

De-revolutionizing the “Red Classics”: A Case Study of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* in
Fiction, Model Opera, Television and Film

by

Liyang Wang
Bachelor of Arts, Zhengzhou University, 2004

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Richard King, (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies)
Supervisor

Dr. Michael Bodden, (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies)
Departmental Member

Abstract

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Richard King, (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies)

Supervisor

Dr. Michael Bodden, (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies)

Departmental Member

ABSTRACT

“Red classics” generally refer to a collection of Chinese literary works produced from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. Many of them were remade to film, opera, and television series in different periods. One of the “red classics” was the semi-autobiographical military romance *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* by Qu Bo. This novel and its many adaptations have been popular for more than half a century. This thesis takes *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* as a case study to explore how socialist “red classic” works have been “de-revolutionized,” reinvented for a new age and a new audience as products for popular consumption in post-Mao China, as compared to the sterner revolutionary works of the Mao era.

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Introduction

The term “red classics” generally refers to a collection of literary works produced during the Chinese communist revolution era, from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. In his book, professor Fan Xing points out that the works first recognized as “red classics” were novels. These include the so-called “*Three reds and a builder*,” (*san hong yi chuang*): *Red Flag (Hongqi pu)*, *Red Sun (Hong ri)*, *Red Crag (Hongyan)*, and *The Builders (Chuangye shi)*. The genre also includes *Song of Youth (Qingchun zhi ge)*, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest (Linhai xueyuan)*, *Railroad Guerrillas (Tiedao youjidui)*, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village (Shanxiang jubian)*, *The Hurricane (Baofeng zhouyu)*, *The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River (Taiyang zhaozai sangganheshang)* and *Song of Ouyang Hai (Ouyang Hai zhi ge)*. These long novels were very popular in those years and were designed to encourage revolutionary passion in younger generations by recording revolutionary war history, the land reform movement and the rural co-operative movement in Chinese villages, as well as by singing the praises of China’s heroic workers, peasants and soldiers under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.¹ Professor Li Yang goes to define the term “Revolutionary Popular Novels” as “one well-known group of ‘red classics’ in the mid-1950s Chinese literary field. These novels include *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, *Wild Fires and Spring Winds Struggling in the Ancient Capital (Yehuochunfeng dougucheng)*, *The Armed Working Team behind Enemy Lines (Dihou wugongdui)* and *Diamond in the Flames (Liehuo jingang)*. These novels told the story of the Chinese revolution, often in the style of Chinese traditional novels,

¹ Fan Xing, “Preface,” In *The Eternal Red Classics: On the History of the Creation and Influence of the Red Classics (Yongyuan de hongse jingdian : hongse jingdian chuanguo yingxiang shihua)*, ed. Fan Xing (Wuhan: Hubei changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2008).

and were well-received by readers because of their language, which is easy to understand, and their storytelling style.”²

Because Fan Xing and Li Yang referred to “revolution” and “Chinese traditional novels” when they analyze “*red classics*,” before engaging in a deeper analysis of the genre, it is necessary to define the typical features of “classic Chinese traditional novels” and “socialist realism.”

Generally, the term “classic Chinese traditional novels” refers to the following four well-known Ming and Qing dynasty novels: *Water Margin (Shuihu zhuan)*³, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Sanguo yanyi)*⁴, *Journey to the West (Xiyou ji)*⁵ and *A Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng)*⁶. These novels use episodic structure to tell tales of legendary stories and were popular among ordinary people. Themes of heroism and romance are also apparent in *Water Margin* and *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. Following in these literary footsteps, the “red classics” depicted many socialist realist heroes who

² Li Yang. *Re-examination of Chinese Literary Classics from the 50s to 70s (50–70 niandai zhongguo wenxue jingdian zai jiedu)* (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 001-002.

³ The novel was written by Shi Nai’an in the 14th century at the end of Yuan Dynasty and the beginning of Ming Dynasty. See Shi Nai’an, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1981). The stories of the novel was set during the 12th century in the Song dynasty. In this novel, we can see 108 outlaws gather at Mount Liang in Shandong Province to form a sizable army. However, they are eventually granted amnesty by the government. It has some of best-known characters and plots in Chinese literature, such as the scene in which Wu Song kills a tiger. Many scholars say *Tracks* is like *Water Margin* in part because of the tiger-killing scene.

⁴ This novel was written by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th century during Yuan Dynasty. See Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms, A Historical Novel*, trans. Moss Roberts (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1999).

⁵ This novel was written by Wu Cheng’en in the 16th century during the Ming dynasty. See Wu Cheng’en, *Journey to the West*, trans. W.J.F Jenner (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1994).

⁶ This novel was written by Cao Xueqin in the 18th century during the Qing dynasty. Cao Xueqin, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi & Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1978).

devoted themselves to Chinese revolution and socialist construction. Like the traditional classics, the red classics were popular with the masses, with broad readership in 1950s. The “red classic” also functioned to solidify the status of Chinese Communist Party after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.

Pavel Korin points out, “Socialist realism is a style of realistic art that was developed in the Soviet Union and became a dominant style in that country as well as in other socialist countries. Socialist realism is characterized by the glorified depiction of communist values, such as the emancipation of the proletariat, by means of realistic imagery.”⁷ In the early 1950s, China was influenced by the Soviet Union, and by the socialist realism it popularized. In 1952, in an essay discussing Soviet literature, the cultural authority and critic Zhou Yang stressed that Chinese writers should look to Soviet socialist realism to learn how to describe the battle between the new power and old power and create a new character with “high morality and quality of communism.”⁸ In 1953, in the Second National Congress of Writers and Artists, socialist realism was pronounced to be the highest literary doctrine. Zhou Yang emphasized that presenting new characters and new ideas will be the most important and central task of literary works. Socialist realism was regarded as the highest principal of Chinese literary creativity and criticism. As professor Richard King pointed out, Zhou Yang’s

⁷ Pavel Korin, “Thoughts on Art,” in *Socialist Realism in Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), 95.

⁸ Zhou Yang, “Socialist Realism--the Road Ahead for Chinese Literature (Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi-Zhongguo wenxue qianjin de daolu), ” in *Collected Works of Zhou Yang* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1985), 190.

endorsement of socialist realism followed other socialist states in promoting it as an official discourse.⁹

Combining influences from classic Chinese traditional novels and Soviet realist novels, the red classics were easily accessible to the ordinary masses and conformed to Chinese Communist Party ideology. In his exploration of contemporary Chinese novels during the Mao era, professor Joe C. Huang states that rural readers “liked to see heroic characters withstand ordeals, overcome difficulties, and defeat enemies in a clearly-defined class struggle or on the battlefield...they prefer characters divided without ambiguity into black or white. The conflict between heroes and villains must be tense, and the plot complex. They like to read a story with a beginning and end...new novels have an educational value. They want to learn about the new society from novels.”¹⁰ With these characteristics, the “red classic” appealed to the masses and achieved broad readership. For example, Qu Bo’s *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, a semi-autobiographical military romance novel written in 1955 and published in 1957¹¹, was printed seven times and sold around one million copies between September 1957 and August 1958.¹² This novel was popular because it has exciting stories and socialist heroes in it. It has been often compared to the classical Chinese traditional novel *Water Margin*.

⁹ Richard King, *Milestones on a Golden Road: Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 37-41.

¹⁰ Joe C. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life* (New York: Pica Press, 1973), 326.

¹¹ Qu Bo, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan*), trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1962).

¹² Wang Xue, “The Adaptations of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* and Their Reception (*Linhai xueyuan* de gaibian zhilu yu jieshou xiaoguo),” *The Literary Gazette* (*Wenyi bao*), July 31th, 2015.

After being published as novels, most of the “red classics” were later remade as films, operas, and television series in different periods. After gaining great popularity as a novel, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* enjoyed repeated success with subsequent adaptations in different forms and eras. The first adaptation of *Tracks* was a spoken drama named *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu Weihushan*), produced in 1958 by Beijing People’s Art Theatre. In the same year, a Beijing opera version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was produced by Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe. These works, and many other subsequent adaptations, took the most celebrated plot-line from the novel. In 1960, the PLA’s August First Film Studio produced a film adaptation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* under the name of the original novel. In 1967, the Beijing opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was made and became one of the first of the Model Theatrical Works (*yangbanxi*) of the Cultural Revolution. In 1970, Chairman Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing produced a model opera film adaptation of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. In 2014, the feature film *Tiger Mountain* was reborn again in an adaptation by director Tsui Hark. The novel also spawned three television series, released in 1986, 2004 and 2017. The first television adaptation was a 10-episode mini-series mainly based on the plot of the novel. The second version was a 28-episode series which supplemented the original plotline with some additions of its own. Condemned by critics as unfaithful to the core spirit of the original novel, the 2004 television adaptation also drew scathing criticism from the former State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). Some viewers, including Qu Bo’s widow Liu Bo, said the portrayal of protagonist Yang Zirong was not heroic enough, damaging the heroic image. The third television adaptation in 2014 was a 64-episode series which added even more plotlines and

characters to depict Chinese revolutionary history during that period. While the spoken drama, Beijing opera, model opera, film adaptations, and first television adaptation all focused on one part of the original novel, the exciting story of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the latter two television adaptations featured a broader focus and they are more complete adaptation of the novel as a whole.

The many adaptations of *Tracks* are like a mirror that reflects the changes in China's political climates, economics, cultural policies and audience tastes over the last 60 years. Some scholars explored the original novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, other scholars explored the adaptations of the novel *Tracks* until 2004. My study will examine this novel *Tracks* and its different adaptations, exploring the adaptations of "red classics" from the 1950s to 2017, with the aim of making the relationship between Chinese literature and history more clear. I hope it can provide a clear and proper direction and make a meaningful contribution to some questions: what is the appeal of red classics? what is the difference between red classics in the Mao era, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zeming, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping years? A comparative analysis of their differences and similarities reveals how the work evolved from a revolutionary classic into a commercialized product for modern audiences. Although *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* is only one of many red classics with a similar evolutionary trajectory of film, opera, and television adaptations, I argue that this work is a particularly effective case study for exploring the "de-revolutionization" of both the story and its target audiences. In this thesis, I will use *Tracks* as the focus for an exploration of the red classics and the society they reflect as they were reinvented and reinterpreted through the Maoist and post-Mao eras as products for popular consumption.

Studies of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*

As a type of literary work, the “red classic” genre has its own appeal and has caught the attention of the scholars of Chinese culture for many years. Red classics are influenced by classical Chinese traditional novels and include some traditional stories to express the revolutionary content. At the same time, we can see how the entertainment value of red classic. Red classics’ traditional elements, revolutionary theme and entertainment value contribute to its charm. Compared with the appeal of other eras of Chinese classics, red classics emphasize collectivism, models and education rather than individualism and critical spirit. Another difference is red classics are easily accessible to the ordinary masses rather than scholars. Here I will discuss scholarly critiques and studies of the “red classic” genre and its representative works.

In the book *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life*, Joe C. Huang reviews a selection of Chinese communist novels published between 1949 and 1966 to analyze the main themes, social-political histories, heroes, villains, and other characters they present. In the last chapter of this book, as Huang pointed out: “During the Yan’an days, literature and art were regarded as an important vehicle for shaping the political ideas of the Chinese peasants.”¹³

In the book *Re-examination of Chinese Literary Classics from the 50s to 70s (50-70 Niandai Zhongguo Wenxue Jingdian Zai Jiedu)*, Li Yang dedicates a chapter to analyzing the heroes, romance and villains in the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* through a

¹³ Joe C. Huang, *Heroes and Villains in Communist China*, 327-328.

comparison with the Chinese traditional novels from which they draw their origins. Li's study demonstrates that the adoption of traditional literary tropes and themes contributed to the success and popularity of the "red classics." Most literary analyses of *Tracks* argue that the novel borrowed traditional forms and models to express new revolutionary content. However, Li believes it's not that simple—is the work "new wine in an old bottle," or could it be "old wine in new bottle"? *Tracks* turns the political mission into a moral story. I will refer to Li's argument in my analysis of the relationship between the novel *Tracks* and Chinese traditional novel.

In the book *The Eternal Red Classics: On the History of the Creation and Influence of the Red Classics (Yongyuan De Hongse Jingdian-Hongse Jingdian Chuangzuo Yingxiang Shi Hua)*, the editor Fan Xing points out that the author of the novel *Tracks* is familiar with traditional Chinese literature classics and his novel *Tracks* is obviously influenced by those classics, especially the tiger-killing scene.¹⁴ In one chapter of the book, Xu Yadong explores the novel *Tracks* and its adaptations in different times in his article *Heroes in the Forest: A History of the Influence of the Red Classics (Mangmang Linhai Yingxiongpu: Linhai Xueyuan Chuangzuo Yingxiang Shihua)*. The first section discusses the novel's historical background and the controversy it provoked during the 1950s. Xu points out the following characteristics. The heroes of *Tracks* manifest characteristics of revolution, class, and ordinary people's everyday lives, while the novel's structure, narrative, and portrayal of the heroes bear similarities to traditional hero legends. Xu argues that these similarities to popular classical forms gave these

¹⁴ Fan Xing, "Preface," in *The Eternal Red Classics: On the History of the Creation and Influence of the Red Classics (Yongyuan de hongse jingdian:hongse jingdian chuangzuo yingxiang shi hua)*.

revolutionary novels popular appeal and entertainment value. The article goes on to examine the contemporary Beijing opera adaptation of *Tracks, Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, and its cultural relevance to the period of the 1960s and 1970s. Xu explores how the adaptation shows the influence of radical literary thought and how the aesthetic principle of the “three prominences” (*san tuchu*)¹⁵ influenced the portrayal of the characters in the opera, as well as innovations in the way the opera was performed. The third section is focuses on the 2004 television series adaptation. Xu argues that it is reasonable to add some new characters and new plots. At the same time, he points out, the adaptation excessively caters to audience tastes and expectations, which is not good because it will lose the original novel’s spirit—a good adaptation, according to Xu, is one that keeps a balance between the entertainment value of the adaptation and the original spirit of novel.¹⁶ I will refer to Xu’s arguments in my comparisons of the original novel, the opera and the 2004 television version which he analyzed, as well as other adaptations and sections which he does not refer to in his essay.

Robert E. Hegel, in his essay “*Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama: From the Yan’an Forum to the Cultural Revolution,*” takes the novel *Tracks* as a case study and shows how it draws from earlier literature, giving many details to compare

¹⁵ The “three prominences” is a creative literary principle formulated by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution. According to this principle, “among all the characters, positive characters should be prominent; among positive characters, heroic characters should be prominent; among heroic characters, the main heroic character should be prominent.” See Richard King, “Fantasies of Battle: Making the Militant Hero Prominent,” in *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-76*, ed. King Richard (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 206.

