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The Absurd and the Comical in *The Piano in a Factory*

Abstract Whereas scholarship on Zhang Meng’s acclaimed film *The Piano in a Factory* is scarce and mainly focuses on working-class identities, the present article contributes to the discussion by investigating the film’s tragicomic style. By taking an existentialist viewpoint about the absurd, it demonstrates that the furloughed workers in fact live in an absurdist existence. Moreover, the changing era rather than character flaws is blamed for the absurdity. Specific images are examined in order to reveal a symbolism having to do with the demise of industrialism and the advent of commercialism. While absurdity is the undercurrent, the characters use humor as a strategy to evade, elude, and cope with life. The third section employs theories of comedy to investigate the comicality of the movie, which derives from exaggeration of negative traits in the characters. The paper argues that by manipulating the scenario at the end, Zhang holds out hope for the working-class’ future. *Piano* is hence able to transcend the absurdist existence and end up with joy, hope and faith.

Keywords absurdist existence, comical, comic devices, transcendence, faith

The Piano in a Factory (2011, hereafter *Piano*), a motion picture directed by Zhang Meng, has won several domestic and international film festival awards and is acclaimed by film critics such as Dai Jinhua as one of the best movies in contemporary Chinese cinema.¹ Dai writes that “in recent years no other

¹ Dai Jinhua, “Jieji huo yin fu zhi ming—Ping *Gang de qin*,” n.p.

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films excite me as *Piano* does. It is not an exaggeration that I unconditionally identify with the movie in almost all aspects.”² Dai is fascinated by the movie not only because it deals with the marginalized, namely the lives of laid-off workers, which is a subject seldom addressed in present-day Chinese cinema, but also because it is set at the end of the Chinese industrial era and focuses on the “versatile, audacious, noble and creative” working class.³ Although she notes absurd elements in the film, Dai claims that “it is not an absurdist movie . . . All absurd elements are in fact the reality of yesteryear and the present.” According to her, while its “highly stylistic cinematography” creates unrealistic illusions, overall the movie presents the profound realities of furloughed workers’ experiences.⁴ In this paper I respond to Dai by demonstrating that the laid-off workers in fact live in what can be called an absurdist existence. While both Dai and Shi Tongyun point out that a sad story underlies the lighthearted comedy,⁵ I extend their discussion by expounding on how the characters use humor as a strategy to evade, elude, and cope with the absurdity of life. Building upon the insights of Dai and Pu Jian, I conclude that the seemingly unrealistic, romanticized finale, even though it has an absurd undertone, is the natural outgrowth of the comedy.⁶ By evoking laughter throughout and holding out hope at the end, *Piano* is thus able to rise above the absurdity that surrounds working-class lives through joy, hope, and faith.

First, I explicate the absurdist existence of the laid-off workers’ lives by applying existentialist views on the absurd and discuss how Chen Guilin, the protagonist, is elevated to a Sisyphean hero through his endeavors. His existence is absurd because of the changing era rather than any character flaws in him. In the second section I analyze how three funerals in the movie symbolize the demise of industrialism and the advent of commercialism. Butchered pork serves as a thematic image representing the director’s implicit criticism of how these workers are treated in the new age. A close reading of the image foregrounds the subtext of the movie and renders the

² Yan Zhuo, “Dai Jinhua, Wang Yan: Dianying zhong de lishi shuxie yu chengxian,” n.p.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dai Jinhua, “Jieji huo yin fu zhi ming—ping *Gang de qin*,” n.p.

⁵ Ibid.; Tongyun Shi, “Chinese Working-Class Identity in *The Piano in a Factory*,” 104–5.

⁶ Dai Jinhua, “Jieji huo yin fu zhi ming—ping *Gang de qin*”; Zhang Meng et al., “*Gang de qin* siren tan,” 41.

motif of misery more prominent. While misery is the basis of the movie, the characters utilize humor to cope with their absurdist existence. Therefore, in the next section I employ theories of comedy to examine the comedic elements of the movie. Exaggeration of the main characters' negative traits—Chen's boastfulness and Fathead's childishness respectively—makes them laughable characters. Furthermore, examining how the characters talk at cross-purposes, how what they say is contradicted by what they do, and how the verbal is undercut by the visual illustrates entanglements of the comical and the absurd. The overall tone of the film is thus tragicomic. My final section illuminates the theme of the movie by focusing on the theatrical last scene. By manipulating the ending, Zhang extends hope for the future while letting the absurdist existence of the working-class show.

An Absurdist Existence

Piano is set in the 1990s in northeast China, the area of the old industrial base. It is a time when workers, the previous masters of socialist China, are losing their jobs due to economic reform. At the beginning of the movie, a group of laid-off workers is left to their own devices to make their livings. Some start legal or illegal businesses, such as running a slaughterhouse, or a barbershop, or organizing unemployed workers to scavenge buried scrap metal to sell; and others just sit idle with nothing to do. The protagonist, Chen, puts together a band and plays accordion at various events. Though a skilled foundry worker, Chen loves music and longs for his daughter to become a pianist. The plot begins when his estranged wife, after a long absence, comes back home, asks for a divorce, and sues for custody of his beloved daughter. His daughter claims that she will go with whichever parent can provide a piano for her. After a series of failed attempts to obtain a piano by, for example, borrowing money from friends and even stealing one from school, Chen decides to make a piano from scratch. He enlists his friends—among them experienced locksmiths (Fathead and Quickhand), a foundry worker (Brother Ji), a carpenter (Chen's brother-in-law), a welder (Big Liu), and a painter (Wang Kangmei)—to help him. Eventually, the ex-wife takes their daughter, but nevertheless, he does fulfill his promise to build a piano that can make a beautiful sound. His daughter is able to play the piano at the

workshop where it is built, accompanied by her mother.

