

Zombie in China: A Distinction concerning Life

Meng Jin¹

Abstract. Since 2000, zombie movies have a reviving tendency, which is mainly because the metaphor of zombies has been echoing modern people's life and their attitudes towards life. this essay has found that the zombies are concerned with the distinction of "life/death" and "us/them". Such distinctions happen to well match Giorgio Agamben's profound perception of the foundation of sovereignty--- through inclusive exception to produce the bare life without life values. many bare lives have been created by political movements Along with the history of New China. These bare lives stand "on the opposite side of the people", just like zombies , reduced to "them" status and remaining no mankind's exclusive dignities any longer. Through these half-living monsters, we can find a new angle to look into China. This essay reminds the readers that the sovereignty's oppressing the bare life through different forms such as oppressing protestors, migrant workers and confining the petitioners comes out every day. We should be wise to know that to be indifferent to their plight is to be indifferent to our own potential plight. Because we are not sure whether we will be the next zombies.

Key Words: Zombie, Popular Culture, China, Bare Life, Giorgio Agamben.

Bringing zombie-ness, the hidden aspects of the self and society, into light may allow us to consider more reflectively what it means to be a 'me'. (Webb & Byrnand, 2008)

1. Zombie as Trope

The real reason why the amount of zombie movies has increased rapidly after 2000 lies in that people are understanding more and more about the real meaning inside the zombies and learning more about the unconfirmed information the zombies represent. Zombie cinema, "helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural" (Jerrold E. Hogle). We see ourselves from the zombies' bodies: they were humans; they dress like humans; to some extent they are still humans ; but we will never admit that they are. Albeit zombies manifest "them" in their own ways, which seems just to have drawn a border line from human beings, The border is not that settle as we tend to believe when we human beings cross from "our side" to "their side" unwittingly. people are more like the monsters since they have been losing their rationality and humanity, which also reflects the shortening of the distance between humans and monsters. And the myth of the zombies lies here. None of the other monsters or enemies can blur the boundary between "us" and "them" to such a degree like zombies. When we are watching them, we take our experienced world and culture to the process. To interpret the zombie culture is to question ourselves. That is the reason why we should pay attention to the "distinction" between human and zombie, because the distinction is the basic mean to understand who we are.

2. Us and Them, as Bare Life

Being segmentation or being "them" is dangerous. To zombies, this means death. Along with zombie's animalistic nature revealed came the verdict of their lives and the further confirmation of their being "inhuman". The only way to eradicate them is to violently destroy their flesh. "They zombies" are no longer pitiful slave but the garbage that "we humans" need to clean up at will. "We humans" can burn their skin with flames, shoot their bodies with heavy machine guns, turn them upside down as our target of marksmanship and even just anchor them there so as to appreciate their foolish expressions. "They" exist as the lowest, worthless life --- bare life.

¹ Meng Jin,
E-mail address: Jin198721@163.com

To distinguish "us" and "them" has always been a core idea throughout all the narrations of zombies. The boundary of life and death has been blurred by zombies and such "confusion is not tolerable" (Gooding, 2007). So human beings are forced to make a more clear distinction between themselves and zombies. As a result, human beings keep the last respect for life to "we humans" ourselves. From Agamben's view, the inherent dichotomy in our minds is the basis for the human political operation. He believes the mankind has never been not purely natural. From the repeated massacres in the history of mankind, Giorgio Agamben sees sovereign practice of biopolitics but mankind's irrationality and animal-like cruelty. And such kind of practice is performed by some kind of technology of manipulating the bare life.

Bare life comes from the ancient European "*Homo Sacer*". They were a life that could be killed licitly but could not be sacrificed, a life that could be eliminated without the prosecution of homicide because it is a life considered to be without value. "*Homo sacer*" was in an "exclusively included" status ---where he could not be subjected to a judicial execution ---he exists outside the law of the city and is the exception to the law, and yet is still subject to the penalty of death and therefore still included, in the very act of exclusion, within the law(Downey,2009).So, sovereign has power to determine and allocate someone a place inside or outside of community and, therefore, to grant or deprive that person of their political rights(Zevnik,2011). Bare life insofar as it operates in an inclusive exclusion as the referent of the sovereign decision. As being captured by sovereign, life can be easily deprived and suspension by its power and this is the foundation of sovereign.

