arts

MDPI

Article

When State-Endorsed Cinema Meets Marvel: A Study of *Wolf Warrior II*'s Global Superhero Vernacular

Lilian Kong [1,2]

[1] Department of Cinema and Media Studies, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637, USA; lkong168@uchicago.edu
[2] Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60637, USA

Abstract: Chinese state-endorsed films have transformed in the past decade. These films make up the "new mainstream", a genre defined by its ability to match strides with Hollywood commercial cinema. But, what exactly comprises Hollywood's impact on official Chinese media? How does it manifest onscreen? Exploring the relationship between state-endorsed blockbusters and Hollywood, this article analyzes a pioneer of the "new mainstream", *Wolf Warrior II* (2017). This film stands out as the inaugural collaboration between Chinese media conglomerates and Marvel Cinematic Universe directors. From this collaboration emerges the film's protagonist, Leng Feng, an ex-soldier who saves civilians from rebel forces in Africa. As Leng enacts justice at home and abroad, however, affective portrayals of his feats foreground ambiguity over coherence and unresolvable impulses over a singular agendum. These melodramatic sites of contradiction, I argue, culminate in the film's own "global superhero vernacular". Such a vernacular aligns with transnationally circulating serial franchise logics, pushing the film's connection with Marvel beyond local–global and state–market binaries. Ultimately, my analysis complicates the smooth thread that links together the superhuman individual, nationalist sovereign power, and international order, thereby re-evaluating state-endorsed cinema's role within Chinese media cultures and social fields.

Keywords: state-endorsed Chinese cinema; global vernaculars; sovereignty; seriality; (trans)national approaches to superhero studies

Citation: Kong, Lilian. 2023. When State-Endorsed Cinema Meets Marvel: A Study of *Wolf Warrior II*'s Global Superhero Vernacular. *Arts* 12: 252. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12060252

Academic Editors: Zhuoyi Wang and Laura Jo-Han Wen

Received: 23 September 2023
Revised: 3 December 2023
Accepted: 11 December 2023
Published: 13 December 2023

1. Introduction

Since the 2010s, Mainland Chinese state-endorsed films have ushered in a new phase of commercial filmmaking as well as nationalist fervor. Releases such as *Taking of Tiger Mountain* (智取威虎山, 2014), *The Wandering Earth* (流浪地球, 2019), and *Battle at Lake Changjin* (长津湖, 2021) flaunt globe- and universe-spanning, action-packed aesthetics and high production values. The blockbuster quality of such films is reminiscent of Hollywood's powerful, longstanding, and no doubt troubled role in the domestic film industry. Chinese critics notably consider these films to be part of the "new mainstream" (新主流), characterized by their ability to compete with Hollywood's aesthetics, budget, and level of global appeal (Wang 2022; Chen 2017).

Yet, not least due to its inherent complexity and large-scale transformations in the 21st century, Hollywood's global influence is hard to pinpoint. This article investigates contemporary trends in Hollywood production and distribution that certain Chinese state-endorsed films work with. Diverging from recent research that condenses the domestic film industry's relationship with Hollywood into a state-engineered soft power strategy (Kokas 2017; Keane 2010, 2019; Zhu et al. 2020), I ask: what varied modes of nationalist affect and global orientation arise from these transnational collaborations? How do they extend beyond mere state mouthpiece to engage politically with broader media cultures and publics, at home and abroad? Above all, how are these dynamics expressed onscreen? My aim is to reframe the domestic film industry's relationship with Hollywood through the lens of sensory politics and aesthetic analysis.

With this vision in mind, I focus on the state-endorsed hit *Wolf Warrior II* (战狼二, *2017*), and the kind of superheroism it has so successfully cultivated. The sequel to *Wolf Warrior* (战狼, *2015*), *Wolf Warrior II* follows ex-People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldier Leng Feng as he protects African and Chinese civilians against African rebel forces. As an action-filled narrative that departs from the socialist-era historical legacy, it was China's highest grossing domestic film until *Battle at Lake Changjin* topped the charts in 2021, and Wu Jing, the film's director and star, is now an icon of the "new mainstream". The film thus epitomizes recent changes in state-endorsed cinema.

An under-discussed element of *Wolf Warrior II*'s success is its collaboration with a franchise that has not simply influenced, but wholly reshaped Hollywood. *Wolf Warrior II* heralds Chinese media conglomerates' first partnership with Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) directors Anthony and Joseph Russo. Actor Frank Grillo and action choreographer Sam Hargrave, who both play important roles in *Wolf Warrior II*, also participated heavily in the MCU[1]. The seeds that grew into this specific collaboration were planted in 2014, when the Russo brothers successfully promoted *Captain America: Winter Soldier* (2014) in Beijing. Shortly after, they began to plan joint ventures. One such joint venture was Anthem & Song, established in 2016 with a Beijing private equity fund and film distributor. The studio set its sights on producing a Chinese-language superhero franchise. When Chinese fans heard about this goal, they playfully begged for a "Captain China" (Brzeski 2016). It is no coincidence, then, that when Anthem & Song helped Leng Feng grace the big screen, he was immediately nicknamed "Captain China" (Pengpai News 2017), as none other than China's first superhero[2].

"Superhero", as character and concept, always invites symbolic interpretation. After all, superheroes are the Übermensch, both embodying and overpowering technological, national, and commercial systems. The equation of American superheroes' transcendent individualism with the strength of a super -state or -race has been discussed since World War II[3]. Yet, to reduce *Wolf Warrior II*'s superheroism to a singular (geo)political agendum is to leave other aspects of the film's collaboration underexplored.

Taking seriously Hollywood's current franchise era, I argue that Leng Feng's superheroism is in fact constructed out of internally polarized, serial rhythms, generating what I call its own "global superhero vernacular". My term critically engages Miriam Hansen's concept of "vernacular modernism", which places emphasis on classical Hollywood aesthetics that foreground social, technological, and political "contradictions…at the level of the senses" (Hansen 1999, p. 70). Indeed, *Wolf Warrior II* not only thrives off of contradiction, most notably in Leng's domestic and global orientations towards justice, but also extends these sensorial tensions to realm of transmedial seriality. Such a superhero vernacular thus sheds new light on state-endorsed cinema's expressions of both sovereign power, troubling easy equivalences between supermen and superstates, and broader media cultures.

