliao* 新文學史料 [Historical materials of new literature] 1 (1996): 57-64. Wu originally wrote this essay for Gao Tao 高陶 ed., *Jin kan Xianggang* 近看香港 [A close look at Hong Kong] (Nanchang: Jiangxi gaoxiao chubanshe, 1996).
novella *Love in a Fallen City* (Qingcheng zhilian 傾城之戀), the fall of Shanghai (first occupied by Japanese, later recaptured by KMT, and finally “liberated” by CCP) ironically fulfilled Hong Kong. 

As mentioned above, between 1945 and 1950, millions of Chinese (including capitalists, intellectuals, filmmakers, industrial workers, and other refugees) left their homes to escape from the political and economic turmoil on the mainland. They came to Hong Kong hoping to rebuild their lives and careers in this British colony. They brought with them money, capital, and experience gained in their former lives in mainland cities, especially Shanghai. Capitalists set up branches or rebuilt their factories, and cineastes relocated their companies to Hong Kong or cooperated with local companies. In a

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190 Compared with Shanghai, which experienced the fiscal chaos and political corruption of the KMT government and the following turmoil in the Civil War, Hong Kong made a rapid recovery after WWII through the consistent policy of the colonial administration. Later, after the Cultural Revolution, when Shanghai was temporarily paralyzed, Hong Kong took off economically in the 1970s. It became one of the “Four Asian Dragons” and Britain’s “crown” colony. It is eulogized as “Pearl of the East”, a title that easily reminds us of “Paris of the East”, Shanghai’s former title.

191 In the late 1940s, industrialists from Shanghai brought capital, equipment, technology and good social connections to foreign markets to Hong Kong. They became a strong competitor with the British firms that had monopolized Hong Kong in shipping, textile, real estate, and entertainment. And those industrialists were used to being called “Shanghai magnates.” See Wang Haiwei, *Jie lai de shijian—Xianggang dianying zhong de Shanghai xiangxiang* 像來的時間——香港電影中的上海想像 [The borrowed time: Shanghai imagination in Hong Kong cinema] (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi chubanshe, 2008), 14.

192 Zhao Weifang, *Xiagang dianying shi 1897-2006*, 75-76. In fact, as mentioned in chapter 2, many members of the Shanghai film industry went to Hong Kong after the fall of Shanghai. When Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese in 1941, some of them went back to the mainland, whereas others chose to stay. During the Civil War period, however, a great number of filmmakers again came to Hong Kong to escape the political turmoil or accusations of collaboration with the Japanese during WWII. Many of them joined the Mandarin film studios (e.g. Yonghua Film Studio) established by Shanghai businessmen. After Shanghai was liberated by the CCP in 1949, some cineastes (e.g. Wang Danfeng 王丹鳳 and Zhou Xuan 周璇) went back to the mainland in the 1950s, whereas others stayed in Hong Kong. For more information, see *Xianggang yingren koushu lishi congshu①: nan lai xianggang* 香港影人口述歷史叢書①：南來香港
sense, while the majority of the refugees lived in poverty on the outskirts of the city (this was vividly presented in the 1957 *Halfway Down* 半下流社會, another film directed by Tu Guangqi), the commercial and cultural elite in Hong Kong “underwent what might be called a process of ‘Shanghainization.’” However, as Lee argues, “Hong Kong in the 1950s remained a poor copy of the fabled metropolis.” Even if Hong Kong one day were to successfully supplant Shanghai, the soul of Shanghai would not revive in the body of Hong Kong. Old Shanghai was lost forever and could not be reproduced by any means. The process of “Shanghainization” is also the process of “localization” for Hong Kong.

This dual process is also embodied in the Hong Kong film industry. Before 1949, and even into the early 1950s, Hong Kong cinema was an extension of mainland cinema. The influence from and communication with Shanghai was especially significant for the Hong Kong film industry. It is said that Hong Kong film from the 1950s to the 1960s “still had a Shanghai accent” (*yuyin youzi dai wunong* 語音猶自帶吳僑). At the same time, though, the 1950s and 1960s was a period of transition and evolution for Hong Kong film culture. During this period, actors and actresses from Shanghai performed together with local performers, and Mandarin-language films competed with and inspired

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[1] Hong Kong film veterans series ①: Hong Kong here I come] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2000).

imitations from Cantonese films. The style of Hong Kong cinema and the taste of the Hong Kong audience began to take shape during this period.\textsuperscript{194}

While Hong Kong films about Shanghai tried to revive the lost city on screen—in Poshek Fu’s words: “filming Shanghai in Hong Kong”\textsuperscript{195}—they also showed a deep indebtedness to the local culture of Hong Kong. In the case of the 1956 film adaptation \textit{Ghost Love}, although it remained faithful to the storyline of the original text—from the dialogue to the action, from the frame story to the embedded story—it is also greatly influenced by Hong Kong culture and intermingles both Shanghai and Hong Kong characteristics. In other words, the Shanghai in this film is a “Hong Kongized” Shanghai.

The setting of the story in the 1956 film adaptation is Shanghai under Japanese occupation. There is an interesting comparison between outdoor scenes and indoor scenes in this film. On the one hand, except the ghost’s house, the most frequent indoor setting in Tu’s film is a dance hall in a nightclub, where wanton music and passionate dances—stereotypical icons for the modernity and extravagance, debauchery and corruption of \textit{shili yangchang} 十裏洋場 (the ten miles of foreign zone)—are performed. This stereotype is echoed in Mao Dun’s \textit{Ziye} 子夜 (Midnight) and in the writing of \textit{xin ganjue} 新感覚.

\textsuperscript{194} Li Yizhuang 李以莊, “Yuyin youzi dai wunong: ershi shiji wuliushi xianggang dianying wenhua de guodu yu shanbian” 語音猶自帶吳儂——二十世紀五六十年代香港電影文化的過渡與嬗變 [Speak with a Shanghai accent: the transformation and evolution of Hong Kong film culture in the 1950s and 1960s], see Li Yizhuang and Zhou Chengren’s 周承人 blog http://liyizhuang.blshe.com/post/4282/147413 (accessed June 29, 2010). Li and Zhou are authors for \textit{Zaoqi Xianggang dianying shi: 1897-1945} 早期香港電影史: 1897-1945 [A history of early Hong Kong cinema: 1897-1945] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2005). For more information about the Shanghai-Hong Kong nexus in the film world, also see Fu, \textit{Between Shanghai and Hong Kong}, 133-152.

\textsuperscript{195} Fu, \textit{Between Shanghai and Hong Kong}, 133.
pai 新感覚派 (New-Perceptionists). In Mu Shiying’s “Five Characters in a Nightclub” (Yezonghui li de wugeren 夜總會裏的五個人) and “Shanghai Fox-trot” (Shanghai de hubuwu 上海的狐步舞), two stories set in a night club or dance hall, this special indoor space is “meant to form a continuum of urban visual landscape.”\(^{196}\) In the film, scenes unfold in a series of panoramic shots in the dance hall accompanied by melodies, and the audience may clearly feel what Mu Shiying called “Shanghai, the heaven built in hell.”\(^{197}\)

On the other hand, the life of ordinary people in Shanghai is exhibited through outdoor scenes of dragon boat racing and lion dances. These scenes are intriguing in two respects. First, the man and the female ghost in Xu’s novella prefer serene evening liaisons to the crowds and bustle associated with these kinds of public entertainment. Tu’s addition of these scenes here is actually related to his revamping of the female ghost’s identity, which I discuss later. Second, because the setting of the story in the 1956 film adaptation is Shanghai under Japanese occupation, it seems unlikely that Shanghai citizens could enjoy such public entertainment at wartime. In fact, dragon boat racing or lion dances were not even the most typical forms of public entertainment for Shanghainese in the Republican period.\(^{198}\) Dragon boat racing and lion dances are, in fact, more typical folk

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\(^{196}\) Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 222.


\(^{198}\) Chen Boxi does not mention dragon boat racing or lion dances in his jottings (1924) about Shanghai folk customs. In Chen’s “Suishi fengsu 歲時風俗 [Yearly folk customs], on the Dragon Boat Festival, Shanghainese ate *zongzi* and salted eggs, drank realgar wine, fumigated their houses with angelica and wormwood, as well as asked magic figures drawn by Taoist priests to invoke or expel spirits and bring good fortune. See Chen Boxi, *Shanghai yishi daguan*, 68.
customs in Canton and Hong Kong. In Hong Kong films, especially the Wong Fei-hung 黃飛鴻 series directed by Tsui Hark 徐克, we can clearly see the significance and influence of such collective, ecstatic forms of entertainment in Cantonese-speaking areas. Tu’s introduction of typical Cantonese customs into the films set in Shanghai might be a strategy to suit the film to the local audience. At the same time, it also reflects the difference between Shanghai and Hong Kong in the process of modernization.

Whereas modernized Shanghai in the early twentieth century abandoned many traditional folk customs, Hong Kong retained such pre-modern customs as the worship of Guan Yu 關羽 and Caishen 財神 (God of fortune), as well as practice of holding grand celebrations on traditional festivals. In fact, although Hong Kong is already a highly modernized metropolis today, we can still find the other face of that modernity in the numerous joss sticks and candles burning at Wong Tai Sin Temple (Huangdaxian miao 黃大仙廟) and colorful sculptures of dragons, Kwan-yin, and the Queen Mother of the West on Repulse Bay (Qianshui wan 淺水灣).

Another example of “Hong Kongization” is the interlude songs in the film. While the 1941 film adaptation borrows the mood song “Auld Lang Syne” from Waterloo Bridge (1940), the 1956 adaptation includes three songs, all sung by Li Lihua, composed 199 For more information, see Lie Fu 列孚, “Xu Ke ‘Huang Feihong’ xilie yanjiu” 徐克“黃飛鴻”系列研究 [A study of Tsui Hark’s Wong Fei-hung series], Cai Hongsheng 蔡洪聲 et al., eds., Xianggang dianying bashi nian 香港電影80年 [80 years of Hong Kong film] (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2000), 162-172.
especially for the film. All the songs are sung in Mandarin, although two of the three, “Flute under the Moon” (Yuexia di 月下笛) and “Ghost’s Lament” (Gui yuan 鬼怨), are greatly influenced by Cantonese opera. Compared with popular songs in old Shanghai (such as “Shanghai at Night” 夜上海 or “Rose Rose, I Love You” 玫瑰玫瑰我愛你) which were written in plain colloquial language and accompanied by jazz music, the language of “Flute under the Moon” and “Ghost’s Lament” is more graceful, with certain rhymes in metrical verse, full of classical imagery and allusions. This is especially true in “Ghost’s Lament,” which seemingly resembles Zhou Xuan’s 周璇 (1918-1957) “Song of Four Seasons” and describes the narrator’s emotion in different seasons. The difference between “Ghost’s Lament” and “Song of Four Seasons” lies in the fact that the former not only borrows imagery such as liuxu 柳絮 (willow catkin), lihua 梨花 (pear blossom), chunri 春日 (spring day), yuese 月色 (moonlight) from classical poetry, but also directly uses words such as shengshengman 聲聲慢, qiqicancan 淒淒慘慘, qingqinglengleng 清清冷冷, and dushanggaolou 獨上高樓 from Li Qingzhao’s 李清照 (1084-1151?) “Shengsheng man” 聲聲慢 and Yan Shu’s 晏殊 (991-1055) “Die lian hua” 蝶戀花. This type of song is more like the arias from popular Cantonese opera, such as “Princess

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200 Special issue (call number PR1824.1x) on the 1956 film adaptation Ghost Love (Hong Kong: Xianggang yingyi chubanshe), 4-5. It is housed in the Hong Kong Film Archive.

201 By contrast, although Zhou Xuan’s 周璇 “Song of Four Seasons” (Siji ge 四季歌) and “Singing Girl” (Tianya genü 天涯歌女) are also accompanied by traditional music, their lyrics are still written in relatively plain and colloquial language (i.e. colloquial words such as da guniang 大姑娘 and xiao meimei 小妹妹).
Flower” (Dinü hua 帝女花), rather than the Western-influenced popular music in old Shanghai.

**War, Ghost and Spy**

A film flyer of the 1956 film adaptation explicitly announced the 1956 adaptation to be “a great sexy dramatic horror film” (xiangyan kongbu qiqing jupian 香豔恐怖奇情巨片). To intensify the horror atmosphere, the embedded ghost story, which is narrated by the male protagonist in the frame story, is dramatized—the 1941 film adaptation also did this. The plot of the embedded story was later echoed in other Hong Kong ghost films such as *A Chinese Ghost Story II* (Qiannü youhun xuji Renjian dao 倩女幽魂續集人間道; 1990) and *A Wicked Ghost* (Shancun laoshi 山村老屍; 1999), in which the male protagonist hugs and kisses the ugly and horrible female protagonist who has been possessed by a ghost and who will only turn to her normal beautiful appearance when he is not frightened by her “ghostly appearance.” However, like the 1941 film adaptation, the 1956 film was limited by the simple special effects technology of time, and this scene of the embedded ghost story is not very successful. The spectator can easily see that it is just a fake story acted by performers on a stage.