This seemingly unrealistic story derives from the experience of the director's own father, who in the 1970s actually did build a piano with colleagues for his *pingju* troupe, though Zhang Meng never reveals how well that piano worked. On the other hand, the actual piano made by steelworkers during filming sounded terrible.⁷ For Zhang, however, the story is plausible because people in Tieling, the town where the movie is set and where he grew up, are good at making things. They even build cars and airplanes. In fact, on being laid off, they asked for machines rather than money so that they could start their own manufacturing businesses and continue to make a living.⁸

In the movie, the characters never contemplate the nature of their existence, since they are more doers than thinkers. Nevertheless, a close reading of the plot reveals the absurdist existence of these working-class people. Here, I wish to examine it by applying to the story an existentialist point of view. I argue that Chen becomes a Sisyphean hero by making a piano even though it is impossible for him to regain custody of his daughter and, more importantly, by his choosing to fight for himself in China's new economic era. Chen's status as a Sisyphean hero provides the very basis for the movie's comedic aspect. The characters take their dilemmas seriously, but a broader perspective renders their decisions absurd. As Thomas Nagel asserts, in our daily lives we make choices that show "we take some things more seriously than others," yet there is always another "point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous." When these two viewpoints collide in us, "we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled, continuing to live with nearly undiminished seriousness in spite of them," making our lives absurd.⁹ The movie's plot itself is essentially absurd, because settling a custody issue based solely on ownership of a piano is preposterous, to say the least. Though ownership of a piano is a sign of wealth and thus represents a step up from working-class status, everything else necessary for taking good care of a child, such as a secure job, love, relationships, and a sense of responsibility, are ignored. Not

⁷ Liu Xiaolei, "Dianying zhong de weiguan zhengzhixue—Zhang Meng fangtan," 89–91.

⁸ Zhang Meng et al., "*Gang de qin siren tan*," 40.

⁹ Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 14.

only that, Chen's ex-wife also lacks both money and security of her own; she has money only because she recently married a con man who makes fake medicines and may very well end up in jail. The potential harm the daughter could face living with a stepfather like that is never even mentioned. Another absurdity is that it is the child who establishes a piano as the condition for custody, but throughout the movie, no adults ever question the rationality of this demand, except when Chen's girlfriend Shuxian once complains in passing that his daughter is too materialistic. Everybody accepts the condition at face value despite its discernible fallacies.

Not only is the concept absurd, Chen's endeavors to acquire a piano are likewise absurd because "in ordinary life a situation is absurd when it includes a conspicuous discrepancy between pretension or aspiration and reality."¹⁰ Given Chen's financial status, obtaining a piano is an improbable if not impossible mission, as evidenced by his resorting to borrowing money and even stealing to achieve his goal. Each of these attempts is almost pathetically absurd, either emotionally or morally. In terms of borrowing money, rather than getting a loan from a wealthy person, Chen goes about asking his relatives and friends—all of whom, of course, are as poor as he is—for money. Some even run away to the countryside to avoid him. Nevertheless, what makes this effort absurd is "less the impossibility of success than the person's pursuit of the project despite recognizing its impossibility."¹¹ Before asking Fathead for money, Chen softens him up by voluntarily paying off his debt, and he even bribes his own sister with a pork slab, showing that he does recognize the difficulty or impossibility of procuring money from his equally impoverished associates. Yet, he goes ahead because he has no other options. Surrounded by relatives and friends who live in poverty as he does, he is forced to undertake the humiliating mission while ruefully recognizing it is doomed.

While he struggles to accomplish his noble task honestly on his first attempt, his second crosses the line in terms of morality and even legality. He decides to steal a piano from the school, even though to no avail. Beforehand, Chen invites his friends to a feast and proclaims his attempt "a great deed,"¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ David E. Cooper, *Existentialism*, 141.

¹² Quotation from the movie.

highlighting the goal of the theft while being selectively blind to its nature. On the way to the school, in a van commandeered from one of his friends, Big Liu, they sing, dance, and laugh, completely lacking moral judgment about the adventure. With regard to the absurd in existential novels, Richard Baker points out that when confronted with absurdity, many protagonists “attempt to deny” moral values because the absurd “by its very nature” suppresses people’s demands for moral choices.¹³ Living in an irrational world where money is valued well above family bonds and restricts one’s circle of friends, Chen and his friends refuse to pass moral judgment upon their theft. The expedition is absurd because of the obvious incongruity between the end and the means: While it is honorable to fight for custody of his daughter, it is pathetic to do so by stealing.

Chen next decides to make a piano from scratch, with the help of steel- and ironworkers in a makeshift workshop that they build. The surrealistic undertone becomes prominent at this point, because their ambition so clearly seems farfetched and unattainable, as Shuxian points out. Chen’s unrelenting determination to obtain a piano reminds one of Sisyphus’s ceaseless attempts to roll a rock to the top of a mountain. Like Sisyphus, he does not give up. Whereas in Sisyphus’s case, the rock keeps falling back down due to its own weight, Chen ultimately makes a piano that can produce a beautiful sound, thanks to the director’s benign intent. Yet, before his final success, he willingly gives up custody of his daughter to his ex-wife, knowing that she will take better care of the girl because, at least for the time being, she has money, no matter how she gets it. The finale once again speaks volumes about the characters’ absurdist existence, as equally important considerations other than money render the resolution gratuitous. In the context where Chen realizes that he cannot win custody but continues to build the piano with nearly undiminished intensity, he becomes a Sisyphian hero.

In fact, Chen initially disbands his team of workers after relinquishing custody of his daughter, but then resumes making the piano after the town’s smokestacks, the symbol of its bygone industrialism, are demolished. He is now trapped in the absurd, since he is “deprived of the memory of a lost

¹³ Richard E. Baker, *The Dynamics of the Absurd in the Existential Novel*, 3.

home”—the smokestacks are gone—and because his daughter has left with his ex-wife, he has no hope. Living in this absurd state, Chen chooses to revolt: Making the piano is no longer a matter of personal gain but an assertion that the working class still has value in the new era. As an outcast living on the margins of society, Chen “is powerless to stop this system, but is nevertheless rebellious and contemptuous of it.”¹⁴ The smokestacks metamorphose into the piano as a declaration that the working class has not perished even though the symbol of it has. More importantly, the finished piano attests that these displaced workers can find a place in the new era with the skills they gained during their industrial prime.

Nagel points out that whereas life is inherently absurd, “Camus . . . rejects suicide and the other solutions he regards as escapist. What he recommends is defiance or scorn . . . by shaking a fist at the world.”¹⁵ The piano that these steel- and iron workers makes functions like a fist shaken at the new age, recalcitrantly affirming the vitality of the working class. Chen might realize from the beginning that times have changed and he is powerless to stop it, since he did not participate in the petition to keep smokestacks. While not attempting to obstruct the forward march of time, he nonetheless makes the choice to fight in the new era, asserting a Sisyphean freedom of choice and a passion for life: This is Chen’s response to his absurdist existence.

