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## What's Chairman Mao Got to Do with It? Nostalgia, Intertextuality and Reconstructing Revolutionary Myth in Tsui Hark's *The Taking of Tiger Mountain by Strategy* Wendy Xie, Appalachian State University

*Abstract*

Tsui Hark's 2014 film *The Taking of Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weibushan*) is the latest in a long line of adaptations of Qu Bo's historical novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan*), one of the most canonized and adapted revolutionary works in the 1950s and 1960s. This essay seeks to trace the success of Tsui's remake to its melodramatic reconfiguration of history, memory and nostalgia. Specifically, it investigates the ways in which the film undercuts the reverential Maoist revolutionary discourse inherent in the original source material by modeling on the *wuxia* (martial arts) paradigm. In addition, the essay argues that by bookending the 1946 war story with a 2015-set prologue and epilogue, Tsui's adaptation presents the audiences with an exquisite example of how memory invokes and re-presents the past, and ultimately points to the fictionality of the reconstructed past. Finally, the essay focuses on the film's self-consciously simulacral status, and argues that Tsui is motivated by a desire to address the prevailing social climate of excessive commercialization and moral decay in contemporary China, and his retelling of a revolutionary tale is deeply implicated in nostalgic longing for idealism of a bygone era.

In the final week of 2014, the Chinese audience, old and young, flocked to the theaters across the country to watch Tsui Hark's film *The Taking of Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weibushan*; *Taking of Tiger Mountain* henceforth), making it one of the highest-grossing films of all time in Chinese cinemas. More remarkable than its commercial success, the film was heaped with critical acclaim. Tsui's film is the latest in a lengthy line of adaptations of Qu Bo's massively popular 1957 novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (*Linhai xueyuan*; *Tracks* henceforth), one of the most canonized Red Classics (a collection of the canonical Chinese socialist literary, theatrical and cinematic works depicting the Communist armed struggle produced in the PRC between 1949 and 1966). 1958 saw the first adaptations of the novel in the form of a spoken drama and multiple versions of Peking opera. Impressed by the stage version of Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe, Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, supervised a revision and renamed it *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (*Zhiqu weibushan*, Group of the Shanghai Peking Opera Troupe,

1963). Jiang's version won the approval of communist party leaders at the 1964 National Peking Opera Convention and, after further revisions, was selected as one of the Eight Model Revolutionary Works in 1966. Arguably the best-known of the very few operas allowed to be staged in China during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), its main characters became household names, especially after it was made into a film by Xie Tieli in 1970.<sup>1</sup> The 1970 version is the one that Tsui remembers watching in New York's Chinatown in the 1970s, an experience that presumably sparked his desire to retell and re-interpret the story.<sup>2</sup> Tsui was keenly aware of his film's intertextual predecessors and acknowledged the circulation and interplay of meaning across numerous preexisting texts when he confessed in his interview: 'I approached this iconic story with utmost respect and caution'.<sup>3</sup>

We could not help but wonder: how did a Hong-Kong based and US-educated director like Tsui Hark successfully tap into the cultural-historic source of the red classics while his peer filmmakers in the mainland struggled to re-package the revolutionary past for contemporary audiences?<sup>4</sup> What set of social-political circumstances impelled broad public to identify *so strongly* with such a film? These questions make the film an interesting case study of the discursive relationship among history, memory, narrative, and subjectivity. In the following, I begin with the relationship between Chinese revolutionary classics and traditional vernacular fiction. Then I proceed to explore the vexed interrelation of nostalgia, historicity, and re-presentation of past in Tsui's remake.

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent analysis of the poetics of Xie's screen adaptation, see Chris Berry, 'Red Poetics: The Films of the Chinese Cultural Revolution Revolutionary Model Operas', in *The Poetics of Chinese Cinema*, ed. by Gary Bettinson and James Udden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 29–49.

<sup>2</sup> Rui Zhang, 'Tsui Hark revives China's red classic', in *China.org* <[http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2014-12/22/content\\_34380847.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/arts/2014-12/22/content_34380847.htm)> [accessed 12 July 2017].

