

Let's Fall in Love . . . to Stay Healthy—Whether and How Qiong Yao's Romance Fits into Healthy Realism

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ABSTRACT

As a film genre devised both to reflect social realities and to promote moral values, healthy realism was introduced into the Taiwanese cinema scene by the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) in 1963. Since then, an issue that remains an academic conundrum for the scholars of this type of film is whether and how screen adaptations of Qiong Yao's novels by filmmakers working in the healthy realism genre fit into the model. This paper seeks to enter the debate by revisiting the generic features of healthy realism and reassess the role played by romantic love in this style of movie. The first part of this paper revisits the definition of "healthy realism," analyzing why the genre remains within the scope of realism despite its intended use as government propaganda, and explores the effects of romantic melodrama in achieving the realist aim of the model. The second part of the paper features analyses of the plots of *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves* with the intention of discerning the motive force of the society of which healthy realism films sought to treat, an undertaking which leads to the discovery that romantic love is an essential element of healthy realism when it serves as the affective condition for bio-power and thus supports the modernization efforts described by the film model. The reliance on melodramatic devices and the significance of romantic love to the underlying social relations pave the way for the entry of Qiong Yao's romance into the healthy realism genre.

KEY WORDS: healthy realism, Qiong Yao's romance,
melodrama, romantic love, affective condition,
bio-power, *Oyster Girl*, *Four Loves*

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因為愛，所以健康—— 瓊瑤電影在健康寫實風潮中的定位

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摘 要

中影公司於一九六三年開始製作健康寫實電影，目標為反映社會現實並推廣特定道德價值。研究此一電影風潮的學者，對於如何定位一系列由知名健康寫實電影導演所導改編自瓊瑤愛情小說的影片，卻自始至今皆未達成定論。本論文的目的在於重啟相關討論，藉由重探「健康寫實」的定義，思考浪漫愛在此一類型定義中的定位。論文第一部分旨在探討，原被設計為宣達政府經濟政策所用的健康寫實電影，究竟是否寫實又如何寫實，並思考浪漫劇情如何輔助此一類型電影對於寫實的要求。論文第二部分則將《蚵女》及《婉君表妹》這兩部電影（前者為中影第一部健康寫實片；後者則為第一部以瓊瑤小說為本的電影，同時，儘管仍有爭議，也多有人將之歸為健康寫實電影的代表作之一）並置討論，旨在於探討健康寫實電影所欲處理的社會現代化進程，並由此凸顯浪漫愛如何作為一種情感條件，來啟動現代化進程中不可或缺的生命權力。本文的結論是，浪漫劇情與健康寫實類型的關係以及浪漫愛對健康寫實電影中生命權力圖象的重要性，即是健康寫實導演改編瓊瑤愛情小說的重要原因之一。由此觀之，瓊瑤愛情電影亦具備「健康寫實性」。

關鍵詞：健康寫實主義、瓊瑤愛情小說、情節劇、浪漫愛、情感條件、生命權力、《蚵女》、《婉君表妹》

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Introduction

As a film genre devised both to reflect social realities and to promote moral values, healthy realism was introduced into the Taiwanese cinema scene by the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) in 1963 (Chen 33).¹ It has been held that the mass of the healthy realism movies produced during the 60s and the 70s helped create what is described as the golden age in the Taiwanese film industry before the rise of Taiwan new wave cinema in the 1980s (Liu 49). Seeking to appreciate the historical significance of the genre, *Film Appreciation Quarterly* dedicated a special issue to healthy realism films. Contributors explored the social and cultural climate which produced the model, the historical evolution and defining traits of the genre, and the impact of the trend on the overall development of Taiwanese film industry (Huang; Liao; Liu).² Issues which invite further discussion were also presented. Commentators find themselves facing problems such as what version of realism is outlined in the cinema of healthy realism, where the aesthetic values of this government-sponsored genre lie, and whether certain movies

¹ Most scholars, among them Liao Jinfong, consider healthy realism as a film movement rather than a well-defined genre (Liao 46-7). Emily Yeh Yueh-yu also mentions that healthy realism is a movement "behaving like a genre" (Yeh and Davis 30). However, healthy realism is still commonly referred to as a genre in related literature (Yeh and Davis 30). Since it is not the concern of this article to add anything to this discussion, healthy realism will be referred to as a genre for convenience.

² Simply put, healthy realism, as a group of pictures that had an enormous influence on the development of Taiwanese cinema in the 1960s and 70s, rose when the KMT (Kuomintang 國民黨) government had successfully spread Mandarin all over the island (Yeh and Davis 25). The type of movies which dominated the Taiwanese film scene prior to the introduction of healthy realism were what Yeh calls *taiyu pian* (台語片) [Taiwanese-language films]; Li Xing (李行) and Li Jia (李嘉), two of the prominent directors in the cinema of healthy realism, also started their careers as Taiwanese-language film directors. The KMT's policy of suppressing Taiwanese inevitably led to the decline of movies made in the language, which were accordingly deemed as an expression of coarse culture and narcotic escapism. CMPC then undertook the task of making films that communicated a version of nationhood and the correlative civic values approved by the government. In addition to *their* optimistic themes, engagement with reality was included in the cherished values. The model of healthy realism was designed against such a background while forms of escapism other than Taiwanese-language films remained to be worked against (Yeh and Davis 25-27). Healthy realism proved to be not only a successful Taiwan genre in its own right but also provided fertile ground from which emerged a wealth of filmmaking talent vital to the development of the Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s. For example, Hou Hsiao-hsien worked with a few of the key figures in healthy realism (Yeh and Davis 136-37). In sum, healthy realism marks an important milestone in Taiwan film history, transforming the film industry by proposing a feasible model which combined propaganda functions and entertainment values for movies made in Taiwan. Representing a fruitful Taiwan film genre exploring a variety of themes and techniques uniquely distributed in each instance, healthy realism has thus generated a number of research projects among film critics.

made in the 60s or the 70s belong to the group or not, etc. (Liao, “A Small Piece of History” 47). Among them is one concerning whether a number of films based on Qiong Yao’s (瓊瑤) novels fit the definition of healthy realism or not. Chen Ru-shiu’s study of the development of Taiwan cinema shows that the genre was designed to counter types of movies such as Huangmei opera movies, romance films, and gung fu cinema, which were then popular (43). Most of the romance films of the time were movie adaptations of Qiong Yao’s novels, which were thought to delineate an idealized version of love that provided a getaway from coarse realities (Chen 44).³ The improbable scenario played out in romance films was therefore generally held to be the antithesis of the healthy realism view of life. The news of the decision of Li Xing to adapt Qiong Yao’s *Four Loves* (《婉君表妹》) and *My Silent Wife* (《啞妻》) into films with CMPC shortly after the success of *Beautiful Duckling*, one of the earliest healthy realism films, was actually met with the surmise that the genre was to be abandoned (Huang 36).⁴ These two adaptations, along with *Heart with a Million Knots* (《心有千千結》), Li Xing’s other Qiong Yao movie, *Girlfriend* (《女朋友》) and *Far Away From Home* (《人在天涯》) filmed by Bai Jingrui, are nevertheless recognized by some critics as instances illustrating the tenets of healthy realism (Huang 29-35; Lin 10). However, researchers have not reached consensus on the position of these Qiong Yao movies within the context of

³ Qiong Yao is the pen name of Chen Je (陳喆), who has remained one of the most famed and well-received romance novelists in Taiwan. Her works, along with those of other women writers, provided an immense wealth of source materials for filmmakers during the golden age of Taiwan cinema (Yeh 206; Huang and Wang 302). From 1965 to 1983, there were 49 Qiong Yao romance movies made by 14 directors, five of whom were well-known healthy realism directors (Huang and Wang 303). Li Xing stated in an interview that the huge popularity enjoyed by Qiong Yao stories prompted him to shoot their big-screen adaptations (Kawase 36). Yeh also noted that Li Xing and Bai Jingrui (白景瑞), another director known for his healthy realism productions, were able to continue to work throughout the 1970s due to their appropriation of romantic melodrama (Yeh and Davis 138). Especially noteworthy, *though*, is the fact that these two directors were exclusive in only adapting Qiong Yao romance novels to movies (Kawase 155-59). We can therefore safely assume that Qiong Yao stories were more closely connected to healthy realism than others of the kind.

