

Looking Back at History

- A Dialogue on the Centenary of the Russian Revolution

Dai Jinhua, Teng Wei

8 June 2017

Teng Wei: Professor Dai, how are you? The first question: a few days ago I came across some material that talked about some Soviet Union science fiction writers who fantasized on what the Soviet society and the Soviet people's life would be like when the Russian Revolution reached the centenary year, which would be 2017. Ironically, the scientific aspects of that fantasizing have essentially been realized, what had not been foreseen was that the Soviet Union no longer exists. We know that Hobsbawm had referred to the 77 years from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 as "the short 20th century". As far as capitalism is concerned, I think the 20th century has been a century in which it had, first, met its demise and then, its re-birth. It went through two World Wars as well as the Cold War, and ultimately it seemed to have defeated all of its enemies. Further, people all over the world are busy making judgment on the losers. For example, the 2015 Nobel Literature Prize laureate was documentary literati Alexievich. Her documentary writings have described all sorts and all kinds of big problems in the Soviet society. So, in face of the global victory of capitalism as well as the accompanying development of the digital era, including artificial intelligence technology, capitalism appears to have been given a cardio tonic. Under the circumstances now, how do you think we should face the history of the defeat of socialist society?

Dai Jinhua: I believe this round of eruption of technological revolution – notably genetic engineering and digital technology - has already changed the premises and parameters of our propositions and reflections on issues. This round of technological revolution, particularly the comprehensive breakthrough and the wide application of artificial intelligence, has already smashed the many constraining premises of the modernity project. In face of this fact, you could say the 20th century has ended, capitalism has won all-round and is proceeding nicely. Yet it could also be said that this breakthrough has at the same time begun to shatter or threaten the capitalist world. At least, it is exposing in an accelerating and unavoidable way the innate crisis and structural problem of global capitalism. With the end of the Cold War and removal of the threat of the socialist camp, capitalism has returned to its "true" form. What follows is precisely the worldwide accelerating rich-poor polarization. If it is said that "Rich and Poor" has been a fundamental fact of capitalism or of class society, then the "new" variable is that the new technological development and applications, being almost entirely dominated by big capital, have in this new round of reshuffling consolidated and concentrated the monopoly and heredity of capital and of wealth structure. More importantly, the breakthrough and wide application of AI technology are rapidly rewriting and expanding the concept and facts of "automation". As such it is continuously creating a radically increasing number of

abandoned people worldwide – an absolute surplus of labor in the structural sense, superfluous people in the sense of capitalist economy and of statistics. The third world countries that have in the past played an essential functional role with their labor intensive mode of production at the bottom end of the global capitalism order chain are now losing their value and significance. In the developed countries, this aggressive eliminating process has gone beyond the blue-collar social groups, making an all-out onslaught on the middle class, even some upper-middle level privileged professions: journalists, solicitors, various kinds of economists.... Yet the problem is, when so many regions and populations are becoming abandoned, global capitalism is also beginning to lose that motivating mechanism of desire and consumption driven by consumerism since the end of the War. The enormous group of consumers that was created by capitalism after the War is now consistently contracting. Therefore, the most optimistic saying has been that capitalism itself has already arrived at the fundamental conditions for communism: the overflowing of materialistic wealth, the disappearance of alienated labor; that with regard to today's capitalism, the only urgent issue to be resolved is simply the way of allocating social wealth.

I find no ways of agreeing with this saying. First of all the global capitalist crisis is not simply emerging as social contradictions that economic measures could not solve. It is also emerging as an ecological disaster and resource crisis. In fact, the refugees of war and the refugees of ecology that have existed for a long time are continuously adding to the group of abandoned people. It is correct that to resolve the worldwide rich-poor polarization, or the "structural poverty", to settle the global group of abandoned people created and expanded by new technology, the resolutions proposed by economists – be it a global taxation scheme or global minimum wage protection – would all presume and demand the appearance of a world government, demand overall control by a strong non-capitalist force. Without that it would not be possible to prevent the present world from collapsing. That would be the only way to maintain the on-going operation of the present world's production structure. Yet we all know that modern capitalism itself has been built on the class and racial system as well as a nation-state institution. Therefore it could not possibly produce a global government out of itself, or some social security systems akin to socialism. It is precisely in the significance of such crisis and solutions that the Russian Revolution re-emerges with its contemporary revelations. I believe that with regard to the reality of today, the significance of the Russian Revolution is no longer being the first eruption of a proletariat revolution within a country, or put in another way, finding a breakthrough in a weak link in capitalism, creating an alternate way of development and a governing power that differed from capitalism. Today, the revelation of the Russian Revolution is how to create a different possibility in a situation that is totally unprecedented, how to seek a resolution for humanity. Or else the crisis we are facing is certainly a global one, and furthermore it will be of an annihilating strength.