<sup>3</sup> Yang Xiao, 'Taking of the Tiger Mountain Qiang Qiang San Ren Xing: Interview with Tsui Hark, Zhang Hanyu and Liang Jiahui', in *news.ifeng* <[http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141229/42817262\\_0.shtml](http://news.ifeng.com/a/20141229/42817262_0.shtml)> [accessed 12 May 2017]. Unless indicated otherwise, translations from Chinese are those of the author. On Tsui Hark's reworking literary and filmic classics prior to making *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, see Po Fung, 'Re-Interpreting Classics: Tsui Hark's Screenwriting Style and Its Influence', in *The Swordsman and His Jiang Hu: Tsui Hark and Hong Kong Film*, ed. by Sam Ho and Ho Wai-leng (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2002), pp. 64–69.

<sup>4</sup> Tsui was certainly not the first Hong Kong filmmaker, who went north of the border to embrace the vast mainland Chinese film market. After the inauguration of the Closer Economic Partnership Agreement in 2003, which exempted Hong Kong-China co-productions from the import quota in mainland China, Hong Kong's film industry entered an age of co-productions with mainland studios. However, the phenomenon of Hong Kong veterans directing 'main melody' films (the Chinese government's official name for the revolutionary propaganda genre) started with Tsui's *Taking of Tiger Mountain*.

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### *Wuxia Paradigm and Reconstructing Revolutionary Myth*

The bulk of *Taking of Tiger Mountain* takes place in the snowy mountains of northeastern China in 1946 amid the civil war (after the Japanese had been defeated in the Second World War). A squad of the Communist People's Liberation Army, Unit 203, is tasked to take down a gang of bandits, led by Lord Hawk, headquartered at a former Japanese fortress and arsenal atop of Tiger Mountain. Outgunned, outmanned and with time running short, the squad attempts to accomplish its mission by sending one of their men, Yang Zirong, to infiltrate the bandits' camp. Posing as a fellow bandit, Zirong surreptitiously smuggles out information regarding the stronghold so that his squad can plan an attack. Hawk and some of the other bandits are suspicious of the newcomer's motives, and Zirong is constantly tested for his loyalty. Zirong eventually forms an alliance with Qinglian, Hawk's kidnapped concubine, who uses her feminine wiles to try to escape Hawk's clutches. Their alliance is formed after she learns that her son, Knotti, whom she was forced to leave behind, has been rescued by the PLA unit. With Zirong's help, Unit 203 launches its attack on Tiger Mountain during a New Year's Eve celebration and triumphantly brings Hawk and his gang down.<sup>5</sup>

One of the reasons that Tsui felt such an affinity for an iconic red classic can be partly attributed to the fact that Qu's novel, despite its revolutionary realism trappings of the 1950s, reads like a 'chaptered novel' deeply rooted in Chinese vernacular fictional tradition, with larger-than-life heroes and legendary adventures. Unlike many of his contemporary writers, who were trained in the leftist, socialist realistic rhetoric and literature, Qu had little formal orthodoxy revolutionary education in writing. But he was well read in classical Chinese fiction. In his post-scripts to *Tracks*, Qu confesses that his true literary imagination is fueled by classical novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo yanyi*, Luo Guanzhong, fourteenth-century; *Romance* henceforth) and *Water Margin* (*Shuibu zhuàn*, Shi Nai'an, sixteen-century) from which he could recite long passages from memory. Believing that the traditional aesthetics is well suited for the narration of a revolutionary story, Qu acknowledges, 'when I wrote [*Tracks*], I tried hard to write in the traditional style in terms of structure, language, characterizations'.<sup>6</sup>

Robert E. Hegel offers an in-depth and illuminating study of the parallels of *Tracks* with classical vernacular fiction and identifies Qu's debt to *Water Margin* and *Romance*. Most obviously, Qu Bo adapts a well-known *Water Margin* episode:

<sup>5</sup> Tsui's fascination with narratives set in China's Republican era (1912–1949) can be traced back to as early as his 1986 film *Peking Opera Blues*, which centers on three young women from different social classes who become embroiled in a revolutionary plot to overthrow the military government. For a comprehensive discussion of the film, see Tan See Kam, *Tsui Hark's Peking Opera Blues* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Bo Qu, *Lin Hai Xue Yuan* [*Tracks in the Snowy Forest*] (Beijing: Ren min wen xue chu ban she, 1997), p. 588.