⁴ Since the two movies to be investigated in this paper were both made by Li Xing, a brief introduction to Li’s career should go before the discussion per se. As mentioned, Li got his start by making Taiwanese-language films and successfully moved to Mandarin-speaking cinema. It is widely accepted that Gong Hong got inspiration from Li’s first Mandarin film, *Our Neighbors*, which eventually led to the introduction of the healthy realist model. Li was committed to making serious movies communicating moral lessons and considered himself as a socially-responsible artist. He nevertheless was the first to direct a Qiong Yao adaptation and continued to explore the genre of romantic melodrama throughout the 1970s (Yeh and Davis 30-35; 138).

healthy realism, due to the common belief that a certain difference in nature exists between films exploring the highs and lows of love and those promoting positive images of society.⁵

Building on the mixed views on this issue, this paper seeks to enter the debate by revisiting the generic features of healthy realism and thereby reassess the role played by romantic love in this movie style. Starting from a brief review of the socio-cultural conditions and the aesthetic awareness of Italian neo-realism from which healthy realism emerged, the first part of the paper reviews existing criticism on the very meaning of the term “healthy realism.” Since Qiong Yao movie adaptations have often been denounced as providers of unrealistic romantic fantasies, the grounds on which film critics evaluate their affinity or incompatibility with “orthodox” healthy realism productions will be revisited especially in terms of the configuration of realism referred to. It will then be shown that healthy realism appears to pose a stylistic conundrum by concurrently aiming for a realistic portrayal of the contemporary society while seeking to disperse propaganda messages. Some commentators accordingly propose a new theoretical take and focus rather on the element of melodrama that pervades healthy realism films. Considering such treatment insightful, this paper will take over from the issue it bypasses, arguing that the emotional appeal of the genre explains why Qiong Yao’s romance fiction served as one of its major sources of inspiration. More significantly, the persistence of excessive expressions of emotion, most notably that of romantic love, in healthy realism films supports rather than counterbalances the realistic aim pursued by the genre. Louis Bayman’s argument that realism and melodrama can form a complementary relationship will be drawn on in the investigation of how melodramatic contrivance aids the revelation of the greater truth of the social reality in question. His position that realism concerns the construction rather than reproduction of *reality* will also be cited to rationalize why healthy realism remains realistic. The rest of the paper will be devoted to attesting the conclusion reached in the former part. The motive force of social development, the greater truth of the social reality to be reached in healthy realism films and explored with the aid of romantic love, will be discussed in detail here. *Oyster Girl*, CMPC’s first

⁵ Most criticism on Qiong Yao films highlights the unrealistic nature they share and the escapist fantasy thus produced. More details can be found in Lin Yuru’s *Romance in Motion: The Narrative and Individualism in Qiong Yao Cinema*. It should also be noted that the English translation of Qiong Yao movie titles in this article is cited from Lin.

attempt in creating the genre and which set the tone for the rest of the type, and *Four Loves*, considered as both the third healthy realist movie and the precursor of the Qiong Yao romance films that would thrive in the 1970s and 80s, will be juxtaposed for analysis.⁶ It will thus be revealed how Qiong Yao's vision of love might serve the function of supporting and even shaping the process of the development of modern social organizations which take the individual body and its life as objects of government. Variations of such process constitute exactly the social realities which earliest healthy realist films sought to capture. On one hand, the story of *Oyster Girl* (《蚵女》) is set against the background of a fishing village marching toward modernization and revolves around the romance between Ah-lan (阿蘭) and Jinshui (金水). On the other hand, *Four Loves* follows the love triangle involving three brothers and Wanjun (婉君) at the center which ends in the respective effort of the three brothers to sublimate their affection towards Wanjun into concern about collective welfare. It might not be surprising that a movie based on Qiong Yao's novel focuses on the love relationships between the leading characters which later transform into the support of certain social ideals. The fact that the leitmotif of love drives forward the plot of *Oyster Girl* nevertheless, as will be suggested in this paper, points to the fundamental place romantic love occupies in the group of social developments jointly known as modernization. Such perspective provides one possible explanation of why Qiong Yao's romance novels were taken as an essential source of inspiration for healthy realist movies. Based on this observation, it can be

⁶ The author is fully aware of the fact that the healthy realism genre features a wide range of styles; as noticed by Yeh, healthy realism "is adaptable . . . [and] applicable to popular genres like women's films, historical epics, comedies and even Chinese 'noodle' westerns" (Yeh and Davis 29). As the first healthy realism film made by CMPC, *Oyster Girl* nevertheless sets the tone for its kind, featuring a set of elements which would continually be drawn on in later instances of the genre. The film illustrates Gong Hong's (龔弘) ideas of healthy realism, among them the "calculated movement with an explicit policy of national uplift" (Yeh and Davis 30). Moreover, Li Xing's decision to introduce the element of romantic love into the film results in, as observed by Yeh, the significant bearing of melodramatic contrivances in the other healthy realist pictures (Li 36; Yeh 206; Yeh and Davis 138). These facts, which serve as vital clues to the understanding of the characteristics of healthy realism movies, add up to my decision to choose *Oyster Girl* over other instances as the object of study. *Four Loves* is juxtaposed with *Oyster Girl* for analysis mainly because it was the first ever attempt to adapt a Qiong Yao novel for the screen. In addition to that, the movie illustrates how romantic love, a theme deliberately incorporated into the configuration of healthy realism, is explored by a healthy realism director. Li Xing undertook the project of *Four Loves* shortly after the release of *Oyster Girl* and of *Beautiful Duckling*. The analysis of *Four Loves* therefore illuminates the way Li negotiated between the features of healthy realism and the factors of romantic love and ultimately the role played by the latter in movies branded as healthy realist.

further argued that as the activity of modern organization in the two movies centers on life management and the optimization of the body's capabilities, a defining feature of Michel Foucault's configuration of bio-power, falling in love thus amounts to the creation of a site where lovers learn what it means to have a body and ultimately to be a living being whose individual and collective welfare becomes the object of power procedures or political struggles. The production of a living body as the locus of the operation of bio-power thus marks the point where romantic love was introduced into the domain of healthy realism.⁷ In the words of Ben Anderson, romantic love in a sense sets an affective condition through which aspects of the question of man-as-living-being are explored (31). Written with an acute sense of the historical context and major motifs of *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves*, this paper will also draw on competing socio-cultural meanings of romantic love and the Foucauldian concept of bio-power as "a society's 'threshold of modernity'" to demonstrate how romantic love, as an instance of affective life, serves as "condition for" a rudimentary form of bio-power. (Foucault, *History* 143; Anderson 37).⁸

The Definition of Healthy Realism

Scholars of Taiwanese film history have evaluated the significance of screen adaptations of Qiong Yao romance novels by influential filmmakers of healthy realism from a variety of perspectives. As has been mentioned, some critics like Chen argue that healthy realism movies were introduced to counter several types of film that had gained popularity by providing the audience with escapist fantasies (43-44). Romance films inspired by Qiong Yao's "unrealistic" vision of love were in this sense regarded as falling outside the purview of healthy realism, a film model that constituted part of the

⁷ It should be emphasized, however, that this paper does not set as its goal to illustrate the notion of bio-power with instances of healthy realism films or Qiong Yao romance novels. As has been mentioned, the issue to be explored is that why and how a number of Qiong Yao romance films fit in the genre of healthy realism. The operation of bio-power happens to *make* an essential component of the social reality depicted in healthy realism movies, which as mentioned constituted a sort of national-uplift effort; the treatment of romantic love in healthy realism movies, especially well-illustrated by those adapted from Qiong Yao's novels, accordingly serves as part of such effort.

