

**The Cultural Politics in East Germany and China: Literature
and Art (1949-1979)**

by

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Abstract

East Germany and China, two modern socialist countries were established in 1949 during the Cold War era. The developments of socialism in these two countries were different: the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was indoctrinated socialism by the Soviet Union, officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), while China was led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), a party that believes in Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Nonetheless, they had much in common, such as their political structure, economic strategies, guiding ideologies. The leaders of these two countries, in East Germany a succession of heads of states and in the People's Republic of China one chairman, took advantage of culture as an instrument to maintain certain ruling relationships, which is part of the daily life of people and can become a significant and invisible mean of social control.

This thesis analyzes specific incidents in relation to literature and art from 1949 to 1979, when the combination of politics and culture reached the peak such as the "Bitterfeld Way" (East Germany), and "Cultural Revolution" (China), and it explores real life experience and influential work of contemporary writers and artists. Finally, the underlying purpose of applying cultural politics in these two countries will be drastically exposed in socialist film comparisons, as the political figures tried to reconstruct citizens' ideologies to control people's minds and further consolidate their regimes.

Table of Contents

<u>Supervisory Committee</u>	II
<u>Abstract</u>	III
<u>Table of Contents</u>	IV
<u>Dedication</u>	V
<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1: The Backgrounds of East Germany and China (1949-1979)</u>	6
<u>1.1 The Political System: The Power Got Personalized</u>	6
<u>1.2 Tight Political Control Over the Economy</u>	14
<u>Chapter 2: Imprisoned Literature and Art</u>	23
<u>2.1 The Similar Cultural Policies in China and East Germany (1940s to 1950s)</u>	24
<u>2.2 The Cultural Policies of China and East Germany in Different Directions</u> <u>(1960s to 1970s)</u>	32
<u>Chapter 3: Cinema as a State Institution</u>	48
<u>3.1 The Epitome of Centralized Politics</u>	48
<u>3.2 <i>The Story of a Young Couple</i> and <i>Story in Summer</i></u>	61
<u>Conclusion</u>	74
<u>Bibliography</u>	79

Dedication

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And I would like to share with everybody a word: nothing is impossible if you strive to do it!

Introduction

After the Second World War, East Germany (the German Democratic Republic (GDR)) and China (the People's Republic of China (PRC)) were both founded in October 1949 as centralized, socialist countries, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and socialism. In spite of a shared ideological framework, the diplomatic relationship between China and East Germany got complicated from 1949 to 1979. Since China and East Germany were fraternal socialist countries in 1950s, their relations were getting closer, and by 1959, East Germany became China's second largest trading partner after the Soviet Union (Slobodian 639). The cultural interactions between two countries also strengthened. For example, they had student exchange programs, and the GDR prepared three million paper Chinese flags for German-Chinese Friendship Month in 1951 (640). Their relationship intensified and reached a peak such that, in spite of the Soviet Union's criticism, East Germany supported the development of Chinese communes towards the Great Leap Forward, a movement that transformed rural economy through industrialization and collectivization.

However, by the early 1960s, because of the Sino-Soviet Split, the diplomatic relationship between China and East Germany was fundamentally challenged. Walter Ulbricht chose to side with Nikita Khrushchev, and Maoism was regarded as a deviation from socialist truth (643). China tried to disseminate their anti-Soviet model of socialism through their embassies, while the SED ordered the confiscation of all the materials related to China (646). In fact, China was positively regarded as pursuing real communism by the many "old comrades" (alte Genossen), that is, the people who had joined the German Communist Party (645). Now, apart from the division in the interpretations of Marxism-Leninism, East Germany started censorship on information about China and published in China. For instance, the books on Chinese literature and

art were prohibited and removed from East Germany's bookstores and libraries; the films in relation to China disappeared from screens (643). In 1966, Ulbricht also criticized the atrocities of the "Mao's troops" in *Neues Deutschland*, when the Cultural Revolution arrived in East Berlin (650).

East Germany and China continue to have many commonalities even after the 1960s when their diplomatic relationships got complicated. For example, they both had close relationships with the Soviet Union. Driven by the Cold War, after its foundation, East Germany was led by the German Socialist Unity Party (SED), the merger of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) established in the Soviet occupation zone. Consequently, East Germany's existence, to a great extent, relied on the approval of the Soviet Union and support. In order to confront the situation that the Federal Republic of Germany joined the Western alliance, East Germany joined the East European Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon) and later the Warsaw Pact under the Soviet Union's leadership.

In order to take over all other socialist countries, not only did the Soviet Union control East Germany, but also China was deeply influenced. These two states signed a series of agreements, in which the Soviet Union provided a wide range of assistance to China, including trade, education, nuclear technology, industry. Despite the breakdown of the relationship resulting in Khrushchev withdrawing all the Soviet specialists in 1960, the Soviet Union's influence on China's economy, culture and politics cannot be underestimated.

From 1949 to 1960s, both East Germany and China's economies were strongly influenced by the Soviet Union. They both nationalized private companies and launched collective agriculture. For instance, they both established centrally planned economies, following the pattern of the Soviet Union that would direct the economy based on plans. This dirigisme was

according to perspective plans that were to be achieved in stages such as, a Five-Year Plan or Seven-Year Plan.

As a matter of fact, not only were the aspect of economy, but also the political structures and the cultural policies they established quite similar. Regarding politics, China is a one-party state: Apart from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which held real power, there were United Front parties in China, who had only nominal representation in the National People's Congress. Similarly, even though officially there were several parties in East Germany, their functions were limited to representing and furthering the interests of the SED. They also adopted single-list elections, which provided electors no alternatives and delivered more than 99% "Yes" votes (Orlow 299). Although these two parties made claims to represent the whole country and to affirm democratic principles, they legalized their dictatorship with constitutional documents and used political repression and the persecution of those who with opposite views to consolidate their control. One of the strategies to restrict "wrong ideas" was to control literature and art. Marxism-Leninism also declared that "Artists, educators, and writers had the task of acting as 'engineers of the soul'" (315). Interestingly, we could find some parallels between the cultural policies of the SED and the CCP's. For example, both of them had strict censorship on publication and monitored artistic workers' lives; they also declared that writers and artists should follow the official guidelines: literature and art must exhibit socialist realism.

Therefore, the first chapter will provide a brief historical background of the two newly established countries, describing their similar political systems as well as the economic and social conditions under specific political controls. Then the second chapter will concentrate not only on the formulation and implementation of cultural policies, but the lives and work of writers and artists. At last, I will focus on a widespread and influential genre: film, which was perceived

as a key player in these countries' national identity, due to its ability to advertise a socialist way of life. For this reason, the films Kurt Maetzig's *Story of A Young Couple* (East Germany) and Yu Yanfu's *A Story of Summer* (China) will be analyzed carefully, which both embodied socialist realism aesthetics and served as propaganda for communism.

In addition to the nationalization of the film companies, exercising total control over film production, audit, and distribution, the two countries' leaders had also developed a series of political film criticism campaigns against progressive filmmakers to correct the minds of people. For instance, early in 1951, Mao published an editorial on the *People's Daily* to urge Chinese people to re-think and re-discuss the film *The Life of Wu Xun*, leading to a top-down campaign of self-education and criticism that lasted more than three months. As the head of China, Mao was directly involved in film criticism from a political point of view, using his power to force the subordinates to obey his will, to eliminate people's erroneous ideas, and to indoctrinate the correct political consciousness (Guo 27). As a consequence, no films were produced in nearly next two years after that film criticism, and many filmmakers chose to limit their creative ideas to avoid political criticism (36). A similar situation took place in East Germany as well. In the 1965 Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party, Kurt Maetzig's *Das Kaninchen bin ich* and Frank Vogel's *Denk' bloss nicht, ich heule* were singled out and criticized by Honecker for exposure of social and political problems. As a result, twelve films were ultimately banned, almost equal to Deutsche Filmaktiengesellschaft's (DEFA) one year's production, and the atmosphere of East Germany's cinema became more conservative and cautious (Brockmann 433).

The themes of *Story of A Young Couple* and *A Story of Summer* were different, that is, one was the conflicts between East and West Germany, the other was internal class contradiction.

However, they had three key similarities: firstly, they explicitly showed the blind worship and devotion of the broad masses and main protagonists for their leaders; secondly, they both presented optimism towards the future, through displaying growth in urban construction and improvement of living standards; thirdly, they directly convey the political ideologies to the audience, for instance, under the socialist system, people have diligent and positive characteristics, and jointly build up new housing and enjoy the benefits from the governments, while capitalism is full of illusory material and corruption. By analyzing the similarities above, it is evident that these two films conformed to official ideological lines and were utilized to spread these two countries' communist political ideologies.

Due to the different historical backgrounds and mass bases, these two countries have different degrees of acceptance to ideological indoctrination. In a way, the CCP is more successful in changing people's minds in terms of its existing and powerful regime, while people in the GDR retained more skepticism towards the official cultural policy, coupled with the oppression of political and economic life, the sense of resistance among the East German people was even stronger, as evidenced by the eventual collapse of the East German regime.

Chapter 1: The Backgrounds of East Germany and China (1949-1979)

When it was founded in the Soviet Occupation Zone in 1949, East Germany's political and economic system largely imitated the Soviet model, and most of its important decisions were made by the Soviet leader, including the changeover of the ruling party's major leaders; it was generally recognized as a satellite country of the Soviet Union. With the support of the Soviet Union, the German Socialist Unity Party (SED) exclusively occupied the position of the ruling party until the collapse of East Germany in 1989 (Gehler 18). After defeating the Chinese Nationalist Party (CNP), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) established a new Chinese state in 1949. Learning from the Soviet Union and aiming to build communism, the CCP attempted to create a socialist country with a proletarian dictatorship.

Under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and the influence of the Soviet Union, both of these countries had not only very similar state and party structures, based on the Leninist principle of democratic centralism, but also economic systems planned by the state. Although this concentration of power could effectively improve the implementation of policies, it could also easily lead to personal dictatorship and excessive intervention in economic processes and social life. For example, the flawed centrally planned economic policies formulated by the major leaders of the SED (i.e. Ulbricht, Honecker) and the CCP (i.e. Mao) led to very repressive politics and enormous productivity pressures on the workers, ultimately cause the East German workers' uprisings in 1953, East Germans' mass exodus to West Germany other Western countries, and, in China, resulted in the Chinese famine and death during the Great Leap Forward.

1.1 The Political System: Power Got Personalized

In both East Germany and China, the state and party structures laid the foundation for the concentration of power; these structures were organized hierarchically, like pyramids. More importantly, in both countries, party and state institutions essentially formed one entity: the party controlled the state by arranging its officials to occupy the state's key decision-making bodies. Since the party establishment followed the principle of democratic centralism, all power was ultimately concentrated in the hands of one person, the highest leader of the party.

In East Germany, the President occupied the highest position of power, followed by the State Council (*Staatsrat*). Below this was the Council of Ministers (*Ministerrat*), which determined important policies in areas such as economics and national security. Notably, the SED chairman Wilhelm Pieck was elected to be the first President of East Germany in 1949, while Otto Grotewohl was elected Minister-President with Walter Ulbricht (the General Secretary of the SED from 1950 to 1971), Hermann Kastner, and Otto Nuschke as his deputies (Kitchen 325). When Wilhelm Pieck died in 1960, the State Council took over his position and became a collective head of state under the leadership of Walter Ulbricht (Fulbrook 140). In 1971, Walter Ulbricht was forced to resign as the General Secretary of the SED and was succeeded by Erich Honecker, who remained Chairman of the State Council. Shortly afterward, due to the change of leadership between members of the ruling party, the State Council was replaced with the Council of Ministers for executive power (140-141). The Upper House of Parliament, the *Länderkammer*, was abolished in 1958. Below this house was the People's Chamber (*Volkskammer*), which functioned as a rubber-stamping agency: it existed only to approve and promulgate legislation decided by the superiors. The lower level consisted of the bodies for local government at regional, district, and local levels (140). In 1952, a reform of the structure was launched that

replaced the five Länder with fourteen districts, and all the district leaders were the SED officials (Orlow 300). Regardless of what the 1949 constitution had regulated, the SED reduced the power of each region by breaking it into smaller entities to facilitate the centralization of administrative control.

Following the principle of democratic centralism, the SED itself also had a hierarchical structure. The Politburo consisted of between fifteen and twenty-five members and candidates (candidate members did not have voting rights), it was at the top of the pyramid, and made the final decision on all appointments to key posts in the party, government, and the economy (299). As a result, many SED functionaries held party and government posts simultaneously. Most members of the Politburo also worked as ministers in the cabinet, including Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker. The members of the Politburo were elected by the Central Committee, a pseudo-parliament within the party that consisted of between 150 and 200 members, and candidates, acted as a mouthpiece for the Politburo (299). Below the Central Committee was the Party Congress, which did not allow free discussion or democratic voting. Like the Central Committee, the Party Congress approved the decisions taken by the Politburo without any opposing opinions. Some party organizations at lower national, regional, and district levels of the hierarchy were able to participate in the policy-making meetings, but ultimately, they were forced to accept and implement the decisions made by the higher bodies.

The Chinese government had a similar hierarchical and centralized structure as that of East Germany. At the top of the hierarchy was the Chairman during the Mao era and the President starting in 1978. Below this was the State Council, which was composed of several senior officials and led by the Chairman. The Council was responsible for formulating policies and all guidelines, the drafts of which were submitted first to the Standing Committee for revision and

then submitted to the National People's Congress for consideration (Weatherley 18). There were five levels of government bodies: national, provincial, prefectural, county, and township (17). The National People's Congress (NPC) functioned as the legislature as well as the highest body of state power; it could elect, appoint, and dismiss the major members of the governments, courts, and procuratorates at the corresponding levels (Ren and Du 51). The National People's Congress was elected for a term of five years and held one Plenum each year; its main functions were amending laws and national constitutions and ratifying international treaties. Because of its large size and infrequent meetings, the Standing Committee of about 150 members was elected to act on behalf of the National People's Congress when it was not in session. In practice, it was the State Council, rather than the National People's Congress, that exercised executive and legislative power. The State Council also supervised many existing policy commissions and ministries (Weatherley 18). In contrast, the National People's Congress was a largely ceremonial rubber-stamping body, capable only of approving each decision the State Council submitted. Although the State Council was officially the administrative organ of the National People's Congress, its actual status was higher than that of the People's Congress, its power second only to the Chairman's.

The party's organizational structure reflected that of the government, including five levels of congresses ranging from nation to township. The Chairman of the Central Committee was the head of the party, leading the Politburo and its Standing Committee. The Standing Committee was composed of about six members with extensive decision-making power, who usually met in secret in the seaside resort of Beidaihe to formulate party policies (19). Below the Politburo were the Central Committee and its Secretariat, both of which were elected by the National Party's Congress. According to the party constitution, the National Party's Congress and its Central

Committee were the highest bodies of the party and served as forums for handling important party affairs. The local party congress and its party committee were the leading bodies of the local party organization (Ren and Du 51). However, regardless whether it was the National Party's Congress or the Central Committee, they could only amend and approve the documents issued by the Politburo Standing Committee. More importantly, like in East Germany, members of the Politburo Standing Committee also occupied the leading positions in the State Council, the most significant body in the government (Weatherley 20).