The end product, a steel piano, rises from the dull, grimy old factory: Chen’s final answer to his absurdist existence is to create a work of art. While the work of art brings joy to both its creators and Chen’s daughter, the movie retains a comedic base because, as Camus asserts, “happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable.” If “one must imagine Sisyphus happy,”¹⁶ one must imagine that Chen is happy as well, particularly because the director arbitrarily creates an ending that is much more hopeful than Sisyphus’s. In fact, as we will see later, laughter is the way that Chen deals with his absurdist existence, and ultimately he rises above it through laughter.

¹⁴ Ibid., 130.

¹⁵ Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, 22.

¹⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 122–23.

The Changing Era and the Metaphor of Slaughter

While Chen's journey to acquire a piano illustrates the absurdity of his existence, one cannot help asking what makes his very existence absurd. As butchered pork—the thematic imagery that Zhang uses throughout Chen's journey—vividly illustrates, the changing era rather than any character flaws in Chen is to blame for his condition. In this section, I first analyze two funerals in the movie, along with the demolition of the smokestacks, to examine how they symbolize the end of industrialism and advent of capitalism. Whereas the funerals allude to Zhang's disapproval of the state's treatment of the working class, a more poignant visual denunciation is represented by butchered pork. My close reading of this thematic image shows how Zhang decries the changing era for causing working-class misfortunes. Functioning as an acute criticism of how workers are treated in the post-socialist state, images of pork emphatically assert the working-class's absurdist existence in the cinematic language of the movie.

The furloughed steel- and ironworkers featured in the film live in an uneasy transitional period where industrialism has become a thing of the past while the ascendant new era shows signs of ugliness. These characters are lost in the new age: Not only do the skills they procured during their prime working years become useless, they also experience a precipitous social decline. In fact, their time has gone forever, as symbolized by the much anticipated demolition of the smokestacks and two funerals.

Specifically, in *Piano*, the end of the industrial era is denoted by the funeral of an unknown woman in the film's opening, the prolonged demolition of smokestacks near the end, and the demise of Chen's father shortly after that. In the movie, the smokestacks have dwindled from a source of pride into a symbol of social, emotional, and mental decay of the working class, suggesting the imminent dissolution of their realm and hence the passing of industrialism. As we closely examine the movie, the impending destruction of the smokestacks comes into focus from time to time, since each character sees some sentimental, social, or cultural value in them and wishes to preserve them. Yet, for much of the movie, this dynamic remains in the background until the smokestacks implode close to the end. By the time the suspense is finally lifted—that is, when the smokestacks are blasted—these

workers have come to terms with the passing of their era: Chen even hands out cigarettes to make the occasion a celebration. Compared with the deep sorrow he experiences at the old woman's funeral, his equanimity on this occasion hints that he is ready to move forward after having endured the sorrow of transition.

It is significant that a mother passes away at the beginning of the movie, and later Chen's father dies soon after the demolition of the smokestacks. The whole movie unfolds in the shadow of the mother's death, alluding to the situation into which the working class is suddenly plunged: They lose the love and protection allegedly promised by the mother state and are left on their own. The long hiatus between the loss of state protection and the ultimate annihilation of industrialism suggests the stress and strain the working class experience as they cope with this abrupt turn of fate. This time of transition is not necessarily an easy one. Moreover, the death of manufacturing hastens the death of Chen's father, who already appears fragile at the beginning of the movie. The haste between the symbolic death of manufacturing and actual death of Chen's father stands out when compared with the extended delay between the old lady's funeral and the eventual destruction of the smokestacks. The older generation, represented by Chen's father, gave birth to socialist China and dies with it. While the physical obliteration of Chen's father proclaims that the pillars of the old era are gone, it inevitably leaves Chen's generation and subsequent ones to deal with the frail relics of their past life and to work toward a new one.

There are several indications of the feebleness and ineffectualness of subsequent generations. In a scene where Chen admonishes his daughter for her poor hand position in playing piano, he is doing a traditional woman's activity: Knitting, which contrasts with and diminishes his authoritative posture and furthermore makes him appear ridiculous. While Chen's effeminacy is shown only within the domain of his family, Fathead's inability to protect his daughter is known to his circle of friends. If Fathead still embraces the belief that a father is meant to be protecting his children, his daughter's boyfriend flees from his responsibilities after getting her pregnant. This spiral of decreasing masculinity echoes the symbolic meaning of Chen's father's demise: the loss of virility. By the same token, the demolition of the smokestacks not only announces the end of industrialism but also signifies

the castration of the working class through the physical resemblance between a smokestack and a penis.¹⁷ Just as the penis gives men a male identity, workers identify the smoke issuing from smokestacks as a sign that factories are functioning well. The complete destruction of the smokestacks strips the working class not only of their livelihood but of the meaning of their lives.

The trio of Chen's father, Chen, and Fathead's daughter's boyfriend epitomize generations serving the past, present, and future of industrialism. And the movie also represents the fourth, newborn generation in the character of Fathead's granddaughter. According to Zhang's painstaking chronicle of death, life, and birth in the *Piano*, the flight of the newborn's father to the south—the test ground for capitalism—hints at the future of the Chinese economy. While the newborn could very well live a different lifestyle, it is almost certain that her generation will leave prior generations far behind, just like the fleeing father. On the brink of a new historical epoch, however, the rising new order makes no sense to Chen and his friends. The values of industrialism—brotherhood, family unity, love, and esteem for Chinese history and culture—are threatened by continuous intrusions from commercialism, be they unanticipated family breakdowns, a fast-moving train, the faint outline of a middle-class lifestyle represented by the piano, or Chen's loss of custody and dignity. In particular, the primordial chaos and threatening formlessness of incipient commercialism and cultural upheaval are ambiguously linked in the choices that Chen's ex-wife and daughter make. In the case of the ex-wife, her new hope (i.e., spouse) is nothing more than an amoral criminal who boasts that what he does helps people. Ironically, everyone, including Chen, acknowledges that his daughter will be better off in the care of the con man, simply because he has money. The ugliness of commercialism, which has even contaminated his supposedly innocent daughter, suggests the chaos of the primordial new age, although this theme remains an undercurrent. Only rarely does it surface and distract attention away from Chen's story.

