

# Between Red and Child: The Evolving Politics of the Child's Body in China's Red Children's Films

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## Abstract

In 2022, China's Ministry of Education issued a new version of the compulsory education curriculum plan and standards, further deepening curriculum reform and integrating film and television (including digital media arts) as a subject throughout the curriculum system for grades one to nine. As a product of the intersection between film and education, children's films constitute an inherent component in the development of the film and television discipline during the compulsory education stage. China's red children's films can not only foster patriotism among young audiences but also help them "fasten the first button of life." This study adopts a combination of historical periodization and textual analysis, drawing on theories from the philosophy of childhood, sociology of the body, and ideological criticism to systematically examine the narrative strategies and character construction in China's red children's films across different historical periods. The research finds that the evolution of these films reflects the transformation of China's socio-political context and cultural policies over time. The construction of child characters represents both an artistic exploration of children's subjectivity and a discursive practice through which national ideology operates within the realm of children's culture. By tracing the shifting representation of the child's body—from revolutionary hero to wounded witness, from collective symbol to psychological subject—this study reveals the persistent tension between ideological imperatives and authentic child-centered aesthetics. It argues that the genre's most successful works navigate this tension creatively, while its failures emerge when education overwhelms entertainment or form substitutes for substance. This study holds theoretical value and practical relevance for deepening the understanding of the aesthetic characteristics, educational functions, and

cultural mission of China's red children's films, offering concrete strategies for contemporary filmmakers seeking to engage young audiences while preserving ideological integrity.

**Keywords:** China's red children's films, body politics, red classics, child-centered aesthetics, character construction

## 1. Introduction

As a medium capable of shaping public ideology, film plays a decisive role in the civilization of a nation. Red classics, as a fundamental component of mainstream ideological construction, have established a comprehensive system of discourse and cultural production methods. They profoundly influence the emotional frameworks, lifestyles, and modes of expression of the Chinese people, while also serving educational, enlightening, and exemplary functions for children (Rao, 2011). In film art, the body serves as the foundation for image creation. Through visual representation, creators shape child characters who drive the narrative and imbue the work with specific cultural meanings. These characters act as mirrors of their era while also functioning as subjects shaped by power and ideology. Over the past century, the identities of child protagonists in China's red children's films have typically revolved around young heroes in the flames of war, victims resisting conflict, successors to the socialist cause, and witnesses of the new era. These films often depict children actively participating in the construction and development of the Party and the nation, remaining devoted to the Party and the people, and contributing their efforts toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Through their physical expressions, these child characters consistently embody the ideals of heroism, collectivism, and communism—concepts constructed around the core principles of national orientation, national interests, and national image. In doing so, they undertake the significant task of narrating the "rituals of the nation," carrying forward national allegories and grand narratives. Thus, China's red children's films serve as a form of cultural performance by the nation-state, presenting state ideology through this behavioral process (Ye, 2009). As China stands at a new historical juncture, questions arise: How can contemporary filmmakers create red children's films and on-screen characters that appeal to young audiences? How can aesthetic education cultivate a new generation capable of undertaking the mission of national rejuvenation? These are questions that every film professional must ponder. Taking these questions as its starting point, this article summarizes historical experiences by dividing China's red children's films into five distinct stages: the "Seventeen Years" period of initial emergence, the difficult transition period of the Cultural Revolution, the vigorous development period of the new historical period, the steady progress period at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the period of preparation and anticipation for the New Era. The aim is to grasp the developmental trends and aesthetic changes of this genre from a macro perspective, providing insights for film education and creation while addressing the important mission of cultivating a new generation capable of undertaking national rejuvenation. However, it must be pointed out that the phased evolution of China's red children's films does not follow a simple linear progression. Instead, it reflects a continuous interplay—and at times, a profound tension—between political discipline and artistic autonomy, adult-centeredness and child-centeredness, as well as grand narratives and individual experiences. As societal contexts shift and children's aesthetic preferences evolve,

many contemporary red children's films have struggled to maintain relevance, often falling into patterns of narrative stereotyping, excessive moralization, and an adult-centric worldview. These shortcomings reveal a deeper structural challenge: the difficulty of preserving the ideological core while authentically representing a child's perspective. The concept of child-centeredness, rooted in the theory of children as standard for education, has been repeatedly invoked across different periods, yet its implementation has been perpetually constrained by competing ideological demands. Understanding this complex and often contradictory historical process not only helps grasp the national characteristics and zeitgeist of Chinese children's cinema but also provides critical insights into how to achieve an organic integration of mainstream values and children's aesthetics in contemporary film and television education, while honestly assessing where the genre has faltered.

## **2. Initial Stage: Revolutionary War Narratives and Childlike Aesthetics during the Seventeen-Year Period**

In 1942, Mao Zedong delivered the "*Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*,"<sup>1</sup> which outlined the creative path and developmental direction for revolutionary literature and art. Thereafter, literary workers produced a large number of works reflecting the spirit of the times, centering on the people, and embodying a national style. Red films began to emerge on a large scale. These classic works were widely disseminated and have endured, deeply ingrained in people's consciousness, becoming formative memories for countless individuals and gradually coalescing into a kind of "collective unconscious." In 1950, the Film Bureau of the Ministry of Culture convened the Second Administrative Expansion Meeting; in the "Future Policy" section of the meeting report, it proposed "pilot production of educational films (including policy-explanatory educational films), children's films, and landscape films." The task of producing children's narrative films was raised for the first time. Thus, New China embarked on the creative path of children's films. The creation of children's films consistently adhered to the guiding principles set forth in Mao Zedong's "*Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*" and the "people-oriented" orientation and "red culture" characteristics of children's films became increasingly prominent. During this period, film creation focused primarily on revolutionary war themes, promoting patriotism and revolutionary heroism. In the narrative process, personal growth was closely linked to the fate of the nation, achieving a narrative structure of "individual — state — nation." The children depicted in these films all participated in war, creating numerous vivid child characters that have endured in China's cultural memory. Child characters from this period can be broadly categorized into two types. The first category involved direct confrontation with the enemy on the front lines or indirect engagement through cunning strategies, as seen in characters such as Zhang Gazi from *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* (1963), Xiao Hu from *Cowboy Joining the Army* (1957), the young guerrilla fighters in *Red Kid* (1958), the five Young Pioneers in *Heroic Little Eight* (1961), and the progressive children in *Underground Young Pioneers* (1959). The second category comprised children serving as wartime messengers for the Eighth Route Army, including Haiwa in *The Letter with Feathers* (1954), Chunlai in *Son of a Militiaman* (1958), and Xiao Chen in *Dawn over the Bank* (1958). Driven by profound patriotism and revolutionary ideals, these young heroes played pivotal roles in securing

victory. They demonstrated unwavering courage in the face of oppression, risking their lives and even sacrificing themselves for their nation and people. Breaking away from the traditional "larger-than-life" archetype, they underwent personal growth and transformation while embodying a distinct sense of childlike charm and aesthetic appeal. Their representation on screen established foundational patterns for how China's red children's films would navigate the relationship between ideological messaging and authentic childhood experience—a tension that would persist throughout the genre's subsequent evolution.

