"Ann Hui's Allegorical Cinema"

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Allegorical cinema as a rhetorical approach in Hong Kong new cinema studies[1] becomes more urgent and apt when, in 2004, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) begins financing mainland Chinese-Hong Kong co-produced films.[2] Ackbar Abbas's discussion on "allegories of 1997" (1997, 24 and 16–62) stimulates studies on *Happy Together* (1997) (Tambling 2003), the *Infernal Affairs* trilogy (2002–2003) (Marchetti 2007), *Fu Bo* (2003), and *Isabella* (2006) (Lee 2009). While the "allegories of 1997" are well-discussed, post-handover allegories remain underexamined. In this essay, I focus on allegorical strategies in Ann Hui's post-CEPA *oeuvre* and interpret them as an auteurish shift from examinations of local Hong Kong issues (2008–2011) to a more allegorical mode of narration. This, however, does not mean Hui's pre-CEPA films are not allegorical or that Hui is the only Hong Kong filmmaker making allegorical films after CEPA. Critics have interpreted Hui's films as allegorical critiques of local geopolitics since the beginning of her career, around the time of the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 (Stokes and Hoover 1999, 181 and 347 note 25), when 1997 came and went (Yau 2007, 133), and when the Umbrella Movement took place in 2014 (Ho 2017). Examples of the first two categories are her "Vietnam trilogy" (1978, 1981 – 1982), *The Romance of Book and Sword* (1987), its sequel *Princess Fragrance* (1987), *Love in a Fallen City* (1984), and *Ordinary Heroes* (1999).

[1] I follow Abbas's use of "Hong Kong new cinema" (2007). See 113, which refers to a "successful international cinema" emerging around 1984 alongside Hong Kong's increasing "ambiguous position vis-à-vis nationalism and self-determination," such as films by "auteurs like Wong Kar-wai, Ann Hui, Stanley Kwan, and Fruit Chan."

[2] CEPA was signed in 2003, but its implementation on the Hong Kong film industry started on 1 Jan 2004.

Although New Wave filmmakers such as Tsui Hark, Wong Kar-wai, and Fruit Chan[3] still make allegorical films, such as *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* (2014), *The Grandmaster* (2013), and *The Midnight After* (2014) in the CEPA era, Hui's allegorical films consistently emphasize either a particular mainland Chinese or a specific Hong Kong historical period. This emphasis on her post-CEPA allegories peaks in *The Golden Era* (2014) and *Our Time Will Come* (2017). The two films form a diptych. They chronicle Republican Chinese history between 1911 and 1942 and Hong Kong's anti-Japanese resistance from 1942 to 1944. In comparison to her other co-produced films set in China, such as *The Romance of Book and Sword* (1987), *Princess Fragrance* (1987), *Jade Goddess of Mercy* (2003), *Night and Fog* (2009), and *A Simple Life* (2011), I choose *The Golden Era* and *Our Time Will Come* for my examination because they are her most political and allegorical works. Their themes of rescue, unsung hero(in)ism, and resistance appeal to both Hong Kong and Chinese markets, pass the state censorship, and allegorize Hong Kong's post-handover geopolitics.

Abbas argues that Hong Kong cinema can be seen as "a cinema of the fragment as a nation" (2007, 126) and "nothing is more baroque than the notion of a Hong Kong national cinema" (118). He defines the baroque" as the "style that deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its own possibilities and that borders on self-caricature" (Borges 1998, 4; qtd. in Abbas 118). This means that beneath the generic exhaustion of Hong Kong cinema since the 1980s, there lies nothing more than an *absent presence* of Hong Kong's subjectivity. Abbas does not directly refer to Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928) (2009, 159–235). But Benjamin's baroque allegory[4] is key to understanding how Hong Kong cinema problematizes the image to critique and reflect on the geopolitical shifts of Hong Kong after the handover.

[3] Tsui Hark is a First Wave filmmaker. Wong and Chan come later as Second Wave filmmakers.

[4] For a concise summary of "baroque allegory" in Benjamin's study, see Tambling (2010), 110–22.

Keeping the relationship between baroque allegory and the Hong Kong "national"[5] cinema in mind (Abbas 2007, 117), I argue that Ann Hui's co-produced films in her post-CEPA *oeuvre* embody a framework of "allegorical cinema."[6] I explain my proposition by building on Abbas's "cinema of the fragment as a nation," Benjamin's baroque allegory, and Yau Ka-Fai's theorization of Hong Kong cinema's political strategies as "cinema of the political" (2007, 117–50). I also probe into why this framework of "allegorical cinema" is effective in negotiating state censorship in mainland Chinese-Hong Kong film co-production in the 2010s.