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202 It is a film flyer used by the Xianyue Theatre (Xianyue xiyuan 仙樂戲院), housed in the Hong Kong Film Archive. Because the center does not hold the copyright for materials related to the film *Ghost Love* (1956), neither the film flyer nor the two special issues can be reproduced. The call number for this flyer is “HB816x.”

203 Character roles in the embedded ghost story wear dramatized ancient costumes (as those usually used in traditional operas) and the ghostly appearance of the female ghost is not well made up but simply presented
production company’s marketing of the film as a dreamlike and regretful love story between a man and a ghost, it actually differs from other ghost-cum-love films in this mode during that period—for example, *Beyond the Grave* (*Rengui lian* 人鬼戀) directed by Tao Qin 陶秦 in 1954 and *The Enchanting Shadow* (*Qiannü youhun* 倩女幽魂) directed by Li Hanxiang 李翰祥 in 1960, both adapted from *Liaozhai* tales and produced by the Shaw Company. While those ghost-cum-love films try to preach through the love story the message that everything in the universe can live harmoniously together, Tu’s film demonstrates the impossibility of the love between people of different identities. Certainly, Tu’s film embodies Xu’s intention in his novella and, represents Tu’s special adaptation of the original text.

In Tu’s film, the male protagonist is designated as a writer, although both the plot design and the performance of the actor do not embody well his quality as a writer. By contrast, the life of the female protagonist, who is designated as an anti-Japanese spy, is exhibited vividly and incisively. Through a series of powerful flashbacks, the audience is presented with the breathtaking life of a stereotypical spy. As such, the movie, which was promoted as a “ghost love” film, has superimposed on it a layer of the spy film genre. One might even say that it is a spy film with ghost elements rather than a “ghost film.”

by a ghostly mask, which is also ordinary in traditional ghost operas (i.e. “Zhongkui zhuogui” 鍾馗捉鬼 and “Nüdiao” 女吊).

The flyer “HB816x” advertises: “Delusive love, between a man and a ghost. They unite and separate—hard to tell if it is true or illusionary. The good dream is always like the smoke, distracted and regretful.”

Zhao, *Xianggang dianying shi 1897-2006*, 112.
The so-claimed “sexy dramatic horror” is exhibited through the thrilling life of spies rather than the life of a “ghost.”

As mentioned above, the only indoor scene that exhibits the prosperity and extravagance of old Shanghai is the nightclub dance hall scene. Meanwhile, the dance hall is also an important setting used in spy films. For example, in *Orphan Island Paradise* (Gudao tiantang 孤島天堂) directed by Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生 (1906-1968) in 1939 Hong Kong, it is in the dance hall that the revolutionaries capture and hold all the traitors. In Tu’s 1956 adaptation, the situation is reversed. The dance hall is the place where anti-Japanese spies contact each other and share information, and it is also the place where they are attacked by the Japanese. When Japanese surround the dance hall, the band plays “The Song of Death” (Siwang qu 死亡曲) as a warning for the spies. They flee into the forest and plan to leave Shanghai the next morning in the guise of dragon boat racers. However, the Japanese see through their disguise, and the ghost’s lover is killed.

It might be Tu’s personal preference to designate the female protagonist a spy. Ten years earlier, Tu achieved instant fame in film circles with his film *Spy Number One*. In that film, the mysterious and beautiful hostess, the wife of a traitor, turns out to be the spy number one, the leader of an intelligence agency. Her earlier abandonment of her lover—the male protagonist who later became an anti-Japanese spy—and her marriage with a big traitor, were a front she put on to carry out “the great affairs of Party and nation” (dangguo de dashi 党國的大事). At the end of the film, she shoots her traitor husband and dies for the nation (see figure 6). Tu repeated this scenario in his 1954 film *The
Mortal Wind, an adaptation of Xu Xu’s work of the same title. Bai Ping, acted by Li Lihua, is a wanton dancing girl in the Paramount, one of the most famous nightclubs in Shanghai. Yet the male protagonist, who is in a love triangle with her, finally finds her a spy sent by juntong 軍統, a KMT spy agency during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Similar to the fate of the female spy in Spy Number One, Bai dies for the nation and the male protagonist continues her uncompleted task fighting the Japanese.

![Poster from Spy Number One](image)

Figure 6. A poster from Spy Number One, directed by Tu Guangqi in 1946.

The 1956 adaptation of Ghost Love can be viewed both as continuing and reversing this spy genre formula. On the one hand, scenes such as the dancing in the dance hall, the chase by Japanese, fleeing in the guise of dragon boat racers, and the
death of the beloved, continues the stereotype of the breathtaking life of a spy and the heroic sacrifice for the nation. In the female protagonist’s words, her lover “died gloriously for the nation.” On the other hand, the female protagonist does not carry on the unfulfilled work of her lover to fight against the Japanese, as protagonists in other spy films usually do. Rather, she is so depressed at his death that she retreats from the human world. The film reveals a paradox. As a professional spy, the female protagonist should be well aware that spying is a dangerous line of work and death is possible at any moment. Then why does she give up her ideal and belief after her lover dies? In Xu’s novella, the two opposite ends in her former revolutionary career are ambiguous, and the woman is disillusioned not only with the opposition to the revolution (the object of her assassination), but also the revolution itself. 206 But the two opposing ends in the film—invading Japan and invaded China—are quite clear, and the distinction between good and evil is obvious. In the context of a time when national survival was at stake, it is difficult to understand why the female protagonist decides to withdraw from anti-Japanese work. One solution to the paradox is to see the female protagonist’s retreat as a strategy to avoid trouble. The film indicates that “the enemy’s yingquan 鷹犬 (falcons and hounds) are still rampant, and her contact with the male protagonist may bring him danger.” 207 In this

206 In Xu Xu’s novella, the woman confesses: “But since then, we failed time after time. Some of them betrayed, some of them informed, some of them worked as government officials, whereas others were arrested or executed, and I am the only one left in my company! I thoroughly experienced this world, absolutely exhausted my life, and totally recognized the human heart. I want to be a ghost, a ghost… Yet I don’t want to die—death will make me lose everything, but I want to dispassionately witness the change of this human world. So I live in the guise of a ghost here.” See Xu Xu Gui lian, 33.

207 See the introduction of the film in Ghost Love (Hong Kong: Youlian shubao faxing gongsi, 1955), 3. It is a special issue of this film (call number PR1824.2x) housed in the Hong Kong Film Archive.
sense, her identity is not like Xu Xu’s ghost, who is disillusioned with everything in her life; instead, she is a spy waiting for the right moment to resume her mission. The reason she cannot stay with the male protagonist is neither the distinction she makes between the human and the ghost, nor her continuing love for her former lover, but the irresistible influence from her past life as a spy.

Therefore, although the 1956 adaptation of Ghost Love closely follows the storyline in Xu’s novella, Tu’s representation of the identity of the female ghost makes this film (in the name of the ghost) an extension of the spy film. We can absolutely regard it as a sequel to Spy Number One or The Mortal Wind, because it tells a story about how a former spy who lost her lover during the war continues her life.

In fact, the appearance and spirit of the female ghost in Xu’s novella is not well presented to the audience through Li Lihua’s performance in this film. By contrast, the spy role she performs in the flashback is much more impressive. Compared with the female protagonist in the 1941 adaptation acted by Zhou Manhua—an actress known for her easiness and tenderness, and her adeptness in the role of a good wife or kind mother—the female protagonist acted by Li Lihua is brave and intelligent, pretty and dazzling. She is not only a revolutionary, but also a professional spy, a social butterfly who is good at singing and dancing, extroverted and comfortable in social situations (see figure 7). In a titbit about this film, it is said that Tu Guangqi designed several dancing scenes for Li, and specially employed a dance instructor to teach her the newest mambo
Interestingly, mambo is a Latin dance that became popular in Hong Kong in the 1950s. Since the form of dance was developed only in the late 1940s, it could not have been a trend in Shanghai under Japanese occupation.

Figure 7. Left: a poster from Ghost Love (1956); right: Li Lihua dressed in cheongsam.

Another fact that deserves our attention is the role of the war in the film. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 1941 film adaptation made at the end of the Solitary Island period (1937-1941) makes the female protagonist an anti-Qing revolutionary, and the story seemingly has nothing to do with current politics. However, the ghost’s hope that the male protagonist should “fulfill his mission” as a human, and the rooster’s crowing

208 Ibid, 4.
before the sunrise at the end of the film both implicitly point to an anti-Japanese resistance message. In other words, an “apolitical” film allegorizes the contemporary war. By contrast, although the setting of the 1956 film adaptation is Shanghai under Japanese occupation, the female protagonist is designated as an anti-Japanese spy, and although there are scenes displaying the deadly pursuit of Japanese soldiers, the war is merely a generic setting for the film and could be replaced by any other war. In fact, Tu’s choice for Li Lihua as the actress for such a film is intriguing, because twenty-year-old Li once starred with Bando Tsumasaburo 阪東妻三郎 in Remorse in Shanghai (Chunjiang yihen 春江遺恨), a propaganda film produced in 1944 to advocate the friendship and cooperation between China and Japan against Western imperialism. The film was denounced and banned after the war as collaborationist, and Li was interrogated by a Shanghai court in 1947 for her funi 附逆 (collaboration). Li declared that she was not clear about the intention of Remorse in Shanghai when she was making the movie, and she claimed to feel so much regret about it that she wanted to give up her acting career. In the turmoil of the Civil War, her case remained unresolved, and Li went to Hong Kong in 1948, where she experienced a second blossoming in her film career. Tu’s film casts

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210 In the 1960s, Li immigrated to Taiwan and twice won the Best Actress Award at the Golden Horse Awards with Garden of Repose (Gudu chunmeng 故都春夢; 1965) and Storm on Yangzi River
an actress who had acted in a collaborationist movie in the role of an anti-Japanese spy—
this fact seems to illustrate that this film does not seriously treat the background of the
Sino-Japanese War at all.

If we consider the 1956 adaptation of *Ghost Love* in the genealogy of spy films
since the success of *Spy Number One*, we can find that the weakening of the
importance of the Second Sino-Japanese War is a common characteristic. The reason
why this type of films attracts audiences is the tight, exciting and suspenseful plots of the
story, rather than any anti-Japanese resistance messages. The entangled and amorous love
of the protagonists, the feud between countries and the hatred between families, sacrifice
and contribution, loss and possession, ethics and desire, and the complicated spy war full
of cheating, shooting, and fighting, together constitute a huge fascination for the audience.
An advertisement for *Spy Number One* in 1946 announced that “The underground work
is miraculous and the assassination is adventurous. It is breathtaking even when you
mention the name of the spy. They obtain information in spite of danger, and save
companions at the expense of their own lives. It is a hot spy war, the combat between the

(Yangzijiang fengyun 楊子江風雲; 1969). Her brilliant performances in over 120 films in her 38-year
career brought her the titles “Superstar” and “Evergreen Tree of the Cinema” in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

211 Inspired by the commercial success of *Spy Number One*, a swarm of spy films were produced by various
studios during the Civil War period, including *Woman Spy No. 76* (Qishiliu hao nü jiandie 七十六號女間
諜; 1946), *Lust Tide* (Yuhaichao 欲海潮; 1947), *The Pink Bomb* (Fenhong se de zhadan 粉紅色的炸彈;
1947), *The Spiny Rose* (Meigui duoci 玫瑰多刺; 1947), *Patriotic Spirit of the Spy* (Jiandie zhonghun 間諜
忠魂; 1947), *He Looks Like A Shadow* (Shenchu guimo 神出鬼沒; 1948), *The Net 626* (Liu’erliu jiandie
wang 六二六間諜網; 1948), *Agent No.5* (Diwuhao qingbaoyuan 第五號情報員; 1948), *Hot Blood* (Rexue
熱血; 1948), etc. For more information, see the filmography in Cheng and Li, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan
shi*, 2: 464-487.
loyal and the traitor.” This sort of spy film ultimately satisfies the viewing demands of mass audiences and provides them with visual and psychological stimulation.

Interestingly, KMT and CCP critics had totally different takes on these spy films. For the KMT critics, spy films such as *Spy Number One* embody the heroism of the KMT’s intelligence agencies (e.g. juntong 軍統 and zhongtong 中統); for CCP critics, however, those films prettify the reign of the KMT and deviate from the real lives of the common peoples, catering especially to the audience’s desire for novelty and their most vulgar taste. As such, the spy genre is just commercial kitsch. In the PRC writing of the history of Chinese film, these films were usually excluded. However, after the iron curtain of the Cold War descended across the world in the 1950s, the spy film become a popular genre in cinema. While the 007 series swept America and Western Europe, and *Spy Number One* was repeatedly remade in Taiwan, spy films were also being made on the mainland in the Mao era. In those PRC spy films, soldiers and other heroes successfully abort complots of enemy spies from the West or Taiwan. The only

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212 See *Shen bao* [Shanghai news], December 19, 1946, page 12.

213 Admittedly, many spy films are of low quality, yet even *Spy Number One*, a film broke the record of box office in 1946, is ignored and excluded from the genealogy of representative films of that period. Once it is mentioned, it is always used as a negative reference to the film *A Spring River Flows East* (Yijiang chunshui xiang dong liu 一江春水向東流), a film that broke the record of box office in 1947. See Cheng Jihua and Li Shaobai, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 2: 174-180, 280-281.