⁸ Roughly put, the notion of romantic love drawn on in this paper is one that, as a type of cultural form, is invested with contemporary meanings of social enterprise. Detailed discussion can be found in the second part of the paper.

propaganda effort of a government then aspiring to reclaim the mainland and thereby called for a collective consciousness mindful of the necessary local socio-economical development (Chen 44). Huang approaches this issue differently by bringing our attention to how the woman born deaf-mute in *My Silent Wife* braved her life of hardships, making this movie adaptation from Qiong Yao's romance novel a qualified addition to healthy realism as a genre promoting the bright side of the society (28; 36). However, as the film was set against the background of a past society instead of a present-day one, contention arose over whether it fitted into the CMPC's description of realism, which according to Gong Hong, then newly-appointed CMPC general manager and the person who coined the term "healthy realism," referred to the attempt to portray contemporary life in rural Taiwan (Liao 42). A short-lived label of "healthy variety" had been put forward by CMPC to cover a broader range of film types, one which Huang argues applies to *My Silent Wife* and other Qiong Yao movies by Li Xing and Bai Jingrui (Huang 36). In other words, Huang considers these films healthy but not realistic. In contrast to Huang's reservation, Liu asserts that romance films were a variant of healthy realism movies, since the emergence of the former was made possible by the interest of the directors of the latter in adapting Qiong Yao novels to films (51; 56). Acknowledging that the movies *Four Loves* and *My Silent Wife* might be better described by the title of "healthy variety," one in his opinion brought up to meet the demands of the market, Liu considers the healthy realism model to have been a major source of inspiration and influence on all of the locally-made films in the 1960s and 70s. Romance films accounted for the lion's share of domestic movies while Huangmei Opera movies and gung fu films were made in Hong Kong. Seen in this light, healthy variety movies as well as romance films can be accommodated within the category of healthy realism, which proves to have supported an entire phase which is vital in the history of the Taiwanese film industry as it developed (Liu 51).

Liu's comment affirms the affinity between healthy realism movies and the film adaptations of Qiong Yao's novels in the 1960s and 70s in particular as well as romance films of the same period in general. Based primarily on the observation that the development of the Taiwanese romance genre owes a great deal to the series of Qiong Yao movie projects supported by CMPC, his theorization nevertheless leaves unaddressed whether, as a derivative of the healthy realism genre, movies featuring Qiong Yao's idea of romantic love

share any structural or narrative elements in common with Qiong Yao's novels. The other two lines of argument, namely one which excludes Qiong Yao romance movies from the province of healthy realism and the other which conditionally places the former under the category of the latter, may boil down to one simple statement: Qiong Yao films, or at least with only a few exceptions, are not realistic, or are not realistic enough. In other words, these films do not attend to real life. To examine the applicability of such remark, a number of questions that have already been subject to investigation or criticism ineluctably emerge and demand reappraisal: What reality does a healthy realism movie proffer? How realistic is such reality? In what sense is a healthy realism film realistic? It is a well-known fact that Taiwanese healthy realism emerged as a response to Italian *neo-realism*, a post-WWII cinematic movement characterized by the adoption of realistic approaches to depict the life among the impoverished and the working class (Bradatan 178; Liao 41-42).⁹ What Italian neo-realist trends had created out of a film industry devastated by the collapse of the fascist regime made an impression on Gong Hong, who was then seeking to stake out new territory in the barren cinematic soil in Taiwan. Embracing the realistic approach of the movement but attempting to avoid the demoralizing effect that visions of poverty and despair might have on Taiwanese audiences, he laid down the guideline of "providing healthy edification and realistically presenting the countryside" (「健康是教化、寫實是鄉村」, my translation) for future CMPC Healthy Realism movie projects (Liao 42). If the "realist representation versus pastoral life" equation stated in this principle is taken literally, then Bai Jingrui's *Girlfriend*, a movie that chronicles the process whereby a college student evolves from a youngster craving for immature love into a responsible adult who devotes himself to the development of the wood industry mostly against the backdrop of National Taiwan University's Highland Experiment Farm, a form of rural setting, might be the only adaptation of Qiong Yao's work that passes for a healthy realism film. However, a rural setting does not have to be a defining characteristic of the healthy realism genre. Liao has discovered that the earlier

⁹ Italian filmmakers involved in the movement worked to counter both the cliché-ridden Hollywood movies that dominated the domestic theater scene at the time and whatever old-fashioned Italian stories that had prevented them from focusing on the real life. When crafting films, they strove to create an impression of day-to-day reality, which thereby usually turned out to be a grim picture of ordinary people struggling with destitution and desperation in realistic settings such as the countryside or the city streets (Bradatan 178; Huang 27-28; Liao 42-43).

entries in this film type did feature a gaze upon the Taiwanese rural landscape whereas later productions in the genre turned to urban life at the time for inspiration (47). In his descriptions of the cinema of healthy realism, Liao accordingly states that these movies kept pace with the times, visualizing changing social patterns in Taiwan and the corresponding sites, not limited to the countryside, in which the emerging social relations are more fully played out (47). This perception in a sense “temporalizes” the previous spatial rendition of realism in healthy realism movies, which means revealing to us, rather than a particular type of scene set in a given period, the evolving process of society and rising issues, including the personal predicaments facing individuals.

A complementary observation nevertheless has to be introduced immediately to allow for a full grasp of the configuration of realism in question. In comparing Italian neo-realism and Taiwanese healthy realism, Liao concludes that these two movements followed dissimilar aesthetic principles and thereby proffered different versions of reality. Characterized by props deliberately given a timeworn feel and with lighting methodically arranged for color cinematographing, the healthy realism genre presented a certain “processed,” “transformed,” and ultimately “beautified” reality instead of one close to the phenomenological real (Liao 43-44).¹⁰ While a given entry did provide a glimpse into social changes underway and views of individuals caught in conflict thus emerged, these images tended to be projected through a certain “soft-focus lens” which filtered out disturbing elements. The audience was exposed exclusively to idealized pictures of common people persistently working for a rosy future, embodying socially-recognized virtues of kindness, perseverance, and hope. In sum, compared to Italian neo-realism, the articulation of realism in healthy realism cinema was uniquely subordinate to the criteria of being healthy which were prescribed by its status as a state-funded genre serving to spread propaganda. The rose-colored portrait thus produced strikes Yeh as “a didactic construction of romantic melodrama and civic virtue” which “mixes the interior/private mis-en-scene specific to

¹⁰ In contrast, Italian neo-realism directors prized certain filmmaking practices for the impression of simple, real life they created, including “a preference for location filming, the use of nonprofessional actors, the avoidance of the ornamental *mise-en-scene*, a preference for natural light, a freely moving documentary style of photography, a non-interventionist approach to film directing, and an avoidance of complex editing and other post-production processes likely to focus attention on the contrivance of the film image” (Shiel qtd. in Bradatan 178).