Implicit in the funerals and the demolition is Zhang's subtle condemnation of the changing era; that is, the loss of state protection and the immediate

¹⁷ Liu Xiaolei, "Dianying zhong de weiguan zhengzhixue—Zhang Meng fangtan," 91.

and latent tolls it takes on the working class. In contrast, the denunciation is vivid and poignant in the imagery of butchered pork from Liu's slaughterhouse. Pork figures in Chen's every attempt to get a piano: When he borrows money from relatives and friends, when he and his friends set out to steal a piano from the school, and when he mobilizes his associates to make a piano. A close reading of this thematic image is therefore called for.

Butchered pork first appears after Chen unsuccessfully attempts to borrow money from Liu. Their conversation takes place in an empty slaughterhouse with a live pig fenced in one corner, and the last shot focuses in on two slabs of pork that foreshadow Chen's bringing one to his sister as a bribe. The second appearance borders on the absurd: Two slabs hang in the foreground while in the background Chen and his friends are seen singing and dancing happily in Liu's cramped van. Not only is the meat incongruous with the jubilant atmosphere but its placement in the foreground exerts a strong visual impact on the audience. The final instance differs in scale from the first two. The camera first pans through the slaughterhouse as it follows Chen scurrying down the aisle, both sides of which are lined with pork. Then as Chen passionately tries to persuade Liu to join his piano-building team, a meat slab gently swings back and forth between them. For a few seconds after Liu disappears from the frame, the audience sees only the butchered pig and Chen, the former is more striking because it is visually taller, wider, and larger and is in motion. Pushed aside by Chen, the swaying carcass becomes the sole focus for three seconds after Chen walks off-screen while continuing to talk. As if this pig were not emphasized enough, when Chen and Liu reach consensus, the camera captures them together. The final shot once more gives a panoramic view of the slaughterhouse, with the camera dollying out.

Zhang claimed that he deliberately utilized the images of butchering to evoke "the sense of being slaughtered."¹⁸ Such imagery represents his understanding of how the working class is treated in post-socialist China: After demanding unconditional allegiance and sacrifice, the state ruthlessly abandons them, offering them no help once they are no longer needed. Thus, the frames in which carcasses are pushed aside and later capture Chen and

¹⁸ Zhang Meng et al., "Gang de qin siren tan," 43.

Liu together take on metaphorical meaning: While attempting to extricate themselves from their state of exploitation, these workers share the same destiny as the pigs heading to slaughter. The shot in between is rendered strikingly absurd by the swaying carcass that overwhelms the foreground, while Chen's impassioned speech is heard in the background. While Chen's response to his absurdist existence—making a piano—lends him nobility, it will not make his life un-absurd, as the images of butchered pork acutely signal. On the contrary, the commitment expressed in his voiceover makes his absurdist existence even more gruesome.

The Comicality of *The Piano in a Factory*

While Chen's journey is imbued with absurdity and the changing era is blamed for his absurdist existence, *Piano* is superficially humorous and lighthearted. The source of the comedy lies not in the plot, or in *what* happens, but in *how* it happens and to *whom* it happens. For the audience, the humor lies in the film's likeable but pathetic characters—both charming in their benevolent innocence and ludicrous in their eccentricity. In this section, by analyzing chase scenes in the movie, I first argue that the characters are generally good people even though they have idiosyncrasies and inadequacies. I then examine the characters of Chen and Fathead—the latter of whom was a locksmith but now idles around after being laid off—to show that the comicality of the movie derives from exaggerating their negative traits. By magnifying Chen's boastfulness and Fathead's childishness, respectively, the movie presents two comical characters.

Turning first to farcical incidents in the film, Zhang seemingly balances the sadness of the characters' absurdist existence with several slapstick chase scenes: A group of women chasing Fathead after he steals their money at a mahjong table; Chen chasing Wang Kangmei because Wang steals his woman; Chen's friends suddenly taking flight in the dark when they steal a piano from the school. Though these chase scenes are supposed to prompt the viewer's reflection on moral issues surrounding theft, the overlaid soundtracks successfully turn them into amusing interludes. It is not surprising that stealing is prevalent in *Piano*, since comedy "deals with the itch to own the

material world” and is “very often about theft.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, in these cases, characters are motivated not by greed, but rather by need. In Chen’s case a piano is a necessity to win his daughter’s loyalty. Like typical comedic characters, Chen and his friends such as Fathead and Wang are in general good people; it is their inattention to others—what Henri Bergson terms “unsociability”²⁰—rather than immorality that makes them ignore the effects of their actions on others. What inspires the audience to laughter is not so much a sense of superiority at observing them stealing and being chased as a sense of enjoyment at recognizing their vulnerabilities and identifying them as profound human conditions that they also share. Zhang thus makes the audience laugh *with* his characters more than laugh *at* them.

Indeed, these characters do have weaknesses. All of them are in impoverished, pathetic conditions: Fathead loafers around, avoiding work; Wang has been wallowing in loneliness since he was widowed; Chen cannot compete financially with the con man his wife has married. Their flaws, however, do not include corruption, nor do they lead viewers to abhor the characters, as the changing era is largely responsible for their situation. Viewers are able to laugh with the characters because “the flaws that are ridiculed do not become vices and cause aversion.”²¹ Furthermore, viewers do recognize the characters’ positive traits: Fathead has been trying to protect his daughter; Wang was faithful to his wife and is ready to move forward; Chen ultimately keeps the promise he made to his daughter, namely to provide, or at least build, a piano. Since they are overall likable and decent characters, their faults reveal merely pettiness and self-absorption, and thus generate benign laughter.

Despite being targets of comedy, the characters in *Piano* “remain normative figures” whose “good-natured eccentricity” (i.e., unsociability) “occasions gentle laughter.”²² This is true of Chen, Fathead, Wang, and all the other characters. For instance, Liu, who is the most financially successful of the group because he is not ashamed of taking a lower-status occupation

¹⁹ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, 304, 305.

²⁰ Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” 156.

²¹ Vladimir Propp, *On the Comic and Laughter*, 119.