In 1954, Shi Hui directed *The Letter with Feathers*, adapted from Hua Shan's novel of the same name. As the first children's revolutionary war film of New China, it stands as a pioneering work in the genre of China's red children's films. Set during the War of Resistance against Japan, the story follows Haiwa, leader of the Children's Corps in Longmen Village, who is tasked with delivering an urgent letter — marked with feathers as a symbol of priority — to the Eighth Route Army. The film uses Haiwa's journey as its narrative thread, unfolding through a sequence of delivering, losing, and retrieving the letter, a structure that progressively builds tension and engages the audience. Rather than presenting Haiwa's mission as straightforward, the director introduces twists and dangers: encounters with Japanese soldiers, repeated confrontations after escape, misplacing the letter, being captured upon retrieval, and even being shot in the hand. These perilous episodes depict Haiwa as innocent, clever, and brave, yet occasionally careless, creating a well-rounded, believable, and authentically childlike portrayal. In addition, Su Li's *Red Kid* offers a collective portrait of youthful resistance. Set in 1934, the film follows a Red Youth guerrilla group led by Su Bao as they outwit Huang Jingbo, leader of the Jingwei Regiment. Seeking revenge for his father's death, Su Bao and his team infiltrate the regiment, rescue Chairman Li, and ultimately kill Huang Jingbo. The guerrilla team consists of six members: Su Bao, Hu Zai, Jin Gen, Shui Sheng, Xi Mei, and Dong Yazi. In his creative notes, director Su Li described each child's distinct personality: "Su Bao is like a young rooster—brave and steady; Hu Zai is straightforward and quick-tempered, flaring up at the slightest provocation; Jin Gen is clever and slick, always full of ideas; Shui Sheng is a quiet, scholarly type who speaks little; Dong Yazi resembles a newly hatched duckling, being the youngest; and Xi Mei is a sharp and capable girl, perceptive and attentive to everything around her" (Zuo, 1959:148). To help the young actors truly experience the hardships of revolutionary struggle, Su Li led them to visit revolutionary bases such as Jinggangshan and Ruijin, where they gained a deeper understanding of the struggles against the White Army and the revolutionary spirit of their predecessors. Co-directed by Cui Wei and Ouyang Hongying with a screenplay by Xu Guangyao, *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* stands as the pinnacle of China's red children's films from this era. Adapted from Xu Guangyao's novel of the same name, the protagonist Zhang Gazi was later selected as one of the "100 Classic Screen Characters in a Century of Chinese Cinema." Set during the War of Resistance against Japan, the film follows Zhang Gazi and his grandmother as they risk their lives to protect an injured Eighth Route Army soldier, Uncle Zhong. After his grandmother is captured and martyred by the Japanese army for her refusal to yield, Gazi embarks on an arduous journey to avenge her and rescue Uncle Zhong. He eventually finds the Eighth Route Army and collaborates with platoon leader Luo Jinbao to defeat the enemy. The directors crafted Gazi's character with remarkable depth, blending

flaws with virtues. He mistakes Luo Jinbao—whom he idolizes—for a traitor and unknowingly punctures the tires of his bicycle. He hides a real gun in a bird's nest to avoid surrendering it, bites others when upset, and is quick to cry. These childlike traits highlight his impulsive, stubborn yet honest nature while underscoring his intelligence, resilience, and wit, infusing the narrative with dramatic and comedic elements.

Building on these individual analyses, a comparative examination of *The Letter with Feathers* and *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* reveals significant divergences in their cinematic strategies for constructing the "little hero." Though both films center on young male protagonists navigating the perils of war, they represent distinct moments in the genre's development: the former explores the child's psychological experience of danger, while the latter marks a maturation into more complex visual language. Examining these two films in parallel demonstrates that the Seventeen Years period was not monolithic in its approach; rather, it was characterized by ongoing experimentation with how to represent the child's relationship to war on screen. By comparing their use of camera work, composition, and lighting, we can trace two distinct trajectories within early red children's cinema—one emphasizing the child's vulnerability and individual endurance, the other celebrating the child's spiritedness and integration into the collective.

### *2.1 The Gaze and the Body in the Letter with Feathers*

Director Shi Hui's visual strategy in *The Letter with Feathers* is characterized by a dialectic between the seen and the unseen, positioning Haiwa's body as both a site of vulnerability and a vessel for revolutionary duty. The film's most technically striking sequences occur during Haiwa's encounters with Japanese soldiers. In these moments, Shi Hui frequently employs point-of-view shots that align the audience's perspective with Haiwa's fearful gaze. When Haiwa hides in a haystack, the camera assumes his position, peering through gaps in the straw at the approaching enemy. This technique does more than generate suspense; it momentarily collapses the distance between viewer and child protagonist, inviting the audience to share his terror. The shallow depth of field in these sequences further isolates Haiwa from his surroundings, visually emphasizing his aloneness and vulnerability. Crucially, however, this subjective alignment is repeatedly interrupted by high-angle long shots that reframe Haiwa's body within the larger landscape of war. When he runs across open fields, the camera pulls back, reducing his figure to a small, darting shape against an expansive, indifferent terrain. This alternation between subjective immersion and objective distancing creates a visual rhythm that mirrors the film's thematic tension: Haiwa is simultaneously a psychologically plausible child experiencing fear and confusion, and a symbolic figure whose individual journey serves a larger national narrative. The film's most powerful image—Haiwa, having been shot in the hand, still clutching the feather letter—is rendered in medium close-up, the camera lingering on the blood seeping through the paper. Here, the child's wounded body becomes a visual synecdoche for the nation's sacrifice, individual pain sublimated into collective purpose.