family melodrama with the civil, public space to accommodate government policy, enabling a smooth integration with the state ideological apparatus,” a comment which brings readers’ attention to the limited scope as well as the pedagogical nature of healthy realism (Yeh 206). It would nevertheless be a hasty conclusion to claim that healthy realism fails to be realistic. We have already seen in Chen’s investigation how Taiwanese romance films in the 1960s and 70s were dismissed as unrealistic on the basis of their disregard of the KMT government’s longing for the recovery of Mainland China and the concordant effort on the part of the state to promote socio-economic development in Taiwan. I argue that this observation, read together with Yeh’s contention, as will be reviewed below, facilitates the introduction of a perspective from which it is shown that the adequacy of realism can rest on how the genre manages to throw light on the society’s driving force.¹¹ Such understanding furthermore sheds a light on how healthy realism remains within the realist orbit and how accordingly the significance of the adaptations of Qiong Yao’s romance in this context can be rendered manifest.¹² First of all, while the purpose of extolling state-approved ideology does bring under suspicion the factuality of the “reality” represented in individual productions, healthy realism pictures can notwithstanding be regarded as realist projects for the aspects of the larger social reality that they seek to address.¹³ This seems to simply bring us back to where Liao recognizes that healthy realism pictures closely followed the changes in socio-economic structure. However, Liao’s exploration of how “realism” is played out in these films is summed up in the remark that there was a certain irreducible gap between the realities on and off the screen (43-44). With whether or not fitting into a very particular state

¹¹ How Yeh recognizes elements of romantic melodrama in healthy realism and the implications of such a point-of-view will be reviewed later.

¹² Chen’s comments in terms of the position of Qiong Yao movies within the context of healthy realism movement are to be reappraised in this paper though.

¹³ Liu has noticed that as a state-sponsored genre, the healthy realism style has been treated by critics, among them Jiao Xongping (焦雄屏), as no more than an instrument for the reinforcement of a set of conservative values encouraged by patriarchy and feudal society. He refutes such comments by pointing to a number of healthy realism films that aimed to subvert rather than embrace these values, and moreover argued that the importance of cinema in general as a popular mass entertainment medium is not reducible to serving as a government propaganda mouthpiece or dispenser of morality (56). Such remarks carry the implication that healthy realism films can be divided into those which endorsed outmoded social ideology and those which did the opposite. The issue of how healthy realism remains realist is nevertheless left untackled.

ideology, which was determined to keep the audience away from what it regarded as escapist fantasies, taken as one of the indicators of being realistic or not, as observed by Chen, we move beyond the pursuit of the immediate correspondence between the filmic representation and its extra-filmic reality to the comprehension of the culture in which elements of realism operate.¹⁴ Bayman takes from Williams' position and takes a step further to assert that rather than being exhausted by a set of features or the reference to reality as a certain fixed entity, realism "is a partial selection, *by its nature constructed*, a representation of reality that depends for its significance on cultural determination more than any inherent essence" (60; original italics). In other words, reality in the movie does not necessarily involve an accurate depiction of the outside world in the most intuitive sense. What remains central to the tenets of realism would rather, according to Bayman, be an artistic engagement with the current social relations. The realistic practices of extending action, which used to be restricted to the noblemen, to the general public and the introduction of the contemporary setting, which exemplify two of the hallmark features of realism identified by Williams, create rather than reproduce the scene where the motive force of the society in question is illuminated. Seen in this light, what strikes some critics of healthy realist movies as unrealistic propaganda, constitutes a certain attempt to artistically engage with the reality of contemporary socio-economic structure.

Realism and Melodrama

However, The real novelty of Bayman's reflection on realism in cinema lies in its exploration of the historical affinity between realism and melodrama and the recent academic recapitulation of such relation, which significantly accounts for its relevance to the attempt of this paper. We have seen that Yeh, going against popular belief, contends that healthy realism films should be regarded as a blend of "romantic melodrama and civic virtue" (Yeh 206; Yeh and Davis 138). Melodrama is a dramatic form which features extravagant

¹⁴ Since it is not the purpose of this paper to undertake an exhaustive investigation of realism in cinema, which has engendered a substantial body of literature, only theoretical issues relevant to the argument pursued by this paper will be drawn on. These notions are primarily inspired by Raymond Williams' definition of realism in general, which identifies the factors of "the secular, the contemporary and the socially extended" (Grist 20). It should also be noted that I am not arguing that propaganda movies can be indiscriminately all regarded as realist projects. Close investigation into each case is required before any conclusion can be made.

appeals to the emotions by the exaggeration of characters and plots, and has accordingly been separated from realism by most critics (Bayman 47). How does romantic melodrama, which contains an excessive expression of romantic emotion, find its way into healthy realism, an aesthetic program that aimed to tie movie images to outside reality? Yeh develops her line of inquiry by addressing the pivotal part literary adaptation, which is designated as *wenyi* (an abbreviation for literature and art), has played in Taiwanese film industry (Yeh 205). Healthy realism movies, relying on popular novels, most notably those of Qiong Yao, as one of their major source materials, featured then “a sort of purified *wenyi*” (Yeh 206). As a significant number of *wenyi* films presented excessive expressions of a broad range of emotions and in so doing lent “some civil and political utility in negotiating socio-cultural discontent,” the brand is in a sense used interchangeably with melodrama, an element which according to Yeh also constituted the principal stylistic trait of healthy realism (Yeh 206).¹⁵ The issue left to be tackled is then whether such melodramatic emotionality, as suggested by the prevailing criticism, turned out to be an offset to the pursuit of realism. Based on the recognition of the historical concurrence of realism and melodrama, Bayman has demonstrated how the emotionally-charged effects pursued by the latter have been drawn on as indispensable resources in materializing the realist aim in Italian neo-realism. In addition to the employment of the documentary aesthetics cherished by Andre Bazin, Italian neo-realism directors utilized melodramatic contrivances to forcefully illuminate the agonies experienced by the underclass in an impoverished society. Emotional excess in these movies was thus integrated into the realist vision, “establishing the common realist concern to encourage empathy with the protagonists of a fiction, while maintaining a questioning focus on the reality outside of its frame” (Bayman 60). It is even argued that the powerful expressions of the sentiments constitute “the greater truth” pursued by realism (Bayman 52-53). Bayman’s assertion of the compatibility between the realistic aim and emotional theatricality in neo-realism movies facilitates a reappraisal of the persistence of melodrama as a component of healthy realism productions. Healthy realism

¹⁵ Yeh cites broadly from literature on *wenyi* and brings to our attention what she calls the “two-pronged, forking configurations” of the style, which can either assume the popular form of entertainment by overstating feelings or transfer to the arena of art-house movies by being low-key (Yeh 206). Simply put, excessive *wenyi* dominated the Taiwanese cinema scene in the 1960s and 70s while serious *wenyi* rose to prominence instead afterward.

exploited an aesthetic style different from that of Italian neo-realism and thereby promulgated a realism suggesting the motive force of society rather than aiming to show the society in chaotic ruins. As will be detailed in later discussion, the melodramatic sensibility was nevertheless imported into the genre to support the realistic project it put forward all the same, by expressing the pains and hopes of honest masses so as to render tangible the operation of social relations which gave shape to the wider environment. The pastiche of civic virtue and romantic melodrama in healthy realism thus fulfills not only a didactic function intended but also a certain realistic aim.

