The Second Sino-Japanese War on Screen

A study of visual representations of Japan and the Japanese in Chinese film

MA thesis

Version 1

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July 1, 2018

14.860 words

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MA Asian Studies

2017-2018

Contents

Introduction

"War hasn't only brought catastrophe to China, but to the people of Japan as well."[1]

Who thinks of Sino-Japanese relations, immediately thinks of the two countries as arch rivals. Wan Ming, a scholar studying Sino-Japanese relations, takes national identity as a theoretical concept to explain Sino-Japanese relations. In *Understanding Japan-China Relations: Theories and Issues* he argues that Sino-Japanese relations are shaped by both the long history of cultural exchange, contempt, and victimization from wars or aggression since the 1890s and the confidence both China and Japan have in superior modernization. These two factors resulted in an arrogant attitude towards the other.[2] As June Teufel Dreyer explains in *Middle Kingdom and Empire of the Rising Sun: Sino-Japanese Relations, Past and Present*, tensions in the relation between China and Japan go far back. As China calls itself the Middle Kingdom and has a strong sense of superiority, China treated Japan, as well as all its neighbors, as cultural and political inferior as early as the seventh century, in some of the earliest contacts between the two countries. The Chinese government however, regards the period from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, including the Second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945), as part of its "century of humiliation" by various foreign powers, in which Japan was clearly stronger than China.[3] In this way, the war, which ended in defeat for Japan in the wider context of the Second World War, can be seen as a crucial changing point in the relation between China and Japan. After China opened its doors to the rest of the world in 1978, China has now become the world's second largest economy and surpassed Japan.[4] Although tensions between China and Japan continue to exist, the two countries have found ways to cooperate on several issues and we can see the phenomenon of high consumption of Japanese popular culture in China, as mentioned by Asako Saito.[5]

It is against this background of ongoing changes in Sino-Japanese relations, with the Second Sino-Japanese war as crucial changing point, that I wondered how the Second Sino-Japanese war is remembered at different moments in time in China. The citation mentioned at the beginning of the introduction comes from the film *Devils on the Doorstep*. This film is set against the background of the Second Sino-Japanese war. This statement, which rehumanizes

[1] Jiang, 2000
[2] Wan, 2016, 49
[3] Dreyer, 2016, 3-4
[4] Lam, 2013, 35
[5] Saito, 2017, 137

the Japanese, offers an indication of how the Second Sino-Japanese war and Japan and the Japanese are visually represented in the film, which was released in 2000. The way the Second Sino-Japanese war is presented in films, thus indicates something about how the war is remembered at that specific moment in time in China.

This thesis therefore addresses the following research question: How do depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Chinese films about the Second Sino-Japanese war develop over time? While avoiding overgeneralization, and recognizing that each film is also the product of the individual style of its director and cinematographer and so on, I take each film as a salient reflection of Chinese images of Japan and the Japanese at that particular time. Against the broader background of the remembrance culture of the Second Sino-Japanese War in China, I will focus on the depiction of Japan and the Japanese by comparing four movies from different moments in time and with different socio-historical contexts, and their reception through various platforms including social media: *Tunnel Warfare* (*Di Dao Zhan* 地道战) from 1965, *Red Sorghum* (*Hong Gaoliang* 红高粱）from 1987, *Devils on the Doorstep* (*Guizi Lai Le* 鬼子来了）from 2000 and *The Flowers of War* (*Jinling Shisan Chai* 金陵十三钗） from 2011.

Tunnel Warfare was produced in 1965 and was directed by Ren Xudong. During the Cultural Revolution that was launched in 1966 by Mao Zedong, the film was seen by millions in China. The film tells the story of a small town in China's countryside whose inhabitants outwit the Japanese soldiers through the establishment of a network of tunnels.[6] *Red Sorghum* is directed by Zhang Yimou and tells the story of a small group of Chinese peasants, who are confronted with the arrival of the Japanese. Jiang Wen's *Devils on the Doorstep* is set in the last years of the Second Sino-Japanese war and tells the story of Chinese peasant Ma Dasan, played by Jiang Wen himself, who is forced by a mysterious man to hold a Japanese soldier and a Chinese translator collaborating with the Japanese captive but alive and interrogate them.[7] *The Flowers of War*, also directed by Zhang Yimou, is set against the background of the 1937 Nanjing massacre and tells the story of American mortician John Miller who ends up saving a group of young convent schoolgirls and a group of sex workers from the Japanese.

[6] Steinfeld, 2015, 103
[7] Fowler, 2010, 58

There is much scholarship on Sino-Japanese relations and the Second Sino-Japanese war, but a study in which movies from different moments in time, and hence with different socio-historical contexts, are compared in this way in an attempt to chart particular aspects of the development of remembrance culture has not been done yet.

To make this research operational, I will use discourse analysis to analyze the four movies. The analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use—usually above the level of the individual sentence—in particular contexts (in this case, films) toward reflection on an underlying message.[8] Moreover, beyond language, discourse analysis can encompass various manners in which meaning comes to the fore, which in my case also includes visual images on screen. We will see that camerawork and music are important features of the medium of film that can add to the meaning of the story told in the films. Besides discourse analysis, I will also use methods used in Cultural Studies and Film Studies.

Because this research focuses on the development of the depiction of Japan and the Japanese in Chinese movies over time, I will address my research question by successive analyses of the aforesaid movies, asking how Japan and the Japanese are depicted in chapters on *Tunnel Warfare, Red Sorghum, Devils on the Doorstep* and *The Flowers of War*. Each chapter will be divided into subsections that will discuss the main characteristics of the depiction of Japan and the Japanese in the film in question. Florian Schneider's website www.politicseastasia.com includes a useful discussion of discourse analysis. According to Schneider, the first step in doing discourse analysis is to ask yourself what the social and historical context is of your source.[9] The first section of each chapter will therefore discuss the socio-historical context in which the film was produced. The conclusion will put the findings of all four chapters together and will form the answer to my research question.

[8] Brown, 1983, 1
[9] Schneider, 2013, www.politicseastasia.com

Chapter 1

Depictions of Japan and the Japanese in *Tunnel Warfare* (1965)

"The enemies have modern weapons, but we have people with great revolutionary thoughts."[10]

Propaganda, heroism and the depiction of the Japanese as fools, are three characteristics of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war, and the depiction of Japan and the Japanese in specific, in the film *Tunnel Warfare* from 1965 which will be broadly discussed in the following analysis of the film.

1.1 Socio-historical background

Tunnel Warfare was produced in the time Mao Zedong was in power and this was a time with a complex social history. In *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*, Andrew Walder explains that Mao had led the Chinese Communist Party since the early 1930s and had thoroughly dominated the People's Republic of China since its establishment in 1949.[11] Mao became the symbol for China's quest to socialism in which he followed the Soviet model.[12] By 1956, China had almost completed a series of revolutionary changes that included land reform and collectivization.[13] The Chinese film industry had to be in service of the Communist party. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson mention that the Communist party nationalized the Chinese film industry: the Communist Chinese cinema reworked popular genres into political message films and these films took Soviet Socialist Realism as their model.[14]

As mentioned by David Curtis Wright in *The History of China*, Mao was impatient to see the agricultural transformation of China through to its completion and it was for this reason Mao launched the Great Leap Forward in 1957 to push agricultural collectivization faster. The results of the Great Leap Forward were however catastrophic: an estimated 20 to 40 million people died of starvation.[15] As a result, Mao's authority was no longer undisputed by this time. Although others criticized him for the Great Leap Forward, Lin Biao, leader of the People's

[10] Ren, 1965
[11] Walder, 2015, 1
[12] Walder, 2015, 82
[13] Walder, 2015, 123
[14] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 371
[15] Wright, 2001, 150-151

Liberation Army, fostered a personality cult around Mao. Mao was very pleased and by 1965, the year *Tunnel Warfare* was produced, he encouraged this personality cult centered around himself, partly for his own glorification but mainly for the mass dedication to his ideology that it might produce. After restoration of Mao's confidence, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 in an attempt to fundamentally change China's culture by rooting out the vestiges of old or feudal ways.[16]

After the Great Leap Forward and a conflict with the Soviet Union in the early 1960's, the PRC became less dependent on the Soviet Union and as a result, films focused more on Chinese life and pre-revolutionary films revived. Bordwell and Thompson mention that many films continued to glorify the ordinary individual who escapes from oppression by discovering the revolutionary movement.[17] We will see that this great focus on propaganda will also play an important role in *Tunnel Warfare*.

Regarding Sino-Japanese relations at this time, China and Japan were not on the best terms after the Second Sino-Japanese war. Dreyer mentions that Chinese media made frequent mention of Japanese cruelties during the Second World War and the valiant struggle that the Chinese people had waged to defeat them.[18] However, despite the horrors of the war, she also mentions that Mao hoped to draw Japan, with its strategic location, skilled population, and advanced industrial base, into the communist camp.[19] In the next sections, *Tunnel Warfare* will be analyzed in order to gain insight into the relation of the socio-historical background of the 1960s and the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war and Japan and the Japanese in the film.

