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THE DREAM PALACES OF SHANGHAI
AMERICAN FILMS IN CHINA'S LARGEST METROPOLIS
1920-1950

by

Marie Cambon

B.A. University of Victoria, 1986

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
COMMUNICATION

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APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss the impact of Hollywood films on Shanghai culture and the Chinese film industry. American films dominated the market until shortly after the revolution in 1949. In the 1930's film production in Shanghai was influenced by the leftist movement and American films were both a target for criticism and emulation. In competition for the audience Chinese film companies faced the monopoly of Hollywood distributors as well as the popularity of American films among the audience and censorship of local films. In 1949, the Communist government took steps to replace American films with Soviet and Chinese productions but were faced with the problem of supplying the market sufficiently. As American and Chinese relations deteriorated further with the onset of the Korean War, the era of Hollywood domination in the Shanghai market finally ended. After an absence of three decades American films were re-introduced to China in the period of economic reform.

This thesis argues that the history of the Hollywood presence in Shanghai influenced the audience and the film industry in a variety of ways, often complex and contradictory. A number of issues are raised that elucidate the political, economic and cultural impact of American films in Shanghai from a historical perspective. Furthermore, it also suggests that the approach to American and other Western media in the contemporary era is reflected in the historical experience.

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access to the film archives. My thanks is also extended to other teachers at the film school whose classes I attended and who gave me a number of insights, not only about Chinese film history, but the art of cinema itself. In this respect, I must also include the valuable insights on cinematic expression from my classmate in Beijing, Michela Guberti. In addition, my thanks to Lisa Atkinson, An Jingfu, and Ruth Hayhoe for their encouragement. Finally, I want to thank my companion in China and life, Yukio Okuda, for his support and patience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	x
PREFACE: NOTES ON THE FORMAT	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
ENDNOTES: Introduction	10
CHAPTER 1	12
SHANGHAI: PARADISE FOR ADVENTURERS	12
A Chinese Modernism	13
Tradition and Change	17
A Shanghai Aesthetic	27
ENDNOTES: Chapter 1	31
CHAPTER 2	37
THE WESTERN SHADOW PLAY	37
The Rise of the Chinese Film Industry	40
The Shanghai Audience	46
Market Struggles	59
Early Film Aesthetics	66
ENDNOTES: Chapter 2	73
CHAPTER 3	86
THE POLITICS OF ENTERTAINMENT	86
The Anti-Japanese Movement	99
Resistance, Compromise and Control	104
Theatre Ownership and Distribution	119
The Audience	126
Production and Aesthetics	138
ENDNOTES: Chapter 3	153

CHAPTER 4	178
WAR, VICTORY AND REVOLUTION	178
Shanghai During the War Years	184
Victory and Civil War	186
The Liberation From Hollywood	200
The Last Picture Show	217
ENDNOTES: Chapter 4	222
CHAPTER 5	237
EPILOGUE: THE NEW CHINA MARKET	237
The Re-encounter With Hollywood	240
Political Priorities and Social Expression	243
The Rise of Commercialism	252
Entertainment and Education	255
Invasion or Inspiration	259
Tradition and the Consumer	265
The Power and the Glory	271
Revolutionary Dreams and Nightmares	279
ENDNOTES: Chapter 5	284
BIBLIOGRAPHY	294
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	308
Written Sources	312
Library Resources	317
Study in China	319
Interviews	320
Closing Remarks	323
MAJOR SHANGHAI THEATRES	325