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Figs. 1-2. Undated photograph of Zhirong (on the left); historical group photo (above).



Fig. 3. Re-enactment by the film's cast of the historical group photo



Fig. 4. Photograph of Squad 203 after their Triumph at Tiger Mountain. Photographer unknown.

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in the imitation of Wu Song killing the tiger with his bare hands while passing through a mountainous region, Qu's protagonist Zirong crosses a mountainous region of China's northeast and kills a tiger with his gun.<sup>7</sup> In Tsui's remake, the tiger-killing scene is not only recast, but with the help of 3D technology and CGI imagery, Zirong battling the hungry tiger on the treetops is one of the most thrilling moments in the film. Later in the film, Tsui also made Zirong sing a song with references to Zhao Zilong, one of the most celebrated heroes of *Romance*.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, *Water Margin* and *Romance* are military romances-cum-tales of chivalry and literary antecedents of the *wuxia* (martial arts) genre. There are many elements of the classical *wuxia* genre in Qu's episodic adventure novel. For instance, the opening chapter, titled 'Blood Debt', is a giveaway of the style of the *wuxia* fiction. This chapter begins with the residents of an entire village being brutally massacred by bandits, thus setting up the archetypal chivalric narrative themes in the chapters to follow: bloodshed, grievances and revenge. The parallels between Qu's novel and the *wuxia* fiction are also evident in their worldviews. Like *wuxia* writers, Qu perceived the world as polarized camps. His communist heroes, like his *wuxia* counterparts, seek to find justice in an unjust world with a clear definition between right and wrong, with the only difference that in Qu's adaption, justice for individuals is replaced with a collectivist cause. In addition, Qu drew the characterizations of his heroes and villains from the *wuxia* tradition that emphasizes type-characters and clearly defined role categories with the extremes of behavior. The PLA soldiers are portrayed as virtuous, principled, and altruistic heroes in their quest to eliminate evil on behalf of the oppressed. They exhibit a clear affinity to the traditional knight-errant in their unflagging strength and courage. As the perfect embodiment of selfless devotion to the communists' goals, they are utterly lacking in moral, political and ideological ambiguities and complexities. By contrast, the bandits are treacherous, covetous and sadistic villains. They are depicted with an almost cartoon-like exaggeration of insidiousness.

As a member of the Hong Kong New Wave, Tsui is responsible for reviving and reshaping the Chinese *wuxia* films at the end of the 1970s and start of the 1980s and known for his well-choreographed, imaginative action sequences. It seems only logical for him to highlight the *wuxia* elements embedded in the Mao-era red classic and rework it into a '*wuxia* film with guns'. In a classical *wuxia*

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Hegel, 'Making the Past Serve the Present in Fiction and Drama from the Yan'an Forum to the Cultural Revolution', in *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the People's Republic of China 1949-1979*, ed. by Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 197-223 (p. 215). For further discussion on the intersection between classical vernacular fiction and revolutionary discourse in *Tracks*, see Krista Van Fleit Hang, *Literature the People Love: Reading Chinese Texts from the Early Maoist Period (1949-1966)* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 91-117.

<sup>8</sup> The military Song of Beiyang Army's 4th Division during the Republic of China sung by Zirong has the following lyrics: 'Among all the heroes of the Three Kingdoms, Zhao Zilong was the best. At the Battle of Changban, on full display was his bravery'.

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Figs. 5-8.  
*The Taking of Tiger Mountain*. Scene  
stills.