2. The Mainstream and the Main Melody: Historicizing State-Endorsed Cinema

A bloody fistfight marks the climax of *Wolf Warrior II*. Leng Feng suffers blow after blow from evil American mercenary Big Daddy (Frank Grillo), who has been leading the rebel forces towards mass civilian violence. Seeing that victory is almost at hand, Big Daddy straddles atop Leng. He whispers, "people like you will always be inferior to people like me". Leng retorts, "that fucking was in the past", before jabbing a small blade into Big Daddy's throat. Reinforced by the implementation of an actual "Wolf Warrior" approach to foreign diplomacy in 2021[4], this scene leads scholars and critics to quickly diagnose the agenda of recent state-endorsed films. While many express giddiness over the novelty of Leng Feng's rogue individualism by comparing him to Hollywood icons such as Bruce Lee and Rambo (Berry 2018; Teo 2019; Hu and Guan 2021), these comparisons oft end with a simple conclusion: the state now thirsts for global expansion[5], and Hollywood has become another land to infiltrate. The state has become the sinister "designated driver" of the global film "market-as-engine" (Davis 2014, p. 194).

This section sets up a less monolithic approach to our Chinese superhero by placing state-endorsed films within China's broader context of mass commercialization, globalization, and privatization. Since the 1980s, critics and directors have commented on the rise of commercial mainstream culture[6], and in 1993, the sole centralized film buyer and distributor since 1949, China Film Corporation (CFC), lost its distribution monopoly in the midst of privatization reforms[7]. Two years later, the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (MRFT)[8] began allowing the import of ten Hollywood films per year. During the same year that Hollywood acquired its first stable presence in China since the late 1940s, the MRFT mandated the long-term production of state-funded films. Ten state-funded films were to be produced annually for five years, under the 9550 Project.

Held right before the height of these reforms, the 1987 National Film Studio Board of Directors meeting inaugurated a slogan that continues to influence media production today. Director Teng Jinxian declared in the meeting, "emphasize the main melody; keep pushing for diversity" (突出主旋律, 坚持多样化) (Teng 1989). The state-funded films released from the 9550 Project onwards were thus unsurprisingly labeled as "main melody films", evoking a shared ideological spirit that can be sustained alongside "diverse"—or, commercial—modes and genres of production.

How are we to understand the relationship between "main melody" and mainstream diversity, positioned in this slogan as two parts of one couplet? The push towards "main melody" does not solely serve as the state's defense against or appropriation of Hollywood influences. Rather, the emergence of "main melody" is intertwined with the opening up of international film industry relations and privatization of the domestic film industry. The 1987 slogan therefore positions state-endorsed cinema squarely in a mainstream culture that is veering towards market systems. This kind of mainstream culture aligns best with what Dai Jinhua coined as "shared spaces" (共用空间). Writing during the 1990s, Dai emphasizes that commercial and state power shape mainland Chinese cultural spaces only as intertwined forces (Dai 1999, pp. 29–30). Attempts to distinguish one cleanly from the other in effect loses grip on the extent of their mutual intimacy.

If main melody production of the 1990s already operated under the influences and pressures of the global commercial market, it participated more directly in this market after the turn of the century. China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, which triggered the exponential growth of state-managed media conglomerates. The main melody label stretched, network-like, across mediums and transnational co-productions. Particularly noteworthy are the collaborations between main melody films and Hong Kong production companies, oft leading to partnerships with other countries[9]. Polybona Films, a subsidiary, privatized company under the People's Liberation Army's business conglomerate wing, was established in 2003. In 2004, CFC was resuscitated as media conglomerate China Film Group (CFG) (Zhu and Rosen 2010, p. 33). Both are producers of *Wolf Warrior II*.

Meanwhile, Hollywood was suffering from economic challenges that ranged from the 2001 dot-com bubble burst to the 2008 fiscal crisis. One-hit blockbusters began giving away to franchises. Superheroes soared triumphantly in this economic climate. Marvel had been pushing its characters onto television and film since the 1970s. After its own entertainment studio was established in the mid-90s, Marvel mostly worked on licensing superhero characters to other studios, such as Sony or 20th Century Fox. However, it was not until the box office success of *Iron Man* in 2008 that Marvel Studios began to establish its independent mega-franchise system. This system has, at the time of my writing, encompassed thirty-two films and fifty-five TV shows and specials. The "Marvel phenomenon", as critic Michael Schulman calls it, has accumulated more profit than any other entertainment franchise, "yank[ing] Hollywood into a franchise-drunk new era" (Schulman 2023).

An entertainment franchise is generally defined as a brand that houses plural characters and affects, primarily by sustaining their repetitions within and across media (Brinker 2016, pp. 434–36). In Marvel's case, superheroes have their own origin stories and gather with countless other characters, jumping from TV show to cartoon to spin-off. Actors may be swapped, narrative arcs may be resolved, but the characters persist perpetually—most

often incoherently—through the loosely interconnected, open-ended plots that make up their franchise universe.

The dominance of franchise production in Hollywood has contributed to the emergence of the mainland Chinese film industry's own franchise-centric approaches[10]. One of the earliest state-funded main melody films to experiment with this approach is Han Sanping's *Founding Of* trilogy[11]. The first of the series, *Founding of a Republic* (建国大业), became China's top domestic grossing film of 2009. It became a hot topic in English-language scholarship, which rightfully emphasizes how the film turned political figures and themes into loose "brands" (Veg 2012, p. 43; Yu 2013). More concretely, Han—the chairman of CFG until 2014—incorporated over 150 pan-Asian celebrities into a two-hour runtime, each portraying a historical figure. The rapid-fire cameos of stars such as Andy Lau, Wang Leehom, and Chow Yun Fat deviate from both grand historical narrativization and the individualism typically associated with Hollywood protagonists. These cameos combine star presence with the longstanding media adaptations of heroes like Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai[12], transforming these figures into serial icons that cross national borders and media formats. Modern Chinese history becomes multimedia franchise. Indeed, if *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) compiled twenty superheroes onto its promotional poster, *Founding of a Party* (建党伟业, 2011) jams in fifty-four faces, suggesting a transformed mode of main melody consumption.

