The Nuclear Future and Politics in the Postwar Asian Screens:

A Comparative Close Analysis of Four Chinese and Japanese SF Films from 1954 to 1963

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I undertake a comparative analysis of the portrayal of the power of the nuclear and its envisioned future in four seminal Chinese and Japanese Science Fiction films from 1954 to 1963. These include *Shisanling shuiku changxiangqu* 十三陵水库畅想曲 (Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir, d. Jin Shan, 1958), *Xiaotaiyang* 小太阳 (The Little Sun, d. Wang Minsheng, 1963), *Gojira* ゴジラ (Godzilla, d. Honda Ishiro, 1954), and *Sekai daisenso* 世界大戦争 (The Last War, d. Matsubayashi Shue, 1961). This comparative study reveals a dualistic perspective on the power of the nuclear in Chinese and Japanese SF films, portraying it as a double-edged sword. While Chinese SF films *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* and *The Little Sun* highlight its utopian potential for social and human advancement, the Japanese SF films *Godzilla* and *The Last War* offer a complex view that weighs the destructive potential of nuclear weapons alongside its possible positive capacities.

Chapter One examines two Chinese and Japanese SF films from the mid-to-late 1950s, *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* contrasts ancient China's oppression with a nuclear-powered utopian commune in the socialist future, artistically reflects struggles against natural forces and imperialists through a symbolic construction site. Meanwhile, *Godzilla* sentimentality constructs a poignant narrative, offering a nuanced reflection on the fearful threat of the power of the nuclear in Japan. And Chapter Two delves into the early 1960s, when Chinese SF milestone *The Little Sun* envisions a hyper-technological China, portraying a utopian dream that symbolize advancements towards a borderless world. Conversely, *The Last War* revisits the traumatic Hiroshima experience and warns against nuclear devastation, similar in sentimentality to *Godzilla*, further enhancing the sense of vulnerability and victimization in postwar Japan.

Acknowledgements

"A master's is not something you do; it is something you become."

After months of finalizing my MA thesis in the bizarrely warm and snowless winter at my place in Edmonton, I suddenly recalled this sentence I had heard during a graduate student orientation two years ago. Glazing at the flurries outside the windowpane, I began asking myself what I had become during this academic journey at the University of Alberta. Finding this particular answer has been challenging, but one thing is sure: I received tremendous support and contributions from various individuals inside and outside Canada during these two years. Here, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all those who have helped me.

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On a personal note, I would like to sincerely thank my parents, Wei Zhou and Quan Zhang, for their unwavering love and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Their faith in me has been a constant source of strength. Additionally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Baoyu Sun, who passed away in May 2023. My grandmother took great care of me throughout my childhood, and I genuinely hope she rests in peace.

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Introduction

What is the fastest way to reach the stars? Through the boundless realms of imagination, Science Fiction (hereafter SF) answers me.

In recent decades, the global landscape of SF has witnessed a remarkable transformation with the rise of Chinese and Japanese contributions. The commercial success of the 2019 Chinese blockbuster *Liulang diqiu* (流浪地球, The Wandering Earth) and its sequel *Liulang diqiu 2* (流浪地球 2, The Wandering Earth 2) made SF a significant part of the Chinese film market. In academia, alongside the burgeoning “Liu Cixin Boom” in Chinese SF studies since, the award-winning SF novel *Santi* (三体, Three-Body Problem) has solidified China’s stature in the global SF world.

Meanwhile, Japan, another major East Asian power, has seen the fruition of SF seeds sown decades ago. Hollywood adaptations of iconic Japanese works such as the 2014 film *Godzilla*, its 2019 sequel *Godzilla: King of the Monsters*, and the 2021 blockbuster *Godzilla vs Kong*, along with the visually stunning *Ghost in the Shell* in 2017 have introduced Japanese SF to millions of fans worldwide, embedding it firmly in global popular culture.

Yet, within this vibrant epoch of Chinese and Japanese SF, there remain unexplored territories. Tracing back to the national origins of these genres, especially during the 1950s and 1960s - a period marked by the Cold War and the dawn of the Atomic Age - reveals a rich tapestry of pioneering works. However, a comprehensive comparative analysis of Chinese and Japanese SF films from this era is notably absent. This thesis thus embarks on a journey to explore these overlooked domains, seeking to unravel the technological narratives that have shaped the foundations of Chinese and Japanese SF during the transformative postwar era.

Science Fiction: More than a Genre

Before examining Chinese and Japanese SF films, it is imperative to confront the fundamental question: How do we define SF? Is SF a genre?[1] Following the path of Jules Verne to Hugo Gernsback, Issac Asimov, Komatsu Sakyo, and Liu Cixin, SF has proven to be a captivating realm that transcends time and space, fascinating scholars and enthusiasts for decades.

However, defining SF is challenging, especially when viewed through Rick Altman's lens, which sees genres as dynamic, ongoing processes rather than permanently fixed categories.[2] This becomes particularly evident considering the ever-evolving post-WWII media landscape. Here, it could be said that SF emerges not merely as a conventional *genre* but as a continuously evolving narrative. Through Altman's semantic and syntactic approach, exploring SF in Chinese and Japanese cinema transcends simple genre analysis, delving into the interplay of thematic elements and narrative structures distinctive to these cultures.[3] Consequently, SF's scope has undergone transformative shifts, underscoring the fluidity and hybridity intrinsic to the genre and resonating the dynamic of postwar culture.[4]

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[1] Given the constraints of this thesis as a close comparative reading, a comprehensive discussion on the academic debate surrounding the definition of SF is beyond its scope. However, the primary purpose of this section is to depict my own perspective on SF, particularly as it pertains to the SF film texts examined in this research project. This viewpoint is informed by the theoretical frameworks of Rick Altman, Darko Suvin, Fredric Jameson, Adam Roberts, Istvan Csiscery-Ronay, and Vivian Sobchack, who collectively serve as the foundation underpinning this thesis.
[2] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, (BFI Publishing, 1999), 11-12, 54.
[3] Altman, *Film/Genre*, 87-89.
[4] It is noteworthy that the films selected for analysis in this thesis were not commonly categorized as SF at the time of their release. Instead, they were classified under various other genres: *Ballad of the Ming Tomb Reservoir* (1958) as a feature film, *The Little Sun* (1963) as an educational film, *Godzilla* (1954) as a monster film, and *The Last War* (1961) as a special effects film. However, retrospectively, it becomes evident that these films embody distinct SF elements within their plots. Therefore, for the purpose of clarity and consistency in later discussions, these films will be referred to under the terms "SF" and "SF films."

Tracing back to the 1970s and 1980s, Darko Suvin is renowned for his influential concept of *cognitive estrangement* and *novum* in SF studies, which he introduced in his seminal work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. The theory of *cognitive estrangement* posits that SF achieves its unique narrative power by creating a sense of alienation or unfamiliarity in the reader while providing enough context for comprehension. He contends that SF is defined by the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, employing an imaginative framework distinct from the author's empirical environment.[5] *Cognitive estrangement* prompts readers to critically examine their reality, leading to a more profound engagement with the speculative world.[6] Suvin encourages us to view SF not merely as escapism but as a form of intellectual exercise that challenges our preconceptions. It encourages contemplation of the imagined world's social, political, and philosophical implications, ultimately deepening our understanding of the fictional and real worlds.

Darko Suvin's *novum*, on the other hand, refers to a specific element or concept within a science fiction narrative that is new, different, and previously nonexistent in our experience or knowledge. *Novum* "appears as an invention or a discovery around which the characters and setting organize themselves in a cogent, historically plausible way."[7] The *novum* is a critical component of *cognitive estrangement*, as it serves as the focal point through which we engage with the speculative nature of the narrative, prompting us to consider its implications and contrasts with reality. Suvin's contributions to the understanding of SF continue to be highly

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[5] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*, (Yale University Press, 1979), 7-8.
[6] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, "Marxist Theory and Science Fiction" in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, (Eds. Edward James, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 118.
[7] *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, 119.

influential in SF studies nowadays, providing a framework for appreciating the genre's distinct narrative strategies and their impact on our perceptions and intellectual inquiries.

Expanding upon the work of Darko Suvin, Marxist critic Fredric Jameson contends that SF operates as a distinctive cultural medium, mirroring the prevailing historical and societal circumstances of its inception. In his work *Archaeologies of the Future*, Jameson suggests that SF narratives are particularly adept at representing a given era's social, economic, and political structures.[8] As Jameson argues, "our imaginations are hostages to our own mode of production."[9] This premise underscores the notion that SF narratives frequently encode the ideological currents of their time, offering a lens through which the reader can dissect the prevailing societal preoccupations.[10] Jameson's theory underlines SF's potential to serve as a medium for cultural critique and a platform for exploring alternative socio-political paradigms.[11] By examining the speculative futures and realms depicted within SF works, we thus gain valuable insight into the underlying tensions and aspirations of the societies that give rise to them.

Furthermore, an essential aspect distinguishing SF from fantasy and horror is its emphasis on explanation. Vivian Sobchack argues that the differentiation between magic and science, as well as between horror and SF, hinges on the extent of information provided about the underlying processes and outcomes, particularly the cause-and-effect relationships.[12] Sobchack's comprehensive definition of SF film further highlights its incorporation of actual, extrapolative, or speculative science, coupled with empirical methodology, within a social

[8] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, (Verso, 2005), 171-172, 270, 289.
[9] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future, xiii.*
[10] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 345.
[11] *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, 121.
[12] Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, (2nd ed. Rutgers University Press, 1997), 59.

context, as it "emphasizes actual, extrapolative, or speculative science and the empirical method, interacting in a social context with the lesser emphasized, but still present, transcendentalism of magic and religion, in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown."[13] Sobchack's perspective underscores the breadth and inclusivity of SF, demonstrating that it encompasses a wide array of subject matter that extends beyond the themes of aliens, outer space, and spaceships.

The boundaries of SF keeps expanding. Adam Roberts, while tracing the footprint of SF back to the age of ancient Greece in his ambitious work *The History of Science Fiction*, notices that in the last decades of the 20th century, SF experienced a significant transformation, becoming increasingly dominated by visual media and a sub-genre termed *visual spectacularism*.[14] As he discusses, this sub-genre, prevalent in cinema, emphasizes scale, grandeur, special effects, and the creation of visually impressive alternate worlds, showcasing events and beings designed to amaze the audience.[15] This shift marks a fundamental change in how SF narratives are consumed and appreciated. In contrast to the traditional dominance of novels and poetry in Western culture for the past 300 years, today, most of the global population, including many novel readers, primarily engage with stories through visual mediums such as cinema and television.[16] Roberts thus emphasizes the profound impact of visual media on 20th-century SF. In contrast to Roberts, I do not aim to expand the scope of SF beyond the modern era. In the narratives of Chinese and Japanese SF, SF is intricately linked to modernization and the introduction of Western technology and ideology in Qing Dynasty China and Meiji Japan.[17]

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[13] Sobchack, *Screening Space*, 63.
[14] Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction,* (2nd ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 383.
[15] Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, 383.
[16] Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction,* 384.
[17] Nagayama Yasuo sees "the question of when Japanese SF began is linked to the question of when modern Japan began." Similarly, David Der-wei Wang explores how Chinese SF contributed to the process of Chinese modernization during the late Qing period. See Nagayama Yasuo 長山靖生. *Nihon sf*

Following Roberts, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay highlights how SF permeates various media forms in the post-industrial North at the beginning of his *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*.[18] He notes that a wide range of media, from films to non-genre fiction, either explicitly belong to SF or incorporate its elements, showcasing the genre's broad cultural impact.[19] This normalization of estrangement has spurred the emergence of *science-fictionality*, a cognitive framework that transcends SF's traditional boundaries.[20] He further suggests that SF is "a complex hesitation about the relationship between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future."[21] This paradigm shift means that SF has transcended its conventional role as a genre with formulaic effects, evolving into a more pervasive and profound form of cognitive engagement with the world.

Later, as he sees SF "can be treated as a particular, recognizable mode of thought and art,"[22] Csicsery-Ronay offers a fascinating perspective on science-fictionality through his framework of *the seven beauties*: fictive neology, fictive novums, future history, imaginary science, the science fictional sublime, the science-fictional grotesque, and the *Technologiade*.[23] This framework encapsulates how SF introduces innovative languages and concepts, presents ground-breaking ideas or technologies, crafts cohesive alternative timelines, delves into speculative scientific concepts, evokes awe through extraordinary phenomena - whether human-

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seishinshi 日本 SF 精神史 [Japanese SF Spiritual History], (Kawade Shobo Shinsha 河出書房新社, 2018), 14-15. And David Der-wei Wang 王德威, Shitongsan kehuanxing – zhongguo kehuan xiaoshuo de xingqi bofa yu weilai 史统散, 科幻兴 – 中国科幻小说的兴起，勃发与未来 [The Rise of Science Fiction – The Rise, Development and Future of Chinese Science Fiction], *Exploration and Free Views* 探索与争鸣, no.8 (2016), 105-106.

18 Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 1.

19 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 1-2.

20 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 1-2.

21 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 4.

22 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 5.

23 Csicsery-Ronay, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, 5-7.

science or non-human-science related - and presents intricate narratives of techno-history. Csicsery-Ronay's interpretation further highlights the multifaceted nature of SF, providing a lens through which to appreciate its diverse narrative elements and imaginative potential.

Chinese and Japanese Cinema in the 1950s and 1960s

The 1950s and 1960s marked transformative periods for Japan and China, two prominent East Asian nations scarred by the aftermath of WWII. In Japan, the conclusion of the Allied occupation in 1952 constituted a significant turning point, as the nation reclaimed governance under Japanese politicians, and the rejuvenation was imminent. Embedded with pacifism and under the protection of the United States, this era witnessed the demilitarized Japan becoming an ally of liberal democracy. Concurrently, responding to the demand for both military and non-military supplies during the Korean War in the early 1950s, Japan laid the foundation for what would become known to the world as the Japanese "economic miracle," with the country marching towards the monumental moment of the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964.

Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China of the early 1950s joined the North Korean side of the Korean War in one of the major flashpoints of the Cold War. Internally, China faced several waves of domestic turbulence with various disruptive government movements and mobilizing campaigns. The domestic socialist reform from 1953 to 1956 in the People's Republic was unprecedented in its scope, reflecting the reborn nation's desire to emulate the Soviet Union's socialist vision. However, as a grand experiment, this endeavour led to profound social disorder. The catastrophic Great Leap Forward campaign and the establishment of the People's Commune in 1958 brought a seismic shift to China, altering social institutions and structures throughout the country. In this period of instability, China also experienced a devastating three-year famine, claiming the lives of tens of millions and finally moving inevitably into the chaotic decade of the Cultural Revolution, which commenced in 1966. Throughout the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, the two major Asian powers, China and Japan, not only moved in different political directions, but their cinematic worlds were in flux as well and moving farther apart, aesthetically speaking.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the film industries of Japan and China took two distinct trajectories. Japanese cinema of the era mainly served as a source of entertainment and a channel for nostalgic reflection on the wartime experience. By contrast, Chinese films, during the so-called period of "seventeen years" (1949 - 1966) primarily characterized by heavy-handed government involvement in cultural affairs in general, closely adhered to the political directives of the Communist Party, mainly functioning as a tool in propagating its ideological agenda.[24]

Yomota Inuhiko, in his book *What is Japanese Cinema?: A History* offers a historical perspective on the Japanese film industry of the 1950s and 1960s, characterizing it as an emergent profit-generating force that became the core of mass entertainment, fueling an expanding domestic market.[25] The 1950s and early 1960s are also considered "the peak of the studio system" and the second peak of Japanese cinema, with the viewership surpassing 1 billion in 1958.[26] This era also witnessed a high point in film production, with 547 films released in 1960 from major studios such as Toho, Daiei, Shochiku, Toei, and Nikkatsu, as well as

[24] The statement highlights a general trend in the PRC film industry during the period. However, as Gina Marchetti points out, some PRC films such as *Wutai jiemei* (Two Stage Sisters), successfully retained elements of bourgeois and Western sensibility, standing out in contrast to the prevailing norms of the era. See Gina Marchetti, "Two Stage Sisters: The Blossoming of a Revolutionary Aesthetic," in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 34 (1989), 95-106.
[25] Yomota Inuhiko, *What is Japanese Cinema?: A History*, trans. Phil Kaffen, (Columbia University Press, 2019), 20.
[26] Yomota, *What Is Japanese Cinema?*, 20.

independent productions. This "feverish period" was eventually tempered by the influence of television.[27]

Sandra Wilson highlights that during the 1950s, the WWII narrative emerged as a predominant and widely embraced theme within Japanese cinema.[28] While a subset of Japanese films conscientiously depicted the grim realities and human suffering of the war,[29] a substantial amount of Japanese war films produced after the end of the occupation and the American censorship chose to portray the Japanese soldier in a favourable light.[30] Wilson contends that this shift in narrative approach can be primarily attributed to the filmmakers' dual aim of captivating their audience through entertainment while fostering a profound sense of "nostalgia for the lost experience of solidarity and sacrifice."[31]

For newly born socialist China, the film industry transformed the nationalist era. After 1952, the new Chinese film industry, as Yingjin Zhang observes, "was under complete control of the Chinese Communist Party, which acted autocratically in the name of the nation-state, and the fate of filmmakers and, to a lesser degree, film administrators were subject to the unpredictable whims of the CCP leadership."[32] Chinese filmmakers navigated within the confines of the socialist state's ideological framework, aligning their endeavours with the CCP's ever-changing policies and political currents. As Zhang points out, China established a robust studio system in

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[27] Yomota, *What Is Japanese Cinema?*, 127.
[28] The Japanese war films in the fifties were focus on the events that happened during the Pacific War. Sandra Wilson, "Film and Soldier: Japanese War Movies in the 1950s." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, no.3 (2013), 538.
[29] Wilson, "Film and Soldier," 538.
[30] Wilson, "Film and Soldier," 539.
[31] Wilson, "Film and Soldier," 554. Wilson also indicates the favourable portrayal of war in these films represented the re-evaluation of the nation in justifying the wartime experience; furthermore, this strategy was instrumental in assimilating those who had experienced the war into the newly established economic growth model of the postwar era.
[32] Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, (1st ed. Routledge, 2004), 189

film production in an era similar to Japan's. However, particularly distinct, this Chinese system was state-owned and led by the CCP's guiding hand.[33]

In their comprehensive overview, Yaping Ding and Haina Jin's *General History of Chinese Film II: 1949-1976* also illustrates the profound extent of the CCP's political sway over the Chinese film industry and cast the industry as the victim of the political movements. Ding and Jin state that the Chinese filmmakers, at the time, "only had thoughts imposed by the authorities, making producing a film in China feel like carrying out an order."[34] However, it is worth noting that the state-controlled Chinese film industry in the 1950s was nuanced with some flexibility and freedom at the time. Particularly during the brief "interlude" from the spring of 1956 to the spring of 1957, Mao Zedong's "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign in art and literature fields encouraged the burdened film industry to explore the cinematic world with more freedom and significant inspiration from Western influences.[35] This freedom, however, was truncated by the chaotic Anti-Rightist Campaign in June 1957,[36] during which, according to Ding and Jin's account, "more than 7,000 people were arrested, more than 20,000 people committed suicide, and more than 3,500 people died abnormally."[37] During the late 1950s, Chinese filmmakers navigated a politically dangerous landscape where their careers and lives were at risk due to the prevailing political climate. Ding and Jin argue that the situation forced filmmakers to produce more political propaganda films, euphemistically referred to as "artistic

33 Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 191.
34 Yaping Ding and Haina Jin, *General History of Chinese Film II: 1949-1976*. (Routledge, 2021), 68.