Teng Wei: So that is to say, the 20th century or "short 20th century" – this kind of so-called history of defeat – would not necessarily extend to the 21st century. Your view is still relatively optimistic.

Dai Jinhua: It is not a matter of being optimistic or pessimistic. I believe the significance of the October Revolution today is not whether something similar could happen again, but rather the historical revelations that it left for us. We no longer understand or recognize the Russian Revolution only on a historical level, nor do we expect it to happen in the same way in other places of the world. Rather, the Russian Revolution is to be revisited in the context of today's overall structural crisis of

Capitalism, or in the sense of Capitalism's climax and self-disintegration. Thus the significance of the October Revolution has emerged as what Žižek has said: to create Marxism in a place where there is no Marxism. In the sense of historical materialism, that is certainly the demand of history.

Teng Wei: The second question is: this year is the centenary year of the Russian Revolution. In principle it is a very important time. Yet up till now no nationwide celebration activities seem to be taking place in Russia, and Putin himself has not expressed any clear views. That is why the western media have generally used the word "dubious" to describe his attitude towards the Russian Revolution. That attitude also demonstrates the polarization within Russia today on the understanding of this hundred-year history. Some historians have said outright that "we live in the schizophrenia of history". On the one hand, ever since the time of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, Russia has been going through an ideological reconstruction process to nullify and stigmatize the revolutionary history. On the other hand, in over two decades since the disintegration, people's vision of a Democracy or a Western style happy life in the post-communist era has not come about, so there is again some renewed understanding and recognition of the Russian Revolution and the socialist history. Yet the Russian official position has stressed that celebration activities of the October Revolution must be conducted within the realm of history and not to be politicized. I feel that this kind of non-politicizing is communicating the message: the Russian Revolution is already history. It can be studied as artefacts and old papers, but that leaf has to be turned over. Putting that together with Russia's role in the global political layout, how do you assess Russia's coolness and polarization towards the revolution heritage?

Dai Jinhua: I think it is obviously not adequate to describe the attitude of Russia towards the Russian Revolution as "schizophrenia". During the 26 years from the disintegration of the Soviet Union to now, the entire Russian governing power of today, and probably in a certain sense the Russian people, still have no way of facing the socialist Soviet Union history or of its disappearance. If mental illness terminologies are to be used, then they are still completely enveloped in a state of Amnesia and Aphasia. I can say this with conviction because in the Russian State History Museum, the entire 20th century portion has evaporated. I remember, in the Russian State History Museum on the Red Square, I did not believe that the display of history had ended at the 19th century, so I went around the museum many times searching, until an English-speaking staff confirmed: the display ended at the 19th Century. Of course, I know that the "20th century" was there in the dust-laden wing of the History Museum, taking up more than half of the space of that building. That was the year 2015, the 70th anniversary of the victory of the global war against Fascism. We know the role and the impact that Soviet Union had in this war, which was that the extremely tragic and heroic Stalingrad Defense Battle (400,000 Red Army fatality, 400,000 civilian fatality, 750,000 German soldiers killed or captured) turned around the military situation in Europe during World War II, halting the Master Plan of fascist Nazi, thence the start of a shift in the relative strength between the Allies and the Axis powers. Because of that, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had presented a Sword of Honor to Stalin on behalf of the British Crown during the 1943 Tehran Conference. In such a year, on such an important piece of history, there had only been a small exhibition room in the nearby military museum that one could readily see was put together in haste, with only a limited number of pictures. And what had occupied the main chamber in the museum was the permanent exhibition on the victory of the 1812 War between Russia and France. Even though there was some kind of historical resemblance between these two wars – quoting from the aside of Tarkovsky movie - that Russia had twice saved Europe

through self-sacrifice – yet the defense war of Soviet Union during WWII did not just save Europe, it also saved the world. Put simply, the fundamental predicament in Russian society and culture that this strange fact has demonstrated is that: the Russian Revolution, as a creation, demonstration and experiment of the proletarian revolution, not only founded the first red nation but also created the socialist camp that had shared half the world, yet it is not possible to find a position and a language for that history within today's global logic and Russia's mainstream logic.