Han Sanping's embrace of franchise dynamics and transnational collaborations partially heralded the rise of "new mainstream" blockbusters. In conjunction with passionate reception of the MCU in China since 2008 (Davis 2019), the trilogy more specifically paved the way for *Wolf Warrior II*'s Anthem & Song collaboration as well as its "game-changer" formal and narrative choices (Teo 2019, p. 322).

3. *Wolf Warrior II*'s Superhero Vernacular

Wolf Warrior II's opening shots immediately depart from any revolutionary historical theme[13]. We float in bird's-eye-view above an anonymous ocean and witness African pirates jam a trade ship's engine. The camera swings amidst fleeing crew members before zooming in on a man who bursts out on the deck. Enter Leng Feng. With martial arts flamboyancy, Leng spreads his arms before flying into the ocean, defeating the pirates underwater. Wu Jing flaunts his extensive martial arts training in a digitally edited one-take, one that bears resonance to famous Marvel opening sequences like that of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017). And, like Marvel opening sequences, this scene has little relevance to the film's plot. Markers of Mainland Chinese territory, history, and institutions are missing, and equally absent is any development of Leng Feng's character. Leng is first introduced as deliverer of thrills, playfully intertwining martial arts choreography with Marvel-esque cinematography.

It is crucial that our superhero embodies affective charge before being linked to clear state symbols or a linearly developed identity. This charge is grounded in moral righteousness—Leng Feng singlehandedly saves a boat full of innocent victims—but also remains vague. His superheroism is a sensation, a feeling. As the film progresses, this moral feeling will not only take on intricate domestic and global dimensions, but will also acquire a serial logic. *Wolf Warrior II*'s portrayal of superheroic justice becomes, I argue, an internally complex affect within a broader "economy of sensory perception" (Hansen 1999, p. 60), shaping itself into a global superhero vernacular.

In 1999, Miriam Hansen introduced the concept of "vernacular modernism" as an alternative conceptualization of classical Hollywood cinema's global popularity. Hollywood achieved such popularity not solely due to its hegemonic dissemination of a universal film language. Instead, Hansen foregrounds classical Hollywood as the moving image "incarnation" of modernity, grounded in industrial production and mass media (Hansen 1999, pp. 64–65). In other words, classical Hollywood cinema was an unofficial language of modernity, circulating within the sensorial fabric of early- to mid-20th century everyday life. Crucially, then, non-American countries inspired by Hollywood were not merely im-

itating its formulas or tropes. They were creatively re-appropriating Hollywood's esthetic orientations towards global capitalism and modern life (Hansen 2000, p. 14). They formed their own "global vernaculars".

When we see *Wolf Warrior II* through Hansen's framework, the film's superheroism does not merely copy a pre-existing superhero formula. The film engages in a shared, sensorial orientation to 21st century, transnational modernities. To engage Hansen's theory productively with Chinese state-endorsed cinema as well as global franchise systems, however, two amendments must be made. First, I dissolve her hard opposition between vernacular and state-sanctioned language. Hansen reminds readers that "vernaculars" stand in between official language and local dialect, and are thus pitted against "state-controlled national publicity" (Hansen 2012, p. 616). However, in the context of mainland China, cinematic vernacular inherently thrives in "shared spaces" where official and non-official forces co-exist, both imbricated in popular expressions of global modernity.

Second, *Wolf Warrior II*'s superhero vernacular does not engage classical Hollywood cinema, or even cinema itself, in any narrow sense of the medium. Here, I find melodrama to be a productive mode that still resonates with shared "sensory perception", while also departing from Hansen's centering of particular cinematic phases as *the* dominant vernacular. Melodrama forges its own transmedial and "transnational familiars" (McHugh, referenced by Zhang 2018, p. 85), and is particularly attuned to sensations of moral conviction or fluctuation. Indeed, it is often through melodrama that "good and evil can be named as persons are named, and […] move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe" (Brooks 1976, p. 17). This section delves into the bond between melodrama and moral feeling that both conditions transmedial superhero vernaculars in general and defines *Wolf Warrior II*'s superheroism in particular.

3.1. An Unstable Superhero Origin Story

Wolf Warrior II's only scene located in China crafts Leng Feng's pivotal origin story as one that does not directly blossom from the strength of native soil. Rather, the film's superhero vernacular originates from feelings of instability over approaches to domestic justice. These feelings will persist throughout the film, in turn complicating his display of nationalist sovereignty abroad.

The film's singular moment in domestic territory offers quite the introduction to mainland China: it is a scene of forced demolition. A real estate manager is about to raze the home of a family grieving over their PLA soldier son. In a terrifying low angle shot, the manager's enormous bulldozer rake seems ready to clamp down on us viewers, before its engine suddenly breaks down. Of course, we cut to Leng Feng, who stands near the bulldozer engine he has just destroyed. Leng has arrived with a group of soldiers and proceeds to defeat an entire mob sent out by the real estate manager. He snatches the gun away from our increasingly violent villain, but at this moment, police arrive. Seeing the wounded mob members, the police jump to mistaken conclusions and command Leng to drop the gun. Wedged antagonistically between the real estate criminal and a naïve legal force, Leng Feng becomes superhero. He takes off his army cap. With a superhuman kick, he sends the manager flying, finally landing on a police car windshield, on the brink of death. We cut to Leng's face. His wavering gaze shows his awareness of the consequences to come. Indeed, Leng Feng's kick costs him his position in the PLA.

This intense scene has political charge. It portrays a process of land seizure that has been widespread since urbanization gained momentum in the 1990s. The Chinese state has either directly sanctioned or turned a blind eye to the systematic, forced evictions of populations and the rapid demolition of their houses. Forced demolition reveals the dark underbelly of China's rapid modernization, and was thus once an extremely sensitive topic. Open discussions on the topic had been subject to frequent censorship[14].