Allegory is a form of writing, a rhetorical device, or a mode of reading and interpretation known as *allegoresis* (Curtius 1953, 204–5). Allegory also refers to saying "one thing and mean[ing] another" (Fletcher 1964, 2). This feature of "meaning otherwise" makes defining allegory impalpable because once a person tries to frame allegory, allegory refers to the Other. So perhaps there is "no definite thing called 'allegory,' only forms of [narrative] more or less 'allegorical'" (Tambling 2010, 2). In "Figura" (1944), Erich Auerbach argues that "*allegoria* generally refers to any deeper meaning […], but the boundary is fluid" (1959, 47). Auerbach's "Figura" is useful to think about the relation between allegory and history. In Latin, *figura* means "shape," referring to allegory's function of prefiguration: "*figura* is something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical" (Auerbach 1959, 29). This model of figure-fulfillment is applicable to the rereading of history. Hayden White refers to Auerbach's model to rethink literary history (White 1987, 151; 1999, 87–100). The past prefigures the present, and the present also reopens and rereads the past, of which its events are fixed while its meanings are not.

[5] Abbas argues that the "fragment as nation allows us to define, tentatively, in what sense it is possible to think about the Hong Kong cinema as a "national" cinema: in the sense that it is a cinema that perceives the nation from the point of view of the fragment."

[6] My idea of "allegorical cinema" differs from Rey Chow's. She is more interested in its interpretation. I am more drawn to its geo-historical relevance. See Chow (2004), 123–42.

When the rereading sees the past in a different light, the past also prefigures the present differently. I will return to this view of rethinking the present when I discuss how an image in the past can help viewers rethink the present, and how this is allegorical.

Walter Benjamin finds incompleteness and myriad meanings of allegory mirroring the fragmentariness of modernity. He uses allegorical German mourning plays (*Trauerspiel*) of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries to reflect on allegory as a writing strategy to represent the fragmentariness of early twentieth-century modernity in Europe. The debate on allegory and symbolism further clarifies Benjamin's argument for allegory. Romantics prefer symbolism for the symbol's idealized, totalized, "natural," and single relationship between the signifier and the signified.[7] This relationship, however, implies a hegemonic approach to meanings, which influences interpretation. Hence a historical view of fragments must overcome symbolism: "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things. This explains the baroque cult of the ruin" (Benjamin 2009, 178). Benjamin's grounds for allegory is his rejection of the "false appearance of totality" in symbolism (2009, 176). He sees thoughts as ruins, as fragments, and as incomplete. The facade of signs or the "dry rebuses" are still there (2009, 176), but meanings are void.

Benjamin's baroque allegory echoes Abbas's argument of Hong Kong cinema as the cinema of a fragment as nation in two senses. First, Abbas refuses to see Hong Kong films as national allegories. He does not assume that "it is possible to see [a society] complete[ly] as an entity, and to see how it interconnects" (Tambling 2008, 36). By adopting a pluralistic, fluid, and slippery approach to Hong Kong films, Abbas avoids the worst problem of national allegory (Jameson 1986) of "moving towards a single, overarching, [and] totalizing meaning" (Tambling 2010, 156). Second, Benjamin's baroque allegory prompts an allegorical reading of fragmentary histories in Hong Kong films through a politics of disappearance. The absence

[7] Also see Paul de Man's discussion on the debate between symbol and allegory: "a configuration of symbols ultimately leading to a single, total, and universal meaning. This appeal to the infinity of a totality constitutes the main attraction of the symbol as opposed to allegory […]" (1983, 188).

of Hong Kong onscreen allegorizes the presence of Hong Kong as the subject through a problematic of visuals in Abbas's "problematic of disappearance" (Abbas 1997, 24; see Ho and Polley in this volume). Hong Kong's subjectivity disappears when it appears through misrepresentation. Abbas calls these misrepresentations "decadent," which means "a one-dimensional development" (1997, 5). The significance of allegory before 1997 is to provoke, instead of pinning down images of Hong Kong, thereby avoiding the disappearance of Hong Kong's subjectivity through decadence.