However, what has caused such state of amnesia and aphasia was not only the big defeat towards the end of the 20th century resulting in the loss of discursive right and narrative logic. Rather, it was the historical proposition which the practice of Leninism had carried and had left behind. Walking through the Russian State History Museum that ended with the 19th century, you could clearly see that the innate narrative logic previously established (even though there had been revisions) was precisely for the purpose of arriving at the glory of the 20th century. The clue that ran through it was the magnificent dream and momentum of how a late developed nation had attempted and eventually did become a strong nation; how, as a Eurasian continental nation, to counter the Western powers, at least to be counted inside Europe. Without doubt, it was precisely in the 20th century that Russia, through socialist Soviet Union, that superpower and imperialist, had realized this dream. Yet looking back at it today, it was like an empty dream, even though Yeltsin had talked about the Soviet disintegration as a return to the orthodox, Russian nation state. What made it impossible for Russia to face is: the end of socialist revolution and socialist history had meant disappearance of the socialist camp but also at the same time the disintegration of the Soviet Union; it meant Russia could only, up to now, strive to maintain itself in an international position among second-rate nations. That is to say, the end of the revolution had simultaneously meant its overall downfall as a nation state. That was undoubtedly an important reason for Russia's amnesia and aphasia.

In reality, the socialist revolution of the 20th century, or the Leninist revolution, had generally taken place in countries and regions that lacked development. That entire process had a dual reference system and a dual layer of significance: the revolution of Marxism and the road to national self-strengthening in a modern sense. That is certainly the disparity between China and Russia today also. I have repeatedly said before, 'On October 1, 1949, Chairman Mao Zedong stood on the tower of the Tiananmen gate to proclaim "The People's Republic of China is founded! The people of China from now on will stand up!" The founding of the People's Republic of China meant that China has stood up – a moment of victory, maintaining integral political sovereignty as well as comprehensive opening up of the modernization / industrialization process, a time, or a second time, of establishing an independent nation. At the same time, perhaps even more importantly, the founding of the People's Republic of China meant that the people would stand up – it has been a proletarian / socialist revolution. It has established a governing power of the proletariat. It was a component of the world revolution. Today, China can attempt to cure the Amnesia of the last two decades of 20th century history, the "montage editing technique" of history and the Aphasia, precisely because China has risen, allowing us to have the possibility and the luxury of transposing the revolutionary history and practice to the modernization process of China as a nation-state, the twists and turns of that process, for purpose of reiteration. Russia has lost that "eligibility" because of its new position in the global system. In fact that had also been the reason why Russia's October Revolution had once excited the world's oppressed people: not only was it a people and proletarian revolution, it was also a late-developed country's search for the road to alternate national independence and

self-strengthening, under the threat of imperialist powers. Back then, it was precisely on this level that the Russian Revolution had inspired and ignited the May Fourth Patriotic Democratic Movement, and, subsequent to the great debate on the nature of Chinese society, had further driven the overall move to the Left among China's intellectual arena.

Teng Wei: From the time of Gorbachev, studies on the Russian Revolution have become more and more right-wing revisionist. For example, some historians, through economic data, showed that the Russian economy before World War I had actually ranked fifth of the world, and furthermore it had ranked among the list of countries with highest economic growth rate. It had its own financial market, and moreover, during World War I, Russia's economic downturn had clearly been less than that of other countries in the European battlefield. In the classic revolutionary history narratives that we studied, the October Revolution was considered as conforming to the historical inevitability that Marxism revealed. Yet today much of the revisionist studies of history, through a lot of details and so-called historical materials, showed that the take-over of revolutionary leadership power by the Bolsheviks as represented by Lenin, has seemed today increasingly exhibiting a certain kind of contingency. Added to that the post-revolution Red Terror, including execution of the Tsar's entire family, and in particular the Stalinist era's oppression and violence against intellectuals, even peasants as well as marginalized groups of minorities, women, gays and so on... the research of history in these recent few decades has continued to exhibit this trend of "disenchantment". Because of that, recently a Russian expert in the U.S., Sheila Fitzpatrick, published an article in *London Review of Books* with the conclusion that the research on the October Revolution has turned from affirmative to negative, the concern has shifted from the working class to cultural research, from studying inevitability to revealing contingency. She regretted that very much. Today, in face of the decades of right-wing revisionist history's narrative, how is it possible to re-narrate and re-interpret the Russian Revolution?