35 Ding and Jin, *General History of Chinese Film II*, 74.
36 Ding and Jin, *General History of Chinese Film II*, 93.
37 Ding and Jin, *General History of Chinese Film II*, 93.

documentaries," [38] aimed at reinforcing the Party's new policy as "the new style of the Great Leap Forward."[39]

In Rudolf Wagner's insightful analysis of Chinese "SF" ("science-phantasy" instead of "science fiction" in his words), he underscores the profound influence of Stalin Era Soviet SF on Chinese SF from the 1950s to the 1970s. This influence is particularly evident in the optimistic outlook, emphasis on scientific progress, fascination with high-tech gadgets, and suspenseful storylines. [40] Wagner sees Chinese SF as a sub-category of science *belle-lettres* and the latter as a sub-category of the grand movement of science popularization.[41] He then emphasizes that Chinese SF remained within the framework of Soviet-originated socialist realism, which was later adapted to China in 1958. As he sums up, Chinese SF in the era "is "realistic" with its science element and shows "revolutionary romanticism" with its "phantasy" component." [42] This approach aimed to depict the seeds of a promising future within present realities.

Mingwei Song's book *New Wave in Chinese Science Fiction* also delineates how post-1950s Chinese SF was influenced by the Soviet literary model and the manner in which it was restricted under the socialist system. Song argues that the imposition of political correctness stifled Chinese SF's imaginative exploration, resulting in a mere replication of ideological

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[38] One of the Chinese SF films that I mention in this thesis, *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, is considered as one of the "artistic documentaries." See Ding and Jin, *General History of Chinese Film II*, 96.
[39] During the Great Leap Forward, spearheaded by Chairman Mao Zedong, China saw a surge in nationalistic fervor. The state-owned film industry, fully aligned with these ideals, worked fervently to produce "more, better, faster and cost-effective" films. Also see Paul Pickowicz, *China on Film: A Century of Exploration, Confrontation, and Controversy* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 196.
[40] Rudolf Wagner, "Lobby Literature: The Archeology and Present Functions of Science Fiction in China," In *After Mao*, (Harvard University Asia Center, 1985), 26-29.
[41] In Wagner's word, science *belle-lettres* (kexue wenyi, 科学文艺) "includes all science propaganda by artistic means: writing, art, or the modern media." See Wagner, "Lobby Literature," 19.
[42] Wagner, "Lobby Literature," 26.

narratives about “reality” and “the future.”[43] Within the socialist literary system, SF was relegated to a secondary status, primarily tasked with disseminating scientific knowledge and reinforcing established ideologies. The dominance of ideological goals and historical determinism severely constrained the genre’s potential for creativity and originality.[44]

In the 1950s and the 1960s, a notable divergence emerged in the popularity and production of SF films in Japan and China, as Japanese SF films were increasingly attracting popularity, while Chinese SF films were, to some extent, niche and nearly nonexistent. Following the seminal success of the now-classic *Gojira* ゴジラ (Godzilla, d. Honda Ishiro, Toho) in 1954,[45] Japan experienced a wave of *tokusatsu* 特撮 (special effects) films, with a substantial amount of them produced by Toho Studios[46] and some contributed from other major studios like Toei and Shochiku. These films showcased imaginative renderings of monstrous entities to the silver screens, including *Gojira no gyakushu* ゴジラの逆襲 (Godzilla Raids Again, d. Oda Motoyoshi, 1955, Toho), *Sora no daikaiju radon* 空の大怪獣ラドン (Rodan! The Flying Monster, d. Honda Ishiro, 1956, Toho), *Mosura* モスラ (Mothra, d. Honda Ishiro, 1961, Toho) and *Matango* マタンゴ (The Attack of the Mushroom People, d. Honda Ishiro, 1963, Toho); some films ventured into themes involving alien beings and space invasions as seen

[43] Song Mingwei 宋明炜, *Zhongguo kehuan xinlangchao* 中国科幻新浪潮 [New Wave in Chinese Science Fiction] (Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe 上海文艺出版社, 2022), 15-16.
[44] Song, *Zhongguo kehuan xinlangchao*, 101-102.
[45] The commercial success of *Godzilla* in 1954 was a milestone for Japanese SF films. The film eventually grossed over 152 million yen in cinemas and over 9.6 million paid admissions, more than a tenth of the Japanese population at the time. The sequel, *Gojira no gyakushu*, immediately began and hit Japanese theatres only a year later. See *Gojira kyarakuta daizen toho tokusatsu eiga daizenshu* ゴジラキャラクター大全 東宝特撮映画全史 [The Gojira Character Collection - The Complete History of Toho Special Effects Films]. (Kodansha, 2014), 39. And William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, (1st ed, St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004), 32.
[46] During the 1950s and 1960s, it could be said that Toho Studios took the lead in producing the majority of *tokusatsu* films in Japanese film market, bolstered by the invaluable contributions of the special effects director Tsuburaya Eiji.

in works like *Uchujin tokyo ni arawareru* 宇宙人東京に現れる (Warning from Space, d. Shima Koji, 1956, Daiei) *Chikyu boeigun* 地球防衛軍 (The Mysterians, d. Honda Ishiro, 1957, Toho), *Uchu daisenso* 宇宙大戦争 (Battle in Outer Space, d. Honda Ishiro, 1959, Toho) and *Yosei gorasu* 妖星ゴラス (Gorath the Mysterious Star, d. Honda Ishiro, 1962, Toho); and films such as *Daisanji sekai taisen* 第三次世界大戦 (The Third World War, d. Hidaka Shigeaki, 1960, Toei) and *Sekai daisenso* 世界大戦争 (The Last War, d. Matsubayashi Shue, 1961, Toho) that presented a grim vision of humanity's apocalypse in total nuclear war.

While Japanese SF films demonstrated impressive SF imagination, none exhibited a similar level of radicality as Chinese SF films of the era. However, their production number was incomparable to Japanese cinema. In stark contrast, Chinese SF films were scarce during this period, with only two prominent entries available for comparison. *Ballad of the Ming Tomb Reservoir*, an adaptation of Tian Han's opera under the same name, offered a utopian vision of a future Chinese commune. Another is *The Little Sun*, a short educational film primarily targeting children, which represented another early foray into Chinese SF.

Research Questions

In this thesis, I select four Chinese and Japanese SF films from 1954 to 1963 for my comparative analysis, *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (d. Jin Shan, 1958), the first-ever PRC film with groundbreaking SF elements; and *The Little Sun* (d. Wang Minsheng, 1963), the only SF film in the 1960s PRC and the first-ever PRC film showing the future cityscapes and space travel; *Godzilla* (d. Honda Ishiro, 1954), a pivotal monster film classic that marked the golden age of Japanese special effects films, and *The Last War* (d. Matsubayashi Shue, 1961) a delicate but often overlooked work of apocalyptical imagination with some of the finest Toho special effect of the era on display.[47] In this thesis, I ponder four research questions regarding these Chinese and Japanese SF films in the Atomic Age:

First, what were the attitudes of four Chinese and Japanese SF films towards nuclear energy and nuclear weapons during the same period? Second, what are the critical differences between the four Chinese and Japanese SF films in understanding their country's future and the outside world? Third, what can a close comparative analysis tell us about the contexts in which all four Chinese and Japanese SF films were produced? Fourth, what may account for the attitudes towards the power of the nuclear in four Chinese and Japanese SF films to be similar, different, or, to some extent, ambiguous?

I investigate how attitudes towards technological progress, particularly concerning the power of the nuclear, in these four Chinese and Japanese SF films in the 1950s and the 1960s were shaped by distinct cultural, historical, and political factors. In Chapter One, I contemplate how *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir,* as a product of political propaganda during the Great Leap Forward, creates a futuristic but hedonistic communist utopia based on an idealized, nationally backed view of atomic technology and the zeal of altering nature. While *Godzilla*, by contrast, functioning as a warning on the big screen, derived from the collective memory and social consciousness in the era, delivers a profoundly victimized reflection of the Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* (Lucky Dragon 5) in 1950s Japan. I view Chapter Two's comparison as a 1960s extension to the two Chinese and Japanese SF films in the 1950s. I argue that adhering to a similar mindset as *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, *The Little Sun* displays

[47] Some argues that the 1961 *The Last War* was one the peak of Toho-made *tokusatsu* films in the Tsuburaya Eiji's era. See *Tsuburaya eiji tokusatsu Sekai* 円谷英二特撮世界 [The World of Tsuburaya Eiji's Special Effect Films]. (Keibunsha 勁文社, 2001), 84-86.

a progressive and optimistic future of communist China and an oversimplified and nature-altering imagination that demonstrates a China-centred utopianism without any supervision from the outside. *The Last War*, on the other hand, as an extension of *Godzilla*'s imagination arc, reveals a destructive future with uncertainty, Japan's victimization, war-inspired international conflict, and overpowered nuclear weapons. These differing perspectives were influenced by a combination of historical events, socio-political contexts, and cultural philosophies, ultimately shaping the visions of the future in these four selected Chinese and Japanese films.

Overview of Existing Scholarship

The cinematic landscapes of Chinese and Japanese SF in the mid-20th century constitute a captivating yet relatively underexplored terrain for comparative analysis. While a substantial body of scholarship that isolates individual works exists, including that about *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* and *Godzilla*, a sizable gap in comprehensive examinations that juxtapose the cinematic achievements of China and Japan during the pivotal era of the 1950s and the 1960s remains. Regarding *The Little Sun* and *The Last War*, a scant number of direct mentions can be found in academic literature, with few of those, even fewer, providing detailed and nuanced readings.

Susan Napier's analysis situates the 1954 classic *Godzilla* within the backdrop of postwar Japanese society. Drawing upon Andrew Tudor's concept of "secure horror," she contends that the film seeks to "demonize American nuclear science in an obvious reference to the atomic tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."[48] Concurrently, *Godzilla* lauds the virtues of Japanese

[48] Susan Napier. "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira." *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1993), 331-332.

scientific achievements, allowing for the triumph of "good" Japanese technology.[49] Napier posits that this positive representation of scientific innovation serves as a form of cultural therapy, [50] envisaging a reimagined narrative of Japan's wartime suffering for the audience of its era.[51]

William Tsutsui's *Godzilla on My Mind* offers an in-depth understanding of the multifaceted layers of meaning embedded within the Godzilla series as the preeminent Japanese culture icon of the Atomic Age. In his detailed reading of the 1954 film *Godzilla*, Tsutsui underscores how the film serves as a reflection of Japan's collective trauma, both physically and emotionally scarred by the defeat in WWII when, in the aftermath, wartime memories were still raw.[52] Furthermore, Tsutsui sees *Godzilla* weaving a narrative of Japanese resilience and patriotism, subtly tinged with an undercurrent of anti-American sentiment as the film casting Japan as the saviour of the world, provides a powerful revision of World War II's outcome, injecting a sense of national pride and redemption into the narrative.[53] Later, he adds another intriguing layer to his reading, as Tsutsui speculates that the notion of the film's military action sequences forms forbidden pleasure in postwar Japan, akin to a type of "military pornography."[54] This stimulating perspective interprets the 1954 *Godzilla* blockbuster in a potentially pro-military light. Ultimately, Tsutsui reads *Godzilla* as a sophisticated morality play with a therapeutic message, offering a form of solace and reframing Japan's wartime history.

[49] Napier, "Panic Sites," 332.
[50] Susan Napier. "When Godzilla Speaks" in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*. Eds. William Tsutsui and Ito Michiko, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 10.
[51] Napier, "Panic Sites," 332.
[52] William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, (1st ed. St. Martin's Griffin, 2004), 17-18.
[53] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 35.
[54] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 97.

Tabata Masahide's interpretation of *Godzilla* (1954) establishes a connection between the monster and Japan's embrace of Western modernity. Tabata contends that Ishiro Honda's *Godzilla* serves as more than a representation of Japan's wartime and nuclear tragedies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[55] The monster also emerges as a poignant symbol of the victimization resulting from both nuclear devastation and the intrusion of Western materialistic civilization.[56] As Tabata puts it, "Godzilla, who is destroying the modern city that is the crystallization of Western civilization, is a kind of warning against the material civilization on which he depends and is a burden. At the same time, it strongly criticizes the self-drowning in it. He was also an entity that spoke for something and expressed it powerfully through the forbidden act of destruction."[57] Godzilla's assault on Tokyo can be viewed as a symbolic counterpoint to the notion of a Westernized Japan.

Kawamura Saburo's famous reading of the 1954 *Godzilla* delves into the darkness that fills the film, attributing it to the haunting spectres of the recent Pacific War and the unsettling memory of the US hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll, which occurred a mere eight months before the film release. He then suggests that the film emerges at the juncture of dread for a potential World War III soon.[58] Kawamoto's insight extends beyond categorizing *Godzilla* as a "war disaster film;" instead, he contends that it serves as a requiem for those who perished in WWII, particularly the soldiers lost at sea.[59] The formidable fear instilled by Godzilla in the

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[55] Tabata Masahide 田畑雅英. "Naze gojira wa toshi wo hakai suru no ka" なぜゴジラは都市を破壊するのか [Why Does Godzilla Destroy Cities?] *Studies in Urban Cultures* 都市文化研究, no. 5, (2005), 16.
[56] Tabata, "Naze gojira wa toshi wo hakai suru no ka," 16.
[57] Tabata, "Naze gojira wa toshi wo hakai suru no ka," 22.
[58] Kawamura Saburo 川村三郎. *Ima hitotabi no sengo nihon eiga* 今ひとたび戦後日本映画 [A Once-in-a-Lifetime Postwar Japanese Film], (Iwanami Bunko 岩波文庫, 2007), 80.
[59] Kawamura, *Ima hitotabi no sengo nihon eiga*, 86-88.

people of Tokyo, Kawamoto argues, arises not solely from its monstrous form but from its enigmatic emergence from the sea—an evocation of the "ghosts of the war dead" returning to life; thus, Kawamura posits that those who endured the wartime era felt compelled to create Godzilla as a form of penance and a heartfelt apology to the departed. For them, it became an act of reconciliation.[60]

Steve Ryfle probes the making of the 1954 *Godzilla*. He uncovers the behind-the-scenes of this iconic Japanese monster SF film, shedding light on director Ishiro Honda's journey to its creation. Ryfle examines Honda's experiences during WWII and the societal milieu in Japan at the time and provides insight into how Japanese film critics poorly received the film in the 1950s despite its commercial success.[61] In Rifle's perspective, Godzilla emerges not as an angry film towards the United States but as a potent condemnation of the atomic age, offering a "plea for nuclear powers to end and march towards oblivion."[62]

Yoshiko Ikeda's comprehensive historical analysis examines *Godzilla* as a film series from the 1950s to the 1990s. She frames these films as reflections of cultural-political concerns surrounding nuclear and technological advancements.[63] Ikeda summarizes this sentiment, stating, "Godzilla's attacks recreate for the audience the atomic terror of the past, the H-bomb tests of the

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[60] Kawamura, *Ima hitotabi no sengo nihon eiga*, 86-88.
[61] Steve Ryfle. "Godzilla's Footprint." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 81, no. 1 (2005), 52, 60. Kamiya Kazuhiro's Japanese essay also provides a detailed perspective in the media exposure of the film *Godzilla* from 1954 to present. See Kamiya Kazuhiro 神谷和宏, "Gojira shirizu wo meguru gensetsu no henka to mondaiten – 1954 nen iko no shinbun hodo wo jiku toshite"『ゴジラ』シリーズをめぐる言説の変化と問題点 —一九五四年以降の新聞報道を軸として [Changes in Discourse and Issues Surrounding the *Godzilla* Series - Focusing on Newspaper Reports since 1954"] Kontentsu bunkashi Gakkai 2018 コンテンツ文化史学会 2018 年大会, (2018), 17-33.
[62] Ryfle. "Godzilla's Footprint," 57.
[63] Yoshiko Ikeda. "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a Scapegoat of the Americans to a Saviour of the Japanese." in *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2011), 43.

present, and the fear of science and technology in the future."[64] Also, Ikeda astutely contrasts *Godzilla* (1954) with *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), highlighting the former's portrayal of war-induced disaster and skepticism towards science.[65] Additionally, she addresses the absence of the United States as the aggressor in Godzilla, attributing this to both tacit post-occupation censorship and underlying tensions between the Japanese people and ruling elites who were responsible for the nation's wartime involvement.[66]

An intricate reading of *Godzilla* unfolds in Kawamura Minato's comprehensive historical analysis of *Genpatsu to genbaku*. He argues that the symbol of *Godzilla* holds a dual significance: it embodies the lingering grievances of the war dead and victims of the Asia-Pacific War while also representing the intangible fear of radioactivity that looms over the ostensibly peaceful post-war society. [67] However, Kawamura emphasizes that this representation does not directly mirror the fear of atomic and hydrogen bombs.[68] Kawamura further explores the nuanced Japanese attitude towards "nuclear energy" and "atomic bomb," as the continued division in postwar Japanese society regarding their stance on nuclear energy is evident, exemplified by the contrasting symbols of *Godzilla* and *Astroboy*.[69] Each of these icons carries its nuanced connotations, offering a poignant reflection of the complexity within Japan's collective psyche in the aftermath of the atomic bombings. Kawamura's comparison of *The Last*

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[64] Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 48.
[65] Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 48.
[66] Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 49-50.
[67] Kawamura Minato 川村湊, *Genpatsu to genbaku: kaku no sengo seishinshi* 原発と原爆：「核」の戦後精神史 [Nuclear Power Plants and Atomic Bombs: Postwar Mental History of Nuclear], (Kawade Shobo Shinsha 河出書房新社, 2011), 20
[68] Kawamura, *Genpatsu to genbaku*, 20.
[69] Kawamura, *Genpatsu to genbaku*, 72. It's noteworthy that this "ambiguity of the nuclear" – encapsulating the juxtaposed sentiments regarding atomic bomb anxiety and the peaceful use of nuclear energy in 1950s Japan – has also been a subject of discussion among other scholars. See Yoshimi Shunya 吉見俊哉. *Yume no genshiryoku* 夢の原子力[Atoms for Dream] (Chikuma Shinsho ちくま新書, 2012): 192-194. I will elaborate on this subject later in chapter one.