To sum up, healthy realism describes a realistic scheme which provides clues to the texture of the society from which it has emerged while showcasing the glittering side of such society. Instead of glaring at the wounds in the social fabric as commonly expected in works branded as realistic, films in the genre created expressive scenes where the greater truth of social reality could be reached. Romantic melodrama has remained a central element of the scheme through which the sentiments underpinning social development are communicated. The effect lent by melodrama in fleshing out the wider social picture is where Qiong Yao's romantic stories came in. The extravagant expression of romantic emotion in these stories was in tune with the melodramatic excess essential to the construction of realistic scenes in healthy realism movies. With the generic features rearticulated as such, an entire series of Qiong Yao movie adaptations by healthy realism directors can be regarded as additions to this "social-context-dependent" genre, even including *Four Loves* and *My Silent Wife*, since both aptly reveal the motive force of present-day society despite the antiquated backdrop. The question yet to be answered then is what social reality can be touched upon via such focus on romantic love and how can the melodramatic contrivances deployed to amplify the joy and poignancy of love also render manifest fundamental aspects of the social relations in question. Scholars like Lin Wenchi and Lin Yuru have argued against the popular belief that Qiong Yao's stories amount to nothing more than escapist fantasies, calling attention to how current socio-cultural issues were woven into the romantic narratives (Lin Wenchi 5-6; Lin Yuru iii). They examine in their articles how Qiong Yao films, which rose and thrived in the golden period of Taiwan economic history, maintained a substantial link to the social reality of the 1960s and 70s. The recurrent portrayal of independent female protagonists working in a

modernizing society, for example, furnishes as one example of evidence which testifies to the realist vision of certain of the Qiong Yao movies (Lin Wenchi 5-8; Lin Yuru 52-54). In this framework, romantic love is turned into a major resource which enables the protagonists to achieve upward social mobility (Lin Wenchi 5; 17). In agreeing with the observation that Qiong Yao's works can be appreciated from a realistic perspective, this paper argues that the social significance of romantic love in certain of the Qiong Yao films lies in the manner in which love relationships serve as a sort of affective condition for the emergence of bio-power. Approached from within the context of healthy realism, the unfolding of romantic love constitutes an arena where a body is produced to be taken as the object of power procedures or political struggles, a member of a traditional community is transformed into an individual that makes up the population in its modern configuration. The rest of the paper is devoted to the analysis of the plot of the movies *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves* with the intention of highlighting how the experience of romantic love in both films is meshed with the investment of bio-power, which sheds light on how Qiong Yao's romance fits into the healthy realist genre.

Romantic Love and Bio-Power

Brief descriptions of the idea of romantic love, which expression has been so far used without any critical consideration in this paper, and the relations between romantic love, as a sort of affect, and bio-power as observed by Anderson, will be provided first to set the scene for further discussion. Approached in preceding paragraphs from within the context of romance films or romantic melodrama, romantic love has primarily been defined as a form of excessively-expressed emotion which facilitates the pursuit of greater social truth in the healthy realist pictures. It has also been hinted, nevertheless, that the content of romantic love communicated via the melodramatic devices in these films sustains the motive force of the society in question. In addition to the awareness that romantic melodrama fits into the realist frame of the healthy realism model, an insight into the place occupied by romantic love in personal and social life might enhance our understanding of the social reality treated in individual movies. Roughly put, romantic love has been treated as a way of life which entails huge investments in the experience of an emotional attachment that is saturated with erotic enticement (Featherstone 2; Langford

1). Presumed to enable identity formation, sexual gratification, intimate communication and self-realization, falling in love has generally been considered as an attractive condition. Commentators nevertheless have competing ideas about the truth of this assumed desirability, paying attention to the promise of social equality that love relationships hold or the power relations involved in particular forms of love (Langford 1; Giddens 39-43). Other critics bring assertions that while erotic attraction to a particular person, experienced as a certain spontaneous and forceful sentiment, is universal, the evolving ideas of love should be approached as socio-historically specific constructs (Featherstone 1-2). The argument pursued in this paper is in line with the recognition that romantic love is a cultural form invested with a rich variety of social meanings. The articulation of love particularly relevant to my purpose here is the one having emerged from the radical social changes brought about by the first industrial revolution in Europe, which unprecedentedly tied romantic attraction between individuals to the process of identity formation rather than the establishment of kinship networks (Langford 2). Such erotically-charged individualism entails the rise of the passionate couple which is regarded “almost everywhere as a central organizing principle of domestic, economic and social life” (Langford xi). The idea of romantic love exploited by the healthy realism model has its roots in this modern form of erotic love. Made during the 1960s and 70s, healthy realist pictures generally treated of a Taiwan society experiencing rapid economic development and concurrently headed toward modernization. The national economic growth had at the time been significantly spurred by land reforms that increased agricultural productivity and by export-friendly policies that brought in foreign investors. Adding up to the well-known “Taiwan Miracle,” the economic expansion is known as part of the modernization efforts implemented by the government since the 1960s. Such project of modernization called for a configuration of the individual which was freed from the restraints imposed by traditional communities so that its integration into the modern society as source of productive labor would be possible. This process led to, or more precisely, was accompanied by great changes in people’s lives. Shi Fanyu maintains that the free choice of one’s own marriage partner, which became widely accepted at the time, is among those with the most far-reaching impact (164). I would like to draw attention rather to the way romantic love was mobilized to bring in the notion of an

individual that was fundamental to the process of modernization. As mentioned, Yeh has identified the didactic elements in healthy realism movies which involve the opening up of the family arena to allow for the taking in of a set of civic virtues. These virtues, as revisited in this light, turn out to be no other than the core characteristics of a productive individual in a modernizing society rather than the general attributes of someone who is virtuous. The characters embodying these virtues are portrayed as much as honest and generous folks as hardworking employees or manpower much needed by modern society. More significantly, romantic love serves as one of the sentiments that enable these characters to recognize themselves as individual living beings. Rendering possible one's breaking away or emerging from traditional social and familial institutions, romantic love finds its way into the heart of healthy realism, a type of movie the form of which spells out the truth of the government's modernization efforts. Film adaptations of Qiong Yao's romance novels by healthy realism directors can be included in the genre for the same reason.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lin Yuru has noted that due to Qing Yao's active involvement in film production, the narrative patterns strung into a set of formula in her novels could also be found in their film adaptations (29). [the narrative pattern that underlies Qing Yao's novels can also be found in their film adaptations due to her active involvement in film production (29).] Therefore, Lin Fangmei's analysis of the articulation of romantic love in Qiong Yao's novels might be drawn on to counter the assertion that the film adaptations of these novels present an experience of romantic love that supports the government's modernization efforts. According to Lin, Qiong Yao puts forward a de-politicized ideal of love which is concerned exclusively with the female protagonist's desire for emotional fulfillment and existential well-being. Such ideal is different from the notion of emancipating romantic love celebrated by the advocates of the May Fourth Movement. The former, as has been mentioned, belongs to the private sphere where the female protagonists indulge in love fantasies, while the latter constitutes an essential part of a public ideology seeking to disable patriarchy and promote individualism (60-65). Such contrast appears to imply that romantic love finds sanctuary in Qiong Yao's romance where it remains untouched by the public world. My defense is made up of two lines of argument. First, as observed by Lin, while the May Fourth era saw the rise of individualism which advocated the freedom to choose one's spouse as a weapon against the obsolete patriarchal system, the passionate youths who led the way had only very vague ideas about what it meant to be in love. Qiong Yao's romance, on the contrary, explores the content and dynamics of romantic love from the women's angle (62-63). Her focus on the art of loving and the way it shapes one's way of living, which is absent from the revolutionary notion of love, exemplifies what Max Weber defines as the modern form of erotic love in which self-realization achieved through the love bond is highly prized (Langford 2-3). If the May Fourth Movement loudly called for the emancipation of emotional energies considered to have been held in the strait jacket of traditional formality, Qiong Yao's romance stages how one can become complete through the fusion of souls and thereby form a stable relationship with another person by quietly nourishing the female protagonists' desires to be cherished by the beloved. In other words, while Qiong Yao's romance does not explicitly target patriarchy, the plots of self-indulgence evoke a certain process of modernization where romantic ties become the major elements of the social structure. In this regard, Qiong Yao's idea of romantic love participates in the modernization efforts in a peculiar manner. An incidental comment to be made is that in addition to starting a rebellion against various forms of traditional forces which served to unify society, the significance of the politicized