¹⁶ Xu Yadong, “Heroes in the Forest: A History of the Influence of the Red Classics (Mangmang linhai yingxiongpu: Linhai xueyuan chuanguo yingxiang shihua),” in *The Eternal Red Classics: On the History of the Creation and Influence of the Red Classics (Yongyuan de hongse jingdian – hongse jingdian chuanguo yingxiang shihua)*, ed. Fan Xing (Wuhan: Hubei changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2008).143-172.

the novel *Tracks* with Chinese traditional novel *Water Margin*. Hegel explores the tiger-killing scenes in *Tracks* and *Water Margin* in detail.¹⁷ I will refer to the tiger-killing scene later in my thesis when I examine how *Tracks* is influenced by Chinese traditional novels such as *Water Margin*, as well as in my comparison of different adaptations of *Tracks*. Hegel also explores the portrayal of heroes and villains in the novel *Tracks* and connected this to Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum."¹⁸

In his book *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966-76*, Richard King explores one scene of the model opera film "*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*" in detail by comparing the prerequisite for Yang Zirong's success and examining how Yang's loyalty is depicted differently in the novel and model opera adaptations.¹⁹ In addition, King explores the relationship between *Tracks* and the Chinese traditional novel *Water Margins* from the structure, narrative style, and the portrayal of heroes.²⁰ King's arguments provide context for my comparison of different portrayals of the character Yang Zirong in different adaptations of *Tracks*. I will also refer to the tiger-killing scene in the adaptations. I will also refer to King's analyses when I explore the logic of the novel *Tracks* and the relationship between *Tracks* and the traditional classic *Water Margin*.

¹⁷ Robert E. Hegel, "Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama: From the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution", in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, ed. Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 218.

¹⁸ On More Mao's opinions about literature, see Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. III (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975).

¹⁹ Richard King, "Fantasies of Battle," 208-209.

²⁰ Richard King, *Milestones on a Golden Road: Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 37-41.

The analyses of *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics": Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, edited by Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, documents research on the red classics from the Maoist era, including the 17 years between the founding of China and the Cultural Revolution, as well as the reform era. The authors point out that while literature and art from this period were expected to faithfully reflect real life, they also had to be moderated to accord with the "historical truth" and the Communist Party of China (CCP)'s political agenda of the time. The authors of *Red Crag* succeeded in transforming their traumatic experience of wartime incarceration into a prototypical red classics narrative only after intense instruction from ideologically "enlightened" cultural officials. In addition, Roberts and Li emphasize that red classic works had to adopt the literary and artistic techniques that were deemed at that time to represent more "real" and "authentic" historical truths. This followed from Mao's talk at the Yan'an Forum, in which he asserted that literature and art should take a strong class stance and portray workers, soldiers, and peasants through "typical characters in typical circumstances." The subsequent introduction of the policy of socialist realism and its later incarnation, the "Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism," which demanded art and literature to portray society an idealized form, required writers and artists to negotiate a narrow and perilous path between representing a recognizable reality with realistic characters and representing the idealized version of reality with class-based character types.²¹ In the essay "*How to Tell a Story of Imprisonment: Ideology, Truth, and Melodramatic Body in the Making of Red Crag*", Li Li explores the circumstances of

²¹ Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, "Introduction," in *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics": Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, ed. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li (Hong Kong University Press. 2017).

the novel's production during the 1950s. Li points out that, unlike many revolutionary historical novels that were scrutinized to check whether they faithfully represented "historical facts," the firsthand, real-life data that authors Luo, Yang, and Liu possessed turned out to be a major hurdle in configuring the putative "historical truth" of the Chinese revolution under the leadership of the CCP. Though the authors faithfully supplied "piles of data," the ideological and symbolic interpretations of that data were controlled and appropriated by cultural officials in the field of literary production. The novel charged these events with meanings that justified the logic of the CCP-led revolution and was thereby able to convince tens of millions of readers of the CCP's legitimacy, however figurative and imaginary.²² When I analyze the novel *Tracks*, I will explore "historical truth" and the portrayal of prototypical characters, with some reference to Li and Roberts' arguments and documentation of the work's political, economic, and literary contexts.

Like Robert E. Hegel and Richard King, Krista Van Fleit Hang also notes the connections between the novel *Tracks* and traditional Chinese novels. In her article *The Heart of the Party: Gender and Communist Party Ideals in Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, Van Fleit Hang examines how *Tracks* reflects the influences of Chinese traditional novels as an episodic adventure novel in the style of *Water Margin* or *Journey to the West*. Establishing that classical Chinese fiction is governed by the "three elements of heroism, romance, and the fantastic," Van Fleit Hang points out that *Tracks* mobilizes all of these

²²Li Li, "How to Tell a Story of Imprisonment: Ideology, Truth, and Melodramatic Body in the Making of Red Crag" in *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics": Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, ed. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2017). 57.

elements in a story that combines themes primarily from the martial arts and romance traditions. As a political tool rather than just an entertainment product, the red classics differ from the traditional classics in their purpose, which is apparent in their focus on narrative. Rather than being thinly bound with one-dimensional characters and weak plots, these episodic novels are designed to tell a complete story capable of imparting a revolutionary message to the city dwellers who read them. In addition to enjoying the entertainment value of the novels, readers were supposed to learn lessons of class struggle, thus attaining a revolutionary consciousness.²³

In the book *Communication in China: Political Economy, power and Conflict*²⁴, Zhao Yuezhi analyzes Chinese communication and media from the perspective of politics and economy. She also refers to red classics adaptations. Zhao points out: “State control, the agency of media producers, the profit imperative of private investors, and not least, an active television audience interacted to create a highly dynamic and multifaceted televisual popular culture.”²⁵ In the book *Popular Media, Social Emotion and Public Discourse in Contemporary China*²⁶, Shuyu Kong focuses on the relationship between China’s cultural reforms and state-led marketization projects—especially those after 1992—and shows the relationship between historical changes and popular media in the past three decades. Kong supports her argument with an exploration of several Chinese

²³ Krista Van Fliet Hang, “The Heart of the Party: Gender and Communist Party Ideals in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*,” in *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period (1949-1966)*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 91.

²⁴ Zhao Yuezhi, *Communication in China Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

²⁵ Zhao Yuezhi, *Communication in China Political Economy, Power, and Conflict*, 216.

²⁶ Kong Shuyu, *Popular Media, Social Emotion and Public Discourse in Contemporary China*. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

television dramas. Both Zhao Yuezhi and Kong Shuyu' opinions about Chinese television series and red classics will be helpful when I analyze the de-revolutionization of the red classics as reflected in the succession of new adaptations of *Tracks*.

The Chinese scholar Yao Dan's book *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction of Revolutionary China: an Investigation of Tracks in the Snowy Forest and its Adaptations* (*Geming Zhongguo de Tongsu Biao Zheng yu Zhuti Jiangou: Linhai xueyuan jiqi Yansheng Wenben Kaocha*) is a study of the novel *Tracks* and its adaptations. Yao looks at how the novel *Tracks* converts memory into history, how the novel's editor collaborated with author Qu Bo to craft a popular novel with Chinese traditional style, and how the new adaptation become commercialized.²⁷ Yao analyzes *Tracks* and its adaptations from multiple aspects, including its balance of realism and imagination, its aesthetic principles and pursuits in the context of the model opera, its writing style, and critical and audience reviews. Yao applies a broad focus, referring to many points of the novel and its adaptation without choosing any one point to explore in depth. My thesis will narrow the focus to the de-revolutionizing of *Tracks* and the culture it represents through a detailed comparison of *Tracks* and its subsequent adaptations. I have referred to Yao's book for a broader contextual analysis, especially in establishing background information.

Chapter 1 of this thesis lays the groundwork for an in-depth analysis of *Tracks* with an introduction to the author Qu Bo and the story behind his novel, including Qu's

²⁷ Yao Dan, *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction of "Revolutionary China": an Investigation of Tracks in the Snowy Forest and its Adaptations* (*Geming zhongguo de tongsu biao zheng yu zhuti jiangou: Linhai xueyuan jiqi yansheng wenben kaocha*), (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2011) .

education and army experience. The aim of this chapter is to make it clear why this novel is popular. I argue that the success of *Tracks* is attributable to the author's experience, his editor's contributions, and the need for new heroes during the 1950s. I will summarize the novel, introduce the main characters and main scenes, and explore the relationship between this novel with Chinese traditional novel and Soviet novel. In this section I will also define socialist realism and explain the typical characteristics of socialist realist novels.

After introducing the author, the novel, and the respective backgrounds from which they emerged, this thesis will use two chapters to explore the adaptations of *Tracks* from 1958 to 2017, including spoken drama, films, model operas and television series, by comparing their portrayals of central images and classic scenes. In Chapter 2, I will refer to the adaptations during the Mao-era by analyzing the spoken drama, the first film, the model opera and the model opera film. In Chapter 3, I will examine the adaptations in the post-Mao era with an analysis of the three television series and one film. These two chapters aim to demonstrate the clear differences between adaptations produced during different eras, reflecting their unique political climates, socioeconomic contexts, and cultural policies. In doing so, I also aim to show the changing nature of cultural production in China and the party-state's relation to history. Together, these three chapters can answer the questions of how and why a red classic story adapted during changing times.

In conclusion, I will point out that the progressive changes in the artistic rendering and public reception of *Tracks* throughout its successive adaptations could be regarded as demonstrating the progressive de-revolutionizing of the red classics, and of China in

general. However, I will argue that the most recent adaptation from 2017 serves to contradict the perspective that the novel's evolution is on a direct trajectory toward de-revolutionizing. The 2017 adaptation is still a version of de-revolutionizing and demonstrates both commercial and educational aims. However, it is less revolutionized than the other versions in Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao years. I argue that this reflects the current political climate, where political leaders such as President Xi Jinping are increasingly concerned with preserving the memory of Chinese revolutionary history and combating historical nihilism in the Chinese public. In this case, red classics adaptations in the current period look more like ideological adaptations than merely commercial products. In my thesis, I explore how modern adaptations perform multiple functions, serving to make commercial profits while also documenting and paying tribute to Chinese revolutionary history and memory, striving to appease both audiences and political censors. The adaptations themselves shift and change over time in response to political directions and censorship demands.

Chapter One: The author Qu Bo and his novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*

Qu Bo was born to a peasant family in Shandong Province in 1923 and died in 2001. He is particularly known for his novel *Tracks*; his other novel, *Qiao Longbiao*, was less successful. Before exploring the adaptations of *Tracks*, this thesis will briefly introduce Qu Bo and how his original novel came to be written.

1.1. The Author Qu Bo

In the book *The Popular Quantities and Basic Construction of Revolutionary China: an Investigation of Tracks and its Adaptations (Geming Zhongguo de Tongsu Biaozheng yu Zhuti Jiangou: Linhai xueyuan jiqi Yansheng Wenben Kaocha)*, Yao Dan interviewed Qu twice in 1999 when she was writing her PhD thesis at Beijing University. In the two interviews, Qu recounted his experiences. By his account, he had six years of private school early education experience, and was unable to continue school education because of his family's poverty. At that time, Qu, who had grand ambitions, was not satisfied with staying at home and being a peasant. He was greatly influenced by three books his father bought for him *The Storyteller Biography of Yue Fei (Shuoyue qua nzhuan)*, which was about the Song Dynasty general and patriot Yue Fei; the previously mentioned novel *Water Margin*; and another traditional classical Chinese novel called *Three Kingdoms*. Qu also said that his father was a leader of a peasant uprising.²⁸ Qu's father's experience and his own ambitious personality would influence his later writing.

Qu Bo joined the communist Eighth Route Army in 1938 and became a member of the Communist Party the following year. At first a cultural worker, he rose quickly to the

²⁸ Yao Dan, *The Popular Quantities and Basic Construction of "Revolutionary China"*, 254.

rank of political instructor. In 1943, he entered the Counter-Japanese Military and Political University in Jiaodong, where he wrote plays for student performances. On his return to active service in 1945, he led a small detachment against local bandits in the mountains and forests of northeastern China. This is the background that inspired the novel *Tracks*. Qu was transferred to accompany the PLA in its final drive south at the end of the civil war, but was wounded in battle. After 1949 he worked as Party Secretary in a locomotive factory and then was transferred to the Ministry of Railways as an official.²⁹ In 1946, he married Liu Bo,³⁰ who had been head nurse at a hospital in the same army regional headquarters.

1.2. The Novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (1957)

Even though Qu Bo had only an elementary school education, his novel *Tracks* entitles him to a place in Chinese literary history. In 1956, before publication in a single volume in 1957, some of the novel's chapters were initially serialized.³¹ Those chapters were serialized in the magazine *People's Literature*.

When discussing his reasons for writing the novel *Tracks*, Qu cites his transition from military work to civilian life in 1950. At that time, he often disseminated Chinese revolutionary traditional education to workers. During that time, he told and retold the stories of Yang Zirong at least seven or eight times, and the story became more refined, concentrated, and appealing with each retelling. It was during this period when Qu

²⁹ Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 251.

³⁰ Liu Bo is often regarded as the model of the female character Bai Ru in the novel *Tracks*.

³¹ Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michal M. Day (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 148.

developed his story-telling skills. Another factor that contributed to the novel's conception was when Qu was subjected to criticism after he expressed his opinions about the Soviet-style management at his factory. The frustration of his working life made him recall his life in the army and inspired him to write this novel.³² Qu Bo wrote the novel in secret, telling nobody but his wife what he was doing.

In the epilogue of the novel *Tracks*, Qu Bo said he wrote the novel to memorialize his army friends like Yang Zirong and Gao Bo.³³ When talking about the victories he witnessed on the battlefield, Qu pointed out that they were achieved “under the wise leadership and the care of CCP, and with the great support of the local masses.”³⁴ When talking about his feelings when he was writing, he said he was inspired by “the age of revolution under the leadership of CCP and the heroes of those days nurtured by CCP.”³⁵ Qu's statements show that the CCP plays an important role in the actual plot. In the following sections, I will outline the content of the novel and the main characters and explore the authenticity of the novel, the contributions of editor Long Shihui, and the relationship with Chinese and Soviet literary traditions.

The Content of the Novel and the Main Characters

The novel *Tracks* presents a series of stories of one small heroic detachment of 36 selected soldiers from Northeast Democratic United Army, the predecessor of the

³² Qu Bo, “How I Wrote the Novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Wo shi zenyang xie *Linhai xueyuan de*” in *Shandong Literature* (*Shandong Wenxue*), no.10, (October, 1981): 80.

³³ Qu, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1962), 581.

³⁴ Qu, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, 583.

³⁵ Qu, 587.

Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)³⁶, which went into the snowy mountains searching out and fighting with hidden bandits and brigands in the Northeast in 1946 during China's civil war. They looked after villagers, aroused their patriotism, and won their support. The detachment won a series of victories over different groups of bandits.

The novel has 38 chapters. In the first three chapters, the author laid a foundation for the following stories. The main character is PLA captain Shao Jianbo. When a group of bandits massacres a group of villagers, including Shao's older sister, Shao and his detachment are sent to eradicate bandits in the Northeast to avenge their deaths. The following chapters are divided into three main parts. The first part tells the story of the battle on Breast Mountain. In this section, the detachment catches two bandits named Luan Ping and Diao Zhanyi and collect information about other bandits from them. With the help of a local mushroom-picker who knows the area, the detachment climbs into the Breast Mountain stronghold and wipes out the bandits. The second part describes the battle for Tiger Mountain. The detachment obtains a map of underground contacts from the captured bandit Luan Ping. The detachment learns that the bandits are planning a feast on Tiger Mountain to celebrate the chief's birthday, and they make a plan to ambush the bandits. The detachment's platoon leader Yang Zirong disguises himself as a bandit and heads to the mountain to open a route for the detachment to invade. The section ends with the victorious capture of the bandit chief by the detachment, led by the hero Yang Zirong. The third part of the novel mainly focuses on internal struggle between the bandits who committed the massacre from the first part of the novel. By the end of the

³⁶ Northeast Democratic United Army's name was changed to Northeast People's Liberation Army in 1948. In this thesis, it will be referred to as the PLA.

novel, the bandits are all dead. In addition to the heroic narratives about bringing the bandits to justice, the novel features an additional romantic narrative between young commander Shao Jianbo and army medic Bai Ru.