War and the novel *Kami to yaju no hi* (The Day of God and the Beast) provides further depth as *The Last War* explores the profound emotional spectrum of joy, anger, and sorrow from a personal standpoint, while *The Day of God and the Beast* provide a conscious examination from the perspective of those in power.[70]

Sun Lichun and Tian Kaihang's recent analysis highlights a distinctive focus on *Godzilla*'s narrative, distinguishing it from the "atomic bomb literature" in Japan. Sun and Tian argue that while the latter often sought to depict the immediate aftermath of nuclear attacks vividly, *Godzilla* subtly shifts the emphasis and downplays the sheer magnitude of direct casualties resulting from the immense energy of nuclear explosions. Instead, it amplifies the pervasive dread of "radiation," including the Lucky Dragon 5 Incident; the contamination of fish underscores the omnipresent sense of nuclear fear.[71] In short, they see the film extend its gaze toward the potential consequences of future nuclear tests and the looming threat of nuclear conflict, which could jeopardize Japan's hard-won peace and impede its post-war development.

Mark Anderson's Freudian reading of *Godzilla* reflects a profound exploration of Japan's nuanced post-war psyche. Anderson sees the monster Godzilla's appearance and the film series' enduring popularity as expressions of national Japanese melancholia, characterized by complex feelings of both love and resentment towards the United States.[72] He points out that the shift in narrative, framing Japanese wartime actions as unjust, creates a significant emotional struggle,

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[70] Kawamura, *Genpatsu to genbaku*, 50.
[71] Sun Lichun 孙立春 and Tian Kaihang 田凯航 "He renshi de gaibian dui riben dongman xingxiang suzao de yingxiang" 核认识的改变对日本动漫形象塑造的影响 [The Impact of Changes in "Nuclear" Understanding on the Shaping of the Image of Japanese Animation and Manga], Chinese Journal of Art Studies 艺术学研究, no.3 (2022), 103.
[72] Mark Anderson. "Mobilizing *Gojira*: Mourning Modernity as Monstrosity." in *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage*. Eds. William Tsutsui and Ito Michiko, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 26.

and it becomes increasingly challenging for the Japanese public to openly acknowledge or grieve the loss of their colonial empire and international hegemony.[73] Anderson then further explores the pivotal role played by media infrastructure in *Godzilla*. Godzilla's emergence generates a profound sense of national threat, hysteria, mobilization, and mourning through this infrastructure.[74] Additionally, he sees the television broadcast of the funeral scene in *Godzilla* and the screening of the film itself are noted for their role in mourning the losses and suffering experienced by the Japanese family state; they contribute to the redefinition of Japan's relationship with technology, modernity, and national spirit.[75]

In their article "Revolutionary Realism: China's Path to the Future," Walter and Ruth Meserve's intriguing reading of the opera version of *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, connects Tian Han's opera to the age of the Great Leap Forward and the stagnation of Chinese communist utopia. Meserve highlights the inherent flaw in utopian societies, which often face stagnation due to a lack of historical perspective to inspire and sustain their idealized vision.[76] Meserve's insightful analysis presents a key challenge for revolutionary realism in China: to depict an ideal or dream in a way that doesn't self-destruct if realized.[77] It raises the question of whether such a vision, when put into practice, can genuinely uplift or potentially lead to either profound fulfillment or deep despair for the individuals involved.

Guo Yuqiong's essay illuminates the oppressive influence of political control on writers, leading to a divided creative identity. Tian Han's 1958 work *Guanhanqing* 关汉卿 and *Ballad of*

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[73] Anderson, "Mobilizing *Gojira*," 27.
[74] Anderson, "Mobilizing *Gojira*," 32.
[75] Anderson, "Mobilizing *Gojira*," 35.
[76] Walter Meserve and Ruth Meserve. "Revolutionary Realism: China's Path to the Future." *Journal of South Asian Literature,* vol. 27, no. 2 (1992), 38.
[77] Meserve, "Revolutionary Realism," 38.

the Ming Tombs Reservoir exemplifies this struggle. Guo highlights the suppression and exile of writers under political and cultural control, which led to a "dual personality" in Tian Han's mind, in which writers may have felt torn between conforming to the prevailing political ideology and expressing their creativity.[78] Guo characterized the opera *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* as a "failure" due to its creative expression being influenced by the mainstream ideological discourse of the Great Leap Forward, which suggests that political directives had a significant impact on artistic output.[79]

Ding Ning underscores the influence of the Great Leap Forward era on filmmakers' aspirations to align with the prevalent political situation. Ding describes *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* as an enthusiastic embrace of the Great Leap Forward ideology, reflecting director Jin Shan's passionate political commitment. [80] Jin Shan's strategic adaptation of the film, including devoting a significant portion to envisioning a communist future, marked the first notable portrayal of the future of China in the PRC cinema. The film reveals the way Jin Shan works in concert with the mainstream discourse of the time and demonstrates a conscious effort to conform to ideological expectations.[81]

Shen Yan's essay highlights the emergence of socialist utopian opera during the Great Leap Forward, reflecting the prevailing atmosphere in 1950s China. Using Tian Han's *Ballad of*

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[78] Guo Yuqiong 郭玉琼, "Zhishi fenzi ziwo lixiang de gaoyang yu shiluo" 知识分子自我理想的高扬与失落: 田汉 1958 年创作中知识分子形象比较 [The Exaltation and Loss of Intellectuals' Self-Ideals: A Comparison of the Images of Intellectuals in Tian Han's 1958 Creations]. *Drama Literature* 戏剧文学, no.11 (2002), 61.
[79] Guo, "Zhishi fenzi ziwo lixiang de gaoyang yu shiluo", 57-59.

[80] Ding Ning 丁宁. "Zhengzhi yu yinmu zhijian de youyi: tianfang Jinshan de shiqinian biaoyan" 政治与银幕之间的游移——田方，金山的"十七年"表演 [The Wandering between Politics and the Screen - Tian Fang, Jin Shan's "Seventeen Years" Performance]. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy* 北京电影学院学报, no.6 (2012), 12.

[81] Ding, "Zhengzhi yu yinmu zhijian de youyi," 12.

the Ming Tombs Reservoir, Shen sums up the characteristics of the idealized vision in the socialist utopian opera, including emphasizing material abundance, labour-centred production methods, and a limited understanding of modern economic concepts.[82] Shen also points out that the influence of the *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* was profound, setting the direction for opera creation of the time and inspiring numerous scripts with similar themes.[83] Furthermore, Shen explores the narrative transformation of the people from a conservative lower class to a heroic and intelligent "upper class," which signifies a shift in societal roles as they now lead in production and innovation, assuming authoritative positions.[84] This shift underscores the transformative power of collective creativity, marking a significant evolution in the portrayal of social classes.

Paola Iovene, in her book *Tales of Futures Past: Anticipation and the Ends of Literature in Contemporary China*, sees the opera version of *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* as a vivid futuristic rhetoric of the Great Leap Forward, with the emphasis on the role of manual labour. Iovene underscores how the opera is a powerful tribute to the transformative potential of manual labour, celebrating the joy it brings in reshaping nature.[85] She also highlights the immense effort and discipline required from cultural producers like Tian Han and Jin Shan during politically charged moments, both physically and mentally, demonstrating the complex interplay between personal commitment and external pressures.[86] Overall, Iovene observes that *Ballad of the Ming*

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[82] Shen Yan 申燕, "Dayuejin yu shehui zhuyi wutuobang xiju" "大跃进"与社会主义乌托邦戏剧 ["The Great Leap Forward" and the Drama of Socialist Utopia]. *Literature and Art Studies* 文艺研究, no.8 (2013), 96, 100.
[83] Shen, "Dayuejin yu shehui zhuyi wutuobang xiju," 97-99.
[84] Shen, "Dayuejin yu shehui zhuyi wutuobang xiju," 97-99.
[85] Paola Iovene, *Tales of Futures Past: Anticipation and the Ends of Literature in Contemporary China.* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 21-22.
[86] Iovene, *Tales of Futures Past*, 22.

Tombs Reservoir portrays a persistent state of labour, ultimately transcended in the utopian vision presented in the epilogue, underlines a disconnection between present anticipation and the envisioned future world.[87]

In Chen Yishui's essay, he traces the history of Chinese SF, as the emergence of science fiction was intertwined with the endeavour to shed pre-modern cultural elements seen as obstacles to China's modernization, which he refers to as the "tail of shame."[88] Chen argues that as the earliest PRC film infusing future imagination elements, in *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, the "tail of shame" appears as the suffering old China at the beginning of the film, and the future imagination recompenses for the real-life struggles of the late 1950s China.[89] Chen also mentions *The Little Sun*- the first PRC film venturing into space - later on, as despite its artificial construction and staged lighting, it encapsulates the view of the science of socialist China during the Cold War while also reflecting the nuanced intersection of Chinese culture's engagement with science since the late Qing Dynasty.[90]

Wang Yao's analysis draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, which illustrates how the SF of the 1950s to the 1970s in China was deeply influenced by the political

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[87] Iovene, *Tales of Futures Past*, 49

[88] Chen Yishui 陈亦水. "Weiba de chiru: zhongguo dianying kehuan kongjian de kexuan siwei moshi yu shenfen kunjing" 尾巴的耻辱：中国电影科幻空间的科玄思维模式与身份困境 [The Shame of the Tail: Mysterious Thinking Mode and Identity Dilemma in the Science Fiction Space of Chinese Films]. *Journal of Beijing Film Academy* 北京电影学院学报, no.6 (2015), 109-111.

[89] Chen, "Weiba de chiru," 111. It is worth noting that this idea of seeing the imagination in *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* as the 1950s' compensation also appears in other scholars' work. See Hui Zheng 惠政, and Jiang Zhenyu 姜振宇. "Fuhao xiucixue shijiaoxia guochan kehuan dianying de siti yanjin tanxi" 符号修辞学视角下国产科幻电影的四体演进探析 [An Analysis of the Four-Trope Evolution of Chinese Science Fiction Films from the Perspective of Symbolic Rhetoric]. *Movie Review* 电影评介, no.1 (2021), 63-68. And Peng Tao 彭涛, and Liu Yifei 刘逸飞. "Zhongguo kehuan dianying zhong de nengyuan shuxie" 中国科幻电影中的能源书写 [The Presentation of Energy in Chinese Science Fiction Films]. *Journal of China University of Petroleum* 中国石油大学学报, no.3 (2023), 40-45.

[90] Chen, "Weiba de chiru," 111.

and cultural agenda of Mao Zedong's socialist revolution.[91] Wang argues that in *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, the Ming Tombs Reservoir serves as a spatial entity intrinsically tied to a future dimension and the emergence of a "new community." These alternative subjects challenge capitalist modernity, evident in the commune's rejection of individualists and the shift from physical labour to technological advancement.[92] She also explores *The Little Sun* as the typical example of the 1950s to 1970s Chinese SF; it highlights how present-day SF serves as blueprints for tomorrow's realities and humanity's mastery over nature.[93] Additionally, Wang sees that in *The Little Sun*'s enclaves, social dynamics are simplified and classless. At the same time, the focus on children as the central figures in scientific practice also signifies a deliberate shift towards a new generation driving progress.[94]

Li Shu provides an intriguing perspective for *The Little Sun* and *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* as he analyzes the meaning of children in *The Little Sun* and how the classic Chinese myth influenced *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir'*s imagination. Li sees the importance of children in two layers: the first layer is that children are figures to be scientifically educated; the second layer is that children serve as signs of equality with adults, highlighting the notion that educating children is equal to educating adults, thus bridging the gap between generations and reinforcing state ideology.[95] He also perceives the female costume in *Ballad of*

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[91] Wang Yao 王瑶, "Cong "xiaotaiyang" dao "zhongguo taiyang" dangdai zhongguo kehuanzhong de wutuobang shikongti" 从"小太阳"到"中国太阳"— 当代中国科幻中的乌托邦时空体 [From "The Little Sun" to "Chinese Sun" -- Utopian Chronotopes in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction]. *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, no.4 (2017), 21.
[92] Wang, "Cong xiaotaiyang dao zhongguo taiyang," 22-23.
[93] Wang "Cong xiaotaiyang dao zhongguo taiyang," 25-26.
[94] Wang "Cong xiaotaiyang dao zhongguo taiyang," 25-26.
[95] Li Shu 黎书. "Zhongguo kehuan dianying de xushi yanjiu" 中国科幻电影的叙事研究 [Narrative Research on Chinese Science Fiction Films]. *Chinese Film Market* 中国电影市场, no.2 (2019), 32.

the Ming Tombs Reservoir as symbolically representing Chinese women as real-life fairies in the future, portraying future China as "heaven on earth."[96]

Zhang Yan's essay underscores how the Chinese SF films *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* and *The Little Sun* films prioritize the portrayal of human resolve and collective willpower over technical expertise in the story. In *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, the protagonists swiftly dispel the antagonists' doubts against the construction, emphasizing the formidable collective will of the people, and those who lack faith in this resolve are ultimately marginalized; similarly, *The Little Sun* also emphasizes the protagonists' unwavering determination as the driving force behind their achievements instead scientific knowledge.[97]

Fan Zhizhong's recent analysis draws a sharp contrast between Western and classic Chinese concepts of time. As he argues, the West's historical narrative is delineated by distinct "points" and "lines," resulting in a linear and fragmented perception of time. In ancient China's agriculture-rooted culture, the society operates in a continuous cycle, marked by the ebb and flow of seasons and eras.[98] He indicates that *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* is identified as emblematic of a linear time imagination, presenting a one-way trajectory towards the future. This linear view starkly departs from the Chinese concept.[99] While envisioning future possibilities, the analysis underscores how these films adopt a temporal perspective more in line with Western

[96] Li, "Zhongguo kehuan dianying de xushiyanjiu," 32.
[97] Zhang Yan 张衍. "Zhongguo zaoqi kehuan xiaoshuo yu dianying zhongde kexue chengxian" 中国早期科幻小说与电影中的科学呈现 [Representation of Science in Early Chinese Science Fiction Novels and Films]. *Culture Journal* 文化学刊, no.1 (2018), 160.
[98] Fan Zhizhong 范志忠 and Jin Lingji 金玲吉. "Zhongguo kehuan dianying de shikong xiangxiang yu meixue huayu" 中国科幻电影的时空想象与美学话语 [Space-time Imagination and Aesthetic Discourse of Chinese Science Fiction Films]. *New Films* 电影新作, no.3 (2023), 47.
[99] Fan and Jin, "Zhongguo kehuan dianying de shikong xiangxiang," 47-48.

notions, highlighting a departure from the cyclical understanding of time ingrained in traditional Chinese culture.

The accumulated scholarship on selected Chinese and Japanese SF films from the 1950s and 1960s suggests that these works are rich texts for an in-depth, close reading analysis. While numerous scholars in the previous decades have explored these films from social, cultural, historical, and political perspectives, a gap remains in the lack of comparative analysis that transcends national borders. Recognizing this, in the following two chapters, I will present a detailed comparative interpretation that not only builds upon existing readings and theories but also delves deeper into how attitudes towards technological progress, especially concerning the power of the nuclear, were distinctively shaped by the unique cultural, historical, and political contexts of postwar China and Japan during the Atomic Age.

Chapter One

The Fairyland and the Monster in *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* and *Godzilla*

Looking back, scholars may argue which film is the first dedicated Chinese SF film from an SF history perspective. However, the first-ever post-PRC film with science-fictionality is the 1958 film *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* (hereafter *Ballad*), a groundbreaking film directed by the former actor Jin Shan (1911-1982) and adapted from the same-year opera written by the well-known screenwriter Tian Han (1898-1968), who also wrote the lyrics of the National Anthem of the People's Republic of China, *Yiyongjun jinxingqu* (义勇军进行曲, March of the Volunteers). Across the East China Sea, in 1950s Japan, there was also another ground-breaking film released with science-fictionality appeared on the silver screen, Honda Ishiro 本多猪四郎 (1911-1993) and Tsuburaya Eiji 円谷英二 (1901-1970)'s now-classic 1954 film, *Godzilla*, based on a script that written by the Japanese SF writer Kayama Shigeru 香山滋 (1904-1975). Both two films could be said to mark a new beginning of the Chinese and Japanese SF cinema after the end of WWII. However, although *Godzilla* received commercial success and is now considered one of the most important Japanese films of the time and aroused scholars' interests from across the globe, *Ballad*, on the other hand, although received limited academic attention, was buried under hundreds of PRC propagandistic films and many of its intriguing details, left unexplored.

In this chapter, I aim to examine these two landmarks in mid-to-late 1950s Chinese and Japanese SF films, *Ballad* and *Godzilla*, in detail, from their visual, music, lyrics, narration, and story plot to the socio-political background of the films. Then, I compare the two films and attempt to seek the answers to the research questions I raised in the introduction.

Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir: The Great Leap Forward Fairyland

The story of the first film to be explored in this chapter, *Ballad*, is divided into three unique parts: "prologue," the main story, and the epilogue, "twenty years later," representing the past, present, and future. The prologue delves into the distant past over 600 years ago, recounting how the construction of a canal near the Yuan dynasty's capital, Dadu – Beijing nowadays - led to the creation of the Ming Tombs. Despite repeated flooding plaguing the area through various eras, a lasting solution remained absent until the 1949 liberation, when the CCP finally resolved to build a reservoir in the Ming Tombs region, ending the people's enduring hardships and improving their lives.

Then, the main story transports the audience to the construction site of the reservoir in 1958, where a diverse group of visitors, including the political commissar, and consolation leader Guo, war-veteran writer Chen, painter Liu, professor Feng, musician Li, youth writer Hu, and Professor Huang organize at the reservoir construction headquarters. Despite concerns about completing the project before the rainy storm, the resolute political commissar instills confidence in the people. Witnessing the tireless labourers, writer Chen desires to join in, while writer Hu's reunion with his former lover, university student Yang, is disappointed. Tensions escalated with encounters between model workers and writer Hu's unwelcomed interview and a charged reunion with tractor driver Sun Guifang, Hu's estranged fiancée. As a looming storm threatens, the political commissar issues an urgent directive for all workers to redouble their efforts; they work tirelessly in the strong storm at night.