Needless to say, then, the scene shocked many viewers[15]. While its boldness might as well be an effect of Xi Jinping's anticorruption policies, Teo (2021) and Yang (2020) stress how rare it is for state-endorsed films to position a hero's moral compass, if only briefly,

against legal institutions. Teo also zooms in on this scene, arguing that Leng comes to uphold an alternative moral structure that remains on the edge of state sanction. He delineates this alternative structure as a product of martial arts traditions and Mohist doctrines, highlighting principles of "universal love" (兼爱) and "responsible chivalry" (任侠). Teo thus complicates overly straightforward equations between Leng's moral values and the political objectives of the state.

However, his move to construct a Mohist "moral universe" (Brooks 1976, p. 17) out of Leng's rupture with state forces leaves two elements underexplored. First, he misses the serialized nature of forced demolition as a melodramatic media phenomenon. Portrayed at the turn of the century almost exclusively by independent filmmakers and experimental artists[16], forced demolition by the mid-2010s acquired a melodramatic flair that enabled its entry into mainstream media. The transition was spearheaded by popular television dramas such as *In the Name of Happiness* (有你才幸福, 2013) and *Housing* (安居, 2016).

The narratives in both dramas officially promote government-sanctioned demolition projects. However, demolition also serves as a productively unresolvable locus, a necessary driving force in these lengthy TV drama formats. *Housing*, for example, features 33 45 min episodes that aired daily for a month (rather than across various seasons). To sustain 25 h of back-to-back runtime, demolition as a melodramatic theme continuously generates conflict and resolution, repetition with variability—basic units of the serial narrative. As emphasized by Williams (2018), Pribram (2018), Zhong (2010), and others, melodrama and seriality are intertwined. They depend both on formulaic repetition (Williams 2018, p. 171) and on excess, on characters and situations that may as well never be coherent, "self-governing entities" (Pribram 2018, p. 237).

The opening of *Wolf Warrior II*, then, emerges neither out of thin air, nor in direct response to top–down policy. Rather, it traces back to the evolution of the portrayals and politics of demolition into a melodramatic-cum-serial register. Inseparable from this phenomenon is of course the countless online discourse about forced demolition, both domestically and abroad. Forced demolition thus accumulates its own robust media presence and rhythm. Indeed, in 2017, dramas such as *In the Name of the People* (人民的名义) more explicitly denounced forced demolition, and since then, it has become a common theme in more mainstream films and online shorts[17].

Second, Teo glosses over the pain that Leng experiences after his "kung fu kick", another melodramatic moment that effectively links *Wolf Warrior II*'s seriality to a superhero franchise logic (Teo 2021, p. 128). Following the forced demolition scene, someone takes off Leng's military badges as somber music plays. A voiceover assures, "the reason a soldier is respected is not because of his uniform, but because of the sense of duty he carries". This voiceover encourages our faith in "duty", but is our protagonist even convinced? Leng cannot contain his emotions during his final salute. He jerks his body ninety degrees, allowing a tear to whisk out, in slow motion, from his eyes. Adherence to duty cannot explain the intensities of Leng's moral feeling. Rather, the pathos of a slow-motion tear expresses his oscillation between conflicting ideals of goodness: he wants to serve in the military, but also willingly performed an illegal exercise of justice. This oscillation between legal and extralegal justice begins to split love for state and love for nation, fueling Leng Feng's superhero vernacular throughout the film.

Leng's sense of justice departs from a Brooksian "moral universe" and aligns more with Christine Gledhill's articulation of the melodramatic mode. Leng's oscillations operate at the edge of concrete cultural and social imaginaries, expressing "signs of struggle" as they negotiate changing configurations of reality (Gledhill 2000, p. 237). Melodrama here becomes "an aesthetic of justice" that "acknowledge[s] the…changing signs of cultural verisimilitude" (p. 236), "peculiarly *attuned to the frisson of the boundary* in its search for polarizing juxtapositions" (emphasis mine, p. 237).

The expression of justice as a melodramatic "frisson" has in many ways fashioned global superhero vernaculars in general. The perpetual attunement to changing and polarized social realities establish a particular sensorial and serial cadence of the multimedial

franchise character[18]. The evolution of Marvel's Captain America, for example—a superhero frequently compared with Leng Feng[19]—speaks to how frissons both create and untether a nationalist superhero. Captain America beamed out of his original 1940s comic series as no more than an avid Hitler-puncher, squarely embodying US wartime agenda[20]. However, in the following decades, he must complicate his relationship to the US government for his serial movement to persist. In Marvel's *Civil War* comic series (2006–2007), Captain America is resuscitated during the 21st century and becomes disillusioned with the government. Its 2012 film adaptation, *Captain America: Civil War*, narrates how the Avengers team splits. After the team contributed to mass civilian death, one side trusts the government to limit their superpowers, led by Tony Stark, while the other side goes rogue, led by Captain America.

Captain America grapples with the aspirations of institutionally managed international peace and his personal sense of justice. At one point, he writes to Tony, "I never really fit in anywhere, even in the army". This confession resonates with Leng Feng's lonely, melodramatic tear. In sum, Captain America and Leng Feng's superhero vernaculars thus both reinforce military power and nationalist fervor, while teasing out polarities that defy moral, emotional, and legal stability. These unstable frissons illustrate how much melodramatic polarities can undergird serial movement with multimedia franchises.

3.2. Reconceptualizing National Sovereignty: Leng Feng Goes Abroad

If Captain America's internal conflicts impact the way he represents America on the international stage, Leng Feng's oscillation between legal and extralegal justice alters his display of national sovereignty when he goes abroad. After Leng Feng is dismissed from the PLA, he relocates to a foreign territory, a choice central to *Wolf Warrior II*'s Hollywoodesque, globetrotting appeal. As he conducts trade in Africa, we see him play volleyball with his African buddies and joke with his African godson, Tundu. Unfortunately, before Leng Feng can have too much fun, rebel attacks and a plague hit the territory simultaneously. Refusing to let so many civilians get hurt, Leng stops himself from fleeing on a rescue ship and instead decides to save African and Chinese workers in a factory. Faced with such international-scale hardships and conflicts, how indeed does Leng orient himself and his nation towards global justice?