The Tiger Mountain story of the second section is a famous and popular narrative from the novel which became the focus of later adaptations. Before comparing later adaptations, I will give a detailed description of the original narrative. In order to wipe out the bandits on Tiger Mountain, Yang Zirong volunteers to disguise himself and join the Tiger Mountain bandits. He explains his advantages to Captain Shao: he has in his possession the map that the bandits were seeking, he is familiar with their coded language, he can convincingly disguise himself as a bandit, and he is deeply loyal to the CCP and people. When Shao expresses concern as to whether Yang could accomplish the mission, Yang assures him he is clever and tough enough to survive on Tiger Mountain. After winning Shao's permission, Yang leaves for Tiger Mountain. On the way, there occurs a classic "tiger killing" scene, based on a famous episode in the traditional Chinese novel *Water Margin*.³⁷ After Yang kills the tiger, he encounters some bandits, who take him to Tiger Mountain, where he presents the chief with the map and the tiger he's just killed and wins the chief's valuable trust. The most thrilling part of the story comes as the captured bandit Luan Ping escapes the CCP and runs to Tiger Mountain, where he accuses Yang Zirong of being a CCP member in disguise. With his life on the line and the mission in jeopardy, Yang Zirong keeps his wits and successfully convinces the

³⁷ In *Water Margin*, the character Wu Song encounters a tiger while walking home drunk, and he ends up beating the tiger to death with his bare fists. The tiger killing scene in *Tracks* is often compared to this scene in *Water Margin*, and is a common point of comparison for scholarly articles and analyses.

bandit chief that he is the true bandit and Luan is not; the chief spares Yang and orders Luan's immediate execution.

The novel portrays Shao Jianbo as an insightful leader. As Robert E. Hegel explains, Shao Jianbo presents a new type of hero, a hero for the problems of the socialist age. He is a model of selfless devotion to the cause of the masses, dedicated to wiping out the forces of exploitation and oppression. He also is young, talented, and handsome.³⁸

Shao's character and its social and literary relevance has been analyzed by other scholars. The character has cultural significance in the similarities and differences he bears with similar characters in earlier and later works. Richard King compares Shao Jianbo with similar characters in traditional Chinese classic novels. King notes: "The novel's central hero, Shao Jianbo, a romanticized version of the author himself, is more like *Three Kingdoms*'s Liu Bei than *Shuihuzhuan*'s Song Jiang. He is the wise and inspirational leader under whom more violent heroes (such as Yang Zirong and "Tank" Liu) are honoured to serve, and by whom they are kept firmly on track. For all the carnage that takes place around him, Shao Jianbo kills only once, at the end of the novel, in what is both an act of personal revenge for the horrific killing and mutilation of his sister and the culmination of his guerrilla band's battle against bandit desperados nominally affiliated with the Nationalist forces."³⁹

Yang Zirong is based on a historical person of the same name. A secondary character in the novel, he replaces Shao Jianbo as the protagonist in the adaptations.

³⁸ Robert E. Hegel, "Making the Past Serve the Present," 219.

³⁹ Richard King. *Milestone on a Golden Road*, 41.

Yang's solo journey to Tiger Mountain reads like a brave adventure and imparts a knight-errant like image on the character. This thesis will analyze his character more deeply when comparing *Tracks*' adaptations.

The eighteen-year-old female medic, Bai Ru, is like a flower in the detachment, whose charm and attractiveness bring beauty to the setting and add a new layer to the narrative. The author gave her the name "Bai Ru" and the nickname "White Dove," names which he did not choose arbitrarily. In Chinese culture, the colour white (*bai*) represents purity and beauty, while a white dove typically symbolizes peace and goodness. The two names send the message to the reader that her character is pure, innocent, young, and peaceful. Bai Ru loves to sing and dance—she not only can take care of the soldiers and heal their wounds, she can also bring them happiness and courage to fight in spite of the bleak environment. Moreover, the white dove is a symbol of the end of war and the coming of peace.

The authenticity of the characters and events in the novel *Tracks*

Qu Bo said the events in *Tracks* are based on his real-life experiences in the army and that he wrote the novel to memorialize his army friends Yang Zirong and Gao Bo who sacrificed in the battles, to whom he dedicated the novel. In a 1999 interview with Yao Dan, Qu revealed that *Tracks*' three characters Yang Zirong, Gao Bo and Chen Zhenyi are the names of real people, while other characters' names are slightly modified from real people's names.⁴⁰ The question of how closely the story and characters in *Tracks* represent the real people and events they are based on has been asked by many

⁴⁰ Yao Dan, *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction of "Revolutionary China"*, 248.

readers and scholars. Before 1986, Qu maintained that the novel featured “real people and real events” (*zhenren zhenshi*). However, in 1986, when *Heilongjiang Daily* interviewed Qu’s comrade-in-arms Lian Cheng, Lian claimed Shao Jianbo’s character was modeled on himself rather than the author; he also claimed that the stories in *Tracks* were not real. Qu defended his historical representation, claiming that his story was “typical” , “concentrated” and “idealized”—three key terms and concepts from Mao’s campaign to popularize socialist ideology through art and literature.⁴¹ Qu Bo admitted that the names of Tiger Mountain, Breast Mountain, and Sifangtai, along with the narratives he wove with them, were his own creations. The story of Tiger Mountain, he said, was synthesized from the stories of ten different battles he’d experienced. Other details, like the part where the soldiers were skiing on the mountain, were inventions he introduced to create idealized characters. Qu Bo also said that this novel, like other socialist realist works, was “from real life, but it was more concentrated, was more typical and broader.”⁴² These contrivances are not only typical of historical and nonfiction writing during this period—they were official policy. Revolutionary history novels from the 1950s, even those documenting the authors’ real experiences, always contain details that go beyond the reality of the events they document, because this is the tradition of revolutionary narrative during this period.

The Editor’s Contribution

⁴¹ Sha Lin, “*Linhai xueyuan* is not to Writing a Biography for Somebody—Interviewing Qu Bo (Linhai xueyuan bushi wei mouren li de zhuan—fang Qu Bo),” *The Literary Gazette (Wenyi bao)*, March 14th, 1987.

⁴² Yao Dan , *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction of “Revolutionary China”*, 10.

The popularity of the novel *Tracks* is closely linked with the contributions of the editor Long Shihui. After carefully analyzing *Tracks*, Li Xinyi of Lu Xun Literature College claimed that “*Tracks* would not exist without Long Shihui, who is a first-class editor.”⁴³

Qu Bo submitted the manuscript of the novel, which he had named *Wiping Out Bandits in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai Xueyuan Jiaofeiji*) to the People’s Literature Press, where it came into the hands of the young editor Long Shihui. Long admired the novel for its legendary quality of revolutionary heroism combined with romanticism. Long believed that if the novel were published as soon as possible, it could replace traditional classic novels and martial novels as the most popular material for readers.⁴⁴ However, Long felt that Qu Bo’s novel was not as strong in the aspects of structure and literary quality. As a novice editor, Long was not confident in his ability, so he consulted with senior mentors to ask if the novel was fit for publishing and if it would be well received. He shared the manuscript with People’s Literary Press vice president Lou Shiyi, who agreed with his opinions, as well as Qin Zhaoyang, chief editor of People’s Literature magazine. After reading the draft of *Tracks*, Qin thought it was a novel that could have broad appeal. Qin edited and published an excerpt from the novel in the February 1957 issue of People’s Literature. Long also asked Qin about the romantic plots in this novel, and Qin’s opinion was that, even in the tough life of war, it was still possible for young people to talk about love. Long agreed with this, but felt the romantic narrative between

⁴³ Lai Chen, “The Mid-wife of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan de jieshengpo*) ,” *Taiyuan Evening* , January 26, 2005.

⁴⁴ Li Pin , *The Editing Life of Long Shihui—From Tracks in the Snowy Forest to the Town of Furong* (*Long Shihui de bianji shengya—cong linhaixueyuan dao furongzhen*) , (Kaifeng: Henan University Press, 1992), 32.

Bai Ru and Shao Jianbo was too simple, advising Qu Bo to enrich it with more details. Qu Bo extended the love story of Shao Jianbo and Bai Ru to two chapters, then asked Long Shihui to revise them for him. Under Qu's supervision, Long spent three months editing the manuscript.⁴⁵ Renamed, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, Long's substantially edited version of the revolutionary novel was published in September 1957 to positive audience reception. The president of People's Literature Press, Wang Renshu, also praised Long's editing. After reading *Tracks*, Wang Renshu wrote on the last page of the original manuscript: "This is how revision should be done." Wang promoted Long to editor and increased his salary by three levels.⁴⁶

Tracks is not only a revolutionary novel but also a hero legend. Some critics said the novel overemphasized individual heroism, while the romantic feelings were too obvious and compromised the quality of the novel. When *Tracks* was reissued in 1958, Long deleted some passages about the romantic feelings between Shao Jianbo and Bai Ru, also toning down the individual heroism without telling the author Qu Bo.⁴⁷

***Tracks* and the classic Chinese novel**

The influence of traditional Chinese classics on the writing of *Tracks* is the subject of many scholarly analyses, especially the classic novel *Water Margin*. Qu Bo himself admits that he tried to imitate classic works like *Yue Fei*, *Water Margin*, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, because these are the forms both he and his readers grew up with,

⁴⁵ Li Pin, *The Editing Life of Long Shihui*, 34-35.

⁴⁶ Li, 34.

⁴⁷ Li, 38.

and they allowed him to convey his message to the workers, peasants, and soldiers. Some classic motifs and tropes can be found in Qu's work. In Yao Dan's interview with Qu, Qu reveals that the scene where Yang Zirong chops off the head of the bandit "Butterfly Enticer" (*Hudiemi*) was inspired by decapitation scenes in *Three Kingdoms*.⁴⁸

In his discussion of Qu's work, Li Yang argues that the novel *Tracks* borrowed old forms to express new content and was influenced by Chinese traditional novels.⁴⁹ In Richard King's analysis of the novel, he argues that "*Tracks* adopted a simplified version of the structure of *Water Margin*, with a linear narrative of resistance and revenge being told in a series of interlocking cycles, each featuring one of the latter day *haohan* (stout fellows or heroes)".⁵⁰ In her article, Krista Van Fleit Hang points out that the novel's episodic adventure structure echoes that of *Water Margin*.⁵¹ Yao Dan, meanwhile, notes that some of the story's plotlines are similar to that of *Journey to the West*.⁵²

Robert E. Hegel argues: "Qu Bo wants his readers to link his novel to the earlier tradition of military romances, that he is 'making the past serve the present' is demonstrated in several ways."⁵³ First, Hegel points out, the PLA officers in *Tracks* are identified by "descriptive nicknames," a characterization technique also used in *Water Margin*. Hegel also explores the similarities between the tiger-killing scenes in *Tracks*

⁴⁸ Yao, *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction*, 252.

⁴⁹ Li, *Re-examination of Chinese Literary Classics from the 50s to 70s*, 34.

⁵⁰ King, *Milestones on a Golden Road: Writing for Chinese Socialism*, 41.

⁵¹ Van Fliet Hang, "The Heart of the Party: Gender and Communist Party Ideals in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*," 91.

⁵² Yao, *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction*, 120.

⁵³ Robert E. Hegel, "Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama: From the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution," 214.

and *Water Margin*. Hegel observes that: “from beginning to end, the scene in *Tracks* is less fantastic than its prototype in *Water Margin*, but the essential stages in the struggle are unmistakably similar. The major change is the context: Wu Song drinks copiously to prove his individual mettle, whereas, Yang Zirong’s reflections on his grudges against local despots and all those who oppress the working people gives his tiger killing political significance.”⁵⁴ If we look further, we can also see *Water Margin*’s character Shi Xiu reflected in *Tracks*. In *Water Margin*, Song Jiang wants to attract Zhu Jianzhuang but needs to gain access. He sends Shi Xiu to uncover more information about Zhu Jiazhuang. Shi Xiu deliberately gets captured and works undercover to get more information about Zhu Jianzhuang, finally helping Song Jiang to attack and defeat Zhu Jiazhuang.⁵⁵ Similarly, in *Tracks*, Yang Zirong goes to Tiger Mountain and leaves some messages for the detachment to wipe out the bandits there.

Tracks, The Yan’an Talks, and the Soviet Novel

Mao Zedong set the tone for the development of literature and art in China in 1942. In Mao Zedong’s 1942 “Talks at Yan’an Forum for Arts and Literature,” Mao said literature should serve the people—especially the workers, peasants, and soldiers. The purpose of that meeting was precisely to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine, functioning as a component part. Mao saw literature and art as powerful tools for uniting and educating the people and as weapons for attacking and destroying the enemy, helping the people fight the enemy with one heart and one

⁵⁴ See Hegel, 215.

⁵⁵ See more in chapter 46-50 in *Water Margin*.

mind.⁵⁶ After seizing power in 1949, Mao was eager to uproot the old cultures—feudal culture, commercial culture, bourgeois culture and elite culture—and replace them with a new socialist mass culture. Molding “new socialist men” and establishing new socialist values became an urgent task.⁵⁷ When talking about socialist realist works, Zhou Yang emphasized that presenting new characters would function to change the life and educate the masses.⁵⁸

Tracks can be said to be a socialist realist work because it includes the new type of hero at that time. We can see positive heroes who are similar to the heroes in Soviet socialist realist novel. For example, in *Tracks*, Shao Jianbo, Yang Zirong, Bai Ru, and other soldiers in the detachment are dedicated to socialism. They were portrayed to be “new people” with the passion and optimism of revolutionary spirit. This is similar to the characters in Soviet socialist novels. The character Pavel Korchagin in the Soviet novel *How the Steel was Tempered* is a well-known character regarded as a positive role model among the Chinese. Miin-ling Yu points out that Pavel Korchagin’s heroic images offered the best example for making new men and a new mass culture for Chinese revolutionary writers during this period.⁵⁹ Richard King also explored how Soviet novels influenced Chinese novels, noting the popularity of *How the Steel Was Tempered* in

⁵⁶ Mao Tse-Tung, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art, ” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*. vol.III(Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975), 70.

⁵⁷ Miin-ling Yu, “ A Soviet Hero, Pavel Korchagin, Comes to China, ” in *Russian History-Historie Russe*29, no.2-4 ,(2002),331.

⁵⁸ Zhou Yang, “Socialist Realism--the Road Ahead for Chinese Literature(Shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi--Zhongguo wenxue qianjin de daolu), ”189.

⁵⁹ Miin-ling Yu, “ A Soviet Hero, Pavel Korchagin, Comes to China, ”331.

China and in the Soviet Union during the 1950s.⁶⁰ In his essay published in *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics,"* Frederik H. Green analyzed the character Pavel Korchagin and argued that the character is a war hero and popular icon for the Maoist era.⁶¹ In light of above analysis, I argue that the novel *Tracks* bears the influence of Soviet revolutionary literature in its portrayals of hero characters.