Dai Jinhua: It is not possible for us here, concretely and in detail, from outside and within, to discuss historical viewpoints, the logic or principles of historiography, and concrete historical writings. Generally speaking, whether in the past, present or future, one fundamental fact that does not change and that everyone today knows is: the winners write history as well as pass judgments on the losers. In fact, if you revisit any important historical moment, you could discover that the final outcome had arisen out of numerous contingencies. You might even have sufficient evidence to theorize: history is a series of contingencies linked together. Yet interestingly, those who hold such kind of historical viewpoints probably would not interpret the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union as contingencies.

Teng Wei: Right.

Dai Jinhua: Returning to the historical narratives that we are familiar with, from the theoretical reflections of Lenin and the realization of the Russian Revolution, it would not be difficult for you to discover that even if people can successfully narrate the October Revolution as a kind of contingency, yet this contingency had, among numerous other contingencies, come out and ultimately won – obviously it had to do with the thorough theoretical reflections and preparations, the launch of in-depth social mobilization and the organizational establishment that Lenin and revolutionaries of the period did well in advance. Therefore to me, responding to those kinds of viewpoint does not have much meaning. Of course, the mainstream history would undoubtedly be revisionist history,

would continue changing, negating or eradicating the significance of the Russian Revolution. Yet no one could possibly rewrite the complete 20th century history. In face of that sweeping 20th century history of wars and violence, the contingency theory, the micro historical viewpoints, the pedants and the gossips could be no more than effective or limited rhetorical tactics or ideological ventriloquism. In fact, there are other voices all along. For example an American historian has used large quantity of first hand materials to analyze Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. According to his materials, the speech was completely a pack of lies. Yet up to now, the speech by Khrushchev is still the key basis on which people talk about socialist Soviet Union and the Stalinist era. Another example: Russian domestic history writing has analyzed that during the entire process of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the working class had almost no say. That is to say, the former Soviet people, or the Soviet working class, might have rejected the political economic road from Stalin to Brezhnev, yet their alternate plan was the possibility of realizing mass democracy, not a complete regression to barbaric / mafia capitalism. However, at the time of political change, the people did not have the opportunity to express their choice, and did not have the opportunity to participate in making new decisions. This is the second point.

The entire narrative logic for judging the 20th century revolution has almost completely relied on the facts of violence, bloodiness and massacre as evidence that support the judgment of authoritarianism (/ socialism). Similar kinds of historical narratives have used Stalinism, particularly the bloody party purge towards the end of the 1930s, as synonym or coverall of the entire Russian Revolution. It was like using the bloody government of Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot to symbolize or cover the history of 20th century international communism. Perhaps evidences being quoted in such narratives were indeed confirmed facts, yet the facts which have been consciously or unconsciously neglected by the narrators are: first, Leninism never denied its characteristics and nature of violence – “violent revolution, smashing the old state machine”. Using Mao Zedong's words, it is “political power growing out of the barrel of a gun”, “revolution is riot; it is the violent act of one class overthrowing another class”. My interpretation is that, setting aside the various positive or negative definitive imagining or expounding of revolution, any true revolution – proletarian or bourgeois – would inevitably involve wholesale, large-scale social wealth redistribution, let alone attempts on fair share of wealth and elimination of private ownership. That determines the unavoidable element of violence in revolution. It is not to do with personal preference and it is never possible to be a simple personal choice (whether desiring or rejecting). Next, the kind of narratives relating to the Russian Revolution as well as the writings and accusations regarding the “violent acts” of communism have been fundamentally built on a “non-historical” premise. Not only did it leave out the violent acts in the western camp and in the Third World in the history of the entire 20th century, it also left out the violent acts and massacres of colonial expansion in the entire modern history. At the same time, one of the characteristics of being “non-historical” is that it does not discuss concrete historical structures and situations, it does not discuss the reasons for each “violent act” to take place, it does not distinguish the external and internal dissimilarity from one “violent act” to another. On the contrary, it has been replaced by some kind of imagined, dream-like, idealistic social political condition, as background for those specific “violent acts”. As far as I am concerned, to visit history, to differentiate the violent acts in history, is not for the purpose of selectively forgetting or forgiving certain kinds of violent acts. On the contrary, living is remembering. If our utopian goal or ideal is justice and the liberation of humanity, then it must include justice for the dead – not to be forgotten or obliterated.