1.2 Propaganda

The plot of *Tunnel Warfare* tells the story of a small town named Gao village during the Second Sino-Japanese war, whose villagers successfully defeat the Japanese by following the instructions from Mao Zedong written in *On Protracted War*. In the exposition of the film, we see the return of Chuanbao, the village militia sergeant, and the village elder. The village elder turns out to be badly injured due to a Japanese attack. Just before he passes away, he

[16] Wright, 2001, 152-153
[17] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 373
[18] Dreyer, 2016, 82
[19] Dreyer, 2016, 83

appoints Laozhong as his successor and hands him the book *On Protracted War* written by Mao Zedong, instructing him that they should "keep up fighting" (Figure 1).

Figure 1

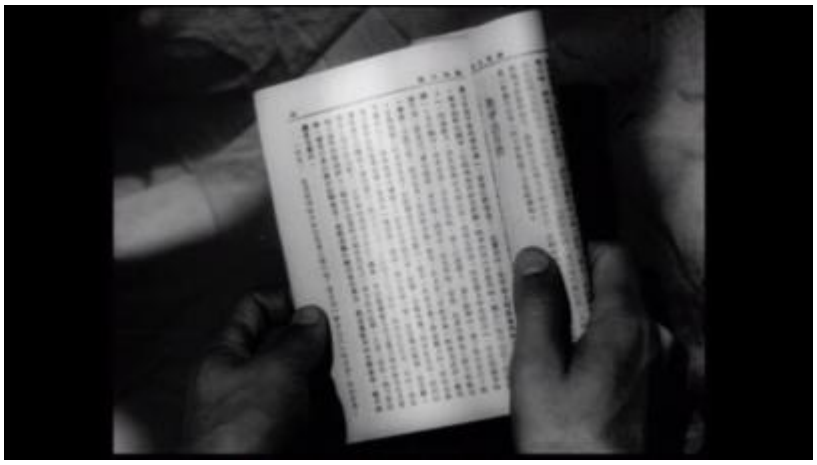
Then, the first confrontation between Chinese and Japanese forces is shown. This first confrontation ends in the capturing of local Chinese villagers and shows a destroyed village at the background. In this scene, the Japanese are depicted as a menacing force bringing only destruction to the defenseless Chinese. This is however the only scene of the entire film that ends in defeat for the Chinese.

After the first confrontation with the Japanese, Laozhong inspires the villagers by reading from the book of Mao Zedong and tells the people that they must keep fighting and unite in order to win the war. Because as he says, "these are the instructions from General Mao (Figure 2)." After Laozhong's speech, the villagers decide to fight the Japanese by digging tunnels and so the tunnel war begins. *On Protracted War* plays an important role in the film. The film contains many shots portraying not only the front matter of the book, but also close-ups of particular pages are enclosed (Figure 3 and 4). These particular shots are elements of a discourse on the importance of Mao Zedong thought. The film emphasizes that this book, and thus the words of Mao Zedong, is a very important source of inspiration and is crucial in defeating the Japanese enemy.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4



The Japanese however, hear of the plans of the villagers to start a tunnel war. The Japanese at their turn plan a surprise attack at night to attack the village. Laozhong was just out for a stroll and discovers them, allowing him to warn the village. Sadly, this results in the death of Laozhong, who gets shot by Japanese general Yamada. After this confrontation, Chuanbao officially becomes Laozhong's successor and he is advised to read *On Protracted War* by his uncle (Figure 5). This will tell him what to do in order to protect his village and defeat the Japanese.

Figure 5

The discourse on the importance of Mao Zedong thought becomes even clearer in the scene when Chuanbao reads the following words in Mao's book: "战争目的中消灭敌人是主要的保存自己是第二位的，因为只有大量的消灭敌人才能有效的保存自己" or "In the purposes of war, the first purpose is to kill enemies and the second purpose is to save ourselves. The reason is that only if we kill a great number of enemies, we can save ourselves effectively." He is very inspired by this quote and this inspiring moment is emphasized by the music that is played at that particular moment. The song is an ode to Mao Zedong and a particular part goes like this: "毛主席的思想闪金光，太阳照得人身暖哎" or "The ideology of Chairman Mao flashes in gold, the sun shines his warmth." The use of music contributes to the generating of meaning in this particular scene. We could therefore say that a first characteristic of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in *Tunnel Warfare* is that propaganda plays a very important role. The personality cult centered around Mao Zedong for mass dedication to his ideology at this time, clearly is of major influence in *Tunnel Warfare.*

1.3 Heroism

Part of the propaganda program was to portray the Chinese people as great people with revolutionary thoughts, in contrast to the Japanese who lacked these ideals. As is also said in the film: “The enemies have modern weapons, but we have people with great revolutionary thoughts.” Timothy Tsu shortly elaborates on the anti-Japanese protagonists in *Tunnel Warfare* in a chapter in the book *Chinese and Japanese Films on the Second World War* edited by King-fai Tam. Tsu argues that the anti-Japanese protagonist is a male communist fighter, who as a warrior is disciplined, fearless and intelligent. As a communist, he is ideologically and morally pure and as a good Chinese, his patriotism is as fierce as is his trust in the Party.[20] This description is clearly applicable to both Laozhong and Chuanbao. A good example is the moment the Japanese try to attack the village during the night and Laozhong warns the village by ringing the bell. The Japanese general Yamada then shoots Laozhong, but Laozhong somehow manages to get up again and throw a grenade at the Japanese with his last strength: he dies a real hero (Figure 6).

Figure 6

The image of the Chinese as heroes characterizes *Tunnel Warfare*. Different from what I expected beforehand, the film does not focus on portraying the miseries of the war. Instead, except for the death of the village elder and Laozhong, the villagers do not encounter other setbacks: the film emphasizes that the Chinese are much smarter and the Japanese have no chance at all. When Communist reinforcements arrive, the Chinese plan on counterattacking the Japanese. Japanese forces are unable to take the village and are forced to retreat. The confrontation ends in a total victory for the Chinese and they even manage to take over the

[20] Tam, 2015, 13

Japanese base. At the end of the film, when the Japanese have lost the war, Chuanbao stands face to face with Japanese general Yamada who holds a sword pointed at him. Chuanbao is not afraid and demands him to put down his weapon and then forces him to watch the Chinese victory (Figure 7).

Figure 7

It is at this moment that the camera turns to a point-of-view shot, which can be described as a shot when the audience temporarily shares the visual perspective of a character or a group of characters.[21] In this case, the audience shares the view of Chuanbao and general Yamada who witness the celebration of victory of the Chinese as is shown in figure 8. Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis argue in *Film: A Critical Introduction* that the use of a point-of-view shot encourages viewers to understand and sympathize with characters.[22] The use of victorious music adds to the sphere of this scene. The film ends with Chuanbao saying: "这是毛泽东思想的胜利" or "This is the victory of Mao Zedong's thought."

[21] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 80
[22] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 85

Figure 8

Sina Weibo is one of China's most popular social media sites. The website was launched in August 2009 and can be seen as a hybrid of Twitter and Facebook.[23] When reading into reactions to *Tunnel Warfare* on Weibo, it is striking that Chinese people nowadays still very much appreciate the way China and the Chinese people are depicted in this film. One reaction goes like this: "很精彩的电影，中国人真聪明，伟大" or "Very exciting film, the Chinese people are so smart and great."[24] We must however take into consideration that censorship of Weibo is severe.[25]

Besides portraying the Chinese as heroes, there also occur 'bad' Chinese characters in *Tunnel Warfare.* After his moment of enlightenment as described in the section on propaganda, Chuanbao figures that they should not only use the tunnels as a hiding place, but they should also use them as a means to attack the Japanese. Meanwhile, the Chinese villagers hear that Communist reinforcements are on their way. The Japanese decide to take advantage of this news by sending spies to the village pretending to be part of the Communist reinforcements and try to learn more about their tactics. Chuanbao however, sees through their trap, tricks them into the tunnels and kills them (Figure 9).

[23] Harvey, 2014, 1372
[24] Sina Weibo, 2014, https://www.Sina Weibo.com/p/10012020214
[25] Harvey, 2014, 1373

Figure 9

Besides Chinese spies working for the Japanese, Japanese general Yamada also has a Chinese sidekick. Although the presence of non-heroic Chinese characters seems to be in contrast with the aim of the film to emphasize the heroic and revolutionary nature of the Chinese people, the presence of these characters makes the message of the film more effective by making it less extreme and more realistic. Besides, the presence of non-heroic Chinese characters could also be a warning for the Chinese people to not betray their country: both Japanese general Yamada and his Chinese sidekick as well as the Chinese bandits are defeated in the end.