Fast forward two decades to the final section, “twenty years later,” the reservoir area has blossomed into a thriving commune in the atomic age. Technological marvels, such as weather-controlling devices, personal helicopters, and trees that can harvest various fruits, have alleviated hunger and inequality, while travel to the moon and Mars is now a reality. The returning visitors are captivated by the progress, including Professor Huang, who once doubted the project’s feasibility. In this sweeping narrative, the story weaves through epochs, from the beginning of the Ming Tombs area to the laborious construction of the reservoir in 1958, culminating in a vision of a transformed future where technology has ushered in prosperity and possibilities.

The short prologue of *Ballad* efficiently sets a grim and dire tone for China’s ancient past from its visuals, music, and narration, emphasizing the suffering of the ancient Chinese people due to the oppression of the rulers and the hostility of nature, then building up the stark contrast with the new socialist society and the “war against nature,” later in the story. The first sequence of the film hints that the story of the Ming Tombs region could date back to over 600 years ago. After establishing shots slowly sweeping the region’s mountainous terrain, the film presents two sublime historical figures, the eminent hydraulic engineer and scientist Guo Shoujing and the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan, with low-angle, hip-level single shots. The music used in the sequence is a smooth and melodic combination of guzheng and modern orchestra, adding the richness of history to the scenes. However, as soon as the canal begins construction, the audience can see the slave-like labour in the construction site, as a high-angle crowd shot with grimy dust floating in the background. The music also drastically changes, as the sound of the guzheng disappears with the appearance of a depressed male and female chorus. The scene follows a solemn voiceover below:

苦难的人民，在马队和皮鞭的压迫下，进行着奴隶的劳动。

The suffering people, under the oppression of cavalcade and whips, performed slave-like labour.

In the prologue, the Chinese labourers under the emperor’s rule are poignantly referred to as “the suffering people” who are performing “slave-like labour,” which serves as the prologue’s overarching goal — to illustrate the enduring hardships of the population throughout centuries of ancient China, setting the stage for an after-liberation contrast later in the film. Particularly, the enslaved labourers’ physical movement is also considerably slower compared to the energetic and voluntary efforts of the construction workers of the Ming Tombs reservoir, later introduced to the audience. This contrast indicates the involuntary nature of labour during ancient times, amplifying the audience’s awareness of the profound distinction that unfolds in subsequent events.

Figure 1.1: The gloomy construction of the Ming Tombs region in ancient China.

(Film Title: *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir,* Time Code: 00:02:52)

Another facet of the hardship placed upon Chinese people in ancient times is the relentless hostility of nature, which, in the film, mainly refers to flooding in the Ming Tombs region. Intertwined with close-ups and extreme long shots of the region's turbulent flooding water, the grim ambient remains the same as the depiction above of slave labour. Still, this portrayal extends beyond class conflict, elevating nature's harsh and unforgiving aspects to the status of an enemy within the film's narrative. Although the film here does not solely condemn nature, since the Chinese emperors – and the accusation extends further - warlords and nationalists also ignored the need of rural people to build sufficient infrastructure to contain the flood and sustain quality and productive life, the rulers' inaction eventually causes the endless suffering from flooding in the Ming Tombs region. The prologue of the film, therefore, presents a dichotomous discussion on nature to the audience: if no one changes the natural environment of the Ming Tombs region, the people in the region will suffer from the cycle of natural disaster without any meaningful progression; however, if someone alters the environment of the Ming Tombs region, the cycle of suffering will end, and rural people will live a safer and more productive life.

The solution to the dire situation of the people in the Ming Tombs region is straightforward: Mao Zedong's party and the new socialist China are the only ways. The film here offers a symbolic moment, composed with a transition scene: the foggy sky symbolizes *laotianye* (老天爷, the heaven god) that suffering people were begging for, and then the fog gradually disappears, suddenly a waving red flag with a hammer and sickle appears from below, with a dramatic change in music tone from grim and sorrow to moving and arousing, showing the refreshment under the new CCP rule. The voiceover also follows the visual in the scene, indicating a transitional chapter of China:

> 但是，老天爷不会显灵，龙王爷也不发慈悲。只有共产党和毛主席才是人民真正的救星！…我们的故事就从现在开始。请大家看看，新中国的劳动人民是怎样在党和毛主席的关怀领导下，为了人类今天和明天的幸福生活，而进行着忘我的劳动吧！
>
> But the heaven god will not appear, and the Dragon King will not show mercy. Only the Communist Party and Chairman Mao are the real saviours of the people! … Our story begins now. Please look at how the labouring people of the new China, under the caring leadership of the Party and Chairman Mao, are working selflessly for the happiness of humankind today and tomorrow!

The voiceover, therefore, concludes the prologue of *Ballad* as a tool to borrow Chen Yishui's idea and connect the "tail of shame" – the pre-PRC history as an obstacle of backwardness – [100] to the new China as a contrast. Then, along with the fog that fades away, the reality of the hammer and sickle becoming present in the film, the film sweeps away the ancient history, the prologue from the rest of the film for the energetic socialist modernization and the fight for the happiness of humankind, today and tomorrow.

At the beginning of the main story, the audience notices that the rural area in the prologue is now a hustling construction site under the leadership of the Party. However, during the meeting, the professor and the writer asked questions about the tight construction timeline and the incoming storm; the political commissar asserts that the resounding answer to his question lies in the unwavering dedication of the hundred thousand-strong workforce. Accompanied by stirring music and fluttering red flags, the audience is introduced to the awe-inspiring construction of the reservoir, complemented by a rousing song:

> 机器隆隆响，军民个个忙。
> 远看像花山，近看红旗扬！
> 这是啥地方，这是十三陵工地大战场。
> 十三陵工地大战场！

[100] Chen, "Weiba de chiru," 109-111.

Machines were rumbling, the army and the people were bustling.
From afar, it looks like a mountain of flowers; the red flags are waving up close!
What is this place? This is the battleground of the Ming Tombs.
The battleground of the Ming Tombs!

Two intriguing emphases in the lyrics stand out: the contribution of the machines and the construction site as a battleground. After a shot with the ebullient construction workers, the camera then switches to a panning shot of the bustling construction in action, showing the terrain-altering scale of the reservoir construction, with scaffolds and cranes expanding deep in the distance. As the song's second verse commences, its lyrics echoing the same sentiment, the perspective shifts to a set of low-angle shots. With an approaching steam-powered freight train, a working bulldozer, and a stirring melody, the scenes vividly portray the mechanized and collective construction of the Ming Tombs reservoir. The sequence shows various flags from different groups; it is apparent that the construction of the reservoir attracts people from all other fields: farmers, workers, soldiers, and college students, showcasing a sense of unification.[101] Paola Iovene argues that the film is an admiration of collective labour, which plays a significant role in *Ballad*. However, it is still worth noting that the machinery in the film also has an essential function in and outside of the film in 1950s China: as a part of the socialist transformation to connect rural China to the CCP leadership.

[101] Iovene, *Tales of Futures Past*, 23. And Zhang Xiaohan 张啸晗, "Cong laodong dao kexue huanxiang: shisanling shuiku shijue xingxiang de shengcheng jiqi chuanbo" 从劳动到科学幻想：十三陵水库视觉形象的生成及其传播 [From Labor to Science Fiction: The Generation and Dissemination of the Visual Image of Ming Tomb Reservoir] Thes. Sichuan Fine Arts Institute 四川美术学院, (2021), 6-8.

Figure 1.2: The bustling construction of the Ming Tombs reservoir.

(Film Title: *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, Time Code: 00:12:19)

The construction site in *Ballad* provides a glimpse of the CCP's endeavour to transform the rural area into a modernized and unified political field in the socialist era. Mao Zedong articulated the vision of mechanization to elevate millions of Chinese farmers into labourers equipped with socialist consciousness, cultural awareness, and technical proficiency.[102] This era witnessed a profound convergence of technology, machinery, and ideological transformation in the pursuit of agricultural mechanization in China.[103] During this period, the CCP was eager to transform the newly established China from a starving country with severe material scarcity to a modernized, socialist model for human civilization. Central to realizing this goal was the imperative to revolutionize traditional notions of agricultural production by introducing new

[102] See Song Xueqin 宋学勤 and Yang Yue 杨越. "Jishu yu sixiang: 20 shiji 50 niandai zhongguo nongye jixiehua yu shehui zhuyi xinnongmin suzao" 技术与思想：20 世纪 50 年代中国农业机械化与社会主义新农民塑造 [Technology and Thought: China's Agricultural Mechanization and the Shaping of New Socialist Farmers in the 1950s.] *Collected Papers of History Studies*, no. 198 (2022), 98.

[103] Song and Yang, "Jishu yu sixiang," 98.

technologies and machines championed by the Party, so-called *jiqi xiaxiang* (机器下乡, machines to the countryside) in political terms. As Song and Yang argue, for the Party, the transformation encompassed more than disseminating technological advancements; it also entailed reshaping the dynamic between the farmer/labourer and the nation in the socialist era, as rural agriculture ceased to be an isolated system but directly connecting to the new nation-state and the Party via the mechanized and collective production.[104] Consequently, the widespread introduction of machinery in rural China during the 1950s can be viewed as a top-down effort to unify a fragmented nation following the triumph of the PRC. In this sense, the machines serve as the materialized representation of the CCP's vision of modernization. Farmers willing to learn to use machines such as tractors and trains and follow the collective way of production are following the Party's transformation as "new people" under socialist China.

Figure 1.3: The visitors with the "tame of flood dragon" flag in the background.

(Film Title: *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, Time Code: 00:13:44)

[104] Song and Yang, "Jishu yu sixiang," 105.

The construction as a battleground portrays this grand battle of the reservoir. It represents two aspects for the workers: the battle against nature and the other against the people who are skeptical about the construction. One scene particularly stands out is when the visitors watch the construction together, and a flag with the words *xunfu jiaolong* (驯服蛟龙, tame the flood dragon) in the background. It is evident that here, the "flood dragon" refers to the cruel nature of the Ming Tombs region, which, as the film emphasizes, was frequently flooded in history and caused significant damage. "Tame the flood dragon," in the film, can be seen as a metaphor for transforming nature via intense construction led by CCP. The original opera script by Tian Han explains the situation more explicitly as the war-veteran Chen says when he describes the militarized construction site:

> 这里就是一个向大自然进军的战场嘛。我们部队是党的最先进的武装，它战胜过民族敌人，阶级敌人，如今向大自然进军也是战无不胜的。
> This is a battlefield to march towards nature. Our army is the most advanced armed force of the Party. It has defeated national enemies and class enemies. Now, it is also invincible when marching against nature.

Other than the war against nature, another aspect of the battle against the skeptic people links with a crucial element in socialist utopian opera in the 1950s. Shen Yan underlines the significance of criticizing the "short-sighted, selfish and backwards" and exposing "the evil and shamelessness of imperialists and reactionists" as one of the critical portions of socialist utopian opera during the era.[105] The construction of the Ming Tombs reservoir in the film serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and unity of the Chinese people under the leadership of the CCP, as the united Chinese people can overcome all challenges and transform nature to suit the

[105] Shen, "Dayuejin yu shehui zhuyi wutuobang xiju," 97.

needs of the Chinese people. Within this narrative framework, those harbour skepticism are portrayed as enemies of the people. In a scene during the initial meeting where the main characters are introduced, the political commissar is angry about writer Hu's malicious question. Without hesitation, he responds, "A few days ago, journalists from several capitalist countries also believed that *our* reservoir would not be completed on schedule…the question *you* have raised has already been answered by thousands of workers on the construction site." This plot development is straightforward since the film aligns the writer Hu with the capitalists. Thus, *you* and *we* in the political commissar's answer could be seen as not only the reservoir and the writer but also the Chinese labour people and the imperialists and reactionists, the revolutionary and the backwardness: the people and the enemy of the people has been formed from this moment.

The past in *Ballad* sets a grim tone for China's ancient history while emphasizing the suffering of people and the hostility of nature, while in the present in *Ballad,* the audience can immerse themselves in the construction site of the reservoir that showcases the mechanized and unified political field under the CCP leadership and portrays a grand battle against nature and those skeptical about the construction. The film then leads the audience to the future twenty years later after the intense group portrait at the construction battleground, when *Ballad* reveals itself as not only an artistic documentary but also an SF showcase in the final part of the film.

Figure 1.4: The entrance gate of the future people's commune.

(Film Title: *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, Time Code: 00:58:26)

In "twenty years later," *Ballad* displays the Ming Tombs reservoir region's future as a lakeside communism commune in 1978. Interestingly, the film's artistic choice for the commune entrance could be seen as a hint for Jin Shan and Tian Han's romanticized depiction of Chinese utopia as a fairyland-on-earth. With a slow zooming shot moving from bamboo forest, peach blossoms, and to reach a Chinese-style tiled roof arched gate, the music here also switches to a joyful tradition-inspired flute version of the previous revolutionary folk song, hinting at the transformation of the Ming Tombs region, from an intense battleground to a well-established living space that seems return to the Chinese tradition.[106] The film here attempts to reconcile the old romanticized China and the new socialist China in the imagined future, or at least to answer the question, "What did China look like when China reached communism?" As Li Shu points

[106] It is worth noting that the particular scene being referred to did not appear in the opera version of *Ballad*. In fact, as Ding Ning points out, the "twenty years later" part in the original opera is not substantial. However, Jin Shan's film adaptation extends this part to about a third of the film and omits many descriptions from the opera script. See Ding, "Zhengzhi yu yinmin zhijian de youyi," 12.

out, *Ballad*'s answer is a well-known metaphor in China: communist China, after the hard work, will look like *renjian xianjing* (人间仙境, heaven on earth).[107]

Later, *Ballad* explores what makes this heaven on earth functional as a part of modernized China through atomic power, automation, and computers; then, the shift from manual labour to automation creates an ambiguity between technological and human development. When all the main characters reunite, the film quickly becomes a showy demonstration of technology marvels: the fruit tree that can grow various delicious fruits all season, flying cars with helicopter-like propellors, a weather-controlling system that can stop rain in seconds, highly efficient factories and farms, portable computer with real-time video call, and the SF classic, space rockets can travel to Mars. Then, the wife of the commune leader, also a model worker at the construction site, enters the scene holding a pole filled with wine while singing a song that the audience heard in the previous part of the story. The wife then engages in conversation with the visitors:

> 来访者：怎么不用电动机运送呢？这多费力啊。
> 妻子：这是二十年前修水库时候挑土用的担子。我特意把它保留下来，常常考验考验我的肩膀，也是一种很好的休息。在这个原子的时代里，动不动就是机器，人们要是不警惕，反而会变成娇养的懒汉了！
>
> Visitor: Why don't you use the machine to carry it? That's a lot of work.
> Wife: This's the carrying pole I used to carry dirt twenty years ago when I was building the reservoir. I kept it on purpose to train my shoulders; it's also a good rest. In this atomic age, everyone thinks about machines; people can be lazy if they are not careful!

[107] Li, "Zhongguo kehuan dianying de xushiyanjiu," 32.

In the vision of *Ballad*'s communist future, reliance on nuclear energy and automation becomes profound, depicting an idyllic society where the utopian ideal is identical to a technologically advanced and precisely organized factory. The aspirations echoed in *Ballad* find resonance in *Outline of the Long-term Plan for the Development of Science and Technology 1956-1967*; here, the PRC government highlighted the most crucial technological advancements that the new socialist society required. The plan emphasized the importance of technologies such as the peaceful use of atomic energy, computers, production automation, and agriculture mechanization. However, the most significant emphasis was on nuclear energy. The plan states, "In the first half of the twentieth century, the greatest achievement in science and technology was the discovery and utilization of atomic energy."[108] The film's imaginative portrayal aligns seamlessly with the envisioned trajectory of the country's future development in the dynamic landscape of the atomic age.

Moreover, two decades ago, physical labour was a crucial aspect of constructing the reservoir, but now it has become an activity of "rest." Machines have replaced manual labour, and the carrying pole, which was once a vital tool during construction, is now reduced to a mere toy for physical exercise. This shift from manual labour to nuclear-powered automation has revolutionized the way work is done, even more than the 1950s emphasis; the film here highlights the immense power of technology in reshaping communist China as a utopian fairyland. Meanwhile, in the imagination, as the commune leader's wife suggests, the atomic machines can make people lazy, creating an ambiguous relationship between technological

[108] *1956-1967 Nian kexue jishu fazhan yuanjing guihua gangyao* 1956-1967 年科学技术发展远景规划纲要 [Outline of the Long-term Plan for the Development of Science and Technology 1956-1967], Ministry of Science and Technology 中华人民共和国科学技术部, 1956.

development and human development or proposing a warning to the visitors and the audience of the film as a faint reminder of the changing relations of production in the nuclear future.

Figure 1.5: The giant pigs for all people's commune members to eat.

(Film Title: *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir,* Time Code: 01:18:03)

The imagination reaches a limit - or, to some extent, absurdity - when the television shows the commune's achievement to all visitors, including a giant pig that every commune member can have daily. Interestingly, such bizarre imagination is not only in *Ballad*, but a relatively common technique in the Chinese SF in the 1950s and 1960s, such as renowned Chinese writer Ye Yonglie's influential SF story, *Xiaolingtong manyou weilai* 小灵通漫游未来.[109] As Chinese scholar Li Jing points out, the communist utopian view of the future during the

[109] Li Jing 李静, "Zhizao weilai: lun lishi zhuanzhe zhong de xiaolingtong manyou weilai" 制造未来：论历史转折中的《小灵通漫游未来》 [Making the Future: On *Xiaolingtong roaming the future* in the

1950s and early 1960s China primarily focused on the "perfect" future that the omnipotent communism could solve all the problems the present suffers, build an abundant utopia, without any contradictions and conflicts.[110] Both *Ballad* and *Xiaolingtong manyou* appear to imagine enlarged food for ordinary people in the ultimate utopia, which originates from the scarcity of food and lack of quality of life in 1950s China, so giant pig, giant watermelons, and giant apples are born to solve the staggering solution that haunts the Chinese people in the era. Ci Jiwei offers a critical lens through which to explore the apparent limitation of imagination within the Chinese SF at the time, as the utopianism embedded in the Chinese revolution can be interpreted as a form of sublimated hedonism and materialism.[111] According to Ci, the core of this hedonism lies in a synthesis of materialist ontology and empiricist epistemology, that "happiness consists in the satisfaction of the senses (as well as the intellectual faculties) and the pleasure consequent upon such satisfaction." [112] What distinguishes this form of hedonism is its temporal dimension — happiness, as the goal of the revolution, is not permitted in the present moment. Instead, its expression takes on an ascetic nature, manifesting as a deferred gratification indefinitely postponed into the future. Thus, the absurd yet limited imagination in *Ballad* could be considered the outburst of hedonistic pleasure that the Chinese people dreamed of in the Great Leap Forward. As the model worker in the future reminds her daughter with the phrase *yao yongyuan yuejin* (要永远跃进！always leap forward!), this subtly hints to the audience that the utopian

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Historical Turning Point], In *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art 文艺理论与批评*, no.6 (2018), 56-57.