214 The English word “spy” has two Chinese equivalents in the Mao era: one is *dixia gongzuozhe/dixia dang* 地下工作者/地下党 (undergrounder), a commendatory term that refers to CCP spies; and the other is *tewu* 特務 (enemy spy), a derogatory term that refers to enemy spies such as those from KMT and America, or those from Japan and Wang’s puppet government. Spy films produced on the mainland in the Mao era are generally called *fante pian* 反特片 (anti-spy film), including *The Invisible Battle Line* (Wuxing de zhanxian 無形的戰線; 1949), *Horse Caravans with Ring* (Shanjian lingxiang mabang lai 山間鈴響馬幫; 1949).
difference between the 1940s and the Cold War period is that the contest in the spy film is not between Allies and Axis, but between the socialist and capitalist camps. As Dai Jinhua puts it: “It is a given historical circumstance—the life and death confrontation that comes from partitioning human beings into two camps in the Cold War era—rather than the demands from a general sense for production of movie industries or satisfaction of societal consumer psychology, that makes the specific hot spot in cinematic narrative.”

Hong Kong, a dividing line between the socialist and capitalist camps, between Communist mainland and Nationalist Taiwan, is inevitably influenced by this international atmosphere. Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that the flashbacks about the spy career of the female ghost in the 1956 adaptation reflect not only Tu’s personal preference for a certain film genre, but also embody the ethos of that period when the spy film became a cultural “hot spot.”

In her article “No Spy: Hong Kong Response to the Fever for James Bond,” He Siying 何思穎 discusses the Zhenjiebang 珍姐邦 (Jane Bond) series and Tie guanyin 鐵
觀音（lit. iron Kwan-yin）series in 1960s Hong Kong, two variations of *Tie jingang* 鐵金剛（lit. iron Vajra; James Bond）series, and points out that “because the [British colonial] government required [filmmaking] to avoid politics, the new ‘spy films’ could not copy the ideology of the James Bond series, and essentially became thrilling action films.”

The confrontation in *Zhenjiebang* and *Tie guanyin* series is not between the socialist and capitalist camps, but between good people and evil gangsters; and their selling point is the thrilling life of a beautiful “angel with the iron fists” rather than any ideological spy mission. He Siying further traces this film genre back to Tu Guangqi’s 1946 film *Spy Number One*. However, He ignores the decade between the 1940s and the 1960s, when there was another variation of spy films emerging in Hong Kong—stories set in the Second Sino-Japanese War, such as Tu Guangqi’s *The Mortal Wind* and *Ghost*

216 In Chinese Buddhist culture, *jingang* 金刚 (Vajra) refers to warrior attendants for the Buddha, holding or wielding the vajra, and guanyin 觀音 (Kwan-yin) is a female bodhisattva. Although “James Bond” is usually translated as *zhanshibang* 占士邦, he is called *tie jingang* in Hong Kong cinema, a translation combining phonetic and semantic meanings. 007 films are translated as *Tie jingang* series, such as *Tie jingang yongpo shenmi dao* 鐵金剛勇破神秘島 (Dr. No; 1962), *Tie jingang yongpo jiandie wang* 鐵金剛勇破間諜網 (From Russia, with Love; 1963), *Tie jingang dazhan jinshouzhi* 鐵金剛大戰金手指 (Goldfinger; 1964), *Tie jingang yongzhan mogui dang* 鐵金剛勇戰魔鬼黨 (Thunderball; 1965), *Tie jingang dazhan jinqiangke* 鐵金剛大戰金槍客 (The Man with the Golden Gun; 1974), etc. Therefore, both Jane Bond (female knight-errant) films and Iron Kwan-yin (female agent) films can be viewed as parodies/variations of James Bond series.

217 He Siying 何思穎, “Wu jiandie: Xianggang dianying dui zhan shibang re de huiying” 無間諜——香港電影對占士邦熱的回應 [No spy: Hong Kong response to the fever for James Bond], Huang Ailing 黃愛玲 and Li Peide 李培德, eds., *Lengzhan yu Xianggang dianying* 冷戰與香港電影 [The Cold War and Hong Kong film] (Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Film Archive, 2009), 221-230.

218 The Shaw Brothers Studio produced *Angel with the Iron Fists* (Tie guanyin 鐵觀音) and *The Angel Strikes Again* (Tie guanyin yongpo baozha dang 鐵觀音勇破爆炸黨) in 1967 and 1968, respectively, both starring He Lili 何莉莉. In fact, from the English title to the plot, they are closer to *Charlie’s Angels* series than 007 series.
Love. This setting not only conforms to the “depoliticization” requirement by the British colonial government, but also appeals to both leftist and rightist spectators. For 1950s Hong Kong audiences, most of whom personally experienced WW II, the designation of Japan as the enemy is easier to recognize and protagonists fighting against Japan are easier to identify with. In other words, contextualized at a specific historical moment, audiences share the same identity and face the same enemy again. Yet from another perspective, this enemy/war is, as discussed above, substitutable. It is merely a generic setting for a spy film that tactically avoids any offense to audiences with different political standpoints, leftist/Communist or rightist/Nationalist. In this sense, these anti-Japanese spy films actually are a kind of displacement for spy films of Cold War theme, in addition to the two variations on the James Bond series mentioned in He Siying’s article.

Conclusion

The 1956 adaptation of Ghost Love helps us understand Hong Kong society of the 1950s. From 1945 to 1950, millions of migrants swarmed into Hong Kong to flee the turmoil on the mainland, including capitalists searching for greater profit, intellectuals and filmmakers hoping to rebuild their lives and careers, as well as unwilling refugees driven from the mainland by their opposition to or fear of the new communist regime established in 1949. This tide of immigration greatly changed Hong Kong society, making it undergo a dual process of “Shanghainization” and “localization” in the 1950s. In this process,  

219 The confrontation between the leftists and rightists was prominent in 1950s Hong Kong, which was also embodied in the film industry: Changcheng 長城, Fenghuang 鳳凰, Xinlian 新聯, and Zhonglian 中聯 are relatively leftist companies, while Yonghua 永華, Guoji 國際, and Shaw 邵氏 are rightist ones.
local elements competed with and assimilated Shanghai elements, and finally formed its special hybrid style. In the case of *Ghost Love*, Tu Guangqi keeps the original setting of the story—Shanghai—in the film, yet he fails to represent the characteristics of Shanghai, despite the symbolic scenes in the dance hall. By contrast, the outdoor scenes of dragon boat racing and lion dances are remarkable for reflecting Cantonese folk customs rather than Shanghai public entertainment. The music in the film is also influenced by Cantonese opera. In a word, the tale in Tu’s film is actually a tale of two cities.

Tu’s designation of the identity of the female protagonist is also notable. Whereas the 1941 film adaptation makes her an anti-Qing revolutionary, Tu designates her as an anti-Japanese spy and presents her former life in a series of flashbacks. The actor Zhang Yang acts both roles of the male protagonist (a writer) and the ghost’s former lover (also an anti-Japanese spy who died for the nation). Their similar appearance and the same habit of being left-handed is the reason why the ghost is impressed by and attracted to him. The problem is, when the camera cuts between the present and the past, between the ghost and the writer and the spy couple, spectators are easily lost in the shifting narratives, because two the male role characters are acted by the same person. What’s more, it seems that the spy couple are really the main protagonists in the film, though they only appear in the flashback for a few minutes. And the spy acted by Li Lihua is more impressive than the ghost she acts. In other words, the film might be viewed as more a sequel to Tu’s early spy films, than an adaptation of Xu Xu’s novella.
If we situate the film in the larger context of Hong Kong culture of the 1950s, especially taking into consideration the Cold War, we can fully understand the popularity of the spy film as a genre, and Tu’s preference to superimpose a spy story to Xu’s ghost story. In fact, the 1950s is also the beginning of the flourishing and popularity of “New School” martial arts novels (epitomized by Jin Yong’s 金庸 works). An interesting coincidence can be found in the newspaper Xin wanbao 新晚報 on February 8, 1955. In the upper right-hand corner of the front page, appears the follow announcement:

Starting today “Tianfang yetan” adds two new serials. The first is Mr. Jin Yong’s martial arts novel Shujian enchoulu 書劍恩仇錄 (Book and Sword, Gratitude and Revenge), the second Ms. Bei Jia’s 貝嘉 spy novel Ta si zai di’er ci 她死在第二次 (She Died the Second Time). Both are thrilling works, full of fascinating twists and turns. 220

In this advertisement, martial arts novels and spy novels are like two mirrors that reflect the social circumstances and cultural atmosphere of the 1950s Hong Kong. John Christopher Hamm notices that in newspapers during that decade, “the international struggle of the Cold War era, and the tensions between the Nationalist and Communist governments in particular, dominate the news.” 221 Hong Kong, as a dividing line between socialist and capitalist camps, a relatively neutral area between Communist mainland and Nationalist Taiwan, as well as a city balanced between Chinese identity and a subordinate

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221 Ibid., 54.
colony to the U.K., struggles on a global stage to negotiate with different powers to build its own identity. In those thrilling and fascinating martial arts novels and spy film/novels, entertainments and politics are tactically and deliberately interwoven together.

On the one hand, if we say that Jin Yong’s martial arts novels, set against the historical background of Han Chinese oppression by the threat or reality of non-Han reign, suggests the negotiation of the problems of Hong Kong’s colonial identity, then we can view Tu Guangqi’s spy films set in the Second Sino-Japanese War as a replacement for typical Cold War spy films under “the dual restrictions of the censorship and the market (box office/audience reception)” in 1950s Hong Kong. On the other hand, through these romances and adventures, spectators/readers may get visual and psychological stimulation, a certain comfort and “temporary escape from cruel economic struggles and the struggle for existence.”

222 “The Cold War is a global war, and Hong Kong, a British colony between the mainland and Taiwan, naturally becomes the battle field of ideological confrontations. Interestingly, in our films, the influential Cold War is hardly visible. To sustain the vulnerable peace between opposing factions, the British colonial government strictly censored films. This ironic situation resonated with the nature of the Cold War—thought is one of the most powerful weapons in this unprecedented war. On the other hand, facing the dual restrictions of censorship and the market, filmmakers often tactically express ideological messages in a way that is full of twists and turns.” See the “Abstract” to *The Cold War and Hong Kong Film* on the website of the Hong Kong Film Archive. http://sc.lcsd.gov.hk/gb/www.lcsd.gov.hk/CE/CulturalService/HKFA/b5/4-1.php (accessed August 5, 2010).

Chapter 4: Enchantment and Disenchantment in the Age of Nostalgia: The 1995 Adaptation *Evening Liaison* and “Shanghai Nostalgia”

**Introduction**

Under the cold moonlight, lies a quiet cobbled alley. Shoes walk on it, with every step echoing “click…clack…click…clack…” The camera takes a close-up shot: first her shoes, next her black cheongsam, then her white gloves with arms folding across her chest, and finally her face in the dark shadow.

Her faint voice comes from the night breeze: “Human being, are you smoking Era?”

He is stunned for a moment, not answering her question.

She asks again: “What are you thinking about? I’m asking you.”

He chuckles to himself: “I do feel a little bit weird. The questioner did not address the listener with ‘sir,’ but with ‘human being.’ Could it be said that you are a deity?”

I’m not a deity. Rather,” She pauses for a while, “I’m a ghost.”

He breaks into a smile, and she insists: “I am a ghost.”

A gust of wind suddenly makes the street lamp swing and the light goes out. He lights a match. In the faint light in the gloom, he sees her silvery-white face without smile (see figure 8).
This is the second scene of the film *Evening Liaison* (Renyue huanghun 人約黃昏), starring Liang Jiahui (Tony Leung Ka Fai 梁家輝) and Zhang Jinqiu (Mabel Zhang 張錦秋), directed by Chen Yifei 陳逸飛 (1946-2005). The ghostly character, together with the macabre setting and the gloomy music, seemingly perfectly construct the atmosphere of a horror film about the ghost. However, *Evening Liaison* cannot simply be categorized as a horror film. Horror is neither the director’s intention, nor the commercial selling point of the film, as it was with the 1956 film adaptation, which was explicitly declared to be a “great sexy dramatic horror film” (xiangyan kongbu qiqing jupian 香豔恐怖奇情巨片) on marketing flyers. There are two dimensions worthy of our attention: First, *Evening Liaison* is the third film adaptation of *Ghost Love*, and whereas an adaptation usually “hopes to win an audience by the prestige of its borrowed title or
subject,” this adaptation does not, because Xu Xu had been marginalized in the literary field and academia and his oeuvre buried in oblivion. Different from the two other adaptations, which were shot when Xu Xu was still popular and well known (1941 Shanghai and 1956 Hong Kong), when Chen Yifei decided to adapt Ghost Love in 1994—fourteen years after Xu Xu passed away in Hong Kong—the name of Xu Xu was pretty new and strange for most people on the mainland at that time. In fact, many people got to know Xu Xu only through Chen Yifei’s film and related reports and interviews. It was Chen Yifei and the mass media who made Xu Xu visible after being ignored for half a century. Compared with the 1941 version and 1956 version, Chen not only decoded but also greatly recoded the image of the ghost, and represented Xu’s story in his own way. Evening Liaison is neither a horror film, nor a suspense film in spite of the detective storyline added by Chen. Rather, as the film’s title Renyue huanghun (which literally means “meet after twilight”) suggests, it is a sad love story about enchantment and disenchantment, as well as memory and nostalgia for a past that cannot be gained again.