Abbas's disappearance theory informs Yau Ka-Fai's "cinema of the political." Yau's framework concerns Hong Kong new cinema's "ways of reflecting upon the articulation and allegorizing of politics that make them political (Yau 2007, 112)." He highlights Hui's geo-historical and political critique and the building of Hong Kong subjectivity at critical points of Hong Kong history in her allegories: "looking back at Hui's cinema of the political a decade after the handover, we should be aware of the changing present. And Hong Kong is becoming a very different subject matter; it may simply be alluded to in Hong Kong directors' works" (Yau 2007, 145). Hui's shift to the allusive or allegorical mode of narration "is itself a very political motif that we will have to deal with in considering Hui's recent and forthcoming works [since *The Postmodern Life of My Aunt* (2006)]" (Yau 2007, 145). Hui made four docudramas from 2008 to 2011 (Hui 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011). These concern Hong Kong social issues, such as the way of life in Tin Shui Wai, cross-border marriage, lesbianism, and aging. Critics treat these films as exemplifications of "aesthetics of the quotidian" (Veg 2014, 84) or "poetics of insignificance" (Szeto 2011, 53). In comparison to these films, *The Golden Era* and *Our Time Will Come* evince Hui's struggle and mastery of using allegory to reclaim the discursive rights to narrating Hong Kong history through a fragmentary mode of storytelling. Unlike a master narrative of history, Hui's allegories lack a clear plot or a central action. They mix up realist and fictional elements, biographize ordinary

hero(in)es, contain elusive endings, and take place in wartimes, which thematize rescue, resistance, and revolution. Since I conceive "allegorical cinema" through looking at Hui's post-CEPA allegories, I shall explain why this narrative strategy is necessary in the co-production era in the following section.

In 2003, when SARS broke out, the Hong Kong film industry endured a difficult time. Since the 1990s, overseas markets continue to shrink because of VCD piracy beginning in 1994 and the Asian financial crisis in 1997 (Cheung 2013, 3). Meanwhile, many noted film workers such as John Woo, Chow Yun-fat, Jet Li, and Jackie Chan left Hong Kong for Hollywood. Hence their departures degrade the status quo of the local film industry (Garcia 2016). Ng See-yuan, the Chairman of the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers, suggested to the Hong Kong government to add film production into the CEPA agreement (Ng 2014, 22).

CEPA was officially effective from 1 January 2004 (Ng 2014). The benefits of CEPA, however, are not gratuitous.[8] The state censorship of SAPPRFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television) has transformed the Hong Kong screenscape since 2003. Two major criteria of making co-produced films under CEPA directly affect the end products. The first is "at least one-third of the leading artists must be from the Mainland." The second is "the plots or the leading characters must be related to the Mainland" (Trade and Industry Department 2016).

In the early stages of CEPA, SAPPRFT stipulates the "co-produced" actor/actress ratio between Hong Kong and mainland China. This is due to the economic and professional discontent of mainland actors against Hong Kong movie stars in the 1980s and 1990s. The reason behind the Hong Kong movie stars' higher salaries and more chances to take up leading roles in co-produced films (Cheung 2013, 11).[9] Although this rule no longer exists,

[8] See Yau (2015, 33): "Scholars have noted that CEPA as a free-trade agreement is not a mere economic instrument; rather, its impact on the Hong Kong film industry's major economic restructuring has ramifications for film content, labor, and identity." Also see Chu (2013), and Szeto and Chen (2012).

the convention of casting a Hong Kong male alongside a mainland Chinese female lead remains. This has led to a lack of opportunities for young Hong Kong actresses in co-produced films. Mainland actors/actresses also have more chances to take up supporting roles in films set in mainland China, because Hong Kong film workers found it difficult to adapt to mainland lifestyles. Those supporting roles do not earn as much as the leading roles although the former also needs to be away from home. Consequently, most co-produced films only have a few familiar Hong Kong faces disregarding the nature of role and plot (Ng 2014, 25; Cheung 2013, 10). This creates an incongruity for films about Hong Kong, which alienates the Hong Kong audience.