Additionally, in the Party's Eighth National Congress (1956), Mao proposed the establishment of a collective leading team system, which was later enshrined in the national constitution and required team members to be members of the CCP. The collective leading teams were composed of government officials at each level: at the national level, the collective leading team was composed of the main leaders of the Central Committee, the National People's Congress, the State Council, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, while at the local level, the leading team was composed of members of the local Standing Committee of the CCP (Ren and Du 52). Since the collective leading team at the national level gathered the major leaders of the government and the ruling party, it was more powerful than either the party or the government. Ideally, this system was meant to concentrate the wisdom of all members under the rule that the minority must obey the majority through secret ballots. However, in reality, the collective leading team used the "gestating rule" instead, which meant important decisions were decided through oral or hand-count voting (53). Since the Chairman had the highest authority over the Politburo and its Standing Committee, those who held contrary opinions could not express their ideas; this led to all decisions being made by one person. Undoubtedly, the purpose of this system at that time was to concentrate the power of the party and the state in the

hands of the Chairman, namely Mao.

Facing the hostility of capitalist countries, both China and East Germany sought to consolidate their power and desired to be recognized by other countries. According to Weatherley, whether a government could acquire the status of a rightful ruler and be perceived as “legitimate”, namely, whether it had the “right” to issue directives and make demands on citizens, was entirely dependent on its political system (1). To create legitimacy and maintain their powers, East Germany adopted the Western democratic parliamentary system and multiparty system; China creatively established the People’s Congress system, and the multiparty cooperation system. But in reality, the CCP and the SED maintained sole control of their own governments by manipulating the elections and using the constitutions to weaken the power of noncommunist parties. This situation is consistent with what Walter Ulbricht once said after his return from exile in the Soviet Union: “Everything has to look democratic, but we have to be in control of everything” (Orlow 298).

In theory, these ruling parties were chosen through elections. Although the SED and the CCP nominally obeyed the rules of elections in congresses, due to excessively close links between the government and party, they often controlled election results. For example, in Germany, the first constitution declared free elections in 1949, but in practice, the voters did not have genuine choice in selecting their representatives. Through the People’s Chamber, the equivalent of the West Germany’s *Bundestag*, which was held every four years, the irreplaceable leadership of the SED was “legitimately” illustrated. The elections were based on a single list of candidates from the National Front (the alliance of all political parties and mass organizations), which was used to create a democratic, liberal impression (Gehler 87). However, voters only had the option of approving or rejecting the entire list of candidates, and the majority of the

candidates on the list were the SED members, including the candidates from the mass organizations. The SED members also functioned as the major leaders of these important mass organizations, including the labor unions (*Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*, FDGB), the GDR's youth organization (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ), the German Women's Association (*Deutscher Frauenbund*, DFB), and the Association for German Soviet Friendship (*Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*, DSF) (Orlow 300-301).

The results of the elections also proved to be suspicious, as "Yes" votes achieved 99.7 percent in 1950, and 99.4 percent of a 99.74-percent turnout in 1986 (Gehler 87). Furthermore, the reallocation of the People's Chamber's seats in 1963 gave the SED a greater advantage in occupying a majority of seats. The numbers of the SED and mass organization delegates were increased to 100 and 144 respectively; nevertheless, the numbers of noncommunist party delegates (Liberals, Christian Democrats, and Farmers) remained at 45 each (Orlow 310). With affiliations from the majority of the candidates on the list as well as the delegates in the People's Chamber, the SED firmly controlled the legislature and kept a firm hold on power, while the other parties had no chance of playing a role in government, they were merely able to maintain their positions under the leadership of the SED.

A similar situation took place in China. Democratic elections in congresses at various levels were guaranteed by the 1954 national constitution, but the voters were unable to express their real opinions in elections and did not have confidentiality. Because of China's large population, the 1953 Election Law stipulated indirect elections from the national level down to the country-level congresses, and direct elections in the township-level congresses (Weatherley 17). Delegates from each level were elected by the congress from the level below. However, Weatherley pointed out that the number of candidates was always equal to the number of

available posts, and although secret ballots existed in higher-level congresses, voting in the township elections was conducted by a show of hands at large public meetings (18). Furthermore, local officials always interfered with township elections and tried to manipulate procedures and distort the results. For example, these officials had the power to nominate candidates directly and prevent opposition candidates from running for office; they could mobilize party members or even force them to vote for government-backed candidates; they could secretly change or invalidate voting results when their candidates earned fewer votes (Sun 113). This electoral structure appeared to be democratic and reasonable in allowing all villagers to participate in political activities, express their political needs, and elect representatives that satisfied them. However, with the intervention of government agents, the equivalent of the party functionaries, neither the electoral processes nor their outcomes were reliable.

In addition to orchestrating false elections, these ruling parties played a decisive role in state affairs; by contrast, the non-communist parties could only function as the proof for democracy. In East Germany, the multiparty system was implemented following the 1949 constitution. The non-communist parties served only as transmission belts, explaining and publicizing the SED's policies to their supporters rather than speaking out for the interests of their members (Orlow 310). Similarly, China's first Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in 1954 symbolized the formal establishment of the system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party. However, the CCP acted as the lone ruling party, while under its leadership, the eight minor political parties simply played a consultative role in government decision-making, and their representatives held a limited number of deputy positions within the government (Ren and Du 51). They were merely tasked with organizing inspection tours to spread their knowledge and experience, then reporting on the

commercial activities to the National People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference, and disseminating the CCP's policies, particularly on the Taiwan issue and the Four Modernizations (Pauw 388).

The national constitutions were secretly violated in that neither democratic elections nor multiparty systems truly existed in East Germany and China. Both the CCP and the SED gained the permanent ruling party positions by controlling the voting processes under the false pretenses of democratic parliamentary systems. The responsibilities of both Chinese and East German non-communist parties were limited to nominally political participation and policy advocacy for the ruling parties; thus, they were not effective expressions of democracy. In the absence of multiparty competition, these two ruling parties' political power was subject to relatively little supervision and restriction, which led easily to excessive concentration of power, severe bureaucracy, and corruption.

1.2 Tight Political Control over the Economy

The stability and sustainability of a regime and the development of socialism ultimately depended on the performance of its economy. Following the economic patterns of the Soviet Union, both East Germany and China collectivized agriculture, nationalized production facilities, and imposed centrally-planned economic systems. However, the maximization of central control, minimization of individual initiative, over-emphasis on the development of heavy industry, and underestimation of the demand for consumer products all caused severe declines in living standards, and eventually prompted the outbreaks of protests and famines.

During the 1950s, under the instructions of the East German government, People-Owned Enterprises (VEB) were established, and by 1952, nearly 80% of industries had completed the transition to nationalization (Kitchen 329). In conjunction with the VEB, Agricultural Production

Cooperatives (LPG) were also set up to collectivize agriculture, more than 90 percent of the East German farmers worked under the LPG system by 1963. Additionally, East Germany announced its First Five-Year Plan in the party's 1950 congress, which aimed to increase the GDP and productivity to the levels of 1936, at 100% and 72% respectively, and focus on the development of heavy industry. These plans were created by the State Planning Commission and included product prices, types, and quantities as well as wages and working hours (Orlow 302). Due to high production targets, scarce resources, and limited autonomy of economic managers, the economy stagnated, and public dissatisfaction became widespread. Despite the struggling economy, after obtaining Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin's (top leader of the Soviet Union until his death) approval in July 1952, the Central Committee decided to accelerate the construction of socialism by increasing production norms and working hours (303). Although the new leader of the Soviet Union urged Ulbricht to relieve the economic pressure after the death of Stalin in March 1953, and the SED's Politburo proclaimed a "new course" on June 9 of that year, this "new course" did not reduce the work norms and failed to appease the discontent of East Germans (Kitchen 329).

In consequence, numerous demonstrations and workers' strikes broke out on June 16; the workers released prisoners and burned down some party offices, demanding the resignation of Ulbricht, free elections, and the return of German prisoners of war from the Soviet Union (Gelb 38). On June 17, between 300,000 and 372,000 workers went on strike, which accounted for about 5.5-6.8 percent of the workforce (Fulbrook 155). However, their movements were suppressed by a display of Soviet force in which more than 50 demonstrators were killed and 13,000 citizens were sentenced by the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*) (Kitchen 330). The ministry for state security was known as the Stasi; it had

271,000 full-time and part-time officials by 1988, and it was established to monitor the lives of East German residents, collecting their private information, as well as to conduct espionage in other countries (Orlow 300). Over time, the plan was readjusted; the growth target of heavy industry dropped from 13% to 5.6%, while the production of consumer goods increased by 30%, resulting a great improvement of the economic situation. By 1957, the economy had grown by 7.9%. These changes did have some effect that the number of refugees, a good barometer of public opinion in the GDR, falling from 331,330 in 1953 to 184,198 a year later (304-310). In addition to implementing these domestic economic policies, East Germany joined the East European Council for Mutual Economic Aid (Comecon) in 1950 and later the Warsaw Treaty Organization (Warsaw Pact) in 1956 to promote foreign trade and exchange, particularly aiming to improve its relationship with the Soviet Union (305).

After Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, severely criticized Stalinism at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956, some reformers suggested that the SED should decentralize its power and offer more autonomy to economic managers, as well as improve relations with West Germany. However, threatened by the Hungarian and Polish crises, Ulbricht and his followers instead carried out a purge and restored their hardline approach with the support of the Soviet Union; during this time, Wolfgang Harich, a leading Philosopher of East Germany, was sentenced to 10 years in prison, while Fred Oelssner (the Secretary for Propaganda of the CC) and Fritz Selbmann (the Chairman of the Commission for Industry and Transportation) lost their positions in the SED (305). Due to this political and economic pressure, 2.5 million East Germans permanently moved to West Germany by escaping to West Berlin between 1949 and 1961, including many skilled, educated refugees, and young people aged under 25; thus, East Germany lost many of its most productive and energetic citizens (303). To prevent continued

losses, Ulbricht erected the Berlin Wall in 1961. Indeed, the flow of refugees was hampered by this barrier, with only 21,365 people successfully escaping the following year, less than half the number who had fled to West Germany in the first 12 days of August in 1961 (307).

China's economic strategies during this period were similar to those of the GDR. China also launched collectivization of agriculture in the early 1950s after completing land reform and nationalization of major industries through its state-planning system in the early 1950s. During the land reform movements, villagers were gathered together to discuss the "bitterness" of the past and denounce their landlords, who were regarded as oppressors and instruments of feudalism (Benson 27). Following these discussions, the CCP redistributed the lands of the landlords to poor peasants and used patterns of family farming in agriculture. Due to the low output caused by these patterns, the CCP enforced the collectivization of rural land, equipment and poultry. This collectivization resulted in the establishment of Agricultural Producers Cooperatives (APCs). By the end of 1955, almost all farmers in China were enrolled in the APC system. Additionally, the government controlled almost all enterprises (31). Like East Germany, China implemented a First Five-Year Plan in 1953 that focused on pursuing high rates of industrial growth, specifically the steel, iron, and textile industries became key development targets, while the production of consumer goods was still ignored (Cannon and Jenkins 8).

Later, hoping to accelerate the pace of reforms, Mao launched the so-called "Hundred Flowers Campaign" in 1956, calling on the CCP members to actively discuss and offer their opinions to promote the socialist economy and improve policies (Benson 31). However, threatened by widespread sharp criticism of the party and its policies, Mao and the Central Committee called a halt to this campaign and instead launched another "Anti-Rightist Campaign" to suppress the counterrevolutionaries who had criticized the party and its policies.

Many of these critics were consequently sent to the countryside for re-education activities such as raising pigs or planting crops (32). Satisfied with the improvements in the economy, Mao then announced the “Great Leap Forward Campaign” which sought to help China catch up with Western countries within fifteen years. However, this campaign created unrealistic goals and considerable problems. Because the state needed grain taxes to support rapid industrialization, all peasants were organized into communes, each consisting of about 3,000 to 5,000 households. Under this system, production decisions, including what to produce, how much to produce, and which price to set, were made by the government. Under Mao’s ideology of egalitarian socialist development, work points, which functioned as money and were originally allocated based on hours worked, were redistributed; all farmers were given the same number of work points regardless of their efforts, which resulted in a loss of individual incentives (Lin 33).

Moreover, because of the unrealistic production goals for steel and iron, peasants melted anything made of iron, from nails to cooking pots, and cut down a large number of trees as fuel, leading to devastating environmental pollution and significant wastes in labor; in the end, only tons of useless metal remained. In addition, flawed planting decisions made by commune officials caused agricultural disaster; officials ordered farmers to plant crops closely together and to spread seeds or fertilizers in thick layers. The state took crops in tax according to a specified percentage, but because commune officials reported inflated figures to the government to please their superiors, the government unwittingly collected a much larger proportion of the country’s grain than it intended, and the collected foods eventually rotted in warehouses (Benson 34).

In the face of a worsening food shortage, Peng Dehuai, the People’s Liberation Army general and Minister of Defense, wrote Mao a letter criticizing the Great Leap forward and its associated policy implementations. Although Mao publicly denounced this letter, he ultimately

took responsibility for its charges by formally resigning as the head of state (Chairman) at the Lushan Conference in 1959. Mao was succeeded by Liu Shaoqi, who was Chairman from 1959 to 1968, but he remained the Chairman of the CCP, which still gave him precedence over other officials (35). Nevertheless, due to inflated harvest reports coupled with mass media promotion of the new agricultural system, ineffective and harmful planting methods continued to exist until 1961, when China's grain output suddenly dropped by 15%. Over the next two years, the food supply dropped to 70% of its 1958 level; consequently, a widespread famine caused about 30 million deaths (Yang 2).

In addition to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the break-up of the Sino-Soviet Communist alliance pushed Mao to adopt new approaches with the mottos "self-reliance, strive hard" and "prepare for war, prepare for famine, and serve the people" (Lin 35). The Sino-Soviet Split occurred in the early 1960s due to a combination of China's domestic political developments, diplomatic issues, and differences of opinion between China and the Soviet Union regarding orthodox communist ideologies. As a result of this split, the Soviet Union withdrew all its technicians and canceled economic contracts with China in July 1960. In March 1965, conflicts broke out between these two communist parties at the Moscow conference on the issue of assisting Vietnam. These conflicts marked the formal disintegration of the Sino-Soviet alliance. The following year, Chinese officials refused to attend the 23rd congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and the relationships between the two parties ended (Li and Xia, 59). However, the strategy of focusing on the development of heavy industry to promote rapid industrialization remained unchanged, and this strategy combined with the outburst of a radical political campaign, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), meant the economy of China was stagnated until 1976 when Mao died. During this period, industrial and agricultural

production fell sharply as workers and farmers spent time engaged in political struggles.