After *Tracks* was published, some critics praised its readability, but others criticized its individualized portrayal of hero characters and the influence they had on other literary creations. Generally speaking, the 1958 edition of *Tracks* was well-received by both readers and critics. It recounted heroic history and was regarded to be a good work of literature that was accessible to ordinary people. As the editor Long Shihui said, there was no doubting the novel's political correctness and educational value. Qu Bo created a popular revolutionary history novel by combining traditional literary forms with personal experience and contemporary issues. *Tracks* become a legendary story that immortalized a period of history. Over the years that followed, the novel was adapted to the stage and screen, with each adaptation bearing unique differences reflecting its unique historical and political contexts. In the next two chapters, I will analyze several adaptations of *Tracks* in relation to their respective historical contexts and explore the so-called "de-revolutionizing" of red classics.

⁶⁰ King, *Milestones*, 101-106.

⁶¹ Frederik H.Green, "The Cultural Indigenization of a Soviet 'Red Classic' Hero: Pavel Korchagin's Journey through Time and Space," in *The Making and Remaking of China's "Red Classics" : Politics, Aesthetics, and Mass Culture*, ed. Rosemary Roberts and Li Li (Hong Kong :Hong Kong University Press. 2017),137.

Chapter Two: From Revolutionary Film to Ultra-Revolutionary Opera in the Mao Era

The popularity of the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* gave rise to many adaptations both during and after the Mao era. The first adaptation was the 1958 spoken drama *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, produced by Beijing People's Art Theatre. In August of the same year, the Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe produced an opera version, also called *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, while the Beijing Opera Troupe produced another version called *Capturing the Bandit Chief Zuoshandiao by Strategy* (*Zhiqin guanfei zuoshandiao*). The first film adaptation *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* was released in 1960 by the PLA's August First Film Studio. In 1963, Mao's wife Jiang Qing saw the Beijing opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and started to make her own revisions to it. From 1963 to 1969, this opera was revised many times under her command. In 1964, Beijing held a conference about Peking opera on contemporary themes. Addressing participants at the conference, Jiang Qing talked about the changes of the Peking opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* and the portrayal of characters:

Peking opera is an art that portrays things larger than life. At the same time, it has always depicted ancient times and people belonging to those times. Therefore, it is comparatively easy for Peking opera to portray negative characters and this is what some people like about it so much. On the other hand, it is very difficult to create positive characters, and yet we must build up characters of advanced revolutionary heroes. In the original version of the opera *Taking the Bandits' Stronghold* produced by Shanghai the negative characters stood out sharply, while the positive characters were quite colourless. Since the leadership attended to this question personally, this opera has been positively improved. Now, the scene about the Taoist Ting Ho

has been deleted. The part of Tso Shan Tiao (the “Hawk” -nickname of the bandit leader) basically has not been altered (the actor who plays the part acts very well), but since the roles of Yang Tzu-jung and Shao Chien-po have been made more prominent, the images of those negative characters have by comparison retreated into the background. It has been said that there are different views on this opera. Debates can be conducted on this subject. You must consider which side you stand on. Should you stand on the side of the positive characters or on the side of the negative characters? It has been said that there are still people who oppose writing about positive characters. This is wrong. Good people always account for the majority. This is true not only in our socialist countries, but even in imperialist countries, where the majority are labouring people. In revisionist countries, the revisionists are only a minority. We should place the emphasis on creating artistic images of advanced revolutionaries so as to educate and inspire the people and lead them forward. Our purpose in producing operas on revolutionary contemporary themes is mainly to extol the positive characters.⁶²

In 1967, this contemporary Beijing opera was recognized as a model opera (*yangbanxi*). Soon after, a film model opera version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* directed by Xie Tieli was released in 1970 by Beijing Film Studio.

In this chapter, I will mainly talk about the spoken drama adaptation, the first film adaptation, Beijing opera adaptation, model opera adaptation and the film Beijing opera adaptation. When reviewing the historical and political contexts and literary policies behind these Mao-era adaptations of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, it is apparent that literature served an overwhelmingly political purpose. The historical events of the times

⁶² Jiang Qing, “On the Revolution in Peking Opera: Speech Made in July 1964 at Forum of Theatrical Workers Participating in the Festival of Peking Operas on Contemporary Themes”, *Peking Review*, no.20, (May 1967), 15.

also leave their marks on these adaptations, particularly the cultural revolution. I will discuss details of campaigns such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign from 1957 to 1959, the Great Leap Forward from 1958-1962, the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 and their significance as historical contexts that influenced adaptations of *Tracks* during their time.

2.1. Spoken Drama: Class Struggle and Politics (1958)

In 1958, Beijing People's Art Theatre took a section of the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* and brought it to the stage with the spoken drama revolutionary play *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the first of many adaptations of Qu Bo's novel. Jin Fu, a professor at Nanjing University, points out that traditional dramatists in the 1950s were concerned with ensuring that the new drama preserved its artistic values while achieving propagandist and educational goals.⁶³ If we see the themes of the spoken drama adaptation, we can see its propaganda function. The spoken drama adaptation's two major themes are eliminating class enemies and showing the intimate relationship between the army and the masses.⁶⁴ The two themes allowed the spoken drama adaptation to qualify as "politically correct." This adaptation is also notable because it only focused on the Tiger Mountain narrative, a decision that carried on through subsequent film versions and operas.

When discussing the historical and political contexts of the 1958 spoken drama, it is necessary to refer to the Great Leap Forward first. The CCP announced the blueprint

⁶³ Jin Fu, *Chinese Theatre*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 121.

⁶⁴ Jiao Juyin. "Talking About Adaptations from Novels to Dramas with Young Authors (He qingnian zuojia tan xiaoshuo gaibian juben)," *Juben*, July 1958, 81.

for the Great Leap Forward in the second plenary session of the Eighth Congress in May 1958. The campaign of the Great Leap Forward aimed to rapidly transform the country from an agrarian economy into a socialist industrial society through rapid collectivization of resources and establishment of industrial infrastructure and facilities. Even though the Great Leap Forward mainly refers to industry and agriculture, it is inevitable that culture was also influenced by this political climate. As the scriptwriter of the spoken drama *Xia Chun* said, it is difficult to move the novel to the stage. But the Great Leap Forward pushed us, the passion of masses encouraged us, the hero images in this novel touched us, so we went all out to finish the initial script of this drama in just over three weeks.⁶⁵

During the Great Leap Forward, all endeavors were invested in the movement, and all successes were attributed to it. After the author of the original novel Qu Bo watched the spoken drama, he wrote an article to share his feeling and opinions. He began the article by connecting the success of Beijing People's Art Theatre with the Great Leap Forward: "Firstly, congratulations to the comrades in Beijing People's Art Theatre for their achievements in the Great Leap Forward."⁶⁶ Qu's comments support the argument that the spoken drama adaptation was born out of the Great Leap Forward, whether as a product of the political and cultural climate or as an agent in its construction.

The drama's director Jiao Juyin commented on the nature of the adaptation, stating that in this atmosphere, adaptation became one of the ways to enrich performing

⁶⁵ Xia Chun, "About the Adaptation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Guanyu Linhai xueyuan de gaibian)," *Juben* 7,no.7 (July 1958), 86.

⁶⁶ Qu Bo, "Watching *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*" (Guan zhiqu weihushan), *Chinese Theatre* (*Xiju bao*), (1958), 43.

dramas—especially the dramas that reflect contemporary life. Novels like *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* and *Song of Youth* are well received by readers, and the heroes in these popular novels touch readers’ hearts, encourage them, and educate them. Jiao felt that by moving these novels to the stage, they would be able to educate more people; he also felt that adaptations of these novels should have equal political meaning to the novels.⁶⁷ For Jiao, the spoken drama of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* had the same political function as the original novel: to educate people about the political struggle underway.

Jiao believed that preserving the novel’s political message was more important than being faithful to the original plot and structure. As he edited the novel into a script, Jiao prioritized ideological content and featured it in the most prominent points of the script. If adapting the novel *Tracks* from an aesthetic or entertainment perspective, a writer would prioritize the most exciting plots and run the risk of diluting or losing the ideological message in the adaptation. Jiao believed audiences would easily be absorbed by the adventures and battles and forget the educational meaning of class struggle. The romantic relationship between Bai Ru and Shao Jianbo also needed to be downplayed to avoid diverting attention from class struggle.⁶⁸

Jiao approved of the adaptors’ editorial decision to single out the Tiger Mountain narrative from *Tracks* for their adaptation. The mission to eliminate bandits on Tiger Mountain was a narrative which could be clearly connected to the larger message of class struggle. Jiao edited the script to make the detachment’s mission more politically relevant.

⁶⁷ Jiao, “Talking About Adaptations from Novels to Dramas with Young Authors (He qingnian zuojia tan xiaoshuo gaibian juben),” 81.

⁶⁸ Jiao, 81.

Their mission was not only to eliminate the bandits—it was a mission to eliminate class enemies. Jiao modified the script to emphasize political messages. For example, he emphasized the storyline of the “Old Taoist” character. This character was a secret agent serving the Japanese during the counter-Japanese war. After the war, he became a KMT spy. He killed the taoist at a temple and disguised himself as a taoist, then recruited bandits to fight the PLA. These editorial decisions strengthened the connections between the fictional narrative and people’s real-life experiences, demonstrating an intimate relationship between the PLA and people and emphasizing the mass line⁶⁹ of the army and the class nature of the battle.⁷⁰ According to Jiao, every detail of the drama adaptation was crafted to emphasize class struggle. This drama’s exciting and suspenseful story also served to please audiences and cover up imperfections in the adaptation, further facilitating the delivery of the message.⁷¹

Xia Chun gave more details about the secret agent in the drama. In the spoken drama, they added one plotline in which the bandit old Taoist went to Tiger Mountain and put Yang Zirong in danger. This adaptation served to increase suspense, and also functioned to highlight the bandits’ political purpose. The editors wanted to show this was a political struggle between the detachment, who represented the masses, and the bandits, who represented class enemies.⁷² This plot was not in the original novel and did not appear in all other adaptation versions. Throughout Jiao and Xia’s writing, in the

⁶⁹ The Mass Line, a political concept promoted in the Chinese revolution, was developed by Mao Zedong. It mainly means “from the masses, go back to the masses.”

⁷⁰ Jiao, 82.

⁷¹ Jiao, 82.

⁷² Xia, “About the Adaptation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Guanyu *Linhai xueyuan* de gaibian),” 87.

spoken drama adaptation, the word “politics” is also used at a much higher frequency than in the original novel.

The editors also cut the romantic subplot of the relationship between Bai Ru and Shao Jianbo, Xia explained that the limited length of the spoken drama made it difficult to develop the plotline of a romantic relationship within the intense atmosphere of the main drama. They felt that this romantic narrative would soften the tension too much and possibly damage the heroic portrayal of the characters.⁷³

As Yao Dan explains, Beijing People’s Art Theatre had been criticized for having few modern dramas in 1958. To some extent, for Beijing People’s Art Theatre, producing *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was a response to social and political pressure. They were expected to prepare modern dramas that presented images of workers, peasants and soldiers appear on the stage of Beijing People’s Art Theatre. The adaptation was highly influential. According to Yao, the creation of the drama was a watershed event in the development of theatre during the Great Leap. The production also influenced later adaptations of the novel *Tracks*. Most subsequent adaptations only cover the Tiger Mountain story rather than the whole novel. The decision to centralize Yang Zirong as the main character instead of the original protagonist Shao Jianbo was also carried over in subsequent adaptations.⁷⁴ In fact, all adaptations of *Tracks* produced during the Mao era—including the film, Beijing opera, and model opera adaptations—used similar scenes to the spoken drama produced by Jiao Juyin and Xia Chun.

⁷³ Xia, 87.

⁷⁴ Yao, *The Popular Qualities and Basic Construction of “Revolutionary China,”* 105-108.

Qu Bo praised the spoken drama adaptation for the following standpoints. Firstly, it showed that the army relies on the masses to defeat the enemies. It also showed the collective heroism of the detachment and highlighted the military's democratic committee meetings onstage.⁷⁵ Qu Bo was not satisfied, however, with the editors' decision to cut some plotlines about Yang Zirong in the Tiger Mountain stronghold. In the spoken drama adaptation, the bandit chief trusted Yang easily and did not test him—a modification which Qu felt de-emphasized Yang's superior wisdom and his brave and heroic proletarian spirit.⁷⁶

2. 2. The first film adaptation: A propaganda film (1960)

Paul Clark points out that film was the most “popular” element in the new mass culture, with the potential to reach the widest possible audience. Moreover, film could reach audiences in an unadulterated form and was easily controllable by Party censors.⁷⁷ In 1960, the first film adaptation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* was produced by the PLA's August First Film Studio. It was based on some episodes of the original novel. While shooting the first film, the producer strove to make this film easily comprehensible to its key audience of the poorly-educated masses. At that time, workers, soldiers, and peasants were the major audiences, and films were required to cater to their needs. The films needed to have clear plots, exciting action, and compelling heroes, as well as featuring close relationship between the military and the people and references to the

⁷⁵ Qu Bo, “Watching *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (Guan zhiqu weihushan).” *Chinese Theatre (Xiju Bao)*, no.12, 1958. 43.

⁷⁶ Qu, “Watching *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (Guan Zhiqu Weihushan),” 43.

⁷⁷ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

Communist Party and its leader. In this section, I will analyze adaptations of *Tracks* as they relate to the civil-military relationship, the CCP, PLA, Chairman Mao, and the heroes.

The Civil-Military Relationship

In the film adaptation in 1960, there are a few scenes which highlight the close relationship between the army and the masses. For example, in one scene, a PLA soldier knocks on the door of villager Yongqi and enters the house. The soldier wears a friendly smile on his face, but Yongqi's mother is still afraid. The soldier soothes her, saying: "Aunt, we are not bandits, we are PLA." No further explanation is given or needed—the distinction between PLA and bandits is implicit, and the soldier's warm smile demonstrates to the audience that the PLA are good people.

In a later scene, the PLA combines action and explanation to win the villagers' support. One morning, as a PLA soldier is helping a villager to sweep the snow before her home, a little child comes outside. The PLA soldier picks up this child and gives him something to eat. Later, the child's mother comes outside. When she finds this scene, she looks scared. At this time, the soldier explains warmly, "Fellow villager, you have confused us with other people. We are not bandits, we are PLA. We are armed forces led by the CCP and Chairman Mao. We come here to fight the bandits."⁷⁸ While he is saying this, he takes off his coat and uses it to warm the little child. His gesture and words assure

⁷⁸*Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, directed by Liu Peiran, the PLA's August First Film Studio, 1960, Film.

the mother and she relaxes and smiles. This scene shows how the PLA cares about the villagers and deserves their trust. To some extent, it is a PLA propaganda film.

The film's pro-PLA message also plays out in the background music. In one scene, where the detachment has finished skiing down the mountain, a joyful song is playing in the background, and the audience can clearly hear one lyric: "The PLA loves the people and the people support the PLA." In the next scene, the grateful villagers scoop up the members of the detachment and invite them into homes for dinner. Scenes such as these portray a close relationship between the PLA and the masses.

The CCP, Chairman Mao, and the Democratic Committee Meeting

The film adaptation also features many explicit references to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This might reflect the difficulties the party was experiencing in their campaign to transform Chinese culture. The CCP and PLA felt the need to secure their status and win the support of the masses.