If the experience of romantic love is found to support the healthy realism project by asserting the primacy of love bonds and hence individualism over traditional institutions, it can further be argued that, based on my observations about *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves*, this erotically-charged individual serves as the site where a rudimentary form of bio-power can be located. More precisely, romantic love is seen in these two movies as serving as part of the conditions for the birth of bio-power, ushering in a set of beliefs and desires that anticipates a power addressing the issues of body and life. As the love story unfolds, the lovers explore what it means to be a living being with a body whose capacities should be optimized to be integrated into a system which aims at fostering life. Such investment in the lovers' bodies and well-being at the population level is not only what makes certain characters stand out as the "model citizens" of a modernizing society, but is also the indication of the advent of certain power relations that are centered on the notion of life. By thus bringing to the fore what Foucault calls the question of man as a specific living being that is specifically-related to other living beings, romantic love in the two movies, in Anderson's words, exemplifies the way in which bio-power works through affects such as love, hope, pain, etc. (Foucault, *History* 143; Anderson 28-29). According to Anderson, affect and biopower, naming respectively "the aleatory dynamics of lived experience" and the manner in which life is taken as the object of technologies of power, are both terms widely employed to investigate aspects of the politics of life (28). It is well known that Foucault coined the term "bio-power" to describe a form of power which has power over bodies and is concerned with fostering the life of the population. As Foucault argues, a society reaches the "threshold of modernity" at the point of the entry of biological existence into its sphere of political techniques. Numerous and diverse methods of power and knowledge are invented to administer bodies and manage life processes. Certain concrete arrangements are made to optimize the capabilities of the body which is to be integrated into the machinery of production while others manage people as a group, attending to biological features of the human species to better promote the life of the species (*History of Sexuality* 141-43). The two poles of development via which such power over life evolves are designated as the anatomo-politics of the human body and the bio-politics of

notion of romantic love might be approached through the particular configuration of individual thus produced, which will be discussed in detail later.

the population (Foucault, *History* 139). Anderson argues that while commentators seldom link Foucault to affect due to the philosopher's "seeming aversion to discussing affect explicitly," Foucault does indicate how bio-power targets affective bodies and populations (Anderson 31; Thrift qtd. in Anderson 31; Foucault, *Society* 253). Moreover, Anderson finds that bringing together these two different ways of considering how power and life relate proves ultimately a fruitful effort in developing certain affirmative relations with life where new potentialities for life may be created. However, an adequate understanding of the encounters between bio-power and affect requires taking into consideration the ways forms of bio-power work through affect. Anderson identifies three kinds of relations in which affective life is taken as "the object-target of," "the condition for," and "the outside" of current forms of bio-power (28-29).

First of all, as mentioned, individual and collective affective capacities are targeted by the two forms of bio-power. Anderson observes that while power has long set its eye on affectivity, contemporary modes of bio-power seek to intervene in "life itself" which consists of molecular affects such as pre-conscious emotional reactions (31). Such tightening of a grip on affective bodies and populations is nevertheless accompanied by the opportunities for the opening up of an affirmative relation to affective life where it evades the grasp of bio-power. Following from Negri, who makes a distinction between bio-power as potestas and bio-power as potential, Anderson understands inassimilable affective life, a form of bio-potential, as being outside of bio-power (35-36). However, Anderson argues that an observation of the antagonism between bio-potestas and bio-potential, which he considers to be a state resulting from tying affect too tightly to individual affective-rational subject, does not exhaust the multiplicity of power relations. The third encounter between affect and bio-power is thus brought out in the attempt to map out how a certain configuration of power relations arises out of "a specific organization of affective life" or "affective condition" (36-37). By "affective condition" Anderson means "an affective atmosphere that predetermines how something...is habitually encountered, disclosed and can be related to" (37). For instance, the liberal forms of governmentality presuppose a collective affect called "state-phobia," which prompts caution against excessive government as well as efforts to extend the market form (Foucault, *Biopolitics* 77; Anderson 37-38). State-phobia, as an affective

condition for the birth of neo-liberalism, is assumed in lived experience, transmitted through populations, and becomes part of the emotions of which policies are imbued (Anderson 37). Anderson thereby concludes that a specific power relation is bound up with a certain affective condition from which its ideal subject emerges.

As a certain organization of affective life, romantic love in the two movies to be scrutinized is found to give prominence to the issues of bodies and species life. Romantic feeling grows when lovers attend to each other's bodies, which are moments when they, as mentioned, emerge as erotically-charged individuals breaking free from the restraints imposed by traditional community. The lovers come to recognize themselves as individual living beings with a body; rising beyond the traditional social-cultural mode, they have certain right to happiness and welfare. This newly-found body is then enlisted into a group in which the individual living beings, or rather redefined as members of a certain living species thenceforth, are related to each other. The force of a particular living being is mustered to foster the life of the group, being taken as the object of either certain techniques of knowledge introduced to take charge of life of the species or political struggles with collective welfare as the stake. Romantic love again serves as the affective condition which facilitates such shift in focus from individual welfare to that of the species. The following discussion is to examine how the love relationships portrayed in *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves*, the former considered to be exemplifying the "orthodox" healthy realist theme, while the latter known as the first of the Qiong Yao movie adaptations by healthy realist directors, contribute to setting up the affective atmosphere that anticipates bio-power.¹⁷ This perspective renders intelligible how the pursuit of romantic love remains an essential plot element in the healthy realist model and ultimately why Qiong Yao's romance became a major source of inspiration for filmmakers embracing the model.¹⁸

¹⁷ It should nevertheless be noted that I am not arguing that Li Xing, the co-director of *Oyster Girl* and the director of *Four Loves*, consciously explores the anatomo-political and bio-political scenes in 1960s Taiwan in his productions.

¹⁸ I appreciate the reviewer's opinion that the ways in which romantic love, recognized as part of the modernization efforts in Taiwan in the 1960s, could contribute to the establishment of institutions and implementation of policies taking disciplined bodies and regulated bodies as their objects deserves further and detailed investigation. The purpose of this paper, nevertheless, is to make an argument, through the comparison drawn between *Oyster Girls* and *Four Loves*, that Qiong Yao's romance fits into the model of healthy realism since the romantic love highlighted in the former serves as the

Oyster Girl

Resulting from the earliest effort of the CMPC to promote a type of movie to counter those presenting so-called escapist fantasies, *Oyster Girl* conveys the healthy realist imagination in its initial form. The exploration of the plot of the movie thus will enable an analysis of the components of this model and furthermore the grasp of the social reality of which it treats. This movie champions romantic love, which in turn serves as the affective condition from which individuals rise above the traditional social-cultural mode and are then taken as the object of techniques of knowledge aimed at fostering the life of the species. The issues of bodies and life, shown to be closely tied to the theme of romantic love, are given prominence from the very beginning. The opening scene of the film compares Ah-lan, the female protagonist, to the oyster, which as emphasized by the voice-over has a soft fleshy body covered by hard shells.¹⁹ This significant comparison not only, as argued by most commentators of the genre, defines healthy realism as a laudation of the virtuous poor person who forces his or her way out from the hardships of life through the use of optimism and determination, but also sets up a scene of bio-power where people are made objects of techniques designed to improve life. Throughout the film, the audience is presented with scenes in which Guo Mingshun (郭明順), an active cadre member of the fishermen's association who is mindful of the need for the the modernization of the oyster village, concentrates on developing modern cultivation methods to increase oyster size or supervises construction of the oyster factory that epitomizes the village's industrialization efforts. These occasional but persistent glimpses of bio-technological intervention in oyster farming and of measures adopted to maximize production levels of the industry are, in a

affective condition anticipating bio-power, which supports the modernization efforts described by the latter. In other words, this paper is less concerned with the governmental practices introduced in response to the transformation of intimate relationships in the society as depicted in the two movies than how the emphasis on fulfillment and satisfaction of romantic relationships in Qiong Yao's romance facilitates the emergence of an image of the individual body and the notion of species departing from the traditional community and its members.