Ultimately, Deng Xiaoping became Mao's successor and embarked on a series of economic reforms that led the country to the next stage. The 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party marked the end of Mao's revolution and became the political platform for Deng (Lin 45). Instead of following Mao's strategies, which emphasized a centrally-planned economy and communist ideologies rather than expertise and professionalism, Deng shifted the state's economic focus from central planning to market coordination that decentralized the decision-making while creating a market mechanism to balance the relationship between supply and demand. He also adopted pragmatic approaches and introduced an open-door policy that allowed for appropriate adjustments according to actual circumstances and attracted foreign capital investments. Deng's approaches had a significant impact on China's economy and resulted in remarkable increases in productivity, personal income, and foreign capital investments.

East Germany's economy also developed in the 1960s, and the living standards of East Germans increased significantly due to the establishment of the 1963 "New Economic System for Planning and Direction (NÖPL)" by Erich Apel, the Chairman of the State Planning Commission. This system reduced the multiple layers of decision-making departments, increased the decision-making freedom of individual VEB managers, and produced consumer goods on a large scale, but several economic problems remained (Kitchen 346). East Germany did not participate in the international investment market, lacking capital investment; its agricultural production did not reach the expected goals, and basic goods and facilities were relatively expensive. For example, a nylon shirt was sold for 12 Marks in West Germany but 78 Marks in East Germany. Ultimately, economic liberation caused demands for more artistic and political

freedom in the late 1960s; therefore, in the Seventh Congress of the SED in 1967, the NÖPL was replaced by Economic System of Socialism (ESS), which re-instituted a centralized production system (Orlow 311). In addition, Erich Honecker, who came into power in 1971, focused his policies on the success of East Germany's socialist achievements rather than on increasing the living standards of individuals by raising the minimum pensions and wages, supporting housing construction, and stabilizing basic grain and rent prices (Gehler 160).

Although East Germany collected Western currency through loans from West Germany, visits of West Germans, and transaction at "Internal Shops" that only used Western currency, domestic economic issues coupled with the oil crisis meant that East Germany eventually became mired in a massive debt trap. In 1979, East Germany was about 30 billion exchange-marks in debt to the West; to a large extent, this debt led to the collapse of East Germany (161).

Regardless of similar political systems and centrally-planned economic systems between the two countries, huge differences still remained. China's development was one of becoming independent from Soviet influence and Soviet dependence, whereas the GDR could not have survived without Soviet economic support, political guidance, and military support in suppressing protests. For example, without the Soviet troops and armored vehicles, the protests wouldn't be extinguished in such short time on June 17, 1953, and East German authority would be greatly challenged. But China relied only on Soviet political theories, diplomatic and economic support by the 1960s, and then on Maoist theories and his economic policies to govern the whole country.

In addition, different national conditions have also led to unique events. The exclusive Great Famine in China, for example, was unparalleled in the GDR, just as there was no parallel in

China for the mass exodus of people and the building of the Berlin wall to prevent people from leaving. The entire chain of grain production, distribution and consumption was completely controlled by the Chinese central government, coupled with the communalization movement and the erroneous instructions of the Great Leap Forward policy, the government has excessively requisitioned grain, which contradicted the actual situation of negative agricultural production, and became the decisive factor leading to the Great Famine. However, although East Germany and West Germany were divided by different forces, the blood and ties of the German people were still inseparable, which was one of the main reasons why most East German refugees chose West Germany as the destination.

Nevertheless, what both countries have in common during the first 20 years of their existence, was the experience of living in a repressive socialist regime that maintained power by controlling every aspect of life, from economic structures, to dictating politics, culture, and social life. Therefore, the next chapter will expose the specific implementation of the socialist cultural policies, as well as the real purposes of the ruling parties.

Chapter 2: Imprisoned Literature and Art

In addition to their focus on adjusting economic policies to meet the material needs of their people, East Germany and China were also aware of the importance of cultural governance. In order to increase the depth and breadth of the spread of socialism, consequently strengthening people's recognition of the Communist Party to maintain its domination, East Germany and China both adopted centralized cultural policies. Both governments advocated socialist realism as the general principle guiding literary and artistic creation and criticism, and each issued political documents requiring literary and artistic workers to provide cultural products of value for the proletariat masses. To further ensure the political correctness of the cultural products, not only did the relevant officials use social institutions to manage and restrain the production and circulation of cultural products, but they also intervened in the lives of literary and art producers.

Although leaders of these two countries occasionally lessened their control over cultural affairs to ease public criticism and resistance, overall, their policies were increasingly strict and reached their peak in the late 1970s. However, China gradually chose to adjust the distorted relationship between culture and politics after Mao's death, while East Germany ignored the contradictions that surfaced and continued to control the cultural sphere completely.

It is worth noting that due to the deterioration of diplomatic relations and the differences in the cultural history of China and the Soviet Union, China officially stopped propagating socialist realism at the end of the 1950s. In its place, officials adopted a combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism as the new approach embraced by producers of Chinese proletarian literature and art; however, many features of socialist realism remained (Pang 35).

2.1 The Similar Cultural Policies in China and East Germany (1940s to 1950s)

As its most longstanding and loyal satellite, East Germany established a Soviet social and ideological model, resulting in cultural policies that were highly consistent with the Soviet Union. East Germany formulated not only the principles of the relationship between culture and politics but also the themes, content, production methods, and critical aspects of literature and art. Indeed, Marxism-Leninism assigned all writers and artists the tasks of helping create a socialist mentality among the people and serving the Communist Party (Orlow 315).

Cultural life under Soviet occupation had been relatively free from 1945 to 1949, but the situation suddenly changed in March 1951. The Central Committee (CC) of the SED established itself as the sole authority on literary and artistic matters and insisted that political criteria prevail over artistic criteria. The CC also released a resolution, “Against Formalism in Art and Literature—for a Progressive German Culture,” which imposed restrictions on East German literary and art producers. According to Stalin’s criteria, art should be “national in form and socialist in content”; formalism was neither a modern style nor neutral subject matter, and as a result, it was severely condemned (Wagner 408).

Simultaneously, socialist realism was confirmed by the SED as the officially sanctioned approach for literary and art workers. However, socialist realism was first proposed by Ivan Gronky (Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers) and Stalin in May 1932 and then formally announced as the primary method for creation at the First Soviet Writers Conference in August 1934 (Jiezhi Wang 144). According to the guidelines of the Union of Soviet Writers, socialist realism requires writers to honestly and concretely describe the revolutionary development of reality. Moreover, the authenticity and the concreteness of the history of artistic description must be combined with the task of remolding and educating public

ideologies with a socialist spirit (Cao 13).

The Soviet form of socialist realism was well represented in East Germany because it was stipulated that literature and art must exhibit “party-mindedness, typicality, and optimism” (Orlow 316). Writers and artists were exhorted to depict life in the GDR and highlight the positive aspects of its progress, which meant they had to depict the future envisioned by the Communist Party, even if the present lagged far behind this ideal. “Typicality” meant that when writers and artists portrayed workers, they had to present the image or behavior of the worker as a producer, owner, and holder of political power. The opposite of the “positive” concept of socialist realism was the “negative” formalism, which referred to individual artistic indulgence and introspection, and was classified by the SED as Western culture and U.S. imperialism. Other schools of literature and art were deemed reactionary and degenerate, including expressionism, abstractionism, and naturalism (316). In short, the SED attempted to use the concept of socialist realism to control the cultural life of the East German people and convert literature and art into propaganda.

Although the implementation of the New Course and the establishment of the Ministry of Culture (1954) after the 1953 uprising helped to reduce social dissatisfaction with the government, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution revealed what the SED perceived as the consequence of liberation, and they returned to a hard-line approach (316). Ulbricht strengthened his grip, launching campaigns against outspoken cultural figures. As Goldenstein has revealed, Wolfgang Harich, the publisher Walter Janka, the journalist Gustav Just, and Richard Wolf and Erich Loest were sent to prison, and altogether 87 intellectuals were arrested by 1957 (36).

Moreover, to solidify the ideal of connecting intellectuals with the working class, a modified version of socialist realism, the “Bitterfeld Path,” was introduced in 1959 as the official

literary policy. That April, the East German Writers Union held a conference at Bitterfeld chemical works. This time there were more than 400 representatives, of which only half were writers and artists; the other half were industrial workers and functionaries. The unusual location and variety of participants indicated the need for close contact between East German writers and industrial workers. The slogan “Greif zur Feder, Kumpel (Pick up a pen, buddy)” was hung in the hall, which accurately expressed the spirit of this conference.

At this event, writers were encouraged to gain practical experience of manual labor and life in the factory, while workers were urged to improve their literacy to become authors in addition to serving as literary models (Fulbrook 237). Ulbricht also participated in this conference, urging writers to participate in industrial production and create works that could positively reflect East Germany’s modern life. He emphasized that the task of writers and artists was to express new developments that resulted from socialist reforms, the national economy, and cultural life. Additionally, the Writers Union was ordered to pay close attention to writers’ ideologies and help them improve their writing skills. Ulbricht thought that the low quality of some works reflecting the production process was not because of the subject matter itself but because the writers failed to visualize the struggles of working people in completing the production plan (Zhang 155).

In comparison, as early as 1955, China had already sent a group of writers to the countryside, and in December 1958, it was stipulated that writers under the age of 30 should take practical jobs in factories, rural areas, or other organizations. In particular, they should take part in manual labor so that their works would draw from the experiences of the masses and meet their needs (Jie Wang 18). However, literature and art did not meet with great success under this policy. According to Orlow, only a few worker-authors had natural literary talent, and the rest were wasting their time and energy to produce a number of meaningless articles. However, the

reality that the writers saw in the factories was opposite what the political leaders had in mind, they were impressed with the emptiness of workers' lives, the conflicts of individual self-realization, and the coercive ideal of artificial collectivity rather than the socialist mentality (317).

Unlike the SED, the CCP realized the importance of cultural policies in the early 1940s. With Mao's status and representative significance, his cultural strategies were unanimously supported by the cadres. In early May 1942, Mao presided over the "Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art" as the supreme leader of the CCP, and these talks were organized into a unitary theory for the later construction of literary and artistic policies, namely "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature." Influenced by Soviet literary theories and Lenin's views on literature and art, Mao emphasized the fundamental issue of how the artistic sphere should serve the revolutionary cause. He believed that fundamentally literature and art must serve the people, including workers, peasants, and soldiers, and disseminated an ideology that literary and artistic workers must be deeply involved in the life of the masses (Si 22).

Given his proletarian focus, Mao believed that to make literary and artistic work explicitly promote the development of the revolutionary cause, it must be closely integrated with politics. Consequently, intellectual writers should be integrated into the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers to achieve the assimilation of literature and politics (Guo 33). In March 1943, most literary and artistic workers in Yan'an were convened by the CCP to participate in the cultural movement to the countryside to join the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers and reform themselves from petty-bourgeois intellectuals into proletarian literary and art workers (35).

In addition, Mao discussed issues related to literary creation and evaluation. For example, Mao claimed that there were two criteria for literary and artistic criticism: political and artistic (J.

Yan 10). The former was a measure of the political and ideological content of a work, and the latter was a measure of its artistry. However, in a socialist society, political criteria were always valued above artistic criteria, and the best art would unite revolutionary political content and perfect artistic form (Ji 14).

“Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature” was published in the *Liberation Daily* the following year, signifying that this literary and art policy had entered the formal implementation stage. The Central Committee of the CCP required cadres and party members to study the talks carefully, and mass-printed pamphlets were distributed to students and the general public (J. Li 22). Shortly afterwards, the Propaganda Department clearly defined the Talks as the CCP’s policy on literature and art in the form of political documents, requiring all literary and art workers to study and follow the instructions of this document to overcome bourgeois individualism and create literary and artistic works that satisfy the needs of the people (Guo 34). Following a series of meetings and political movements, combined with the publication of the official policy on literature and art, the range of possibilities of writers regarding their choice of subject were limited, which consequently led to a loss of enthusiasm among artists.

In July 1949, Mao attached great importance to the First National Conference of the Representatives of Literary and Art Workers and sent a congratulatory telegram he personally revised and finalized. The telegram emphasized the political premise of creating literature and art as well as the primary task of literary and art workers after the founding of a new China. In sum, without the victory of the revolution, literature and art could not develop and expand throughout the country. Consequently, literary and art workers must be united, have close ties with the people, and vigorously promote popular literary and artistic campaigns, ultimately contributing to the construction of China’s culture, education, and economy (Pan 201).

At the conference, Zhou Enlai also fully affirmed this direction in a political report stating that literary and art workers needed to be familiar with the life of workers, peasants, and soldiers and should create cultural products to meet their cultural needs. Additionally, he listed six needs regarding literature and art: the unity of literary and art workers; how to serve the people; popularization and the improvement of literature and artworks; reforming old literature and art; developing an overall perspective; and the organization of literary and art workers (Y. Li 24). Moreover, at the Second National Conference of the Representatives of Literary and Art Workers in September 1953, Zhou proposed that literary and art workers should focus on praising familiar characters and strive to create excellent literature and artworks to achieve unity between artistic form and ideological content. He pointed out that in order to fulfill the tasks of literary and art workers, it was necessary to delve deeply into the real lives of workers and fully grasp the policies of the state (Y. Li 25).

At the Second Conference, socialist realism was officially declared by Zhou Yang (Vice Minister of the Propaganda Department and Culture Department of the CCP Central Committee) as the highest criterion for the creation and criticism of literature and art in China (Jiezhi Wang 147). Undoubtedly, works of socialist realism were essentially subordinate to communist political ideologies. With the new interpretations of literary theorists, socialist realism was subject to political demands and became the CCP's effective educational tool in China.

After completing the socialist reform of agriculture, private industries, and the economic system, to promote the development of socialist culture, Mao put forward the policy of “a hundred flowers blossom, a hundred schools of thought contend” (“Double Hundred” policy). He introduced this concept at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee in April 1956, declaring that different forms and styles of art could develop freely and allowing various

academic schools the freedom to debate and criticize each other. The following year, Mao delivered a speech at the eleventh meeting of the Supreme State Conference, “On the Correct Handling of Contradiction among the People.” One section focused on the “Double Hundred” policy and put forward six political criteria for distinguishing between “fragrant flowers” and “poisonous weeds”. The central tenets of this policy were as follows: cultural works must be conducive to the unity of the Chinese people, socialist transformation, and construction; helpful in consolidating a democratic dictatorship, democratic centralism, and the leadership of the Communist Party; and beneficial to the solidarity of socialist countries and the unity of peaceful people worldwide. He also pointed out that these six political criteria were suitable for all cultural activities (Y. Li 26).

Further, Mao and Zhou Yang proposed the integration of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism to replace socialist realism as the primary artistic method in 1958. Later in 1960, this new method was officially identified at the Third National Conference of the Representatives of Literary and Art Workers. The new method retained most characteristics of socialist realism and was consistent with its spiritual connotation, and the only actual difference was the name change (Pang 35). So, why did Mao suddenly come up with a new artistic method? First, this change stemmed from the deterioration of the relationship between the Communist Party of China and the Soviet Union. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union—along with differences in diplomatic, military and economic strategies—led to a sharp deterioration in relations between the two countries. Thus, Mao asserted that it was wrong to imitate the Soviet Union indiscriminately, and he argued that theories of Marxism-Leninism should be combined with the actual situation in China, including its unique political and artistic spheres (Jie Wang 63).