On the one hand, Leng's altruistic desire to save civilians glorifies the Chinese state and bolsters national sovereign power abroad. The imagery in the film's final scene exemplifies this. Having saved the factory workers, Leng and his friends ride a truck toward a no-combat zone. African soldiers initially bar entry. Leng's frustration turns into fiery patriotism as he pulls a Chinese flag onto his arm. Captured through multiple angles, the flag billows in the wind. Seeing the flag from afar, an African soldier yells, "It's the Chinese", and lets the truck through. Here, nationalist fervor merges perfectly with state agenda as our superhero literally puts on China's official colors.

On the other hand, just as Leng's domestic origin story is grounded in multiple moral impulses, when he ventures abroad, these proud displays of national sovereignty eventually reveal themselves to be internally divided. We can begin to reconceptualize the film's expression of sovereignty by returning to our African soldier's exclamation: "It's the Chinese!" What is "the Chinese"? The official flag? Some kind of ethnic bond? In fact, for most the film, Leng struggles to either link up with the military or with Chinese citizens exclusively. Instead, he forms his own makeshift team. He adopts two African children, befriends a few Chinese expats, and romances a white doctor, Dr. Rachel. By the time he wears the national flag, he is propped up by two Chinese men and surrounded by Dr. Rachel as well as African workers. Our protagonist forms two intermingled "families": one made up of various Chinese men and one made up of various races.

The two men who hold Leng Feng up are senior PLA soldier Old He and rich youngster Zhang Yifan. These characters have symbolic value: Old He, whose first name literally translates to "building nation" (建国), symbolizes PLA legacy, and Zhang Yifan boasts top tier military resources as well as economic prowess. These are all traits that Leng

Feng embodies, feeding the toxic masculinity orgy that has since gained traction after the film's release (Liu 2018; Berry 2018)[21]. However, Leng's heated conflicts with each of these men also turns nationalist sovereignty into a "site of struggle", rather than a site of hypermasculine self-confidence. His first encounter with Zhang Yifan particularly exacerbates melodramatic frissons that tie back to *Wolf Warrior II*'s own identity as a serial franchise. When Leng arrives to rescue the factory, he realizes that Zhang manages the area. Zhang lists the weapons in his possession and says, "I have a M1911 pointed at your head right now. How the fuck are you gonna save us?".

Here, Zhang is more wolf warrior than our wolf warrior himself. This is the point. His arrogance in fact echoes back to Leng Feng's arc in *Wolf Warrior* (2015). The 2015 film features a self-assured Leng pushing American mercenaries out of Chinese territory. However, now that Leng has been exiled from the PLA, his serial movement necessitates a break from his previous self. He glares at Zhang, before their tension is disrupted by melodramatic pathos: Tundu's biological mom knocks over Zhang and rushes to hug Leng, tearfully thanking him for protecting her son. Literally struck off balance by the intimacy between Leng and his African godson's family, Zhang's aggression fizzles out.

The aggressive bursts of conflict between Leng and Zhang point to tensions within China's own self-identity that extend outwards, creating polarized orientations vis-à-vis 21st century global modernity. These orientations are seen in how the two men engage with African characters. Whereas Zhang is ready to militantly defend the African workers in the factory, Leng Feng's masculinity takes the form of paternalistic care. Their displays of sovereign strength—two sides of the serial wolf warrior icon that is Leng Feng—pair together at times, but also disrupt any singular expression of masculine "Chineseness" and any coherent sense of what global justice entails.

This internally polarized expression of national sovereignty takes on a different magnitude when we examine Leng Feng's love for his multiracial "family". Thinking back to his encounter with Zhang, we may feel like his protective love for Tundu and his biological mom has less positive intonations. Combined with certain ways Leng treats African tradesmen and women early on in the film, Africa seems sexualized, nameless (we never know what the actual country is called), infantilized, and bound to exploitative foreign trade, all markers of neocolonialism[22]. Thus, when Leng Feng declares to Big Daddy in their final showdown that he was "born for" both African and Chinese civilians, this statement raises more questions than answers. Is our superhero destroying Africa's semi-colonized, oppressed status under Big Daddy, liberating civilians and the rebel forces? Or does he represent another, more caring colonizer, targeting any force that gets in the way of their exploitative goals? The presence of African rebel forces itself exacerbates these fluctuating geopolitics. They wear red scarves and hail "the revolution", reminding viewers of China's own semi-colonized and revolutionary past, especially the Third World bonds forged in the socialist era[23]. Yet, they are oft portrayed as unruly and naïve, forcing the Chinese to put them in their place.

Confronted with the film's simultaneous evocation of anti-colonial and neocolonial tendencies, many scholars contend that the film superficially evokes Third World bonding in order to conceal Leng's embodiment of "a new master race that has arrived to displace the whites" (Liu 2018). I am not interested, however, in assessing the validity of *Wolf Warrior II*'s revolutionary or paternalistic approach to global justice. More significant is how the film turns precisely this contradictory space between anti- and neocolonialism into a defining quality of its superhero vernacular.

Similar internal contradictions construct the narrative worlds of many MCU superheroes. Captain America himself was poised between promoting and abandoning US-sanctioned international order, but among non-white Marvel superheroes, the tension between neo- and anti-colonialism grows even more explicit. In their Special Issue on the first black superhero movie of the MCU, Black Panther (2018), Rachel Griffin and Jonathan Rossing (Griffin and Rossing 2020) hone in on the conflict between Prince T'Challa (Black Panther) and Erik "Killmonger" Stevens. T'Challa ultimately concedes to facilitating the

United States' preservation of international peace, while Erik Stevens plans to arm a "global Black community" (p. 205). The core antagonism in Black Panther amounts to an internally "paradoxical ideation", a "counter/hegemonic" oscillation between Third World militancy and neocolonial mentality (p. 212). Similar oscillations can be teased out in other non-white MCU icons like Shang-Chi and Miles Morales.