¹⁹ The introductory commentary on some facts about oysters and the resemblance between Ah-lan and the oyster by the authoritative voice-over is as follows: "This is an oyster. The oyster has a hard, impervious shell, but its flesh is soft and delicious. Along the western coast of Taiwan, several tens of thousands of fishermen make a living by oyster farming . . . There is a girl named Ah-lan in the oyster village. Her personality resembles that of the oyster—hard outside but tender and pure at heart. This is her story."

sense, manifestations of how the healthy realism genre served as propaganda by the government in promoting its modernization programs. At a more profound level, however, the audience is provided with a glance into the social reality in which issues of bodies and life insinuate themselves as essential elements in the village's progress toward industrialization. The juxtaposition of Ah-lan with the oyster, whose biological process is overseen and modified by the expert grower from the fishermen's association, thus anticipates what Foucault calls "the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" (Foucault, *History* 141). The attempt to produce better oysters illustrates the application of a certain field of knowledge to improve life in general. Moreover, just as the oysters are taken as objects by scientific knowledge and serve as the basis of economic expansion, the oyster girls and the village residents will be taken over by the reign of bio-power, and thereby made available for the techniques of power and knowledge meant to control and modify bodies and life. Some lines from the theme song sung in chorus take it a step further, associating the passion for cultivating oysters with the romantic love felt between a couple: "Stick the slips of bamboo firmly into the oyster bed/Bunches of oysters grow abundantly on the surface of the bamboo /The copious harvest meets the expectations of the oyster girls/. . . /The heart of a beautiful girl is more tender than the flesh of the oyster /Her affection overflows the confines of the shell of the oyster/Where has her beloved gone?/ Will the sentient oysters nurture their love and make their bond?" Immediately following the song are scenes which introduce the audience to the love affairs of three of the oyster girls, who have been portrayed as diligent workers sustaining the industry as well as great admirers of professional opinion. One of them, Ah-juan (阿娟), even falls in love with Guo, who leads the modernization project the project of the modernization of the village. At the end of the movie, the same tune is played again with different lyrics which strengthen the link between economic expansion and romantic love even more: "You pull the sail while I row the raft/Let us dress up to harvest the fruit of economic development/We have fallen in love with each other/Lovers like us will eventually live happily together."

In the first healthy realist film, romantic love as such occupies an indispensable role in the investment of bodies and the control of populations, which constitute the two basic forms of bio-power. How exactly romantic love

takes such effect is yet to be detailed. To begin with, Ah-lan's story, which describes her love relationship with Jingshui, is shown to the audience through the ample use of melodramatic features. Scenes displaying an excessive expression of emotions incorporate personal dramas within the gears of the changing society, forcefully communicating the restrictions of traditional institutions and the desirability of a new set of emerging social relations. From the outset, the pleasure of love and the moments of poignancy set in motion the emergence of an individual body from pre-modern value systems. Among the group of oyster girls who make up the village workforce, the audience knows only the names of the three of them who are shown to be in love. In other words, romantic love endows them with a sense of individuality which distinguishes them from the rest of the group. It should be noted that the group of oyster girls and even the village residents do not automatically make a population in the bio-political sense because of the number of people involved. The phenomenon of population only comes into being when the species life is invested by an entire array of regulatory controls. The mass of the oyster girls therefore primarily represent the traditional economic systems and the correlative social-cultural modes, which is particularly revealed when most of them sneer at Ah-lan when she becomes pregnant before marriage. As will be discussed later, Ah-lan's pregnancy constitutes one of the most significant bio-political scenes in the film, which evidences the difference between traditional community and modern population. Before entering into the sphere of life administration, Ah-lan has to explore what it means to have a body through her love relationship with Jinshui. The words of love exchanged between the lovers (such as "Does your foot hurt?" or "Do you feel cold?"), casual touches that bring them sweet satisfaction, and the enchanted evening they spend together which leads to Ah-lan's pregnancy all contribute to the formulation of an erotically-charged body which rises superior to the influence of any tradition or custom. We can tell from what Ah-lan's father says when Ah-lan and her younger brother refuse to buy alcohol on account for him that the power of traditional values, though lingering on, has been seriously shaken by the rising appeal of romantic love: "I have been nice to you or I would have already married you to someone else than Jinshui! I am not obliged to approve of you dating him!" Although the father then asks for a huge dowry from Jinshui, which defers the young couple's marriage for some months, and loudly voices his disagreement

about Ah-lan's pregnancy on the basis of traditional values, his happy smile shown at the end of the movie when everything is settled is a sure sign of the triumph of romantic love.

Romantic love thus enables the lovers to disentangle themselves from the clutches of traditional institutions. The bodies of the lovers, whose individual welfare is asserted in their rights to love and happiness, will then be taken over by life-fostering technologies at the population level. Yearning to be loved by Ah-huo (阿火) and therefore envious of Ah-huo's desire for Ah-lan, Ah-chu (阿珠) raises a quarrel with Ah-lan on the oyster farm which ends up with a mass fight among the oyster girls. The camera closely follows the movement of the bodies of the participants in the fight, even presenting the parts of their bodies which are exposed when their clothes are pulled open. These erotically-charged bodies brought out by the pleasure and displeasure of love will soon pass into the control of medical knowledge. After the fight, Guo sends the oyster girls to the local clinic to have their cuts and scratches treated by Dr. Su, another figure of modernity in the film. Special attention should be given to the scenes in which each of the oyster girls, taking turns to receive treatment from the medical professional, gets a drink of water from the water dispenser placed in the waiting room before leaving the clinic. This ritual observed by each patient is very likely a component of a public health project which aims to ensure the health and welfare of citizens and thus constitutes an effort to optimize the capabilities of the individual body. These enhanced bodies will ultimately be integrated into the productive forces. It is seen that Guo takes advantage of the opportunity to talk to Dr. Su to suggest that he run for the position of township mayor. Dr. Su consents to his suggestion on condition that Guo helps him with the economic development program. The fruits of Guo's efforts are represented by the construction of an oyster factory equipped with modernized assembly lines. Ah-juan, a former oyster girl and one of the three who are in love, is then seen to be working in the factory in a professional uniform. The bodies invested through and through first with romantic love and then with attempts to increase their productive forces are taken over by the techniques of knowledge aimed at transforming human life. Ah-lan's pregnancy marks the moment when the life of species becomes the center of the technology of power. Feeling upset by the cruel words of the villagers about her pregnancy before marriage, Ah-lan, accompanied by Ah-juan, goes to Dr. Su to ask for