1.4 The foolish Japanese

Before watching *Tunnel Warfare*, I expected Japan and the Japanese to be portrayed as crude, menacing people. Although we see this image occasionally, such as the scene at the beginning of the film in which Japanese soldiers destroy a village in order to find Chinese villagers (Figure 10), the focus of *Tunnel Warfare* seems to be on portraying the Japanese as foolish people, rather than dehumanizing them. General Yamada is presented as evil, because he killed Laozhong, and he is presented as stubborn, because he does not want to give in to the defeat of the Japanese (Figure 11).

Figure 10

Figure 11

The fact that the Japanese are not able to cope with the resourceful Chinese and do not see through their tactics, completes the picture of the Japanese as foolish people. Given the fact that the film was produced relatively soon after the war and given the condition of Sino-Japanese relations at the time, it is not surprising that the character of general Yamada is not played by a Japanese actor, but is played by Chinese actor Wang Xiaozhong. As a result, there is little to no communication in Japanese in the film. Paola Voci mentions that having the enemy express himself in a foreign language, a Japanese general expressing himself in Chinese in the case of *Tunnel Warfare*, allows the film to show him as inferior not only to the villagers who eventually defeat him, but also to the collaborators who support him.[26] The discourse on the stupidity and inferiority of Japan and the Japanese presented in *Tunnel Warfare* is therefore also emphasized through the way they communicate.

[26] Tam, 2015, 44

Conclusion

When analyzing *Tunnel Warfare*, three discourses can be found concerning the portrayal of the Second Sino-Japanese War. First of all, the film presents a discourse on propaganda. Mao Zedong is presented as a cult hero and the film suggests that when following the socialist ideology propagated by Mao, victory will be within reach for the Chinese people. Second, the film presents a discourse on the heroism of the Chinese people. In contrast to the heroic Chinese villagers who follow Mao's writings, stand the foolish Japanese who are evil, stubborn and no match for the Chinese. *Tunnel Warfare* therefore lastly presents a discourse on the inferiority of the Japanese people. Filmic aspects such as music and language used in the film, support the discourses propagated by the film. The socio-historical background in which the film is produced, clearly shows through in the development of the film. Little disaster seems to happen to the Chinese village and victory seems to be all theirs.

Chapter 2

Depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Red Sorghum (1987)

"The officer said, if you don't do it well, he will kill you."[27]

In the first chapter, we have seen that propaganda plays an important role in *Tunnel Warfare*, a salient reflection of Chinese images of Japan and the Japanese at that particular time. In the present chapter, it will become clear that, different from *Tunnel Warfare*, the Chinese people are not depicted as heroic revolutionary people driven by the ideology of Mao Zedong, and the Japanese are depicted as much more capable and harmful than in *Tunnel Warfare*.

2.1 Socio-historical background

Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 after Mao died in 1976 and Rana Mitter explains in *Modern China: A Very Short Introduction* that Deng recognized that Mao's Cultural Revolution had damaged China's economy and moved to set China on the path to genuine modernization. Economic equality was no longer the all-overriding goal of government and the 1980s were therefore marked by a remarkable openness to economic change.[28] As Jeffrey Wasserstrom mentions in *China in the 21st century: What Everyone Needs To Know*, Deng was remembered positively for his economic reforms which intended to temper Communist ideology with limited forms of private entrepreneurship, appeals for foreign investment, and a partial reduction of state control over agriculture and industry.[29]

Along with these economic reforms, Chinese cinema also started to change as mentioned by Bordwell and Thompson. The new generation filmmakers were known as the Fifth Generation and they created a renaissance in Chinese filmmaking. As we have seen in the previous chapter, films made around the period of the Cultural Revolution emphasized education and learning based on Mao's writings. The Fifth Generation however, operated under less strict control and this gave the Fifth Generation a lot of artistic freedom and new ideas. *Red Sorghum* became the most popular Fifth Generation work, both in China and abroad. [30] Characteristics of Fifth Generation films were that the films reacted against the ideological purity of the Cultural Revolution by exploring the actuality of local culture in a documentary

[27] Zhang, 1987
[28] Mitter, 2008, 64-65
[29] Wasserstrom, 2013, 79
[30] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 638

fashion. Emphasis lay on depicting the dramas of people's ordinary lives.[31] This will also became clear in the analysis of *Red Sorghum.*

According to Dreyer, the period between 1972 and 1989 has been characterized as the golden age of Sino-Japanese relations. She mentions that in this period there was reciprocal good will and mutual admiration. In Japan, there was a so-called "China fever" and exchange groups proliferated, with each expressing delight at the friendliness of the people, the beautiful scenery, and the unique culture of the other.[32] Do these circumstances visibly influence Chinese images of Japan and the Japanese in *Red Sorghum*?

2.2 Personal story

Red Sorghum is an adaption of the eponymous novel by Mo Yan.[33] The story takes place in a rural village and is narrated from the viewpoint of the protagonists grandson using a non-diegetic voice-over. The narrator tells about his grandmother, Jiu'er, who was sent into a pre-arranged marriage with a man named Li Datou, who owns a sorghum liquor distillery. As mentioned above, a characteristic of Fifth Generation films is the emphasis on depicting the drama of people's ordinary lives. In *Red Sorghum,* the emphasis is on depicting the life of Jiu'er and the encounter with My Grandpa, as the narrator calls him. A first characteristic of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in *Red Sorghum* is that the personal story plays a more important role than the war, as was the case in *Tunnel Warfare.* The first half of *Red Sorghum* presents a discourse on the personal story of Jiu'er. As mentioned by Wendy Larson in *Zhang Yimou: Globalization and the Subject of Culture,* the film can be divided into three connected sections with focus on the sorghum fields, the distillery and the Japanese invasion.[34]

The first part of the film shows how Jiu'er is carried to her wedding in a sedan, carried by, among other men, My Grandpa. Along the road, a masked bandit appears, takes their money and tries to lead Jiu'er into the sorghum field. My Grandpa succeeds in rescuing her. In the second part of the film, Jiu'er arrives at the sorghum liquor distillery, but on her way to visit her father, she again is attacked by a masked bandit. It appears to be My Grandpa who has a crush on her. He chases her down and under his arm he drags her into the sorghum field

[31] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 638
[32] Dreyer, 2016, 157
[33] Qin, 2010, 163
[34] Larson, 2017, 46

where he kneels down before her. Larson argues that Jiu'er and My Grandpa have a passionate relationship, but I doubt this statement.[35] Although the film does not show what exactly happens the moment My Grandpa kneels before Jiu'er in the sorghum field, the fact that Jiu'er was chased down and dragged into the field against her will, suggests that she is raped. Jiu'er turns out to be pregnant later in the film.

Meanwhile at the distillery it is discovered that Jiu'er's husband-to-be Li Datou mysteriously died. The villagers believe he was murdered and the narrator thinks it was My Grandpa who did it. Nothing can be proven however and Jiu'er decides to take over the distillery since Li Datou was without heir. She really inspires the workers and becomes friends with Luohan, a respected worker at the distillery. My Grandpa however, cannot let go of Jiu'er and shows up drunk at the distillery. He again tries to claim Jiu'er and even wants her to be his bride. Jiu'er refuses however and tosses him out. In "Mixing Memory and Desire: Red Sorghum, a Chinese Version of Masculinity and Feminity" Wang Yuejin argues that by giving one of the lead roles to a woman and making her stand up for herself in this scene, *Red Sorghum* transgresses the conventional Chinese melodramatic narrative pattern of the vulnerable woman intimidated by bullying men.[36] Just as in the sorghum field, My Grandpa again forces himself upon Jiu'er and this makes me doubt even more whether the nature of the relationship between Jiu'er and My Grandpa is consensual. Moreover, Wang mentions that the reception of the film in China was dramatic and controversial mostly because it addresses issues of desire instead of tender love, and sexuality instead of marital bliss. Because the film transgressed the deep-rooted Confucian ethics and moral codes of sobriety, the film was received negatively.[37]

Subsequently, Jiu'er is kidnapped again by a bandit called Sanpao. He forces the distillery workers to pay ransom for her freedom. According to Larson, the film significantly modifies Mo Yan's narrative, twisting the tale into a story of resistance to the exhaustion and worry that the filmmaker identifies as characteristic of Chinese life. This worry consists of concerns about China's future, global status, and equality with the West. Larson argues that *Red Sorghum* makes this context clear by the presence of hostile outsiders, such as Sanpao, and

[35] Larson, 2017, 53
[36] Wang, 1989, 45
[37] Wang, 1989, 32-33

their confrontation with a harmonious community.[38] The arrival of the Japanese is another example of an hostile outsider.