There are three main challenges to Hong Kong filmmakers in this co-production era: The capturing of both Hong Kong and mainland markets (Garcia 2016), the preservation of an "authentic" Hong Kong culture, and the passing of the state censorship by abiding to its guidelines of "the True, the Good, and the Beautiful" when supplementing "Chinese elements" to films (Cheung 2013, 10). For instance, Andrew Wai-Keung Lau and Alan Siu-Fai Mak's *Infernal Affairs* (2002) screened a version with an alternative ending in mainland China. It was because the mainland censor saw the triad member, Lau (Andy Lau) killing the undercover cop, Chen (Tony Leung) in the original as a romanticization of criminals. So it is Chen, the lawful and the righteous side, who kills Lau in the mainland version.

To Hui and other New Wave directors who were experimental and experienced in making "suspense, ghost and horror, and crime" films, the challenge is that they cannot make films in these genres anymore because the mainland censors bans them all (Garcia 2016). In comparison to Hui's allegorical (and one of her most overtly political) film, *Ordinary Heroes*, Hui must heighten her allegorical mode of storytelling after 2003 in responding to Hong

[9] According to Cheung, "Many Hong Kong actors and actresses are recognized by the mainland audience in the 1980s and 1990s because of pirated Hong Kong films and TV dramas. Both Hong Kong and the mainland investors agreed that Hong Kong actors and actresses had an advantage in the Hong Kong, mainland, and overseas markets."

Kong's political changes through self-censorship. The significance of allegorical storytelling in the post-CEPA era lies in negotiating the state censorship, provoking audience's response to geopolitical shifts of Hong Kong through historical reconstruction, and emphasizing the *necessity* of self-censorship. I choose the aforementioned films by Hui to illustrate this allegorical aesthetic because the Chinese Civil War and the anti-Japanese resistance are both incidents with allegorical potential: "the Japanese occupation has often been used by Hong Kong filmmakers as a stand-in for the Mainland's reclamation of Hong Kong" (Stokes and Hoover 1999, 147). Hui's allegorical diptych of Hong Kong Republican histories sets an example for upcoming allegories of Hong Kong. The diptych maximizes the historical potential to rethink the present, and at the same time, meeting political constraints.

The Golden Era is a biopic that opens in Harbin and ends in Hong Kong. The film traces the life of the Republican Chinese writer, Xiao Hong (1911–1942). This film, resembling *Our Time Will Come*, allegorizes the political with the personal, but it is by no means a national allegory. Hui's biopic on Xiao Hong is not a complete account of her time. In particular, the film depicts the writer's life in an alienated way with second-person narration akin to Brechtian theater. Hui adopts a pseudo-documentary style in the film. This allows Xiao Hong's acquaintances and relatives to comment on the happenings not acted out on screen. The non-linear narration is also Hui's hallmark of using various types of flashback. The second-person narration, the non-linear timeframe, the prominent use of flashbacks, and the dynamic cutting all traverse space and time. These techniques indicate Hui's stance on the "irretrievability of historical truth" (Marshall 2015).

The Golden Era and *Our Time Will Come* are both conceits, a form of allegory. Conceit is "a concept, or an image, applied to a figure of speech which finds an unusual parallel between two dissimilar things; an intricate metaphor, or witty (quick-witted) comparison" (Tambling 2010, 147). Thinking what *The Golden Era* parallels to is thinking

allegorically. Reading this film in conjunction with Stokes and Hoover's comparison between the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and mainland China's takeover of Hong Kong in 1997 (1999, 147), Xiao Hong's time allegorizes a tumultuous era of the post-1997 Hong Kong. In the film, Xiao Hong's sojourn in Tokyo in 1936 and 1937 (Li 2014, 121–29) is what she saw as her "golden era." It is "golden" because of the freedom, the peace, the security, and the leisure enabling her to write. This "golden era" is for apolitical writers like Xiao Hong, who uses her personal memories to resist national histories by writing *The Field of Life and Death* (1935) and *Tales of Hulan River* (1941) (Li 2014, 235). The politics of memory in Xiao Hong's literary works and in Hui's biopic intertexualize to allegorize each other, making seemingly apolitical conceits allegorize with each other. Xiao Hong's era is golden especially when the audience looks ahead of her time and sees the looming political crises in China.