an abortion. Dr. Su rejects her demand, making the following speech: "If you love Jinshui, you must be patient and take good care of the baby. One born amid hardship is usually stronger. I believe your baby will be strong." Both Ah-lan and Ah-juan are deeply touched by the doctor's words; Ah-lan then resolves to keep the baby. This talk is in a sense a continuation of certain techniques concerned with enhancing the capabilities of an individual body. It is also noteworthy that the love relationship between Ah-lan and Jinshui is cited by Dr. Su to reason against Ah-lan's abortion attempt, which reinforces the central position occupied by romantic love in the process of modernization. What makes this talk more significant is nevertheless how it introduces a technology of power of a different nature than that which focuses on individual bodies. Here Dr. Su is giving support to propagation of the species body based on mutual love more than to the continuation of a single case of pregnancy before marriage. Reproduction being a part of biological processes which bio-politics seeks to regulate, Dr. Su's talk can be seen as a sort of intervention utilized to sustain the phenomenon of population. The emphasis put by the medical profession on the significance of procreation contradicts the villagers' comments that Ah-lan should be ashamed of getting pregnant before marriage, and marks the birth of a notion of population that follows different principles of formulation than traditional community where members are united by traditional relations of production and values. The advantage of the former over the latter is reiterated when the midwife, unable to deal with Ah-lan's difficult labor, suggests that Ah-lan be sent to the hospital for modern medical care. The happy ending of the film is set against the backdrop of the oyster factory where Ah-lan's new-born son is held by his grandma and all the other characters are carrying out their work joyously. This is a picture celebrating romantic love and modern techniques of power over the life of the species. The audience is presented with a portrait that realistically delineates the motive force of a society aspiring to economic expansion and modernization. Romantic love plays the role of setting the process of modernization in motion and bringing out the ideas of bodies and life that anticipates the exercise of bio-power.

Four Loves

This formula which consists of a cluster of interrelations between romantic love and bio-power finds another form of expression in *Four Loves*.

As a film adaptation of a Qiong Yao romance novels, *Four Loves* relies heavily on melodramatic contrivances as it follows the multiple relationships among Wanjun and her three male cousins. The use of these devices, which invoke joyful laughter or trigger copious tears from the main characters, support the realist scheme of the film by drawing attention to the desirability of new social relations and the urgency of fully developing such relations, which are namely those fostered by emphases on romantic love and the species body. Having lost her parents when she is still young, Wanjun is taken to her aunt's house where Bojian (伯健), Jongkang (仲康), and Shuhao (叔豪) have been raised. All three of the brothers fall in love with this beautiful cousin. They express their affection for Wanjun in different ways though. Bojian, who has been confined to bed for years due to illness, reads love poems to Wanjun. Shuhao makes wood sculpture pieces for her. Jongkang, described by his father as a short-tempered person, is the most passionate in love and tends to express his affection through action. The three brothers all come to her aid when Wanjun once scrapes her arm during a playful chase, but Jongkang is the first and the only one to help her deal with her wound. He sucks the blood from the scrape several times and then wraps the wound with his handkerchief. Soon after the incident, Wanjun goes out with Jongkang and Shuhao to fly a kite. The kids from around the neighborhood are also there and start to make fun of the relationships between the brothers and Wanjun on their arrival. Jongkang is the one who decides to fight back instead of ignoring their taunts. After a violent physical fight with the teasers, Jongkang, alone, tries to cool off under a tree. Wanjun finds him there and it is her turn this time to attend to him, gently treating his wounds and stroking his blotched face.

These two episodes in which Jongkang and Wanjun invest the bodies of each other with intensive attention explain why the feelings of love are reciprocal between them, although Wanjun appears to waver between the three brothers when it comes to establishing the marital tie. Their affection for each other is made more explicit when the three brothers try to justify why they deserve to win the hand of their cousin. Jongkang is the only one who asserts that their love is mutual while Bojian cites parental authority and Shuhao demands equal right to ask for Wanjun's hand. The adherence to the value of romantic love enables Jongkang to break free from the shackles and chains of the traditional family, which is evidenced by the occasion in which

he tells Wanjun that they have been born into an age which prizes freedom to choose spouses over marriages designated by the elders. Such sense of individuality accounts for why Jongkang, compared to his two brothers who are content with living under the protection of their parents, possesses the most active body in the film, always full of stamina and free to widen its reach. More significantly, Jongkang's assertion that mutually felt love should be held in higher regard than an arranged marriage amounts to a declaration that one has an individual welfare to be regarded and a right to happiness. Romantic love as such serves as the affective condition through which the issues of bodies and then life are brought to the attention.

As has been mentioned, the celebration of romantic love signals the beginning of the process of modernization, which is also the case in *Four Loves*. The modernization efforts are driven furthermore by concerns expressed about how to optimize the forces of bodies and invest the life of the species. By attending school, the individual body emerging from the investment of romantic love is rendered visible and thus available for modification by techniques of power and knowledge. Spotting Jongkang looking troubled in a corner on the campus, Teacher Huang tries to identify what keeps the young man from maximizing his potential and furthermore undertakes to restore his vitality. The action he takes and the rhetoric he employs to achieve this goal constitute techniques which center on the individual body, seeking to increase its usefulness and availability: "Youngsters have a propensity to indulge in worrisome thoughts. But remember, the world is so big and the true meaning of life is to create a more meaningful life. Don't let your affection for a girl prevent you from doing your part as a member of the society and the country." The forces of the body to be optimized should be integrated into the society's modernization efforts as well. As the take-off of modernization continues to gain momentum, the optimization of the species body is set as the new objective. Such shift of focus was voiced by Teacher Huang, who was at the time confined in a prison for his participation in planning for a revolution against some sort of pre-modern political structure left unspecified in the movie: "You don't have to try to rescue me. My life is worthless. You should be mindful of the welfare of millions of your fellow countrymen. Remember, you can shape the future of the coming generations!" Teacher Huang's speech marks the moment when life in general replaces individual bodies, which process will involve the

propagation and maintenance of the population.

Although *Four Loves* does not explicitly describe the newly-raised question of the adjustment of man as a living being to economic development, the plot of the film is saturated with concerns about man's individual and collective welfare which serve as the objective of modernization efforts of the society. The process of modernization propelled by romantic love is thus accelerated by the effort invested in governing the individual body and life in general at different levels. This is how *Four Loves*, the first Qiong Yao screen adaptation by a healthy realism filmmaker, echoes the healthy realism theme set in *Oyster Girl*. Moreover, with the massive emphasis on romantic love that is communicated primarily via melodramatic devices in *Four Loves*, it is revealed that romantic love serves as both the content and dynamic of the social relations in question. When Teacher Huang repeatedly emphasizes that young men should turn the romantic feelings they have for lovers into a sublimated passion for the life of the population, the audience is reminded that romantic love serves as the affective condition through which a rudimentary form of bio-power emerges, which in turn makes the society's modernization projects possible. The juxtaposition of *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves* for analysis thus proves fruitful in identifying a formula which highlights the central position occupied by romantic love in the healthy realist model, and which, in turn, provides a possible explanation for the popularity of Qiong Yao's romance among healthy realism filmmakers.

Conclusion

Seeking to explore whether and how a number of movie adaptations of Qiong Yao's novels fit into the category of healthy realism films, the first part of this paper revisited the definition of "healthy realism," analyzing why the genre remains within the scope of realism despite its intended use as government propaganda, and explores the effects of romantic melodrama in achieving the realist aim of the model. The second part of the paper featured analyses of the plots of *Oyster Girl* and *Four Loves* with the intention of discerning the motive force of the society of which healthy realism films sought to treat, an undertaking which leads to the discovery that romantic love is an essential element of healthy realism as it serves as the affective condition which anticipates the start of bio-power, which supports the modernization efforts described by the film model. The reliance on melodramatic devices and

the significance of romantic love to the underlying social relations pave the way for the entry of Qiong Yao's romance into the healthy realism genre. This paper does not aspire to be a comprehensive study of healthy realism pictures and Qiong Yao movie adaptations but does offer a different view to address the position of Qiong Yao's romance within the context of healthy realism.

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