Qin Liyan mentions in "Transmedia Strategies of Appropriation and Visualization: the Case of Zhang Yimou's Adaptation of Novels in His Early Films," that unlike the original novels, Zhang Yimou's films are heavily flavored with cultural details.[39] A characteristic of Zhang's films is the focus on culture, as is mentioned by Larson. Local songs, dress, food, drink and rituals in daily life are important cultural elements. The opening scene of *Red Sorghum* focuses highly on such elements: The camera zooms in on Jiu'er's earrings, the attachment of hair ornaments, a bracelet slid along her arm, and the fastening of the cloth buttons at her neck and a local song is sung by the sedan carriers.[40] The use of diegetic music instead of non-diegetic music also highlights the focus on culture in *Red Sorghum*. A film can contain diegetic music, music with a source in the film, and non-diegetic music, music without a source in the story world.[41] By letting local songs be an actual part of the story, such as the local song sung by the sedan carriers, Zhang highlights this important cultural element. Presenting local culture in a documentary fashion is a characteristic of Fifth Generation films and this sphere is created by cinematographer Gu Changwei. As will be shown in the next chapter, a characteristic of his work is the use of a hand-held camera to create this sphere.[42]

The last part of the film shows how the arrival of the Japanese influences the life of the peasants at the distillery and presents a discourse on the Second Sino-Japanese war. Considering the different social-historical contexts in which *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum* were produced, it is obvious that the emphasis on propaganda and the importance of Mao Zedong thought in people's daily lives is absent in *Red Sorghum*. The purpose of *Tunnel Warfare* was to emphasize the heroic character of the Chinese and the foolish character of the Japanese; *Red Sorghum*, by contrast, only partly focuses on the war and the emphasis is not on portraying the good Chinese in contrast to the bad Japanese, but on telling a personal story. This makes it reasonable to assume that the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in these first two of the four films under scrutiny here reflects change in the way Japan and the Japanese were viewed in Chinese society at their respective points in time. At the same time, we will see that although *Red Sorghum* was produced during "the golden age" of Sino-

[38] Larson, 2017, 45
[39] Qin, 2010, 166
[40] Larson, 2017, 56
[41] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 68
[42] Ward, 2004, 111

Japanese relations, the Japanese are depicted more unfavorably in *Red Sorghum* than in *Tunnel Warfare.*

2.3 Horrors of war

A second characteristic of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war, and the depiction of Japan and the Japanese at large, is that *Red Sorghum* emphasizes the horrors of the war and the horrors visited on the Chinese by the Japanese. This is different from *Tunnel Warfare*, that mainly emphasized the foolishness of the Japanese. As soon as the Japanese arrive and the film switches from Jiu'er's personal story to a broader historical tableau, the atmosphere of *Red Sorghum* changes. As mentioned by Pramaggiore and Wallis, like any other visual technique, color in the *mise en scene* may function as a motif.[43] In *Red Sorghum* the color red plays an important role. Red appears at the opening scene where Jiu'er is carried in a red sedan wearing a red dress, the distillery produces red sorghum wine and in the last scene of the film, the whole sky turns red. The color red however, is mostly represented by the red sorghum field. This field appears many times and plays a crucial role in the film. The moment the Japanese arrive, the audience also gets to see a shot of the red sorghum field as the narrator tells the viewer the Japanese are coming (Figure 12).

Figure 12

It can therefore be argued that the red sorghum field, and the color red in general, indicates that bad things will happen: the field is where Jiu'er is attacked by a robber twice and the moment the Japanese are coming, the viewer gets to see the same field. The red sorghum field therefore gives the film another layer of symbolic meaning. When the Japanese arrive at the

[43] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 119

village, they force the locals to build a road through the field while they themselves are just watching (Figure 13). The absence of music adds to the level of cruelty in this part of the film: only the yelling of the Japanese soldiers and the wailing of the villagers is present. In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare*, in which there seems to be nothing but victory for the Chinese, *Red Sorghum* does show the horrors of war that the Chinese encountered. The film extensively presents the Japanese as inhumane: they treat the Chinese as animals (Figure 14). Against my expectations, such scenes are absent in *Tunnel Warfare*.

Figure 13

Figure 14

The demonization of the Japanese in *Red Sorghum* becomes most clear in the scene when the Chinese collaborator demands Sanpao's butcher to kill a man. The butcher and his assistant are skinning a donkey and the Chinese collaborator compliments them for their good work. Then Japanese soldiers drag in a Chinese prisoner and the collaborator yells at the crowd that they have to watch closely what happens next, because this will be the result for anyone who

opposes the imperial army.[44] The collaborator then demands Sanpao's butcher to skin the man alive. The man turns out to be Sanpao, the bandit who kidnapped Jiu'er. The butcher does not want to do it and instead of skinning the man alive, he stabs him (Figure 15). He is killed for his refusal and just before he is shot, he scolds the Japanese (Figure 16). The butchers assistant however, is also demanded to skin a man, and he does. The man being skinned is Jiu'er's friend Luohan (Figure 17). In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare*, in which the Chinese would probably rather die for their country than do as the Japanese told them to, *Red Sorghum* shows that the Chinese are not all superhuman revolutionary beings who are willing to die for their country: they just want to live.

Figure 15

Figure 16

[44] Larson, 2017, 64

Figure 17

After this horrific scene, the narrator sums up some facts that indicates the amount of damage the Japanese have caused. He says: "The Japanese forced over 400.000 farmers to build the 'Zhangping Road.' Many families were destroyed and over 1000 people were killed. Luohan was skinned by the Japanese army as a warning to the people in Qingshakou, he was not scared and scolded the Japanese until he died."[45]

We could conclude that, in contrast to *Tunnel Warfare*, the Japanese are not depicted as foolish people, but they are depicted much worse: not only do they force villagers to work, they even force them to kill their own people in the most horrific ways. We could say that in *Tunnel Warfare* the Second Sino-Japanese war is remembered as a heroic war in which the Chinese people defeated the Japanese with ease, while in the *Red Sorghum* the emphasis is on remembering the horrors done by the Japanese to the Chinese. Considering that the film was made during a period when Sino-Japanese relations were generally considered to be good, this shows that there is no simple, one-on-one correlation between the socio-historical background on the on hand, and the film, on the other. The picture is complicated by the fact that the rules for film-making were less directly and fully tied to state policy.

2.4 Revenge?

In *Tunnel Warfare*, taking revenge, fighting back and being a hero are key characteristics of the Chinese protagonists. This seems to be the same in *Red Sorghum*: After the confrontation with the Japanese in the sorghum field and the murder of Luohan that took place there, Jiu'er and the rest of the village plan on taking revenge for the death of Luohan by sabotaging the

[45] Zhang, 1987

cars of the Japanese (Figure 18). The moment Jiu'er announces this plan, she wants the men to drink. After that we get to see a close-up of the red sorghum liquor. As mentioned before, it could be argued that red sorghum is a symbol of inauspicious events in this film. This shot could therefore be a sign that it ends badly for the Chinese villagers.

The day the ambush takes place, My Grandpa and his fellow peasants attack the Japanese with homemade bombs. This scene is filmed in slow motion and this makes the scene even more interesting: although they accomplish in killing the Japanese, they get themselves killed too. In addition, Jiu'er, who was on her way to bring some food, is also killed. Only My Grandpa and his son survive. The film concludes with the sky turning bright red (Figure 19). Although the hostile outsiders are killed, the harmonious community is also destroyed. As mentioned earlier, Larson argues that *Red Sorghum* presents a discourse on resistance to the exhaustion and worry of Chinese life, symbolized by the resistance of the harmonious distillery community against hostile forces such as the Japanese. The end of the film therefore suggests that the success of this resistance can be doubted.

Figure 18

Figure 19

In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare,* in which the Chinese hero is a socialist resistance hero, the Chinese hero in *Red Sorghum* seems to be an anti-hero. Tsu mentions that My Grandpa, the unnamed hero, is not a communist but an uneducated man who sexually assaults a young bride and kills her husband-to-be.[46] As is mentioned by Qin, Zhang Yimou deliberately makes the rascal-like Grandpa, the real hero of the film, different in every way from the hero in classic Communist films, such as *Tunnel Warfare.* Brother Luohan is turned into a Communist in the film, and classic Communists in films do not die in such a violent way Brother Luohan did.[47] Although it is true My Grandpa is very revengeful towards the Japanese, the fact that the rest of the Chinese villagers die during the attack and it is precisely My Grandpa, the 'bad' Chinese, who survives, makes me question whether this revenge was successful. It could therefore be said that a third characteristic of *Red Sorghum* is that the anti-Japanese hero does not have to be a socialist resistance hero, but it could as well be a 'bad' Chinese with strong vengeful feelings towards the Japanese.

Conclusion

When analyzing *Red Sorghum,* three main discourses can be found. In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare,* propaganda does not play a central role in *Red Sorghum,* but the personal story of ordinary Chinese peasants, who not even seem to be communist, plays a central role. The film therefore first of all presents a discourse on local cultural life. Second, the Japanese are no longer presented as foolish people, but they are depicted as devils who seem to enjoy taking lives and torturing people. In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare,* in which the Chinese villagers

[46] Tam, 2015, 15
[47] Qin, 2010, 170

encountered little disaster and victory seemed to be all theirs, *Red Sorghum* emphasizes the horrors that the Chinese did encounter and presents a discourse on the horrors of the Second Sino-Japanese war. Lastly, the film presents a discourse on the revenge taken by the Chinese. Although it seems that revenge for the Chinese people is successful since the Japanese were killed, Chinese lives are lost as well and only the 'bad' Chinese protagonist survives.