Andrew, “Adaptation,” Concepts in Film Theory, 98.

Although since the late 1980s, some scholars have paid attention to Xu Xu and a few of Xu’s works have been reprinted, Xu Xu was still a strange name for most people on the mainland. By contrast, since Chen’s film was shot and released, through related reports and interviews, more and more people learned about this forgotten writer. The research articles and books about Xu after 1995 number almost six times more than those before 1995.

Renyue huanghun comes from a couplet “yue shang liushao tou, ren yue huanghun hou” 月上柳梢頭, 人約黃昏後 (“The moon rose to the top of the willow tree, and my love and I met after twilight”) in “Sheng chazi” 生柵子, a piece of Song ci composed by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1003). It tells a sorrowful love story about the poet once meeting his beloved during the Lantern Festival. They met after twilight, when the moon rose to the top of the willow tree. However, this year, while the moon and lanterns
Second, Chen Yifei is best known as a painter and a leading artist in the Chinese art market of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{227} His filmic debut in 1993 was a plotless art film called \textit{Old Dreams of Shanghai} (Haishang jiumeng 上海舊夢). \textit{Evening Liaison} is his first feature film. It was commercially successful at the box office with ¥2.6 million earned in just ten days, and was well received in film circles.\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Evening Liaison} (1995), together with \textit{Old Dreams of Shanghai} (1993) and \textit{Flee to Shanghai} (Taowang Shanghai 逃往上海; 1999), a documentary about European Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai before 1949, are all set in Republican-era Shanghai and form Chen Yifei’s “Shanghai Trilogy.”\textsuperscript{229}

Chen’s nostalgia for old Shanghai is not an isolated phenomenon: “Shanghai nostalgia” remain the same as in the past, the narrator cannot find his beloved, and the sleeves of his spring dress are covered with tears.

\textsuperscript{227} Chen graduated from the Shanghai College of Art in 1965, and went to study in the United States in 1981. He was soon accepted into local arts circles. During his years in the United States, Chen painted elegant American and Chinese musicians as well as the countryside scenery of south Yangtze River. His first one-man exhibition was held at New York’s Hammer Galleries in October 1983. In 1985, one of his pieces was used by the United Nations; and another painting “The Double Bridge” was given to Deng Xiaoping as a gift by Armand Hammer, chairman of the Occidental Petroleum Corporation of the United States. Chen returned to Shanghai in 1990 and began constructing his own visual arts and fashion empire, vowing to bring art, beauty and style to people who grew up in Communist China. In 1991, Chen’s work “Lingering Melodies at Xunyang” was auctioned in Hong Kong at HK$1.37 million (US$162,000), at the time the highest price ever received for a contemporary Chinese painting. The auction gained him an artistic-entrepreneur status. Chen branched out into film circles in 1993, and died in 2005 after a stomach hemorrhage he suffered while working on his last feature film, \textit{Barber}.

\textsuperscript{228} \textit{Evening Liaison} was entered at the Festival de Cannes in May 1995, and garnered the “Silver Camera” in October at the Brothers Manaki International Film Festival in Macedonia. In November of the same year, it got four nominations and won “Best Costume Design” at Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival. In October 1996, it was nominated at the Golden Rooster Film Festival on the mainland, and garnered “Best Cinematography” and “Best Art.” See Yang Changxun 楊長勳, \textit{Shijue rensheng: Chen Yifei zhuan 視覺人生：陳逸飛傳} [Vision life: the biography of Chen Yifei] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2006), 86, 83.

\textsuperscript{229} Chen also made \textit{Shanghai Ark} (Shanghai fangzhou 上海方舟), a TV version documentary of \textit{Flee to Shanghai} in 1999.
was a prominent cultural trend in the 1990s. Old Shanghai, the semi-colonial Shanghai of the Republican period, the world-famous “Paris of the East” and “Paradise for Adventurers” constitutes an irresistible enchantment, and has rekindled new collective memories suppressed by Mao-era representations. As a cultural fashion and mode of historical imagination/reconstruction in post-socialist PRC, “Shanghai nostalgia” is overdetermined, a phenomenon I analyze later. The intertwined historical, social, economic and cultural factors behind this nostalgia also help us to understand Chen’s adaption of Xu’s novella. In addition to the enchantment and disenchantment at the story level, the film itself can also be viewed as an embodiment of this duality: it enchants people with the narration of old Shanghai in the age of nostalgia, on the one hand, and disenchants and brings them back to the reality when the film is over, on the other hand.

A Nostalgic Ghost Story without Ghosts: Ghostly Enchantment and Ghostly Time

As mentioned in the Introduction, compared with the first two adaptations, which follow what Andrew calls “borrowing” mode, Evening Liaison is an “intersection”—a mode film characterized by Chen Yifei’s own art philosophy and aesthetic pursuit. Xu’s story is only the skin of the film, while the kernel/spirit of the film belongs to Chen. How to represent the story to serve his own intentions becomes the key problem of Evening Liaison. As Robert B. Ray argues, “stories depend for their legibility on codes, conventions, connotations, topoi and tropes that similarly migrate from medium to medium—in short, on an intertextuality that includes not only film and literature, but all
the other media as well.‖ As discussed in Chapter 2, whereas a literary text can be filled with metaphysical polemic on concepts such as beauty and horror, the human and the spectral, and its plot can center around just two characters, it is much less likely for a feature film to do the same. It is therefore not surprising that Chen eliminates the abstract polemics and invents many new roles and plots to develop the story.

In Chen’s film, the male protagonist is designated as a journalist, a modern occupation in Shanghai and an occupation that serves to develop new plotlines. After the encounter with the ghost, the journalist is sent the next morning to report on a suicide case downtown, where he hears some rumors that the man who jumped from a building was recently haunted by a female ghost. It is easy for him to connect this case to his own encounter the night before, and it seems that he probably met the same ghost as the suicide. Whereas in the novella, the wandering of the ghost at night indicates the woman’s mental struggle to be a human or a ghost, the action of the ghost in Evening Liaison is reinterpreted as kind of revenge against those who murdered her lover. The unfolding love story between the journalist and the ghost accompanies the process of detection and revelation by the journalist.

Compared with the male protagonist in the novella who is mostly fearless, the journalist in the film seems much more timid. Since he knew that the suicide had met the same ghost as he did the night before, he has been in a daze all day. When he goes back to the newspaper and works in the print workshop, he suddenly sees the phantom of the

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female ghost at one moment, though it turns out to be a typographer. On the same night, the journalist has a nightmare in which he follows the female ghost through a cemetery full of withered leaves. In the novella, the male protagonist tells the ghost a traditional ghost story to prove his courage; in the film, this story is narrated in the form of a Suzhou pinghua 蘇州評話 (storytelling in Suzhou dialect) performed in a teahouse. The journalist is quite scared when the performer impersonates a female ghost by quickly thrusting out her long tongue. However, despite his fear, the journalist insists on having an evening liaison with the mysterious woman, and becomes more and more infatuated with her. The beauty of the female ghost and the horror implied by her identity as ghost intertwine, forming a special enchantment that is irresistible. To render this dual mystical and horrific atmosphere, Evening Liaison both makes use of the suspense of Xu’s original novella, which is full of dramatic twists and turns, and draws from ghost images in various cultural traditions. Whereas the reader’s knowledge is limited by the point of view of the first-person narrator in the novella, the focalizer in the film switches between different roles. The spectator is easily misled by some shots and initially mistakes the film for a horror film about the ghost.

Interestingly, although horror is not the primary intention of Evening Liaison, Chen Yifei does use some typical tactics of horror films (especially ghost films) to create suspense and attract the spectator. In other words, Chen was perfectly aware of the characterization telegraphed by certain images of the ghost “whose meaning had become coded through repeated similar uses in other movies, popular fiction, advertising, and
comic strips and was also revealed by ‘common sense.’” The face in a dark shadow, the gust of wind that makes a light go out, the erratic behavior of a woman, a deserted cemetery, a funeral procession in white, all appear repeatedly in the cinematic genealogy of the ghost—these tropes evoke horror rooted in the cultural memory of the spectator and realize “immediate intelligibility” because they are “signifiers whose connotations are predictable within a culture.”

If we say that there is salient correspondence between the embedded traditional ghost story and the frame story in Xu’s novella, and there is a certain intertextuality between the two stories, then we have to say, in Evening Liaison, intertextuality exists not only in the frame story and the embedded Suzhou pinghua, but also in this film and other Hong Kong ghost films drawn from traditional narratives. The most prominent example is the intertextuality between Evening Liaison and A Chinese Ghost Story (Qiannü youhun 倩女幽魂), a popular Hong Kong ghost film directed by Ching Siu Tung and produced by Tsui Hark in 1987, also a remake of the 1960 film The Enchanting Shadow directed by Li Hanxiang. As discussed in Chapter 1, Xu’s novella repeats the stereotyped story of “a man encountering a female ghost,” and this traditional scenario has been cinematized in the Chinese Ghost Story series (i.e. Li Hanxiang’s and Ching Siu Tung’s films). Furthermore, the intertextuality between Evening Liaison and A Chinese Ghost Story is not only about plot, but also scenes/shots.

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231 Ibid., 40.
232 Ibid., 41.
There are at least two scenes in *Evening Liaison* that do not exist in Xu’s novella, but seem to have been drawn from *A Chinese Ghost Story*. One is the scene when the journalist goes to the woman’s house for the first time. He is stunned when he suddenly sees her face—half under the moonlight, half in the dark shadow. This shot resembles the most classic close-up of the ghost Nie Xiaoqian 聶小倩 in *A Chinese Ghost Story* (see figure 9). The other scene occurs the next morning when the journalist leaves her house. He comes across a funeral procession, with mourners lifting *zhao
cun fan* 招魂幡 (flags to call back the spirit of the dead) and *zhiren* 紙人 (paper servants to be burned for the dead), playing funeral music, and distributing spirit money. Suddenly, he catches sight of the mysterious woman in the procession, though she disappears in the twinkling of an eye. It reminds us of the experience of Ning Caichen 宁采臣, the male protagonist in *A Chinese Ghost Story*, who sees Nie Xiaoqian in a funeral procession when he leaves the Lanruo Temple 蘭若寺 (see figure 10). The intertextuality in these shots with *A Chinese Ghost Story* might lead spectators to assume that the mysterious woman in *Evening Liaison* is, like Nie Xiaoqian, a beautiful ghost with a sorrowful past, dangerous yet enchanting; and that the journalist is a modern Ning Caichen who is enchanted/fascinated/bewitched by a ghost.
Figure 9. Two similar close-ups of the female ghost (left: *Evening Liaison*, right: *A Chinese Ghost Story*).

Figure 10. Two similar scenes of the funeral procession (top: *Evening Liaison*; bottom: *A Chinese Ghost Story*).
Furthermore, the resemblance between Nie Xiaoqian in *A Chinese Ghost Story* and the female protagonist in *Evening Liaison* not only inspires the spectator’s imagination of the ghost and the human-ghost love stories in traditional narratives, but also suggests “a strong notion of spatiotemporal nonsynchronism,” because the relationship between a living man (who lives at present) and the spirit of a dead woman (who lived in the past) can “unsettle the linear time of conventional narrative.”\(^{233}\) In other words, a ghost film has a certain generic potential to indicate the fragmentation of time, because characters in ghost films (as well as those spectators who identify with them) can experience time with the ghost by “repeating (via haunting) events thought to have been finished or laid to rest.”\(^{234}\) In Chen’s film, both the woman and her lover are designated as anarchists in the 1930s Shanghai. One night, after their anarchist community implemented a purge to exclude betrayers, someone shot them in the backs. The woman’s lover died, yet she survived through pretending to be a corpse. Because she is supposed to have died that night, her later presence becomes a ghostly return. Different from the woman in Xu Xu’s novella who has given up everything in the human world and tries to totally forget her past, the woman in Chen’s film is obviously obsessed with finding the murderers and revenging her lover. She is not really a ghost, yet she lives under the shadow of her past, haunts those who shot her and her lover, and forces them to recall the

\(^{233}\) In her article “Spectral Times: The Ghost Film As Historical Allegory,” Bliss Cua Lim raises the concept of the “nostalgic allegory” in ghost films, and discusses nostalgic ghost films like *Rouge* and *Haplos* that posit a disjointed present, provocatively insinuating the nonsynchronism of spatiotemporal aspects of social life. See Bliss Cua Lim “Spectral Times: The Ghost Film As Historical Allegory,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 9.2 (2001): 287-329.

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 300.
past buried in oblivion, as ghosts usually do in traditional revenge stories. Even the innocent journalist is inevitably entangled into and witnesses her haunting past. An interesting detail in *Evening Liaison* is that the journalist tries to clarify the boundary between the ghost and the human (as well as the past and the present) through modern technology. When he secretly returns to the ghost house, he not only puts his watch there as a mark to verify his memory of and existence in the “ghost house” (as Xu’s novella depicts), but also pushes the pendulum of a clock in her house, trying to make it work—a detail added by Chen in *Evening Liaison*. Here, fluid time is viewed as a symbol for existence; time and space verify each other. In this sense, although Chen’s film does not shoot any real ghost story (the embedded ghost story) as the two earlier adaptations did, it does a better job in presenting the image/cultural code of the enchanting and mysterious “ghost” as well as the nostalgic ghostly time typical of a ghost film.