²² Randall Craig, *The Tragicomic Novel: Studies in a Fictional Mode from Meredith to Joyce*, 37.

as a butcher, often amuses us with his gullibility. If, as Vladimir Propp claims “an imitation of men worse than the average” or “exaggeration of negative traits” creates comic characters, we should interpret “men worse than average” and “negative traits” in this instance as reflecting human flaws rather than moral shortcomings.²³ In other words, either magnifying certain negative features or presenting a superfluity of unfavorable characteristics can create a comical character. In Chen, his minor flaw of boastfulness is magnified to the point where he misrepresents himself, which then makes him stand out among the characters. He elevates himself to the height of an official, a wealthy man, or a philosopher/mentor—the last role often demonstrates his wit and generates verbal comedy. On the other hand, Fathead is reduced to an irresponsible child, creating a comedic incongruity between his childish behavior and expectations about adult behavior. These two characters merit deeper analysis.

To begin with, the protagonist Chen manifests “the attractiveness of docile, non-achieving, dreamy, idealistic people (as well as their comicality and ineffectuality),” a feature often seen in Chekhov’s plays.²⁴ An embodiment of “the Little Man,” Chen belongs to “the submerged population groups.”²⁵ He is forced to play in a ridiculous band and perform in the street in a desperate effort to make money, but he can still laugh at himself in spite of his pitiful situation. And despite everything, he is a boaster. When distributing their hard-earned money to his band, he insists they carefully count their earnings because, as he says, “do not think officials are necessarily embezzlers or corrupt.”²⁶ While the audience resonates with the last part of his statement, they cannot help being amused by the fact that Chen, a destitute father who barely provides for his family, equates himself with an official, typically a position of status and wealth. In another instance, countering his ex-wife’s accusation that he is incapable even of providing a real piano for their daughter, Chen argues “the piano I ordered from Germany is currently sailing on the sea.”²⁷ While attempting to justify himself

²³ Vladimir Propp, *On the Comic and Laughter*, 105.

²⁴ Gordon McVay, “The Centenary of Anton Chekhov: A Survey of Publications,” 102.

²⁵ Frank O’Connor, *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story*, 15, 18.

²⁶ Quotation from the movie.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

as a competent father, he goes way beyond the truth to claim that he bought a piano from Europe, where classical music originated, whereas even an upper-middle-class family could barely afford such an expensive instrument. This time his bragging stretches to the point of an outright lie where his daughter is concerned, which could have made him repulsive to viewers. The motivation for his dishonesty, however, is his laudable desire to be a worthy father, so he becomes merely ludicrous.

From time to time, Chen makes witty remarks that highlight his intelligence, a trait incongruous with his status as an unemployed foundry worker. Intent on borrowing money, he chats up his sister. When she complains that her husband is unwilling to take small jobs for fear of losing face, Chen exclaims that “only can one liberate his mind, he can liberate himself,”²⁸ pointing out the tumultuous shift in thinking he himself went through facing the precipitous social decline from a master to an entertainer in the streets. While the change shows his adaptability and acumen to find a way out of a difficult situation, he expresses it condescendingly and playfully by “parodying” the “hackneyed phrase” *liberate mind*, a phrase with a philosophical undertone of Chinese socialism. The comic effect is obtained by “*transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key*,” that is, a significant life lesson is presented as a jest.²⁹ Chen’s idea for how to preserve the smokestacks by repurposing them is another example of his wit. This remark alludes to the theme of the movie, a point that I will analyze in the last section.

As his wit shows, Chen is far from being a little man—he is capable of rallying all the skilled hands necessary to make a piano from scratch. Boasting, small lies, and wittiness are inextricably entwined to help him convince his friends to come together; and all serve as ingredients in the comic recipe. Chen’s impassioned speech in the slaughterhouse is a salient illustration of the point that the comedy often derives from his words.

In his speech to Liu, making a piano becomes a “great” project; the engineer Wang “completely” relies on “Russian literature” to come up with the design; brother Ji provides a workshop and materials “for nothing”; girlfriend Shuxian gives up her singing “career” “entirely”; even Wang

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” 130, 140. Italics are in the original.

Kangmei “voluntarily” offers to cook.³⁰ By imitating the motivational speech prevalent in official socialist discourse, Chen even energizes Liu, who would never attempt the impossible. Deep inside, it is *working in a factory* that ignites the latter’s passion. As usual, Chen does not hesitate to manipulate others when needed. He instructs Liu to “bamboozle” his brother-in-law into joining.³¹ “Bamboozle” is a popular expression that essentially means to coax, without negative connotations of lying or using force. On the contrary, the word connotes endorsement of the behavior in question. It is preposterous to propose bamboozling someone into an honorable feat, so the comic effect is achieved “*when an absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase-form.*”³² Chen further advises Liu to converse “nicely,” since his brother-in-law is a “refined” person.³³ It would be a mistake to take these two words literally: What Chen actually means is that his brother-in-law is afraid of losing face, so Liu should bolster the man’s ego when persuading him. Wit is “a gift for dashing off comic scenes in a few strokes . . . [such] that all is over as soon as we begin to notice them,”³⁴ in keeping with which viewers tend to take the words at face value. By the time they realize the expressions are meant figuratively, Chen has finished his speech. Since viewers’ attention is fixed on the surface meaning of the words, the idea beneath it becomes comic.³⁵ It is ludicrous to worry about saving face when one’s family is going hungry; it is even more ludicrous to feel that going back to the factory to work is insulting, which is the reaction Chen expects from his brother-in-law. Obviously the factory shutdown has taken a psychological toll on him.

From a positive perspective, boasting helps Chen to feel good about himself in spite of his humble status; his wit and small-scale hustling assist in his survival. These characteristics highlight his resourcefulness, cunning, and ability to get his bearings in a difficult situation and find a way out of it. Whereas Chen is generally a responsible father who continues to provide for

³⁰ Quotations from the movie.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Italics are in the original. Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” 133.

³³ Quotations from the movie.

³⁴ Henri Bergson, “Laughter,” 130.