Xiao Hong's politics of memories exists only in a biopic, which allegorizes the political with the personal. Referring back to my definitions of allegorical cinema, Hui's allegory does not have a linear plot or a central action. The mix of commercial appeal of being "based on a true story" and dramatized fictionality challenges the audience's reception of Xiao Hong's literary life. A biopic usually ends with the death of the subject. Hui subverts this convention with flashback. The film opens with Xiao Hong's posthumous self in chiaroscuro. She appears in her clothes and youth in 1936, the year she receives the obituary of Lu Xun before leaving for Tokyo (Li 2014, 9). Hui's treatment of Lu Xun in Xiao Hong's life has two functions: social critique and the de-romanticizing of the greatness of a (literary) hero. For instance, when Xiao Hong, Lu Xu, and his wife Xu Guangping meet in 1934, Lu Xun says:

> I find the nature of literati not good because their knowledge and thoughts are relatively complicated, so that their positions can be slippery. It is hard to find someone who persists. When the leftist ideology is popular, they find this trendy so

> they immediately become leftists. When oppression comes, they cannot resist so they immediately change. Some of them even sell their friends out as a greeting favor to the other side. This is not uncommon in other countries, but China has a lot of these people. (Li 2014, 103; my translation)

Although Lu Xun criticizes the literati of his time, spectators can see how this resonates with ideological politics and the oppression of dissenters in China in the 2010s, such as the oppression of Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia. Hence Hui voices out her social critique of contemporary China through the political frustration of Lu Xun in the 1930s.

Despite using character to present social critique, Hui avoids idealizing the greatness of Lu Xun. Hui highlights his remarks on Xiao Hong's dress in 1936 during a flashback of Xiao Hong's when she and Duanmu Hongliang are exiles in Chongqing: "The colors of your dress do not match. It is not because the red top is not beautiful. All colors are good. But a red top has to go with a red dress, or a black one" (Li 2014, 204). Lu Xun's seemingly casual remark shows Hui's rejection of romanticized characters and dramatized plot. Instead, she emphasizes a humane side of Lu Xun. Hui similarly does not streamline Xiao Hong's life into a dramatic biopic in *The Golden Era*. The film is full of inconsequential anecdotes like Lu Xun's remarks. These anecdotes and testimonies of Xiao Hong's friends in second-person narratives challenge the coherent and linear way of understanding Xiao Hong's life. These accounts, moreover, allegorize the resistance to prevalent ideologies in a time of literary politics.

As seen in Hui's autobiographical documentary, *As Time Goes By* (1997), Hui confesses her doubt of historical singularity since her childhood:

> In the 1950s, camps of newspapers are distinct. That's what we call leftist and rightist. The rightist ones were the papers of the Taiwanese Kuomintang. The leftist ones were from mainland China. If we as children didn't know which side a paper belonged to, we would feel strange. It's because the reports in different papers on the same incident were entirely different. This has developed an attitude of doubt in us, who know there is no absolute truth. (My translation)

Hui's questioning of historical narratives is crucial to historical re-presentations in the diptych. Both films are biographical or prosopographical (group biographical) dramas based on real historical events. They emphasize a mix of realist and fictional elements. Hence both alienate audiences to rethink the reliability of what they see on screen. Allegory helps to negotiate this gray area between realism and fictionality. In *The Golden Era*, Hui uses the third-person narration to recount historical truths not acted out onscreen. For instance, Xiao Hong's revolutionary friend Bai Lang retells Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun's farewell before their journey to Qingdao. Also verbally recounted, in lieu of actively demonstrated, are the political crackdowns upon the friends of the Xiaos once they leave for Qingdao (Li 2014, 83). Xiao Hong's voiceover of reciting her novel *The Field of Life and Death* in Qingdao immediately follows these historical truths: "Living and dying preoccupy people and animals in the village…" (Li 2014, 83). This juxtaposition of factual and fictional deaths in the film echoes another other. The narrative strategy leads the audience to rethink the validity of what they see onscreen as an objective representation of Xiao Hong's life.

Hui has a history of biographizing ordinary hero(in)es. An instance is *Ordinary Heroes*, in which Augustine Chiu-yu Mok performs a show on the life of Wu Zhongxian (1946–1994), "the prominent 1970s activist who first railed against British colonialism and was subsequently arrested several years later on a trip to China" (Kempton 2011, 108). The embedded allegory of Evans Chan's *The Life and Times of Wu Zhongxian* (2002), within another, *Ordinary Heroes*, reappears in *Our Time Will Come*. Since Hui made *The Golden Era* in the co-production era, this film may not be able to biographize a social activist such as Wu overtly. The film, however, highlights Xiao Hong's apolitical stance during her exile in the Chinese Civil War:

> HU FENG. Did you meet Ding Ling on your trip to the Northwestern part? How's she?
> XIAO HONG. We are two entirely different kinds of people.
> HU FENG. Why didn't you go to Yan'an?