### *2.2 Composition and Movement in Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy*

In contrast, Cui Wei and Ouyang Hongying's *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* employs a more

dynamic and spatially complex visual language. Where Shi Hui's camera often isolates Haiwa, Cui and Ouyang's camera frequently positions Zhang Gazi within densely populated frames, surrounded by fellow children, villagers, and Eighth Route Army soldiers. This compositional choice visually enacts the film's ideological premise: the child hero is not a solitary figure but is embedded within, and sustained by, a collective. The famous scene of Gazi hiding his precious pistol in a bird's nest is shot in a fluid tracking shot that follows his movements as he climbs the tree, the camera sharing his childlike excitement and mischief. The subsequent scene, in which he is forced to surrender the weapon, is staged in a series of two-shots and three-shots that emphasize the social pressure exerted by adult authority figures. The gun, a recurring visual motif, is repeatedly framed as the object of desire that mediates Gazi's relationship to the adult world of revolutionary struggle. The film's use of lighting further distinguishes its approach. While *The Letter with Feathers* employs high-contrast lighting to create a sense of danger and uncertainty, *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* favors a brighter, more even illumination that reduces shadows and enhances clarity. This choice aligns with the film's optimistic, almost folkloric tone. Even in moments of conflict, the visuals remain legible and accessible, reflecting the film's pedagogical ambition to present revolutionary struggle as an adventure in which the child audience can imaginatively participate.

### 2.3 Comparative Analysis: Two Models of Child Heroism

The contrast between these two films illuminates a fundamental tension within early Chinese red children's films. Shi Hui's approach, with its alternation between subjective fear and objective distance, produces a psychologically complex portrait of childhood under duress. The child's body is presented as vulnerable, permeable, and at risk—qualities that make Haiwa's ultimate triumph poignant yet ambiguous. Cui Wei and Ouyang Hongying's approach, by contrast, subsumes individual psychology within collective action. Zhang Gazi's flaws—his impulsiveness, stubbornness, and attachment to the gun—are not signs of vulnerability but markers of a spiritedness that, when properly channeled by adult guidance, will mold him into an effective revolutionary. Where Haiwa's heroism is defined by endurance and survival, Zhang Gazi's is defined by integration and growth. These divergent cinematic strategies reflect competing conceptions of the child's relationship to ideology. *The Letter with Feathers* suggests that ideology must enter the child from without, penetrating his consciousness through experiences of fear and danger. *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* proposes that ideology is already latent within the child's natural spiritedness, awaiting cultivation and direction. Both films, however, ultimately subordinate the child's interiority to the demands of narrative: Haiwa's fear is resolved through mission completion; Zhang Gazi's mischief is disciplined into revolutionary zeal. The child's body, rendered visible through the camera's gaze, becomes the surface upon which these ideological transformations are inscribed.

### 3. Difficult Transitional Period: Adult-Oriented Creation and Political Aesthetics during the Cultural Revolution

During the 1960s and 1970s, the production of children's films in China was subject to significant cultural constraints, with most works bearing distinct political imprints. The most prominent feature of film production during this period was its ideological focus on class

struggle, coupled with simplistic and rigid artistic techniques. Adhering to the "Three Prominences" principle, a guideline for literary and artistic works that emphasized the prominence of positive characters, heroic figures, and major themes, these films were products of their era and served specific social functions. Due to their strong political orientation, the productions of this time placed excessive emphasis on political aesthetics, where political significance consistently outweighed artistic value. Representative works from this era include four notable red children's films: *Sparkling Red Star* (1974), featuring Pan Dongzi; *The Yellow River Juvenile* (1975), featuring Zhao Zhiyan; *Beacon Fire Boy* (1975), featuring the orphan Xiao Song; and *Golden Lock* (1976), featuring the child league member Jin Suo. In these films, child protagonists engage in life-and-death struggles against counter-revolutionary forces under the leadership of the Communist Party, embodying the ideals and political convictions of communism. The child's body in this period becomes thoroughly politicized, functioning primarily as a vessel for revolutionary ideology rather than as a site of individual psychological development.

The film *Sparkling Red Star* tells the story of its protagonist Pan Dongzi, who, guided by the spirit of the Zunyi Conference, actively fights against the enemy and persists in participating in battles. With composure and determination, he cuts off the enemy's retreat, delivers intelligence, foils the plans of the local tyrant Hu Hansan, and cooperates closely with the guerrilla force in attacking the enemy. Nurtured and inspired by the Party and revolutionary predecessors, he eventually joins the Red Army and heads to the frontlines of the War of Resistance against Japan. In the film, his mother's words—"The Party would never let the people suffer"—and the red star given to him by his father become the pillars of his revolutionary spirit. Through symbolic imagery and metaphors, the film portrays Pan Dongzi's transformation under the guidance of the Party and the nation. Three other films from this period feature children directly involved in the anti-Japanese resistance. *The Yellow River Juvenile* follows young Zhao Zhiyan, who joins the anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, taking on tasks of delivering intelligence and leading the children's team to stand guard and patrol. Even when captured by the enemy, Zhao remains calm and composed, ultimately completing his mission with the help of the couriers and the children's team. *Beacon Fire Boy* tells the story of Xiao Song, an orphan injured by the Japanese invaders and rescued by the guerrilla unit. Upon learning that his rescuers are the Eighth Route Army, he insists on joining them to avenge his deceased parents. With the help of the soldiers, he grows from an orphan into a revolutionary young soldier, using his intelligence to obtain vital information. Later, he cleverly deceives the enemy, leading Japanese troops into an ambush set by the Eighth Route Army and personally killing the traitor responsible for his parents' death, thus becoming a true little hero. In *Golden Lock*, the young protagonist Jin Suo fights against the enemy with wit, collecting large quantities of scrap steel to support the New Fourth Army and contributing to the material foundation for victory in the War of Resistance against Japan.

From these works, it can be seen that China's red children's films produced during the Cultural Revolution, despite operating under significant political constraints and artistic regulation, continued to pursue the political shaping of the child subject through symbolic imagery and moralized narratives. These films collectively present child protagonists whose

individual identities are entirely subsumed by their revolutionary roles, with narrative progression driven not by psychological development but by the fulfillment of ideological imperatives. This period demonstrates a strong orientation toward political enlightenment, with the child's body functioning almost exclusively as a vessel for revolutionary ideology.