Agamben cited the Jewish concentration camp in World War II as a realistic illustration of bare life. Concentration camp is the extreme manifestation of biopolitics. It is in the camps that we encounter the subject who possesses physiological life without any political significance or representation before the law; it is there that we witness the subject who can be killed with impunity but not sacrificed – he is, after all, beyond the law and therefore unrepresentable within it; and it is there that we see the subject precariously inhabiting a 'zone of indistinction' between life and death, law and violence, citizen and refugee(Downey,2009).As a nation exception, the Jewish were excluded from the social order. Concentration camp thoroughly threw their lives in to the political field, made the whole Jewish nation bare and pushed them to the edge of destruction. An emerging ruling force is often accompanied by the production of a large number of bare lives. It can be said that the decisive activity of living right lies not in manufacturing life or death but in creating a lot of unlimited surviving. The right of the people here more often left than given. As for example, There were also massive political movements of classifying "class enemies" when the Chinese Communist Party was revolutionizing and it produced new survivors through adjusting the eradicating targets.

During the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the "Rebel Vanguard "Red Guards became a horrible force. Wherever they went, there would be inevitably bloody and violent while most of them were teenage children. Their enemies were the "Black five types"²,Whatever the Red Guards did to them was reasonable because they were "people's enemies". This is the "revolutionary struggle". The Red Guards stormed into the home of the "Black five types", smashing their households plundering their cultural relics, books and gold and silver jewelry. They also put physical persecution and spiritual abuse on the "Black five types". Black five types" knew they were just like the victims in the concentration camps and Auschwitz, they do not essentially different, you want to survive they had to give up something originally belonging to mankind - humanity and responsibility are something that the deportee had to abandon when entering the camp. (Downey, 2009) During August and September, around 1,000 people were beaten to death just in Beijing. (Yin, 1994). In the eyes of some of the Red Guards, "Black five types" could only be regarded as something like pigs and dogs and it didn't matter all of them died let alone just so few. They could not wait wipe the "Black five types" from the Earth. (Ding, 2006) .

Their lives were brutally and arbitrarily taken away because they stayed in a fuzzy status which neither belonged to the law of God nor law of mankind. After one was designated as the "them", any resistance is futile. Agamben 's thesis is not so much concerned with the anomalous nature of the camp as historical fact, as it is with the camp as 'the hidden matrix and *nomos*(laws) of the political space in which we are still

² "Black five types" often refers to the five black categories of children, namely, landlords, rich peasants, counter revolutionaries, bad elements and rightists' children during the Cultural Revolution.

living' (Agamben,1998:166). What he focuses on is the pattern by which the concentration camps are restored to exercising power: power of deciding the value of life. Agamben warns us that concentration camps are just an extreme form of the sovereignty over our biopolitics and other forms of it are still continuing. Since the sovereignty is not based on the social contract but on the fact that the "*homo sacer*" was included with exception in a country, every modern citizen may be a potential "*homo sacer*". He said, "If today there is no longer any one clear figure of the sacred man, it is perhaps because we are all virtually *homo sacer*"(Agamben,1998:115).It is possible that everyone's life will be manipulated by the sovereignty and we will ultimately have to be included in them (Downey, 2009). "Life becomes a stake on politics." With the change of the purpose of sovereignty, the object is constantly changing. "The foundation is thus not an event achieved once and for all but is continually operative in the civil state in the form of the sovereign decision." (Agamben,1998:109) Every Chinese who had experienced different eras suffered from it- almost every Chinese came in and out of "concentration camps" in different eras. One moment one person was stepping on the others' body, the next moment he might be threw into the circle of "them". The metaphor of the dual identity of zombies stays in every political individual who combine features of "us" and "them" together.