The second reason was a result of policies connected to the Great Leap Forward. In October 1957, rural areas responded to the call of the central government to build irrigation and water conservancy projects; the number of participants even may have reached 100 million, and at that time, new folk songs were born. Mao advocated a nationwide collection of folk songs at the Central Conference in Chengdu and mobilized the masses to write new folk songs. Zhou Yang also published an article, “New Folk Songs Open Up A New Path for Poetry,” to support Mao’s strategy. He evaluated the significance of the new folk songs, arguing that they showed the pride of workers and reflected the spiritual state of the proletariat (Lv 129). The revolutionary enthusiasm and energy displayed in the new folk songs aligned with the spiritual state required by the Great Leap Forward, and their contents were interpreted as the integration of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism (Jie Wang 64). Unlike Western romanticism, which spoke highly of individual freedom and lyricism, revolutionary romanticism was only concerned with the intensity of revolutionary feeling and imagination, as well as a hyperbolic, overenthusiastic embracing of communism and communist life. The content of revolutionary realism was based on reality and its proper political reflection (64). The theoretical interpretation catered to the political needs of the time and encouraged people to participate in the Great Leap Forward movement.

In general, ruling parties in China and East Germany strengthened or relaxed their cultural control according to changes in political, economic, and social conditions. What remained unchanged was that both of them restricted the direction of literary and artistic creation, namely in relation to socialist principles. Compared with East Germany, China’s cultural policies were introduced earlier and more frequently. At the end of the 1950s, China developed its own literary theories to promote the unity of the masses and their enthusiasm for the great revolution due to

political differences with the Soviet Union. Similar to their political and economic trajectories, the trends of cultural policies in East Germany and China resembled two wavy lines that occasionally intersected.

2.2 The Cultural Policies of China and East Germany in Different Directions (1960s to 1970s)

Due to changing national conditions, the cultural policies of the two countries moved further apart as time went on. East Germany's frequent comparisons to West Germany and its economic disadvantages led to widespread domestic opposition. Consequently, the SED tried to censor writers and artists more aggressively to suppress rebellions among intellectuals, worrying that critics would negatively influence the general public and shake the foundation of the regime. On the other hand, China was caught up in internal political struggles, inundating the masses with specific cultural products and making every individual dream of becoming a member of revolutionary movements. One example was the Red Guards, who took the lead in criticizing and improving members of society deemed problematic or politically suspect. Numerous intellectuals and innocent people were brutally persecuted; political, economic and cultural activities were brought to a halt; and the country gradually fell into grave peril that the government's power was crumbling, whereas the strength of the Red Guards were dramatically increasing.

In East Germany, with the erecting of the Berlin Wall, the SED then strengthened the protection of East Germany from Western cultural influences and connections, especially the "degenerate" culture from West Germany. As Orlow argued, any signs of imitation of Western clothing and behaviors, as well as listening to "unaesthetic beat music" were all condemned as evidence of deprived Western influence (318). In December 1961, the Minister for Culture, Alexander Abusch, announced the "two-culture" doctrine, stating that East Germany and West Germany belonged to opposite cultural spheres: one progressive and humanistic; the other

reactionary and imperialistic. Following such official guidelines, leading East German journals like *Sinn und Form (Meaning and Form)* abruptly stopped publishing literary works by West German authors (317).

In addition to preventing undesirable interference from the West, Ulbricht also took a harder line against intellectuals to stem the growing tide of dissent within the socialist camp in the early 1960s. One of the most effective strategies the SED adopted targeted leadership; more precisely, it compelled writers and artists to uphold the party's cultural policies by managing and manipulating the unions to which they belonged. In 1961, the SED required artist unions to submit biweekly reports on the opinions and debates of the members and details of all artistic activities (Goldenstein 37). Shortly after that, in 1963, the first secretary of the Writers Union, Otto Braun, was replaced by the SED functionary Hans Koch to better implement party directives. Moreover, SED functionaries serving on the steering committee of the Writers Union were instructed to take orders directly from the Ministry of Culture in 1964. Meanwhile, some functionaries in central or regional agencies were required to submit monthly reports (38).

There is no doubt that joining these state-dominated bodies was their primary means of securing their professional lives, prestige, and privileges. As further incentives, the unions procured benefits and "luxury" consumer items for their members. For example, the Writers Union provided its members with more opportunities to publish books, advance careers, create publicity, and travel to the West (43). But if they produced any counter-revolutionary works, they would be expelled from the unions and have work banned, like the famous playwright Heiner Mueller, whose play *Die Umsiedlerin (The Resettler)* was criticized by SED officials and banned from the stage in 1961 (37).

The 1963 new economic system reduced the control of the market but brought new

demands for freedom of literature and art from among the general public. Thus, the Central Committee led by Erich Honecker (the successor of Ulbricht) launched a broad attack on cultural revisionism at the end of 1965, and any works or performances that deviated from the officially sanctioned socialist realism line were prohibited. That same year, Wolf Biermann, a highly popular guitarist and songwriter, was declared a “class enemy.” Honecker attacked his poems for their criticism of the regime’s inhumanity (Orlow 326). Biermann was also forbidden from performing his songs publicly in East Germany until Honecker’s fall in late 1989. In 1976, he performed some songs critical of the Communist regime at a permitted concert in West Germany, which led to his expulsion from the GDR and the stripping of his East German citizenship. Although more than 100 writers, artists, and intellectuals, including Christa Wolf and Robert Havemann, protested against this enforced exile, things did not improve significantly under SED rule (320). Until then, many artists, writers, and intellectuals thought that they were still somewhat part of a collective project to build a Utopian socialist society, and they thought the government would invite their criticism as constructive contribution to this project. However, after the expulsion of Biermann, it was clear to everyone that the GDR was a repressive dictatorship that had no interest in the views of independent artists and that artists were just tools to be used by the government.

Similarly, Christa Wolf lost her position as a member of the Central Committee of the SED due to her publishing a rather pessimistic novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (*Thoughts about Christa T.*), a story about a young woman who committed suicide because she could not solve the conflicts between her individuality and the collectivity (317). By contrast, her previous work, *Der geteilte Himmel* (*Divided Heaven*), written in 1963, had won the Heinrich Mann Prize the year it was published and depicted a young woman who chose to return to East Berlin without

being tempted by West Berlin's material advantages (Summers 153).

It is worth noting that suicide was one of the major themes of literature in the 1970s and 1980s, but it was a sensitive topic for a regime that attempted to cover up the rising suicide rates among East German citizens (Blankenship 1). In order not to jeopardize the transition of power and the international recognition of East Germany as an independent state by the United Nations in 1973 and the KSZE (Konferenz für Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa) in 1975, Honecker allowed writers and artist more freedom between 1971 and 1976. Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (*The New Suffering of Young W.*, 1972), a reworking of J. W. Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*, 1774), for example, was allowed to be put on stage in 1973 and turned into a movie in 1975. Plenzdorf's novel depicted suicide and exposed the tension between the individual and society, especially the role of young generations and their difficulties in finding a sense of belonging and purpose in society (Blankenship 28). However, the SED banned writers from writing about suicide, despite Honecker's commitment to the KSZE to respect human rights in East Germany.

Differing from the situation in East Germany, China was caught in an internal conflict, wrongly placing class struggle ahead of all other topics and constantly adapting its cultural policies to serve the political needs of the time. With the end of the Great Leap Forward movement, the development of cultural undertakings ushered in a relatively relaxed environment, but the relaxation in cultural policy was a short lived moment without too much influence on the overarching political and ideological program of the leaders. In 1962, the Central Committee of the CCP approved "Opinions on Several Issues of Current Literary and Art Work" and ordered all government agencies to adhere to the "Double Hundred" policy, carry out literary and art criticism correctly, inherit positive national heritage and absorb foreign cultures, improve

leadership, and strengthen the unity of literary and art circles (Liu 18). Shortly after, Mao released two additional texts: “Reports on Literature and Art” (1963) and “Reports on the Rectification Situation of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and its affiliated associations” (1964). In these texts, Mao denied the achievements of literary and artistic work, criticized the inaction of government leaders, and stated that the field of literature and art had been occupied by feudalism and capitalism, causing colossal damage to the proletariat and socialism. Subsequently, leaders of the Central Committee, such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, the Central Propaganda Department, and representatives of literary and artistic circles all agreed at a symposium in June that Mao’s instructions were correct (Li 29). This adjustment of cultural policy was short and incomplete, and as a result, the national Federation of Literary and Art Circles and its affiliated associations began a new rectification movement following Mao’s criticism.

Political criticism intensified in the cultural field due to the efforts of Mao Zedong. In November 1965, Yao Wenyuan’s (a member of the Cultural Revolution Group) critical article against Beijing Vice-Mayor Wu Han’s adaptation of the historical play *Hai Rui’s Dismissal from Office* was published by Shanghai’s *Wenhui Daily* (Liu 22). Although he dramatically criticized the portrayal in Wu’s play of the recovery of the individual economy and the bourgeois resistance to the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist revolution, his article received Mao’s permission. It was published by the national press, leading to a mass critical movement and becoming the prologue of the Cultural Revolution.

In April 1966, the Central Committee of the CCP ratified the “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing,” stating that literary and artistic circles had been infiltrated by bourgeois

literary and artistic thought and revisionism, which were opposed to Mao Zedong Thought (23). Subsequently, the Politburo of the CCP authorized the “May 16 Circular,” thoroughly criticizing bourgeois reactionary ideologies in the literary, artistic, press, and educational circles. It also announced the dissolution of the Central Propaganda Department and called on revolutionary groups to seize power from the government’s cultural institutions. Consequently, these institutions almost ceased functioning, and the Ministry of Culture only lasted until the beginning of 1967 (Pang 97). This notification, a sign of the official start of the Cultural Revolution, not only foretold the direction of the CCP’s cultural policies for the next ten years but also heralded the tragic fate of intellectuals.

Coincidentally, both the SED and the CCP strengthened their supervision and control over literary and artistic works and intellectuals under the subjective decisions of prominent leaders. Along with the beneficial influence of the “Ostpolitik,” the recognition of the GDR by other foreign countries, Honecker took office in 1971 and announced a policy of “no taboos” under socialism. As a result, writers and artists could express themselves freely, as long as they remained loyal to socialist principles (Goldenstein 69). Although Honecker’s promise of liberation generated optimism among intellectuals, it served mainly as a tool to establish a positive reputation and consolidate his new position as the leader of the country. In reality, SED leaders were far from enthusiastic about critical and creative analyses of the system; they continued to interfere in literary and artistic affairs, secretly regulating and restricting the direction of literary and artistic creation. For instance, Goldenstein revealed that SED functionaries in the Writers Union’s central steering committee played a decisive role in planning the Seventh Writers Congress (1973), and the Vorstand Party organized an activist group to ensure that preparations for the congress followed the SED’s guidelines (80). Moreover, the

presidents of the Writers Union, Anna Seghers and Hermann Kant, gave opening speeches on the congress's first day, echoing Honecker's address in *Neues Deutschland*, where he lauded writers' contribution to socialism and affirmed the need for diversity in literature, but argued that criticism would only be tolerated from those who demonstrated loyalty (85).

In addition to policy restrictions on literary creation, writers also faced many difficulties finding publishers for their work. Stefan Heym, for example, was able to publish his novels *Lassalle (An Uncertain Friend)*, *Die Schmähschrift oder Königin gegen Defoe (The Queen against Defoe)*, and *Der König David Bericht (The King David Report)*, but his *Fünf Tage im Juni (Five Days in June)* about the 1953 uprising was rejected in 1974. Heym also received more attention from SED leaders, especially after the 1974 conference where he denounced censorship (88). Similarly, Volker Braun's critical play *Tinka* was cancelled in 1974 and its publication was blocked in 1975. His 1970 play *Lenin's Tod (Lenin's Death)* was also not published until 1989 (89).

As mentioned above, the SED revoked the citizenship of Wolf Biermann in November 1976, but dozens of intellectuals signed a petition demanding the SED reverse its decision, which undoubtedly challenged the party's authority and led to a government crackdown against dissidents, especially in the literary community. The day the expatriation was announced, Stephan Heym and Hermlin assembled some writers and signed a petition together; they then took it to *Neues Deutschland* but did not receive permission to print it. As a result, they distributed it to the Western press; within days, more intellectuals had signed, and the "Biermann Affair" became an acute situation for the SED (Goldenstein 101). The SED quickly fought back, with each signatory being closely monitored by the Stasi, some encountering trouble with publishing or staging theatre performances, and a few who expressed sympathy being arrested,

including musicians Gerulf Pannach and Christian Kunert. In addition to secretly repressing the petitioners, party leaders tried to shift the direction of public opinion. Some authors like Gerhard Bengsch and Eva Strittmatter were pressured by Honecker to openly accuse Biermann of being an irresponsible citizen and condemn the petitioners for violating policy and using inappropriate methods to articulate dissent (102).

However, following the Biermann affair, many intellectuals, frustrated by the government's heavy-handed tactics to silence critics and their opinions, wanted more open discussions of pressing issues to improve the country. In contrast, the 1978 Eighth Writers Congress was an opportunity for the SED to refine boundaries and clarify the rules for writers under socialism. In March, Honecker met with the presidium for the first time before the congress, stressing the limits of criticism, making it clear that writers must know their positions, and stating that "the socialist GDR is the only alternative" (111). He employed a conciliatory tone, but the subtext of this message was that if they criticized socialism, they would be regarded as enemies of the country. Moreover, the selection of congress delegates during preliminary preparations was based on the most significant criterion, political trustworthiness, and only then considered literary achievements and social activity. Consequently, many prominent writers, including all the petitioners save Hermlin and Braun, were absent (112). In another significant shift, the President of the Writers Union, Anna Seghers, resigned and was replaced by Hermann Kant, a former Stasi informant codenamed "Matin" who was active from 1957 to 1976. Other leaders of the union also had close ties to the Stasi, such as Holtz-Baumert ("Villon," 1957-81), Kerndl ("Rainer," 1978-89), and Nowotny ("Dozent," 1972-81) (115).

As an essential organ of the government, the Stasi has been indirectly assisting the implementation of SED leaders' decisions in the cultural realm. For example, Stasi reports from

January 1978 revealed that operatives used all available measures to ensure the preparation of the Writers Congress and monitor suspected writers. In April, they planned to prevent hostilities between writers and publishers and deployed numerous informants, including six members of the Berlin delegation (112). What is more, the Stasi expanded its observation of intellectuals rapidly and constantly; between 1974 and 1976, the number of surveillance projects increased by 288 percent, and after 1976, the Stasi department responsible for Berlin, where half of all writers lived, doubled in size (115). It could be said that the Stasi was the backbone of the government's control over intellectuals and was involved in every part of the implementation of the cultural mandate.