#### **4. Flourishing Period: Child-Centered Creation and Humanistic Aesthetics in the New Historical Period**

The concept of child-centeredness, rooted in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, has been a recurring ideal in Chinese children's literature and film since its introduction to China in the early twentieth century. Championed by intellectuals such as Guo Moruo, Hu Shi, Zhou Zuoren, and Lu Xun, this approach posits that children's culture should be constructed from the child's perspective, prioritizing their psychological needs, cognitive abilities, and aesthetic preferences (Fang, 1993). In the realm of cinema, this theory demands that films take children as both the primary subject and the target audience, with narratives, characters, and visual styles that authentically reflect a child's way of seeing the world. However, the repeated invocation of child-centeredness across different historical periods, from the Seventeen Years period to the Cultural Revolution, reveals not a linear progression toward its realization but rather a persistent tension within China's red children's films. While filmmakers had long professed commitment to this ideal, its implementation was perpetually constrained by the competing demands of ideological transmission. The child in these films was often caught between two conflicting imperatives: to be an authentic, psychologically plausible young person and to serve as a symbolic vessel for revolutionary values. This dual mandate created a fundamental paradox that earlier periods struggled to resolve. It was not until the new historical period that this tension began to be addressed in more meaningful ways. For the first time in the genre's history, filmmakers started to consciously prioritize the child's perspective, allowing child characters to possess their own ways of seeing, feeling, and behaving rather than functioning merely as reflections of adult revolutionary consciousness. This shift marked a genuine turn toward child-centered creation, even as the underlying tension between ideological messaging and authentic childhood experience remained present. The films of this period, while still operating within the framework of red children's cinema, began to explore the interiority of young protagonists with greater psychological depth and emotional nuance. Understanding both the persistence of this tension and its partial resolution in the new historical period is crucial for moving beyond the mere repetition of the concept and toward a more nuanced appreciation of what it truly means to create films that are both ideologically meaningful and authentically child-centered.

Since the beginning of the new historical period, Chinese children's literature and art have undergone a shift in perspective—from the external to the internal—reigniting respect for the personality and humanity of young individuals. Professor Lu Shuyuan defines this introspective literary approach as the "inward turn" of literature (Lu, 2022). This inward turn is also reflected in China's red children's films, where the grand narrative of national discourse shifts toward the intimate whisper of individual stories. In 1979, Xie Jin's film *Ah! Cradle* marked a turning point by shifting its focus to vibrant lives against the backdrop of war. Abandoning the didactic tone of earlier works, the film delicately portrays human nature

and emotions, signaling a departure from the "little hero" archetype and initiating a discursive shift from the social to the personal. Xie Jin paved the way for the diversified development of China's red children's films in the new historical period, endowing the genre with a distinctive humanistic aesthetic.

Children are both the starting point and the ultimate focus of children's films. During the Seventeen Years period and the Cultural Revolution, films typically traced the physical and moral development of child protagonists, charting their progression from ordinary children to revolutionary heroes within an educational framework. Beginning in the new historical period, China's red children's films moved away from rigid moralizing toward a more child-centered creative approach. This period witnessed a significant expansion in thematic scope and character types, moving beyond the singular "little hero" archetype to explore more diverse narratives. Broadly, these films can be grouped into four categories: those depicting children's direct or indirect involvement in revolutionary warfare; those focusing on children's lived experiences amidst the turmoil of war; biographical films exploring the childhoods of national heroes; and works celebrating the red spirit in everyday contexts.<sup>2</sup> During this period, the main manifestations of creative concepts and identity construction are reflected in the following three aspects.

#### *4.1 The Return to the Child's Perspective*

First, the new historical period witnessed a renewed emphasis on the child's perspective in red children's films. While filmmakers during the Seventeen Years period had begun exploring child-centeredness, this approach was largely suspended during the Cultural Revolution. The new historical period thus represented a revitalized restart of child-centered creation. In *Ten Days* (1980), for instance, the director employs cinematic language to portray three distinct child characters: the brave and righteous Afeng, the reckless yet endearing Huzai, and the clever, courageous Lanmei. The performances render these children vivid and lifelike, allowing audiences to intuitively grasp their personalities. *The One Who Helped Me Onto the Battle Horse* (1983) adopts a first-person perspective, narrating how General Peng Dehuai influenced a young boy's growth. The mischievous protagonist and his companions, under Peng's guidance, eventually join the Children's Corps. Their attempts to experience horseback riding—riding donkeys and playing tricks on young Eighth Route Army soldiers—generate comedic situations that highlight their childlike nature. In *War's Internezzo* (1987), the young messenger Xiuju looks down on the militia but is secretly curious about Chouwa's walnuts. Unable to distinguish ripe from unripe walnuts, she eats a raw one, ending up with yellow stains around her mouth that lead others to mistakenly believe she is ill. These moments foreground the innocent and straightforward nature of children, marking a genuine turn toward child-centered storytelling.

#### *4.2 The Brutalized Body: Confronting Wartime Trauma*

Second, red children's films of this period increasingly emphasized the helplessness of children caught in the brutal realities of war. Unlike earlier works that focused on heroic triumph, these films often ended tragically, depicting children as innocent victims who resisted merely to survive. Death became a central motif, as creators reexamined the

relationship between children and war. In *Ten Days*, Afeng loses his life even as his companions complete their mission. In *I Only Cried Three Times* (1987), Ma Yue is reunited with his father, but his close friend Xiao Xiao's father sacrifices his life for the nation. In *Visions from a Jail Cell* (1986), Little Radish Head—imprisoned and yearning for freedom—is killed attempting to escape. In *Young Prisoners of War* (1989), only one of six child captives survives. These portrayals mark a shift from hero worship to reflection on war, revealing the tragic fate of children in wartime and signaling the emergence of humanistic concern within the genre.