Visiting history, refusing the “non-historical”, rejecting the logic of the winners, rejecting the judgment of losers – it is precisely the refusal to forget.

If we were to say what new historical perspectives are needed today to re-read the Russian Revolution, I think there are no more than two. One is what we have already talked about: we must understand afresh the revelations of the Russian Revolution amidst the new circumstances of globalized capitalism. That is because global capitalism has already become a true and blatant fact today. The global capitalist financial market, its production chain and market chain, the logistic system being put together for that enormous, high-energy consuming shipping system – have tied the world closely together. Capitalism no longer has its externality. It is not as Marx had predicted, that the world would be separated into two, and eventually polarizing into the bourgeoisie and the proletariat: capitalism breeding its own grave-digger. Yet, today’s world is also as Marx had predicted, capitalism has ultimately completed its appropriation and conquest of the whole world, and at the same time created the condition for its own eradication and destruction.

However, the problem is what comes after capitalism. How to avoid having the doomsday of capitalism become ultimately the doomsday of the Earth? In today’s world, one side is the financial capital, global production chain and logistic chain integrating the world and the world’s asset holders, the other side is the laborers around the world, particularly the abandoned people, sharply segregated from within the boundaries of nation states. At the same time, there is the global mobility which continues to take place on a scale of ethnic migration, not “emigration”, as Umberto Eco put it. Simultaneous to the movement of the few elites in the upper echelon are all kinds of illegal immigrants, refugees, accompanying another type of segregation and confrontation: racism, right-wing populism, terrorism, and their inevitable derivative: the threat of fascism. It remains what Eco had said, this type of movement has reached the scale of ethnic migration and not just emigration. As an aside, one important fact regarding the 20th century that has been veiled by revisionism is that the only force that had attempted to stop and to stand up to international fascism was international communism, while the “free world” had stood aside during that cruel confrontation back then, out of fear and wariness of communism, resulting ultimately in the unimpeded strengthening of fascism in Europe. I think that in the face of global capitalism’s new situation, its development and crisis, we are encountering a reality that is almost impossible to divert, a reality that is not covered by the theories and predictions of Marxism. Therefore, the significance and revelation of the Russian Revolution is first and foremost: the creation of a new social possibility. The significance of this new possibility is in leading us as a whole out of the predicament, and allowing the majority of the people to have hope of gaining benefits in future changes.

On the other side, re-narrating the Russian Revolution is looking back at history after one hundred years. I have always thought that the effective way is not to launch a defense in face of the winners’ verdict. In fact, I have all along refused the role of defendant in any sense. That is because the role of defendant would first and foremost imply acceptance of the court, the laws and the game rules of the winners, accepting the premise of the possible guilty verdict. For me, the meaningful task is: consciously take up the role of heir to the legacies of the red history of the 20th century, and at the same time it is inevitably the role of settling the account of the red history. To me, this liability which is as weighty as, perhaps weightier than, the precious legacy is not the list of crimes appearing on the judges’ verdict, but an in-depth reflection and pursuit - it should not be forgotten that the 20th century

international communist movement and the socialist camp that grew out of it had not been conquered or shattered by capitalism. On the contrary, it had self-exploded and lost without a fight. So, its political logics, cultural logics and social organization forms... what had the problems been? In face of this brand new and crisis-laden world, activating the red legacy is clearly and urgently necessary, yet we all know that in order to activate the legacy, the premise has to be settlement of the liability. Yes, I have not the least desire, nor do I feel it necessary to launch a dialogue or debate with any mainstream history, because they are not only judging the Russian revolution as a matter of course, they are also judging the French Revolution all-out – the French and European revisionist histories are comprehensively, “objectively”, negatively re-writing the French Revolution. We all know that it had been the central movement in the bourgeois revolution symphony, the beginning moment of modern history. In the sense of history of thought and political history, the most important paradigm shift in the recent twenty, thirty years has been the replacement, covering or negation of the French Revolution by the American Revolution, referred by some as replacement of the political mode with an economic mode. However, it does not require many words to show that this enormous, global orientation in thought and culture towards bidding farewell to revolution is by itself displaying an enormous fear of the history of the revolution and of 20th century memory. In other words, the specter of revolution still represents an enormous threat to those benefitting from global capitalism and the capitalist world. The reason that Ghost Theory has become a new creation at the start of the new century is precisely that apparitions are found everywhere and specters appear all the time. Because of that, the Russian Revolution again shows its significance as a starting point – not only for 20th century history but also as the continuation of history into the future. We can rely on that to find again our subject position, to find it together with the majority of the people and to fight for the common future.