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fashion, Tsui uses the vast sparsely populated mountains of Manchuria covered with snow, the pine forests, a steam locomotive snaking through the ice, and a gothic castle built with huge cement, as the backdrop for the actions. In a keen reminder of the imaginary, utopian world *jianghu* (literally 'rivers and lakes'), the good (PLA soldiers) and bad knights-errant (bandits) engage in an epic battle based on the codes of *xia*: justice, altruism, loyalty, bravery, and righteousness.

Zirong in Tsui's version is a more complex character than in Qu's novel. It involves another archetypal stratagem of the *wuxia* genre: a flawed hero succeeds in overcoming a rapacious and powerful villain. At the start of the film, Zirong joins the squad as an outsider and, with his full beard and unusual outfit, looks like a bandit more than a PLA soldier. When the squad commander expresses mistrust based on his non-soldier like behaviors, Zirong feels compelled to resign from the PLA to assume his undercover disguise. Disobeying orders from his commanding officer and acting on his own initiative set Zirong apart from the one-dimensional communist hero portrayed in Qu's original work. Upon entering the bandits' lair, Zirong outsmarts the bandits with incredible skills and courage. In all these, Zirong seems to pose as a stand-in for *wuxia* genre's wandering, chivalrous swordsman seeking self-serving adventures.

At the core of the *wuxia* genre is the well-choreographed spectacle of violence — heroes and villains fighting each other and performing extravagant feats. *Taking of Tiger Mountain* models on the *wuxia* paradigm and overloads the viewer's senses with bullets-flying and blood- spurting shootouts between the PLA and the bandits. There are three major action sequences in the film — the opening warehouse skirmish, the bandits' attack on Leather Creek village, and the final siege on Hawk's mountain fortress. In his analysis of the Hong Kong action film, David Bordwell stresses the importance of *stasis* in the choreography of a fight sequence.<sup>9</sup> One could argue that the narrative structure of Tsui's remake is organized around a 'pause-thrust-pause' pattern, with the action sequences interspersed as pure spectacles to break the diegetic flow. The moments of excessive violence, gunplay, and explosive pyrotechnics are best displayed in slow motion cinematography or 'Bullet Time', as made popular by the Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003): the camera follows the advance of bullets as they fly at and through their targets and sees how they ricochet through them.

While Qu deploys many fantastic elements and the episodic structure of the *wuxia* fiction in the service of a narrative of communist liberation, it is interesting to note that Tsui transforms an episode in China's civil war between the communists and the nationalists, a deeply political discourse, into an ideologically neutral narrative of an epic battle between heroes and villains. The communist propaganda, i.e. the logic of class struggle, is thus concealed and suspended

<sup>9</sup> David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 221–247.

by a *wuxia* concept of good vs. evil.<sup>10</sup> In the climactic finale, the PLA squad commander says: 'It's over. I hope Knotti's generation won't see war again'. As such Tsui's representation of the communist history serves mainly to articulate a value that is universal and undifferentiated: the belief in a better tomorrow, which is apparently at odds with the hegemonic Maoist revolutionary discourse of a 'continuous revolution'. In fact, *Tracks* ends with the last entry of Jianbo's diary: 'Today, a new struggle begins'. As Hegel rightly points out, 'Qu Bo here prefigures a sequel; his work thus becomes a single, multi-segmented episode in the saga of the broader revolutionary struggle'. Although his larger-than-life knights-errant fit well with the tradition of the Maoist hero: indomitable of spirit and formidable of strength even in the face of the most pernicious obstacles, Tsui slyly undercut the reverential Communist ideology of the highly political original text by eliminating any symbols of political significance. Red stars, red flags, PLA-specific cap insignias, and any mention of the communist party or Chairman Mao are stripped away in his remake. Also, the Leather Creek villagers are portrayed as cowards and in dire need of salvation, which is in stark contrast to Qu's portrayal of their impassionate support for the PLA soldiers. Eager to fight Hawk and his men and by extension the nationalists, the villagers in Qu's narrative are not only the object of salvation but the agent of salvation. With the political event being transformed into a chivalric tale, Tsui's remake suggests a degree of subversiveness and challenge to the government-sanctioned narrative of history.