#### 4.3 *The Hero's Childhood: Biographical Narratives of Formation*

Third, this period saw the rise of biographical films tracing the childhoods of national heroes. Through these narratives, young audiences encounter the human dimension of heroic figures before their entry into history. In the opera film *Yue Yun* (1984), the fifteen-year-old protagonist leaves home to join his father Yue Fei's army. When his eagerness to fight leads him to violate military regulations, he is sentenced to redeem himself through combat, ultimately contributing to victory over the Jin forces. *Young Peng Dehuai* (1986) portrays the future general's childhood, depicting his refusal to accept charity, his defiance of feudal landlords, and his emerging sense of justice. *The Unfinished Diary* (1991) traces the youth of hero Lai Ning, his noble character, and his eventual sacrifice fighting a forest fire. *Lei Feng in His Childhood* (1996) shows the formation of a communist fighter under the Party's education. Heroic figures such as Yue Fei, Peng Dehuai, Lai Ning, and Lei Feng—each from their distinct historical contexts—inspire successive generations. They play a crucial role in cultivating collectivist values among children and forge intangible connections with audiences of the same age. Beyond these heroes, the classic screen image of Little Radish Head stands as another exemplary creation, following in the tradition of child characters such as San Mao, Zhang Gazi, and Pan Dongzi. Although the revolutionary historical novel *Red Crag*<sup>3</sup> had already etched this image deeply into the public consciousness, films, television series, animations, dance dramas, and plays have continued to engage in cross-media narratives surrounding Little Radish Head, rendering him an enduring figure in the hearts of countless Chinese people. As China's youngest revolutionary martyr, his spirit inspires people to pursue national liberation and uphold national faith, establishing him as an exemplary figure that every Chinese person must know.

### 5. The Period of Steady Progress: Realist Creation and Trauma Aesthetics in the Early Twenty-First Century

At the dawn of the new century, children's films in China, alongside the broader literary and artistic landscape, faced unprecedented challenges stemming from industrial transformation, the impact of globalization, and the rise of internet media. For decades, the production of children's films had relied heavily on government planning and support. As the country transitioned to a market economy, state control over children's cinema gradually loosened. However, factors including shifting market dynamics, persistent funding constraints, and changing parental preferences led to a steady decline in the distribution and exhibition of children's films. In 2000, the China Children's Film Studio was merged into the China Film

Group, effectively marking the end of the traditional state-run children's film production system. Concurrently, the state-mandated production quota for children's films was reduced from five to three films per year. By 2005, the Tongniu Award—China's most prestigious children's film award—was discontinued, signaling the contraction of institutional recognition for the genre and the close of its golden era (Tan, 2020:153–155). Amid competition from foreign blockbusters, the expansion of internet media, and the diversification of children's entertainment, children's films struggled to survive in an increasingly constrained environment. Despite these challenges, red children's films during this period continued to be produced steadily, largely adhering to the creative styles established in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike their predecessors from the previous century, however, these works no longer depicted children directly facing or participating in combat. Instead, they adopted a realist approach to filmmaking, using historical events as backdrops or drawing inspiration from real-life figures to explore the impact of war on childhood from a more reflective distance. Films from this period can be grouped into two main categories. The first comprises works based on real-life figures, such as *Young Hero* (2003), which tells the story of Wang Erxiao, and *YuLai Little Hero* (2009), featuring the young protagonist Yulai, and *Shanghai Adventure* (2004), which is based on the three brothers Mao Anying, Mao Anqing, and Mao Anlong, sons of Mao Zedong. The second category uses war as a historical backdrop to depict the tragic fates of children. Examples include *May & August* (2002), set against the Nanjing Massacre; *The Flying Red Scarf* (2003), against the backdrop of the Hong Kong General Strike; *Being A Son and Comrade* (2006), based on the New Fourth Army; *Anyuan Children's Corps* (2011), set during the Great Revolution; *Little New Fourth Army* (2009), set during the War of Resistance against Japan; and *The Children of Huang Shi* (2008), also against the backdrop of the War of Resistance.

Despite these expansions in thematic depth, the early twenty-first century also exposed the growing limitations of the genre. Many films from this period, while well-intentioned, suffered from repetitive subject matter, flat characterizations, and an overreliance on sentimental tropes. *Young Hero*, for instance, largely replicated the narrative structure of the "little hero" archetype from the Seventeen Years period, offering little innovation in character development or storytelling. Its portrayal of the hero remained idealized and distant, failing to resonate with a younger generation raised on more complex and psychologically nuanced media. Consequently, its viewership was largely confined to school screenings, functioning more as a mandatory educational tool than as a genuinely engaging cinematic experience for children. This phenomenon underscores a fundamental dilemma: while striving to fulfill a national narrative mission, these films often failed to compete with the more diverse, entertaining, and globally influenced media landscape that children were actively choosing. The challenge, therefore, was not merely one of funding or production, but of creative stagnation that struggled to reconcile the demands of ideological transmission with the evolving tastes of a new generation.

Amid these challenges, however, two films stand out for their more ambitious attempts to grapple with the representation of childhood trauma. While both *May & August* and *Being A Son and Comrade* belong to the early twenty-first century wave of red children's films and

share a commitment to representing children's experiences of war, they employ fundamentally different cinematic strategies for visualizing trauma. The former confronts one of the most catastrophic events in modern Chinese history—the Nanjing Massacre—while the latter focuses on the prolonged emotional aftermath of war on a single child's psyche. Examining these two films in parallel reveals that the early 2000s was not a period of unified aesthetic direction but rather a moment of experimentation with how to translate historical violence into visual language suitable for young audiences. By comparing their approaches to representing the unrepresentable—the death of parents, the destruction of home, and the wounding of the child's body and mind—we can trace two distinct trajectories within contemporary trauma aesthetics: one that relies on indirection and displacement, and another that centers on the child's sustained gaze as witness to loss.