> XIAO HONG. I only want to concentrate on writing. I am used to being someone who does not belong to any party. I don't understand politics. (Li 2014, 190)

The film characterizes Ding Ling as an enthusiastic Communist writer, who "determines to use life and real war to write an epic" after visiting Yan'an (Li 2014, 154). Ding Ling's political enthusiasm, still, fails to move Xiao Hong. Xiao Hong's apolitical stance is implicitly subversive in a time of binary oppositions between subscribing to the ideologies of the Kuomintang and to those of the Chinese Communist Party. Unlike Wu Zhongxian's social activism, Xiao Hong's unsung heroinism is literary and allegorical. She uses her individualism to resist the cult of explicitly subordinating literature and art to politics.

The Golden Era closes with memories of Xiao Hong in a series of flashbacks. After her death in the temporary hospital of St. Stephen's Girls' College in Hong Kong, the film winds back to the setting of the opening. In 1918, Xiao Hong is eight in the back garden of her Harbin home. A sequence features a happy childhood with her grandfather, the wilting of garden crops, and the death of her grandfather. This arrangement visualizes the childhood memories of Xiao Hong in her semi-autobiographical novel *Tales of Hulan River*. Xiao Hong completed this novel's manuscript before dying in Hong Kong. This novel does not have a main plot or main characters. In this sense, the novel mirrors the circular plot of *The Golden Era*. Mao Dun, who writes the foreword to this novel, is an implicit link to *Our Time Will Come*. The film closes with a teary flashback of Binji Luo, who accompanies Xiao Hong when she dies in 1942. Luo's point-of-view shot captures the pregnant Xiao Hong climbing out from a window during the flood in 1932 Harbin and optimistically requesting a boat ride. The film ends elusively in 1933 when Xiao Hong sings with Xiao Jun in Harbin's Central Street. Xiao Hong stops and looks at the camera in the second-person shot when Xiao Jun walks away. The sequence therefore commemorates Xiao Hong's achievement as a writer

with her individual way of resistance and her personal optimism of living on in difficult circumstances.

The Golden Era re-presents a segment of Hong Kong's anti-Japanese period (1941–1942) by probing the meaning of Xiao Hong's *zeitgeist* and her works in 2014 in Hong Kong. Hui's ensuing film on anti-Japanese guerrillas in Hong Kong, *Our Time Will Come*, is also set in wartime. The movie retells a forgotten historical episode of the anti-Japanese resistance among civilians (1942–44). It centers on the anti-Japanese East River guerrilla formed by a group of villagers in the New Territories. The unsung heroine, Fong Lan, nicknamed "Sister Fong," leads the group. The film continues with the reconstruction of Hong Kong history after Xiao Hong's death in 1942, thus complementing an allegorical reading of *The Golden Era*.

Our Time Will Come is an unconventional war film due to its lack of epic battle scenes. The central action of the battle against the Japanese army is absent. But there are still a few street-fighting scenes with Japanese soldiers and Chinese traitors. This film echoes *The Golden Era*, which reworks the conventional biopic structure by beginning and ending with Xiao Hong's youth and childhood instead of death. *Our Time Will Come* similarly retells the historical narrative of anti-Japanese resistance with the use of minor histories. The film biographizes a few civilians' participation in the anti-Japanese resistance and their rescue of major Chinese intellectuals in their ordinary lives. These intellectuals include He Xiangning (1878–1972), Liu Yazi (1887–1958), Zou Taofen (1895–1944), Liang Shuming (1893–1988), Mao Dun (1896–1981), and Mei Lanfang (1894–1961). This fragmentary sketch of how ordinary people from all walks of life devote their lives, efforts, and money to rescue those in need conveys Hui's hope for "conscience" and "self-awareness" in a dystopian time (Cheung 2017, 63). Mei Xuefeng (2017) sees Hui's focus on a few civilians from New Territories villages as a way of challenging any singular interpretation of history:

> They are ordinary people indeed. The most daring thing Ann Hui does in this film is how she makes this into a Republican version of *The Way We Are* [(2008)]. The grand narrative is absolutely dissolved in those quotidian episodes, and those anti-Japanese activities are domesticated and trivialized. When the female protagonist delivers information on her way of attending her cousin's wedding, the film clearly shows Hui's attitude towards the resistance. Hui wouldn't simplify that period for the sake of dramatization. She wants to create genuine conditions of the anti-Japanese revolutionaries. (My translation)