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Map of Old Shanghai	327
Fig. 1: Hong Shen	328
Fig. 2: Xia Yan and Cai Shuxin	328
Fig. 3: Asia Theatre Staff	329
Fig. 4: Percy Chu and Zhu Manhua	329
Fig. 5: Grand Theatre	330
Fig. 6: Asia Theatre Staff and American Film Distributors	330
Fig. 7: He Tingran	331
Fig. 8: Percy Chu	331
Fig. 9: Ad for <i>Welcome Danger</i>	332
Fig. 10: Ad for Grand Theatre	332
Fig. 11: Audience at Grand Theatre	333
Fig. 12: Audience at Grand Theatre	333
Fig. 13: Nanking Theatre	334
Fig. 14: Audience at Nanking Theatre	334
Fig. 15: Roxy Theatre Staff	335
Fig. 16: MGM Shanghai Office	335
Fig. 17: Audience at Roxy Theatre	336
Fig. 18: Movie Pamphlet for <i>Bathing Beauty</i>	336
Fig. 19: Movie Pamphlet	337
Fig. 20: Audience at Roxy Theatre	337
Fig. 21: Movie Pamphlet for <i>Outlaw</i>	338
Fig. 22: Cartoon Critical of American Films	338
Fig. 23: Cartoon Critical of Hollywood	339

Fig. 24: Cartoon Critical of American Culture	339
Fig. 25: San Mao Cartoon	340
Fig. 26: San Mao Cartoon	340

PREFACE: NOTES ON THE FORMAT

With some exceptions (such as Chiang Kaishek and C. T. Hsia), Chinese names have been written throughout this paper using the *pinyin* system. The family name is given first. In the case of Japanese names, owing to the usual style that appears in English publications, the family name is written after the given name.

Article titles that appear in the text and endnotes have been written in italics. Book titles are written in bold type. All film titles are given in italics.

INTRODUCTION

And then ...opium.

The Chinese will take opium. Only a few chests at first, but the volume of trade increases at an extraordinary compound rate, much in the same fashion as the merchant's daughter, when offered her reward by the despot, in all innocence asked for a single grain of rice on the first square of the chessboard, two on the second, four on the third and...not all the granaries of the East could supply a bounty so prodigious. And thus does the trickle of opium become a torrent, such that the terms of trade are irreversibly shifted and the outflows of silver from the Empire become enormous, to the point where the currency is debased almost to the point of valuelessness and the law of Gresham, contemporary of Hawkins, begins to operate. The value of the opium imported now greatly exceeds the value of the teas exported. The British may declare the slave trade illegal in 1807 and abolish the institution of slavery in 1834 (although their cousins do not), but then who needs unwaged primary producers, who still have to be housed, clothed, cured, if necessary, and always fed, when you have a market of consumers in thrall to your product, to whom you have no responsibilities whatsoever!¹

The factor of opium has great significance in the historical process which led to the Western presence in China and the development of Shanghai as a twentieth century Asian metropolis. British opium tycoons like William Jardine and Arthur Dent left the muddy footprints of their trade on the shoreline of the Huangpu River, land which grew to support the famous skyline of the Bund reminiscent of Liverpool's Merseyside. There is something about these buildings on the Bund and their relationship to opium itself which symbolizes the dark, heavy imprint of European history in China. The thought of opium simultaneously conjures up the image of Western adventurers on rampage, making deals, buying land,

establishing for themselves an outpost of Western prosperity at the expense of wasted addicts. Opium addiction embodies the sense of dependency and false consciousness that fits neatly into the premise of Marxist theory and the notion of imperialism, as the *nadir* of capitalist development that exploits the resources of subjugated nations. What better euphemism is there for the threat to the national economy and cultural integrity that characterized Western encroachment on Chinese territory? From imported goods to Christianity, all have a place in the powerful metaphor that evokes China's experience with opium.²

The medium of film was but one of such foreign products that sought to exploit the potential of the vast "China market" which mesmerized European, American, and Japanese capitalists. Americans became the most successful purveyors of motion pictures and in the years following World War I, films produced in Hollywood began to dominate the world market. China was no exception to this development, though it was not until the 1930's that American movie studios actually set up distribution offices in Shanghai. If the success of the British in China can be associated with opium produced in India, America's success in the China market might best be underscored by the distribution of its popular culture, along with oil, cigarettes, Christianity, and education.³

Films, jazz, and dancing were probably the earliest forms of American popular culture introduced to urban areas in China, particularly in the treaty ports and Beijing where foreigners lived. With few exceptions and for a variety of reasons, American

films never gained a market away from major urban centers. Given that Hollywood grew to become a veritable dream factory in the 1920's, could not a persuasive analogy be drawn with the British opium factories in India? Both were created for the sole function of economic profit. Like opium, films act upon the consciousness and inspire dreams in the process of their consumption. And is it not possible to argue, without physiological evidence of course, that Hollywood films, once imbued, suggest a proclivity of habit that recalls the dependency of a drug?