### *5.1 The Problem of Spectacle: Visualizing Atrocity in May & August*

Du Guowei's *May & August* confronts an immediate formal problem: how to depict the horrors of the Nanjing Massacre—including rape, murder, and mutilation—while maintaining a child's point of view and remaining suitable for a young audience. Du's solution is a strategy of indirection and displacement. Violence is rarely shown directly; instead, it is registered through its effects on the child protagonists' faces and bodies. When the sisters' mother is taken away by Japanese soldiers, the camera remains fixed on May and August's faces in extreme close-up, their expressions shifting from confusion to fear to dawning horror. The off-screen sounds—shouts, gunshots, and screams—function as an auditory stand-in for the violence the audience does not see. This technique, known as a sound bridge, transfers the burden of representation from the visual to the aural register, allowing the film to acknowledge atrocity without graphically depicting it. The film's most striking visual choice is its desaturated color palette. Unlike the high-contrast black-and-white of *Seventeen Years* films or the naturalistic color of the new historical period works, *May & August* employs a muted, almost monochromatic scheme that drains the image of vitality. This technique visually encodes the trauma of its protagonists; the world, having lost its color, mirrors their emotional desolation. In scenes where the sisters wander through destroyed villages, the camera adopts a slow, drifting movement that mimics the aimlessness of trauma survivors. There is no heroic tracking shot following a determined protagonist; instead, the camera seems to float, disoriented, reflecting the children's loss of spatial and emotional orientation. However, this strategy creates its own set of problems. The repeated reliance on the child's reaction shot as a substitute for direct representation risks transforming the child into a passive receptacle for trauma rather than an active agent within it. Where Haiwa and Zhang Gazi acted upon their worlds, May and August primarily react to a world that acts upon them. The camera's prolonged focus on their suffering faces—while intended to generate empathy—can also veer toward what film scholar Linda Williams terms the "melodramatic mode," an aesthetic that solicits audience tears without necessarily fostering deeper understanding (Williams, 2001). The desaturated palette, by aestheticizing suffering, risks transforming historical trauma into a visually pleasing object—what critic Susan Sontag called "the pain of others" as spectacle (Sontag, 2003). The film's beautiful images of devastation raise uncomfortable questions about the ethics of representing violence,

particularly violence experienced by children.

### 5.2 *The Witnessing Gaze: Trauma as Accumulation in Being a Son and Comrade*

In contrast to *May & August's* strategy of indirection, *Being A Son and Comrade* adopts a different visual approach: the sustained medium shot that holds the child's face in frame during moments of loss, allowing trauma to accumulate through repetition rather than erupt in singular spectacle. Director He Xiaojiang frequently positions Lizheng at the edge of the frame during scenes of adult action, including battles, strategy discussions, and moments of sacrifice. This compositional choice visually encodes the child's position as peripheral witness rather than central participant. He sees, but he does not act; he absorbs, but he does not intervene. The film's most powerful sequence occurs when Lizheng learns of his sister's death. The scene is shot in a single, unbroken medium close-up of Lizheng's face as an adult delivers the news off-screen. The camera does not cut away to the speaker, nor does it provide a reaction shot from other characters. It simply holds on Lizheng, recording the micro-movements of his expression as understanding slowly dawns. This technique, drawn from the aesthetic of observational realism, refuses to manipulate the audience's emotional response through editing. Instead, it asks the audience to sit with the child's process of grief, to witness witnessing itself. The duration of the shot—nearly two minutes—becomes uncomfortable, forcing the audience to experience time as the child experiences it: stretched, heavy, and unbearable. Where *May & August* uses desaturation to signal trauma visually, *Being A Son and Comrade* employs lighting as an index of emotional accumulation. Throughout the film, the lighting grows progressively darker, shadows lengthen, and the child's face increasingly disappears into half-light. This gradual descent into darkness visually encodes the cumulative weight of loss: each death, each departure, and each piece of bad news adds another layer of shadow until, by the film's end, Lizheng's face is barely visible, his features submerged in near-total darkness. This visual trajectory suggests that trauma is not a singular event but an accretion, a slow drowning rather than a sudden shock.

### 5.3 *Comparative Analysis: Two Approaches to Representing Childhood Trauma*

The contrast between these two films illuminates the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas facing China's red children's films in the early twenty-first century. *May & August* attempts to represent catastrophic historical trauma through indirection, using sound, reaction shots, and desaturated color to evoke horror without depicting it directly. This approach respects the limits of what can be shown to young audiences while still acknowledging the magnitude of historical violence. However, it risks transforming the child into a passive sufferer—a vessel for audience empathy rather than an active subject. The film's beautiful images of suffering also raise questions about the aestheticization of trauma, specifically whether making horror visually pleasing necessarily betrays its reality. *Being A Son and Comrade* takes the opposite approach, using duration, accumulation, and the sustained gaze to represent trauma as process rather than event. By holding on Lizheng's face, allowing time to stretch, and letting shadows gradually consume the frame, the film asks audiences to experience the slow, grinding weight of loss rather than its spectacular eruption. This approach preserves the child's subjectivity; the audience is positioned with him, in his time, seeing through his eyes. Yet it risks losing

historical specificity. The Nanjing Massacre—with its unique horror and scale—demands a different representational strategy than the more diffuse losses of prolonged warfare. The question arises whether the same cinematic language can adequately represent both.

Comparing these films to earlier works such as *Visions from a Jail Cell* reveals both continuity and rupture. The earlier film also used the restricted frame and subjective fantasy to explore a child's interiority under conditions of extreme constraint. However, where *Visions from a Jail Cell* ultimately refused ideological closure—allowing Little Radish Head's death to remain senseless—both *May & August* and *Being A Son and Comrade* gesture toward redemption: the sisters survive, and Lizheng grows into a revolutionary. This return to narrative resolution, even in the face of profound trauma, suggests the enduring pull of the pedagogical mission inherent in China's red children's films. Yet it also raises questions about whether trauma, once resolved, remains trauma or becomes something else—a lesson, a moral, a story to be told. The early twenty-first century thus emerges as a period of productive tension within China's red children's films. Filmmakers experimented with new visual languages for representing violence and loss, drawing on realist aesthetics and psychological depth. Yet they remained constrained by the genre's fundamental commitment to ideological messaging and narrative resolution. The result is a body of work that gestures toward complexity while ultimately pulling back from its fullest implications—a cinema of trauma that cannot quite let trauma remain traumatic, that must always, in the end, offer hope. Whether this represents a limitation or an essential feature of the genre remains an open question, one that subsequent decades would continue to explore.