Despite the fact that the 1980s have been characterized as the golden age of Sino-Japanese relations, *Red Sorghum* does focus on the horrors of the Second Sino-Japanese war and the inhumane side of the Japanese. This in contrast to *Tunnel Warfare* where focus mainly lay on remembering the victories and heroic actions of the Chinese people. This difference may have to do with the fact that Fifth Generation filmmakers operated under less strict control and had a lot of artistic freedom.

Chapter 3

Depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Devils on the Doorstep (2000)

"The Japanese are human too."[48]

In chapter 2 we have seen that in *Red Sorghum,* Chinese images tend toward demonization and dehumanization of Japan and the Japanese. In this third chapter, we will see that the image of Japan and the Japanese is different again in *Devils on the Doorstep*, which does not emphasize the horrors of war but tends toward a (re)humanization of Japan and the Japanese.

3.1 Socio-historical background

The previous chapter mentioned Deng Xiaoping and his economic reforms in the 1980s. One group that benefitted considerably from the reforms were the intellectuals, such as students and academics. Mitter explains that the new freedoms that intellectuals enjoyed gave them appetite for more: the demanded further opening up of the party.[49] This eventually led to the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in 1989 that were suppressed by the army in the night of 3-4 June.[50]

This demand for more freedom, led to the rise of a new generation filmmakers, the Sixth Generation. Bordwell and Thompson mention that these new directors were not Film Academy graduates, but often became entranced with cinema by watching foreign films. The new generation filmmakers pursued their own visions and they could escape government control by overseas financing. Because many of the Sixth Generation films were not submitted for censorship, most of those films were regarded as "illegal" and were likely to be never shown in China.[51] These illegal films however triumphed at film festivals in Europe. This eventually led to the adoption of strict measures by the Chinese government: any film made in China, had to pass censorship in order to be shown abroad. *Devils on the Doorstep* by Jiang Wen is also a Sixth Generation film that had to deal with these strict measures. *Devils on the Doorstep* triumphed at the film festival in Cannes and won the Jury Prize, but after the

[48] Jiang, 2000
[49] Mitter, 2008, 67
[50] Mitter, 2008, 68
[51] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 640

Chinese authorities adopted strict measures, the film was forbidden to be shown in China or abroad as punishment for not submitting his work to censors.[52]

After the Tiananmen incident, China wanted to restore Sino-Japanese relations to the so-called Golden-Age status. However, Dreyer explains that this era of relative good relations began to end in the mid-1990s as familiar tensions between the two countries returned.[53] It is against this background that Jiang Wen decided to produce *Devils on the Doorstep*, a film that tends toward the humanization of Japan and the Japanese. In the following analysis of the film however, it will become clear that the tendency toward humanization of Japan and the Japanese is more nuanced.

3.2 Chinese as fools and collaborators

A first characteristic for the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in *Devils on the Doorstep* is that the Chinese protagonists are presented as fools and collaborators in the film. This is different from the image of the Chinese protagonists shown in chapter 1 and chapter 2: the Chinese protagonists in *Tunnel Warfare* are socialist resistance heroes and the Chinese protagonists in *Red Sorghum*, although not all necessarily exemplary Chinese people, also have strong vengeful feelings towards the Japanese. Jiang Wen however, presents a different type of Chinese protagonist in *Devils on the Doorstep*. As mentioned in the introduction, the plot of the film tells the story of Chinese peasant Ma Dasan, played by Jiang Wen himself, who gets interrupted when making love to his lover Yu'er when a man bursts into his house and holds Dasan at gunpoint. The identity of the man remains unknown and he only refers to himself as "我" or "Me," while also Dasan has no clue who the man is. The man demands Dasan to hold two men captive and interrogate them. The man promises he will return by the eve of Chinese New Year to collect them and before Dasan could ask anything, the man disappeared. The two men are Japanese sergeant Kosaburo Hanaya and Chinese interpreter Dong Hanchen who works for the Japanese army. Not knowing what to do, Dasan asks his fellow villagers for help. Out of fear of what will happen if they do not obey the mysterious man, the villagers decide to follow his orders and hide the two men in Dasan's cellar.

Dasan is criticized several times by his mother for hiding the two Japanese captives, who accuses him of being a collaborator (Figure 20 and 21). She herself would rather die than be a

[52] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 641
[53] Dreyer, 2016, 188

collaborator and suggests Dasan should do the same. Dasan however, feels like he has no choice and tries his best to take good care of them. He feels that it is not right to let them die (Figure 22). In *Devils on the Doorstep*, the Chinese protagonist Ma Dasan is neither a soldier nor a communist, but a simple peasant who is more interested in self-preservation than resisting foreign aggression.[54] This image of the Chinese protagonists in *Devils on the Doorstep* stands in sharp contrast to the Chinese with strong vengeful feelings towards the Japanese in *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum*.

Figure 20

Figure 21

[54] Tam, 2015, 18

Figure 22

It was precisely this image of the Chinese as foolish collaborators and the lack of strong vengeful feelings towards the Japanese of the Chinese protagonists, that caused the film to receive a lot of criticism and was even banned by the Chinese government. As Simon Fowler mentions in *100 Essential Chinese Movies*, the film was condemned and eventually banned by the Chinese government for "severely distorting history" and characterizing the Chinese as "ignorant...not hating the Japanese as they should."[55] Following its success at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000, *Devils on the Doorstep* was labeled 'insufficiently patriotic' by the Chinese Film Bureau and judged to have distorted China's history. Jiang Wen was banned from making films in China for seven years. Although the film was shown at foreign film festivals and enjoyed brief runs in France and the United States of America, it has not been released in China.[56]

Julian Ward mentions in "Filming the Anti-Japanese War: The Devils and Buffoons of Jiang Wen's Guizi Laile" that the film has never been far from controversy. First of all, Jiang Wen was accused by You Fengwei, the author of *Getting By* (*Shengcun* 生存), the story of which the film is loosely based, that Jiang traduced the tone of his story by omitting the positive role played by the Chinese Communist Party and concentrating instead on depicting the Chinese people as ignorant fools.[57] According to You Fengwei, the villagers in Jiang's film were simply an unruly mob, docile and subservient to the Japanese, devoid of national consciousness, and lacking understanding of the anti-Japanese struggle.[58] The Chinese

[55] Fowler, 2010, 59
[56] Ward, 2004, 108
[57] Ward, 2004, 108
[58] Ward, 2004, 113

peasants eventually even discover similarities between Japanese sergeant Hanaya and themselves when interrogating him: he turns out to be a peasant too (Figure 23).

Figure 23

As mentioned by Pramaggiore and Wallis, light is an essential requirement of filmmaking. It illuminates the set and the actors and can be used to create certain moods and effects.[59] Much of the action at the beginning of *Devils on the Doorstep* takes place inside the homes of the villagers. The lighting is therefore crucial for establishing the film's atmosphere and Ward argues that the atmosphere that Jiang Wen sought to create for the film is considerably enhanced by the camerawork of Gu Changwei, the same man who did the cinematography of *Red Sorghum.* As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gu Changwei is known for creating a documentary-like feel. In *Devils on the Doorstep* he also uses a hand-held camera in the early parts of the film to accentuate certain comic episodes. The oil lamps in the peasants' homes provide dramatic back lighting as the camera moves from face to face. This use of lighting and the black-and-white cinematography, which is the most noticeable stylistic feature of the film, create the documentary like atmosphere.[60]

Although *Devils on the Doorstep* does present Dasan with friendly feelings towards the Japanese, the end of the film does present him with strong vengeful feelings towards them. The mysterious man who delivered the prisoners does not show up by the eve of Chinese New Year as he promised. Six months later the man has still not returned and it is at this point that the villagers plan on killing the prisoners. Dasan has to take up this task after a drawing of lots. However, he does not dare to commit murder and instead hides the prisoners somewhere else

[59] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 109
[60] Ward, 2004, 111

and continues to keep them alive. When the other villagers find out Dasan has not killed them, they decide to hire an assassin, but even he fails to kill them. The villagers then decide to return the prisoners to the Japanese Army encampment.

The return of Hanaya however shames the army, who already assumed he was dead and made him a war hero. After giving Hanaya a heavy beating, the Japanese commander of the army, Inokichi Sakatsuka, does thank the Chinese villagers and demands his men to bring food and wine to the village to celebrate together. During this celebration the friendly attitude of the Japanese commander changes completely. When the Japanese commander wants to speak to Dasan, he discovers that Dasan is not present; Dasan was just out of town to pick up Yu'er. The commander then starts accusing Dasan of plotting against the Japanese and it is at this point that he orders his men to kill all the villagers and to burn down the village completely.