Under government pressure, several East German writers with divergent opinions began to publish texts in the West, such as Jurek Becker's *Schlaflose Tage* (*Sleepless Days*, 1978), Werner Hieduczek's *Tod am Meer* (*Death by the Sea*, 1977), and Karl-Heinz Jakob's *Wilhelmsburg* (1979), which questioned authority and criticized the oppression and corruption of the government. Additionally, Stefan Heym's *Collin* (1979) vehemently attacked censorship and became a thorn in the government's side. Thus on May 16, Kurt Bartsch, Adolf Endler, Jurek Becker, Erich Loest, Klaus Poche, Dieter Schubert, Klaus Schlesinger, and Martin Stade wrote a letter to Honecker and the Western press protesting the SED's policy against Heym. The main ideas expressed in the letter were similar to those in 1976, calling for freedom to express discontent and stating that the socialist society needed more criticism and public discussion. As a result, these signatories and Heym were all expelled from the Writers Union. Bartsch, Poche, Schlesinger, and Loest left the GDR, while Heym, Endler, and Schubert remained and faced publishing problems and Stasi surveillance (119-21). Therefore, from August 1979, the law stipulated that if a GDR writer sought to publish abroad, they must first submit it to a GDR

publisher and then obtain permission from the copyright office. Only the copyright office could negotiate contracts with foreign publishers, and any writer who violated this law would face stiff fines and possible imprisonment (Zipser 112).

Worse than the situation in East Germany, China's Cultural Revolution spread rapidly throughout the country. In the beginning, with the support of policies and the encouragement of Mao, student organizations that supported Mao's thought and had the spirit of proletarian revolutionary rebellion, namely the Red Guards, expanded quickly. On August 18, 1966, Mao met with Red Guards from all over the country at Tiananmen Square, the first of eight meetings. Every Red Guard wore an armband with the words "Red Guard," Mao's badge on their chest, "Quotations from Chairman Mao" in their hands, and a military bag with the words "Serving the People" on their shoulders, which embodied the mass's worship of Mao and their dogmatic respect for his thoughts in this remarkable historical period. It became a popular dress that young people competed to imitate (Yu 26). "Quotations from Chairman Mao," more commonly known as the "Little Red Book," was initially widely spread throughout the army, and later in the mid to late 1960s, it was printed in more than 50 languages, with a total of more than 5 billion copies (25). In September, the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council stated that the food and lodging of teachers and students in Beijing would be borne by state finances, which aroused great interest among supporters of the Cultural Revolution (Chi 7). Taking advantage of their adoration of him, Mao encouraged them to continue the revolution and overthrow the bourgeoisie; he called upon them to destroy the "Four Olds," (Old Ideas, Old Culture, Old Habits, and Old Customs), which he described as anti-proletarian elements that poisoned the mind of the people.

However, the campaign to destroy the Four Olds severely damaged many places of interest

and historical relics, disturbing people's daily lives. In particular, some intellectuals were slandered as "reactionaries" and "class enemies," persecuted, and even killed. At first, the Red Guards changed the names of roads, shops, and cities to names with revolutionary meanings, such as "Anti-Imperial Hospital" and "Anti-Revisionism Road" (7). Some historical sites were demolished, and collections of ancient calligraphy and paintings were treated as waste paper or even burned (Liu 33). Gradually, the Red Guards began to launch attacks based upon people's hairstyles, clothing, and accessories, stipulating that women could not wear skirts or high heels, and men were not allowed to sport quiff-style haircuts (Chi 7). In August, the Central Committee of the CCP agreed with the Ministry of Public Security to issue regulations prohibiting the deployment of police to suppress revolutionary movements, which allowed the Red Guards to publicly trample on the law and harm people and their property. From June to early October, the Red Guards collected about 48.28 billion yuan in cash and deposits, 1.188 million taels of gold, and more than 10 million antiques (8).

With the growth of the Red Guards, internal armed fighting grew more serious; some used military weapons and attacked weapons depots to steal ammunition. Furthermore, they began to seize power from provincial and municipal agencies to expand their influence, which aroused Mao's resentment. In order to restore social order, reduce employment pressure, and stabilize the political situation, the Central People's Broadcasting Station broadcast Mao's latest instructions on the evening of December 21, 1968, encouraging educated young people to go to the countryside to receive re-education from workers and peasants. Although some people doubted his intentions, all of society had a fixed mode of thinking at the time, that is, listening to the words of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao to find solutions. Therefore, the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement spread rapidly throughout the country. In

total, approximately 14 million youth were sent to rural areas, and the organizations of the Red Guards scattered and gradually disappeared (Wu 19-20).

More than 197,000 people were falsely accused and persecuted during the campaign. What is more, many intellectuals were criticized, censored, and even paraded through the streets. Some committed suicide due to the unbearable humiliation. For example, Chairman of the Beijing Federation of Literature and Art and famous writer Shu Qingchun (Lao She), Luo Binji, and Beijing Opera artist Xun Huisheng were forced to kneel beside a burning pile of props while being criticized and severely beaten by the Red Guards. The next day, Lao She drowned himself in a lake due to despair and indignation, fighting against a society he saw as twisted and which cost him his life (Liu 24).

Due to this re-education, intellectuals were not only punished with physical labour but also suffered from mental torture. For example, at the end of 1969, Lin Biao (successor of Mao) ordered the members of the Writers Association to reform themselves at the May 7 Cadre School under Mao's instruction, which was more like a farm than a school. As the writer Yan Gang recounted, once a writer was labelled a "counter-revolutionary," "revisionist," or "right-deviating opportunist," they would be monitored, insulted, and not allowed to visit their family. They were forced to engage in farm work during the day and attend a special study class at night. The class was, in reality, a heavily guarded interrogation room where they were subjected to various forms of corporal punishment, including being burned by cigarettes, kicked with leather boots, and violently interrogated overnight (60).

On the other hand, creations and works of literature and art were restricted and significantly damaged, while works with proletarian revolutionary characteristics were vigorously promoted, resulting in a unitary cultural output. Planned and engineered by Jiang Qing, a member of the

Cultural Revolution Group and the wife of Mao, the revolutionary operas were broadly and purposefully publicized. The revolutionary operas visually manifested the history of Chinese people's confrontations with foreign and class enemies at different stages of leadership by the CCP, arousing the patriotism of the audience. The related script content, classic stills, performance experiences, interviews, and aesthetic appreciation articles were all reproduced in full by the mainstream press at that time, including the *People's Daily* and the magazine *Red Flag* (Hui and Gao 23). When other recreational activities were exhausted, model operas such as *The Legend of the Red Lantern* and *The Red Detachment of Women* were widely and repeatedly promoted to a countrywide audience through radio, television, films, and other media. For example, "Appreciation of Model Opera Aria" became a fixed release by China's National Radio, rolling back and forth six times and 40 minutes each time (33).

Additional cultural activities could only be preserved if they complied with official principles. The music that was mainly distributed included the singing and popularization of quotation songs, while dancing was forbidden because it did not meet the temperament of workers, peasants, and soldiers, nor the need of the class struggle. The painting and sculpture of that time were based on Mao's image. Although Mao had not asked for his portrait, there was no request to revoke depictions of his likeness. The themes of painting and sculpture were almost the same—both depicted the proletarian revolutionary struggle and publicized class struggles (Liu 25).

Publishing stagnated. By 1971, there were only 46 state-owned publishing houses. Except for works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao—as well as some political readings and popular science and technology books—few books were published. Bookstores stopped selling, and libraries stopped lending, which aroused dissatisfaction among the general public. To solve

the problem, Zhou Enlai met with the leading publishing group several times and held a national publishing work symposium from 1970 to 1972, emphasizing the need for reading materials to distribute to young people. Eventually, many classic literary works and comics were released for publication and distribution (Mo and He 30-35).

Contrary to the increasingly difficult situation in East Germany, China reached a significant turning point in 1978. The disaster ended after Mao died on September 9, 1976, when his successor, Hua Guofeng, and other central leaders crushed the Gang of Four, namely Jiang Qing, Yao Wenyuan, Zhang Chunqiao, and Wang Hongwen (the first three were members of the Cultural Revolution Group). However, government agencies, economic management systems, and severely damaged education, science, and cultural circles all needed to be restored or reconstructed. After two years of introspection and development, Deng Xiaoping completely disavowed the erroneous policy of the “Two Whatever,” that is, the policy to resolutely uphold Chairman Mao’s decisions and instructions. Instead, Deng moved to end the class struggle and shift the central task to economic construction at the eleventh CCP Central Committee Third Plenary Session in 1978.

Fully aware of the severe consequences of the government’s excessive criticism of literary and artistic works and intellectuals, and acknowledging the abnormal development of highly politicized literature and art during the Cultural Revolution, the “Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces” was revoked in May 1979. That same year, Deng delivered a powerful speech at the Fourth National Congress of Literature and Art, reiterating the need to stick to the direction of serving the people; to persist in the policies of the “Double Hundred,” bringing forth the new by weeding out the old, making the past serve the present, and forcing foreign things to serve China; and to promote the freedom of literary and

artistic creation and discussion. Meanwhile, in response to the slogan “Literature and art were subordinated to politics and they must serve politics,” he proposed that the CCP’s leadership of literature and art should be based upon artistic significance, rather for political reasons (Y. Li 37-38). Without the arbitrary intervention of the government, Chinese literature and art gradually returned to their former prosperity under the guidance of scientific and continuously improving cultural policies.

Overall, China under Mao was much more overtly an oppressive regime that used a lot of violence and state terror to keep the population and its intellectuals in line, whereas the GDR, while also very repressive, had tried to maintain outwardly the face of an open, positive, democratic society. The Bitterfeld Way Movement of 1959 launched by Ulbricht, for instance, was much smaller in scale and influence than that in China. The CCP began to implement such movement as early as 1955, and in 1958 all the writers under the age of 30 were stipulated to participate in practical jobs. Moreover, under the strong control and call of the government, Mao’s Talks in Yan’an, which contained the similar idea with the Bitterfeld Way Movement that writers and artists should be transformed into proletarian literary and art workers, was widely propagated in the early 1940s. All the Party members were forced to study Mao’s Talk carefully, which later became the official political principles of literature and art after the founding of the new China.

Furthermore, Chinese cultural politics in the 1960s and 1970s were far harsher and more brutal than those in East Germany. In the practical implementation of cultural policy, East Germany used party-related organizations and the Stasi to control public opinion, with the most severe punishments being banning works, home arrested, deprivation of nationality, or imprisonment. In China, however, writers and artists with opposing political views were subject

to public criticism, street demonstrations, re-education through labor, and even death, as evidenced by the Cultural Revolution, when more than 190,000 people were falsely accused and executed.

Chapter 3: Cinema as a State Institution

Film, the ideological state apparatus in East Germany and China, was used to maintain the legitimacy of the ruling class and the submissiveness of the people. With their popularity and mass medium appeal as well as their authenticity and ability to convey ideas in simple form, dynamic images in films connected with audiences' personal experiences to transform the imaginary world into a concrete one. Thus, they built a blueprint for a socialist utopia, encouraging audiences to consolidate their sense of class belonging and their obedience to ruling parties (Zhang 14). As demonstrated by *The Story of a Young Couple* and *Story in Summer*, socialist realistic film was an effective propaganda tool the ruling parties in East Germany and China used to educate their nations and convey concrete socialist political ideologies to citizens.

With the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and the support of the Soviet Union, whether in China or Germany, the task of film was to abide by cultural policies and political authority to serve political needs and the proletarian people. The development of national cinema depended on the monopolized state-owned film industry and the decision-making bodies appointed by the ruling parties. In other words, under the leadership of the SED and the CCP, the entire process of film production, distribution and exhibition was carried out under a centralized and unified system. This system did not value the autonomy of artistic creation or the commercial value of film, which greatly hindered the development of the film industry.

3.1 The Epitome of Centralized Politics

The development of the film industry in East Germany and China did not only exemplify concretely a political system and cultural policy; it was also the focus of each country's leader, who both openly criticized specific films and manipulated public opinion through political

commentaries. Politics and cinema in these countries were inextricably linked: politics significantly affected the development of cinema, and thus the history of cinema presents a microcosmic view of each country's political development.

Both the SED and the CCP set out to control the film industry before the formal establishment of their states, and each eventually built a party-controlled film monopoly with a pyramidal leadership structure. In East Germany, the DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) was already a film monopoly in the Soviet Occupation Zone, managed by the leadership of the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD). At that time, East German cinema took the form of newsreels, and films were produced by a group of formerly exiled communist filmmakers who established the group in October 1945 with the goal of reviving German cinema. Because of their affinity for communist ideals, they were allowed to create films: Wolfgang Staudte began to shoot *Kolonne Strupp* (*The Strupp Convoy*) on January 1, 1946, and Kurt Maetzig began to produce *Der Augenzeuge* (*The Eyewitness*), the first German newsreel, in mid-January of that year. Several months later, SMAD approved their application for a formal production license. On May 17, 1946, the Soviet colonel Sergei Tulpanow officially licensed DEFA as a film production company and mandated that they convey pro-democratic and antifascist messages. Shortly afterward, DEFA was formally registered as a stock company on August 13, and some of its shares were held by the SMAD (Heiduscheke 10).

Moreover, in addition to the SMAD's contribution, the SED provided DEFA with start-up capital of 21,000 Reichsmarks and purchased DEFA stocks through a holding company called Zentrag to align the cinema with party goals. In November 1947, the SED established the DEFA Commission to regulate film production and control personnel (11). Gradually, SED functionaries began to occupy key DEFA posts and steered the company toward serving the

SED's political goals. Soon after East Germany was formally established, SED and SED-related institutions held all DEFA stocks. The DEFA Commission was replaced with the Staatliches Komitee für Filmfragen (State Committee for Film Issues); this was the first time a state office took control of film production and distribution (Feinstein 33). In 1952, the SED reorganized DEFA and created five separate studios: DEFA Feature Film Studio, DEFA Studio for Animation, DEFA Studio for Popular Scientific Films, DEFA Studio for Newsreel and Documentary Films and DEFA Studio for Film Dubbing (Heiduscheke 11). Ultimately, DEFA was nationalized on January 1, 1953, turning from a private enterprise to a state-owned institution.

Gradually, state and party functionaries gained control over DEFA. A division of the Ministry of Culture, Hauptverwaltung Film, took over the responsibilities of the State Film Commission in 1954. This new agency oversaw all aspects of film production and distribution, from manufacturing film and equipment to managing theaters. For example, this agency was responsible for formulating a master plan for the industry based on film studios' annual production plans and submitting it to the Minister of Culture. The Minister of Culture, in turn, integrated the film plan into the broader plan for culture and received approval from the Council of Ministers, the highest executive body in East Germany (Feinstein 40).