There is one particularly prominent scene in the film that shows how it emphasized the importance of the CCP. During a dialogue between Yang Zirong and Shao Jianbo which is close to a scene in the original novel, Yang is convincing Shao that he has some advantages that will help him succeed in the mission to infiltrate the bandits on Tiger Mountain. In the film, as Yang speaks, he stops to look into Shao's eyes. Shao returns his gaze and says with passion: "You have a loyal heart dedicated to the CCP and the people." Yang Zirong affirms him: "Captain, you understand me completely." When Yang sets out for Tiger Mountain, he tells Shao, "Don't worry. I will never disappoint the CCP and the

people.” These explicit references to the CCP place the focus firmly on the greater context of class struggle rather than on the content of the novel.

The first film adaptation makes many references to the PLA and the CCP, but Chairman Mao is not mentioned nearly as frequently as the PLA and the CCP are. In the Seventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1945, the new Party Constitution emphasized the CCP take “Mao Zedong Thought” as the guideline for all its work. However, in November 1948, Mao declared that Mao Zedong Thought should be renamed in official documents to “Marxist-Leninist theory combined with Chinese revolution practice.” In 1954, the Department of Propaganda announced that, in accordance with Mao’s orders, the term “Mao Zedong Thought” would no longer be used to avoid misinterpretation. Other special notices asserted that Mao Zedong Thought was equivalent to and in unison with Marxist-Leninist theory, ordering officials to avoid using the term “Mao Zedong Thought” in articles and speeches and only use the term “Marxist-Leninist theory.”⁷⁹ The Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China was held in 1956. According to this congress, “ It emphasized the problem of the building of the Party in office and the need to uphold democratic centralism and collective leadership, oppose the personality cult, promote democracy within the Party and among the people and strengthen the Party’s ties with the masses.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ James T. Myers, Jürgen Domes and Milton D. Yeh, *Chinese Politics Documents and Analysis: The Fall of Hua Kuo-feng(1980) to the Twelfth Party Congress(1982)*.vol.4 (Columbia :University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 331.

⁸⁰ Myers, Domes and Yeh, *Chinese Politics Documents and Analysis: The Fall of Hua Kuo-feng(1980) to the Twelfth Party Congress(1982)*, 56.

This campaign to support democratization and oppose the Mao personality cult impacted editorial decisions in the film adaptation. In such a context, it is not hard to figure out why Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought are not referred to in the original novel and the first movie.

This context is also the reason why the term “committee” is stressed in both the novel and the first film. In both, Shao Jianbo refers explicitly to the democratic committee meeting. In the 1960 film adaptation, when discussing if Yang Zirong can go to the Tiger Mountain alone, Shao Jianbo says: “We cannot do it before the committee studies it, because this is such an important issue.” Instances such as this can be seen as direct products of the policies and discourses that were prominent during The Eighth National Congress of China in 1956.

The Portrayal of Heroes

It is easy to tell the difference between the “good” characters and “bad” characters in this film. The good characters are presented to appear inspiring, while the bad characters look sinister and untrustworthy.

One example is actor Wang Runshen’s portrayal of Yang Zirong, whose performance and portrayal of the character were deemed successful at that time. Before shooting the film, the director consulted with Wang to ask how he planned to portray Yang’s character. Wang shared his strategy: Yang Zirong is a legendary character, and his character will be vivid if he is portrayed in the familiar style of a Chinese

swordsman.⁸¹ Yang's strategy succeeded in creating an inspiring and relatable hero character for the masses.



Figure1: Yang Zirong (middle) in the first film adaption in 1960.

2.3. Beijing Opera, *Yangbanxi* and Model Opera Film: Strong political messages (1958-1970)

At the beginning of this chapter, I referred to the 1958 Beijing opera adaptation *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the 1967 model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, and finally the 1970 model opera film adaptation. All of them are performed as Beijing opera. Between 1964 and 1970, from the stage to the screen, the Beijing opera version was revised many times on the command of Jiang Qing, who was in charge of *yangbanxi* at that time. Discussing the 1964 stage version produced by the Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, professor Jin Fu points out that war, espionage, danger and

⁸¹ Su Hongyi, Talking About Yang Zirong: Interviewing the Actor Wang Runshen who Portrayed Yang Zirong in the Film (Fengyu Ruyan hua Zirong: dianying *Linhai Xueyuan* zhong de Yang Zirong banyanzhe Wang Runshen zhuanfang), *Shen Zhou*, 2006, 8.

suspense make this play especially dramatic. The stage version won high critical praise and was adopted as a model by troupes all over China after it was performed. Dramatists prioritized characterization as they set about adapting other works into model operas for the stage, with the logic that audiences would only be politically influenced by model operas whose characters they could relate to and respect.⁸² In this section, I will focus on how these opera adaptations were influenced by the politics and literary policies at the time.

In his book *Chinese Theatre*, Jin explains that, following the 1964 Modern Peking Opera Festival and a round of contemporary opera play performances, the CCP tightened restrictions on public performances of traditional operas to the point where operas on contemporary themes were the only choice for dramatists. Opera had become a political medium. Model opera stories incorporated political messages into legendary narratives in a style best illustrated best *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.⁸³ Model operas featured many explicit references to the CCP, the PLA, and Chairman Mao. Characters used words and actions to demonstrate the difference between the PLA and bandits and praised the CCP and Chairman Mao as the people's saviors.

The 1970 model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* includes many such examples of references to the CCP and the PLA. For example, in the scene when Yang Zirong is preparing to disguise himself as a bandit and infiltrate the enemy stronghold, he states the three main advantages he has that will help him succeed. The first two are the

⁸² Jin Fu, *Chinese Theatre*, 122-123.

⁸³ Jin , 121-122.

same as those given in the original novel and the first film adaptation; the third, however, has now been changed to reflect the needs of the time. The third condition, Yang says, “is the most important,” and the Chief of Staff⁸⁴ completes his sentence: “The loyal heart of a PLA soldier dedicated to the Party and Chairman Mao.” Full of feeling, Yang affirms him: “You understand me completely, Chief of Staff.” Yang then sings: “A Communist always heeds the Party’s call. He takes the heaviest burden on himself.”⁸⁵ Here, Yang Zirong mentions Chairman Mao—a new introduction to the script that was not present in either the novel or the 1960 film adaptation.

Another innovation in the 1970 model opera is the addition of two new characters, Chang Bao⁸⁶ and her father. In one scene, Yang Zirong introduces himself to them, saying: “I’m a soldier of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army...We are battalions led by Chairman Mao and the Communist Party...We’ve got a big force not far behind. Our PLA has won several big victories in the Northeast.”⁸⁷ There are more explicit references to Chairman Mao and the CCP later in the film. In one, Yang Zirong sings: “Follow the savior, the Communist Party, and bring the land a new life.” In scene five, while he is on the way to Tiger Mountain, Yang Zirong sings: “The Party gives me wisdom and courage. Risks and hardships are as naught.” In scene eight, Yang Zirong sings: “The party places

⁸⁴ Chief of Staff is the character Shao Jianbo /203 who is unnamed in the Model Opera version.

⁸⁵ The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, *A Modern Revolutionary Peking Opera: Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1971), 17.

⁸⁶ Chang Bao and her father, both hunters, are new characters. The girl is disguised as a young man to protect her from bandits.

⁸⁷ The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, 18.

great hopes on me...The Party's every word is victory's guarantee, Mao Zedong Thought shines forever.”⁸⁸

Li Longyun points that Mao's personality cult gradually reached a peak of unconditional worship of himself and the masses in the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).⁸⁹ In the 1970 model opera film version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought were accordingly referred to many times. In scene one, the Chief of Staff says: “The regimental Party committee sent us as a pursuit detachment into this snowy forest in accordance with Chairman Mao's directive to build stable base areas in the Northeast.”⁹⁰ In scene 4, when the Chief of Staff is talking about how the hunter helped them, he says: “Long ago, Chairman Mao told us, ‘The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them’. Without the masses, we can't move a step.”⁹¹ When discussing the plan to expel the bandits from Tiger Mountain, Chief of Staff says: “We must remember what Chairman Mao tells us—strategically, we should despise our enemy, but tactically, we should take him seriously.”⁹² The 1970 film adaptation of *Tracks* is unique in its plentiful references to Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought. These explicit praises for Mao are limited to the 1970 model opera version; afterward, following new

⁸⁸ The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, 10, 32, 40.

⁸⁹ Li Longyun, *Small Well Lane: A Contemporary Chinese Play and Oral History*, trans. and ed. Hong Jiang and Timothy Cheek, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 18.

⁹⁰ The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, 1.

⁹¹ The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, 14.

⁹² The “*Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*” Group of the Peking Opera Troupe of Shanghai, 16.

party policies, no explicit references to Mao Zedong Thought can be found in any other adaptations of *Tracks*.

The Eighth National Congress of the CCP in 1956 did not mention Mao Zedong Thought and Mao Zedong, and it gave some of Mao's powers to State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and party General Secretary Deng Xiaoping. However, Mao soon tried to use his prestige to win his power back. After the 1959 Lushan Conference, Mao Zedong Thought once again became the dominant ideology. The Model Opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by strategy* was created under the guidance of Mao's wife Jiang Qing during the Cultural Revolution. In this period, "Mao worship" became prevalent, and this can explain why Mao Zedong Thought was mentioned many times in the script of the 1969 model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.

In his article *Model Drama as Myth: A Semiotic Analysis of Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, Kirk A. Denton analyzed how the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* used cultural signs to achieve political goals. As Denton argued: "The color red, a popular symbol of happiness and prosperity for joyous and festive occasions, is pervasive in *Taking*...By the time of the Cultural Revolution, the designation 'red' had come to signify one's political and ideological correctness, how fully and sincerely one had embraced the Thought of Mao Zedong. In the model drama red is an omnipresent sign of Mao Zedong and Maoism. Red flags are flown about the stage. A very large one forms the backdrop of the final scene of the drama, when the PLA Soldiers have taken Tiger Mountain. PLA soldiers wear red armbands and red star badges on their caps. A peasant girl wears a bright red jacket and a red flower in her hair. Yang Zirong, the

principal hero, sports a red banner diagonally across his chest and his riding crop. The bandits, however, never appear in red of any shade.”⁹³

The morning sun is another Maoist motif that features in the opera. In the Mao era, there was a famous song, “The East is Red,” which begins with the lyric “The east is red, rises the sun, China has produced a Mao Zedong.” The image of the sun and the colour red are always connected to Chairman Mao during the Mao era. In one scene from the 1970 model opera film Yang Zirong sings he has the morning sun in his heart. According to Denton’s analysis, at that time, “To add to the intensity of the sun imagery, the orchestra is playing *The East is Red, Rises the Sun*’. This is perhaps the climax of the drama. Yang Zirong, filled and warmed by Maoist ideology.”⁹⁴ This scene shows that the model opera is primarily intended to meet the CCP’s political demands.

It is easy to recognize heroes and the bandits in the model opera film by their language, their actions, and their positions on stage. One interesting feature of the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* is that almost all of the “good” characters are chubby. For example, the mountain hunter’s daughter Changbao was supposed to be thin because she lives in the mountain and presumably never gets enough to eat. However, she is presented with a chubby red face—a decision which I argue suggests that even poor people can have better nutrition and better lives because they have the CCP and Chairman Mao. In addition, in this model opera, Yang Zirong does not look at all like a bandit when he is on Tiger Mountain—instead, he appears more like a flawless and brave

⁹³ Kirk A. Denton, “Model Drama as Myth: A Semiotic Analysis of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*,” in *Drama in the People’s Republic of China*. (New York: State University of the New York), 1987, 125.

⁹⁴ Kirk A. Denton, 126.

PLA soldier. This portrayal is in line with the “Three Prominences” policy enacted during the Cultural Revolution..



Figure 2: Yang Zirong in the model opera film version (1970)

Chapter Three: De-revolutionizing in the Age of Reform and Opening

After 1978, following the death of Mao and the end of the Cultural Revolution, China began to transform from a planned economy to a market economy. The policies of “going out into the world” and “allowing the entry of foreign products” become the major concerns of China’s evolving strategy. Over many years, the nature of Chinese television dramas and films has changed alongside the economic, political, and social changes. Cultural entertainment evolved from a purely propaganda instrument of the ruling Communist Party to become a commercial product, though it is still controlled by the authoritarian system.

In this section, I will discuss post-reform adaptations of *Tracks* and the cultural, social, and political changes they reflect. The first adaptation I address is a ten-episode television series in 1986. The second and most controversial adaptation is the 2004 television series. The third is the popular 2014 film adaptation by director Tsui Hark. The fourth is the newest television series adaptation, produced in 2017. I argue that these successive adaptations show obvious signs of change, transitioning away from education (teaching people to participate in class struggle under the leadership of Chairman Mao during the cultural revolution) toward entertainment, albeit under government influence.

In this chapter, I will analyze the above four adaptations, especially the last three versions. I will explore what has been added and what has been omitted and argue how these alterations demonstrate the “de-revolutionization” of the red classics that took place after 1978. I will mainly explore how the market economy influences the nature of red classics through focused analyses of key moments and changes in the portrayal of main characters.

3.1 The First Television Series, *Linhai Xueyuan* (1986): Revolutionary History as Soap Opera

After 1978, with the ending of Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the “reform and opening-up” policy, China entered a new age. Many Chinese felt excited about the new order after the long-term spiritual depression. They were hungry for new knowledge from the west and were becoming eager to express their own personal opinions and thoughts.

The first television series in China was produced by China Central Television (CCTV) in 1980. At this time, television serials were usually produced by stations which received state subsidies. In spite of their state-controlled status, serials made during the 1980s began to show signs of relaxed censorship. For example, the 1986 television adaptation of the novel *Journey to the West* and the first television adaptation of the novel *Tracks*, also made in 1986, were allowed to contain sexual content and nude scenes.

The first television series adaptation of *Tracks* was produced by Jilin Television. In this adaptation, we can see ten episodes adapted from selected chapters of the original novel. The series starts with the massacre and ends with the annihilation of the bandits. The series follows the original novel’s general structure, but added some new narratives, including some sexier ones. For example, in the first episode, Butterfly Enticer puts on sensual clothes and flirts with the bandit Zheng Shanpao. In episode six, we see a scene where Yang Zirong goes into his room to discover a prostitute wearing a Chinese bellyband lying on his bed. In the television series, Butterfly Enticer becomes a central

character rather than a peripheral one, as in the novel. She is portrayed writhing around in front of the camera in several episodes.

The producers' decision to add these sexualized elements to the story is worth exploring. Firstly, even though television production was still under the control of the party-state, censorship was beginning to relax at that time. The producers had more freedom to express their opinions and thoughts. Secondly, the producers hoped these sexy scenes would attract more audience attention.