During his time abroad, Leng Feng cultivates his own "counter/hegemonic" approach to global justice. Such an approach by no means de(con)structs the film's state-sanctioned expressions of sovereignty. Rather, influenced by serial franchise logics, it points us towards an alternative conceptualization of sovereign power that circulates among global, capitalist media distribution systems. As with a "Möbius strip or a Leyden jar", we are never clear on whether Leng's Chineseness refers to PLA governance or its exiled, extralegal "state of exception" (Agamben 1998, p. 28), the exercise of paternalistic imperial sovereignty, or defensive militancy. His globetrotting superheroism showcases how sovereign control utilizes self-contradiction to participate in and structure global media circulation, and also how such control inherently holds ambiguous tension. Such a conception of sovereign control is engrained in the shared franchise logic of Hollywood and "new mainstream" cinema.

4. Conclusions

Leng Feng cannot be simply defined as nationalism personified. Any individualistic will and political conviction he sports is rendered unstable by two elements of his superhero vernacular: melodrama and seriality. On native soil, his self-governance struggles between legal and extralegal justice. Abroad, his representation of "Chineseness" jumps between polarized attitudes towards global modernity, complicating his masculine glorification of state sovereignty.

Wolf Warrior II's superhero vernacular challenges assumptions about what state-endorsed cinema entails. The "new mainstream" genre can no longer be explained as Chinese official media's overtaking of Hollywood's esteemed global reach, or co-optation of Hollywood styles of themes. In fact, because neither are self-coherent entities, their relations are always ambiguously intertwined. Serial franchise logics, then, gain traction as, among other factors, a means to express this defining element of their relations.

Having pulled state-endorsed media out of discourses fixated on state/market and local/global antagonisms, how do we articulate its politics? I would like to conclude by briefly returning to Dai Jinhua's "shared spaces". *Wolf Warrior II*'s vernacular invokes spaces where both transnational, commercial media, and state-endorsed productions intertwine. On the one hand, these spaces re-evaluate sovereign power as a multi-centered system of political control. As Dai explains, "although, looking at it superficially, media is still completely in the control of classical political power, [… those in control are] the massive funds from multiple sources and the increasingly complex [configuration of] media producers" (Dai 1999, p. 28). Under late capitalist systems, state-endorsed media represent and take on a productively ambiguous, split-body political function.

On the other, these shared spaces engage a sensory politics that exceed terminologies of control. Just as Dai defines "shared spaces" as her own critical iteration of ordinary, public space[24], Leng Feng's serial frissons require a domestic environment where ties among hero, nation, and world are perpetually agitated. Indeed, *Wolf Warrior II* forms a superhero vernacular that is embedded in dominant publics, participating in their organization of sensory perception and interpretation, albeit evidently imposing limits. As state-endorsed media gain even more popularity after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, expanding its reach towards Internet conglomerates and platforms, it becomes imperative to examine its politics as always enmeshed within and at times synonymous with China's inherently transnational, intermedial popular cultures. Such media are, after all, explicitly involved in shaping a new mainstream.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 Frank Grillo played villain Brock Grumlow in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Captain America: Civil War* (2012), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Sam Hargrave has served as a stunt actor and coordinator in seven MCU productions.

2 Beijing University professor Zhang Yiwu describes Leng Feng as a hybrid "China-style superhero" (中国式超级英雄) (Zhang 2017), and Chen Xuguang describes *Wolf Warrior II* as belonging to the "Hollywood superhero subcategory film" (Chen 2017, p. 18).

3 Walter Ong published a biting article titled "The Comics and the Superstate" in 1945, at the forefront of the postwar dip in the popularity of superhero comics (Ong 1945). Ong specifically links Superman and Captain America, which American youth glorified during World War II, with ideologies of states such as Nazi Germany. He condemned their superstrength as a the sensationalist glorification of totalitarian, racist power.

4 For more detailed analyses of "Wolf Warrior diplomacy", see Yaoyao Dai and Luwei Rose Luqiu's "Wolf Warriors and Diplomacy in the New Era: An Empirical Analysis of China's Diplomatic Language" (Dai and Luqiu 2022).

5 Chris Berry interprets Leng Feng's "psychotic" superheroism as a sign—a warning?—of China's "new global role", where "anything goes in the drive to win" (Berry 2018, p. 42). Evan Osnos more directly asserts that "*Wolf Warrior II* captures a new, muscular iteration of China's self-narrative", using 'China' primarily in reference to the Chinese state under Xi Jinping (Osnos 2018).

6 Articles acknowledging and advocating for entertainment films (娱乐片) and commercial popular culture became widespread in the mid-1980s, although calls to diversify film genres were published in journals as early as 1980 (Qi 2015, pp. 186–87).

7 See "Document 3—Suggestions on the Deepening of the Chinese Film Industry's Institutional Reform", cited by Zhu and Rosen (2010, p. 27).

8 Until 2018, the State Council merged various media platforms and productions together: the MRFT was itself a merged administration that previously comprised separate administrations for film, and radio and television. In 1993, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), succeeded this Ministry. SARFT was then replaced by SARPPFT in 2013, administering press and publication alongside radio, film, and television. SARPPFT was the administration that oversaw the production of *Wolf Warrior II*, before splitting into three separate administrations in 2018.

9 In terms of transnational co-productions, the 2003 Closer Economic Partnership (CEPA) paved the way, allowing the mainland Chinese film industry to essentially treat Hong Kong films as domestic rather than imported.

10 Hollywood superhero franchises make up only one aspect of the intertwined, global proliferation of franchise media systems. A broader historical framework is out of the scope of this article, but East Asian media systems that have been long fostering a regional "media mix", character-centric industry include the Japanese idol and anime industry (Steinberg 2012).

11 The trilogy includes *Founding of a Republic* (建国大业, 2009), *Founding of a Party* (建党伟业, 2011), and *Founding of an Army* (建军大业, 2017). It was co-produced by Polybona, CFG, numerous Hong Kong companies, and Beverly Hills-based company DMG Entertainment.