### *Nostalgia and Historical (In)authenticity*

As shown previously, *Taking of Tiger Mountain's* emphasis on punishing evil and exalting goodness and on a visual style less concerned with cinematic verisimilitude than bombarding audiences with a series of images of spectacular excess results in deliberate de-politicization of the highly propagandist narrative inherent in the original source material. The strategic absences of political consciousness are reinforced by Tsui's inventing a modern-day narrator Jimmy (played by Hang Geng, the Chinese Justin Timberlake), and bookending the 1946 war story with a 2015-set prologue and epilogue, thus recasting the historical event into an individual, personal witness account. Tsui's remake is often taken to be a historical epic, but the individualist perspective points to the ultimate fictionality of the narrative. I argue that this fictionality lays claim of the film as an alternative to Maoist histories and presents us with an exquisite example of

<sup>10</sup> In this respect, *Taking of Tiger Mountain* feels like an update of *The Raid* that Tsui co-directed in 1991, which is based on the historical events of the 1930s, when Japanese-occupied Manchuria have set up the last Chinese emperor Pu Yi as their puppet leader. Like *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, *The Raid* uses the Sino-Japanese War as a backdrop for an action-adventure narrative that sidesteps most political themes.



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how memory invokes and re-presents the past. What is at stake here is not how accurately the film recreates an episode from China's civil war, but rather how, or how far, it is shaped by a desire to offer a particular interpretation of the past, by the cultural and political imperatives informing the film's moment of production.

*Tracks* has many autobiographical elements. The plot draws on its author's real-life experiences in the civil war. Shao Jianbo, the PLA squad commander, bears a great resemblance to Qu, who commanded the squad himself that defeated Hawk's bandit gang. Zirong was closely based on one of Qu's close comrades-in-arms. Zirong, whose real name was used in the novel, was famous for his experience in different trades and his expertise in local culture and bandit argot. His versatile skills made him an ideal PLA scout after he joined the army. In 1946, when his squad became aware of the hidden fortress of Hawk and his gang, Zirong masqueraded as a bandit in a rival gang and went undercover. He quickly won the trust of the bandits and eventually captured Hawk along with 25 other bandits. The head of the bandits, Hawk, and some minor characters, such as Gao B, were modeled after real-life people as well. In fact, the novel was mainly written to honor Qu's memory of his fellow soldiers: 'With utmost respect, the book is dedicated to my heroic comrades-in-arms Yang Zirong and Gao Bo'. Yet, based on Qu's account, his first draft, which started with dry facts, went through so many revisions that the final product was largely fictionalized and dramatized.<sup>11</sup> However, without being labeled or advertised as a memoir or a realistic historical account, the novel never deterred its readers from reading it as an autobiography.

Tsui was fully aware of the connection between the fictional story and the historical event when he concludes with his film with 3 black and white photographs. The first one is an undated photograph of Zirong, the historical figure, captioned by details of his life, such as the year of his birth and death, and his original name and birthplace (fig. 1). The second one is a historical group photo taken on August 1, 1946, featuring Zirong and his comrades-in-arms at an awards ceremony (fig. 2). The photo then dissolves into a third photograph and the final shot of the film, showing the heroes of the PLA squad celebrating their triumphant attack at Tiger Mountain (fig. 3). Despite providing the illusion of a historical moment coded in the past tense, the third photograph is in fact a re-enactment by the film's cast of the historical group gathering as recorded in a 1946 photograph (fig. 4). While the inclusion of the first two historical photographs integrates the historical event into the fictional world of the film's diegesis, the third image, in its sudden arrest of movement and black and white contrast, functions as a mechanism of narrative closure and as a figure of aligning the film with the authentic telling of history. The momentary 'lapse' from a 'real'

<sup>11</sup> The popularity of the novel brought Qu's former comrade-in-arms, Sun Dade, unexpected fame and he suddenly found himself in high demand for interviews and speech tours. However, his eyewitness account of the battle, a more accurate and closer version to historical truth without any flourishes and embellishments, offered contrast to Qu's fictionalized account.

representation into an imaginary one highlights the filmmaker's conscious choice of dialogue between history and the retelling of history and memory. Moreover, the subtle blending of history and the imagining of history seems to emphasize his efforts in erasing the mediation and its representational status.