However, the image of the ghost in *Evening Liaison* is not a simple copy of the stereotype portrayed in traditional stories and films like *A Chinese Ghost Story*. For one thing, as discussed in the first chapter, Xu’s novella is a “modern” ghost story that involves modern issues and reflects social and cultural problems. For another, Chen endows the ghost in *Evening Liaison* with some characteristics that are different from those in Xu’s novella, not to mention those in traditional narratives.

The ghost in the novella is mysterious and enchanting, yet she is emotionless and indifferent. She insistently rejects the love from the man and only agrees to maintain a Platonic relationship with him. In other words, she maintains the semblance of being a
ghost from the beginning to the end. The 1941 and 1956 adaptations both copy this characteristic of the ghost. By contrast, the ghost in Evening Liaison finally falls in love with the journalist. They have dates that take them to every corner of Shanghai and make love at the journalist’s home. Although in the end, she vanishes and resumes her revenge, alone and full of regrets, with the help of the journalist, she joined the human world, if only temporarily. While the journalist finds her an enchanting woman, she is also enchanted by him and his love.

There is an interesting hint that foreshadows her unfolding love/desire for him. When their evening liaison is stopped by a sudden rainstorm, she invites him into her house to take shelter. She gives him some dry clothing that she claims belonged her husband. After a close-up of the journalist in the bathroom through the window, the camera pulls back to the woman, leisurely seated in a chair, lighting a cigarette, tilting her head up to better gaze at him. Then the film cuts to the bathroom, where the journalist is taking off his wet clothing and putting on the white silky clothing she has given him. The camera pulls back again to show the woman, silently gazing at him. Undoubtedly, the object of her gaze is his naked body (see figure 11).\textsuperscript{235} The term “gaze” in film studies refers to that of the camera, that of the characters looking at one another, and that of the spectator, induced to voyeuristically identify with a masculinist gaze at woman. In feminist film critic Laura Mulvey’s words, women are made “(passive) raw materials for

\textsuperscript{235} In his 1992 French film L’amant, an adaptation of the autobiographical novel by Marguerite Duras, Liang had some sex scenes. It was advertised that “there is an OUTSTANDING ass shot on top of Tony Leung Ka Fai,” and Liang was recognized as “the Asian man who owns the sexiest ass.” Chen adds this scene and a sex scene in his film might also be a strategy to use Liang’s star effect in the marketing.
the (active) gaze of man.” However, the “gaze/being gazed at” relationship in *Evening Liaison* is reversed. On the one hand, the gaze at the journalist’s body confirms her desire as a woman. While the ghost in the novella is sexless, and the beautiful ghost in traditional narratives usually becomes the object of masculinist desire and is perceived by voyeuristic men (e.g. naked Nie Xiaoqian in *A Chinese Ghost Story*, see figure 11), the ghost in *Evening Liaison* is a desiring subject. She is enchanted by him (mentally and physically) just as he is enchanted by her. On the other hand, as Laura Mulvey argues, visual pleasure in the cinema reproduces a structure of male looking and female “to-be-looked-at-ness,” a binary structure that mirrors the asymmetrical gender power relations operative in the real social world. The switch of the subject/object of the gaze in the film indicates a change of power; the female ghost, rather than the journalist, is the decider of their relationship. Their “honeymoon” is very short. When she accidently discovers that the salesman in the tobacconist is one of the murderers, it seems that she is disenchanted with her mission to seek revenge for her former lover. For her, love is a burden she was once enchanted by, yet now she has been disenchanted from it and goes on her life as a lonely ghost.

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238 In fact, the female ghost’s desire to have the gender power is also embodied in her cross-dressing. She not only shuttles between the human world and the ghost world, but also between male and female identities. She not only announces to the journalist that “I’m my own husband,” but also gains love from another woman (the nurse), when she gives up her identity as a woman and dresses as a man.
The film ends with the first-person narration of the journalist. Although he clearly knows that he will never meet her again, he cannot help waiting for her at the tobacconist and at her old house, with a forlorn hope to relive his first evening liaison with her. In other words, he is rationally disenchanted from this hopeless love, yet emotionally still enchanted by her and this lost love. In the last scene of the film, the journalist finds the tobacconist open again. In a trance state, he hears the woman’s voice: “Is Era sold here?” He turns back with a pleasant surprise, and the last shot is of his smiling face in the
golden sunshine at dusk. The audience is left with suspense: has she really come back? or is it only an illusion caused by his yearning? can they finally reunite? or will he only bask in nostalgia forever? Anyway, it seems that for the journalist, the only material evidence of this memory is the Egyptian cigarette Era. Like the ending of A Chinese Ghost Story—where the scholar is left with but a picture—the journalist only has this cigarette brand to remember the ghost by.

In her article “Imagined Nostalgia,” Dai Jinhua cites a short essay in the journal *Hua cheng 花城* by Xiao Yan 小彥, entitled “The Right to Nostalgia”: “Nostalgia is not only a kind of remembrance, but a kind of right. We all have a longing for the past—lingering over some mundane objects because these mundane objects have become the memorial to the trajectory of one’s own life, allowing us, without a doubt, to construct a human archive.” In this sense, the story presented in *Evening Liaison* can be viewed as a personal “human archive” of the journalist, who tries to preserve his memorial to the trajectory of his own life with a certain “mundane object”—the cigarette Era. As the first line in *Evening Liaison* suggests “it happened many years ago,” the whole story is actually set in the memory of the journalist. What spectators view is no more than flashbacks that present the remembrance of a nostalgic man.

However, as Dai further points out in her article, the idea of constructing a human archive and of the right to nostalgia also highlight the fact that “within a social discourse,

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seemingly fraught with fragmentation, that Chinese cities of the 1990s unassumingly mobilize the ambience of nostalgia.“ Evening Liaison is not only a nostalgic ghost story at the textual level, but also an embodiment of “Shanghai nostalgia” at the level of social context.

Haunted by Old Shanghai: the Affinity between Evening Liaison and Chen Yifei’s Late Paintings

The setting of Xu Xu’s novella is ambiguous; the reader is never explicitly told when and where the story takes place. We can roughly deduce from the “it was ten years ago” phrase at the beginning of the story and the date it was written that the story is set in 1927. We can also conclude that the setting must be Shanghai, because the narrator mentions places such as Nanjing Road, Avenue Joffre, Xietu Road, and Longhua, though there is little description of those places. They are merely settings for the story. As analyzed in Chapter 1, Nanjing Road and Avenue Joffre suggest an urban space since we know there were shops, tobacconists, cafés and other modern business there; and Xietu Road and Longhua indicate a suburban space and may also remind us of some historical events. But that is all. For a reader who has never been to Shanghai and has no background knowledge about it, it is impossible to imagine from the story what Shanghai looks like. In other words, the setting in Xu’s novella is general and abstract, and the story has no obvious Shanghainese characteristics. By replacing the place names, we could easily reset the story in another metropolis—say, Hong Kong (actually Xu rewrote Ghost Love

240 Ibid.
as part of his *Inside the Garden*, in which a similar story happens in Hong Kong, as discussed in Chapter 1; and Tu Guangqi’s film adaptation of *Ghost Love* easily resets the story in a “Hong Kongized” Shanghai, as discussed in Chapter 3) or Paris (like the *Gypsy’s Enticement*, in which Xu’s cosmopolitanism is sufficiently expressed, is set).\(^{241}\)

By contrast, Chen’s film explicitly sets the time and place of this story at the very beginning of the film. It clearly tells the spectator that it is a story about the past (1932), about Shanghai (See figure 12). The 1956 film adaptation of *Ghost Love* directed by Tu Guangqi takes the dance hall, which can be shot in any studio, as a symbolic setting for Shanghai, but working in Hong Kong, Tu could not present authentic outdoor scenes of Shanghai. Obviously, what Tu lacks is what Chen is good at: along with the plot development, the spectator enjoys a visual banquet of old Shanghai. From the cobbled alley under the cold moonlight to the wooden attic in the golden sunshine at dusk, from a bustling downtown full of people, shops, cars, trolleys and rickshaws to a quiet path with beautiful phoenix trees in the French Concession, from the Xujiahui Catholic Church to the *Waibaidu qiao* 外白渡橋 (Garden Bridge) and the alley *Daxing fang* 大興坊, from the extravagant ballroom in *Heping fandian* 和平飯店 (Peace Hotel, also known to westerners as Cathay Hotel) to the simple wonton kiosk at the street corner, from the newspaper office where complaint and rumors spread to the printing workshop where old-style printing machines work day and night, from the public bath where people enjoy massage and pedicure to the living room of ordinary people where women are playing

\(^{241}\) Cosmopolitanism is one of Xu’s characteristics in his writing. For more analysis about it, see Frederik Hermann Green’s dissertation.
mahjong, Chen gradually shows the spectator a series of scrolling pictures of society in 1930s Shanghai, a fluid and vivid portrayal of the everyday life of common people at that time. Every scene in the film is like an oil painting with perfect color, perspective, and composition. In fact, Chen does draw every scene for the cast and crew before shooting.242

Figure 12. The first scene of Evening Liaison: Customs House (the church-like building with clock tower at center) on Shanghai Bund.

Compared with the story Chen presents in the film, the form through which the story is expressed is more successful and seductive. In fact, two thirds through the film,

when the main plot of Xu’s novella has been exhausted and Chen adds his own plots to complete it, the film narration develops problems. For example, when the journalist and the ghost become lovers, the ghost disappears the morning after they make love. The journalist finally finds her in the tobacconist, with a gun pointing at the salesman. The salesman shouts to her that her lover was not innocent, because he cruelly killed the salesman’s brother—the so-called traitor in their community—and his family, including his little niece. She is stunned by the truth, and finally throws the gun on the floor. After she leaves, the salesman picks up her gun and commits suicide. From then, the journalist never meets her again. There is no reason given for this anticlimax, and it is unclear why the ghost accepts the journalist’s love for a while and then suddenly abandons him after they make love. Does the carnal union make her recall her former lover and the mission of revenge again, or has she decided to leave him at the beginning of their “honeymoon,” and the sex is the last gift/memory she leaves for him?

In addition, in some respects, there are many scenes in the film that do not really contribute to the plot, such as the public bath scene and the two-minute-shot of Xujiahui Catholic Church from both high and low-angles. As Zhang Zhaoqian criticizes, “except the brothel on Sima Road, almost all the typical things of old Shanghai appear on screen. However, the effect is motley—it displays things for the display and expresses things for the expression, becoming a superficial assorted dish.”

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Zhang’s comment is poignant; it suggests that the atmosphere of old Shanghai usurps the central role of the story itself in *Evening Liaison*. Even Chen admits this fact. For him, whether it is a painting or a film, the most important thing is the atmosphere. Atmosphere is also the reason he selected Xu’s *Ghost Love* to adapt for his first feature film. This aesthetic preference is clearly embodied in the Chinese title *Renyue huanghun*. Chen once explained why he re-titled the film to Ge Yuan, Xu’s daughter—he was concerned that the title *Ghost Love* might make the spectator misunderstand the film as a horror film, while his work is a literary film with nostalgia. The term *renyue huanghun* comes from a Song *ci* written by Ouyang Xiu, telling a story similar to that in *Ghost Love*—a sweet liaison in the past and sorrowful memory in the present. Compared with the original title of the novella (as well as that of the two other film adaptations), the connotation and atmosphere of *renyue huanghun* is more graceful and nostalgic. The term relates to the dusk, the moon, the willow tree, and the lonely and regretful narrator. It resonates with what Chen wants to express in *Evening Liaison*: a certain lifestyle and aesthetics in old Shanghai, and the atmosphere of loneliness, desolation, and mystery of the past. Compared with this nostalgia, the storyline about the love between a human and a ghost is of secondary importance.

In a sense, *Evening Liaison* is more like an updated version of Chen’s film debut *Old Dreams of Shanghai*, a plotless art film. In *Old Dreams of Shanghai*, there are two characters, one is a woman from old Shanghai, the other is a modern painter acted by

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244 Chen Yifei, “Yifei zishu,” 62.

245 Ge Yuan, “Bei banshang yinping de Xu Xu xiaoshu.”
Chen Yifei himself. The film follows the beautiful woman, who wanders every corner of Shanghai and haunts the dreams of the modern artist. However, no matter how hard the artist tries, he always fails to meet the woman and can only possess her in dreams. Obviously, there is a certain analogy between the journalist and the modern artist, the female ghost and the nameless woman. It seems that not only the male protagonist, but also the director Chen (as the artist he acts in *Old Dreams of Shanghai*) is equally enchanted by the female protagonist as well as the lost beautiful past she represents. This nostalgia is also notoriously embodied in Chen’s paintings of Republican era women lounging about in traditional dress. In other words, there is a certain affinity between Chen’s films and paintings in terms of their nostalgia.