Additionally, Fernando Ramos Arenas claimed that the state "control over film distribution had been completed by 1950s at the least, with the founding of the state company Progress, while the exhibition underwent a similar development: from 1949 on, and after a first round of expropriation of film theaters formerly in the hands of 'war criminals and Nazi activists' ('von Kriegsverbrechen und Naziaktivisten'), the regional governments had started to unify the rest around associations of publicly owned companies ('Vereinigungen Volkseigener

Lichtspieltheater’)" (275). He also revealed that, by the end of 1951, Progress had already cooperated with the *filmaktivs*, whose principals were a continuation of the combination of film cultural work and ideological commitments that had emerged from left-wing German groups. As early as the Weimar period, the *filmaktivs* organized activists who guided discussions among audience members and received support from political parties and organizations. In East Germany, Progress used the *filmaktivs* to promote specific titles and to disseminate state propaganda, and with the establishment of the Central Filmaktiv, Progress' intervention intensified. After 1952, the Central Filmaktiv formulated guidelines for controlling audience discussion, which specified which subjects were to be discussed and which were to be ignored or criticized. These guidelines were then distributed and used by *filmaktiv* members during film introductions and discussions (274-275).

Parallel to the development of East German cinema, the CCP began to establish film studios in 1946 and completed the nationalization of private film institutions in 1953. In October 1946, the CCP integrated the Manchukuo Film Association with staff from the Yan'an Film Studio, and it eventually established the Northeast Film Studio (officially renamed Changchun Film Studio in 1955). Simultaneously, the CCP also intensified filmmakers' Marxist-Leninist education and skills training to improve their political consciousness and set up a rich reserve of talent for future Chinese cinema (He 7). After the CCP took over the Chinese Nationalist Party's studios in 1949, they established Peking Film Studio and Shanghai Film Studio in April and November, respectively. In 1953, Shanghai Film Studio merged with eight private film studios and became the state-owned Shanghai Joint Film Studio. The CCP successively established eight additional state-owned film studios from August 1952 to August 1958, including the three largest film studios mentioned above (11).

The CCP also created state agencies to govern the film industry: the Central Film Administrative Bureau (renamed the Film Industry Administrative Bureau in 1955) was designated the highest administrative body in the industry. The industry's internal structure was centralized such that film production, distribution, exhibition and personnel management were all determined by the Film Bureau and affiliated departments (Shi 7). In April 1950, "Censorship Measures for Screenplay and Films of All Studios of Central Film Administrative Bureau" was promulgated; it stipulated that films produced by national studios of any type, with themes and content of any type, must be copied and submitted to the Film Bureau for review (He 13). In May, the Film Committee (later renamed the Film Steering Committee) was established at the suggestion of Zhou Enlai. This organization was responsible for reviewing films, making recommendations for production and distribution etc. However, this agency ended operations in 1953 because it was too large and complex to reach a consensus; for example, more than 40 scripts were vetoed within a year, which eventually led to a paucity of scripts and hampered the development of the film industry (Shi 39).

In the same year, because the film production management system's shortcomings—namely, low work efficiency—had been exposed, the system underwent reforms designed to simplify film review procedures and expand production autonomy. The Ministry of Culture and the Film Bureau became solely responsible for reviewing film scripts and finished films, and in 1958, the local government, the local party propaganda department and the studios became jointly responsible for reviewing films' political content (8). Consequently, the film management system was optimized, but the effect of the reform was limited, and party functionaries still played a decisive role in film production and review. The state agencies of East Germany and China became powerful institutions with dual administration and business management functions.

The state-owned studios were production bases for film processing, lacking free artistic creation or managerial autonomy.

The audience has also become their target. Before the Berlin Wall was erected, East Berliners could cross the border to watch movies not playing in the eastern sector. Those watching Western films included the DEFA directors, who needed to stay abreast of new films released by Western European cinemas and Hollywood. In response to this direct competition, movie theaters offered relatively cheap tickets to DEFA movies to expose as many East Germans as possible to their productions. Additionally, the government provided subsidies to organize trips for entire schools and factories to watch (occasionally free) films showing the victory of communism or promoting socialist ideals. Later, movie theaters even bundled screenings of a DEFA film with an imported Western film, requiring audiences to take their seats before the first film and not allowing late seating (Heiduscheke 20). Similarly, the Chinese government offered films free or at low prices to attract more people to watch movies depicting revolutionary history and the life of the proletarian class. The charge for film screenings in rural areas was only about 0.05 yuan, and in urban theaters about 0.2 yuan. In order to expand film distribution, the government subsidized mobile projection teams, and the number of Chinese movie theaters, film clubs and projection teams grew dramatically between 1949 and 1965, from slightly more than 700 units to 20,363 units, and the number of viewers increased from approximately 47 million to 4.63 billion (Shi 2).

Although the number of film productions and the size of audiences continued to grow under the SED and CCP, rigid cultural policies and the critical opinions of their leaders led films to shape a politicized socialist culture. In the 1950s, East Germany underwent a series of “freezes” and “thaws” in accordance with changes to cultural policies. Between 1949 and 1953, the

application of the principle of “socialist realism” was rigidly enforced; the 1952 Film Resolution of the SED Politbureau restricted film production to two subjects: focusing on the worker’s reality and depicting socialist history (Walker 197). For example, the banning of Falk Harnack’s adaptation of Arnold Zweig’s novel *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (*The Butcher of Wandsbek*, 1951) clearly signalled that the SED required filmmakers to follow socialist realism as a guiding principle, portray exemplary heroes and demonstrate the triumph of socialism, regardless of artistic merit (Feinstein). The film was withdrawn shortly after its premiere under pressure from Soviet General Igor Tschekin, an advisor to DEFA, who criticized it for not arousing hatred toward fascism. It became the first East German film to be banned by the SED for ideological reasons. An edited version was allowed to be shown until 1962, and the ban was lifted in 1981 (Heiduscheke 12). Between 1953 and 1956, cultural policies were modified to placate broad resistance movements and accommodate the new course, during which film censorship was handled more loosely and filmmakers were allowed to voice their criticism in the films.

However, in response to uprisings in Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1956, censorship again became more restrictive; the 1958 film conference changed the direction of filmmaking from embracing liberalism and diversity to nurturing and promoting socialism. Consequently, DEFA replaced the relatively liberal head dramaturge Rudolf Boehm with Konrad Schwalbe, a staunch SED member, and fired the last remaining non-East German directors. Films considered too Western were either completely banned or released in black and white. An example of the latter is Arthur Pohl’s *Die Spielbank-Affaere* (*The Casino-Affair*, 1957) (13).

In 1961, following the closure of East Germany’s borders, DEFA was granted moderate political autonomy. DEFA not only allowed its directors to embark on more critical projects, but also the organization became decentralized, forming many independent artistic work groups

(KAGs). Despite this, the SED remained sensitive about films related to the Wall. Films that criticized or mocked it were banned, but films that illustrated commitment to the state, such as Frank Vogel's *Und deine Liebe auch* (*And Your Love Too*, 1962) and *Der geteilte Himmel* (*The Divided Heaven*, 1964) were shown (14).

For a brief time, DEFA operated fairly free from SED control, but the 1965 Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED began a new round of intensified censorship. Honecker and other party leaders intended to hold a summit about the New Economic System; however, they deemed cultural policy more pressing and turned to attacking progressive artists, particularly filmmakers (Feinstein 2). During this period, two films, Kurt Maetzig's *Das Kaninchen bin ich* and Frank Vogel's *Denk' bloss nicht, ich heule* were singled out, screened in full and then subjected to withering criticism for promoting nihilistic worldviews and exposing social and political problems (Brockmann 432).

As a result, all twelve feature films produced by DEFA from 1965 were banned, and some directors were forced to work for the television department or end their careers completely (Heiduscheke 14-15). Additionally, official censorship continued to play a key role in restricting film creation. The Stasi, for example, organized a group of people to disrupt screenings of Frank Beyer's 1966 film *Spur der Steine* (*Trace of Stones*) in movie theaters, which was banned immediately after its premiere and re-released in the fall of 1989, to prove the rationality for the ban (Trumpener 136). Simultaneously, most artists also engaged in self-censorship. Most avoided politically sensitive topics, which hindered artistic renewal. Directors, who feared endangering their jobs, they had to weigh their potential film projects against the current political mindset and the degree of artistic freedom they allowed to determine the expected level of individual freedom. This caused significant harm to East German cinema (Heiduscheke 15).

Following Ulbricht's replacement by Honecker, another "thaw" for DEFA cinema commenced. In 1971, Honecker declared the end of artistic censorship at the Eighth Party Congress. Thereafter, filmmakers were granted more freedom to point out deficiencies in daily life under socialism and pursue critical narratives. Nevertheless, Honecker continued to emphasize the necessity of artists' firm socialist perspective as a prerequisite for artistic freedom (Walker 198). The SED functionally retained control over film projects. Iris Gusner's *Die Taube auf dem Dach* (*The Dove on the Roof*, 1973), for example, was censored and is believed to have been destroyed due to its criticism of society and working class (Heiduscheke 16).

Unexpectedly, the artistic freedom proclaimed in 1971 gradually dwindled by the late 1970s. In addition to the writers who petitioned for Biermann, some DEFA directors and actors sent a letter of protest to the SED and refused to retract their signatures in 1976. They were therefore targeted by the party and forced to abandon their careers or even expelled from the country. For instance, popular movie star Manfred Krug no longer received new roles, and his completed DEFA film *Feuer unter Deck* (*Fire Below Deck*, Hermann Zschoche, 1977) was withdrawn from distribution. He ultimately immigrated to West Germany with colleagues Armin Mueller-Stahl, Hilmar Thate, Jutta Hoffmann and Winfried Glatzeder, all of whom had also protested for Biermann (Heiduscheke 16). Additionally, the 1978 film *Geschlossene Gesellschaft*, starring Mueller-Stahl and Hoffmann, was banned by the SED. Because the film depicted conflict between individuals and society, both the director, Frank Beyer, who had achieved huge success with *Jacob der Luegner* (*Jacob the Liar*, 1974), and the screenplay writer, Klaus Poche, were forbidden to work and exiled. Even Hans Bentzen, who was in charge of culture in East German television as a member of the SED, was fired (Wikipedia).

Compared with East Germany, Chinese cinema was more deeply influenced and controlled by the personal political ideas of the country's leader; it was vastly influenced by Mao from the founding of state until the late 1970s, when Mao died of health complications. In 1951, Mao personally initiated criticism of the film *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun Zhuan*, Sun Yu, 1950), which turned normal film debate into a political movement, thus establishing the basic mode of literary and artistic criticism. That is, academic debates were replaced with political judgment. Critics tended to first judge a work's political ideology, then seek evidence in the work's content and specific details to prove their judgments. More importantly, under this critical mode, the "correctness" of opinions was often determined by those with political power, such that when a point of view was affirmed by politically powerful groups, it had indisputable "correctness" (Shi 40).

The Life of Wu Xun told the story of a poor peasant, Wu Xun, who raised money by begging and performing to eventually found a free school for children. On May 20, Mao published an editorial in *The People's Daily*, criticizing the film for promoting feudal culture and yielding to feudal rules and strongly denouncing praises of the film (He 17). Local party committees immediately responded to his call, and even the director of the Film Bureau called on filmmakers to actively discuss the film. All schools named after Wu Xun were renamed; related monuments and pavilions were eliminated; and the film manager, Xia Yan, and director, Sun Yu, were told to issue a public statement of self-criticism (Shi 41). There was a sharp drop in film production in 1951; only one feature film, *Shen Hun Bu Ling*, was produced (He 18). At the same time, a trend toward conceptualization and formulation appeared in the film industry. That is, the story structure, content and characterization in different films were similar, and their themes and narratives were all drawn from political perspectives (Shi 42).

The implementation of the Double Hundred Policy in 1956 brought a certain degree of freedom to artistic creation and discussion. From October to November, a meeting of the Film Bureau's studio directors made a significant changes to Chinese cinema: the Three Self and One Center (San Zi Yi Zhong Xin) reform plan was proposed, which asserted that films should be free theme, free combination, self-financing and director-centered. At the same time, many intellectuals participated in a discussion of the question "Why are there so few good domestic films?" initiated by *Wenhui Daily*, pointing out the underlying problems in the country's cultural policies and political system (He 24). For example, Zhong Dianfei, an influential film theorist and critic, directly criticized the film leadership's factionalism, administrative interference and neglect of traditions in his well-known editorial "Drum of Motion Picture." Consequently, in the subsequent Anti-Rightist Campaign, the film industry leaders held 15 consecutive conferences to criticize and attack his comments (Shi 44). In addition to Dianfei, this campaign labeled many well-known directors, actors and scriptwriters as "rightists," including Wu Yonggang, Shi Hui, Wu Yin, Sha Meng, Guo Wei and Lv Ban (He 25).

Furthermore, the Great Leap Forward and the Pulling Out Bourgeois White Flag Movement broke out in 1958. These not only affected the development of the cinema but also created economic devastation. In March, Kang Sheng, a candidate for the CCP Central Committee's Political Bureau, began to launch a campaign against the bourgeois ideology in feature films produced during 1957 and 1958 (Shi 45). The *People's Daily* also published the article "Resolutely Pulling Out the White Flag on the Screen" by Chen Huangmei (Deputy Director of the Film Bureau) in December, in which he criticized the bourgeois ideas in films created in 1957. He argued that they publicized opposition to the party's policies, distorted images of party leaders, and so on; this marked the climax of the Pulling Out Bourgeois White Flag movement

(46). As in East Germany, filmmakers tended to engage in self-censorship and avoid politically controversial topics for fear of political criticism and punishment. This resulted in decreased enthusiasm for artistic creation.

In response to the call of the Great Leap Forward, production and exhibition tasks were formulated at the Conference on Leap Forward in Film Work on March 9. These stipulated that production volume in 1958 needed to be double that of 1957 (that is, 80 large-scale films were needed). Four million screenings were expected to be completed in 1958, 300 thousand more than in 1957 (He 27). In addition, under the instruction of the Ministry of Culture, the number of film studios increased from 16 to 330 from 1957 to 1959, and the number of projection units increased from 646 to 16,849 between 1949 to 1960 (28). In order to fulfill political directives, film studios blindly pursued quantity over quality, resulting in many inferior films and a vast waste of resources.

Reflecting on the disastrous consequences of the Great Leap Forward and the Anti-Rightist Movement, the government adopted adjusted economic, cultural and other policies in the early 1960s, which relieved the tension in literary and artistic circles to a certain extent. However, Mao's Cultural Revolution was catastrophic for Chinese cinema. According to Peng Li, among the more than 600 films made between 1949 and 1976, more than 400 were labeled "poisonous weeds" at the time and were either banned or shown only to limited audiences to facilitate the spread of revolutionary ideas (1). Additionally, both the variety and the number of films dropped sharply during this period: not a single feature film was produced between 1966 and 1972, and only 10 Model Operas were made and disseminated to large audiences between 1970 and 1972. These include *The Legend of the Red Lantern*, *Shajiang*, *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, *Red Detachment of Women*, and *The White-Haired Girl*. This is in stark contrast to the 17 years

between 1949 and 1965, during which a total of 603 films were produced, with an average annual output of 36 films. Only 69 feature films were produced from 1966 to 1976; with an average annual output of fewer than 7 films. Film production in the Cultural Revolution decreased by approximately 80%. More importantly, film workers who had helped to create “poisonous weeds” were all sent to cadre schools or farms for re-education through labor, and they were subjected to numerous criticisms and torture (1).