[110] Li, "Zhizao weilai," 46-62.

[111] Ci Jiwei, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: From Utopianism to Hedonism*. (Stanford University Press, 1994), 134-167.

[112] Ci, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution*, 135.

bliss of the future is inextricably linked to the laborious efforts of the people during the Great Leap Forward.

Fredric Jameson's examination of utopian visions in a socialist context reveals a complex interplay between ideology and imaginative text. He contends that "the confluence of socialism and Utopian form presents some problems for the latter's autonomy, seeming to relegate the latter to the secondary status of illustration or propaganda."[113] In other words, instead of being an independent genre that explores ideal societies through imaginative narratives, it becomes subservient to the political objectives of socialism.

The utopian fairyland depicted in *Ballad* exemplifies this issue. Here, the imagined communist commune serves as a "wishing machine" for hard-working CCP followers, offering a vision of an atomic future as a panacea for all problems. However, this optimistic vision has its drawbacks. As the commune glorifies the promise of a government-backed, hyper-technological future, the value and reality of manual labour are overshadowed by hedonistic happiness. In contrast, manual labour quietly became the toy for the romanticized heaven on earth, creating a subtle dissonance between the harsh truths of the historical present and the idyllic portrayal of a utopian commune.

Godzilla: The Atomic Monster on Their Mind

The story of *Godzilla* starts with an ominous disaster involving a Japanese ship near Odo Island, where a formidable storm wreaks havoc on the island's village. Seeking aid, villagers' journey to Tokyo presented evidence of a potentially monstrous force ravaging their community.

[113] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 20.

Responding to the crisis, the government dispatched renowned scholar Dr. Yamane to investigate. The colossal dinosaur-like creature, identified as Godzilla, is witnessed firsthand. Dr. Yamane posits that Godzilla, an ancient Jurassic creature, has been stirred by underwater H-Bomb tests. Amidst heated deliberations, the government endeavours to eliminate the monster using navy ships, but their efforts prove futile. Complicating matters is the personal drama involving Emiko, Dr. Yamane's daughter, who decides to end her engagement to colleague Serizawa in favour of her true love, Ogata. Emiko learns of Serizawa's horrifying research, the "Oxygen Destroyer," during a secret demonstration. Godzilla subsequently reappears, assaulting Tokyo's waterfront before retreating to the sea.

While constructing a high-voltage defence tower system, the Japanese government remains at odds with Dr. Yamane, who laments people's lack of understanding about the creature. Godzilla's second attack breaches defences, inflicting further devastation on Tokyo. Shelters overflow with casualties, prompting Emiko to reveal Serizawa's secret to Ogata: a technology capable of annihilating all life underwater. Together, they implore Serizawa to deploy the Oxygen Destroyer. Finally, Serizawa agrees to use his clandestine weapon, and a navy ship transports him and Ogata to confront Godzilla. Beneath the waves, Serizawa sacrifices himself, deploying the Oxygen Destroyer and ensuring Godzilla's demise. However, Dr. Yamane warns that unless nuclear testing ceases, the spectre of another Godzilla may loom in the future.

In *Godzilla*, many sequences in the film, extending from the beginning to the end, serve as sentimental moments that effectively remind the audience of the era's various influential historical events in the 1940s and 1950s. The mysterious ship disaster at the beginning of the film already presents to the audience a powerful cue of the infamous *Daigo Fukuryu Maru jiken*

(第五福竜丸事件, the “Lucky Dragon Five” incident) that occurred the same year *Godzilla* was released. The sequence starts with an establishing shot of the ocean with a water trail running backward, indicating an ongoing sea voyage. The scene that switches to a set of crowd shots shows the life of the sailors with peaceful acoustic music. However, the audience may notice the dim brightness during the scene, as it may refer to a night sail, and a contrast to the sudden bright flash - refers to the nuclear test at night - soon after. The sudden danger quickly escalates as the delightful music ends with the explosion sound, then reappears as a piece of threatening string music. Only a few seconds later, the destruction of the ship is imminent, leaving the audience in astonishment with tragic disasters and substantial human casualties. Unlike the real-world event of the incident, the ship in *Godzilla* did not survive. Here, the shocking beginning scene immediately adds a layer of suspense to the film and directly connects with the incident of the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*.

Figure 1.6: The sinking Japanese boat at the beginning of the film.

(Film Title: *Godzilla*, Time Code: 00:03:04)

The incident, as mentioned earlier, along with the anxiety and the anti-nuclear movement after the incident, shaped the distinctive social dynamics in 1950s Japan. As Yoshii Hiroaki indicates, the incident, with substantial influence, could be seen as the third nuclear attack against Japan after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, further elaborating the existing nuclear anxiety within the society and accelerating the birth of *Godzilla*.[114] The incident was sparked by the Bravo hydrogen bomb test conducted by the US at Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954. The fallout from the nuclear test – so-called "death ash" by Japanese media - which showered the Japanese fishing boat *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* while it was trolling for tuna, resulted in the death of Kuboyama Aikichi, the radio operator of the ship on September 23, 1954, less than two months before the Japanese release of the film *Godzilla*.[115] The incident intensified the perception of nuclear victimization by the United States among the Japanese people. In response, the Yaezu City Council passed a resolution on March 27, urging an end to the production, testing, and use of nuclear weapons and advocating for international management of peaceful nuclear energy. This resolution initiated a chain reaction, with 36 other city and prefectural councils swiftly following suit.[116] Despite widespread support for anti-nuclear sentiments, the Yoshida government hesitated to assert demands on the United States. Faced with government inaction, the peace movement gained momentum, notably driven forward by the activism of housewives in Japan. Activist groups around Japan took the initiative in the wake of the incident, as a result, they collected over 32 million signatures against nuclear testing, over one-third of the Japanese

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[114] Yoshii Hiroaki 好井裕明, *Gojira mosura gensuibaku: tokusatsu eiga no shakai gaku* ゴジラモスラ原水爆:特撮映画の社会学 [Godzilla, Mothra, Atomic Bomb and Hydrogen Bomb: The Sociology of Special Effects Films], Serika shobo セリカ書房 (2007), 32-33.
[115] Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protest in Postwar Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, (2001), 120.
[116] Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous*, 120.

population in 1954.[117] The film *Godzilla* also began its production, which overlaps the situation of being the only country suffering from atomic bombs and the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, with the approval of Toho's head of production, Mori Iwao.[118] *Godzilla*'s sentimental introduction, thus, resonates with the fervent sentiments of the 1950s Japanese society grappling with the consequences of nuclear devastation.

The sentiment reaches new heights as two male and one female passengers on the train comment on the situation after the official reveals the monster. This sequence demonstrates that *Godzilla* actively brings social reality to the film narrative and intertwines fiction and reality. The female commuter here comments:

> いやね、原子マグロだ、放射能雨だ、そのうえ今度ゴジラと来たわ！東京湾までまがりこんできたら一体どうなるの…せっかく長崎の原爆から命拾いしてきた、大切な体なんだもの…
> Oh my, atomic tuna, radioactive rain, and now Godzilla is here! What will happen if it reaches Tokyo Bay? … My precious body was saved from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki…

Without camera movements, the dirty triple shot of the three passengers portrays a colloquial conversation onboard a commuter train in Tokyo as if it is discreetly inserted in the crowd. Remarkably, the female commuter here is also a *hibakusha* (被爆者, atomic bombing victim) from Nagasaki, adding another layer of the nuclear bomb narrative to the plot. Yoshii sums up this brief dialogue as a condensation of "what were the people watching the movie feeling and thinking at the time?" since words such as "atomic tuna "and "radioactive rain"

[117] Sasaki-Uemura also underscores the petition were "emblematic" as Japanese women's political engagement in the 1950s. See Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous*, 121-122.
[118] *Toho tokusatsu eiga daizenshu* 東宝特撮映画大全集 [Toho Speical Effects Film Complete Collection], eds. Toho Studios 東宝株式会社 Village Books ヴィレッジボックス, (2012), 5.

frequently appeared in Japanese media during the panic of *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*. [119] Morishita Hiroshi also points out that in the conversation, the monster Godzilla could be seen as a disaster that befell the Japanese people in the wake of the atomic bombs.[120] The commuter in this sequence functions as a medium, embodying the 1950s Japanese audience and establishing a dialectical connection between the film's narrative and the socio-historical dynamics of the period. Acting as a conduit, the commuter becomes a representational channel, bridging the gap between the fictional depiction of Japan in the film and the tangible experiences of the people in the 1950s. The presence of the atomic monster Godzilla operates as a vigorous signifier, stirring the collective memory of atomic bombs and nuclear testing prevalent in the societal consciousness of 1950s Japan. It is apparent that the female *hibakusha*'s conversation here in *Godzilla*, becomes a sentimental thread, weaving through the film's narrative and the lived experiences of the audience, from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the recent event of *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*.

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[119] Yoshii, *Gojira mosura gensuibaku*, 50.

[120] Morishita also mentions the impact of the Japanese fishing industry, and concerns over food safety due to the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* incident, which could be considered one of the reasons why Japanese housewives actively joined the anti-nuclear petition. See Morishita Hiroshi 森下達, *Kaiju kara yomu sengo popular karucha: tokusatsu eiga SF janru keiseishi* 怪獣から読む戦後ポピュラーカルチャー：特撮映画 SF ジャンル形成史 [Postwar Popular Culture Read from Monsters: History of the Formation of the SF Genre of Special Effects Films], Seikyusha 青弓社, (2016), 36-37.

Figure 1.7: Serizawa and Emiko witness the Oxygen Destroyer experiment.

(Film Title: *Godzilla*, Time Code: 00:41:47)

Godzilla's sentimental exploration expands further to the discussion on technological advancement with the introduction to the film's deadly secret weapon – "Oxygen Destroyer." When Emiko first witnesses Serizawa's secret research "Oxygen Destroyer," the film effectively communicates the horror of his technology to the audience through a combination of visual and sound design, without directly displaying the experiment itself. As Serizawa activates the "Oxygen Destroyer" in the water tank within his underground lab, chilling background music featuring high-pitched string instruments intensifies the atmosphere. In a moment of tension, Serizawa, still off-screen, urgently instructs Emiko to step back as he realizes her proximity to the water tank. And the film presents a set of double shots from medium to close-up, the audience now can only see Serizawa and Emiko's reaction, as she painfully screams and covers her eyes with a sudden drum noise, a dramatic conclusion to the scene. Despite the audience remaining uninformed about the events within the water tank at that moment, the sequence's arrangement effectively creates a disturbing impression of Serizawa's secret research. The audience is compelled to imagine the potential aftermath, heightening the suspense, and emphasizing the ominous nature of the technology. This strategic approach not only maintains a sense of mystery but also engages the audience's imagination, fostering a heightened emotional response to the unfolding plot, revealed only after the devastation of Tokyo.

Figure 1.8: Godzilla relentlessly destroys Tokyo, with a sea of fire in the background.

(Film Title: *Godzilla*, Time Code: 01:06:36)

Japan in the mid-1950s bore physical and emotional scars of total war and defeat. Memories of war remained fresh and traumatic.[121] In *Godzilla*, the excitement of witnessing new technological marvels is deliberately replaced by anxiety and distrust, creating a sentimental emphasis on "fearful technology" that echoes a particular consciousness that haunted Japanese society in the 1950s. As Ikeda Yoshiko indicates, the economic recovery of postwar Japan is intricately linked to the pivotal role played by technology and industrialization.[122] However, the

[121] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 17-18.
[122] Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 50.

aftermath of WWII, marked by the devastating atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, cast a profound shadow on the Japanese psyche. In the aftermath of the war and the subsequent Occupation, a pervasive sentiment of "fear and distrust of science" permeated the Japanese mindset during this crucial period.[123] This period of postwar Japan, therefore, becomes characterized by a delicate balance between the imperative for technological progress, which also corresponds to the development of the power of the nuclear, and the lingering fear associated with destructive and weaponized power of scientific innovations. The dichotomy between the necessity for industrialization and the psychological aftermath of wartime trauma underscores the intricate dynamics that shaped Japan's approach towards technology during this pivotal era.

After the monster Godzilla's second attack, when Emiko and Ogata go to Serizawa's lab to ask him to use the Oxygen Destroyer and stop Godzilla, Serizawa vehemently refuses Ogata, and after a struggle, Serizawa and Ogata finally have a chance to sit down and talk:

> 尾形、許してくれ。もしこれが使用できるなら、誰より先にこの俺が持って出たはずだ。だが今のままでは、恐るべき破壊兵器にすぎないんだよ。わかってくれよ…尾形、もしも一旦このオキシジェンデストロイヤーを使ったら最後、世界の為政者たちは黙って見ているはずがないんだよ。必ずこれを武器として使用すると決まっている。原爆対原爆、水爆対水爆、その上さらにこの新しい恐怖の武器を人類のうえに加えることは、科学者として、いや、一個の人間として許すわけにはいかない。
>
> Ogata, forgive me. If this could be used, I should have taken it before anyone else.[124] However, as it stands now, it is nothing more than a terrifying weapon of destruction. Please understand…Ogata, if we use this Oxygen Destroyer once, the world's rulers will not just stand there and watch. They will surely use this as a weapon. Atomic bomb versus atomic bomb, hydrogen bomb versus hydrogen bomb, and as a scientist, no, even

[123] Ikeda "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 50.
[124] Based on the context, it could be considered that Serizawa wishes to find a way to use the Oxygen Destroyer in a peaceful manner, rather than introducing it to the world as a weapon.

just as a human being, I cannot allow humans to add this Oxygen Destroyer on top of those weapons.

The very name "destroyer" implies the potential weaponization of the technology. However, the dialogue reveals Serizawa's hesitant stance towards deploying the Oxygen Destroyer as a weapon in a moralized way. This stands in stark contrast to the historical context of atomic and hydrogen bombs, where nuclear technology evolved into devastating weaponry. Given this perspective, it is logical to speculate that the Oxygen Destroyer could follow a similar path, potentially being wielded by "the world's rulers."

Figure 1.9: The aftermath of Tokyo from the television.

(Film Title: *Godzilla*, Time Code: 01:21:23)

The sentimental resonance of the atomic bomb imagery becomes particularly poignant as it evokes memories through the footage on television, echoing the cataclysmic aftermath akin to the American nuclear bombing of Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945. Following the heated conversation, Serizawa opposes using Oxygen Destroyer and thrusting the plot into a we-are-running-out-of-solutions moment. A sentimental shift occurs as the audience is enveloped by a melancholy Japanese folk song coming off-screen. Then, following the movement of all three characters on screen, the source is revealed to be the television in the lab. Here, the television broadcast becomes a powerful medium, showcasing the aftermath of Godzilla's rampage in Tokyo. This visual narrative draws parallels with the devastation inflicted by the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Tokyo Air Raid during WWII.[125] The sequence starts with documentary-style panning shots, initially with borders resembling TV screens. As the sequence progresses, the borders become smaller until the shots are borderless.[126] This gradual transition immerses the audience into the television and leads to a distant field through the cable. It shows the aftermath of Godzilla's attack on the Tokyo area, bearing a resemblance to the devastation wrought by the American atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the Tokyo Air Raid during WWII. The underwater nuclear test not only disturbs but also transforms Godzilla, from victim to aggressor,[127] with its formidable exterior and scorching breath, into a haunting spectre of war and the atomic bomb.

The sentimental climax of the film occurs when Serizawa, who is firmly against weaponizing his powerful technology, decides to sacrifice himself to fulfill his goal. This action - characterized by William Tsutsui as "an act of hara-kiri performed in a diving suit"[128] - ends the concurring moral discussion in *Godzilla* on technological advancement: Japan triumphs both

[125] Tabata mentions *Godzilla*'s screenwriter, Kayama's original description of the hospital scenes as the film *Gojira* here intentionally adapt the situation of Hiroshima to the film, creating a realistic impression for the audience, therefore, an echo of the war in the past and for the future nuclear war. See Tabata, "Naze *Gojira* wa toshi wo hakai suru no ka," 18.
[126] See Figure 1.10.
[127] Yoshii, *Gojira mosura gensuibaku*, 56.
[128] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 36.

technologically and morally. It is apparent that from the plot of *Godzilla*, the science produced by Japan is considered to be superior to the country that tested hydrogen bombs and disturbed the monster since the Japanese science, represented by the saintly figure Serizawa, is always intended for peaceful purposes; thus Japan emerged as a both technologically and morally better country in the atomic age.[129] It is noteworthy that, while the film consistently alludes to real-world events within its plot, there is a deliberate avoidance of a direct accusation toward the US regarding the hydrogen bomb test that catalyzes the entire plot. This strategy creates a thoughtfully orchestrated blank in the storyline, allowing the audience to interpret and fill in this void in their unique ways.

Figure 1.10: Doctor Yamane warns people after Serizawa's sacrifice.

(Film Title: *Godzilla*, Time Code: 01:35:18)

[129] Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind*, 36.

To further enrich the argument, Serizawa's ultimate sacrifice in *Godzilla* could resonate with the Japanese government's vision of the peaceful uses of nuclear since the 1950s.[130] As Serizawa grapples with the decision to bury himself with the monster Godzilla under the Pacific, the film *Godzilla* contemplates the duality of technological advancement: acknowledging their potential for devastation, while suggesting the importance of harnessing technology for peaceful uses. Yoshimi examines that in the postwar era, Japan navigated a nuanced nuclear energy policy strategically aimed at transforming public sentiment towards nuclear weapons while grappling with the profound legacies of atomic bombings at Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* incident. And the dual nature of the power of the nuclear, both a technology of war and growth, necessitated a concept that distinctly separated military applications *kaku* 核 as "evil." and peaceful uses *genshi* 原子 as "good."[131] This dichotomy functions as a mediation strategy, addressing conflicting perceptions surrounding nuclear technology. In the mid-1950s, the Japanese public experienced a paradoxical coexistence of the "nuclear dream" and atomic bomb fears.[132] With the fear of nuclear weapons on the side, and the need to utilize nuclear energy for development, despite the film's closure with Serizawa's underwater hara-kiri and Dr. Yamane's cinematic warning, the perplexing and conflicted attitudes towards the power of the nuclear persist in 1950s Japan, embodying the complex interplay of fears and developmental aspirations within the country's postwar cultural-political landscape.