Soon after this raid, Japan surrenders and the war is over. Dasan however is filled with vengeful feelings and ends up killing Japanese soldiers. He tries to find Hanaya, but before he could kill him he is stopped by guards. It is in this last part of the film that the image of the Chinese as foolish collaborators is contested: Dasan does hold vengeful feelings towards the Japanese.

3.3 "Who says the Japanese are not human?"

A second characteristic of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in *Devils on the Doorstep* is that Jiang Wen tends toward humanization of Japan and the Japanese in the film. As shown in chapter 1 and chapter 2, the Japanese are depicted as fools in *Tunnel Warfare* and even worse in *Red Sorghum*, where they are not even human. A key characteristic of the depiction of Japan and the Japanese in *Devils on the Doorstep* is that they are depicted in the opposite way. At least in part, *Devils on the Doorstep* presents a discourse on the humanness of the Japanese, where they are depicted as good, friendly human beings.

The opening scene of the film shows the entry of the Japanese into the village Dasan lives in. The children of the village are happy and excited to see the Japanese who hand them candy (Figure 24). This image of the Japanese as friendly human beings is in sharp contrast with the image depicted of them in chapter 1 and chapter 2. Whereas the film was banned in China for the way the Japanese and the Chinese are depicted in the film, the film did become a box-office hit in Japan for the exact same reasons: the overwhelming feeling in Japan is that,

compared to other Chinese films, Jiang's portrayal of Japanese soldiers is realistic and unpropagandistic and that the film is more about exposing universal human nature than about criticizing Japanese brutality.[61]

Figure 24

The entry of the Japanese is followed by cheerful music and this Japanese naval tune is heard several more times in the course of the film. The tune is used to signify the arrival in the village of the parading Japanese forces and in this way alerts the villagers to the possibility of the prisoners being discovered.[62] Besides this soundtrack, the film also uses non-diegetic music to highlight the importance of the relationship between Ma Dasan and his lover Yu'er. Ward argues that the use of such music underlines the fact that *Devils on the Doorstep* is not about displaying heroic courage, but rather the effects of war on the lives of non-combatants.[63]

Although the film was banned by the Chinese government because the Chinese were depicted as collaborators not hating the Japanese as they should and the film tends toward humanization of the Japanese, *Devils on the Doorstep* does not only show the good sides of the Japanese. The scenes that show the goodness of the Japanese are alternated by scenes that show the inhumane side of the Japanese. The massacre of the village at the end of the film is the best example of this. During this raid, the same Japanese general that gives children candy at the beginning of the film, kills a child during this massacre of the village at the end of the film (Figure 25).

[61] Xu, 2007, 49
[62] Ward, 2004, 112
[63] Ward, 2004, 112

Figure 25

Moreover, Japanese sergeant Hanaya is depicted as an inhumane being at the beginning of the film. In contrast to *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum* in which only the Chinese language is used to communicate, *Devils on the Doorstep* adds another aspect of the Second Sino-Japanese war to the film in the form of language barrier: the Japanese captive does speak Japanese. The moment Ma Dasan tells his fellow peasants about the two captives, they want to interrogate them. During this interrogation, they ask whether the Japanese sergeant killed Chinese people and raped Chinese women. His answer is, "Of course. That is what I came to China for" (Figure 26).

Figure 26

The Chinese translator Dong Hanchen however, does not translate this answer. During the first part of the film, the Japanese sergeant keeps scolding the Chinese, saying things such as, "I'll never surrender or betray the motherland! We will be victorious! Long live the emperor!" The Japanese sergeant believes Hanchen translates his words correctly, but this is not the case. Hanchen deliberately mistranslates his words in order to ensure that the villagers do not hear

anything that might cause them offence. The scenes with mistranslations add to the humorous level of the film. Hanchen teaches Hanaya honeyed, respectful phrases. The bemused villagers are consequently greeted with a bellicose Japanese prisoner shouting out 'I am guilty', 'I surrender', and 'Do not kill me'.[64] The Chinese peasants therefore genuinely believe the Japanese sergeant has good intentions, while in reality, Hanaya has no good intentions at all. The depiction of the Japanese as 'good' human beings is therefore more complex than it seems at first sight.

The moment the villagers plan on killing the prisoners, but fail in doing so, Hanaya's attitude changes and he only feels gratitude towards Dasan and his fellow villagers. He says: "The people here gave up their own rations to keep us alive for these six months. That women even dressed my wounds" (Figure 27).

Figure 27

This scene emphasizes the good, human side of the Japanese. The end of the film however, is nothing but violent: the Japanese kill the peasants and set their village on fire. As mentioned above, this results in revenge of Ma Dasan after the war ends. Ward notices a similarity between the end of *Red Sorghum* and *Devils on the Doorstep*. Just as the barbarism of the Japanese soldiers in the last section of *Red Sorghum* may have placated the censors who would have blanched at the boisterous attitude to sex seen earlier on in the film, Jiang Wen may also have tried to please the sensors with the scene in which Dasan takes revenge on the Japanese.[65] Although I agree that this seems to be in line with both *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum* in which the Chinese peasants also take revenge on the Japanese, Ma Dasan is

[64] Ward, 2004, 108-109
[65] Ward, 2004, 114

executed by Hanaya in public for doing so, the very man who he had been taking care of for the last months and whose life he had been unable to take. Before Dasan's decapitation, a Chinese officer gives a speech in which he says: "War hasn't only brought catastrophe to China, but to the people of Japan as well. Are the Japanese not human too?" (Figure 28).

Figure 28

The final shot shows the decapitation of Dasan and it is the only color shot in the entire film. Gary Xu mentions in "Violence, Sixth Generation Filmmaking, and Devils on the Doorstep" that this contrast between all the black-and-white scenes and the decapitation shot in color is the key to understanding Jiang's choice of black and white. Xu argues that the fact that the Japanese soldier is able to kill Ma Dasan, which both the hired Chinese executioner as well as Dasan were not able to do, emphasizes the skill of the Japanese and the Chinese peasants' naïveté, ignorance and even stupidity. The staging of this violent act apparently is intended to criticize the Chinese national character. It is modern Chinese history that is being mocked according to Xu.[66] Furthermore, Jiang Wen's film reflects how history is not as black and white as the official version of history: the Japanese are not as evil as thought and the Chinese are not as heroic as thought.[67]

Conclusion

When analyzing and comparing *Devils on the Doorstep* with *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum*, two things are striking. First, in contrast to *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum*, in which the Japanese are presented as foolish people in *Tunnel Warfare* and devils in *Red Sorghum* respectively, *Devils on the Doorstep* tends to give a more nuanced depiction of

[66] Xu, 2007, 42-43
[67] Xu, 2007, 44

Japan and the Japanese. They are presented not only as devils but the film also tends towards humanization of the Japanese. Second, in contrast to *Tunnel Warfare,* in which the Japanese are presented as stupid and the Chinese as revolutionary thinkers, *Devils on the Doorstep* presents the Chinese as foolish collaborators.

Since *Devils on the Doorstep* is banned in China and for this reason no reactions to the film can be found on Chinese social media such as Weibo, we can only guess what Chinese society thinks of this film. The fact that Jiang Wen tried to depict the Japanese in a different light, indicates a certain change.

Chapter 4

Depictions of Japan and the Japanese in The Flowers of War (2011)

"I apologize on behalf of our soldiers."[68]

This last chapter focuses on the analysis of the depiction of Japan and the Japanese in Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War*, one of the most recent films on the Second Sino-Japanese war. We will see that a different aspect of the war is added to this film, namely the role Americans played in this war, and it seems that the attempt of Jiang Wen to portray a nuanced view of the war in *Devils on the Doorstep* is partly continued by Zhang.

4.1 Socio-historical background

In 2008, two years before *The Flowers of War* was produced, the Olympic Games were held in Beijing. Mitter mentions that the Olympic Games was a symbolic 'coming out' from a dictatorial past: it symbolizes China's arrival in the international community.[69] We can see similar developments in the Chinese cinema. After China joined the World Trade Organization in the 1990s, Chinese cinema also arrived in the international community. Bordwell and Thompson mention that American funding had helped China to make high profit worldwide. Zhang Yimou, also director of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games in 2008, became one of the establishments of this type of film with his film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* from 2000, which turned out to be the biggest-earning Mainland film at that time. In a sense, Zhang became the official filmmaker of the New China.[70] Perhaps because of the widespread sense that Chinese cinema arrived in the international community, Zhang gave a special role to a white American male in the film *The Flowers of War.*

The film is played against the background of the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, also known as the Rape of Nanjing. After the seizure of the city Nanjing, former capital of the nationalist Chinese, soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army killed and ravaged large numbers of Chinese citizens and decapitated soldiers (the death toll is generally set at 300,000 in a matter of days).