## **6. Preparation Phase: Diverse Transformations and National-consciousness Aesthetics in the New Era**

On May 30, 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping presided over a symposium at the Minzu Primary School in Haidian District, Beijing, and delivered a speech titled *Cultivating and Practicing Core Socialist Values from Childhood*. In his speech, he pointed out: "Having role models in mind means learning from heroes, exemplary figures, and positive things, and developing good moral character and aspirations through learning. China has a long history of stories about young heroes, and a large number of young heroes have also emerged during the revolutionary, construction, and reform endeavors led by the Communist Party of China. In the past, films such as *Red Kid*, *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy*, *The Letter with Feathers*, *Heroic Little Eight*, and *The Heroic Little Sisters of the Grassland* depicted the stories of these young heroes (China Communist Party News Network, 2014)." This official endorsement of past classics, while affirming their enduring cultural value, also implicitly poses a challenge for contemporary creators: how to honor these canonical works without simply replicating them. The films of the Seventeen Years period succeeded, in part, because they spoke directly to the lived experiences and political consciousness of their original audiences. For today's "digital natives," children raised in an era of media saturation, global cultural flows, and rapidly evolving aesthetic sensibilities, these same narratives risk feeling dated and remote. The task, therefore, is not merely to reproduce the heroic archetypes of the past but to reinterpret them in ways that resonate with contemporary children's psychological realities and cultural frameworks. This requires a delicate balancing act: preserving the core

ideological function of the films while adapting their narrative forms, visual languages, and characterizations to speak meaningfully to a new generation. Currently, red culture in cinema is predominantly tailored for adult audiences. Although such films have secured a notable presence in China's market, achieving both commercial success and critical acclaim, red children's films suitable for young viewers remain largely absent. When primary and secondary schools seek to impart red culture education, their options are often limited to adult-oriented red films or classic children's movies from past decades. Therefore, it is essential for China's red children's films to align with the times, engage in dialogue with contemporary realities, and continue preserving the revolutionary traditions embedded in the nation's red culture.

Since the dawn of the New Era, under the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Culture, literature and art have demonstrated a trend of diversification and nationalization. By building upon traditional Chinese culture and integrating modern aesthetics and expressive techniques, a number of literary and artistic character images rich in contemporary spirit have been created. These works showcase a unique national charm and style, convey the Chinese spirit, values, and strength, and ultimately achieve cultural self-reliance (Min, 2024). In terms of narrative approach, China's red children's films have shifted from "telling stories to children" to "letting children tell stories," reflecting a growing emphasis on children's agency. Traditional young heroes in wartime settings have gradually faded from the screen, making way for a new generation of protagonists aligned with the goal of national rejuvenation. These films evoke collective memories of significant historical events, forming an aesthetic of national identity internalized and expressed through cinematic works. In the 2019 film *My People, My Country*, the segment *The Champion*, directed by Xu Zheng, adopts a child's perspective to document the historic moment of the Chinese women's volleyball team winning gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Similarly, in the sequel *My People, My Parents* (2021), the segment *Hey, Kid* employs a "red theme plus children plus sci-fi" approach to depict the relationship between a mischievous boy with scientific dreams and his robot father from the year 2050. The robot father plants the seeds of technological ambition in the child's heart, guiding him to pursue his dreams in the New Era. In 2023, *Young Pioneers*, directed by Li Andong, uses a time-travel narrative to connect contemporary children with revolutionary predecessors, weaving together six major historical events. By breaking the boundaries of time and space, the film allows children to step into history, presenting a panoramic view of revolutionary heroes: Young Pioneers donating pocket money to buy fighter jets, the heroic grassland sisters protecting their sheep, the Anyuan Children's Corps participating in strikes, and young support troops aiding the frontline. These figures exemplify the growth of the Chinese Young Pioneers and highlight children's contributions to China's revolutionary history.

This period thus marks a significant evolution in China's red children's films, which have moved decisively beyond the wartime narratives that dominated earlier decades. By embracing diverse genres, from children's perspectives on historical moments to science fiction and time-travel adventures, contemporary works have found new ways to make national heritage resonate with young audiences. Films such as these demonstrate how red

themes can be woven into imaginative storytelling that respects children's cognitive and emotional worlds, successfully expanding the genre's aesthetic vocabulary while maintaining its core commitment to cultivating national consciousness. Nevertheless, this innovative turn is not without its challenges. While recent cinematic experiments have successfully blended national themes with children's perspectives and genre elements, such approaches risk prioritizing formal innovation over substantive depth. In some instances, the pursuit of visual spectacle and broad emotional appeal may soften historical complexities, resulting in narratives that sanitize the past. This raises critical questions about whether such works cultivate genuine, thoughtful engagement with history or merely offer a comforting, easily consumable image. The task for future creators is to harness these new aesthetic forms not as a substitute for historical substance but as a vehicle for conveying a more nuanced, emotionally resonant portrayal of the nation's heritage—one that respects the child audience's capacity for critical thought and complex emotion.

### **7. The Pedagogical Dilemma: When Education Overwhelms Entertainment**

Throughout the history of China's red children's films, a persistent tension has shaped the genre's evolution: the competing demands of ideological education and aesthetic entertainment. This is not merely a technical challenge to be solved but a structural condition embedded in the genre's very identity. At its heart lies a fundamental question: how can films serve as vehicles for national values while remaining genuinely engaging to young audiences whose primary expectation is not instruction but delight?

The difficulty of this balancing act becomes evident when films tip too far in either direction. When education overwhelms entertainment, child protagonists risk becoming vehicles for revolutionary messaging rather than recognizable young people. They speak in complete ideological sentences, express no personal doubt or desire, and move through narratives that leave no room for the detours, mistakes, and small rebellions that characterize actual childhood. Filmed in ways that emphasize their moral stature over their vulnerability, these characters offer young audiences little space for identification. The intended lesson remains external—a truth to be accepted rather than an experience to be lived. Yet the opposite imbalance proves equally problematic. When entertainment overshadows education, red content can become mere ornamentation—a revolutionary photograph glimpsed in passing, a brief nod to national achievement that gestures toward meaning without inviting genuine engagement. Audiences may leave the theater having felt patriotic sentiment without having encountered any substantive ideological complexity. The emotion lingers, but the understanding does not deepen.