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[130] Peter Kuznick and Yuki Tanaka. "Japan, the Atomic Bomb, and the 'Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Power'," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2011), 1.
[131] Yoshimi, *Yume no genshiryoku*, 41-42. It is noteworthy that both *kaku* and *genshi* can be translated to "nuclear" or "atom" in English. However, in Japanese, it is expected to use the prefix *kaku*- when describing nuclear weapons, and the prefix *genshi*- to describe nuclear energy.
[132] Simultaneously, there emerged movements advocating for the prohibition of atomic and hydrogen bombs, triggered by the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* incident, juxtaposed against the promotion of nuclear power policies, including budgets led by the Nakasone government and the enactment of the Three Atomic Energy Laws. See Yoshimi, *Yume no genshiryoku*, 135, 192.

Conclusion: Contrasting Visions of the Nuclear?

In this chapter, I delve into a detailed analysis of two seminal SF films from the mid-to-late 1950s: the Chinese SF milestone *Ballad* and the Japanese classic *Godzilla*. Two films offer rich insights into the social-political consciousness of their respective countries during the transformative era. In *Ballad*, the distinctive and ambitious three-part narrative illustrates a revolutionary epic intertwining China's past, present, and future. The prologue sets a sombre tone, portraying the harsh realities of ancient China. This grim beginning serves as a backdrop to the subsequent narrative, highlighting the transformative efforts of the CCP. Later, the construction site of the reservoir, central to the story, serves as a battleground, symbolizing both the struggle against nature and skepticism from the people and as a symbolic bridge connecting the historical past and the visionary future. The narrative culminates in a portrayal of an idealized commune twenty-year-later, a romanticized and almost hedonistic fairyland. The utopian future blended Jin Shan and Tian Han's vision of modernizing China with the idyllic SF imagination, inspired by the governmental strategy to reshape socialist China using advanced technology such as nuclear energy and automation.

On the parallel cinematic spectrum in the same period, the morally cautious story of the Japanese SF film *Godzilla* employs a narrative strategy steeped in deep sentimentality to forge a poignant connection with its audience. *Godzilla* opens with a sinking ship accident, which sets the tone for the film's exploration of traumatic experiences. This exploration is further exemplified through moments such as the female *hibakusha*'s conversation on the commuter train and the documentary-like footage on the television that weave a sentimental and victimized narrative from the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the incident of *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*. In stark contrast to the optimism of *Ballad*, *Godzilla* emphasizes the theme of "fearful technology," through the main characters' debate regarding the use of secret technology. It offers a reflective lens into the prevailing social-political anxieties of postwar Japan, highlighting the ambivalence towards technological advancement and its potential consequences to the audience.

In both *Ballad* and *Godzilla*, these films are profound depictions of their respective societies, intertwining historical context with cinematic representation. Both narratives share a similar emphasis on the potential for the peaceful utilization of nuclear technology. Their approaches to depicting the future diverge, reflecting the distinct cultural and historical contexts of 1950s China and Japan.

Compared to *Godzilla*, in the utopian imagination of *Ballad*, the portrayal of technology, particularly the power of the nuclear, appears idealized. Within the social-political context of mid-to-late 1950s China, the film envisions advanced technology as a panacea for all existing social issues. This utopian portrayal is in sync with the aspirations of the CCP's *Outline of the Long-term Plan for the Development of Science and Technology 1956-1967*, depicting an atomic future where technological advancements align seamlessly with the government's vision of a modernized and industrialized socialist society. *Ballad* idealizes nuclear technology, suggesting a harmonious and determined integration with societal development, where the power of the nuclear is a controllable transformative force to fulfill hard-working labour's dream of development.

Conversely, *Godzilla* takes a subtle approach, with a more morally complex and reflective perspective, due to the parallel of the increasing concerns regarding nuclear testing and the emergence of the peaceful use of nuclear energy policy in the mid-1950s Japan. While acknowledging the peaceful possibilities of nuclear technology, as epitomized in Serizawa's dilemma, unlike *Ballad*, *Godzilla* delves into the nuanced and conflicted duality towards the power of the nuclear in Japan during the 1950s. The film portrays the duality of nuclear technology, symbolized by the destructive force of the monster Godzilla, reminiscent of the Hiroshima tragedy, and the moral quandaries surrounding Serizawa's secret technology. From here, the power of the nuclear in *Godzilla* could be seen as a double-edged sword that holds both the promise of progress and the peril of catastrophe. The film reflects the moral ambiguity associated with nuclear technology, portraying a more nuanced view of the future.

Therefore, while the narratives of *Ballad* and *Godzilla* diverge in their portrayal of the atomic future, both films offer profound insights into differing perspectives on the power of the nuclear. *Ballad* paints a hopeful and idealized picture of nuclear energy as a catalyst for national prosperity, in line with political ideology. In contrast, *Godzilla* offers a cautionary narrative, resonating with the moral complexities and societal apprehensions of its era, highlighting the dangers of uncontrolled and militarized nuclear energy. Through these differing lenses, both films provide a rich commentary on the multifaceted nature of the power of the nuclear in their societies in the mid-to-late 1950s.

Chapter Two

Technological Playground and Radioactive Hell in *The Little Sun* and *The Last War*

As the cinematic landscape shifted from the monochromatic hues of the 1950s to the vibrant spectrum of full colour in the 1960s, the exploration of SF in Chinese and Japanese cinema continued to unfold. While Japanese cinema experienced a boom in SF films after the success of Toho's *tokusatsu* classic *Godzilla*, Chinese cinema in the era still awaits the rise of SF films. Remarkably, the pivotal 1963 Chinese short film *The Little Sun*, directed by Wang Minsheng 王敏生 (? - 2017) and produced by Shanghai Science and Education Film Studio, stands as the only PRC film with SF elements and one of the few PRC films with unique special effects in the 1960s. This ground-breaking work not only stands as the sole Chinese film with science fiction elements in the 1960s but also holds immense significance as the first-ever PRC film to venture into the realms of space travel and portray futuristic cityscapes within a Chinese context.

Meanwhile, in Japan, before the rise of television, a frequently overlooked *tokusatsu* film gem emerged in the form of the 1961 film *The Last War*, directed by Matsubayashi Shue 松林宗恵 (1920-2009) and renowned special effect director Tsuburaya Eiji, some considered as the peak of Tsuburaya's special effect.[133] Beyond its technical brilliance, *The Last War* also weaves a story that intricately portrays the layers of human emotion against the backdrop of a threatening total nuclear apocalypse.

[133] See 44.

In this chapter, expanding from the discussion in the previous chapter, I examine two significant Chinese and Japanese SF films, *The Little Sun* and *The Last War*. I explore their technicalities while discussing their intriguing plots; then, I offer a comparison of the two films, examining their ideas about the future and atomic power in the age of the Cold War.

***The Little Sun*: The China-centred Technological Playground**

The story of *The Little Sun* unfolds in the winter land of northern China, where children desire to hasten the arrival of spring. Motivated by their audacious request to transform nature, the children form a daring plan: creating a luminous "little sun" to serve as an additional heat source and accelerate the changing seasons. Guided by the animated sun, the protagonist is instructed to seek out scientists who can actualize the concept of the "little sun." A group of children, including the protagonist, journeys to a futuristic Chinese city. There, they encounter an elderly scientist captivated by the children's idea. He reveals the astonishing potential of anti-matter energy, a power surpassing nuclear energy by a factor of a thousand.

Embracing the challenge, the children and the scientists collaborate to design an anti-matter reactor and a spaceship. The goal is to launch the reactor into space, transforming it into a radiant "little sun." The launch is a success, with two youngsters aboard as astronauts, accompanied by their little reactor. However, as the astronauts prepare to return, a threat emerges in giant meteors racing towards the reactor. Then astronauts activate the reactor, employing its power to melt the approaching meteors. In this moment, the "little sun" fulfills its intended mission. The triumphant result sees two suns decorating the sky, melting the snow and ice, and turning winter into a vibrant spring.

Figure 2.1: A scene of colourful flowers swinging with the wind.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:01:24)

The beginning of *The Little Sun* immediately engages the audience by conveying a clear message about the dichotomous "spring versus winter" discussion and unveiling the film's central theme of altering nature. The film's inspiration is drawn from a childlike dream that envisions prolonging spring and shortening winter in the northern regions of China, which, unlike the warm and subtropical south, experiences an extensive and chilly winter. Right before the actual story begins, *The Little Sun* visually portrays the contrasting relationship between the vibrant spring and the snowy winter by using multiple establishing shots of colourful flowers and snowy trees and landscapes, and strategically sequencing the flower scenes before the winter scenes, to show the stark contrast between two seasons.

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Figure 2.2: A scene of snowy trees and snow-covered land.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:01:43)

The strategic use of vibrant colours to portray the rebirth of nature in spring and the depiction of trees and vegetation in all-white to symbolize the winter season establishes a captivating visual dichotomy between the two seasons. In this context, *The Little Sun* does not merely view spring and winter as mere components of the four-season cycle; instead, the film fills these two seasons with additional layers of meaning. As the narrative unfolds, with a slow panning shot, the audience starts to see the main characters of *The Little Sun,* a group of children working in a greenhouse with a background of snowy trees and mountains, indicating that they live in the northern region. After setting the stage with this contrast through a thoughtfully crafted visual sequence, the narrative takes a more explicit turn with the introduction of verbal narration via a voiceover:

> 春天来了。可是在祖国的北方，还是一片冰天雪地。在这里，也许有人会抱怨春天来得太迟，可是小朋友们却和春天一样的富有活力。在幻想着一个改造大自然的有趣的问题。

> Spring is coming. But in the north of the motherland, there is still a world of ice and snow. Here, some may complain that spring comes too late, but the children are as energetic as spring. They are thinking of an interesting question of transforming nature.

The narration in the movie highlights the contrast between winter and spring and explores two regions in China: the north and the south. While the movie's depiction of the world is oversimplified, the voiceover hints at why spring is considered superior to winter. The reason is that spring is considered more energetic than winter, which is linked to the portrayal of the younger generations in China who are dynamic and energetic. So, what is the primary reason the children complain about northern China? The narrator mentions the arrival of spring in southern China, where the climate is milder than in the north. Subsequently, the discussion involves the protagonists who focus on enhancing agricultural production in the region by cultivating crops outside during winter, rather than in a greenhouse. Notably, the narration uses southern China as a benchmark for comparison, implying that the onset of the warm season occurs later each year in the northern parts, making the spring season preferable in agriculture over winter.

Considering the difference in climate, the late-coming spring in the north is not preferred for better agricultural production, and therefore, from the children's perspective, the situation needs to be changed. So, they decide to make another sun to warm up the northern lands. This decision highlights one of the main themes of *The Little Sun*: modifying nature to suit human needs, or in this case, to cater to the needs of Chinese children. If the spring arrives late in the north, altering the climate becomes imperative to expedite the arrival of spring. The notion of making winter as warm as spring or merging the north with the south disregards the unique climate and geographical location of northern China. As a science and educational film aiming to popularize scientific knowledge, it recklessly simplifies the sophisticated climate model and four seasons in the northern hemisphere.

At first glance, the plot follows a Promethean theme, offering a cautionary tale that delves into the potentially tragic outcomes of audacious, God-like behaviour. However, the imagination of *The Little Sun* takes a different turn. The children's unrestrained ambition is not met with punishment but rather directed towards materializing their imaginative plan through the assistance of advanced technology and the hands of Chinese scientists. It is as if the film encourages that technological advancement could be the ultimate solution for realizing children's world-altering dreams. As the protagonist believes in the beginning, "I think, if science develops in the future, it will definitely be possible!"

Before delving further into the discussion, it is worth noting that *The Little Sun* also creates an intriguing futuristic Chinese cityscape to showcase technological advancement. The Chinese audience in the 1960s witnessed the first glimpse of what a future Chinese city could look like in the PRC's cinematic world.[134] Through the lens of *The Little Sun*, audiences are offered a visual feast of progress, witnessing the first cinematic portrayal of a visionary urban landscape that reflects the aspirations and possibilities of technological evolution within the context of the era.

[134] This assertion is justifiable because the 1953 film *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir* does not contain any description of an urban area in the film other than the area around the reservoir. Thus, *The Little Sun,* the second Chinese SF film in the PRC, is the first Chinese SF film to imagine a future cityscape.

Figure 2.3: The future city at night with neon lights.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:07:50)

The depiction of the future cityscape in *The Little Sun* and the protagonist's awe-stricken expression present a visually captivating spectacle that boldly showcases technological advancement with a positive representation of an industrialized Chinese city. It could be said that the city in *The Little Sun* is an extrapolation from the established 1950s Stalinist Chinese cityscape[135] infused with a futuristic twist, evident in features such as the monorail transit system and densely packed buildings with vibrant neon lights. Remarkably, nearly every scene unfolds against the backdrop of this futuristic city, primarily depicted during the nighttime with reduced brightness. This choice may not only emphasize the glow of neon lights but also, pragmatically,

[135] In *The Little Sun*, the building where the kids find the scientists, is also a Stalinist-style building, or better known as *Sushijianzhu* (苏式建筑, Soviet-style architecture) in the Chinese world. For the influence of Stalinist architecture in 20th century PRC. See Chen Li 陈雳 and Zhang Hanwen 张瀚文, Sulian jianzhu fengge jiqi yingxiang xia de zhongguo ershi shiji jianzhu yichan 苏联建筑风格及其影响下的中国 20 世纪建筑遗产 [Soviet Union Architectural Styles and 20th Century Chinese Architectural Heritages under Their Influence] *Contemporary Architecture* 当代建筑, no.4, (2020), 23-25.

have contributed to managing budget limitations associated with detailed miniature model production.

Figure 2.4: A self-driving flying car with a female AI voice.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:06:38)

Furthermore, a particular scene captures attention with a massive sign decorated with Chinese characters, displaying *Shanghai Gongye Zhan* (上海工业展, Shanghai Industrial Exhibition). This addition is a subtle nod to the potential future achievements of Chinese modernization and industrialization.[136] By integrating real-world elements into the futuristic visual, *The Little Sun* connects the film's speculative narrative and the broader context of China's aspirations and progress. Liu Yangyang offers a glimpse into contrasting perspectives on portraying modern and industrialized societies, particularly from the lens of Western literature

[136] It is speculative, but the future world in *The Little Sun* may operate by nuclear energy since later in the story, the scientist mentions that anti-matter power is 1000 times greater than nuclear energy. It may show that future China can well understand or harness the power of atoms and begin to explore more powerful power such as anti-matter.

since 19th century and PRC SF literature. He sees that within the framework of capitalist culture, pre-modern societies are romanticized and viewed through a lens of nostalgia, evoking a poetic sentiment, while modern industrial civilizations are depicted as melancholic and alienated spaces.[137] Conversely, Liu argues, Chinese SF in the 1950s and 1970s diverged from this narrative, presenting industrialized cityscape as a crucial symbol of socialist modernization, thus embodying an optimistic attitude, reflecting the ideals of progress and collective prosperity.[138] The portrayal of Chinese cityscapes in *The Little Sun* fits within the Chinese SF context of the 1950s and 1970s. The film depicts a highly industrialized Chinese city as an exciting playground for technological marvels. However, the film fails to address the negative consequences of such progress, such as light pollution caused by neon lights. Despite featuring school uniform-wearing protagonists and grand science fiction displays, the movie largely overlooks the more grounded aspects of the future city at night. Leaving the audience only a panorama of neon light silhouettes, with little insight into the real lives of its residents.

[137] Liu Yangyang 刘阳扬. "Lun 1950-1970 niandai kehuan xiezuo zhong de gongye xiangxiang yu chengshi jingguan" 论 1950−1970 年科幻写作中的工业想象与城市景观 [On Industrial Imagination and Urban Landscape in Science Fiction Writing from the 1950s to the 1970s]. *Modern Chinese Literature Studies 中国*现代文学研究丛刊, no.2 (2022), 104.

[138] He also points out that despite the Chinese narratives celebrating the industry, there appears to be a relative neglect of the daily life and experiences of the city's citizens. See Liu, "Lun 1950-1970 niandai kehuan xiezuo," 105.

Figure 2.5: The protagonists plan the orbit for the “little sun” reactor with a globe.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:13:56)

Interestingly, when the protagonists start building the spaceship, although they are aware of the planet Earth throughout their design and calculation with the scientists, no other country’s name is mentioned in *The Little Sun*. When the children are designing the orbit of the little sun reactor, they are discussing the earth as a whole planet rather than a geopolitically divided, international world:

> 男孩：地球是绕太阳转的。要是让“小太阳”也绕太阳转 ，等我们这儿开始冬天的时候，你们看，“小太阳”正好照到北极，等冬天过去了……
> 女孩：春天一来，北方暖和了，我们就不让小太阳再发光了！
>
> Boy: The earth orbits around the sun. If we let the “little sun” also orbit around the sun, when we are winter here, see, the “little sun” shines precisely to the North Pole, and when the winter is over…
> Girl: When spring comes and the northern region warms up, we won’t let the “little sun” shine anymore!

The ambiguity portrayed in the film is a mysterious element that demands further analysis. At this point, the film makes the national borders nonexistent and emphasizes geographical and astronomical concepts. The protagonists are talking about *beiji* 北极 (the North Pole) and *beifang* 北方 (the northern region, which usually means northern China in the context) instead of China, Japan, the United States, or the Soviet Union, thus creating a surreal viewing experience for the audience that extracts the "motherland" out of the context of international conflict, without any distractions of Cold War amid the 1960s. It's worth noting that in the film, a globe without national borders or country names is used, creating a depoliticized nationless world. At first glance, it may seem like the film treats the united earth world, but the proposed purpose of their reactor is exclusively interested in warming up northern China. They do not intend to let the reactor keep operating after the winter ends in the north.

Figure 2.6: The detailed interior of the spaceship with two saluting astronauts.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:19:55)

However, domestic politics still exists in *The Little Sun*'s nationless world. One piece of evidence is that all the children in the film are wearing a *honglingjin* 红领巾 (red scarf), which is a symbolic item for *shaoxiandui* 少先队 (the Young Pioneers of China), a youth organization that has insinuated itself into the Chinese public education system and serves as a stepping stone to Communist Youth League, and a bridge to the CCP. And as well as in a particular scene, the astronauts use the iconic salute when they greet the ground controls. As a result, while the Chinese spaceship is going to outer space from a borderless and geographically unified Earth, the kids, as well as the astronauts, are still tied to domestic political practices. They launch their hyper-technological interstellar mission independently, merely for the interest of a specific geographical area in China, and ignore every other country, including ideologically friendly ones, as if China is the only place left on the pale blue dot.

Figure 2.7: The spaceship leaves Earth and reaches outer space.