There are few film industries in the world that can compete with Hollywood productions for box office receipts.⁴ This imbalance is in part the result of the economics and technology involved in film production. Like cheap durable cotton, American movies do indeed flood foreign markets which makes it impossible for local film industries to compete and unlike the evolution of some manufacturing industries, a situation has not yet arisen that would reverse the surplus flow of American film and television productions to other areas of the world. But the question also arises that cannot be fully explained by economic and technical factors. What else is it that gives American films their alluring qualities that attract the global audience?

Understanding the economic preeminence behind the domination of American films in international markets is important. Films however, also communicate what are recognized as cultural attributes, that is, ways of living, social values and aspirations, those qualities which a society collectively accepts as heroic and

admirable. Films are created in a fairly specific cultural and social context and they retain those features when they are sold abroad. As exports, films can function equally as economic products and as cultural windows that convey the characteristics of the society in which they were created. Yet, as in the case of American films, what are the implications for the host society when the relationship is clearly imbalanced? When exported films dominate a foreign market as part of a geopolitical economic system that allows them certain advantages then the question of "cultural imperialism" also comes into play.

The distinct *cultural* consequences of cultural or media imperialism however, are often difficult to determine. In this respect, John Tomlinson has highlighted problems with the term in his book **Cultural Imperialism**, published in 1991. He notes that the "discourse of media imperialism often tugs back to one of economic domination, in which the specific moment of the cultural seems forever to recede."⁵ To further illustrate his point, Tomlinson includes the following quote from an article on media imperialism by Fred Fejes.

While a great deal of the concern over media imperialism is motivated by the fear of the cultural consequences of the transnational media, of the threat that such media poses to the integrity and the development of viable national cultures in Third World societies, it is the one area where, aside from anecdotal accounts, little progress has been achieved in understanding *specifically the cultural impact of transnational media on Third World societies*. All too often the institutional aspects of transnational media receive the major attention while the cultural impact, *which one assumes to occur*, goes unaddressed in any detailed manner.⁶

Thus, the specificity of "cultural impact" is infinitely complex. It is my understanding that all products of inter-regional exchange carry with them cultural influences, regardless of whether the relationship is equitably balanced or not. This brings to mind products as seemingly banal as potatoes, or tea, or in the Chinese context, writing with a pen instead of a brush. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Lasek notes in her analysis of imperialism in China, the introduction of capitalism itself had important cultural consequences, as a new system of economic and social relations which expressed the need "to organize production and commerce so as to facilitate particular patterns of trade."⁷ It seems that the "cultural" in the cultural imperialism thesis has a much broader content than that which is usually discussed. The problem still remains to identify how such cultural influences manifest themselves in practise.

On the other hand, perhaps it is the metaphysical qualities of film, and by extension, other media, like television, that makes the logic of an immediate consequence on culture more tenable. Similarly, the sheer volume of American media in international markets makes it plausible to assume there are implications for local culture. In many countries, for example, the presence of American media clearly inhibits the development of audience appreciation for domestic film and television productions. In some situations, however, national or local politics are equally successful in suppressing native expression in cultural production. Paradoxically, this also can explain the allure of Hollywood films

in their chameleon-like ability to both assuage and incite dissent. Moreover, the domination of American media can also form the basis for the emergence of public debate and resistance.