Mei comments on Hui's insistence on the realist representation of resistance and rescue. Zhao Hai, a film crew member of *The Golden Era*, explains: "The 'realness' that Hui demands does not rely on 3D special effects. It is a kind of realness [that] originates from audience reception, including the hope for freedom and the interesting experience during danger" (*Blog Weekly* 2017). This combination of realist and fictional elements provokes the viewer's emotional engagement with the villagers, who have no choice but to take part in the resistance as part of their ordinary lives.

Hui embeds an allegory within another in *Our Time Will Come*. Mao Dun and his wife stay with the Fongs before the guerilla members rescue them. Hui effectively uses Mao Dun's allegorical essay "Dusk" (1934) to allegorize revolution and hope. Fong Lan's recital of the essay appears thrice. The first time is in the opening of the film as voiceover. The second time in Mao Dun's room when Fong recites it in admiration. The third time is when Fong thinks about her mother, who becomes a captive of the Japanese. The natural imagery in the essay serves as an intertextual allegory of Fong's revolutionary time and of Hong Kong in the post-handover period:

> The wind has gone with the manifesto of the dusk./
> As if they have melted suddenly, the myriad golden eyes of the sea have been flattened into a big, dark-green face./
> There is a sad and solemn sound of a nomad flute from afar./
> The black canopy of the night is going to fall and yet to fall./
> The wind which travelled to elsewhere has suddenly returned; this time as if it is drumming: Bellow! Bellow! No, not only wind, there's thunder! Wind has come with thunder!/
> Waves are roaring in the choppy sea. Roll! Roll!/
> The storm has come to the sea at night! (Mao Dun 163; my translation)

"Dusk" can be read in juxtaposition with Mao Dun's essays "Before the Thunderstorm" (1934). "Before the Thunderstorm" is about a giant tearing away a gray curtain on the sea. The removal of the curtain is followed by a thunderstorm cleansing the world and bringing back lights. Since the giant represents Chinese Communist officials' wielding power to tear off the gray curtain, the curtain alludes to the governance of the Kuomintang and anti-revolutionary forces. The thunderstorm in both essays can therefore be read as revolutionary activity. Dusk is a time when night is going to fall, but dawn awaits. Hence the function of "Dusk" in the film is intertextual: It stresses the themes of revolution and hope, both in Fong's and the audience's respective times.

The entire film turns out to be a flashback of one of the junior guerrilla members, Cheng Ka Ban. Cheng is an old taxi driver in contemporary Hong Kong. After the guerilla sniper Blackie Lau says farewell to Fong at the pier, the camera pans to the left until the waterscape becomes a view of Victoria Harbour. The iconic night view acts as a cue for today's Hong Kong. Ann Hui's cameo interview of Cheng follows this scene. The film ends elusively when Cheng quickly walks out of the community center and drives away in his taxi, conjuring the theme of unsung hero(in)es both in Hong Kong's past and in Hong Kong's present.

In the above discussion and analysis, Hui's post-CEPA co-produced films evince an auteurish shift of her aesthetics from portraying ordinary hero(in)es in everyday life to those in history. Under state suppression of cinematic expression, Hui's *The Golden Era* and *Our Time Will Come* allegorize the geopolitics of post-handover Hong Kong. The two films allegorize with fragmentary narratives, the mix of realist and fictional elements, the biographization of ordinary hero(in)es, open endings, and the themes of rescue, resistance, and revolution. Allegorical cinema compels Hong Kong filmmakers to be more creative in their storytelling, so as to negotiate delicate interactions between nationalism, localism, self-

censorship, and art. This framework also results in a more ambiguous tone and increased possibilities to interpret Hong Kong films. In a sense, allegorical cinema resembles the allegories of 1997, but with more political constraints to meet in terms of individual and collective expression. Perhaps the merits of the allegorical cinema lie in carving out a rhetorical space for Hong Kong filmmakers to continue telling Hong Kong stories—stories that continue to resonate with Hong Kongers even as the local cityscape rapidly changes under mainland Chinese influence. If Hong Kong filmmakers allegorize like Hui, who explores universal themes of resistance, revolution, and conscience, Hong Kong cinema will be able to speak on its own terms in this universal language.

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