(Film Title: *The Little Sun*, Time Code: 00:21:35)

The radical and oversimplified future in *The Little Sun*, therefore, raises the troubling prospect that the younger Chinese generation can modify nature at will, or to some extent, without contemplating the negative possibilities, with the help of technology and encouragement from adults. They have little to no awareness of other countries in the northern hemisphere nor of the impact of their mission on nature, the planet Earth, or, on a smaller scale, how such a transformation could bring a catastrophic environmental crisis to their region in northern China. Some scholars may argue that the China-centred scientific fantasy of *The Little Sun* is only a dream;[139] on the other hand, at the end of the film, the narration asks an intriguing question to the audience:

> 是啊，小朋友所想的这个改造大自然的问题，难道永远只能是个幻想吗？
> Yes, will this question of transforming nature that children think about only ever be a fantasy?

The narration at the end suggests that as a science and educational film, *The Little Sun* is more ambitious than simply showing an unthinkable fantasy to Chinese children. According to Wang Yao, the film's educational role echoes the *kexue wenyi* 科学文艺 (scientific literature) from the 1950s to the 1970s, which is to inspire the new Chinese generation with scientific knowledge, so "fantasy" can one day become a reality in China.[140]

Wagner contends that from the 1950s to the 1970s, PRC SF, including seminal works like *The Little Sun*, was significantly shaped by the trends of Soviet SF from the Stalin Era, particularly evident in its science optimism, as well as a keen interest in cutting-edge technology and gadgets.[141] Building upon Wagner's insights, Li Hua also points out that due to the profound impact of Soviet literary ideas and the translation of Soviet SF into Chinese, the concepts of the "new socialist man" and the "assured" journey towards a "radiant" communist future became

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[139] Wang Yao 王瑶, "Cong "xiaotaiyang" dao "zhongguo taiyang" dangdai zhongguo kehuanzhong de wutuobang shikongti" 从"小太阳"到"中国太阳"— 当代中国科幻中的乌托邦时空体 [From "The Little Sun" to "Chinese Sun" -- Utopian Chronotope in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction], in *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, no.4 (2017), 25-26.
[140] Wang, "Cong xiaotaiyang dao zhongguo taiyang," 26.
[141] Wagner, *Lobby Literature*, 29.

fundamental elements in SF narratives during the Mao era.[142] It could be said that this background provides a richer context for understanding the optimism of a highly technological future in *The Little Sun*, where nuclear energy and even anti-matter energy are seen as catalysts for empowerment, resonating with the CCP's idealized vision for its younger generations. It is noteworthy that in 1962, a year after the release of *The Little Sun*, the CCP terminated the campaign of the Great Leap Forward, which resulted in a three-year great famine, including children who were uncertain about the future of the socialist republic. *The Little Sun*, as a science and educational film, aims to spark interest in science among Chinese children and inspire them to join the workforce in the future.

The Little Sun, an intriguing Chinese SF film from the 1960s, portrays a hyper-technological and unrestrained future. The narrative depicts a world in which technology is so powerful that even a child's dream of transforming nature can be made a reality with the assistance of adult scientists. At the same time, it presents a total disregard for other significant factors, such as the impact on neighbouring countries and the environment, reflecting an oversimplified, China-centric viewpoint and an ideological belief in technology. In this imagined future, it appears as if the earth and hyper technology have transformed into playgrounds and toys for the god-like Chinese children and are free from any consequences.

***The Last War*: The Victimized Radioactive Hell**

The Last War unfolds against a rebuilt postwar Japan, showcasing the nation's significant achievements. Despite the prevailing belief in a newfound era of peace, tensions escalate

[142] Li Hua, *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw*, (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 167-168.

between the superpowers *domeikoku* (同盟国, the Alliance) and *renpokoku* (連邦国, the Federation). Tamura Mokichi, a humble limousine driver with a family of four, remains optimistic, cherishing his biggest wish: to witness his daughter Saeko's marriage. As Saeko's boyfriend, the sailor Takano, returns to Tokyo, the couple decides to share their intention to marry each other with Saeko's parents. Meanwhile, they catch wind of the deteriorating international situation through Saeko's amateur radio. The Japanese government proposes a ban on the use of nuclear weapons by both the Alliance and the Federation, yet unsettling rumours about an impending nuclear war circulate among Tokyo's citizens.

On the Korean peninsula, the military conflict between the Alliance and the Federation brings nuclear weapons into play. Though a cease-fire is declared at the 38th parallel, global tensions persist. Takano's departure comes sooner than expected, prompting Saeko and him to marry before he leaves. The situation takes an unforeseen turn as the spectre of total nuclear war materializes, charging Tokyo into chaos. Saeko and Takano, separated by the grim reality, communicate for the last time via amateur radio. Rather than attempting to flee the city, the Tamura family gathers at home. The inevitable occurs as nuclear bombs devastate Tokyo and other major cities worldwide, leaving nothing but destruction in their wake. Despite the dangerous circumstances, those aboard Takano's ship, including him, yearn to return to Tokyo, fully aware of the potential consequences.

Figure 2.8: A rotating earth with grey smoke around it.

(Film Title: *The Last War*, Time Code: 00:01:49)

The Last War introduces a gloomy tone right from its opening moments, before the commencement of the story. Behind the title screen with striking orange fonts, the audience is presented with a captivating scene: a slowly rotating Earth envelope by a layer of thick grey smoke. As one of the first scenes the audience witnesses in the film, *The Last War* enhances the ominous ambiance in the scene by utilizing skillful special effects and embracing full-colour widescreen. The dimmed brightness and controlled lighting effect, low saturation colours, and the haunting intensity of the music collectively contribute to a powerful sense of forewarning, suggesting that the destiny of the entire planet is veiled in the unknown.

Figure 2.9: A view of the flourishing postwar Tokyo.

(Film Title: *The Last War*, Time Code: 00:04:32)

After the gloomy ambiance, the audience is soon drawn back to a colourful and cheering montage of the Japanese rebuilding their country after WWII. The semi-documentary montage showcases flourishing cities, busy streets full of pedestrians and cars, massive sports games with cheering emanating from the stadiums, and workers manufacturing gigantic container ships. Particularly, none of the scenes in the montage contain wartime images such as Hiroshima or Nagasaki, as it simply showcases the accomplishment of building a modern, industrialized postwar Japan. The film was released in 1961, only 16 years after the end of WWII, making the process of rebuilding Japan a recent memory. The montage at the film's beginning reminded the Japanese adult audience of that time. Then, the voiceover adds further explanation to the Japanese historical moment:

> 戦後十六年、一面の焼け野原から、ともかく大都会って呼ばれる姿に復興したのは、人々が働いたからである。もう二度と東京が破壊され、この地上から消える日がないことを信じながら…
>
> Sixteen years after the war, because of the work of its people, the city was restored from a burnt-out wasteland to a revived metropolis. People believe that Tokyo will never again be destroyed or disappear from the planet…

Here, this voiceover in *The Last War* not only serves as a commentary for the fictional 1960s Japan, but also aligns with the real-world desire of the Japanese people in the 1960s, to prevent the destruction of Tokyo and the repeat of the wartime tragedy. As Wesley Sasaki-Uemura remarks, the Japanese public in the 1960s was still dealing with the consequences of WWII. Since the 1950s, postwar Japan was marked by discussions around survivor's guilt, personal accountability, and war responsibility.[143] And people debated how to avoid repeating the same mistakes that led to destruction.[144] [145] *The Last War* presents the fictional and real-world in parallel, laying a realistic foundation for the film. The voiceover at the end also offers a faint hope for the safety of Tokyo, but it is only a prediction. At the end of the film, Tokyo is turned into a scorching hell because of the total nuclear war.

Figure 2.10: Mokichi, Oyoshi and Saeko in the after-dinner discussion.

(Film Title: *The Last War,* Time Code: 00:14:37)

The film then effectively portrays the Tamura family: a Japanese middle-class family with a hardworking father, Mokichi, a gracious mother, Oyoshi, and three children, including an attractive daughter, Saeko, of marriageable age. On the other hand, *The Last War* does not forget to remind the audience of the atomic bomb trauma and anti-nuclear sentiment. In a family dinner scene, the film reveals the dynamics of a typical Japanese household: Mokichi diligently works, acting as the primary breadwinner, as well as the *shujin* 主人 (leader or head of the house) in the

[143] Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous*, 24.
[144] Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous*, 24.
[145] As mentioned in Chapter 1, other than Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* incident in the 1950s could be considered as another reason for the pacifist sentiment in the 1960s Japan, resulting in an anti-nuclear movement with 32 million petition signings.

family, and contributing to the family's financial stability, while Oyoshi the wife, currently out of work, assumes the role of caring for the children and the salaried husband. While illustrating a harmonious middle-class family, *The Last War* introduces another character, *ojiisan*, the older man, as a street vendor near Tamura's hard-earned home:

> オヨシ：あのおじいさんね、広島で身売りを全部失わせて、東京へ出てきたんだっていうの。
> モキチ：へえー。
> サエコ：それでね、売り上げの一割を別の貯金箱へ入れて、原水爆反対の会使ってくださいともっていくんだって。
>
> Oyoshi: I heard that old man lost everything in Hiroshima and then moved to Tokyo.
> Mokichi: Huh.
> Saeko: Well, he said he would put ten percent of the sales into a separate coin container and give it to the group against atomic and hydrogen bombs.

In *The Last War*, here the film intentionally blends the Hiroshima experience that near the main characters, the Tamura family, could be seen as a subtle reminder of the Japanese vulnerability and victimization. In his work, John Dower reveals the impact of nuclear destruction and unconditional surrender, highlighting Japan's sense of vulnerability and victimization, so-called *higaisha ishiki* 被害者意識 (victim consciousness) as Hiroshima and Nagasaki became icons of Japanese suffering in postwar Japan.[146] Especially, the particular scene also shows the audience about the contrasting mindsets of Saeko, who belongs to the younger generation, is more concerned about the anti-nuclear sentiment in Japan, and Mokichi, who seems apathetic to *ojiisan*'s past in Hiroshima. He later comments, "The old man is just showing off!" to Saeko, and the casual after-dinner discussion quickly turns into an argument

[146] John Dower, "The Bombed: Hiroshima and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 19, no.2 (1995), 280-281.

between the two. By interwoven Hiroshima, postwar Japan's icons of suffering into the narrative, the presence of *ojiisan* near the Tamura family not only acts as a reminder for the uncaring Mokichi but also serves as a sentimental reminder to the audience about the impact of the atomic bombing experience. This creates a sentimental foundation for the plot of *The Last War*, which will be crucial later.

Intriguingly, *The Last War* constantly reminds the audience about the international conflict surrounding Japan. Although the film mainly focuses on the Tamura family living in Tokyo, it is more than just a microscope perspective on a Japanese middle-class household. The storyline continually shifts its narrative angle to contrast individuals from different nationalities, professions, and political standings. In *The Last War*, a significant aspect is the involvement of foreign actors in film production. These actors may not be well-known outside of Japan, but they play various powerless roles, such as journalists, radio announcers, soldiers, and Alliance and Federation officers. Similar to the Japanese government and Tamura family, they are solely responsible for relaying information regarding an international military crisis, but ultimately do not make any significant decisions themselves.[147] Most foreign characters in *The Last War* speak in English, and the Japanese audience can read Japanese subtitles on the side of the screen like in an imported film. Apart from English and Japanese, other languages such as Russian, German, and Chinese are also used in the film as international media when emphasizing the influence of the nuclear war in a globalized scope. The world depicted in *The Last War* is mainly inspired by the Cold War's bipolarity. It portrays the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union allegorically, represented by the Alliance and the Federation, respectively. Additionally,

[147] I will discuss the absence of the decisive force such as the two superpowers' governments later in this chapter.

since both countries in the movie speak English, it makes the fictional world portrayed within it less specific.

Figure 2.11: Federation officers are witnessing the missile countdown.

(Film Title: *The Last War*, Time Code: 01:06:49)

It’s important to note that in *The Last War*, Japan is depicted as a pacifist and neutral country, caught between two superpowers as a powerless victim of nuclear devastation. Unlike the real Japan, which played a central role in the Western world in the Cold War era, Japan in the film is shown as a neutral nation. As the Japanese prime minister says during the cabinet meeting:

> 総理：わが政府としては今まで両陣営に働きかけて、戦争を放棄した国だけが言えるような強いことも言ってきたんだが…
>
> PM: As for our government, we have been working on both sides and have said some strong words, only a country that has renounced war could say…

The Japanese government in *The Last War* issued repeated warnings about the impending threat of nuclear war to the global community, advocating for a cease-fire between the two superpowers. However, Japan’s earnest efforts not only proved ineffectual in mitigating the crisis but, ironically, resulted in Tokyo becoming the primary target of a thermonuclear attack in the film, pre-empting major global capitals such as New York, London, Paris, and Moscow. The narrative here is situated within the border political context of the Cold War era, particularly since the Korean War in the early 1950s; the threat of a nuclear WWIII, as Dower indicates, had become a palpable fear in postwar Japan after the US president Truman's threat to use nuclear weapons in the Korean peninsula conflict.[148] The early 1960s, during which the film was released, were marked by further concerns about a potential nuclear war.

These anxieties were further exacerbated by the contentious new Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, with rising voices contending that it contradicted the goal of banning atomic and hydrogen bombs. Adding to the turbulent atmosphere, an incident occurred in 1960 when an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft was shot down in Soviet airspace.[149] Against this backdrop of social unrest and geopolitical tension, Japanese weekly magazines engaged in publishing stories envisioning the apocalyptic aftermath of a nuclear war.[150] It was within this fraught context that *The Last War* emerged—a cinematic allegorical response to the prevention of total nuclear calamity.

Notably, the film *The Last War* uses extensive sequences to illustrate the detailed, realistic, and war-film-like military operations of the Alliance and the Federation by utilizing Tsuburaya Eiji's renowned skills in special effects and miniature photography. This was made possible by the widespread adoption of widescreen and colour film in the 1960s, which allowed

[148] Dower, "The Bombed," 291. It is worth noting that the nuclear conflict in Korean peninsula also act as an important turning point in *The Last War*, could be seen as an alternative cinematic outcome for the real-world event.
[149] It could be said that the making of *The Last War* is a response to the U2 incident. See *Toho tokusatsu eiga daizenshu* 東宝特撮映画大全集 [Toho Speical Effects Film Complete Collection], eds. Toho Studios 東宝株式会社 Village Books ヴィレッジボックス, (2012), 58.
[150] *Toho tokusatsu eiga daizenshu*, 58.

cinema to become the dominant form of entertainment.[151] Tsuburaya's work during this time had matured, and he created some of his most technologically impressive and realistic miniature works in *The Last War*, including moving models of airplanes and submarines in the imaginative war between the Alliance and the Federation.[152] Viewing from a different perspective, it is ironic that Tsuburaya's most impressive cinematic technological achievement in the 1960s was a film about an apocalypse that served as a cautionary tale about the dangers of technology and its potential to bring about the end of humanity.

Figure 2.12: The Japanese government is gathering for the emergency meeting.

(Film Title: *The Last War*, Time Code: 00:53:18)

Although *The Last War* uses extensive sequence to illustrate the military operations of the Alliance and the Federation, the governments of both superpowers are conspicuously absent from the narrative, leaving the audience to witness Japan's passive and futile reactions to the unfolding catastrophe. To elaborate, similar to *Godzilla*, the absence of direct accusation in *The*

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[151] *Tsuburaya eiji tokusatsu sekai* 円谷英二特撮世界 [The World of Tsuburaya Eiji's Special Effect Films]. Keibunsha 勁文社, (2001), 72, 82.
[152] *Tsuburaya eiji tokusatsu Sekai*, 86.

Last War may be due to the lingering influence of the occupation period censorship.[153] This intentional absence could be a strategic maneuver to avoid potential criticism and disapproval when approaching sensitive international matters, especially during Cold War tensions. The film suggests that the invisible superpower governments have failed in their liability to safeguard international peace and have made inhumane decisions by opting for total nuclear war. The intentional invisibility also underscores the powerlessness of the characters depicted in the film, such as the Tamura family, the Japanese government, and the soldiers who operate the nuclear warfare system for both superpowers, highlighting the nuclear war as devastation falling from the sky. This fictional portrayal positions Japan as an unfortunate victim of the impending total nuclear war, contributing to the film's depiction of the victimized country as vulnerable in the face of global turmoil.

Figure 2.13: A view of Tokyo from the sky after the devastation.

(Film Title: *The Last War*, Time Code: 01:49:16)

[153] See Ikeda, "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II," 49-50.

Furthermore, in contrast to previous segments that delve into human interactions, *The Last War* introduces a notable shift with a sequence of bird's-eye shots portraying the aftermath of nuclear war, offering a perspective beyond the human experience: also, a visual extravaganza in Japanese special effects marvels. Kamiya Kazuhiro argues that Tsuburaya Eiji, the special effects director, employs bird's-eye shots in his *tokusatsu* films to reconstruct the world and present it from a high-up, inhuman angle, essentially functioning as a device to provide a bird's eye view of society.[154] This technique is evident in *The Last War*, particularly when nuclear devastation unfolds, transforming the once-thriving Tokyo into a desolate plain of melted buildings. With almost no scenes featuring human characters, this part of the film focuses solely on the visually remarkable and carefully crafted miniature destruction of major landmarks and cities, as if the destruction of the buildings could be representative of the destruction of human civilization. In the film's final moments, excluding scenes of Takano's ship, the audience is confronted with an uncanny solitude as if they are the sole survivors on Earth. Tsuburaya's bird's-eye shots, therefore, evoke a transcendent and objective effect. Despite the absence of visible victims in the scenes (and the absence of the Tamura family), the imagery conveys the complete destruction of humankind with a chilling emptiness; on the other hand, it also demonstrates the impressive advancement in Tsuburaya's special effects expertise to the audience.