[68] Zhang, 2011
[69] Mitter, 2008, 94
[70] Bordwell & Thompson, 2010, 642

This destruction of the city was ordered by Japanese commanding General Matsui Iwane.[71] Whereas China tries to come to terms with its dictatorial past to the rest of the world, Sino-Japanese relations were in their downturns and contradictions were deepening as mentioned by Dreyer. Results from a poll from 2006 show that only 28 percent of the Japanese held a favorable view of China, and only 20 percent of the Chinese had a favorable view of Japan.[72] Despite the status of Sino-Japanese relations at the time the film was made, *The Flowers of War* shows that Zhang did not portray the Japanese invaders as only negative. Again, the relation between the socio-historical background and the portrayal of the Japanese in a film of that time is not one-on-one.

4.2 The white American hero

The protagonists in the first three films were of Chinese descent. In *Tunnel Warfare* Chuanbao was the socialist resistance hero of the film; in *Red Sorghum* it was My Grandpa who was the 'hero' of the film, although it could be discussed whether he is a real hero; and in *Devils on the Doorstep* it was Ma Dasan who played the lead role as both collaborator and hero. In *The Flowers of War* however, the protagonist is a white American named John Miller, played by Christian Bale. A first characteristic of *The Flowers of War* is therefore that an international aspect is added: not only Chinese people were victims of this war, but Western people were victims too. It may be because Zhang tried to highlight the international aspect of the war and also had a Western audience in mind, and at the same time wanted to give an alternative to the classical 'white savior tale', as will be discussed below, that the dialogs in the film are for a large part spoken in English.

The Flowers of War is told from the perspective of Shu Juan, a Chinese convent schoolgirl trapped in the city of Nanjing during the Nanjing massacre of 1937. The plot tells the story of John Miller, an American mortician who has the task to bury a priest of a Catholic cathedral run by Westerners in Nanjing in 1937. The Japanese have taken over the city and the beginning of the film shows how a group of young schoolgirls, including Shu Juan, and John Miller try to get to the cathedral. When they get there, John is welcomed by a boy named George, who was raised by the dead priest. Not long after they arrive, a group of sex workers

[71] *Brittanica Academic*, 2018, https://academic-eb-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/levels/collegiate/article/Nanjing-Massacre/54784
[72] Dreyer, 2016, 21

also arrive at the cathedral trying to find shelter. During the film, John Miller and one of the sex workers named Yu Mo develop intimate feelings for each other.

Jing Yang argues in "The reinvention of Hollywood's classic white savior tale in contemporary Chinese cinema: *Pavilion of Women* and *The Flowers of War*" that both the film *Pavilion of Women* and *The Flowers of War* tried to adapt Hollywood's white savior tale to present a more nuanced image of China. In the classic white savior narrative the story of a white man's venturing into the exotic land and chivalrous rescue of a Chinese woman is a recurring pattern, but this Orientalist image of China being inferior to the West is contested in both films.[73] *Pavilion of Women* is a film directed by Chinese actress Luo Yan and tells the story of the emancipation of two Chinese women, Madame Wu and Qiuming amidst the Japanese invasion in 1938. The film tries to adapt the white savior tale into a feminist-nationalist discourse. Both *Pavilion of Women* and *The Flowers of War* however, are criticized for their attempt to intervene in Western discourses to present a complex and nuanced image of China.[74]

The attempt of Zhang to adapt the traditional white savior tale clearly appears at the beginning of the film. The moment John arrives at the cathedral, the first thing he says to George is that he has to pay him, otherwise he will not help him bury the priest (Figure 29).

Figure 29

John does not feel the need to help the girls and the sex workers at all and it is not until one of the schoolgirls tragically dies, that he changes his mind. This image indeed does not fit the classic white savior tale. Besides, *The Flowers of War* also differs from a classic white savior

[73] Yang, 2014, 248
[74] Yang, 2014, 249

narrative in that the woman the white savior tries to rescue and conquer, is not submissive, innocent and illiterate as they are in the classical tale.[75] Instead, Yu Mo is the one in power. I will elaborate more on the empowerment of women in *The Flowers of War* later this chapter.

Although *The Flowers of War* is not a classic white savior tale, John Miller is portrayed as a hero later in the film. As Jing mentions in his article, John is a multi-layered character undergoing spiritual transformation and emotional recovery.[76] At the beginning of the film, as the previous example shows, John does not care about anything but himself and money. This attitude changes however, when a schoolgirl dies. At one point in the film, Japanese forces assault the cathedral and try to rape the schoolgirls. During this raid, one of the schoolgirls falls of the stairs due to Japanese violence and instantly dies. Fortunately, the only Chinese soldier left in the city kills the Japanese soldiers during this raid and therefore worse has been prevented. The young girl reminded John of his own daughter that he recently lost and it is at this moment that he decides to protect the girls. He secretly tries to repair an old truck standing outside the cathedral to use for an escape. It is also during this raid that John decides to dress up as a priest and tries to stop the Japanese (Figure 30 and 31). Yu Mo compliments John for his brave action (Figure 32).

Figure 30

[75] Yang, 2014, 248
[76] Yang, 2014, 256

Figure 31

Figure 32

4.3 The Chinese hero

Besides the white American hero, *The Flowers of War* also features Chinese heroes. In chapter 1 the Chinese hero was portrayed as a socialist resistance hero willing to give up his life for his country. In chapter 2 and 3 the image of the Chinese 'hero' was somewhat different. The Chinese hero in *Red Sorghum* turns out to be a bandit and a rapist and the Chinese hero in *Devils on the Doorstep* is even criticized for not being a hero because he lacks strong vengeful feelings against the Japanese. The Chinese hero in *Flowers of War* however, seems to have the most similarities with the protagonist in *Tunnel Warfare.*

Although the film does not foreground anything like a socialist spirit, the Chinese soldiers heroically sacrifice their life. The beginning of the film shows how the few soldiers that are left, although aware of the fact that they do not have adequate weapons, give up their life trying to defeat the Japanese. Eventually only one Chinese soldier survives, who also rescues the convent girls during the Japanese raid at the cathedral. In a detailed scene the film shows

how this Chinese soldier uses his last strength fighting the Japanese. As he is shot down and falls off a building, a network of bombs is activated and destroys a whole building with Japanese soldiers in it (Figure 33 and 34). This scene is shot in slow-motion and this enhances the dramatic effect.[77] This shows many similarities with the protagonist Laozhong from *Tunnel Warfare* who also uses his last strength to throw a grenade to the Japanese. Before the bombs are activated, a close-up of the face of the Chinese soldier is shown. As mentioned by Pramaggiore and Wallis, a close-up tends to produce a greater sense of intimacy by allowing viewers to focus on actors' faces and character emotions.[78]

Figure 33

Figure 34

Besides Chinese heroes, the film does also feature Chinese collaborators. As we have seen in both chapter 1 and 3, this is not a new aspect. In *The Flowers of War,* the father of Shu Juan collaborates with the Japanese, because as he says, he has no other choice. He does however

[77] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 135
[78] Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2011, 142

help John get a permit to leave the city with his truck, that eventually allows John to rescue the schoolgirls.

4.4 Japanese as humans?

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Japanese have been depicted as foolish people in *Tunnel Warfare*, they are dehumanized in *Red Sorghum* and in *Devils on the Doorstep*, the director attempted to also emphasize the humane side of the Japanese. Since the story of *The Flowers of War* is set against the background of the Nanjing Massacre, the event in which the Japanese mass murdered and raped Chinese citizens, one would assume that the Japanese would be depicted as solely evil in this film. Zhang Yimou however, did try to show the human side of the Japanese. As mentioned by *Xinhua*, while admitting that the moral judgment on the Nanjing Massacre is indisputable, Zhang said he tried to portray the Japanese invaders with multiple layers in an attempt to distinguish the film from previous ones depicting the same subject that were written off as unilateral propaganda.[79]

His attempt to portray the Japanese as humans is well shown in the scene when a Japanese officer comes to the cathedral. After Japanese soldiers assaulted the cathedral and tried to rape the girls, Japanese Colonel Hasegawa comes to the cathedral to apologize for what happened (Figure 35).

Figure 35

After that, he starts to play a song on the piano in the church. It is a Japanese folksong from his hometown that he and his soldiers love to hear when they are homesick. This scene emphasizes that the Japanese have feelings too and are also victims of the war. Zhang says

[79] Zhang, 2011, http://english.cntv.cn/20111222/110066.shtml

that he wanted to give this character something special and did not want to generalize.[80] The scene emphasizes the sentimental character of the Japanese officer and by using a close-up, his facial expressions really show that he is affected by what happened and this creates a greater sense of intimacy as mentioned above (Figure 36).

