

Eggs under the Red Flag and Beyond



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In this dissertation, I considered five representative images of childhood that the Fifth Generation filmmakers created throughout a thirty-five year period of post-Maoist social transition in China since the beginning of the market reform and opening policy in 1978. To look at evolving childhood through their films is to position the construction of childhood under the prism of the most prominent and controversial cinematic transformation. On the one hand, the Fifth Generation's shift towards incorporated production, theatrical narration, sentimental style, and generally conservative ideology, signals and constitutes their transition into the paradoxes of "market-socialism;" on the other hand, it maps out the fluctuation and signification of three discourses of capitalism, socialism and Confucianism through evolving images of the child and childhood.

I expect this original work that bridges Chinese film studies with childhood studies to unfold a thorough and dynamic scroll, through which I can tap into China's social transition toward authoritarian neoliberalism, and reveal the discursive mechanism where propaganda of communist regime and re-mobilized Confucian values negotiate and compete with global capitalist orders over the construction of childhood.

This dissertation claims that the significance of childhood lies in its capability to fight against a homogenized and hostile environment as both a fundamental humanist domain, and a political, critical and imaginative weapon in commercialized Chinese society.

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