As one of the leading artists at the state-financed Shanghai Institute of Painting, Chen was a favorite artist of CCP leaders in the 1970s and 80s. He used to paint large-scale revolutionary canvases, such as *Eulogy of the Red Flag* 紅旗頌, *Eulogy of the Yellow River* 黃河頌 and *Seizing of the Presidential Palace* 佔領總統府 (see figure 13). In those paintings, revolution and heroism are ardently eulogized, through a mixture of realistic painting skills and romantic revolutionary passion. Protagonists in those paintings are always masculine soldiers armed with weapons, and their predominant color is usually grey-white or grey-green, just like the grey uniform of the Mao era. The only exception is the red flag, a symbol of victory and the blood of martyrs in the classic revolutionary discourse—especially when it forms a sharp contrast with the dusty national flag of the KMT government in *Seizing of the Presidential Palace*. This sort of
painting not only presents the heroism of the CCP’s army, but also reminds spectators of the contribution and sacrifice that the CCP and its army made to the nation and people, and legitimatizes the current socialist regime on the mainland.

Figure 13. Chen Yifei’s early paintings. Left: *Eulogy of the Red Flag* (I); top right: *Eulogy of the Yellow River*; bottom right: *Seizing of the Presidential Palace* (co-painted with Wei Jingshan).

However, since the 1990s, Chen’s artistic attention has turned to women dressed in traditional dresses and the leisurely or extravagant life of Shanghai citizens during the Republican era. Rather than masculine men in the battle field, his protagonists are

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246 Women in the Republican era are only one of the favorite themes in Chen’s paintings since the 1990s. Chen also has paintings of countryside scenery of south Yangtze River and Tibetan villagers.
feminine women who stay at home or linger in a dance hall. Those jiangnan shinü 江南仕女 (classical women of south Yangtze River), beautiful and elegant, are leisurely sitting or standing in an indolent atmosphere. They might be wives and concubines sharing rumors and whispers, courtesans playing music, or misses and maidservants praying under the moon. They are insignificant women on the margins of the grand narrative of history, yet representing the refined, cultivated and cozy past, a lifestyle that is free of fire (revolution) and blood (heroism/sacrifice), and an aesthetics that has been suppressed and lost in the revolutionary discourse in the Mao era (see figure 14).

Figure 14. Chen Yifei, Jiangnan shinü series. Top left: Xunyang yiyn; top right: Duomeng shijie; bottom left: Liren xing; bottom right: Xixiang daiyue.
In an interview by *Time* magazine, Chen admits that when he returned to China from America, he found that “there were one billion people living without any real sense of lifestyle,” and he began to have a dream—“to bring aesthetics to Chinese society.” This aesthetics is not only embodied in the quiet life of those classical *jiangnan shinü*, but also in the modern life of wanton social butterflies and common citizens in old Shanghai. We can easily find similarities between Chen’s paintings and scenes in *Evening Liaison*. For example, when the journalist wakes up from a nightmare and hastily goes for the first evening liaison, he runs into the landlady at the door, a typical Shanghai *nongtang* (alley) woman. She scorns him for his insanity, and the camera follows her into her living room, where her companions are waiting around a mahjong table. Through the door left ajar comes the sound of the shuffling of mahjong tiles and gossip in Shanghai dialect. This scene is echoed in Chen’s painting titled *Shanghai jiiumeng zhi huangjin suiyue* (Golden era in the old dream of Shanghai), in which four women dressed in cheongsam are sitting around a table, playing mahjong, and a man is sitting next to one of them, seemingly showing her how to play it (see figure 15). As its title suggests, the past represented by this kind of lifestyle is the heyday of Shanghai; and it also coincides with the temporal setting of *Evening Liaison*—1932, the middle of the so-


248 As a typical portrait of everyday life of Shanghai citizens, this scene is also echoed in Ang Lee’s *Lust, Caution* (*Se jie* 色戒; 2007), an adaption of Eileen Chang’s pseudonymous work.
called “huangjin shinian” 黃金十年 (Golden Decade: 1927-1937) in Republican history.²⁴⁹

Figure 15. Chen Yifei, *Shanghai jiumeng zhi huangjin suiyue* (Golden Era in the Old Dream of Shanghai)

In another scene at the dance hall in the Peace Hotel, when the journalist loses the woman’s whereabouts, he tries to drown his sorrows in this extravagant place. In a high-

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angle shot, we see numerous men and women happily dancing to wanton music, a group of beautiful dancers performing Western-style step dance on the stage, and an alluring singer singing “Rose Rose, I Love You.” Compared with the dance hall scene in the 1956 adaptation, Chen’s film is more impressive and shocking both in terms of the large number of actors and the strong visual and aural stimulation. The nostalgia for the modern extravagant past of old Shanghai is equally represented in Chen’s “Shanghai Bund” painting series, in which musicians are playing Western-style musical instruments (i.e. saxophone and violin), and elegant and enchanting ladies are dancing or meditating (see figure 16). In fact, Zhang Jinqiu, the actress performing the role of the ghost in Evening Liaison, is just like a beauty walking out from one of Chen’s paintings about the Shanghai Bund: tall and slender, graceful yet impassive, with exquisite short curly hair and dressed in a formfitting cheongsam. Different from the two other film adaptations, which cast popular stars in the role of the female protagonist, Zhang Jinqiu was a model before making Evening Liaison and had no filmic experience. Yet Chen was deeply impressed by her appearance (similar to those women in his paintings) and her pose when smoking (resembling his impression of the quality of the ghost in Xu Xu’s novella), so he invited her to perform the role of the ghost in his film.²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Yang, Shijue rensheng, 87.
Besides scenes and characters, there is also an affinity between Chen’s paintings and *Evening Liaison* in terms of color. Different from the predominant color in his early works in the Mao and early post-Mao era, Chen uses various colors on a black background to display the elegant life and beautiful appearance of women in the Republican period. Pale-yellow and dull-red, both warm-toned colors, are the two most frequently used colors. *Evening Liaison* shares the same preference to color. Except for scenes that are shot under a blue light to indicate moonlight, most scenes are shot under the soft sunshine at dawn or dusk, or the golden light of pendant lamp in a dance hall, or the dim light of indoor candles or oil lamps. As such, every scene (through soft diffuser) is more like a faded antique picture rather than a newly-taken photo (see figure 17).
If we say that Chen’s early paintings present the grand narrative of revolutionary ideology in the Mao era, then his late paintings and films in the post-Mao era seemingly suggest an alternative narrative of the past, and are concerned more with the individual and fate than the brutality of history or shifting of political power. On the one hand, protagonists in Chen’s film and late paintings are not determined and fearless revolutionaries devoted to the nation and people. Rather, they are sentimental even selfish common people drifting through historical upheavals. On the other hand, compared with the uniform and humdrum lifestyle in the Mao era, they enjoy freer and more colorful modern lives.

**Shanghai Nostalgia, Evocation, and Collective Memories**

*Evening Liaison* is neither the first nor the only film haunted by old Shanghai in the 1990s. The choice of the mode of adaptation depends on the aesthetic system of the
cinema in a particular era and on that era’s cultural needs and pressures. “Shanghai Nostalgia” reflected in *Evening Liaison* is a prominent cultural trend initiated in Hong Kong and Taiwan and flourishing in film circles in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{251}

The cinematic genealogy of “Shanghai Nostalgia” starts with Yan Hao’s (Yim Ho 嚴浩) film *Red Dust* (Gungun hongchen 滾滾紅塵) in 1990. *Red Dust* is a film based on the real-life love story between Hu Lancheng 胡兰成 and Eileen Chang. In 1991, Ou Dingping (Tony Au 區丁平) directed *Au revoir, Mon Amour* (Heri jun zai lai 何日君再来), which tells the story of a love triangle in wartime Shanghai. Stanley Kwan 關錦鵬 followed with *Center Stage* (Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉) in 1992 and *Red Rose White Rose* (Hong meigui yu bai meigui 紅玫瑰與白玫瑰) in 1994, the former a biographical film about a famous Shanghai actress in the period of silent film, the latter an adaptation of Eileen Chang’s novella of the same title. The 1995 film *The Phantom Lover* (Yeban gesheng 夜半歌聲) directed by Yu Rentai (Ronnie Yu 于仁泰) is a remake of the 1937 film *Song at Midnight*. And Ann Hui’s 許鞍華 *Eighteen Springs* (Bansheng yuan 半生緣) in 1996 is a film adaptation of another work of fiction by Eileen Chang. Also, there are two Kung-fu films set in old Shanghai: one is Pan Wenjie’s (Poon Man-kit 潘文傑) *Shanghai Grand* (Xin Shanghai tan 新上海灘) in 1996, and the other is Yuan Kui’s (Corey Yuen 元奎) *Hero* (Ma Yongzhen 馬永貞) in 1997, both remakes of old gangster

\textsuperscript{251} This nostalgia swept cities on the mainland with the “fever of Eileen Chang” and the “fad of petty bourgeoisie” (xiaozire 小資熱) in the 1990s.
films/ TV series. This nostalgia culminated in the film *In the Mood for Love* (Huayang nianhua 花樣年華), directed by Wong Kar-wai 王家衛 at the turn of the century.\footnote{252}

Although the setting of Wang’s film is 1962 Hong Kong, Shanghai is an invisible presence. In the protagonists who come from Shanghai and speak Shanghai dialect, the beautiful woman dressed in cheongsam, the narrow living space, and the apartment where women play mahjong and share gossip, Wong perfectly combines the atmosphere of 1930s Shanghai with the setting of 1960s Hong Kong.

PRC directors also joined in this fad for “Shanghai Nostalgia.” Besides Chen Yifei’s “Shanghai Trilogy,” Huang Shuqin 黃蜀芹 directed *A Soul Haunted by Painting* (Hua hun 畫魂) in 1993, a film about the legendary female artist Pan Yuliang 潘玉良; two famous directors of the Fifth Generation—Zhang Yimou 張藝謀 and Chen Kaige 陳凱歌—also made *Shanghai Triad* (Yao a yao, yao dao waipo qiao 搖啊搖，搖到外婆橋) in 1995 and *Temptress Moon* (Fengyue 風月) in 1996, respectively. Ye Daying 葉大鷹 directed *A Time to Remember* (Hongse lianren 紅色戀人) in 1998; it tells a story about love and revolution. All of a sudden, old Shanghai, or we can say, the semi-colonial Shanghai of the Republican period, the world-famous “Paris of the East” and “Paradise for Adventurers,” is reborn in numerous cinematic representations. As the title of Ye Daying’s film suggests, it is “a time to remember”; and Shanghai at that time, is also a city to remember, to recall.

\footnote{252 The film took 15 months to shoot, and was released in Hong Kong on September 29, 2000.}
This nostalgia is not only the need of Shanghai “to seek to reconnect its own past while striving to regain its place in the national and transnational markets of the 1990s,” or the means of the local people to critique their present and to serve as a prologue for the future; rather, it is a trend prevalent from Hong Kong, to Taiwan, to mainland and also part of a global fin-de- siècle wave of nostalgia.

Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase view nostalgia as a characteristic of modernity, and highlight three key requirements under which nostalgia develops: (1) a view of time and history as linear and with an undetermined future; (2) a sense that the present is deficient, for societies and cultures as wholes or for particular groups or indeed individuals within a society; and the undesirable state of the present is compensated by a turn toward the past; and (3) objects, buildings, and images from the past should be available in order to be appropriated nostalgically. These three conditions are all satisfied in “Shanghai Nostalgia.”

As one of the earliest treaty ports in China, “by 1930 Shanghai had become a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world.” On the one hand, it is the city of sin and desire, of wanton debauchery and rampant imperialism marked by foreign extraterritoriality, the city where various powers wrestled against and negotiated

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with each other. On the other hand, it is also the economic and cultural center of China at that time, providing a certain successful modernization model for other cities, as well as numerous opportunities for adventurers and entrepreneurs. As David Strand comments, hardly any twentieth century “Chinese city with progressive or modern aspirations or institutions could ever really escape the influence of Shanghai.”

However, after thirty years of a centrally planned economy and Mao’s class-struggle-first policy, by the 1980s Shanghai had become like an elderly woman who was well past her prime, when she was a beautiful woman in bloom.

The turning point came with the market reforms after Deng Xiaoping’s inspection tour to the south in 1992. Since Deng, known as the “chief architect” for China’s reform gave a series of important talks in his tour, the economy had become the most important dimension in Chinese society. Compared with Shenzhen and Guangzhou, which began their development in the 1980s, it was not until the 1990s, with special support from the central government, that Shanghai really began its reform, resulting in rapid growth of the city’s economy and infrastructure. As Dai Jinhua points out, “the cultural emergence of Jiangnan and Shanghai is undoubtedly related to the boom in Shanghai’s economy


257 This is Bai Xianyong’s 白先勇 metaphor. Quoted in the Chinese Preface to the Chinese edition of Leo Ou-fan Lee’s Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of A New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2001), 4.
during the 1980s and 1990s, and to the prosperous growth in the economy of the Yangzi delta.”  

Also, “Shanghai Nostalgia” resonates with the new ideology of the market economy in post-Mao era. In his article on changing exhibitionary practices and historical narratives in PRC history museums, Kirk Denton points out: “by glorying nostalgically in the commercial and cultural life of Republican Shanghai,” the new narrative in post-Mao era “establishes a historical foundation for the ideology of the present market economy.” Old Shanghai of the Republican period becomes a certain reference for today’s Shanghai. The prosperity and glory Shanghai used to have is what it wants to regain at present and in the future. Follow this ideology, miniature mansions in the Shanghai Municipal History Museum that used to display class privilege and oppression, now become promising “rewards for those who work hard in the new economy.”