12 Socialist-era heroes such as Mao and Zhou have repeatedly been featured on big and small screens since the reform era, so much so that they have become media icons. For example, Zhou Enlai has been featured in countless historical epics, and has been the protagonist of biopics such as *Zhou Enlai* (周恩来, 1992), *Zhou Enlai in Bandung* (周恩来万隆之行, 2003), and *The Story of Zhou Enlai* (周恩来的四个昼夜, 2013), as well as television dramas such as *Long March* (长征, 2001), *My Uncle Zhou Enlai* (海棠依旧, 2016), and *Nos Annees Francaises* (我们的法兰西岁月, 2012). He is most famously played by Liu Jin, but in recent years have been played by younger stars such as Zhu Yawen and Jin Dong.

13 It instead follows a much more recent influx of "new mainstream" films that suspend viewers almost completely out of domestic territory, led early on by military blockbuster *Operation Mekong* (湄公河行动, 2016).

14 A noteworthy case of such censorship within the domestic film industry is the sudden withdrawal of *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) from mainland Chinese theatres in January 2010, in part due to Chinese online discourse that connected the film's anti-colonial narrative to issues of domestic forced eviction.

15 See a popular Zhihu thread posted shortly after the release of *Wolf Warrior II*, titled: "How does everyone view the forced demolition scene at the start of Wolf Warrior II? 大家是怎么看待战狼二开头的强拆的？" https://www.zhihu.com/question/63094980 (accessed on 10 September 2023)

16 Forced demolition is commonly portrayed in renowned Sixth Generation and New Documentary movement films from the 1990s onwards. Internationally recognized examples include Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (三峡好人, 2006) and Ou Ning's *Meishi Street* (煤市街, 2006). In the realm of experimental art, examples include Wang Jinsong's "One Hundred Signs of Demolition" (拆, 1999), as well as many of Zhang Dali's photographs.

17 Examples of mainstream films include Lou Ye's *The Shadow Play* (风中有朵雨做的云, 2018) and Cathy Yan's *Dead Pigs* (海上浮城, 2018). Online micro-films (微电影) and student films about this topic also proliferated after the mid-2010s. Some examples include Ren Liying, Li Qiang, and Ji Mengrui's *Demolition* (拆迁, 2016) and Beijing Film Academy student Zhang Yan's *Chai* (拆, 2017).

[18] Gerald Jones notes that the inspiration for *Superman*, Hugo Danner from science fiction novel *Gladiator* (1930), is laden with pathos. Writhing at the edge of moral and physical human limits, Danner emerges out of and often devolves back into the frisson space of "self-pitying nonsense" (Jones 2004, p. 75). Not many scholars, however, have analyzed superhero comics from an explicitly melodramatic perspective. This is likely due to a limited conception of melodrama as the woman's film (the weepies, the romance plot, or the domestic family drama), a conception that has been challenged by Gledhill (2000) and Mercer and Shingler (2013), among others.

[19] While the film's Anthem & Song collaboration is rarely explicitly mentioned, Leng Feng has been oft labeled as "Captain China" (中国队长) (Pengpai News 2017).

[20] See Sean Howe's *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, for an introduction to Captain America's first release in 1940. Throughout World War II, Captain America became Marvel's best-selling comic (Howe 2013, p. 20).

[21] Director and actor Wu Jing has himself stated that *Wolf Warrior II* hopes to cultivate a "real man" in a society increasingly inundated with effeminate men. Such statements have had administrative resonances: in September 2021, the Chinese government banned so-called effeminate men from broadcast TV (NPR 2021).

[22] I follow Kwame Nkrumah's definition of neocolonialism in Africa, shared by numerous other scholars, as grounded in the economic, ideological, and political subjugation of African countries on exploitative foreign trade that aims to exacerbate class gaps, rather that aid developing countries (Nkrumah 1965).

[23] In *The East is Black: Cold War China in the Radical Black Imagination*, Robeson Frazier details that, despite how the alliance collapsed distinctions between self and Other to forge transnational subjectivities and revolutionary coalitions (Frazier 2015, p. 61), there existed a perpetual feeling that African countries were being guided by China and did not have much to offer the more economically advanced communist nation (p. 49). In this sense, feelings of inequality might not automatically index neocolonial hierarchy.

[24] In the introduction of *Invisible Writing*, Dai compares her concept of "shared spaces" with "public sphere" (公共空间), implying that they are similar but not interchangeable (Dai 1999, p. 40). She also meditates on how "culture" has changed within these post-1990s "shared spaces" to become integrated into everyday rhythms, a kind of shared "lifestyle"—mostly a middle-class one (8). Here, she explicitly references Raymond Williams' "Culture is Ordinary" (1958).

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Berry, Christopher J. 2018. Wolf Warrior 2: Imagining the Chinese Century. *Film Quarterly* 72: 38–44. [CrossRef]

Brinker, Felix. 2016. On the Political Economy of the Contemporary (Superhero) Blockbuster Series. In *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film*. Edited by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda. East Sussex: Reframe Books, pp. 433–73.

Brooks, Peter. 1976. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Brzeski, Patrick. 2016. Russo Brothers to Form Production Venture With China's Huayi. *Hollywood Reporter*. August 29. Available online: https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/russo-brothers-form-production-venture-924191/ (accessed on 2 January 2019).

Chen, Xuguang 陈旭光. 2017. Chinese New Mainstream Blockbusters: Interpretations and Constructions 中国新主流电影大片: 阐释与建构. *Hundred Schools in Arts* 2017: 13–21.

Dai, Jinhua 戴锦华. 1999. *Invisible Writing* 隐形书写. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House.

Dai, Yaoyao, and Luwei Rose Luqiu. 2022. Wolf Warriors and Diplomacy in the New Era: An Empirical Analysis of China's Diplomatic Language. *China Review* 22: 253–83.

Davis, Darrell William. 2014. Marketization, Hollywood, Global China. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 26: 191–241.

Davis, Rebecca. 2019. How the Avengers Became Such a Marvel in China. *Variety Magazine*. April 25. Available online: https://variety.com/2019/film/news/avengers-endgame-marvel-universe-china-box-office-1203197686/ (accessed on 25 July 2019).

Frazier, Robinson Taj. 2015. *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Radical Black Imagination*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Gledhill, Christine. 2000. Re-thinking Genre. In *Reinventing Film Studies*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York: Arnold.