In the late 1970s, East German cinema was falling into ruin, whereas the Chinese film industry had gradually recovered and presented a picture of prosperity. Following the end of the Cultural Revolution and the convening of the eleventh CCP Central Committee Third Plenary Session, film workers who had been unfairly criticized were vindicated, and films wrongly classified as “poisonous weeds” were released again and their social significance and artistic value was affirmed. During this period, film creation in China, including both propaganda films and films with artistic value, was greatly encouraged, and filmmakers were able to expose social realities critically, portrayed complex characters and developed new film structures and shooting techniques. Following the liberation of film production, more than 1,200 feature films were produced from 1977 to 1989, which to some extent met people’s needs for spiritual and cultural life. The quality of film production, meanwhile, improved dramatically, with more than 120 international awards won from 1978 to 1989, more than three times the total for the previous 27 years (Li 57).

Within their political system, both the East German and Chinese governments attempted to use administrative cultural policies to guide or control different institutions related to the film industry, such as film bureaus, studios, movie theaters and the press. Furthermore, each country’s leaders seemed to play a decisive role in the evaluation of films. The audiences and filmmakers

alike were forced to accept film reviews guided by their leader's subjective perceptions and to transform and hide their personal thoughts. The development of both the Chinese and East German film industries were strongly suppressed at this time. From 1949 to the late 1970s, both film industries experienced multiple "thaws" and "freezes," but, unlike East Germany, the Chinese film industry experienced a turning point, during which a change in leadership and the refinement of cultural policies set the stage for greater artistic freedom in the film industry.

3.2 *The Story of a Young Couple* and *Story in Summer*

After their rule was established in East Germany and China, the SED and the CCP respectively sought to promote socialism through film, and both adopted socialist realism as the official guiding principle for art and literature. *The Story of a Young Couple* (*Roman einer jungen Ehe*, 1952) and *Story in Summer* (*Xia Tian De Gu Shi*, 1955) are exemplary examples; these films enabled the ruling parties to promote the socialist realist aesthetic to their citizens. Despite enormous differences in historical context, both films share common elements, namely politics, economics and romance, and they both end with the heroes feeling optimistic about a socialist future.

Additionally, according to Wolfgang Emmerich, these films reflect three important characteristics of socialist realist works, in which "the true and historically concrete artistic representation must be united with the task to ideologically reshape and elevate the working people in the spirit of socialism" (80). First, in socialist societies, people were encouraged to make positive contributions to the economy, and economic productivity is a significant theme in socialist work (Benchik 5). Second, politically correct socialist work contains a positive hero as a role model with whom audiences can identify. Third, socialist realist work reflects classic cultural heritage. Emmerich also said that works without a tie to Germany's cultural past would

undermine national consciousness, promote cosmopolitanism and support American imperialist politics (81).

The Story of a Young Couple, directed by Kurt Maetzig and written by Maetzig and novelist Bodo Uhse, exemplifies the fact that love stories produced in the early 1950s were subject to socialist realism's characteristic politicization of any and all intimate relationships; that is, desire was cut to the measure of politics (Urang 88). Kurt Maetzig, an acclaimed socialist film director, began his film career in 1932. Upon graduating, he founded Radius, an animation studio. Although he was forced to suspend his film career in 1937 because of his mother's Jewish heritage, he joined the Communist Party in 1944 and became a founding member of DEFA in 1946. His first feature film, *Ehe im Schatten* (*Marriage in the Shadows*, 1947), was based on the suicides of the actor Joachim Gottschalk and his Jewish wife in 1941. The only postwar German film shown simultaneously in all four zones of Berlin, it revealed the cruelty of anti-Semitic policies and achieved both critical and commercial success. As a loyal socialist, Director Maetzig made many films depicting East German rural construction, workers' revolutions, and so on. He created twin biographic films, *Ernst Thaelmann - Sohn seiner Klasse* (1954) and *Ernst Thaelmann - Führer seiner Klasse* (1955), portraying the life of Ernst Thaelmann, the leader of the German Communist Party (Chatten 54). However, his film *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, which portrayed hypocrisy in the criminal justice system, came under attack at the 1965 Communist Party meeting. As a result, the film was banned until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and Maetzig was required to make a public statement of self-criticism that saved him from prison and enabled him to continue his career. Though Maetzig's colleagues in the film industry defected to the West, he never thought of leaving East Germany, and he died in his home on August 8, 2012 (Dillon 1).

In *The Story of a Young Couple*, both Agnes Sailer, from Dresden in East Germany, and Jochen Karsten, from West Germany, are aspiring actors. In the beginning, they support each other's careers; however, they began to disagree about politics, especially the role of politics in art. Agnes' political values are consistent with those of the SED. She is unable to accept their political and moral differences, so she decides to leave Jochen for East Berlin. There, she is part of the collective, and she is able to find acting roles she finds morally and politically agreeable. Ultimately, Jochen becomes disillusioned with the political and economic situation in the West and decides to join Agnes in East Berlin (Benchik 18).

The subordination of romantic love to political ideologies is clearly reflected in Agnes' socialist political beliefs, and she eventually chooses to become an East Berliner. Agnes' political beliefs are first revealed in a scene during which she rehearses for *Nathan the Wise*. In this scene, Agnes discusses the role of art in politics with Burmeister, the director, and suggests that the function of art is to distract people from the suffering caused by the war. Burmeister attempts to direct Agnes toward a new understanding of art, and he earnestly says, "Art shouldn't lead us astray. Art is a flaming torch on the foggy road to the future," echoing the SED's statement that art should be used to serve politics (*Roman* 14:40-50). In addition, the film's inclusion of *Nathan the Wise* not only marks the collapse of National Socialist ideology in the theater and the new era of tolerance tempered with remorse, but it also highlights the ideological and moral opposition between East and West Germany, as well as the limitations of capitalism in addressing the legacy of fascism. This is illustrated by the presence of anti-Semitic director Hartmann in Möbius' premiere at the Westend Theater rather than in the East (Allan 262-263). Moreover, as capitalist director Möbius reflects on his anger at the expulsion of Hartmann as intolerant, it is the socialist director Burmeister, who reminds him not to tolerate the inhumane:

“Wollen Sie den Anti-humanen gegenüber human auftreten?” (*Roman* 24:25-45). This dialogue clearly demonstrates that the capitalist West cannot come to terms with the Nazi past, and that the capitalist entrepreneur Pflisch exploits Hartmann’s return for more box office revenues, showing the opposite view and attitude of the East and West Germany towards people who worked for the Nazis culture industry under the fascist ideology.

Gradually, Agnes’ strong political views become apparent as she listens to a radio adaptation of East German author Anna Seghers’s *The Seventh Cross*. Seghers was Jewish and was among the first to leave Germany after the Nazis came to power in January 1933. During her exile in Paris and later in Mexico City, Seghers continued to produce a large body of work, including 9 major novels and more than 60 novellas, short stories and fairy tales, as well as essays on aesthetic issues and political issues of the time (“Seghers” 2330). As one of the most prominent writers in East Germany, she received numerous awards and was elected president of the Writers’ Union in 1952. Her works were adapted for the stage by Brecht, Heiner Müller and Volker Braun, meanwhile she also had a profound influence on women writers, the most important of whom was Christa Wolf, and her work became the object of intense feminist inquiries (2331).

Seghers’s *The Seventh Cross* tells the story of when seven prisoners escaped from the Westhofen concentration camp, the commandant Fahrenberg ordered to erect seven nail-studded crosses made of sycamore trees in the courtyard, on which the escapees who were recaptured would be hung. But among them, George Heisler became the only one who managed to escape, and his successful escape was regarded as a symbol of the unity of people as well as the victory of resistance to fascism (“The Seventh Cross” 416). Deeply influenced by East German culture, Agnes becomes enraged and turns off the radio when the radio announcer states that the work

was written as anti-communism instead of anti-Nazism: “Was Anna Seghers gegen die Nazis geschrieben hat, soll hier gegen die Kommunisten gerichtet werden-auch wenn es Frau Seghers nicht passt” (*Roman* 29:10-50). In Agnes’s mind, it is a good piece of anti-Nazism that is maliciously distorted by the West German radio, but of Jochen and their friends, only Burmeister agrees with her and leaves with anger and incomprehension.

Agnes’s political ideology further diverges from Jochen’s when he wears a Nazi uniform to play the leading role in Carl Zuckmayer’s *Des Teufels General* (*The Devil’s General*). After the performance, Agnes denounces the Nazi uniform and the play, whereas Jochen asserts that the ability to play characters one dislikes is a sign of a good actor (Benchik 20). The characters’ opposite perspectives on clothing also reflect how Nazi history was treated differently in the East and the West. Agnes thinks the costume has Nazi militarism and she doesn’t want Jochen to play this evil Nazi general role, but in Jochen’s eyes, he simply wears the uniform for the sake of art. It is clear that their opposing views reflect the contrast that West German resistance to Nazi militarism was waning, while East Germany remained steadfast in its moral and ethical opposition to the totalitarian government that fomented the war. In reality, *Des Teufels General* was the most popular play in British and American zones of Germany, with over 3,000 performances from 1947 to 1950; by contrast, the positive depiction of Harras and the Wehrmacht provoked outrage among East German citizens, and the play was prohibited. It is worth noting that Maetzig’s criticism, as hinted in Agnes’s reproach “Du hast mir mal gesagt, du wuerdest dich nie wieder im Leben in eine Nazi-Uniform stecken lassen,” was not directed against the Third Reich’s military past, but rather the re-militarization of West Germany in 1950 (Allan 266; *Roman* 34:00-55).

What's more, the gap between Eastern and Western perceptions becomes more apparent when Agnes turns down a role in Sartre's *The Dirty Hand* offered by Pflisch, the patron of the Westend Theatre, but later accepts a role in Constantin Simonov's *The Russian Question*. *The Dirty Hand* is about the dark political struggle between the two leaders of the proletarian party, so when Agnes reads the entire script, she immediately rejected the role and calls it heartless and shameless. However, no one anticipates her choice, and Jochen even bought an expensive stereo in advance on credit (*Roman* 38:25-39:00). Pflisch, who represents Western materialism with his new expensive car and luxurious life, expresses the view that art and morality are separate topics, in opposition to socialism (*Roman* 39:15-30). Eventually, the inconsistency of Eastern and Western artistic conceptions prompts Agnes to seek a role in East Berlin. Soon after, she participates in *The Russian Question*, directed by Burmeister, a socialist advocate who denounces West Germany's false prosperity and Americans' reinstating of warlords and Nazism. Meanwhile, Kala, a West Berlin actress, complains that she had heard fake news that West Germany would soon abolish East German currency; she exchanged her money at a 10:1 rate and lost a lot of money. Kala's statement that her money would flow into Pflisch's pockets reveals the defect of capitalist society: that is, wealth will ultimately be held by a few.

Agnes' career flourishes in East Berlin. She stars in the film *The First Years*, which is critically acclaimed by East German audiences. However, when Jochen reads the lines in the script "Das kommt daher, dass bei uns die Arbeit wirklich zu einer Sache der Ehre geworden ist", he finds the play very odd (*Roman* 47:15-40). After the premiere, he blames her for not acting the way he had taught her and infusing her performance with subjective socialist views. In addition, Agnes is humiliated by the comments Jochen's friend Frank, a film critic, writes in the newspapers. He accuses the film of being riddled with excessive propaganda and spreading

tedious patriotism, and Agnes of acting like a walking mouthpiece under Burmeister's direction (*Roman* 57:44-59:00). Therefore, Agnes leaves West Berlin and moves to the town of Halle in East Germany.

Though Agnes struggles to gain recognition from the East due to her ties to the West, with her firm socialist political beliefs and actions, she finally gains acceptance from her Eastern peers. Because of her marriage to a Westerner and Jochen's anti-socialist remarks at the film premiere, her application to join the East German Actors' League is rejected. To prove her political beliefs, Agnes attends the trial of director Veit Harlan (renamed Hartmann in the film), who made the film *Jew Süß*, which used pejorative representation of a Jewish character to promote antisemitism. Moreover, the Jewish extras were sent back to the ghetto after the film shooting, and most of them were immediately killed. Although Harlan was charged with crimes against humanity, he was acquitted of all charges and was still able to find sponsors, even making nine feature films in 1950 (Trumpener 138). Like Harlan, Hartmann in the film argues that the Propaganda Ministry of the Third Reich forced him to make such films (Benchik 22). Jochen's friends Frank, Pflisch, and Möbius also attend the trial, and during the trial, Möbius even testifies for Hartmann that he did not direct the film voluntarily. Despite Jochen's absence from the trial, when Agnes complained that his friends' support for Hart was disgusting, Jochen defends and countered that the Hartmann affair is not about the war, arguing that Agnes is overreacted. Apparently, this episode of Hartmann's acquittal and return to the film business exposes the flaws of Western capitalism, namely its tolerance of Nazism and the parochial concept of prioritizing profit.

Soon after, illustrating their different political points of view, Agnes and Jochen argue about why a choir of girls from Dresden came to West Berlin. Agnes thinks they were lured by the

Westerners, whereas Jochen believes they escaped into West Berlin for a better life and recites poems about freedom to them (22). However, when Jochen attends their recital, he is embarrassed to discover that some of the girls had fled back to East Germany, which both shocks him and demonstrates the hypocrisy of Western journalism. In the meantime, Agnes recites Kurth Barthel's eulogy to Stalin before a crowd of construction workers at a grand performance commemorating the building of the Stalinallee: "When this performance achieved its emotional climax with the rhetorical question 'Sagt, wie soll man Stalin danken?' it is she who articulated the equally rhetorical answer: 'Wir gaben dieser Straße seinen Namen'" (Allan 269; *Roman* 75:50-59). Agnes' strong socialist political conviction is completely vindicated, and as a result, she and other model workers are each eventually awarded an apartment lease for their contribution to building the Stalinallee.

Despite his original disapproval of socialist ideas, Jochen ultimately chooses to live in East Germany after becoming disillusioned by the West. When the Westend Theater closes due to financial problems, Pflisch sends Jochen to audition for the Americans, but when an actor, Chap, asks Pflisch for his work arrangement, Pflisch says coldly that he is not a philanthropist. Although Pflisch prepares an audition for Jochen, his attitude toward and arrangement with Chap illustrate capitalists' cold-blooded exploitation and abandonment of employees. When Jochen arrives at the movie set, the actors depict a scene in which East German hooligans kidnap pedestrians. He finds that the East German hooligans' teeth have been painted black to resemble missing teeth, and the staff shouts that this is a common phenomenon in East Germany. The act of deliberately smearing East Germany disappoints Jochen; thus, he tears up the script in his hand and quickly leaves the set.