Tsuburaya's bird's-eye view imparts an objective, almost detached perspective on the nuclear catastrophe, conveying the finality of the destruction. This aligns with Charles Derry's

[154] Kamiya Kazuhiro 神谷和宏, "1950-1960 nendai tokusatsu ni okeru fukan no manazashi – 19 seiki shikakubunka kenkyu no shiza kara" 1950～1960 年代特撮における俯瞰のまなざし —19 世紀視覚文化研究の視座から— [What the "Tokusatsu" from the 1950s and 1960s Drew from a Bird's-Eye View: The Perspective of 19th Century Visual Culture Research] in *The Journal of Next-Generation Humanities and Social Sciences* 차세대 인문사회연구, no.16, (2020), 286-287.

idea of the "horror of Armageddon" in his work *Dark Dreams*. Derry contextualizes Armageddon as a historically divine concept, traditionally seen as the ultimate battle between good and evil, now reimagined in contemporary narratives as a human-induced disaster, epitomized by nuclear warfare.[155] As Derry argues, "while ancient people could easily imagine an Armageddon caused by God, modern man can all too easily imagine an Armageddon caused, not by God, but by man. Armageddon is the war to end all wars, the ultimate confrontation; in short, the atomic bomb."[156] *The Last War* exemplifies this shift, where nuclear weaponry symbolizes the apex of human potential for self-destruction. The film's depiction of nuclear devastation is remarkably evocative, steering away from the immediate portrayal of human suffering and instead focusing on the profound and broader impact of such a catastrophe. This approach culminates in a powerful and haunting message, conveyed through the stark emptiness that follows the destruction. The absence of human characters in the final scenes serves as a chilling reminder of the potential consequences of modern Armageddon, transforming the urban landscape into a silent, desolate void. At the end of the film, with clear text appears on the screen, *The Last War* finally delivers a stark warning against the uncontrolled nuclear devastation to the audience:

> この物語はすべて架空のものであるが、明日起こる現実かも知れない。しかし、それを押しとめようわれらすべてが手をつないで…
>
> This story is entirely fictional, but it could be a reality that will happen tomorrow. But let us all stop it, hand in hand…

[155] Charles Derry, *Dark Dreams: A Psychological History of the Modern Horror Film*, (A.S. Barnes, 1977), 49-50.
[156] Derry, *Dark Dreams*, 50.

The Last War, therefore, paints a devastating vision of the future, serving as a sentimental resonance on the collective memory of rebuilding postwar Japan and the fear of nuclear apocalypse while showing off Toho's magnificent special effects in a full-colour ultra-wide cinema. As the narrative unfolds within the context of a bipolar international conflict, the spectre of total nuclear war looms large, threatening the annihilation of humanity, Japan included. The film's realistic imagination, while providing a haunting "what if" scenario to humanity, continually underscores a sobering truth: Japan, as if the tragedy of the perished Tamura family, remains a vulnerable entity in a Cold War-inspired world, despite its stance of neutrality and pursuit of peace and happiness. It vividly illustrates how Japan's short-lived and dearly cherished post-war prosperity can be obliterated within seconds by the overwhelming force of nuclear weapons beyond their control.

Conclusion: Controlled Ambition and Uncontrolled Devastation

In this chapter, I engage in an in-depth examination of two pivotal early 1960s SF films: a Chinese SF breakthrough, *The Little Sun* and *The Last War*, a Japanese special effects marvel. Extending from the first chapter, both 1960s films provide intriguing understandings of the socio-political consciousness during an ever-changing Cold War period. *The Little Sun* envisions a future where advanced technology enables humanity to reshape nature itself, presenting a highly industrialized Chinese city as a beacon of positive progress. The film begins its exploration from the dichotomy between spring and winter, northern China and southern China, and eventually blurring national boundaries into a unified, China-centric world. The film becomes a utopian playground where the younger generation of Chinese are encouraged to make their audacious, irresponsible dream come true.

The Japanese *tokusatsu* classic The Last War presents a different perspective in juxtaposition. The film announces a grim world-historical statement that humanity will be destroyed if a total nuclear war happens. Focused on the harrowing aftermath of conflict, mainly drawing from the Hiroshima experience, it portrays Japan as a pacifist nation trapped between two out-of-controlled superpowers. The film is notable for its stunning special effects, but its core lies in the tragic depiction of a Japanese middle-class family's experience and the intense, bipolarized military operations. This dual narrative highlights Japan's victimization and its nuanced response to global crises, delivering a political message to the audience that corresponds with the existing anti-nuclear sentimentality and victim consciousness in early 1960s Japan.

In examining *The Little Sun* and *The Last War*, a striking contrast emerges in their representations of the power of the nuclear, each offering a distinct perspective shaped by the cultural and historical contexts of China and Japan in the early 1960s. While both films engage with the theme of a near future transformed by the power of the nuclear, they diverge in their portrayal of nuclear technology's role and implications.

The Little Sun epitomizes a vision of a highly technological Chinese future, where the power of the nuclear is the linchpin of an industrialized society, and something more powerful than the power of the nuclear is capable of turning even the most audacious childhood dreams into reality. Extending from the utopian vision of *Ballad*, the optimistic depiction in *The Little Sun* resonates with the era's Chinese zeitgeist, reflecting a period of optimism, national aspirations for scientific advancement, and CCP's idealized vision for its younger generations in the early 1960s. Compared to *The Last War*, it could be said that the film neglected the consequences of out-of-controlled the power of the nuclear and the potential devastation it could bring to humanity. Instead, *The Little Sun* symbolically presents a utopian scenario where nuclear and even anti-matter energy catalyze societal transformation and empowerment.

By comparison, *The Last War* puts an emphasis on a different form of the power of the nuclear, the devastating nuclear weapon, showing a haunting modern Armageddon of postwar Japan, reflecting on collective memories of rebuilding from wartime trauma and the looming fear of a total nuclear apocalypse. This narrative demonstrates Japan's postwar pacifism and the pervasive anxiety of a nuclear apocalypse, depicting a nation still in the throes of rebuilding and haunted by the spectre of its wartime experiences. Here, the power of the nuclear is not a symbol of progress, but rather a grim reminder of the fragility of humanity and the potential for technological advancements to lead to catastrophic consequences. Two Chinese and Japanese SF films echo their societies in the early 1960s. They both utilize SF settings to explore extrapolative themes such as technological progression, the manipulation of nature, and the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War era.

Crucially, they present a nuanced exploration of the power of the nuclear's dichotomy: in *The Little Sun*, it is harnessed as a controlled force underpinning a futuristic technological landscape, whereas *The Last War* depicts it as an uncontrolled and catastrophic force, symbolizing the total destruction of humanity. This contrast illuminates the differing perceptions of the power of the nuclear. It focuses on the implications of nuclear energy in terms of global politics and moral contemplation in the early 1960s. By situating their narratives in SF, they offer a sophisticated comparison of the period's aspirations. *The Little Sun* and *The Last War* highlight the intricate and dualistic relationship humanity has with nuclear technology: a source of boundless potential when controlled and a looming threat of unparalleled devastation when uncontrolled.

Conclusion

The Possibility and Ambiguity of the Nuclear

> "SF began with the rise of modern science and modern society and has carved out a history of its development and turmoil while at times taking a critical stance. It is a history of dreams, depicting the most improbable fantasies and many possible possibilities, utopias, and dystopias."[157]

> "SF is the literature of possibility."[158]

> "One of the most significant potentialities of SF as a form is precisely this capacity to provide something like an experimental variation on our own empirical universe."[159]

From the comparison undertaken in Chapter One, we can see the Chinese SF opera adapted the landmark *Ballad of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, which stages a revolutionary epic about the nuclear-powered utopian commune. The three-part narrative explores the past, the present and the future of China, as the prologue establishes the image of an oppressive ancient China and contrasts it with the transformative socialist era. Then, the bustling construction site serves as a symbolic battleground, representing both the struggle against natural forces and the skepticism faced by the imperialists and reactionaries while signalling the CCP's ambitious transformation plan in mechanization and modernization. The subsequent portrayal of a romanticized and hedonistic fairyland, set twenty years later, blends Jin Shan's and Tian Han's vision of an idealized China with a utopian imagination inspired by the CCP's plan to reshape socialist China that embraces the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In a different vein, the Japanese

[157] Nagayama Yasuo 長山靖生. *Nihon sf seishinshi* 日本 SF 精神史 [Japanese SF Spiritual History]. (Kawade Shobo Shinsha 河出書房新社, 2018), 438.
[158] Liu Cixin 刘慈欣, "Kehuan xiaoshuo chuangzuo suibi" 科幻小说创作随笔 [Essay on Writing Science Fiction Novels], *Chinese Journal of Literary Criticism* 中国文学批评, no.3 (2019), 69.
[159] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 270.

SF classic *Godzilla* employs a narrative strategy steeped in sentimentality to forge a poignant connection with its audience and explore a nuanced view of the power of the nuclear. The sinking ship at the beginning, the female *hibakusha*'s conversation on the commuter train, and the documentary-like footage on television weaves a sentimental narrative from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the incident of *Daigo Fukuryu Maru* that haunts postwar Japan. In contrast to the excitement associated with technological marvels in *Ballad*, *Godzilla* deliberately underscores the theme of technology as a fearful threat, providing a nuanced reflection into the dilemma of a socio-political consciousness regarding nuclear technology as the dream of progression and the persistent spectre of nuclear disasters.

In Chapter Two's exploration of the 1960s, the Chinese SF landmark, *The Little Sun*, further extends upon the imaginative realms established in *Ballad*. It envisions a technologically advanced future, presenting a utopian world that radiates optimism. The film depicts a highly industrialized Chinese city that has progressed beyond the era of nuclear. The view of science as an almighty power allows for the change of nature at will, emphasizing the positive representation of this future. From the dichotomous argument between spring and winter, the north and the south, to the later expansion towards a China-centered world with no other countries, the film portrays a utopian dream where the younger generation of Chinese can make their most audacious dreams come true in a matter of time. Conversely, the visually impressive Japanese SF *The Last War* continues the sentimental technique in *Godzilla* that connects the film with the audience. The film delves into the traumatic experience of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. Portraying it as an icon of suffering. It also examines postwar Japan through the lens of a middle-class family tragedy, presenting the powerless country as a neutral force caught between the irresponsible global superpowers. This perspective highlights Japan's vulnerability and victimization in the face of an unfolding nuclear Armageddon. It offers a cinematic warning about the nuclear devastation that could be the reality outside the screen.

The portrayal of the power of the nuclear as a great power in Chinese and Japanese SF films in the 1950s and 1960s compresses a nuanced and dualistic perspective, presenting it as an effective double-edged sword with profound implications for the future of humanity. In the *Ballad* and *The Little Sun*, the power of the nuclear is frequently depicted as a utopian foundation, symbolizing the promise of a brighter future for both infrastructure and human progress in the future socialist China. These narratives often paint a hopeful picture, showcasing the transformative potential of nuclear energy in powering advanced societies and solving all issues in the socialist transformation, the Great Leap Forward, and the famine. Conversely, while also exploring the potential of the peaceful use of nuclear, *Godzilla* and *The Last War* unfold a moralized narrative that casts the power of the nuclear as a weapon with the potential to bring about the catastrophic end of humanity. Here, the dark side of nuclear technology takes centre stage, emphasizing the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons and their existential threat. Drawing inspiration from historical events such as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the anti-nuclear sentiment after the incident of *Daigo Fukuryu Maru*, the films delve into the consequences of irresponsible technological advancement and militarization, underscoring the immense responsibility associated with the control of nuclear capabilities.

Moreover, within the historical context of 1950s and 1960s China and Japan, an extended exploration of this topic opens avenues for future research. In China, the juxtaposition between the cinematic depictions in films like *Ballad* and *The Little Sun*, which celebrate the technological wonderland embracing the peaceful use of nuclear energy in alignment with the national plan of that era, takes on added significance. Concurrently, behind the cinematic portrayal, China discreetly pursued the development of its nuclear armament during the same period, with assistance from the Soviet Union.[160] The culmination of these efforts materialized in China's first nuclear detonation in 1964, marking a pivotal moment in the proliferation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War.[161] In Japan, a similar duality emerges. While the civilian nuclear program in Japan during the 1950s and 1960s was apparently aimed at peaceful purposes, it also laid the groundwork for latent nuclear weapon potential.[162] A U.S. intelligence report speculated that Japan had the capability to conduct its first nuclear test as early as 1971 and could potentially produce an estimated 10-30 weapons annually.[163] These projections suggested that such developments could occur without violating reactor safeguard provisions.[164]

The depiction of nuclear energy in PRC SF films in the 1950s and 1960s offers a fascinating vista for further exploration, particularly considering the Soviet influence on these narratives. Micheala Smidrkalova notes that, similar to PRC SF of the same era, in the Czechoslovak media in the 1950s, the nuclear age was often idealized as a near-paradisal era, where fantasy merges with reality and serves as a catalyst for the transition to Communism.[165] This glorification of peaceful nuclear energy was frequently linked to the Soviet Union, reflecting strong ideological underpinnings that helped legitimize the established communist

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160 Ichikawa Hiroshi, "Reconsidering "Eternal Brotherhood": the Transfer of Nuclear Technology from the Former Soviet Union to the People's Republic of China in the 1950s," *Hiroshima Peace Science* 広島平和科学, vol.41, (2020), 8.
161 Ichikawa, "Reconsidering Eternal Brotherhood," 9.
162 Kurosaki Akira, "Nuclear Energy and Nuclear-Weapon Potential: A Historical Analysis of Japan in the 1960s," *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol.24, (2017), 47. Notably, Kurosaki also points out that after the Chinese nuclear test in 1964, Japanese conservatives indicated their interest in possessing nuclear weapons for Japan.
163 Kurosaki, "Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Weapon Potential," 55.
164 Kurosaki, "Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Weapon Potential," 55.
165 Micheala Smidrkalova, "Atoms for Socialism: The Birth of a Czechoslovak-Soviet Nuclear Utopia," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, no.3 (2023), 131-132.

regime.[166] Exploring these utopian visions of nuclear energy in socialist countries in the context of their connection to Soviet ideology presents a compelling topic for future research. Such a transnational investigation would not only illuminate the social-political narratives surrounding nuclear energy in the PRC and other socialist countries, but also offer insights into how these narratives served to endorse and reinforce the legitimacy of communist governments during the era of the Cold War.

Building upon and going beyond this thesis, a future in-depth comparison between the recently released 2023 Toho *Godzilla* film, *Godzilla Minus One*[167] and the original 1954 *Godzilla* could reveal an apparent shift in narrative focus and thematic elements. Intriguingly, the 2023 film revisits the sentimental postwar narrative that characterized the original film of nearly 70 years ago. However, it diverges significantly from the original *Godzilla*'s exploration of themes such as sacrifice and the ominous presence of fearful technology. Instead, the plot of the 2023 film centers on the triumphant convergence of military technology and heroism, effectively countering the atomic bomb-like threat posed by the monstrous, hyperviolent Godzilla. Significantly, while Godzilla in the 2023 installment retains its identity as a radioactive monster, there is a deliberate toning down of emphasis and commentary on nuclear tests, distinguishing it from the profound reflections found in the 1954 *Godzilla*. This nuanced shift in thematic focus could be seen as a changing landscape of storytelling and social consciousness over the decades in Japanese cinema that is awaiting exploration.

Additionally, the 1954 film *Godzilla* harbours an often-overlooked dimension in its narrative, particularly concerning the monster's diminished origin and connections to colonial

[166] Smidrkalova, *Atoms for Socialism*, 133, 139.
[167] The Canadian release of Toho's 70th anniversary *Godzilla* film, *Godzilla Minus One*, was on December 1, 2023.

scientific achievements. Inutsuka sheds light on this aspect, revealing that in the film's early planning stages, Kayama's original script *G sakuhin kentouyou daihon* G 作品検討用台本 ("G Film" Script for Review) offered explicit hints linking Godzilla's origins to Japanese colonialism. In contrast to the final version, the initial script portrayed both Serizawa and Dr. Yamane as former professors at Peking University during the Sino-Japanese War. It attributed Serizawa's eye injury to an accident during a fossil excavation in Rehe Province instead of war.[168] He argues that in this original narrative, the monster Godzilla and the Japanese scientists symbolize the pinnacle of Japanese colonial scientific endeavours in Manchukuo, a notable centre for geology and paleontology. However, this connection to Rehe Province and the implications of colonialism were swiftly removed from subsequent drafts.[169] This omission altered the creature's backstory and signified a broader trend of postwar Japan distancing itself from its colonial past.[170] The evolution of the Godzilla script, therefore, reflects a deeper cultural and historical process of obscuring or "forgetting" the realities of Japanese colonialism in the collective memory of postwar society.

Beyond the scope of the four selected films from the era, promising opportunities exist for further examination, particularly in Japan. The declining studio system and the ascendance of television-based entertainment represent a transformative period. Simultaneously, a notable shift in the audience demographic for *tokusatsu* films towards a younger generation unfolded after the mid-1960s. As the popularity of *tokusatsu* films among younger audiences grew, there was a

[168] Inutsuka Yasuhiro 犬塚康博, "Gojira kigenko" ゴジラ起源考[A Consideration of the Origin of Godzilla], *Chiba daigaku jinmon shakai Kagaku kenkyu* 千葉大学人文社会科学研究, (2016), 45-46.
[169] Inutsuka, "Gojira kigenko," 56.
[170] Inutsuka, "Gojira kigenko," 56.

gradual and notable trend in the fantasization of nuclear themes.[171] This evolution manifested in the widespread media consumption of the image of atomic and hydrogen bombs, atomic energy, and the representation of the nuclear as fantastical elements within SF television series targeted at children. Japanese television programming from the late 1960s onward showcased a diverse array of anime and dramas that not only entertained but also actively emphasized the importance and superiority of technology, including the power of the nuclear.[172] This cultural phenomenon merits closer scrutiny, as it not only underscores the dynamic relationship between popular media and societal attitudes but also provides a unique lens through which to examine the evolving role of nuclear themes in mass entertainment in postwar Japan. These suggest areas for future research and illustrate the need for a multi-dimensional approach to understanding the historical and ideological narratives in postwar Chinese and Japanese SF cinema.

In concluding this thesis, the convergence and the ambiguity of cinematic narratives and real-world political dynamics in both China and Japan in the mid-to-late 1950s and early 1960s add a layer of complexity to the discourse surrounding the power of the nuclear. The interplay between cinematic idealization and social-political realities prompts a deeper investigation into how cultural representations may reflect and obscure the intentions and actions of nations during a critical juncture in global history. This interconnection between cinematic SF imagination and realities serves as a rich field for future scholars to explore, offering insights into the intricate dynamics between cinema and politics during the Cold War era in East Asia.

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[171] Yoshii Hiroaki 好井裕明, *Gojira mosura gensuibaku: tokusatsu eiga no shakai gaku* ゴジラモスラ原水爆:特撮映画の社会学 [Godzilla, Mothra, Atomic Bomb and Hydrogen Bomb: The Sociology of Special Effects Films], Serika Shobo セリカ書房, (2007), 205
[172] Yoshii, *Gojira mosura gensuibaku*, 224

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Matsubayashi, Shue 松林宗恵, director. *Sekai daisenso* 世界大戦争 [The Last War], Toho, 1961. 1 hr 50 min.

Wang, Minsheng 王敏生, director. *Xiaotaiyang* 小太阳 [The Little Sun], Shanghai Science and Education Film Studio, 1963. 31 min.

Wingard, Adam, director. *Godzilla vs Kong*, Legendary Pictures, 2021. 1 hr 53 min.

Yamazaki, Takashi 山崎貴, director. *Gojira mainasu wan* ゴジラマイナスワン[Godzilla Minus One], Toho, 2023. 2 hr 5 min.