The author Qu Bo was not satisfied with this television adaptation. When journalist Du Zhonghua interviewed Qu in 1987 following the launch of the series: “ Qu said, the show had some serious flaws that lowered the artistic value of the work and also deviated from the spirit of the original novel. The series skipped the fantastic events and dramatic climax of the original novel. The drama had lost its most wonderful parts. For example, the plots of a few important battles, such as the attack on Breast Mountain and the battle in Sifangtai, were weakened. Meanwhile, some characters and plotlines were omitted, including the old mushroom picker who helped the PLA soldiers find the bandits. The scenes where Li Yongqi rouses the masses in Jiapigou and Yang Zirong battles the bandits on Tiger Mountain (scenes that were considered key to their characterization as wise and courageous heroes) were also cut...Qu said that the television series format had its own strengths, particularly its greater length and high continuity, which could help

move a whole original novel to the screen. However, if the plots cut the best parts of the original novel, what was left to watch? ”⁹⁵

It is obvious that Qu Bo was not happy with this 1986 television adaptation and its alterations to the plots and central themes. In addition to the exciting battle scenes that were cut, the scenes that explain why and how Yang Zirong decides to go to the Tiger Mountain are also missing. The original pretext for the story is reduced to just one scene before Yang leaves for Tiger Mountain. In the scene, Yang and Shao are standing outside. Shao lights the cigarette for Yang. Yang smokes silently. At this moment, Shao says with tears in his eyes: “Platoon Leader Yang, take care of yourself.” Yang nods his head and leaves. Here, rather than listing the advantages he believes will help him win the mission as he did in the novel, Yang simply stands in silence with Shao. The scene serves to highlight the tender feelings between the characters, rather than the heroic spirit and class-struggle mission that the scene was originally intended to highlight. This television version is longer than any of the adaptations produced during the Mao era; presumably, it should have more time to dedicate to the exciting battle stories. However, some scenes considered important in the original work are even not included in this version, while more time is spent on other scenes. Qu Bo felt that this scene with Yang and Shao was too warm-hearted and could not show the brutality of war and the wisdom and courage of the hero Yang Zirong. One explanation for the failure of the series is simply the producers’ lack of experience. In the 1980s, television dramas were a new thing; the producers had no experience in writing these long-format dramas.

⁹⁵ Du Zhonghua, “Qu Bo Talks about the Television Series *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Qu Bo tan dianshiju *Linhai Xueyuan*) ,” *Tianjin Tonight News Paper* (*Tianjin Jinwan bao*), January 18, 1987.

In his analysis of economic and political changes as reflected in Chinese media, Guo Ke finds that, since 1985, “Of the entertainment fare, television drama is the most popular. After 1983, TV dramas saw growth in popularity.”⁹⁶ In the 1980s, there was an enormous increase in the number of television dramas being produced. In these circumstances, competition between dramas would be inevitable. In addition, in the 1980s, televisions were not a common item in Chinese homes, and not every television drama would have the chance to be broadcast. At that time, it was common for people to watch television dramas in a collective viewing hall. To some extent, television drama producers were under pressure to adapt for the commercial markets at that time. This may explain the sudden inclusion of sexy scenes in the 1986 television drama adaptation of *Tracks*.

Another key difference between the 1986 television series and the original story is the narrative in which the PLA visit poor peasant families and talk to the old man or woman of the house about the virtues of the PLA and the CCP. When the PLA is making plans to attack Breast Mountain, Shao Jianbo just simply says they will ask the old mushroom picker to guide them on how to climb the mountain; he does not give any more details, and as mentioned before, the mushroom picker’s character has been struck from the script. The producers’ decision to omit these plots and de-emphasize the PLA and the CCP give the impression they are merely telling ordinary stories that happened to occur during the civil war.

⁹⁶ Guo Ke, “Economic Liberalization and Political Conservatism as Reflected in China’s Media Development(1978-Present),” in *Religion, Law, and Freedom: A Global Perspective*, ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour, Joel Thierstein (California: Praeger publisher, 2000), 208.

There are also key differences in the 1986 adaptation's portrayal of the character Shao Jianbo. When asked the source of the name, Qu Bo explained, "there are three meanings: Shao (少) means young; Jian (剑 sword) symbolizes martial, smart, quick, brave and decisive; and Bo (波 waves) means growing in the storm of magnificent revolution."⁹⁷ Qu Bo wanted to portray Shao Jianbo as a young and growing hero. However, Qu Bo said, in this television adaptation, the characteristics Shao Jianbo's character was named for have been diminished. In addition, this adaptation lacked battle scenes that contributed to his character development.⁹⁸

3. 2. Television Series Adaptation: Misleading the Audience (2004)

Here, I will discuss the "de-revolutionization" of the red classics between the Mao-era productions and the current era. "De-revolutionization" refers to a shift in a revolutionary work's intended purpose—a shift away from politicizing popular discourses and educating the masses in communist ideology, moving towards entertaining the masses, instead. As Cai Rong discussed, since the year 2000, television adaptations of red classics and other revolution-related productions have proliferated on Chinese television, creating a "Red Classics Craze" (*hongse jingdian re*) in the new century.⁹⁹ According to the SARFT records, between January 2001 and January 2004, approval was granted for the production of 41 red classic dramas, totaling 886

⁹⁷ Du Zhonghua, "Qu Bo Talks About the Television Series *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Qu Bo tan dianshiju *Linhai xueyuan*)," January 18, 1987.

⁹⁸Du, January 18, 1987.

⁹⁹ Cai Rong, "Making the Present Serve the Past: Restaging *On Guard beneath the Neon Light* in Contemporary China," in *Chinese Television in the Twenty-First Century: Entertaining the Nation*, ed. Ruoyun Bai and Geng Song (New York: Routledge, 2015) , 141.

episodes.¹⁰⁰ It is obvious that those producers of red classics adaptations were under pressure to survive amid fierce market competition. In these circumstances, producers would need to be more focused on viewer preferences and create shows that would get high enough ratings to support the series.

Zhao Yong explores how the term ‘red classics’ was born after 1996. In Zhao’s opinion : “though the rebirth of the red classics was closely related to the hype of the main trend, this is only one side of the story. The other side of the story is the market...Following their revival in 1996, the red classics attracted film and television producers who recognized the trend and wanted to seize the business opportunity.”¹⁰¹ In 2001, the series *Years of Burning Passion (Jiqing Ranshao De Suiyue)* was launched, becoming a hit series across China. Even though this television drama is not an adaptation from a red classic novel, it shares common features with the genre as a story about a revolutionary hero. The series tells the story of army officer Shi Guangrong and his experiences between the 1950s and 1980s. The series is regarded as a soap opera because it mainly focuses on his love story and family life. However, it also portrays his revolutionary passion, idealism and heroism. The success of the series made producers and directors notice the huge market potential of hero stories. Thus, the red classic trend was born. Producers began adapting red classic novels and other revolution-related hero stories for television and film. The trend saw a large number of films and dramas

¹⁰⁰ Qiu Hongjie, Zhongguo wenyi hanwei hongse jingdian (Chinese literature protects “red classics”), *China.com*, May 24, 2004, <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/CU-c/571153.htm>, accessed March 15, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Zhao Yong, “When a Red Classics Was Spoofed: A Cultural Analysis of a Media Incident,” in *Chinese Revolution and Chinese Literature*, ed. Tao Dongfeng, Yang Xiaobin, Rosemary Roberts and Yang Li (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 257-258.

featuring revolutionary history and heroes. One of them was the second television adaptation of *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, a 28-episode series that premiered in 2004. In this adaptation of the novel, the story begins with the massacre of the villagers and ends with the death of Yang Zirong on Tiger Mountain. The 2004 series added several new narratives and characters which were not in the original novel, and it received a lot of criticism from audiences.

One of the things audiences didn't like about the 2004 series was its slow pace. However, this is arguably a reflection of the market conditions: the more episodes a series has, the more profit potential it has, giving producers incentive to stretch the story and make it longer. According to Cai Rong, who interviewed the producers, “in order for a television drama to be profitable, it must have at least 20 episodes, which explains why there are seldom any TV dramas with fewer than 20 episodes.”¹⁰² Television programs now also need to attract private investment. In order to stretch the original novel *Tracks* to 28 episodes, the producer needed to add the extra narratives.

In this section, I will mainly analyze the portrayal of hero Yang Zirong and how it differs from previous adaptations. Many critics and audiences regarded the 2004 portrayal of Yang Zirong as a total failure. In the 2004 adaptation, Yang is the central character rather than Shao Jianbo, with the focus of the series on the story of how Yang Zirong grew up to become a real hero. In this adaptation, Yang starts his career as a cook, a common person with common flaws—he even has a fiancée, a woman named Huai Hua. The romance becomes tragic when Huai Hua is sold to another family to marry another

¹⁰² Cai Rong, “Restaging the Revolution in Contemporary China: Memory of Politics and Politics of Memory,” 667.

man because her family is too poor and needs the money. Even when Yang Zirong volunteers for the mission to Tiger Mountain, he is still not the hero audiences knew from the novel and model operas. Before Yang Zirong leaves for Tiger Mountain, he pays Huai Hua a farewell visit. He does not say goodbye to her directly, but he offers her a gesture of goodwill by moving a heavy stone in the yard for her. In this scene, he appears more like an emotional romantic rather than a revolutionary hero. An even bolder adaptation is at the end of the series, when Yang Zirong is shot to death while looking for his first lover's son.



Figure 3: Yang Zirong (Left), Shao Jian Bo (Right) in the 2004 television adaptation.

As we saw in previous adaptations, Yang Zirong's explanation of his advantages in the Tiger Mountain mission are again updated for this new version. Yang again sites his map and understanding of the bandits' slang, as in the original; the third advantage, however, is no longer "loyalty to the CCP"—it's tobacco. This is meant to reflect those

times, when tobacco was a popular trade item. In this version of the story, Yang Zirong is still not a CCP member at this time. Instead, he applies to join the CCP before he leaves for Tiger Mountain. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that this television series is mainly about the development of Yang Zirong; even though Yang Zirong is not a CCP member at the beginning, he proves that he is worthy to join the party using his wisdom and actions.

In spite of its major differences from earlier adaptations and the original text, the 2004 adaptation still emphasizes the PLA. In episode seven, the PLA save an old man and bring him to Jiapigou. Shao Jianbo introduces the detachment to the old man: “Old grandpa, we are PLA. We are here to fight with bandits.” The old man complains to the communist soldiers about the bandits’ crimes and says he wants to go back to Mushroom Mountain. Shao Jianbo asks the old man to have a good rest and asks Gao Bo and Bairu to stay at the old man’s home to take care of him. This key scene characterizing the PLA basically plays out the same way earlier adaptations did, showing a notable continuity with the original spirit and message.

In addition, the producers added a love triangle to the romance between Shao Jianbo and Bai Ru by adding an admirer—a Soviet officer called Sasha. Sasha likes Bai Ru, but Bai Ru tells him she already has a lover. The 2004 adaptation of *Tracks* attempted to attract viewers with new and innovative plots, but ended up being unpopular. In addition to the criticism about its plot adaptations, the series also received criticism for its actors’ performances. Zhao Yong, professor at the School of Literature of Beijing Normal University, said Wang Runshen, who played Yang in the 1959 film, did a good job because he understood the character, while Wang Luoyong, who played Yang in the

2004 television adaptation, acted too scholarly.¹⁰³ The portrayal of Yang in the 2004 drama is indeed more ordinary than heroic.

The 2004 television version provoked scathing criticism, including from the former State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, citing its unfaithfulness to the core spirit of the original work. In April 2004, SARFT issued a special notice named “On the Issues Related to Adapting Red Classics into Television Series.” In this announcement, SARFT addressed the fact that recent television adaptations of red classics such as *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, *the Red Detachment of Women*, *Red Crag*, *Little Soldier Zhang Ga*, *Red Sun*, *Red Flag Chronicle* and *Steel Meets Fire* had provoked some controversy and criticism, with audiences claiming these adaptations “misread the original works, misunderstood the masses, and misconceived the market.” The administration agreed that some television production companies did not understand the core spirit of the original novels and the social and historical contexts they came from, and that they simply used the “red classic” brand for entertainment value and audience ratings. The announcement specifically pointed out the producers’ incorporation of characters’ emotional entanglements, emphasis on love scenes, and excessive romanticism as the main problems that detracted from the core spirit and ideology of original works. SARFT also pointed out that, because the red classics are limited in number and length, the television producers added more plots artificially, influencing the works’ completeness, seriousness and classic nature. As the representative works of revolutionary realism, the creation of red classics is based on real history. SARFT declared the red classics to be important

¹⁰³Zhao Yong, “New Tracks on Tiger Mountain”, *China Pictorial*, http://www.chinapictorial.com.cn/en/culture/txt/2015-03/03/content_672389.htm, accessed April 24, 2018.

artistic heritage that influenced and inspired following generations. SARFT concluded that all provincial broadcasting authorities should strengthen the censorship of the television productions of red classics, stipulating that film and television producers must respect the core spirit of the original works, respect the cognitive and psychological impressions of history that have already been established in the public mind, and to avoid violating the red classics.¹⁰⁴ Zhao Yuezhi analyzes in her book : “Specifically, the order aimed to prevent television dramas that ‘flirt with’ revolutionary classics by exploiting their fame but making excessive changes that denigrate the party’ revolutionary legacy and present a less-than-dignified treatment of revolutionary hero.”¹⁰⁵

After the notice criticizing questionable red classics adaptations that “had misunderstood the masses” (*wuhui qunzhong* 误会群众), a news report published on the official website of the People’s Daily quoting the notice said that these adaptations had “misled the masses” (*wudao qunzhong* 误导群众). In Cai Rong’s opinion, this is a significant variation implying serious allegations. To say the producers “misread the masses” implies they had made an innocent mistake; stating they “misled the masses” implies that they were deliberately generating misconceptions of history among audiences—an alarming action with serious consequences.”¹⁰⁶ The reasons for the word change are not known. It could have been a journalist’s error, or it could have been a

¹⁰⁴ People’s Daily Online, “Notice on Some Issues Concerning the Question of Treating Re-adaptations of the ‘Red classics’ Carefully (Guanyu renzhen duidai ‘hongse jingdian’ gaibian dianshiju youguan wenti de tongzhi).” *People.com*, May 26, 2004, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/22114/33943/33945/2523858.html>, accessed May 13, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Zhao Yuezhi, *Communication in China Political Economy, Power, and Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 214.

¹⁰⁶ Cai Rong, “Restaging the Revolution in Contemporary China: Memory of Politics and Politics of Memory”, *The China Quarterly*. September, 2013.

deliberate decision by a journalist to produce a more interesting story. In any case, the seriousness of the allegation implied by the change is undeniable.

In May 2004, about one month after the first notice was issued, SARFT issued another notice intended to strengthen the censorship of television adaptations of red classics. This notice defines red classics as literary masterpieces that are known through the country and covering revolutionary history as the primary subject matter. It required all television producers to submit scripts of their red classics series to SARFT for review after the first trial by provincial broadcasting authorities. After examining the series, SARFT would give an opinion on its adaptations and issue a “license for the distribution of television dramas” if it met requirements. Television adaptations of red classics that were not granted this license could not be broadcast.¹⁰⁷ This shows that SARFT wanted to tighten controls on the reproduction of red classics and how they recorded and presented the country’s history.

Jiang Zemin emphasized this point one more time in his report at 16th Party Congress in 2002: “Having gone through revolution, reconstruction and reform, our Party has evolved from a party that led the people in fighting for state power to a party that has led the people in exercising the power and has long remained in power. It has developed from a party that led national reconstruction under external blockade and a planned economy to a party that is leading national development while the country is opening to the

¹⁰⁷ Ren Yan, “SARFT: Thorough Investigation of Red Classics Against Regulations (*Guojia Guangdian Zongju: YanCha Weishen Hongse Jingdian*),” *People.com*, June 2, 2004, accessed May 13, 2018. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14677/14737/22039/2539607.html>.

outside world and developing a socialist market economy.”¹⁰⁸ After this, evolving from “revolutionary party” to “governing party” became the official discourse. The word “revolution” was minimized. Jiang Zemin came to power after the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement and he presided for around 12 years. China did not collapse the way the Soviet Union did. On the contrary, the 1990s and early 2000s saw great growth and diversification in the Chinese economy, as well as political stability. However, during Jiang’ leadership, the development of the market economy made corruption a serious problem. At that time, red classics and revolutionary stories became another commodity to sell; as a result, they were de-politicized as necessary and adapted into profitable soap operas.