Teng Wei: The next question is that there is a recent article by Zizek, “Lenin Navigating in Uncharted Territories” and at the beginning of the article he made the point that in 2017 we not only should celebrate the centennial of the October Revolution, we should also celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first edition of *Capital* and the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Commune’s taking over of power from the authorities. He seemed to think that these three events represent the three stages of communist movement. One phrase that we as Chinese have become thoroughly familiar from childhood is that “the sound of canon from the Russian Revolution brought us Marxism”. Yet up until now we also have very few celebrations of the Russian Revolution. With reference to the reality of today, can you further talk about the significance of the legacy of the Russian Revolution?

Dai Jinhua: Earlier we already talked about the dual historical significance of “the sound of canon from the Russian Revolution brought us Marxism”: the consciousness towards proletarian revolution and world revolution, and the pursuit of an alternate road by oppressed peoples and countries to build independent nation states. The revelation of the Russian Revolution has made the 1919 May Fourth Movement, and not the 1911 Revolution, to be the true starting point of China’s modern history. In 2017 China is facing the same predicament as Russia, which is also the predicament that the Chinese ruling class has faced all along. The revelations of the Russian Revolution to China had been the key driving factor forming the May Fourth Movement, which was in turn the driving factor of the new cultural movement, or the birth of the genuine modern China. The genuine modern China was not born out of the 1911 Revolution but out of the May Fourth Movement. In China, to trace the

historical significance of the October Revolution would be to trace the history of the spread of Marxism, the history of left-wing thinking and revolution.

Yet I think that the direct and important revelation of the October Revolution to the world today is to rethink the possible naming of the new historical subject, to attempt to interpellate that subject. We know that prior to the October Revolution, Russia was an under-developed agricultural country. Yet the practice of Leninism had ultimately turned it into the first country that had won a victory in the proletarian revolution. In other words, the proletariat in Marxist theory not only pointed to a growing class but also achieved an important naming, the naming of a future historical subject. Thence the practice of Marxism could call on the success of the proletarian / socialist revolution in Russia and China (even though undoubtedly the nature of this red political power that was obtained by means of military uprising and urban labor riots had determined right from the start the situation of red urban political power encircled by grey rural regions at large. That fact had also determined the frequent appearance of red violence since then.) Relative to the new situation of global capitalism of today, the revelation of the Russian Revolution is also pointing to the urgent as well as fundamental theoretical / practical proposition: what is the future historical subject for the world today, what kind of force and masses could take up and develop the post-capitalist world? Among the consumers / debtors (the group of young, urban middle-class after losing upward social mobility), the third world laborers and the new abandoned people in the whole world, where is the integrating force and the historical naming? To me that is the significance of the Russian Revolution, which has been always there, always new.

Teng Wei: The last question, as film researchers, we all know that the Russian Revolution had had a very important impact on the development of film art in the 20th century. I would particularly like to hear your further tracing of this history.

Dai Jinhua: There are two fundamental or important aspects here. One aspect is that as we know, Russia, in particular Red Russia, was one of the birth places of film art. If it is said American films with "last minute rescue" had created the rhetoric of film art, then it was precisely the Soviet montage school as well as the theory and practice of montage that had made film into art, and further had attempted to arrive at philosophical expression. Once upon a time, in the history of the film world, there was not a mere binary separation into so-called commercial films and art films, but a quadruple separation: right beside the American Hollywood films and the European art films, there were the Soviet/East European political/art films as well as all kinds and all types of ethnic parabolic films of the Third World. Soviet films, together with Soviet literature, music and paintings, had once moved and inspired generations of people of this world, particularly during the Cold War. The other aspect is that: film is not simply one of the greatest arts of the 20th Century but also some kind of national-trans-border industry, in some sense an indication of state power (not only soft power). Under certain circumstances it plays the role of an image name-card of the nations. In the former era of U.S. and Soviet rivalry, they had at the same time been the two major industrial systems for films and the two main industrial systems for film rolls. Of course, they were two completely incompatible ideologies, two types of film aesthetic systems and film rhetoric forms. People seem to have forgotten that Tarkovsky, the master of film art whom the world reveres today, had grown up and had created on the soil of Soviet film industry and Soviet-Russian culture. Yet with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of Russia, the once enormous state film industrial system had collapsed