Hollywood films had become part of China's urban culture by the 1920's, most notably in Shanghai, and I will confine my discussion to this particular urban environment. Although (in deference to Fejes), my research does rely heavily on anecdotal references, my emphasis will be on analyzing the role American films have played in the cultural context of Shanghai, for it is obvious they had a major cultural impact in a variety of ways. Hollywood films were a pervasive part of both consumer and film culture in Shanghai. For example, a member of the audience in Shanghai might bring along his or her tailor to cull the latest fashion off the screen and nascent film-makers would spend hours in the movie theatre to learn their craft from the newest American import.⁸ But there was as well a dimension to many American films perceived to be offensive to national and cultural dignity. By 1949, American films were deemed to be inappropriate for socialist society and were identified by many Chinese film makers and Communist Party propagandists, as "wenhua yapian", or cultural opium.

The presence of Hollywood films in China influenced the development of China's film industry intrinsically and antagonistically. Chinese films, like other film industries worldwide, drew upon the conventions of Hollywood style but there were also continuous efforts to oppose many of cultural and

ideological assumptions inherent in Hollywood films. Kirstin Thompson argues in her book **Exporting Entertainment** that "[A]lternative cinemas gain their significance and force partly because they seek to undermine the common equation of 'the movies' with 'Hollywood'." This has been and continues to be true in China.⁹

My analysis of American films in China parallels the observations of John Tomlinson who is concerned with an understanding of cultural imperialism that is not narrowly defined. To clarify his position he includes a quote from Jeremy Tunstall's book, **The Media Are American**, that says:

The cultural imperialism thesis claims that authentic, traditional and local culture in many parts of the world is being battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the United States.¹⁰

Tomlinson's reply is given in the following statement.

A better way of thinking about cultural imperialism is to think of it as a variety of different articulations which may have certain features in common, but may also be in tension with each other, or even mutually contradictory. One way of putting this is to speak of the *discourse of cultural imperialism*. To speak of a discourse rather than a thesis is to recognise the multiplicity of voices in this area and inherently "unruly" nature of these articulations.¹¹

For me the key words here are "articulations" that are "mutually contradictory" and the "multiplicity of voices". These two examples are exemplified in the history of American films in China which I have related in this paper. I believe that this experience of the past, and today, with the addition of television programs, contribute to a discourse of cultural imperialism, not a

theory. Furthermore, the situation in China is unique in that a certain period of grace existed, so to speak, when American films, like opium, were banished from Chinese soil shortly after the revolution of 1949. Unlike many other societies who experienced increased exposure to Hollywood products in the years following America's postwar economic dominance, China was exempt. This historical factor is particularly relevant when trying to understand the influence of American media after it was re-introduced to China in the late seventies and early eighties.

Although most of my research focuses on the years prior to 1949, I cannot resist the temptation to comment briefly on the contemporary aspect of China's experience with American media as a country isolated, for forty years, from the tenacious phenomenon of Hollywood. During my research in China, I also realized that a rigid adherence to the cultural imperialism thesis that defines Jeremy Tunstall's argument can be very problematic when one actually begins to question people within a cultural milieu that has been supposedly "battered" by American media. The analysis may be appropriate for certain situations but it can also be extremely presumptuous. Again, China is a particular historical situation yet I cannot forget the reaction of one elderly man I interviewed. He had been an unabashed film fan in his youth and recalled with great relish the names of past Hollywood films and stars. Annoyed finally with my needling about American films and imperialism he bellowed out, "you are far too patronizing towards Chinese and their attitude to the West." His criticism was a timely reminder of the

dangers involved in assuming that spectators are powerless victims.¹²

The change in policy that the Chinese government has had toward trade with the West and foreign investment in the last decade necessarily raises new problems for the Chinese film industry and the Chinese audience. Many of these problems, however, are the result of a historical process in which Hollywood played no part, and it is very difficult to determine how China will manage its imports of media products in the future. One can derive a certain amount of comfort in Kristin Thompson's optimism on the prospect of alternatives, for nothing can be absolute, not even Hollywood. The opium-eater, who escapes reality in a fabulous world of dreams, is never beyond salvation, to be revived and energized with new hope and convictions in following less debilitating avenues of human endeavour. For all people trying to express themselves in the face of political and cultural domination, what more vital source of strength is there than the prospect of liberation, cinematic or otherwise?

