

*Reconstructing Water metaphor in portraying modern China and its minorities in Zhang Yang's "Shower."*

*(Vorontsova Julia)*

This paper discusses the issue of Chinese minority representation. Minorities are generally viewed as China's "own internal Other". While the concept of family is often applied to present the relationship between the minorities and a probably illusory<sup>1</sup>, Han majority, this "family" relationship does not mean equality. This paper focuses on representation of Chinese minorities in Zhang Yang's film "Shower" ("Xi Zao" 洗澡) and use of water metaphor in constructing the power relationship within the state.

Throughout the film, "minority" is described explicitly in total less than five minutes, but the representations have a crucial effect on forming Chinese modern identity. Father-son, male-female, owner and owned and other oppositions showing the political hierarchy within China are described. As Gladney (1994, p. 93) notes, that the "process of representation of "minority"...suggests the following parallels: Minority is to the majority as the female is to male, as "Third" World is to "First", and as subjectivized to objectivized identity." Learning about the representations of minorities in China we learn more about the socio-political atmosphere in China and the construction of its "majority" Han identity.

"Shower," produced in 1999, by Zhang Yang. Sometimes called "nostalgic" (Hongwei Lu 2008, p. 122), it tells the story of an old bathhouse and its old owner. The discussion of the value and importance of water parallels the approaching reconstruction of the old city. The elder son of the old man and a successful businessman Da Ming comes to visit his elderly father having received a confusing postcard from his retarded young brother.

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<sup>1</sup> See Gladney 1994 and Prasenjit Duara 1993 for the discussion of the origins of Han nationality.

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During his stay, a qualities of water are demonstrated, while the rumors about approaching reconstruction become more and more common.

Water metaphor has been used in multiple Chinese philosophical texts. Clear and still water was at times compared to the perfected heart-mind, it was associated with rule, power and life. Zhang Yang re-constructs the central metaphor in such a way that it gives preference to modernization and reconstruction of China. It justifies the demolishing of the city and destroying its culture and traditions. It also places China's "minority" at the bottom of political and social hierarchy.

"Shower" is a widely known film in China and abroad. It is often included in Chinese Cinema course in institutions in Europe and North America. Therefore understanding the representation of "minority-majority" relationship is necessary for an objective understanding of Chinese nation. Questions like metaphor of water constructed to promote Han-Chinese power, feminization and erotization of minorities, portrayal of modernity and its incompatibility with traditional life are discussed in this paper.

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