However, the very notion of 'realness' is cast into doubt by the film's self-conscious employment of a narrator. It begins with a present-day scenario that portrays Jimmy, a young Chinese expat, fresh out of college and Silicon Valley-bound, attending his farewell party thrown by a group of friends at a karaoke bar in New York City. When a famous aria *Climbing Tiger Mountain* from *Tiger Mountain* is queued up on the karaoke machine, the partygoers become confused and quickly switch to another song. But Jimmy is mesmerized: the *Tiger Mountain* story happens to be set in his hometown. After the party, he is due to fly back to China to spend Chinese Lunar New Year with his family. On his way to the airport, Jimmy decides to re-watch the aria on his phone (fig. 5). Safely separated from the outside world in a mood of subjectivity, Jimmy's viewing in the taxi blends into a retelling of the first segment of the 1946 *Tiger Mountain* tale taking place in China's northeast — the warehouse skirmish between Hawk's men and PLA squad.

The second sequence of the film begins with a historical steam locomotive traveling through the snow-covered forests, which is soon superseded by a contemporary high-speed bullet train apparently traveling the same route but with the narrator Jimmy as one of its passengers. When Jimmy sets his eyes on a sketchbook image featuring a sleeping woman, it dissolves into a shot of a mysterious artist working on the sketch while traveling in the steam locomotive back in 1946. This sequence concludes with a full-color image of the sunrise on Tiger Mountain following the night of PLA's victorious attack, which fades into a sketch of the exact sunrise scenery in black and white. As the camera pulls back to reveal it as an image in the sketchbook that Jimmy is holding, the film returns to its present-day frame. The identity of the artist of the sketchbook is now unmasked as Zirong. Thus, the second segment, starting with the entrance of Zirong and ending with his squad's defeat of Hawk, is framed by Jimmy's reminiscences and unfolds in one long flashback narrated from his point of view.

The film's present-day frame continues in the epilogue as Jimmy arrives at Grandma's house. Noticing the huge amount of food on New Year's Eve's dinner table, Jimmy inquires if Grandma is expecting any guests. 'What guests? They are all family', Grandma's response triggers Jimmy to imagine the PLA squad and Knotti being transported from 1946 and joining him at the table (fig. 6). It is only now revealed that Knotti is Jimmy's now deceased grandfather and the young daughter of the Leather Creek village head, Little Juan, his grandmother. Invoked by the sight of the heroes from the past, Jimmy recalls the hidden airstrip at Tiger Mountain that his grandfather has mentioned and offers an alternate ending to the wartime drama, in which Zirong duets with Hawk and eventually rescues Qinglian, Jimmy's great-grandmother, from a plane that Hawk is trying to take off in an action-packed and spectacle-laden fashion. The final scene sees

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the film transition back to the present time with Grandma, Jimmy and the PLA squad watching an iconic sequence from *Tiger Mountain* featuring Zirong's first encounter with Hawk at the bandits' lair on TV (fig. 7). The camera gradually closes in on the TV image until it takes over the full screen (fig. 8).

Tsui's employment of a personal narrator stands in stark contrast to his predecessors. The earlier adaptations of *Tracks*, including the 1960 film and the 1986 and 2003 TV dramas, all use an opening crawl or a neutral authoritative narrator's voice to introduce the historical background of the story.<sup>12</sup> With the constructed nature of the fictional historical discourse being concealed by the apparently unmediated, objective voice, the viewer is presented the illusion of accurate representation of an actual past and historical reality. However, Jimmy's visible narrative presence in Tsui's remake destroys any seeming transparency to the past and prevents the film from ever taking on the appearance of a true chronicle of events. The past is conjured up, restructured and reconstructed through the eyes of an invented figure. The film is Jimmy's personal, subjective and partial reimagining of the 1946 event. His preoccupation with his own family history and his urge to reconnect to the greatness of his forebears drive the narrative. A grand narrative of class struggle and national salvation is thus turned into a family legend.<sup>13</sup>