Griffin, Rachel Alicia, and Jonathan P. Rossing. 2020. *Black Panther* in Widescreen: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on a Pioneering, Paradoxical Film. *Review of Communication* 20: 203–19. [CrossRef]

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. 1999. The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism. *Modernism/Modernity* 6: 59–77. [CrossRef]

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. 2000. Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism. *Film Quarterly* 54: 10–22. [CrossRef]

Hansen, Miriam Bratu. 2012. Tracking Cinema on a Global Scale. In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*. Edited by Mark Wollaeger. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howe, Sean. 2013. *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. New York: Harper Collins.

Hu, Tingting, and Tianru Guan. 2021. 'Man-as-Nation': Representations of Masculinity and Nationalism in Wu Jing's *Wolf Warrior II*. *SAGE Open* 11: 1–13. [CrossRef]

Jones, Gerald. 2004. *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*. New York: Harper Collins.
Keane, Michael. 2010. Re-imagining China's Future: Soft Power, Cultural Presence and the East Asian Media Market. In *Complicated Currents: Media Flows and Soft Power in East Asia*. Edited by Daniel Black and Steven Epstein. Melbourne: Monash University ePress.
Keane, Michael. 2019. China's Digital Media Industries and the Challenge of Overseas Markets. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 13: 244–56. [CrossRef]
Kokas, Anne. 2017. *Hollywood Made in China*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Liu, Petrus. 2018. Women and Children First—Jingoism, Ambivalence, and Crisis of Masculinity in Wolf Warrior II. In *Wolf Warrior II: The Rise of China and Gender/Sexual Politics*. Edited by Lisa Rofel and Petrus Liu. Columbus: MCLC Resource Center. Available online: http://u.osu.edu/mclc/online-series/liu-rofel/ (accessed on 2 January 2019).
Mercer, John, and Martin Shingler. 2013. *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Nkrumah, Kwame. 1965. *Neo-Colonialism: The Highest Stage of Imperialism*. London: Heinemann.
NPR. 2021. China Bans Effeminate Men on TV. *National Public Radio*. September 2. Available online: https://www.npr.org/2021/09/02/1033687586/china-ban-effeminate-men-tv-official-morality (accessed on 10 September 2023).
Ong, Walter. 1945. The Comics and the Super State: Glimpses Down the Back Alleys of the Mind. *The Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of Literature, History, Folklore* 1: 34–48.
Osnos, Evan. 2018. Making China Great Again. *The New Yorker*. January 8. Available online: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/08/making-china-great-again (accessed on 2 January 2019).
Pengpai News. 2017. How to Interpret the *Wolf Warrior II* Phenomenon: Captain China in an Age of Anti-Globalization" 如何理解《战狼2》现象: 逆全球化时代的中国队长. *Pengpai News*. August 11. Available online: https://m.thepaper.cn/yidian_promDetail.jsp?contid=1758713&from=yidian (accessed on 2 January 2019).
Pribram, Deidre E. 2018. Melodrama and the Aesthetics of Emotion. In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 237–52.
Qi, Wei 齐伟. 2015. *Research on the Perspectives and Debates around 80s Films* 八十年代电影观念辩论研究. Beijing: China Film Publishing Press.
Schulman, Michael. 2023. How the Marvel Cinematic Universe Swallowed Hollywood. *The New Yorker*. June 5. Available online: https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/06/12/how-the-marvel-cinematic-universe-swallowed-hollywood (accessed on 1 July 2023).
Steinberg, Marc. 2012. *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Teng, Jinxian 滕进贤. 1989. Striving to create a new situation where films are healthy and prosperous—Response to a reporter's question 努力开创社会主义电影健康, 繁荣的新局面—答本刊记者问. *Qiushi* 21: 37–40.
Teo, Stephen. 2019. The Chinese Film Market and the *Wolf Warrior 2* Phenomenon. *Screen* 60: 322–31. [CrossRef]
Teo, Stephen. 2021. *Chinese Martial Arts Film and the Philosophy of Action*. London: Routledge Publishing Press.
Veg, Sebastian. 2012. Propaganda and Pastiche: Visions of Mao in *Founding of a Republic*, *Beginning of the Great Revival*, and *Let the Bullets Fly*. *China Perspectives* 2012: 41–53. [CrossRef]
Wang, Jing 王净. 2022. 'New Mainstream' Films: How are They 'New'? What Path Will They Make? 新主流电影: 新在哪里？路在何方？". *Pengpai News*. December 12. Available online: http://m.cyol.com/gb/articles/2022-12/22/content_nyYln6fe3L.html (accessed on 10 September 2023).
Williams, Linda. 2018. World and Time: Serial Television Melodrama in America. In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 169–84.
Yang, Jane. 2020. Main Melody Recomposed: Deconstructing the Wolf Warrior Phenomenon. *Washington University in St. Louis Center of the Humanities*. May 14. Available online: https://humanities.wustl.edu/news/main-melody-recomposed-deconstructing-wolf-warrior-phenomenon (accessed on 10 September 2023).
Yu, Hongmei. 2013. Visual Spectacular, Revolutionary Epic, and Personal Voice: The Narration of History in Chinese Main Melody Films. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25: 166–218.
Zhang, Yiwu 张颐武. 2017. Zhang Yiwu Talks Wolf Warrior II: The Success of a China-Style Superhero 张颐武谈《战狼2》: 新的中国式超级英雄的胜利. *People's Daily*. August 9. Available online: http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0809/c1003-29460389.html (accessed on 2 January 2019).
Zhang, Zhen. 2018. Transnational Melodrama, *Wenyi*, and the Orphan Imagination. In *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures*. Edited by Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 83–98.
Zhong, Xueping. 2010. *Mainstream Culture Refocused: Television Drama, Society, and the Production of Meaning in Reform-Era China*. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.
Zhu, Ying, and Stanley Rosen. 2010. *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
Zhu, Ying, Kingsley Edney, and Stanley Rosen. 2020. *Soft Power With Chinese Characteristics China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*. London: Routledge Publishing Press.