³⁵ Ibid., 135. Bergson claims that “*Once our attention is fixed on the material aspect of a metaphor the idea expressed becomes comic.*” Italics are in the original.

his family after losing his job, Fathead is the opposite. After being laid off, he occupies himself with pleasure and play, demonstrating childish self-centeredness and egotistical irresponsibility. His childish behavior and mentality are humorously at odds with his age and position, which are highlighted by his hair loss and the birth of a grandchild. Svetlana Evdokimova argues that a character's childishness provokes laughter "primarily because of the incongruity between what we expect and what we finally see."³⁶ This is what makes Fathead a comedic character.

We often find Fathead playing mahjong or in a dance hall—he does not mind being surrounded by women, a signal of his retrogression to infantilism. Even though in his socialist workers' culture men are expected to look out for women, he cheats them out of money in gaming mahjong. For Fathead, stealing money is a sign of his childish disregard for others, as is his later blunt, even abrasive, refusal to lend money to Chen right after the latter voluntarily pays off his debt. Other examples of his explicitly childish behavior include running away as soon as he is caught cheating and climbing up a smokestack when there is nowhere to hide. That he clings to the smokestack when a group of women on the ground refuse to leave until he returns their money vividly illustrates his childlike mentality: Like a naughty child he dreads being caught and longs for protection. As Evdokimova asserts, a childish individual is one who "not only feels paradise lost but who actually never fully realizes the transition" "from the bliss of carelessness to the burden of responsibility."³⁷ In Fathead's case, the lost paradise equates to the golden age of industrialism, emblemized by smokestacks, and he is completely blind to the end of this era, as suggested by his gripping the sides of the smokestack. It is symbolic that he grasps the smokestack for sanctuary: He has been lingering in the past and is unwilling to work outside of factory life.

Fathead's fixation on factory work manifests in his obsession with Quickhand's ability to copy keys. Both of them were locksmiths and competed with each other when working in factory. After being laid off, Quickhand makes a living by copying keys for customers whereas Fathead idles around. When Chen approaches Fathead to join the team, he somewhat

³⁶ Svetlana Evdokimova, "What's So Funny about Losing One's Estate, or Infantilism in 'The Cherry Orchard,'" 639.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 626.

enviously recommends Quickhand instead. He essentially picks a fight by challenging Quickhand to unlock the door to a workshop where they used to work, acting like a child who is infatuated with his playmate's superior skill. In his careless way, he is completely unaware of the implications of his childish game on Quickhand, who does not want anybody to mention his dishonorable history—he duplicated the key to the safe that belonged to the financial department and was sent to jail because of it. Whereas Quickhand himself has moved past his former activities, Fathead's insistence on bringing them up reveals his disregard for the passage of time. His procrastination over joining the team and his lighthearted attitude toward the project also point to his childishness; he even brings fireworks to celebrate their returning to the factory.

Zhang identifies childishness as Fathead's weakness, and further suggests a cure: The birth of his granddaughter forces him to assume responsibility. Not only does he refrain from beating up his daughter's no-good boyfriend but an unexpected desire to be a dependable grandfather comes over him. While Zhang is making us laugh at Fathead's childlike behavior, he is subtly facilitating growth in the character. Notwithstanding that he is the most rebuked figure in the movie, Fathead remains a normative personality in whom the audience sees glimpses of humanity from time to time.

The Comical as Main Current and the Absurd as Undercurrent

After reviewing George Meredith's and Henri Bergson's theories on comedy, Wylie Sypher concludes that by living in the "dust and crashes" of the twentieth century we have learned that "human life at its depths is inherently absurd. The comic and the tragic views of life no longer exclude each other. Perhaps the most important discovery in modern criticism is the perception that comedy and tragedy are somehow akin, or that comedy can tell us many things about our situation even tragedy cannot." Sypher then uses works by Kafka, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and existentialists as examples to illustrate that "the fragmentary lives we live are an existential comedy."³⁸

While Sypher talks about the entanglement of the absurd and the comical

³⁸ Wylie Sypher, "The Meaning of Comedy," 193, 196.

in human life in general, Eric Bentley, in particular, analyzes the relationship between them. He asserts that “it is a difficulty, like death itself, that permeates all of life . . . The comic sense tries to cope with the daily, hourly, inescapable difficulty of being. For if everyday life has an undercurrent or cross-current of the tragic, the main current is material for comedy.”³⁹ For him, underneath the comical lies the inherent absurdity of human life. Indeed, in *Piano*, the awareness of the absurd is tragic but the way the characters experience the absurd is often farcical. As the audience laughs heartily with and at the movie’s comic elements, our laughter is constantly complicated by the movie’s darker themes of alienation, perversion, subtle visual criticisms of the characters’ reality, and above all, an absurdist existence. In this section, I examine three classic comic devices employed in the movie to reveal how the absurd and the comical are intertwined. The result imbues the movie with a tragicomic tone.

The three comic devices employed consist of characters talking at cross-purposes, contradictions between what characters say and do, and visual elements that undercut the verbal.⁴⁰ In the movie, the sense of the absurd manifests first in the characters’ alienation from the community despite their ultimate cooperation to build the piano. Their inability to empathize or communicate effectively with one another is often presented in the classic comic confusion of characters talking at cross-purposes. Often at least one of the partners to the crosstalk is suffering but the other fails to recognize the emotion. At the beginning of the movie, for example, Wang Kangmei tries to persuade Chen not to divorce because “it is not easy to live by oneself. If you end up divorced, we will be in the same boat.” While Wang is covertly seeking sympathy for his loneliness, Chen claims that they are “completely different.”⁴¹ Wang’s reaching out for compassion fails, but each character’s isolation in his own emotions is nonetheless bitter. Wang is right that both endure similar pain, but Chen is comically unwilling to recognize their shared condition. While we admire Chen’s refusal to wallow in misery as Wang does, we sympathize with the latter because he continues to be a

³⁹ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, 306.

⁴⁰ Verna A. Foster closely examines these three classic comic devices in her essay “The Dramaturgy of Mood in *Twelfth Night* and *The Cherry Orchard*.”

⁴¹ Both quotations from the movie.

decent man after being widowed for years. Such exchanges are common in the movie. In fact, there are very few moments when the characters have meaningful conversations. These usually occur when they talk about the smokestacks or about making the piano. Even when the characters seem to engage, the shared moments are undercut by the enclosed space they are in, insinuating their ostracism from the rest of the world. Dai specifically analyzes the sense of expulsion evoked by confined rooms, such as a tavern.⁴² In *Piano* the camera usually captures two characters in one frame, the purposeful cinematic language speaking volumes about their desperate need for companionship as a result of estrangement.