Immediately afterward, Pflisch establishes a new film company and invites Jochen to star in a military film directed by Hartmann because the theater is no longer lucrative. As an incarnation of Western capitalism, Pflisch is only concerned with whether works of art can bring him economic success, which runs counter to Jochen's opinion about art's purpose. Although Jochen once saw art as a way to earn a living, he gradually realizes that real art accurately reflects politics and society (Benchik 24). On the way to his divorce hearing, Jochen witnesses West Germans protesting re-militarization being arrested by police. Jochen helps two of them flee the scene and picks up a flag with a dove on it, a symbol of peace, which had been dropped by a protester. Recognizing the Western views on war and having unsuccessfully attempted to integrate into the Western social system, Jochen's political thought undergoes tremendous changes, and he finally chooses to join the East. The two characters' political compatibility plays a key role in their romance; in the final scene, Jochen and Agnes give up divorce negotiations and leave the courthouse arm in arm to pursue a future in the East.

Additionally, an idealized caricature of a working-class figure, Colleague Dulz, guides Agnes to live in the East. When Agnes, helping to clean up the ruins of Berlin, is weak with hunger, Dulz gives her a slice of bread, which he remarks is plain and nothing fancy. The bread could be considered a metaphor for East Germany; though simple and unpretentious, it fulfills Agnes' basic needs (23). Furthermore, Dulz's words of comfort to Agnes display characteristics of socialist thinking. When Agnes cries after the *Stalinallee* premiere because of her argument with Jochen, which eventually leads to the divorce, Dulz tells her, "We can tell that you are one of us." (Roman 77:02-13). He also enlightens Agnes, "you can't always solve things alone, builders learn that, if the load's too heavy, it's shared"; that is, people in socialist society help each other overcome difficulties (Roman 77:06-18). His socialist thoughts also reach the

audience through the words of Brigitte, his daughter. When Agnes complains that the East German ration card she uses in the West is not worth its full value, Brigitte suggests that she move to the East and shows her and Jochen a vacant apartment. When they find that the apartment in the East is dilapidated, Jochen mocks Brigitte, saying that the West is full of shops and merchandise, while the East has no future or prospects. Quoting Dulz, her father, Brigitte replies, “The bigger the house, the greedier the foundation,” thereby denouncing the existence of class differences and military expansion in capitalist society and praising the phenomenon of equality in socialist society (Benchik 23; Roman 46:20-25).

Similarly, in the film *Story in Summer* directed by Yu Yanfu (autonym: Yu Jinglin), the protagonist falls in love with a girl who shares his socialist political ideas, and they decide to contribute to the agricultural production cooperative together. Unlike Maetzig’s *The Story of a Young Couple*, this film shows the protagonist’s political leaning more directly and emphasizes the creation of a positive hero image by lauding his sacrifice of his studies and future career and his dedication to the economic construction of collective agriculture. Yu, a member of the CCP, worked as an actor, scriptwriter and director. He shot the famous film *Start an Undertaking* (*Chuang Ye*, 1974), the first color feature film to depict the history of China’s petroleum industry based on Daqing Oilfield. *Ward 16* (*16 Hao Bing Fang*, 1983), which he co-directed with his wife Zhang Yuan, won the Best Picture Award, the 7th Public Movie Hundred-flowers Award and the 1983 Outstanding Film Award from the Ministry of Culture. The following year, *Girl from Mt. Huangshan* (*Huang Shan Lai De Gu Niang*, 1984) co-directed by the pair, received the same award (Zhu 46-47). His career as a director spanned more than 40 years, and his works had a profound impact on the development of contemporary Chinese cinema, culminating in his being awarded the title “Excellent Film Artist” in 2006.

Story in Summer revolves around the protagonist Tian Jinsheng, who is passionate about labor and collective agricultural construction. It tells the story of his selfless dedication to the construction of the rural economy. Tian Jinsheng, a junior high school graduate, is emphatically portrayed as a model of responsibility, kindness, diligence and wisdom. With these excellent virtues, he not only helps the cooperative improve its wheat planting and irrigation method, but he also exposes a crime: the accountant Mi Sanduo colluded with the rich peasant Wang Dacheng to embezzle public funds and resell food for personal profit. Furthermore, he chooses to stay in and contribute to his hometown rather than attending high school for his personal development.

Like Agnes and Jochen's love story, the relationship between Tian Jinsheng and Gao Erniu is deeply influenced by their political views. At the beginning of the film, Tian Jinsheng is deeply attracted to his classmate Mi Yulan; however, his adoration gradually disappears as he realizes that she is a selfish person who despises agricultural labor and longs for a life of wealth in a big city. In the end, he falls in love with Erniu, who is hardworking and values cooperation, unity and dedication. When Jinsheng and Yulan return to their hometown for summer vacation after their graduation ceremony, they learn that the agricultural production cooperative is unable to distribute food or purchase fertilizer because its accounts are not accurately settled. Due to the lack of fertilizer, the wheat field managed by Erniu and her brother, Baoming, is stunted and grows very slowly. Jinsheng volunteers to help them dig mud from the river for fertilizer, and he warmly invites Yulan to participate. Although Jinsheng's mother had asked them to borrow some wheat from his uncle that day, Jinsheng and Aizhen, his sister, secretly help dig the mud, despite their mother's instruction and their beautiful new clothes. In the mud-digging scene, all the young people smile as they work hard, except Yulan, who is annoyed because her hands are

getting sore from the farm implements. Her expressions of contempt and disgust contrast sharply with the hard-working people, hinting at her subsequent political differences with Jinsheng, a committed socialist (*Story in Summer* 15:10-53).

Jinsheng and Erniu grow closer because they start to help with the accounting together, and Erniu's perseverance and diligence, admirable qualities in socialist society, gradually attract Jinsheng. When Jinsheng hears the villagers complain that Mi Sanduo did not settle the accounts on time, causing their donkeys to be hungry and unable to help with farm work, he suggests that Erniu help settle the accounts. At that time, she is both a vital force on the production team and the leader of the work group. Although Erniu worries that she would not be able to settle the complicated accounts, Jinsheng reassures her and promises to help her often. After gentle persuasion, Erniu finally agrees. However, she is repeatedly obstructed by the wily Mi Sanduo, who attempts to hide his embezzlement. Thus, as Erniu calculates, Sanduo deliberately reports data quickly and incorrectly. He also blames Erniu for her poor arithmetic skills, but when she asks to calculate again, he uses various excuses to let her rest and complains about the complexity of the accounting work. Despite multiple obstacles and physical exhaustion, Erniu insists on handling accounting work while sick in order to distribute food and funds to the villages as soon as possible. Similarly, Jinsheng stays up late to prepare for high school in order to help with farm work and accounting during the day. The actions of the two characters show the strong will of the working people, and the film praises their attitudes and efforts to take responsibility for collective agriculture.

By contrast, Yulan and Jinsheng's different political views drive a wedge between them. Yulan's career and personal plan run counter to Jinsheng's. Jinsheng, believing that personal interests must be subordinate to national and collective interests, suggests that Yulan work for

the agricultural cooperative. After learning that Yulan failed to pass the high school entrance exam, Jinsheng advises her to study for another year while running a private school, joining the agricultural production team or helping her father, Mi Sanduo, with accounting work for the collective. As a staunch socialist, Jinsheng attempts to persuade her to contribute to society in return for the government's support for their studies, and he claims that there is no particular distinction between jobs as long as they are beneficial to society. However, Yulan resolutely refuses, believing that doing farm work is suffering and that being an accountant would be worthless because it is not the career she studied for.

Moreover, because Mi Sanduo and the wealthy peasant Wang Dacheng worry that Jinsheng's intervention will expose their misappropriation of public funds, Wang Dacheng proposes marrying Yulan to Wan Shicheng, a shop owner whose wife recently died, to make money to fill the funding gap. Although Yulan refuses at first, due to her disagreement with Jinsheng's political opinions, she finally accepts the marriage arrangement for a life of wealth. Yulan speaks highly of the living standard in big cities and attempts to persuade Jinsheng to study at an industrial technical school in Taiyuan City with her. However, Jinsheng expresses his positive expectations for rural development. He hopes that Yulan will become an accountant and himself, an agricultural specialist; thus, they could work for the agricultural cooperative together to improve living standards in the villages. On the one hand, Jinsheng's comments promote the importance of collective agriculture in socialist life and convey a belief in the importance of class consciousness over individual subjectivity; on the other hand, he directly attacks the capitalist ideas of selfish individualism and materialism.

In this film, the heroes with socialist political ideas are rewarded, and the capitalist bourgeoisie is punished. For example, Mi Sanduo and Wang Dacheng do not receive funds from

Wan Shicheng, who is revealed to be in significant debt, so they try to secretly steal the account books to cover up their crime but are eventually caught by the police; this indicates that egoistical capitalist ideologies are eventually destroyed. By contrast, Jinsheng finally decides to give up high school and take a year off to help the agricultural cooperative with accounting affairs due to the lack of talent in the village. With the help of Jinsheng and Erniu, the cooperative successfully opens a tractor station and purchases a waterwheel, which greatly improves work efficiency. In the final scene, the villagers distribute wheat piled higher than the height of a person, and all those who receive it wear satisfied smiles. Undoubtedly, there are very clear differences between the endings of the different classes in this film, revealing its support for socialism and its function as socialist propaganda.

Overall, *The Story of a Young Couple* and *Story in Summer* both examine the role of political ideologies as the most significant factor in the protagonist's choice of his or her partner. In *The Story of a Young Couple*, for example, Jochen and Agnes' differences in political thought lead to a break-up of their relationship, but after Jochen realizes the shortcomings of Western capitalist society, namely its discrimination and hostility towards the East German people as well as the retention of Nazi militarist ideology, he eventually chooses to live in East Berlin, which means that he identifies with the communist ideology of East Germany, and this is what reunites the couple. Similarly, in the *Story in Summer*, Jinsheng ends up with a proletarian-minded Erniu and abandons Yulan, who despises work and selfishly pursues personal goals and wealth instead of working for the collective.

In the meantime, both *The Story of a Young Couple* and *Story in Summer* profoundly embody the three key characteristics of socialist realist works as containing communist heroes as role models, reflecting historical reality and promoting a collective economy. Firstly, the

thoughts, behavior, and personalities of the the protagonists are all glorified by the film. Agnes and Dulz, as well as Jinsheng and Erniu, are typical proletarian role models, that is, they are all hard-working and simple, able to resist the material temptations of Western capitalist society and willing to contribute their labour to the collective at the expense of their personal careers and dreams.

Secondly, the images of collective co-creation of economic value are brought to the fore, whether in the scenes of East Germans moving bricks together to build collective houses and the grand ceremony to commemorate the building of the Stalinallee in *The Story of a Young Couple*, or in the scenes of farmers digging mud together to make fertilizer and sharing grain in the *Story in Summer*, which promote the positive aspects of collective labour and suggest a bountiful harvest for those who participate in the collective community.

Thirdly, although both films are closely linked to the reality of life in the early 1950s, there are significant differences in the main themes of the two. *Story in Summer* is about the internal class conflicts in the peasant commune movement, while *The Story of a Young Couple* deals with the questions of belonging to the German people after the division of East and West Germany. In addition to the thematic differences, the contents of these films also have different focuses. For example, the East German director emphasizes the portrayal of the different attitudes of East and West Germany in reflecting on the Nazi past and glorifies East Germany's performance in opposing the war and Nazi militarism, while the Chinese director focuses on portraying the selfish, profit-motivated image of domestic bourgeois figures and highlighting the great selflessness of the proletariat.

Conclusion

Both China and East Germany faced the challenges of rapidly developing their socialist economies while maintaining social stability and national integrity during 1949-1979. Using the Soviet system as a model, each country implemented a centrally-planned economic system accompanied by a centralized power structure; their governments monopolized economic and political affairs, leaving little room for regional governments, individual creativity, or international market forces. The economic consequences in both countries were characterized by an excessive increase in industrial output, lagging agricultural production, and the demands of unsatisfied citizens. From the 1960s to the early 1970s, East Germany and China underwent many adjustments of their economic policies; however, fearing that the decentralization of power would lead to the collapse of their regimes, both countries retained a tight grip on their economic systems through political might. East Germany abruptly veered toward economic collapse and was drowning in debt in the late 1970s, while China implemented economic reforms and opened up to outside interests. These reforms gradually strengthened China's national economy, improved its people's living standards, and further stabilized its communist regime.

Under each political system, the ideas and theories of the foremost leaders of the ruling parties in China and East Germany played a decisive role in formulating cultural policies. Similarly, the governments of the two countries formulated principles and established the direction for literary and artistic creation, strengthening state censorship and prohibiting the publication of certain works. In China, Mao dictated the beliefs of the Chinese people at that time, which made it easier to promote and implement cultural policies; Mao also paid particular attention to the ideological transformation of intellectuals and made them aware of their responsibilities as socialist writers. However, the rise of Deng Xiaoping brought more freedom

and opportunities in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. Conversely, East German citizens were subjected to constant political, economic, and social oppression, resembling a compressed spring. Under the continuously tightening political tactics of the SED, more and more people chose to leave or boycott the government, which had a profound impact on the demise of East Germany.

Under similar socialist political systems, the SED and CCP used film, not for its economic or artistic functions, but as a propaganda tool. The entire film industry, from production and distribution to screening, was regulated and censored by various government agencies, which were largely dominated by loyal Party members. The industry was under such strict control that films were required to have set plots, stereotypical characters and no aesthetic experimentation (qtd. in Benchik 13). Both *The Story of a Young Couple* and *Story in Summer* have a distinctly socialist realist aesthetic, and they precisely reflect the shortcomings of film production at that time. They portray the positive character of the proletarian working people in socialist society, exaggerate the benefits of the economic system of public ownership and deliberately emphasize and criticize the drawbacks and shortcomings of bourgeois characters and the capitalist system. As a result, audiences were forced to accept the ideological indoctrination of the socialist films, and individual consciousness was limited by communist values such as politicized conformity, collectivism and deference to authority. Therefore, audiences experienced negative, low-demand psychological satisfaction (Shi 11).

Obviously, the SED and the CCP took advantage of merits of their political systems to control ordinary citizens' minds through restricting the contents and publication of artistic productions, keeping writers and artists under surveillance, as well as transforming literary and artistic works into propaganda tools. Among which, film was a representative combination of art,

literature and technology, playing an important role in publicizing these parties' political ideas in a large scale, as well as connecting the reality and fantasy to meet people's needs to stabilize the new-born regimes. Compared to the SED, the CCP did a better job in indoctrinating socialism into ordinary Chinese people, regarding the fact that the SED's regime ultimately collapsed, while the CCP is still the ruling party and continues to be the sovereign power in the mind of Chinese people.

Due to the powerful political systems and cultural policies, the supply of cultural products was out of line with the actual needs of ordinary people. In formulating cultural policies, the SED and the CCP only focused on how to make literature and art serve politics and how to suppress dissenting opinions, thereby ignoring the truth that literature and art are the reflection of social life and expressions of citizens' feelings. They ignored that governments should lead the developments of culture positively and create free and rich cultural atmospheres, rather than overly censoring or completely controlling the cultural life of ordinary people.

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