3. Who is Next?

The bare life would not disappear with the ending of that era. As Agamben said, as long as the sovereignty and its foundation are there, the bare life will continue its presence in different forms. In June 1989, in order to safeguard the national stability, or rather to maintain the legal status of sovereignty of CCP, a group of bare life was produced in Tiananmen Square ---the government recognized the protesters' lives could be sacrificed for the sake of the Party and its monopoly over power(Zevnik, 2009). I feel fearful to the fact that the living lives could be regarded as "enemies of the state" so reasonably and legitimately and it was so quick to distinguish the life-death boundary on them. "us" means living while "them" means death. But people can not help but worry about the increasingly blurred boundary between the "us" and "them". Here, the saying of Francis Gooding (2007) "The dead must always die, and so must the living live; confusion is not tolerable." indicates a more thought-provoking meaning in China.

The 1989 TianAnMen Square event may the last vehement show of the sovereignty. Now, the sovereignty lies not in the power of execution but in intervening in living. As Foucault said, the sovereignty no longer put on visible constraints on the living but invisible repression and penetrates every corner of the politics by means of ideology. Bare life --- zombies --- us, got an exclusive inclusion in a less bloody status.

Farmers, the nominal "ruling class" of China, had ruled the landlord class and the so-called "black five types" with dictatorship and brutally excluded them from the protection of the law. However, with the advance of reform and opening up, they gradually felt that in reality they were those who were being excluded. Before the reform and opening up, production and revolutionary as the consistent goals of socialist construction dominated the life of the farmers and the farmers also enjoyed the political benefits as revolutionaries; However the reform and opening up brought various effects. Apart from the unequal trading on agricultural products' price and heavy taxes, the publication of The Residence Registration Regulation of the People's Republic of China in 1958 meant they would always be farmers and bound in their own land forever and being excluded from enjoying the fruits of development. (Sun, 2003). Nowadays, a large number of rural laborers have come into the cities to become migrant workers. They survive in the city but can never be recognized as citizens: Migrant workers can't enjoy the urban social security and health insurance and their children's educational problem is difficult to be solved. The migrant workers are bare lives surviving on the urban edge. Once drained by the assembly line of modern factory, they as a commodity will soon be abandoned by the city. Discourses like "Get back to your damn village" further reflect the distinction of "us" and "them" the citizens have made between the farmers and themselves. There are similar lines in a zombie movie: "go back to the grave, you bastard!" The distinction between "us" and "them" reveals dichotomous relationship of "higher / low" status in addition to the "friend /enemy" relationship. The arbitrary killing of zombies is based on the assumption that they are just like wild animals with no rationality or emotion; the establishment of the Nazi massacre of the Jews was based on the belief that the Jews were like the "lice". His

"life rating decline rule is an important prerequisite. When they were degraded lower than the common mankind, all the dignity and human rights were no longer hesitating problem.

As Downey said, human rights belong to the citizens but those bare lives. Bare lives can only wait to be dealt with by the sovereignty "according to law". Farmers, for the people of the city, are of low status and "cleaning" them, naturally, is a logical thing for them. They were expelled by the "just" government out of "our" city. Likewise, the survivors in a zombie movie eagerly looked forward to the army coming forward to save them from the zombies around. When we cheered upon the human's extraordinary victory over the zombies, we always forget that the killed zombies once were and even now are still our beloved brothers and sisters. When people ecstatically observe the city becomes more and more "clean", the bare life on the edge of the city has become irrelevant and dispensable.

Indeed, "we" won the victory. However when we look back at the history, we will find that the old elites were excluded through brutal agrarian revolution and the rulers proved to the farmers that the old order was powerless so that farmers can now confidently support the new system, maintaining the stability of the new regime; later farmers were excluded external to guarantee "the National People's happier life". 20 years ago, some citizens were suddenly abandoned from their lifetime community due to the policy of "off the units" and to guarantee the smooth progress of reform; some citizens become "exceptive prisoners" due to their bypass petition to beg for fairness and justice. They are locked up in the illegal private prison, deprived of freedom of movement, and any slight resistance and discontent would bring the beatings and verbal abuse of the guards. However these "Black jails" manufacturing bare life come out of the "bona fide purpose of maintaining social stability" of the sovereignty which again and again manipulated people's lives and degenerate them into a valueless zombie. The most profound caution that Agamben gave us is that we should not be optimistic about complacent to ourselves in the Sanctuary as a "human" and not despise those "zombies" in great misery out of the sanctuary. To be indifferent to their plight is to be indifferent to our own potential plight, so the respect for the zombies is the respect for ourselves.

And who will be the next zombie?

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