Most of the time the absurd is suppressed behind jokes, humor, or Chen's grandiose speeches. The comic device is the classic undermining of words by actions. Chen is virtually a personification of this device: His exalted orations are repeatedly rendered amusing by accidents. For instance, he makes a big speech about liberating the mind to his sister, with the hidden agenda of borrowing money from her, even though like him, she is barely able to put food on the table. Lacking the courage to ask her directly, he walks out in distress, only to discover that the pork he'd intended to bribe her with has been stolen. Equally classic, after asserting his steadfast determination to make a piano, no matter what difficulties lie ahead, he asks where his spoon went. In both instances, the grandeur of his words is undermined by the triviality of his deeds, which provokes the audience to laugh at his ludicrous pretensions. Moreover, the contradictions between Chen's actions and words, which veer from businesslike to contemplative, from petty to ambitious, from frivolous to solemn, reflect a persona struggling to elevate himself from his current inconsequential position. The absurdity is that he can reveal his serious side only in an ostentatious and comical way.

In some scenes, the verbal is poignantly undercut by the visual. Fathead brings fireworks to celebrate the initiation of their adventure; yet, after a close-up of Chen's reflective countenance, fireworks are hung like elegiac couplets from the Foundry Factory sign. They shoot right up so far that they evoke the sensation of a funeral. Celebration is thus bizarrely turned into mourning. As if intentionally, the camera captures characters from the back,

⁴² See analyses of the cinematography of the movie in Dai Jinhua, "Jieji huo yin fu zhi ming—ping *Gang de qin*," n.p.

inviting the audience to participate in the service. The deceased being mourned is the foundry factory, i.e., industrialism, as the nameplate—Foundry Factory—is seen in a momentary close-up before the scene ends. Near the end of the movie, visual undercutting creates overt ridicule. While singing the children’s song “If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands,” Chen’s daughter and her schoolmates break rocks, causing sherds to fly toward their faces. Neither the children nor Chen who stands aside and observes, seems to recognize this life is by no means happy for kids, since they are doing hard labor and are very likely to get hurt. The audience, however, is prompted to ponder the ludicrous contradictions between the verbal and the visual—in other words, an absurdist existence of these school-age children.

There are many other occasions when we sense the absurd as we laugh; for instance, in chase scenes or whenever Chen is bragging. The three comic devices are just examples to illustrate the entanglement of the comic and the absurd in the movie. Though it is tempting to characterize *Piano* as a tragicomedy, given the fusion of the two, I hesitate to do so not only for fear of simplifying the complexity and richness of the movie but also because of the artificial ending Zhang has given it. I now turn to the denouement that has perplexed many scholars.

Comedy as Transcendence

While *Piano* perfectly illustrates the tragicomic existence of the working class, the movie finishes with a piano successfully made and beautiful music flowing out under Chen’s daughter’s fingers. Some scholars argue that the ending is unrealistic and thus unnecessary, since it is impossible to hand make an extremely complex musical machine like a piano;⁴³ others argue that it provides a romanticized finale for the movie.⁴⁴ While both arguments hold a bit of truth, I interpret the ending differently. I contend that it is the natural outgrowth of the lighthearted comedy. To give the background to this argument, I first closely read the final scene and analyze the theme of the movie. At the end, I provide my insights with regard to why Zhang makes

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Zhang Meng et al., “*Gang de qin siren tan*,” 41.

Piano a comedy and argue that the film is able to transcend its humorous absurdity.

The ending does seem implausible, since in reality making a piano requires extremely fine techniques and materials. It is noteworthy that images of the nearly finished piano alternate with a surrealistic band marching in the workshop. While the juxtaposition tints the piano-making project with surrealism, it also cues viewers to the theme of the movie. As the band advances steadily on a motor trolley, what stands out are the passionate red color of Shuxian's dancing costume and the flashing sparks shooting up from the track—a stark contrast to the gloomy colors appearing up to this point in the movie. Equally unprecedented is the fortitude emanating from the performers who apparently are workers, a quality accentuated by the low camera angle. When the camera switches to the piano making, flames and sparks fill the screen and flare with dazzling rays. Chen and his friends have never been so focused and content; the work atmosphere has never been so pleasant and harmonious. That the band continues to march and Shuxian follows the soon-to-be-finished piano aloft takes on symbolic meanings in relation to how the working class should grapple with abandonment—they insist on taking the stage.

The final scene can be cross-read with Chen's comment on how to preserve the smokestacks. At one point he advises engineer Wang that "you have got to give them perceived value" by turning them into gold bars, missiles, rocket launchers or even abstract chopsticks.⁴⁵ While the fact that wealth is the first thing he thinks of speaks to his specific difficulty in the new era, the remark indicates that he has found the key to survival: One has to have values. These workers are passionate about making a piano because doing so proves they are still useful in the new age: The skills they gained and the work they did in the foundry during their prime working years are no longer considered worthless. By making the piano, they gain a sense of having found a place in the rapidly changing era where they can connect to the past. In other words, they have got values. While the finished piano extends hope for the future, however, the surrealistic undertone to its construction hints at the absurdity of these workers struggling to secure a place in the new age. Just as the band

⁴⁵ Quotation from the movie.

marching is out of place in a rundown factory workshop, the workers' venture into the new era may very well wind up being a futile gesture of resistance, an act at ridiculous odds with the ascending new order.

At a roundtable discussion, Zhang claimed that he was unsure whether he was presenting the actual state of mind of the working class or his wishful thinking about what it should be.⁴⁶ In other words, is making a piano a metaphor for what the working class really do in this difficult time or for what he wishes them to do? Is the story real or a fantasy? The surrealistic undertone of the climax vividly exemplifies Zhang's ambivalence. In the end, Zhang chooses a happy ending, in which a functional piano is made, which is consistent with the lighthearted tone throughout the movie. That Zhang elected to produce a comedy makes a happy ending unavoidable, because "comedy regularly illustrates a victory of arbitrary plot over consistency of character . . . the convention of comedy will make some kind of happy ending inevitable." The building of a piano does not "impress us as true, but as desirable," and it is brought about "by manipulation."⁴⁷ By highlighting the color red in the final scene and by finishing the movie with a functional piano Zhang holds out hope for and even instills faith in the future of the working class, as in reality building a piano under such circumstances is highly improbable.