Jimmy finds his connection to the past resonant with personal meaning and through him multi-generational Chinese project their longing for the past onto the screen. It is important to read nostalgic longing as fundamentally concerned more with the present than with the past.<sup>14</sup> Tsui's film re-stages and re-packages the revolutionary tale for contemporary audiences and speaks explicitly to current social and political issues confronting Chinese society. With excessive commercialization and ruthless market and profit-driven ambitions readily embraced by as global norms, the post-Mao society in the past twenty years has been pestered by commercialism, ethical relativism, and moral decay. In Tsui's remake, the lament about the loss of heroism and idealism today is translated into the yearning for the glory of a bygone era. Tsui tries to re-appropriate the iconic

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed comparison between *Taking of Tiger Mountain* and the previous adaptations, see Zhang Xiuhe, 'The Reincarnation of Tiger Mountain: Post-Socializing the Model Opera Film (Yangbanxi)' (unpublished M.A. thesis, San Francisco State University, 2017), <<https://sfsu-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/197283/AS362017FILMZ43.pdf?sequence=1>> [accessed 21 March 2018].

<sup>13</sup> Nathan To also points out the role of the narrator Jimmy in urging diasporic Chinese in the West to rediscover their roots and heritage through a vision of re-connecting with the Motherland, see 'A Revolution for Memory: Reproductions of a Communist Utopia through Tsui Hark's The Taking of Tiger Mountain and Posters from the Cultural Revolution', in *Frames Cinema Journal* <<http://framescinemajournal.com/article/a-revolution-for-memory-reproductions-of-a-communist-utopia-through-tsui-harks-the-taking-of-tiger-mountain-and-posters-from-the-cultural-revolution/>> [accessed 21 March 2018].

<sup>14</sup> Grainge, Paul, 'Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes and Media Recycling', in *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, 23.1 (2000), 27-34 (p. 27).

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idealism in the Red Classics and seems to be certain that the revival of heroism and chivalry will fill the spiritual vacuum and purge society of threatening evils.<sup>15</sup>

In *Taking of Tiger Mountain*, nostalgic longing is based on both memory and imagination, inspired by Jimmy's contact with representations, whether they be his grandfather's witness account (for that matter, legend), the historical photographs, the 1970 model opera film that sandwiches his flashback to the past, or Zirong's sketchbook — apparently inherited from his grandfather. The representations demonstrate Tsui's attempt to forge explicit continuity with its predecessors and to integrate his adaptation into authentic history. At the same time, they are also unmistakable evidence of the film's intertextuality and its nostalgic structure. It is a reproduction of past modes of representational styles and narratives that include productions and transpositions from Qu's 1957 novel onward. In Tsui's recreation of the wartime drama, historical reality and its representation are collapsed and Tsui's/Jimmy's 'reality' takes on quotation marks. With the modern-day framing device, its repeated quotation and revision of pre-existing texts, the film is self-consciously positioned as representational rather than original. Its self-consciously simulacral status undermines any claims to verisimilitude and belies any attempts to read the film as historically 'authentic'. Like modeling on a *wuxia* paradigm and de-politicizing the communist ideological dogma, the anti-realist tendency is one of the primary means employed by the filmmaker to resist and propose an alternative approach to the Maoist discourse that has dominated the previous adaptations. Without laying claim to 'truth' or 'reality', Tsui's remake encourages a thoughtful, self-aware spectatorship and potentially addresses the insistent and unabating yearning for heroism and idealism.

<sup>15</sup> 'Why would these exhausted soldiers in the archived photos continue to sacrifice for their hometown and their fellow countrymen? It was [...] because they had faith. I think Zirong's faith was most romantic. People need faith. If we don't have it, our lives would be empty and shriveled'. Tsui Hark, 'I Think Yang Zirong's Faith Was Most Romantic', *Huashang Bao* <[http://hsb.hsw.cn/2014-12/27/content\\_8560496.htm](http://hsb.hsw.cn/2014-12/27/content_8560496.htm)> [accessed 6 May 2018].