3.3. Tsui Hark’s Film Adaptation: Heroic Hollywood-style Film (2014)

The 2004 television adaptation was not a popular version of *Tracks* and has been criticized for its disloyalty to the original novel. Against such a backdrop, Hong Kong director Tsui Hark¹⁰⁹ faced multiple challenges when he undertook a film adaptation of *Tracks* in 2014. On one hand, he had to be faithful to the original work to avoid the criticisms of unfaithfulness that were the 2004 adaptation’s downfall. On the other, he needed to offer fresh entertainment elements in order to attract viewers in a new age. Tsui Hark did not disappoint reviewers with this 3D film adaptation *Taking of Tiger Mountain*

¹⁰⁸ Jiang Zemin, “Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at 16th Party Congress, ” *Xinhua News Agency*, November 17, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/49007.htm>, accessed June 04, 2018,

¹⁰⁹ Tsui Hark is in an interesting position as a Vietnam-born Chinese film director, and a Hong Kong based director who was born outside of China in 1950, he is familiar with western film making as well as film making in China and Hong Kong. His relationship to the mainland of China and the Communist Party and message is thus very different from the author Qu Bo and other adaptations’ producers.

by Strategy. Even though this film adaptation also took some risks with the addition of some new characters and love scenes, his innovations did not upset audiences the way the 2004 version did. This film became a blockbuster, grossing \$51.29 million in its first six days.

Tsui Hark's 2014 version of *Tiger Mountain* plays more like a war film or action film than a revolutionary film, emphasizing action over politics. It omits many explicit references to political and revolutionary content, such as when the detachment soldiers promote the PLA and the CCP to the villagers. The battles are presented as battles between good and evil, not communists and nationalists. It presents Shao Jianbo as not only a wise commander but also a brave soldier, emphasizing his battle scenes. The film also shows a lot of weaponry. In this section, I will explain why Tsui Hark wanted to produce this film and analyze key scenes to demonstrate the de-revolutionizing and de-politicizing of the story and the character Yang Zirong.

When Tsui was studying in America in the 1970s, he watched the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. At that time, he felt the story of the PLA's strategic infiltration and elimination of the bandits was fantastic. When Tsui came back to Hong Kong around 1977, he read the original novel and learned that its stories and heroes were real. He hoped to remake the novel and salute those heroes. Tsui claimed that shooting *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was not only to make his own dream come true but also to fulfill the promise he made to his old friend Xie Jin, a famous director in China.

Tsui had told Xie if he could make a film about Mainland China, he would like to choose the story of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*.¹¹⁰

This film's producer Huang Jianxin said, at the beginning of this movie's production, he and Tsui decided to make this movie fun rather than moralistic. They even gave Shao Jianbo a line dismissing something as "a little moralistic," although they ended up cutting it out.¹¹¹ It would seem that a modern director like Tsui does not think it is necessary to emphasize moralistic dialogue for modern viewers.

Tsui Hark's version of the story is notable in its more individualized portrayal of the characters, particularly Yang Zirong. Yang Zirong appears more like a bandit or a lone hero than the proletarian hero of the model opera. Even his appearance is more like a bandit. In one scene, his appearance even scares a child. In addition, Yang seems to have taken on some James Bond-like characteristics in this new version. James Bond always has a "Bond girl," a woman who either fights with him or gets rescued by him, and now Yang also has one, too—a woman named Qinglian. This feature changes Yang's characterization—rather than being a proletarian hero, Yang is more like a typical hero who saves a beauty at the end of a typical adventure story.

¹¹⁰ Zhang Shihao, "Tsui Hark started to shoot *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* to make good on the promise with Xie Jin (Duixian yu Xie Jin de chengnuo: Xu Ke kaipai *zhiqu weihushan*)," *Chengdu Economic Daily*. December 20, 2013.

¹¹¹ Zhou Nanyan, "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy: A Red Classic Becomes a Film of Knight-errantry (*Zhiqu weihushan*: hongse jingdianxi paicheng guoyin xiakepian)," *People*. December 25, 2014, <http://ent.people.com.cn/n/2014/1225/c1012-26275889.html>, accessed January 29, 2018.



Figure4: Yang Zirong in the 2014 film adaptation.

Another notable change in the 2014 adaptation is the omission of the committee meeting which was previously such an important part of the scene where the PLA are drawing up a plan to attack Tiger Mountain. Shao Jianbo does not emphasize that they should have a committee meeting when they make a plan like previous adaptation versions. Even when there is a scene where Shao has everyone gathered and is discussing how to attack Tiger Mountain, it looks like Shao Jianbo's idea is the only important one. When Yang Zirong told Shao Jianbo his plan, Shao Jianbo rejects it and says Yang Zirong does not call the shots here. This change shows a shift toward individual heroism in the film. In addition, in the 2014 version, Yang creates his plan to impersonate a bandit to infiltrate Tiger Mountain. However, when Captain Shao initially rejects his plan, Yang is discouraged and even tries to resign from the detachment—another demonstration of

individualism. Tsui's Yang Zirong is more like James Bond in his approach to the mission. When Bond disagrees with the head of the secret intelligence service, he strikes off on his own and does not follow the plan. In the scene where Yang justifies his solo mission to Shao, this new version of Yang has much more individualistic qualifications to list: "As an enemy intelligence scout, I was assigned as undercover in Big Stick's gang for one year. I studied them thoroughly. ...I want to take up this mission."¹¹² There is no mention of his loyalty to the CCP and Chairman Mao like in the earlier versions. In the 2014 version of this key scene, Yang Zirong is more like a lone wolf than a loyal, Mao-loving PLA soldier. In this 2014 version, without the emphasis on the CCP, Yang's bravery and wisdom appear more attributable to his personal characteristics.

Tsui's portrayal of the PLA has also been de-politicized. The detachment refers to itself as "the army" or "our army," not "the PLA"—they do not use the language of revolution anymore. For example, they refer to "the Army troop captain" rather than "the PLA troop captain," as in older scripts. The first mention of the PLA is when the bandits catch Gao Bo and read the ID card they find in his pocket: "Regiment2, Detachment2, PLA Private." When talking about the upper leader, they always use the word "Headquarters." However, when bandits talk with each other, they use the word *gongjun* (meaning the army led by the CCP). This is the word that signifies that the detachment is PLA. Without being told who the detachment is and why they fight with the bandits on Tiger Mountain, this would simply be a typical action film.

Another example is the scene where the detachment enter Yongqi's home and assure Yongqi and his frightened mother that they are not bandits. In previous versions, the soldiers emphasize they are the PLA serving Chairman Mao and they have come to fight bandits. In the 2014 version, however, Yang Zirong simply says: "Fellow villager, don't be afraid. We are not bandits." He does not mention the CCP or the PLA.

These editorial decisions may be seen as the omission of political messages, but they can also be seen as a different, more subtle strategy to impress the audience and demonstrate the power and trustworthiness of the CCP and PLA. The PLA in the 2014 film use their noble actions to impress people, rather than moralizing language. The scene in Yongqi's home is an example of this. Rather than telling Yongqi and his mother how good the PLA are, Yang simply tells them they are safe and cooks them dinner. This kind of portrayal of the CCP and the PLA is a wise way to make audiences accept hidden ideology. In another words, it shows the PLA pays attention to the relationship between the army and the masses. In all adaptations of *Tracks*, this scene in Yongqi's house portrays a close, almost family-like relationship between the soldiers and civilians and highlights how the strong always take care of the vulnerable. Tsui Hark uses a very understated way to show the PLA is in touch with the people and promote their message. This technique can make modern audiences accept hidden propaganda more easily. The disappearance of references to the PLA in the 2014 film may be seen as similar to the disappearance of references to Mao Zedong Thought in all versions after the model operas. This could be seen as a strategy, facilitating the promotion of the message by de-politicizing and de-revolutionizing the delivery and increasing the entertainment value.

It is worth mentioning that the relationship between the masses and military in the 2014 film adaptation is different from other adaptations and the original novel *Tracks*. For example, there is also one scene in which the PLA hand out food and even guns to civilians. But when the PLA mobilizes the masses to fight the bandits, they face some trouble. The villagers are not excited or happy that the CCP and PLA have come to their village to help them. There is one scene in which the soldier named Tank calls the villagers to fight the bandits and not fear them. The village chief refuses this plan and expresses his concern: “There is no way to fight them. Any villages that fight bandits are wiped out. We can’t fight the bandits...Mr. Soldier, after you leave, Leather Creek will again suffer calamity. Hide those [weapons] right away. I beg you. I’ll kneel before you. Spare our lives. We can’t fight the bandits.”¹¹³

Compared to earlier versions, the villagers in the 2014 film adaptation are careful, passive and pessimistic. They are not immediately won over by the PLA. Firstly, they do not think the CCP and the PLA are their saviors. They are worried that they will have more disasters after CCP and PLA leave the villagers. They think that the CCP and PLA can help them for a while, but they cannot protect the villagers forever. The 2014 version of the villagers have less trust in CCP and PLA. Secondly, the villagers have suffered too much under the bandits and are terrified of them—they have chosen to stop resisting, because they do not believe the bandits can be eliminated and they do not think the PLA can save them. In this case, the PLA do not explain for themselves; they do not give an

¹¹³ *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy-3D*, directed by Hark Tsui, Bona Film Group Production, 2014, Film.

inspiring speech about how they are led by the CCP and Chairman Mao. Instead, the 2014 version of the PLA just says they are one family and they will get revenge. Rather than emphasizing their confidence in the power of the CCP and the righteousness of the collective spirit, the PLA appears to show confidence in their own strength, heroism, and fighting skill. The PLA soldiers in this film are depicted very heroically—in this regard, they are similar to the soldiers in the 1960 film adaptation. In the new times, however, it would seem that audiences prefer heroism without propaganda.

Although the 2014 film still shows a close relationship between the PLA and the civilians, we can see they are not as close as in the earlier versions. For example, in the scene where the villagers invite the PLA soldiers to their homes for Chinese New Year's Eve dinner with them, Shao Jianbo refuses their hospitality and says they can have a family dinner together after their victorious return from Tiger Mountain. This scene highlights the PLA's determination, but reduces the intimate relationship between the PLA and the villagers.

Another notable innovation in Tsui's adaptation is the story that frames the film, which is different from the original novel and other adaptations. Tsui Hark has gone further than any of the other adaptors, in directly bringing in the younger generation (people in their 20s), by bracketing his film as a flash-back in the mind of a young Chinese abroad in America. The story is framed as a flashback that takes place during modern times. At the beginning of this film, we meet a young man Jimmy, who is the grandson of Shuanzi. Jimmy is in New York having a gathering with his friends before he goes to work in Silicon Valley. In New York, he happens to watch the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. Inspired, he suddenly decides to go visit China. The

revolutionary story unfolds as a flashback that begins during Jimmy's train to his hometown. It's like a journey into the past. The historic revolutionary narrative takes up most of the movie and contains exciting and crowd-pleasing battle scenes. At the end of the film, the narrative re-enters the present, as Jimmy goes back to his childhood home—this is when it is revealed to the audience that Jimmy's grandparents are the characters Little Shuanzi and Juanzi, who were children in the revolutionary narrative. Jimmy's grandmother has prepared Chinese New Year's Eve dinner for the soldiers' ghosts, and Jimmy imagines that he and his grandmother are having dinner with the soldiers together. It is in this scene—not the scene with Yang Zirong—where the film shows that the PLA soldiers and the civilians are one big family.

This film adaptation has two endings: in one, Vulture was shot to death by Yang Zirong in the tunnel of the Tiger Mountain, the other is the fantastic airplane fight. Jimmy imagines the second ending: Yang Zirong fights the bandit chief. Jimmy's imagining of the scene is presented far more heroically than other adaptations. It looks like a battle in Hollywood film, and Yang Zirong's individual cleverness and bravery make him look more like James Bond. According to the viewer Da Yinhe, at the beginning, this film just had the airplane fight ending. However, this ending was criticized by the Mainland China censors as being “not true to the story”. The director Tsui Hark did not want to delete this ending and made this airplane fight ending happen in Jimmy's imagination.¹¹⁴ Even

¹¹⁴ Da Yinhe, “It is Worth Reading for People Who are Not Satisfied with the Two Endings and the Combination with the Old Times,” (Duiyu you liangge jieju he jiuxiandai jiehe buman de nimen zhide yikan) *Douban*, March 9, 2015, <https://movie.douban.com/review/7400902/>, accessed August 04, 2018.

though the director Tsui Hark is from Hong Kong, this film was made with investment by Mainland China company and was thus under the Communist Censorship board.

It is undeniable that the 2014 film adaptation is a market-driven film, and that modern consumer culture does not allow Tsui Hark to use the same dialogues from the model opera. The model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* is a communist propaganda film. However, for young generation who were born after 1980, dialogues about the CCP, the PLA and Chairman Mao are from another world. These are the memories of their parents and grandparents. Young audiences today did not grow up in revolutionary times; it is hard for them to understand and relate to the revolutionary content. If Tsui had used the original dialogues about CCP, PLA and Chairman Mao from the model operas, the film would probably have lost its younger audiences. During the Cultural Revolution era, the model opera *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* served the CCP, the PLA, and Chairman Mao; it had a clear political purpose. By contrast, one of the primary purposes of the 2014 film adaptation is commercial profit. It serves a different purpose for a different age.

3.4. The Newest Television Series Adaptation: Heroic and Patriotic (2017)

The 64-episode television series *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, which debuted on July 16, 2017, was well received by audiences of all age groups and inspired netizens' patriotic fervor all over the country. In the 2017 Asian American International Film Festival, the 2017 adaptation won the award for Best Television Series and Best

Director.¹¹⁵ Its popularity also won the series recognition for excellence by the Chinese Department of Television of the new State Administration of Press Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). The series earned official and audience praise for many reasons. First, this series used modern ways to tell the red classic stories. Second, it was faithful to the original novel's structure. Third, it was also faithful to the historical record, showing the whole history during that time. Fourth, it was faithful to the revolutionary spirit of the original novel and conveys revolutionary themes like the loyalty to the CCP. Fifth, it revitalized an old red classic, but also added some new characters that increased its attractiveness. Sixth, according to viewers, the heroes were portrayed in a way that satisfied their expectations.¹¹⁶

In the 2017 drama, Yang Zirong is a great hero without any flaws. He is an introverted, respectable, balanced and brave man. However, in this version, he is not a lone-wolf hero as he was in the 2014 film. In contrast with other versions, even though Yang used his cleverness and skill to survive on Tiger Mountain, he still needed the help of a poor peasant couple—new characters to the story, the couple had been kidnapped to Tiger Mountain to work eight years before. Yang Zirong in this version is very different from the Yang Zirong in the 2004 adaptation. In this adaptation, the producers were not allowed to add plots that were unflattering toward the hero. In this version, we can see

¹¹⁵ Patricia Johnson, "Five stellar Moment at the 1st Annual Golden Oak Awards in New York," *Hello Asia*, November 17, 2017, <http://www.helloasia.com.au/news/five-stellar-moments-at-the-1st-annual-golden-oak-awards-in-new-york/>, accessed May 15, 2018

¹¹⁶ Sohu, "Good News, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* was Chosen as an Excellent Television Series by SARFT," (Haoxiaoxi! *Linhai xueyuan* ruxuan guojia xinwen chuban guangdian zongju dianshijusi youxiu jumu), *Sohu.com*, November 30, 2017, http://www.sohu.com/a/207637584_99960365, accessed May 15, 2018.

some affairs between the bandits, but the good characters are always virtuous and devote themselves to battling evil. Yang Zirong has no affairs, no fiancée or girlfriend, and never mentions his past or his family. When Shao Jianbo is injured and afraid, Yang always knows how to help him come back to his senses. To some extent, Yang is portrayed more like an older brother in the detachment. His persona is strong and down-to-earth.