Then the question arises: Why does Zhang make a comedic film? We can catch a glimpse of his motivation from several interviews with him. Zhang remembers steel- and iron workers being "optimistic and capable of doing anything." "They always smiled with confidence." When he saw these workers becoming more and more depressed as deindustrialization progressed, he could not help wondering, "Why did these positive and hopeful people complain and become dejected?"⁴⁸ In addition to being emotionally attached to these workers and nostalgic for their optimism, as a director Zhang is determined to "avoid portraying misery" because he "prefers comedies that make one shed tears, even tragicomedies."⁴⁹ He argues that one should "sing and dance" with bleeding wounds rather than indulging in suffering. Therefore, his approach is to "evade and elude

⁴⁶ Zhang Meng et al., "*Gang de qin siren tan*," 46.

⁴⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 158.

⁴⁸ All quotations from Yang Yang, "Zhang Meng: *Pai gongchang de ren*," n.p.

⁴⁹ Du Min, "*Gang de qin: Ai er bu shang (Zhang Meng fangtan)*," n.p.

hardship and pain” and simultaneously to “magnify and present the process of happiness.”⁵⁰ Simply put, he prefers to confront misery with laughter. In his discussion of comedy, Eric Bentley likewise points out that the comic stance is a strategy to “evade and elude” and to “cope with” the difficulty of being.⁵¹ In this sense, Zhang chooses comedy as the genre best suited not only to reflect the quality he most admires in his beloved working class but also to epitomize his philosophy. Returning to the ending of *Piano*, Zhang claims that through his “passion” he “desires to endow meanings” to the working-class struggle.⁵² By offering hope at the end, *Piano* is able to escape “into faith” and hence rise “to grandeur and to greatness.”⁵³

Conclusion

Theologians argue that humor can provide an opening to faith, which is the only means of dealing with the deepest problem of human existence, namely the meaning of life. Reinhold Niebuhr calls humor not only “a vestibule to faith” but “a ‘no-man’s land’ between faith and despair.” He emphasizes that the humorous either “must move towards faith” when “the ultimate issues are raised” or it will “sink into despair.”⁵⁴ Conrad Hyers refines this argument, contending that “without faith, humor becomes superficial, empty, and helpless.”⁵⁵ In *Piano*, the furloughed workers feel useless and dispensable after being laid off, depriving their lives of meaning. They use humor to combat the frustration of meaninglessness, the existential vacuum of their lives. That Zhang Meng ends the movie with the workers creating a beautiful piano gives a glimmer of hope that they can recover their faith that their lives have purpose. The ending presents “a fleeting image” of the furloughed

⁵⁰ Zhang Meng and Li Yunlei, “Zhang Meng: Jianchi yishu daolu de mengxiang bu hui gaibian (fangtan),” n.p.

⁵¹ Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, 301–2.

⁵² Min Du, “Gang de qin: Ai er bu shang (Zhang Meng fangtan),” n.p.

⁵³ In “Comedy,” 77, Christopher Fry claims that “Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair: A narrow escape into faith.” Second quotation from Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, 300.

⁵⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Humor and Faith,” 137, 149.

⁵⁵ Conrad M. Hyers, “The Comic Profanation of the Sacred,” 27.

workers “transcending” their “finitude” and, “if only for a brief moment, gives us the exhilarating idea” that perhaps they will prevail in their struggle against the post-socialist commercialism that is “bent on crushing” them. Perhaps in this moment of transcendence lies “a promise of a reality yet to come,” when they will become capable of rising above the miseries of their ordinary, everyday existence.⁵⁶

Following Niebuhr further, comedy and faith are intimately related. Niebuhr would argue that “both deal with the incongruities of our existence”: Laughter being the response to “immediate incongruities” whereas faith to “the ultimate incongruities of existence.”⁵⁷ Hyers claims an even “more essential and intimate” relation between comedy and faith, in which humor is “a profanation of the sacred” that has its “own validity within the religious encounter.”⁵⁸ In other words, humor is a component of faith. In the presence of disaster and death, the furloughed workers laugh instead of pray. Or perhaps better stated, their laughter is their way of invoking their faith, which seems their only remaining defense. To quote the theologian Harvey Cox, “hope is the characteristic form of faith for modern man” and “laughter is hope’s last weapon.”⁵⁹ Despite the disappearance of any empirical basis for hope from their point of view, the furloughed workers refuse to abandon hope, in a form of “living defiance.”⁶⁰ It is in this sense that their laughter coincides with Sisyphus’s defiant spirit. They have *chosen* to laugh because they are strong, resilient, and optimistic, characteristics imbued in them by their experience in the socialist past. This is Zhang’s statement on the working class of Chinese socialism.⁶¹ It is also why Dai proclaims that *Piano* is

⁵⁶ Peter L. Berger, “Christian Faith and the Social Comedy,” 127, 128.

⁵⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Humor and Faith,” 135.

⁵⁸ Conrad M. Hyers, “The Comic Profanation of the Sacred,” 23.

⁵⁹ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*, 156, 157.

⁶⁰ Peter L. Berger, “Christian Faith and the Social Comedy,” 127.

⁶¹ Zhang asserts that we need to “have a judgment” on Chinese socialism so as to “position” ourselves when looking at the history. My understanding is that “judgment” here refers to how we evaluate the Chinese working class. See Zhang Meng and Li Yunlei, “Zhang Meng: Jianchi yishu daolu de mengxiang buhui gaibian (fangtan),” n.p.

“about history and memory as well as future.”⁶² The kernel of hope is that the Chinese working class has acquired these traits from their socialist past and will carry them forward into the future.

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⁶² Dai emphasizes that even though it presents the laid-off workers’ current lives, the movie stimulates our memory of Chinese socialism and the working class. Therefore, it is “about history and memory as well as future.” In other words, it deals with who the Chinese working class is. See Yan Zhuo, “Dai Jinhua, Wang Yan: Dianying zhong de lishi shuxie yu chengxian,” n.p.

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