ENDNOTES: Introduction

1. Timothy Mo, **An Insular Possession** (London: Chatto and Windus, 1986), p. 24.
2. After opium was outlawed in the early part of the twentieth century, the British stopped importing Indian opium to China. Because Indian opium was considered to be of higher quality than opium cultivated in China, it was still distributed illegally, but at the same time opium production increased in China. Furthermore, its cultivation and distribution quickly became an almost exclusively Chinese operation. For more information on opium in China, see articles by: Jonathan Marshall, *Opium and the Politics of Gangsterism in Nationalist China: 1927-1945*, in **Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars**, July-Sept (1976), p. 19-48. Jonathan Spence, *Opium Smoking in Ch'ing China*, in **Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China**, eds. Carolyn Grant and Frederick Wakeman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
3. That is not to say that the Americans did not participate in the Opium trade. On a smaller scale than the British, they smuggled Turkish opium into China.
4. Of course there are exceptions to this generalization. Russia was never a prosperous market for American films until recently. At present both India and Hong Kong have film industries that successfully compete with Hollywood films.
5. John Tomlinson, **Cultural Imperialism** (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), p. 34.
6. Tomlinson, p. 36. Quoted from Fred Fejes, *Media Imperialism: An Assessment*, **Media Culture and Society**, Vol. 3 (1981), p. 287.
7. Elizabeth Lasek, *Imperialism in China: A Methodological Critique*, **Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars**, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1983), p. 53-54.
8. The example of cinema-goers bringing their tailors to Hollywood movies was told to me by my professor of Chinese film history at the Beijing Film Academy, Zhong Dafeng. The practise of Chinese film-makers going to the cinema to study the latest innovations from Hollywood was mentioned in my interviews with various people from film circles in China, as well as in written sources.
9. Kristin Thompson, **Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-34** (London: British Film Institute, 1985), p. 170.
10. Tomlinson, p. 8. The quote is taken from Jeremy Tunstall, **The Media Are American** (London: Constable, 1977), p. 57.
11. Tomlinson, p. 9.

12. Zhou Wenchang, interview, July 1991. The specific source of his outburst was my questioning the validity of his observation that American films gave the Chinese audience insight into Western science and technological development. He was speaking of science fiction films and films based on scientific themes such as *Madame Curie* and *Young Edison*. Dr. Zhou was a retired physician and presumably had greater insight into the value of these films than I did. I immediately regretted my interjection because it typified the quality of a righteous Western arrogance that often accompanies Western criticisms of Chinese society, behaviour which many Chinese justifiably find repugnant.

CHAPTER 1

SHANGHAI: PARADISE FOR ADVENTURERS

...in short, our forebears believed themselves to be the most advanced, the most civilized, and the most noble, and those farthest away from China, the Middle Kingdom, to be the most savage, the most lowly of peoples. From the Duke of Zhou to Confucius, from the Emperor Qin to Han Wu, all the way to the Qing dynasty reigns of Qian Long and Dao Guang, this view was held in all the realm, and Shanghai was no exception.¹

The site of Shanghai on the Yangtze delta was an important entrepot by the end of the Song Dynasty in the latter part of the eleventh century. Its position at the end of the trading network filtering out from the interior of China made Shanghai attractive to Europeans intent on "opening up" China for their commercial purposes. Following the first Opium War and the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, Western traders, under the auspices of the British, (and almost immediately afterwards, the French) began buying up land surrounding the walled confines of the already centuries old city. This area outside the wall grew rapidly as Chinese moved in to settle, seeking both opportunities and refuge, particularly when the Taiping Rebellion disrupted the East-China region. Soon becoming the majority, Chinese residents were not granted the same privileges as foreigners, but nevertheless, their presence in the new settlement laid the ground for the unique cultural milieu which gave rise to, as Marie-Claire Bergere suggests, "a westernized metropolis such as Shanghai on the one hand and the appearance in

Shanghai itself of a new tradition, that of Chinese modernism, on the other".²

A Chinese Modernism

The idea of modernism is usually associated with the development of new approaches to art and culture in Europe in the wake of the Industrial Revolution up to the Second World War. The debate about modernism still continues today among Western critics and scholars and it is hardly my intention here to elucidate the various arguments on what defines modernism in the Western context. Instead I have relied on a very general reading of modernism that highlights its quality of establishing a new tradition; a process which drew upon the political changes and technological advances emanating from Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their social and cultural implications.