Between these poles lies a more subtle challenge: how to represent difficult historical truths in ways appropriate for young viewers without betraying those truths through oversimplification. Films that honestly depict childhood trauma through sophisticated visual strategies often struggle with how to conclude. Having immersed audiences in a child's experience of suffering, they face pressure to deliver a positive, uplifting message—to recuperate trauma into national meaning. When this shift feels abrupt or forced, it risks creating cognitive dissonance rather than genuine edification. The emotional logic established

throughout the film gives way to pedagogical imperative, leaving audiences uncertain whether they have witnessed a story or received a lesson. These difficulties are not failures of individual filmmakers but expressions of the genre's inherent hybridity. Red children's films must be entertaining enough to compete with commercial media yet educational enough to satisfy ideological requirements. They must represent history honestly, yet ultimately offer hope. They must create child characters relatable enough for identification, yet exemplary enough for emulation. These demands pull in different directions, and no single film can fully satisfy them all. The most successful works are those that acknowledge this tension and work within it, finding temporary accommodations rather than permanent resolutions. Recognizing this structural condition is essential for moving beyond either naive celebration or simple dismissal toward a more honest engagement with what the genre can and cannot achieve.

## **8. Conclusion**

Throughout China's modern history, red children's films have evolved through distinct phases: from early revolutionary heroism, through the psychological turn of the new historical period, to the trauma aesthetics of the early twenty-first century and contemporary genre experiments. Across these transformations, they have consistently served a dual function: transmitting socialist values while constructing the child's body as a site of national meaning. Red symbols have functioned as spiritual totems for children's identity formation, while on-screen participation in revolutionary acts has enacted the transformation from natural body to political body, a process that internalizes state ideology within the individual while shaping children's subjectivity. Yet this historical trajectory also reveals a persistent tension: the struggle between adult-driven ideological imperatives and authentic child-centered aesthetics. The most successful films succeeded not by resolving this tension but by navigating it creatively, allowing child characters to be recognizably childlike, flawed, curious, and emotionally complex, even as they participated in grand historical events. The failures emerged when films prioritized ideological messaging over narrative integrity, reducing children to mere symbols of revolutionary virtue through didactic perfection, abrupt tonal shifts that betrayed emotional logic, or formal innovation that decorated substantive emptiness. Moving forward, China's red children's films must move beyond superficial innovation and engage more honestly with this central conflict. Drawing from historical analysis, several concrete strategies emerge for contemporary filmmakers.

**Narrative strategies.** First, embrace narrative incompleteness. Child protagonists should learn gradually, make mistakes, and sometimes fail, mirroring children's own experience of growth and making ideological development feel earned rather than imposed. Second, prioritize relationships over mission. Revolutionary content becomes meaningful when mediated through emotional bonds such as love for family, friendship with peers, and respect for mentors, bonds that audiences already value. Third, trust children's emotional complexity. Allow child characters to experience ambiguous feelings such as grief mixed with hope or doubt alongside determination, rather than simplifying emotions into clear moral categories. **Visual strategies.** First, use point-of-view to build empathy, not just suspense. Subjective camera work that reflects the child's emotional state, including unsteady framing during fear, restricted framing during confinement, and expansive framing during discovery, creates

powerful audience-protagonist bonds. Second, employ lighting as a psychological index. Track the child's emotional journey visually, allowing shadows to deepen as trauma accumulates and light to return gradually as healing begins, communicating truth without didactic explanation. Third, resist tonal rupture. If a film honestly represents suffering, it must earn its hope through organic narrative development, not abrupt shifts that betray established emotional logic. Fourth, ensure formal innovation serves substance. New technologies should deepen understanding of red content rather than distract from its absence, making ideological heritage more accessible rather than merely decorating it.

China's red children's films remain essential to the nation's cultural mission: nurturing new generations capable of carrying forward the revolutionary heritage. But this mission cannot be fulfilled through didacticism or empty formalism. It requires films that respect children's cognitive and emotional complexity, that trust a well-told story grounded in authentic human experience to carry ideological weight more effectively than any pronouncement. By adopting these strategies and truly centering the child as both subject and audience, red children's films can genuinely achieve the dual objectives of education and entertainment, securing their place as a vital cultural resource for generations to come.

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### Notes

Note 1. Source of translation: The monograph *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art"*, published by U OF M CENTER FOR CHINESE STUDIES in 1980, authored by Bonnie McDougall.

Note 2. The works produced during this period can be mainly classified into the following four categories: First, young heroes are directly or indirectly involved in the war, as seen in films such as *Two little fighters* (1977), *Fire Boy* (1978), *Ten Days* (1980), *Little Su San* (1981), *War's Internezzo* (1987), *Adventure of a young gavalry* (1988), *The headless arrow* (1988), *The Meridian of War* (1991), *Little Cowherd* (1992), *SanMao Joins The Army* (1992), *Hero of the White Mountains* (1992), *My Native People* (1993), *Nursery Rhyme of War Zhan* (1994), *A Kid's Kite* (1995), *BLACK BANDITS* (1989), and *Goodbye, Our 1948* (1999). Second, the films depict the living conditions of children against the backdrop of war, including *Deer Crying in Valley* (1981), *A White Dragon Horse* (1981), *The One Who Helped Me Onto the Battle Horse* (1983), *Bouncing Flame* (1984), *Childhood Friends* (1984), *I only cried three times* (1987), *Visions from a jail cell* (1986), *Young prisoners of war* (1989). Third, there are biographical films about the childhoods of heroes, such as *Yue Yun* (1984), *Young Peng Dehuai* (1986), *The Ufinished Diary* (1991), *Young Sun Wen's Journey* (1995), *Lei feng in his childhood* (1996), and *Liu Hulan* (1996). Fourth, the films celebrate the red spirit of children, exemplified by *In That Winter* (1990), which promotes internationalist spirit by saving an elderly foreigner, and *Deep Affection on the Small Island* (1994), which praises children's lofty love for their country and the army.

Note 3. "*Red Crag*" is the English translation of the novel “《红岩》”. The original Chinese version was created and published by Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyan in 1961. The author was an eyewitness to the prison struggle. The work took nearly ten years to be conceived and completed, with a manuscript of over 3 million words. Since its publication in 1961, the book has sold over 10 million copies. In 2001, Foreign Languages Press published the English version of this book. The work is set against the backdrop of Chongqing in the period from 1948 to the eve of liberation. It tells the story of Chinese Communists and revolutionary heroes who fought against the reactionary forces of the Kuomintang in the White Mansion and Chuxiangtang concentration camps during the "Sino-US Cooperation Office" period. The novel portrays characters such as Xu Yunfeng, Jiang Sister (Jiang Xueqin), Cheng Gang, Liu Siyang, and Hua Zilang, and describes the scenes of their heroic struggles against the enemies in prison.

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