Historical sites such as Western-style, colonial buildings on the Bund are no longer a source of national humiliation, but evidences of cosmopolitanism and typical vestiges of old Shanghai in the eyes of nostalgic visitors. Also, China’s attempt to join the WTO in the 1990s further made “to link up with the global market” (yu guoji jiegui 與國際接軌) become a politically correct direction. What the new state ideology promotes is an old Shanghai dream for those adventurers: You may be nobody at present, but as long as you

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260 Ibid.
work hard, you may become somebody and gain rewards someday. Similar to those important survival experience told by fabled figures in old Shanghai,261 in the logic of new ideology, commerce is legitimate and hard work is rewardable, and they will bring individuals bright and affluent futures as well as economically flourishing society.

In addition, “Shanghai Nostalgia” reflects China’s attempt to reconstruct cultural identity in the age of globalization and modernization. The reconnection to the modernized past intentionally ignores the thirty years between the end of the Republic and the post-Mao reforms, which actually indicates a national cultural semiotics of biding “farewell to revolution.”262 In other words, it is a time to rethink the role of class struggle and revolution, core concepts of Marxism/Communism, when people are obviously wearying of conventional revolutionary discourses.263 This new discourse was even

261 As some famous lines indicate in Shanghai Bund, a popular Hong Kong TV series about old Shanghai: “It is the rule in Shanghai: rise and fall, has nothing in the past, yet has everything at present.” “If you want to live a good life in Shanghai, remember: never have grudge against money.” “Running business in Shanghai, definitely will earn a great fortune” Quoted in “Shanghai jing” 上海經 (Shanghai experience), see Wang Haiwei, Jie lai de shijian, 57.


263 In addition to market reforms, the failure of Tian’anmen Square protests of 1989 is, in some scholars’ views, also responsible for the discourse of “farewell to revolution” in the 1990s. If we say that the 1980s is an idealistic era when spiritual pursuit was deified and sacrifice glorified—in Liu Xiaofeng’s 劉小楓 words, “this generation can fully understand the significance of Jesus on the cross, and they believe that love should be realized through suffering and sacrifice in this world” (See Liu, “The Fear and Love of Our Generation”)—then we have to say that the 1990s is a pragmatic/utilitarian decade when people were generally disillusioned with lofty things, such as spiritual belief, heroism, and sacrifice. Revolution was out of date, whereas economics became of primary importance. In his book discussing the contemporary Chinese poetry scene, Maghiel van Crevel uses “mind, mayhem and money” to characterize pre-1989, 1989 and post-1989 periods respectively. See Maghiel van Crevel, Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).
overtly spoken out by some famous intellectuals such as Li Zehou 李澤厚 (1930- ) and Liu Zaifu 劉再復 (1941- ) through their book of the same title. In Liu’s words, “the epic era symbolized by the hero and passion will be substituted by the essayistic era symbolized by the order of quotidian life.”

Therefore, different from 1930s leftist films in Shanghai, which paid great attention to the cruel social reality and struggles of the downtrodden, films about old Shanghai in the 1990s are more enchanted by and indulge in modern urban life (wanton or graceful), entangled love stories, or exciting and legendary adventures of Shanghai gangs. In fact, “farewell to revolution” and “Shanghai nostalgia” can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. While the former marks cultural “disenchantment” with the socialist utopian ideology and classic revolutionary discourse of the Mao era, the latter rekindles collective memories about Shanghai, about the past.

Old Shanghai is not only a city that “possesses the history of revolution,” but also a city that represents “the history before revolution” when China (represented by the single cosmopolis Shanghai) belonged to the modernized world and was part of the picture of globalization.

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264 Liu Zaifu, “The Preface to the Fifth Edition,” Li Zehou 李澤厚 and Liu Zaifu 劉再復, Gaobie geming: huiwang ershi shiji zhongguo 告別革命: 回望二十世紀中國 [Farewell to revolution: looking back on twentieth-century China] (5th ed. Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi, 2004), 2. The original edition was published in Hong Kong in 1995, the same year when Evening Liaison was produced. The book initiated heated discussions both on the mainland and Hong Kong. For the CCP government, the interesting paradox lies in the fact that in terms of discourse it did not favor Farewell to Revolution, while they actually implemented policies that embodied the idea of “farewell to revolution” in the market reforms. Similarly, when the government claimed to explore a certain “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” it actually promoted a sort of “capitalism with Chinese characteristics.” See Yasheng Huang, Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

from the horizon of history, people gain confidence to reconstruct their present identity in
the world—by skipping over the thirty years between 1949 and 1979, “modernization is
no longer the miracle of the 1979 reform of an old China in decline but an always integral
part of the history of China,”266 and Chinese people are not left behind by the world. In
other words, Chinese were, are, and will always be part of modernization and
globalization. As such, nostalgia links China to the world, individuals to society, and the
“absent” past to the “present” reality, and provides Chinese a certain model of a
modernized cosmopolitan life.267 This interpretation of the past actually resonates with
the national ideology in the age of market reforms.

However, the collective memory contributing to this cultural identity is something
processed. As Maurice Halbwachs argues, “society from time to time obligates people
not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up,
to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our
memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not process.”268 Similarly, in
the nostalgic mood, people’s collective memory about Shanghai during the Republican
period has also been polished and even distorted.

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266 Ibid., 160.

267 In fact, the Shanghai nostalgia in Hong Kong films is also related to their cultural identity. For one thing, it is the continuity of what Leo Ou-fan Lee calls “a tale of two cities” I have discussed in Chapter 3; and for another, it also reflects a certain collective anxieties over the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, a fear that the handover from Britain to Mainland China may lead to the disappearance of Hong Kong’s identity, as what Shanghai has experienced in the Mao era.

In the case of *Evening Liaison*, Chen presents Xu Xu’s idea that the experience/memory of the individual is the only true measure of the real, through the personal nostalgic memory of the ghost and the journalist. At the same time, however, Chen pays more attention to creating an ambience that meshes with people’s collective memory about the Republican era. In addition to typical scenes of the urban landscape and the display of secular life in old Shanghai, the clothes of the female protagonist also stand out. In the scene when the man meets the woman for the first time, Zhang Jinqiu in *Evening Liaison* is dressed in a formfitting black cheongsam with thigh-high slits, whereas Zhou Manhua in the 1941 adaptation is dressed in a loose and conservative black robe that almost wraps her from head to feet. This sharp contrast suggests that the cheongsam is not only a costume for the female protagonist, but also a symbol for the elegant and alluring lifestyle in old Shanghai, a signified to the signifier “nostalgia.” No one really cares whether women during the Republican period actually wore this type of cheongsam. This symbolized nostalgia later culminates in the Hong Kong film *In the Mood for Love*, through the display of Maggie Cheung’s twenty plus beautiful cheongasams.

Chen also composes a complete pre-story for the ghost that mingle the collective memory about progressive May Fourth females and the nostalgic memory of the Republican era: an unhappy childhood in a big family (as a daughter born by a concubine), an unfortunate arranged marriage (with a husband who was addicted to opium), a determined break with the past (in the form of leaving home after reading works such as *Nora*), an independent new life (as a teacher of primary school students,
the hope of the nation) and a new lover (who not only shares her interest in education but also her idealism—anarchism). The ghost in Xu’s novella is mysterious, because we do not know her past; by contrast, the ghost in Chen’s film is accessible, because her life is an embodiment of a collective memory of the past. This May Fourth female collective memory seems at odds with the nostalgic memory of the Republican era, because it depicts the oppression and revolution that belong to the grand narrative of the Mao era. However, this plot actually is more like a motley collage of various cultural icons interwoven with nostalgic memory, rather than a touching socialist realistic story that can inspire people’s fighting spirit against the old society. The discrimination and humiliation the woman suffered is not only ascribed to her identity as a girl in a patriarchal society, but also to her identity as a child born by a concubine in a polygamous family; and this plot also implicitly implies the theme of jealousy and competition between wives and concubines in big traditional families (that has been incisively presented by Su Tong’s 蘇童 Wives and Concubines and Zhang Yimou’s adaptation Raise the Red Lantern.) The scene of the woman’s ex-husband’s smoking opium and her numb face in a hazy, sunless house, not only reflects the inhumanity of an arranged marriage, but also depicts the decadency and desolation of a dying upper-class family, which reminds us of the gloomy mood in Eileen Chang’s “The Golden Cangue” 金鎖記, especially the desperate scene when Tong Shifang 童世舫 is greatly shocked by the news that Chang’an smokes opium, and Chang’an 長安 quietly comes downstairs—“her black embroidered shoes and white silk stockings pausing on the staircase yellowed with sunlight. After a while, she was
again going up. Step by step, going up to the place where no light was visible.”

Furthermore, Chen’s designation of the identity of the woman and her lover as anarchists also tactically disarms the typical revolutionary discourse and becomes a presentation of “farewell to revolution.” Despite the hidden historical paradox that anarchism ebbed in China in the late 1920s, and was largely absent from 1930s Shanghai,\(^{270}\) the identity of an anarchist perfectly glosses over the drastic struggle between CCP and KMT in the 1930s as well as the “Shanghai Incident” between China and Japan in 1932,\(^{271}\) and greatly weakens any political implications. The woman’s lover is no longer a revolutionary martyr executed by an anti-revolutionary government (as Xu Xu’s novella and the 1941 adaptation suggest, though they suggest different governments), nor a heroic anti-Japanese spy who dies for his country (as the 1956 adaptation depicts). Rather, he is an anarchist who dies in a revengeful purge and an assassin who cruelly kills the family of a traitor (the salesman’s brother), including the traitor’s five-year old daughter. The tragedy

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\(^{270}\) In *Evening Liaison*, the anarchist purge is designated two years earlier than the main story, and we can roughly deduce it happens in 1930. Anarchism was introduced into China during the first decade of the twentieth century, and flourished in the 1910s and early 1920s. But after 1925, as a political thought and movement, anarchism virtually disappeared in China. For more information, see Kuang Shanji 匡珊吉, “Wuzhengfu zhuyi zai zhongguo de chuanbo jiqi pochan” 無政府主義在中國的傳播及其破產 [The spread and bankruptcy of Anarchism in China], *Sichuan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 四川大學學報（哲學社會科學版） [Journal of Sichuan University (humanities and social sciences)] 1 (1979): 56-64.

\(^{271}\) The “Shanghai Incident” or “Shanghai War of 1932” (January 28–March 3, 1932) is a short war between the armies of the Republic of China and Japan, before official hostilities of the Second Sino-Japanese War commenced in 1937. It is often called “January 28 Incident” in Chinese sources, whereas known as the “First Shanghai Incident” in Japanese sources, alluding to the Second Shanghai Incident in 1937.
of the woman and her lover is not about the catastrophic history or the tumultuous nation, but about personal revenge and individual fate. The setting of Longhua, which has strong political allusions in Xu Xu’s novella, is completely ignored in Chen’s film. By contrast, typical historical sites and buildings in old Shanghai (i.e. Xujiahui Catholic Church, Peace Hotel, Garden Bridge and *Daxing fang*) are fully exhibited. Compared with the woman’s symbolized past life showed in the flashback, her present life (vividly exhibited through her visiting every corner of old Shanghai) is more impressive. As such, Chen’s film not only comes from “sophisticated” collective memory, but also reconstructs collective memory in return.

Now, let’s return to the scene of the Customs House, with its clock tower at center, on Shanghai’s Bund. In fact, this image may be viewed as the key for understanding the whole film. With its western-style, colonial buildings, the Bund is often seen as a vestige of old Shanghai in the eyes of nostalgic visitors. It is used as a symbolic setting for old Shanghai in films and other media, though buildings there continue to perform their former functions as banks, trading companies, customs offices, municipal courts, and other government institutions. The clock tower, built by the British, symbolizes in the film the concept of modern time—an important dimension in the modernization; yet it also reminds the spectator that the lapse of time is irreversible. We hear the bells chime from the clock tower of 1932 Shanghai, so we are drawn into another world that “promises sensual and spiritual fulfillment,” yet it is actually “the illusion of power, of the capacity to transcend the human condition,” as Wai-yee Li puts
it for a different context. In other words, the film temporarily links spectators in the present to the story in the past, developing China to developed/modernized Shanghai, the intense, uncomfortable life to the affluent, cozy life of common citizens in old Shanghai; despite the fact the film meanwhile screens the class oppression and social disparity of Shanghai at that time. During the ninety-eight minutes of this film, spectators become part of the story, part of old Shanghai, part of the history of the world. This feeling is similar to the journalist in Evening Liaison when he secretly returns to the ghost house. After he puts his watch there as a mark to verify his memory of and existence in the “ghost house,” he is so satisfied with his smart trick that he gains the confidence to go on with his relationship with the mysterious woman. However, at the end of the film, the journalist finally becomes aware that everything is only an illusion, and he just wakes from a dream. Similarly, when the film is over, spectators may find that they, just like the lonely journalist in Evening Liaison and the modern artist in Old Dreams of Shanghai, have been pursuing the phantom of an enchanting woman, a sufficiently idealized and detached figure—old Shanghai. The past is something we can never have, because “by the time we’ve become aware of what has happened it’s already inaccessible to us: we cannot relive, retire, or return to it…We can only represent it.”