Figure 5: Yang Zirong in the 2017 television adaptation.

Compared with the previous versions, this newest television version of *Tracks* gave a richer expression of many supporting characters. This version also added more characters and changed information about original characters. For example, there are spies who hide in the army and in the PLA's hospital in order to obtain information. In addition, Bai Ru is no longer a poor peasant's daughter; instead, her father is an army leader and her mother is the head of the military hospital.

In addition, by contrast with other versions, Yang Zirong in the 2017 adaptation is not portrayed as a lone hero who survives on Tiger Mountain just using his wits. This version introduces the character Lao Chang, the father of Chang Bao, who was kidnapped to the mountain by the bandits and who helps Yang with his mission. Lao Chang helped Yang to monitor the bandits and help guide the detachment to the mountain. Yang also gets help from Lao Chang's wife, who makes him his bandit disguise. After the victory on Tiger Mountain, Yang is shown introducing the couple to the detachment and giving them credit for their contribution to the mission. This plot emphasizes that Yang Zirong did not succeed alone, and that the PLA did not succeed without the help of the villagers. This sends the message that the poor masses are not just victims waiting to be saved; they are brave enough to fight the bandits. We can see sacrifice, bravery, courage and the close relationship between the army and the masses in this version. It looks similar to the earlier socialist realism adaptations in the Mao era. However, this television adaptation version is not simply a step back to socialist realism—there is something of a step towards similar control of certain spheres of the arts. It is still different from the other adaptations of *Tracks* in the post-Mao period. Rather than socialist realism, we could call this new form “patriotic realism.”

The CCP plays an important role in the 2017 drama. After the detachment successfully takes back Tiger Mountain, Yang Zirong thanks the head of the CCP. In another scene, Lao Chang thanks Yang for bringing his family together, to which Yang replies: “Do not thank me. We should thank the CCP. If not for the CCP, if the CCP did not nurture me to be a good scout, I would not have come to Tiger Mountain to fight the bandits. We should thank the CCP, Chairman Mao, 203's brilliant plan, and the many

brave soldiers who rushed bravely into Tiger Mountain on the eve of Chinese New Year.”¹¹⁷ From what Yang Zirong said, we can see he is a modest hero. He does not forget to thank other people and does not forget to mention the CCP and Chairman Mao. In addition, another reason that the drama’s producers added Yang’s thank-you to the CCP and Chairman Mao is probably because it made it easier for the series to be approved by government censors. The CCP is occasionally mentioned in other parts of the script. Even though these scenes are minor parts of this series, they show that the adaptation of the red classics is still ultimately under the Party-state ideological control.

In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping made an important speech in a forum on literature and art work in Beijing in which he stressed the following points:

First, the role of literature and art is irreplaceable in the effort to realize the “Two Centuries” objective and achieve the “Chinese Dream”: the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation...Second, artists must strive to produce even more excellent works that disseminate the values of present-day China, reflect the spirit of Chinese culture, and mirror the aesthetic pursuits of Chinese people, which organically integrate ideology, artistry and enjoyability. Since reform and opening up, in the area of literature and art creation, our country’s literature and art creation has welcomed a new springtime. At the same time, it cannot be denied that, in the area of literature and art creation, there has been a phenomenon of quantity over quality. Some works ridicule the sublime, warp the classics, subvert history, or defile the masses and heroic characters. Literature and art cannot lose their direction as they

¹¹⁷ *Tracks in the Snowy Fores(Linhai xueyuan)*, episode 52, directed by Jin Shuhui, Beijing J.A.Media, Aired June 11, 2017.

are absorbed into the market economy...Third, art works should serve the people and socialism. Essentially speaking, socialist literature and art is the people's literature and art. In order to properly reflect the people's wishes, literature and art must persist in the fundamental orientation of serving the people and serving socialism. Use a realistic spirit and romantic feelings to illuminate real life, deploy light to dispel darkness, and goodness to defeat ugliness. Let people see the good, feel hope, have dreams...Fourth, Chinese spirits are the soul of socialist art works. Patriotism is the deepest, the most fundamental, the most eternal in socialist core values. Art works must make patriotism into the main melody of literature and art creation, guide the people to establish and uphold correct views of history, views of the nation, views of the country and views of culture, and strengthen their fortitude and confidence to be Chinese...Fifth, strengthen the leadership of the party on the literary and art works. All levels' party committees must grasp the correct direction of literary and artistic development.¹¹⁸

Xi's speech on literature and art are highly reminiscent of Mao Zedong's speech during the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942. In the speech, Mao referred to the role of literature and art in China. In their respective speeches, both Mao and Xi emphasized that literature and art should serve the people. However there are some obvious differences. Mao emphasizes socialism and revolution (using terms like "socialist revolution," "revolutionary arts," "revolutionary culture" and "enemy"), while

¹¹⁸ Xi Jinping, "Speech at the forum on Culture and the Arts," (Xi Jinping zai Wenyi Gongzuo Zuotanhui Shang de Jianghua) *Xinhuanet*, October 15, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/2015-10/15/c_134715070.htm, accessed June 03, 2018.

Xi, in contrast, emphasizes Chinese culture and values, using terms like “Chinese restoration,” “Chinese dream” and “socialist core value system.”

In the new era, Chinese political leaders often mention the important status and mission of the CCP in their speeches. The 2017 television drama adaptation of *Tracks* also seems to highlight the nature and mission of the CCP. For example, in one scene, Yongqi says he wants to join in the CCP and Shao Jianbo asks him what the CCP is; Yongqi explains that the CCP’s job is to help people live well. Even though the 2017 adaptation can be regarded as a consumer product, it still fits into the current ideology, and we can find some places where there are more explicit political messages. In other words, even though its length of 64 episodes gives people impression that the drama is just for commercial profit, reviewers prefer to call it a mainstream adaptation because it inspires patriotism. With government approval, it is undeniable that this adaptation still has some political relevance.

In the 2017 drama, the producers added many new characters, including KMT chief of staff officer Guan Yizhong. Guan is portrayed to be a real KMT soldier. When Guan is defeated by the detachment, Shao Jianbo tells him, “Your failure is not your failure, it is because your government and leaders are not good. Their darkness and corruption contributed your failure.”¹¹⁹ Shao tries to persuade Guan Yizhong to join the PLA, but Guan opts for suicide instead. In this narrative, if Guan were to agree to join the PLA, this would be a political choice, and the narrative would be politicized as a result. However, the character’s suicide is a personal choice, highlighting the character’s

¹¹⁹ *Tracks in the Snowy Forest (Linhai xueyuan)*, episode 63, directed by Jin Shuhui, Beijing J.A. Media, Aired June 11, 2017.

personal sense of honor over the political context. This editorial choice reduces the politicism of the narrative and amplifies the human drama to attract audiences. The narrative around Guan's character marks a new turn in the red classic canon. It is almost as if this version is "less-revolutionized" for the age of Xi Jinping.

Conclusion

From the Mao period to the reform era and even the post-reform era, the adaptation and reimagination of original red classics has drawn much attention from government, audiences and scholars. According to the analyses in the preceding chapters, we can see that the adaptations of the novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* reflected the changing cultural, political, and economic situation of their times, from the earliest revolutionary versions to the ultra-revolutionary propaganda films in Cultural Revolution, to the commercial versions in the reform years, then to commercial but patriotic (“patriotic realist”) versions for the post-reform era. The 2017 version could be regarded to be less politicized, but it is not purely commercial. It still conveys messages of patriotism, and it still serves the Party’s goals.

During the Mao era, the adaptations of red classics served the CCP and helped to secure its status. After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the CCP has paid more attention to its approval amongst the Chinese public. In 1993, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mao’s birth, former President Jiang Zemin made a speech and emphasized Mao Zedong’s contribution to China. After that, red songs and red novels experienced a rise in popularity. As Rosemary Roberts points out, “the reappearance of the red classics offered the CCP an opportunity to reaffirm its relevance and legitimate right to rule at the time when its political capital was dangerously low, so government-controlled media and publishing houses, both central and provincial, played a supporting role to market demand in promoting a

continuous stream of new adaptations of the old classics.”¹²⁰ At the beginning of 2000, the use of the word “revolution” was minimized. In terms of the adaptations of red classics, revolutionary stories were adapted into household opera and they were less political. Now, President Xi Jinping is promoting a new approach to China’s revolutionary past: “let ‘red spirit’ release new shine in the new times.” Xi has mentioned “red spirit” many times in different occasions. He has also emphasized “mass line,” criticism and self-criticism, revolutionary tradition, Chinese traditional culture and patriotism education. Xi’s current reign and his attitude toward China’s revolutionary history is another reason for the continued popularity of new adaptations of red classics. In other times, when red classics were adapted for re-release, the government played a supporting role. The spirit of red classics can also help the government to get some political capital, because they portray the CCP as always having the power to inspire people to achieve their dreams.

In terms of the socioeconomic contexts for red classic adaptations, during the 1990s, China transited from a centrally-planned economy to a market economy. With the reform of the economic system and the opening of market to foreign trade, some new problems came out. Rosemary Roberts also mentions new problems that emerged, including rampant official corruption.¹²¹ Some people who lost in the economic system reform and market economy felt nostalgic for the Mao years. This is another reason why the red classics became popular at that time.

¹²⁰ Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, “Introduction”.

¹²¹ Rosemary Roberts and Li Li, “Introduction”.

As China's economy developed, the gap between the rich and the poor became bigger and official corruption became more serious. Pursuing money and political power became the dream for many Chinese. Some people thought it was wrong to give up the way of Mao Zedong; they became angry and nostalgic for the memory of the Mao era. It was an era of faith, with Mao as their spiritual leader. People missed the equality and perception of uncorruptability during the Mao era. They also missed the sense of having a mission and of serving the people with heart and soul. This is another explanation for the return of red classics.

In the Mao era, the adaptation of red classics was for the purpose of creating propaganda. After 2000, Chinese are more open to the outside world in many areas. Accordingly, the adaptations of red classics are hugely different from previous versions. For example, in the 2004 television dramas version, the producers added more emotional plots to cater to audience tastes and compete against other shows in a flooded market. In Tsui Hark's 2014 adaptation of *Tracks*, by contrast, we see a commercial movie that channels the classic hero image of a swordsman.

Even in a new and more peaceful age, audiences still need legends and heroes. People hope to watch hero dramas and films. Red classics meet this need with their heroes and heroic missions. In this sense, there is no reason the remaking of red classics will ever stop. Producers need red classics because they are profitable. The Chinese government needs them to educate people about revolutionary history and current political ideology. Chinese leaders also need the red classics to provide the Chinese people with optimistic, strong, dedicated and selfless role models. The continued adaptation and re-release of red classics fits with the CCP's official strategy of "national revitalization through culture."

President Xi Jinping emphasizes Chinese tradition and he also emphasizes the CCP's contribution to China in Chinese history. He points out, "de-ideologizing, de-valuing, de-historicizing and de-mainstreaming has absolutely no future."¹²² Xi also said that, for the CCP, Chinese revolutionary history is the best nutrient. If we review this great history, we will gain a lot of positive energy.¹²³ Xi cited the Soviet Union as an example to explain why we should not fall into the trap of historical nihilism: if one wanted to ruin one's country, one would start by denying its history.¹²⁴ President Xi's message, in other words, is that Chinese people cannot forget Chinese revolutionary history. There are two reasons why this is crucial. First, Chinese revolution history and the achievement of socialism construction can provide positive energy for Chinese people when they move forward. Second, it was the denial of national history that contributed to the Soviet Union's collapse. China does not want to go the way of the Soviet Union.

Beijing University's former Vice-President Liang Zhu, a staunch supporter of Xi Jinping, has joined Xi's attack on "historical nihilism" as a failure to take on the Party's view of historical events. Liang has written, "Historical nihilism invariably starts out by laying down a 'principle' in the name of 'academic research', and then seeks or 'fabricates' a so-called factual basis. A prominent feature of this thinking is that it does everything it can to demean and deny the revolution, to slander and mock the anti-

¹²² Xi Jinping, "Speech at the Forum on Culture and the Arts" (Xi Jinping zai Wenyi Gongzuo Zuotanhui Shang de Jianghua), *Xinhuanet*, http://www.xinhuanet.com/zg/jx/2015-10/15/c_134715070.htm, accessed January 23, 2018.

¹²³ Jiang Zan, "Revolutionary History is the Best Nutrition (Geming lishi shi zuihao de yingyangji)," *China Daily*, January 16, 2015.

¹²⁴ Xi Jinping, "Xi Jinping: History Cannot be Nihilism" (Lishi buke xuwu), *China.com*, October 20, 2016, http://www.china.com.cn/news/2016-10/20/content_39532165.htm, accessed January 29, 2018.

imperialist and anti-feudalism struggles engaged in by the Chinese people to achieve national independence and liberation, to slander and deny the socialist orientation of our social development and its great achievements.”¹²⁵

In the new age, the works of those socialist “red classics” have been “de-revolutionized”—reinvented for a new age and a new audience as products for popular consumption. Among all of the red classics, *Tracks* accumulated the most adaptations. From a revolutionary story, it was turned into a propaganda opera and film, a historical soap opera, an action film, and an epic history television series. Nowadays, red classics are commercial products wearing revolutionary coats. Compared to the model opera, it is not such an obvious educational tool as it once was. The model opera sought to teach people to fight class enemies under the leadership of Chairman Mao and CCP. During the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward, the red classics were primarily a political tool. However, after 1978, the adaptations become more about entertaining than indoctrination. In the modern age, cultural producers are allowed to remake the red classics and add some fancy plots that do not exist in the originals or in real history. However, producers still have to follow some rules made by the government.

Tracks in the Snowy Forest and its many adaptations are like a mirror that reflects the changes of Chinese politics and audiences in the last 60 years. It can show us how a red classic changes from a revolutionary history novel to a market-oriented product with a more commercial than political nature. Ideology still plays a symbolic, yet crucial role

¹²⁵ Xinhuanet, “What did Teacher Liang Say that Got Him Attached?” (*Bei weigong de Liang Zhu Laoshi shuo le sha?*), *Xinhuanet*, September 1, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-09/01/c_128188489.htm (accessed May 15, 2018).

in influencing Chinese politics. The Communist Party is the absolute power center in Chinese politics. Costume dramas about the Qing and Tang dynasty are a popular historical cultural product in China. They are based on history but not real history. The red classics may be seen as having a similar role in modern post-reform China. The Party hopes to keep the spirit of original novel in order to control the ideology in the new stage. At the same time, during the reign of Xi Jinping and his emphasis on cultural heritage, we also can see the adaptations of red classics as more than just commercial products or vehicles for Party ideology—they are also the carriers of Chinese history and memory.

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