Figure 36

He concludes by saying that he will post armed guards in front of the church to protect them. This attempt of Zhang to portray the Japanese with sentimental features is also noticed by Chinese people when reading reactions to *The Flowers of War* on Weibo. One reaction goes like this: "当日本军官唱起故乡民谣的那刻，我得承认内心有非常大的触动" or "The moment the Japanese officer sings a folksong from his hometown, I have to admit that I felt deeply moved."[81]

After this emotional moment however, Hasegawa gives John an invitation for the schoolgirls to sing at a victory celebration party of the Japanese army. Although John feels that something is wrong and declines, the Colonel insists that they have to be ready the next day. It turns out that the only reason the girls are protected, is that the Colonel wants them alive for the celebration. It is obvious that singing is just a cover for the real reason they want the girls to be present. Before the Japanese leave, they count the girls and erroneously include one of the sex workers, making it thirteen in total. The rest of the film contains cruel scenes of ravaging of Chinese citizens by the Japanese army and even contains a scene of the cruel rape and murder of two of the sex workers who left the church to find strings for a violin. The

[80] Zhang, 2011, http://english.cntv.cn/20111222/110066.shtml
[81] Sina Weibo, 2017, https://www.Sina Weibo.com/p/10012047997/review?feed_filter=1#1523351654021

single scene of the Japanese soldier apologizing and singing a sentimental song therefore does not outweigh the cruel scenes in order to create a positive portrayal of the Japanese.

4.5 Women

A fourth and last characteristic of the depiction of the Second Sino-Japanese war in *The Flowers of War* is the attention paid to the role of women. Not only men are heroes in this film, but also women play a heroic role. *The Flowers of War* is however not the first film in which a woman plays a lead role, as we have seen in chapter 2, where Jiu'er is one of the protagonists. Although some might argue Jiu'er is also a hero in some aspects, the role of hero is largely ascribed to My Grandpa in *Red Sorghum*.

After the convent schoolgirls find out about the invitation of Japanese Colonel Hasegawa, Shu Juan convinces the other girls that they are better off committing suicide than go along with the invitation. Yu Mo however, saves them by convincing her fellow sex workers to protect the schoolgirls and go in their place instead. There are only twelve sex workers however, so George volunteers as well. Using his morticians skills, John helps them to dress up like the convent girls and the next morning they are awaited by the Japanese soldiers. After they left, John hides the convent girls in the repaired truck and escapes. If it was not for the heroic sacrifice of Yu Mo and the other sex workers, John would not have been able to help the girls escape.

According to Jing, it is charismatic figures such as Madame Wu and Qiuming from *Pavilion of Women* and Yu Mo from *The Flowers of War* that make these films different from the classic white savior tale. They do not simply play the role of exotic victims awaiting the white hero's redemption. Instead, they are granted power and agency to pursue freedom, change their fate and make sacrifices stemming from their own moral courage and patriotism. These are qualities that previously were only granted to the white savior and were the signifier of the 'advanced' West. By granting Chinese characters with these qualities, it is signified that China is no longer inferior to the West.[82] In this way the classic Hollywood paradigm is contested.

Meanwhile, the submissive status of the Chinese women is sustained within the framework of interracial romance. Both the women in *Pavilion of Women* and *The Flowers of War* eventually are conquered by the white savior. Jing argues that this shows that both films

[82] Yang, 2014, 258

struggle to maintain a balance between rejecting and sustaining the Hollywood classic white savior tale. [83]

Conclusion

In 2008, two years before the film *The Flowers of War* was produced, the Olympic Games were held in Beijing. It was seen as an opportunity for China to show to the rest of the world its arrival in the international community. It is against this background that *The Flowers of War* was produced and it may therefore be no surprise that a white American male plays the main role in this film. According to Larson, who wrote an extensive book on the work of Zhang Yimou, an interest in the cultural resources available to people as the societies in which they live undergo rapid change is a recurring feature of Zhang's films. Globalization and the subject of culture is an apt phrase for the intriguing and provocative films that Zhang has produced.[84] As Jing argues, in its attempt to adapt Hollywood's classical white savior tale, *The Flowers of War* provides tools to address issues of Chinese nationalism and cultural centrism under the impact of globalization and transnationalism. Jing therefore concludes that *The Flowers of War* can be read as key cultural text illustrating the reconciliation of China's socialist past with its new-found identity in global capitalism.[85]

Although the protagonist is an American, *The Flowers of War* is not a classical white savior narrative. The Chinese female protagonist Yu Mo turns out to be a strong female and this might show the viewer that China is no longer inferior to the West. We could therefore conclude that in *The Flowers of War*, the Second Sino-Japanese war is not only viewed as a war between China and Japan, but the role Westerners played is also emphasized. As far as the depiction of Japan and the Japanese is concerned, Zhang did try to give the Japanese multiple layers and wanted to show the human side of the Japanese. We could therefore see a continuation of Jiang Wen's attempt to humanize the Japanese.

[83] Yang, 2014, 258
[84] Larson, 2017, 345
[85] Yang, 2014, 258

Conclusion

When comparing four movies from different moments in time and with different socio-historical contexts, we can conclude that depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Chinese movies about the Second Sino-Japanese war have developed over time. With the passing of time, we can see a development from the image of the foolish Japanese to the image of the cruel and inhumane Japanese. These two different images serve two different discourses. *Tunnel Warfare* presents a discourse on the importance of Mao Zedong thought and the revolutionary Chinese people, while *Red Sorghum* presents a discourse on ordinary peasant life and how it got interrupted by the arrival of the Japanese. In *Devils on the Doorstep* we can see a change to the depiction of the Japanese with humane features. *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum* both emphasize the great difference between the 'good' Chinese and the 'bad' Japanese, but *Devils on the Doorstep* from 2000 tries to show a different perspective: Japanese are human too. This tendency towards humanization of the Japanese partly continues in *The Flowers of War,* in which Zhang Yimou gave the Japanese general sentimental features. These humane features both the Japanese in *Devils on the Doorstep* and *The Flowers of War* possess, are absent in *Tunnel Warfare* and *Red Sorghum*.

Not only the depiction of Japan and the Japanese has changed with the passing of time, but a lot of other aspects in the depiction of the Sino-Japanese war have changed. As far as the depiction of the Chinese is concerned, we have seen a change from the socialist resistance hero in *Tunnel Warfare* to the non-communist 'bad' Chinese protagonist in *Red Sorghum*; in *Devils on the Doorstep* we see an even 'worse' Chinese protagonist, namely the Chinese collaborationist; in *The Flowers of War* the heroic Chinese from *Tunnel Warfare* is back, but is followed by a female Chinese protagonist and a white American who both play a lead role. Taking both the change in the depiction of the Japanese and the Chinese in consideration, this research shows that there have been a change from depicting the Sino-Japanese war as a one-sided story of a war between the cruel and foolish Japanese and the revolutionary Chinese, to the attempt to produce a many-sided story of a war between not only Japan and the Chinese in which both the Japanese and the Chinese are sometimes foolish and sometimes sentimental, but as a war in which Westerners were involved too.

Although we can see developments, we cannot speak of a gradual or linear change to a less extreme antagonistic image of the Japanese with the passing of time: Japan and the Japanese are depicted a lot worse in *Red Sorghum,* than they are in the earlier *Tunnel Warfare.* In

addition, we have also seen that the socio-historical background in which the films were produced, has not always demonstrably influenced in a one-on-one fashion how Japan and the Japanese were depicted in the film: in periods where China and Japan were on good terms, the Japanese were still dehumanized, as is the case in *Red Sorghum.* Therefore, there seems to be no one-on-one relation between the socio-historical background in which the film was produced and the way Japan and the Japanese are depicted herein.

This research tried to answer the question how depictions of Japan and the Japanese in Chinese films about the Second Sino-Japanese war have developed over time and in this sense get an idea of China's national feelings towards Japan and the Japanese at different moments in time. This research has shown that the medium of film proves to be a useful tool in reflecting the national feelings towards this topic: the way directors try to depict the Japanese in their film, indicates something about their feelings towards Japan and the way the films are received through various platforms including social media, indicates something about the feelings towards Japan by the public. Specific use of camerawork and music make the medium of film unique in evoking emotions: by focusing on local songs and using close-ups sympathetic feelings can be created.

However, government control in China is really tight and censorship makes it harder to get a grasp of the opinion the public holds towards that particular film and Japan and the Japanese in general. *Devils on the Doorstep* was banned in China because of the way the Japanese were depicted in the film and although this indicates something about the way the government views Japan and the Japanese, it does not tell us anything about the national feelings. Besides, the films that have been studied in this research form just a small part of all Chinese films directed on the topic of the Second Sino-Japanese war, and directors and cinematographers obviously also exert profound individual influence on their films, and we should therefore be careful about generalizing. It is however impossible to take all films on this topic in consideration, so we could therefore conclude that the depiction of Japan and the Japanese is less extreme antagonistic with the passage of time, but this development is however not gradual.

The overall conclusion could therefore be that the Second Sino-Japanese war is remembered differently at different moments in time and there seems to be no one-on-one relation between the socio-historical background and the way Japan and the Japanese are depicted in films. China and Japan have found ways to cooperate on several issues and this can be seen in the

attempt of Chinese directors from Second Sino-Japanese war films in portraying Japan and the Japanese with multiple layers. Although the Chinese government does not appreciate this attempt, the attempt of the directors and the way it is received by the public does indicate a certain change in the national feelings towards Japan and the Japanese and the Second Sino-Japanese war in general. It is tried to remember the war in a less black-and-white fashion.

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