Wai-yee Li, Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1993), 3. This tactic is also used in Ann Hui’s film Eighteen Springs, in the first scene of which, time and place is clearly remarked: 1930s, Shanghai.

What we have, in the end, is just the representation. As the ending remarks indicate in *In the Mood for Love*, a film inspired by Liu Yichang’s 呂以釗 fiction *Duidao* 對倒(Tête-bêche): “That era has passed, and nothing that belonged to it exists any more. Those elapsed years, like something behind a piece of glass full of dust, can be viewed, yet cannot be touched.”

**Conclusion**

Chen Yifei’s *Evening Liaison* tells a nostalgic story about enchantment and disenchantment. On the one hand, Chen intentionally decodes and recodes Xu’s ghost through popular cultural codes of the ghost and intertextuality with other ghost films, creating a female ghost not only enchanting but also enchanted by the man/journalist. On the other hand, although the film does not shoot the real embedded ghost story, it presents well the generic potential of a ghost film in terms of “nostalgic allegory” (“spatiotemporal nonsynchronism”), because it depicts how the female “ghost,” who is supposed to only live in the past, haunts in the contemporary world to revenge her lover. When her revenge is done, she vanishes and leaves the journalist, who has been rationally disenchanted from this hopeless love, yet who is still emotionally enchanted by her and this lost love, alone. For the journalist, the only way to preserve the trajectory of this love is to build his personal “human archive” with a “mundane object”—the cigarette *Era*. Therefore, what spectators view in the film is only a nostalgic story about enchantment and disenchantment narrated by a lovelorn man.
Chen admits that it was the atmosphere of Xu’s novella that caused him make this film adaptation. Indeed, the atmosphere of old Shanghai usurps the central role of the story itself in Evening Liaison. The film is like a fluid oil painting of Shanghai during the Republican era, streamed with the beauty of nostalgia. It seems that Chen, as the artist he acts in his film Old Dreams of Shanghai, is equally enchanted by the female protagonist and the lost beautiful past she represents. This nostalgia is also embodied in his paintings of Republican era women lounging about in traditional dress.

If we situate Chen’s film and paintings in a broader social context, we can find that they are part of the fad for “Shanghai nostalgia.” In fact, a bunch of nostalgic films about old Shanghai were produced in the 1990s. Nostalgia by definition represents not a seamless continuity with the past, but an evocation of the past from a position fundamentally altered in some respect. From 1949 to 1979, Shanghai broke with its Republican past (the “old society”), but in the 1990s its connection with the past was restored. With the boom in Shanghai’s economy and the promotion of the new market ideology in the post-Mao era, the prosperity and modernization Shanghai used to have during the Republican period was legitimized and glorified. Old Shanghai became the model Shanghai wanted for its present and future. Thus, nostalgic works about the commercial and cultural life in old Shanghai establishes a historical foundation for today’s market economy and ensures a glorious economical future. Also, the nostalgia presents a trend of “farewell to revolution,” as well as a construction of China’s cultural identity in the globalization today. Through recalling the past of modernized Shanghai, people are disenchnanted from the socialist utopian ideology and classic revolutionary
discourse of the Mao era, on the one hand, and gain confidence and a certain comfort in the globalized world, because modernization is always integral part of the history of China, and China is always part of the history of the world, on the other.

In Evening Liaison, Chen processes people’s collective memory about the past and old Shanghai, to create an enchanting city and ambience for spectators. However, when the film is over, spectators may finally be disenchanted from pursuing the phantom of this sufficiently idealized and detached figure—old Shanghai. Of course, there are some people who may hold on to enchantment even after leaving the cinema. The story of the enchantment and disenchantment by a ghost is over, yet the story of the enchantment and disenchantment by old Shanghai continues. Zhu Xueqin remarks that nowadays there is a split between the real Shanghai and the pseudo Shanghai, and the latter intentionally finishes itself through nostalgic fiction, oil paintings, and films, and pretends to live in the past. The landscape of so-called “bar street” on Hengshan Road is no more than a scaled-up Chen Yifei painting. Yet old Shanghai is neither the city of baoshengong (indentured worker) in the writing of leftist writer Xia Yan, nor the city in Eileen Chang’s writings or Chen Yifei’s paintings. Unfortunately, people’s collective memories about Shanghai have been “murdered” by those literati with their exaggerated presentations, and new collective memories are being continuously produced following their patterns. Zhu further provides an intriguing anecdote: one day, when he saw an antique Republican lamp in the restroom of a nostalgic bar that tried to recreate the ambience of Shanghai in the 1930s, he immediately recognized that it was the same sort of lamp he had bought in the Cultural Revolution, a
lamp made in 1969 by a state factory. In this case, it is not a real object passed from the Republican past, but an artificial counterfeit to fulfill consumerist desires for nostalgia. As such, a bar in post-Mao Shanghai ironically constructs the “imagined” pre-Mao ambience with a Mao-era product.

Conclusion

On the evening of December 20, 1940, Xu Xu created a poem as the dedication to his reprinted edition of *Ghost Love*:

I bury falling flowers in spring,
And bury withered leaves in autumn.
My tombstone is wordless,
Only leaving a suspiration.
Therewithal I silently walk away,
Not caring about the sunrise and moonset,
As well as the millions of meteoric stars.
If there is any soul mate walking by,
Who suddenly feels my past suspiration,
The tombstone in front of the tomb;
He will speak to his own spirit:
“Although those red flowers and green leaves have perished into the earth,
The tomb always retains the trace of youth,
And emits forever the message of life in the earth.”

In this sentimental poem, Xu portrays a first-person narrator, a ghost, who has been buried in a tomb with a wordless tombstone, yet whose spirit is still wandering in the human world, waiting for recognition from a soul mate. Taking into account that the poem was created for the reprinted *Ghost Love*, it can be viewed as a kind of supplement to or interpretation of the novella. The poem not only further blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality, through the monologue of a ghost, but also explicitly argues that death is not the final destination for human beings, and that the spirit/soul/youth do not end with the death of the body.

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275 *Xu Xu quanjì*, 2: 1-2, also see 12: 352-353.
The “wordless” tombstone is also remarkable. While it implicitly alludes to the life and tomb of Empress Wu 武則天 (624-705), a famous and controversial historical figure who is also known for her wordless tombstone (wuzi bei 無字碑), a certain historical view is presented by this resemblance—in this boundless universe and history, a person is always a traveling stranger, whose fate is always drifting through historical upheavals. Since history is always written/presented by the winner/the dominant hegemony, it is meaningless to leave any words, positive or negative, about one’s life. The suggestion is that words (literature, historical narratives, and other artistic presentations, etc.) are intertwined with history, to create a constantly unfolding narrative.

While this thesis was inspired by Xiaofei Tian’s methodology to trace the trajectory of textual variants as they change over time, it has equally benefited from David Wang’s study of history, violence, and the allegory of the ghost in Chinese culture. As Wang argues, “the historical violence not only refers to the atrocious outcomes brought by disaster, war, revolution, famine, and pestilence, but also various totems and taboos marked by various ideologies and psychologies—of nation, class, and body—in the modernization process.”276 In fact, my discussion of the trope of the ghost of Republican era as well as the case study of Xu Xu and Bai Wei, is an effort to go one step further than Wang’s study of Bai Wei in The Monster that is History.

Throughout the thesis, I have sought to pull out many threads in the fabric of Chinese film, literature, and cultural politics. Through case studies of four texts

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276 Quoted in the preface to the Chinese version of David Wang’s The Monster that is History (Taipei: Maitian chuban, 2004), 5.
corresponding to four important periods—prewar Shanghai, wartime Shanghai, postwar Hong Kong, and the post-Mao mainland—my discussion ranges from the history of the 1927 Great Revolution to the 1937 Second Sino-Japanese War, from the Solitary Island period in WW II to the succeeding Cold War, from the Mao era to the post-Mao era. And in terms of space, discussions are mainly centered around two metropolises—Shanghai and Hong Kong—that greatly influence the culture (including literature, play, film, etc), and economy in twentieth century China. The diversity of discussions is also embodied in various artistic forms: from fiction to film, from spoken drama to Cantonese opera, from music to paintings.

With such diversity, it seems to be difficult to offer a clear conclusion of what I have discussed in this thesis. But one thing is sure, at least. What I have tried to explore is how each particular social and historical environment shapes certain cultural ambience and psychological pattern, and finally shapes the particular variant of the same “ghost” story. I am questioning what allegories are hidden behind the story, and what appropriations of the image of the ghost are applied to these texts. Meanwhile, issues related to the agent of the production of the text are also discussed, such as Xu Xu’s Bergsonism and disillusionment, He Zhaozhang’s dramatic direction, Tu Guangqi’s preference to spy films and Chen Yifei’s nostalgic aesthetics. What I want to point out is that, those seemingly personal issues are also closely related to and shaped by the broader social and historical context.

Despite the difficulty of generalizing a general conclusion of this thesis, I would like to provide some tentative specific conclusions for the future study. First, as
mentioned in the “introduction,” the ambiguous and rich characterization/personae of the “ghost” provides diverse angles to interpret and various possibilities to adapt. Maybe this can also explain why it has been adapted three times. In Xu’s novella, she shifts between human and ghost identities, as well as male and female identities. Also, she is endowed with feminine beauty and elegance, but is also unmatched in masculine skills and prowess—so much so that she becomes a female resistance symbol in the genealogy of beautiful women warriors in films and plays of wartime Shanghai. While she lives a peaceful isolated life at present, she seems to have had a thrilling life full of danger and adventures in the past—as such, the character leads itself to the spy genre. She is disillusioned with the ugly human world, yet she is still inevitably attracted by this secular world and might once be touched by the love from the male protagonist—therefore, interactions between her and the man can be supplemented and reinvented, in which she is not only the icon of enchantment, but also the icon for the lost past and lost city.

Second, the ambiguity of the political standpoint in *Ghost Love* also deserves our attention. Xu is not an apolitical writer, yet he rarely explicitly presents his political ideas in fiction. The novella, as discussed in Chapter 1, makes allusions to the Great Revolution in 1927 and the massacre of leftists by the KMT government. However, spectators apparently have no trouble understanding the story while the 1941 film represents it as an anti-Qing revolution story (that actually suggests a national allegory of the anti-Japanese resistance), the 1956 film resets it at wartime Shanghai and turns it to a spy film (that actually reflects the confrontation in the Cold War era), and 1995 film
represents it as a revenge story of anarchist assassins (that tactically avoids any ideological issue between CCP and KMT, between China and Japan; and realizes the director’s intention to restore the heyday of Shanghai).

Nothing comes from nothing. The aforementioned two ambiguities are caused by corresponding social, historical and cultural context. If there is something that has to be spoken out through the mouth of a ghost, there are always something have been screened and hidden in this context. And there are always some oversimplified narratives about history, culture, and people. For example, Neither Xu Xu can simply be labelled a “neo-Romantic” or an “anti-Romantic,” nor be singly marked as a liberal apolitical writer or a popular fictionist, because he implicitly expressed his philosophy and political ideas through a stereotyped “ghost story.” Also, the commercial films during the Solitary Island period are not all vulgar apolitical entertainment. Besides those films with obvious resistance theme such as Mulan Joins the Army and Ge Nenniang, there are also films that “deliberately depoliticized” themselves from current politics, yet hidden certain resistance messages between the lines. The 1941 Ghost Love can be viewed a good evidence. Likewise, although the 1995 adaptation Evening Liaison inevitably applies typical tactics and cultural codes in ghost films to fulfill this “ghost story,” it is not a horror film as it might initially seem to be. Through the form of “ghost film” which has a certain generic potential to indicate the fragmentation of time, Chen Yifei actually presents a dual nostalgia both at the story level and the filmmaking level. In this sense, the allegories and appropriations of the ghost is not only related to horror or fear, but reflects the fact that, as David Skal’s argues, “our imaginative life in the twentieth
century has been devoted to peeling back the masks and scabs of civilization, to finding, cultivating, and projecting nightmare images of the secret self.”

277 Skal, The Monster Show, 22.
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**Illustration Sources:**

All of the illustrations used in this thesis come from the following sources:

Figure 1: [http://www.cinemagicasia.de/](http://www.cinemagicasia.de/)

Figure 2: [http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/db/ft638nb3db/figures/ft638nb3db_00011.jpg](http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/db/ft638nb3db/figures/ft638nb3db_00011.jpg)

Figure 3 and Figure 4: The China Film Archive

Figure 5: The Shanghai Library
Figure 6: http://static13.photo.sina.com.cn/bmiddle/4c4564a3t7825bf410d7c&690

Figure 7:
http://hkmdm.com/db/movies/image_detail.mhtml?id=2263&image_id=16591&display_s et=big5

Figure 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12: Video clips from DVD

Figure 13, 14, 15 and 16: http://news.xinhuanet.com/collection/2005-04/11/content_2813779.htm

Figure 17: http://www.yifei.com/yifei5/movie.html
Appendix: Film and TV Adaptations of Xu Xu’s Works

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