overnight. At the most tragic time, on that wide span of the Russian territories, only seven screens were left. What became dispersed at the same time was the history and memories regarding Soviet art films. I have contacts with some Russian film circle, some young teachers and students in Moscow's film academies. Their true recollections of their own film masters had only come down to Tarkovsky. As for Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov..., their reaction was unfamiliar, to be more precise, extremely indifferent.

Teng Wei: It couldn't be!

Dai Jinhua: It was certainly so. Just as Russia has not been able to rebuild its position as a great nation within the global system, Russia has not been able to rebuild its own film industry. The Russian films that the world know of today, just like for most non-western countries, are simply the few art films that international film festivals have favored. Among them, one type that is quite symptomatic and to me also quite tragic, is *Fausto* by Sokurov. This art film that was subsidized by the Russian Cultural Revitalizing Fund actually picked for its theme a German classic, and besides, it could only complete the filming with funds directly operated by Putin himself. The re-surfacing of Soviet-Russia's film aesthetics has been applied nakedly to a cultural expression that is almost bootlicking the winners. And some others, whether directly or indirectly, have become somniloquy of that historical amnesia and aphasia: such as all kinds of stories with peculiar displays of intimate father-son relationships (even father-son love affairs which were definitely not manifestation of homosexuality), such as the story about the father-son's road actually being named *The Name that Disappeared from the Map*, or stories of son killing father and father killing son that were densely mixed with an orthodox Christian atmosphere. In my interpretation, this is undoubtedly a sense of nightmarish, bloody, intricate, clinging and powerless nostalgia towards the former Soviet Union, the wandering of the murdered son's ghost, also the sense of guilt and craze after assassinating the father.

In connection with the Russian Revolution to re-examine the history of Soviet-Russian film history, we would discover that within it there is something almost like the shattered pieces of a holographic picture, including all (at least most) of the propositions that we are attempting to reflect on, to clear up, and to re-initiate. The key points are first, that the glamour of Soviet films had directly come from the cultural policy that Lenin laid down after the victory of the October Revolution, reflecting a high priority given to film and a preferential view towards film. The far-sightedness of Lenin had been demonstrated not only in his foreseeing the common nature and mass nature that films could possess, but also in his overall planning of future political culture: building the new culture of socialism to interpellate new people; building and eventually arriving at the new society. One of my viewpoints is that on the defeat, without even a fight, of 20th century international communist movement and the socialist camp, or their implosion, one important, or perhaps even the most important, reason is the failure of the attempts and endeavors to create a new socialist culture. The success of the western world's peaceful transformation has precisely come from the failure of the eastern camp's cultural construction. New culture is not and certainly cannot be simple propaganda or ideological indoctrination (/ brainwashing), but must be completely new logic and value. Secondly, the reason why socialist Soviet Union became one of the birth-places of film art was because it had been a global storm of a cultural revolution in another sense: a component part within the modernity movement. Constructivism, futurism, cubism... had all made use of icons of Russian-Soviet artists and film personalities around the time of the October Revolution. To me, that constituted an important

proposition and riddle: which is the water-and-fire historical relationship between socialist political power and modernist art movement. Even though the way I look at it – even if we cannot simply connect the modernist art movement with the unprecedented capitalist crisis during the early 20th century, or we cannot directly equate modernism art movement with the self-hatred or denunciation of bourgeois culture, we can at least point out definitively: the modernist art movement is the self-exposure of modernity's most in-depth internal contradiction. Almost all important Marxist theorists would in some ways lend importance or agreement to the social and cultural demands of modern art as well as the aesthetic revolutionary significance that they carry. Yet starting with the Soviet Union, the art movement had been banned, simultaneous with the establishment and consolidation of new political power. That might lead us to the recess of the Russian Revolution or the practice of Leninism, to reflect on the internal tension between nation state and the proletarian political power, to reflect on the multi-level themes of revolution and order, people and power. Yes, films have never been simply films.

Teng Wei: Thank you!

Translated from Chinese into English by Alice Chow.