Bergere uses the term "Chinese modernism" without elaborating on its definition in specific details. Yet it is clear from her prefix that modernism in China, whether in the past or present, cannot simply be seen as a concept borrowed from the West.³ Modernism is not the application of new techniques as much as it is a new and different way of interpreting life and reality. Changes in the Chinese intellectual tradition were certainly influenced by foreign stimuli but the reality being observed was still inhabited by Chinese people who did not *en masse* become "westernized" by moving to Shanghai. On the contrary, life in Shanghai brought new dimensions of thought framing the question "what is Chinese." The

assumption of newness which accompanies the notion of modernism depends not only on new ideas but changes in the social and physical environment which the viewer ponders, absorbs and attempts to describe and articulate in cultural behaviour. By locating "Chinese modernism" in relationship to Shanghai and its Chinese population, the idea of modernism in China is infused with specific political, socio-economic and physical conditions similar to those which spawned modernism in the West. One important feature of modernism in the West was its relation to the rapid urban development which accompanied the Industrial Revolution. A similar situation developed in Shanghai *vis a vis* other areas in China, that was accelerated by the Western focus on Shanghai as a site for trade and industry. Ultimately, Shanghai took on many characteristics that emulated urban development in the West and laid the ground, so to speak, for a metropolitan environment which cultivated new expressions of Chinese culture. Of course, Chinese urban settings had been the locale for new cultural developments in the past and the Zhejiang and Yangtze Delta region had its own traditions in painting, drama and literature that characterized an approach to life and art already quite different from more orthodox traditions to the north. However, as Raymond Williams argues in his chapter *Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism*, the urban component for cultural change and development in the West, and, I would add, China, was distinguished by a greater disparity with non-urban environments than in the past.⁴

Thus the key cultural factor of the modernist shift is the character of the metropolis: in these general

conditions, but then, even more decisively, [this factor is revealed] in its direct effects on form. The most important general element of the innovations in form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasized how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants. At the level of theme, this underlies, in an obvious way, the elements of strangeness and distance, indeed of alienation, which so regularly form part of the repertory. But the decisive aesthetic effect is at a deeper level. Liberated or breaking from their national or provincial cultures, placed in quite new relations to those other native languages or native visual traditions, encountering meanwhile a novel and dynamic common environment from which many of the older forms were obviously distant, the artists and writers and thinkers of this phase found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practise.⁵

The relevance of this observation to Shanghai is compelling. First of all, within the sharp dichotomy of composition in "immigrants", what was Chinese and what was foreign, there existed in both these categories various levels of complexity. In the case of the former, the city quickly (and continually throughout its history) became populated by groups from different regions in China, from Ningbo to the south, from the rest of the surrounding Zhejiang province and from Jiangsu. The shift of European trade from the Canton System to East China also drew traders and transport labourers from the south. Moreover, many of these regions were represented by particular social groups, such as merchants from Ningbo and Guandong province, educated classes and landholders from Zhejiang, and labourers from Anhui province and the Subei region in Jiangsu. Furthermore, to illustrate the complexity of Shanghai's immigrant profile, many immigrant groups were characterized by specific categories of social practice. In her research on labour distinctions in the Shanghai textile industry,

Emily Honig gives an indication of the social stratification based on both geographical and class origins.

Each sector of the Shanghai labour market was dominated by people from one rural area... rickshaw pullers came from certain Subei villages. Most maids were from Shaoxing and Changzhou, coppersmiths were from Ningbo, and bathhouse attendants were from Yangzhou. Subei people dominated the cotton-spinning industry, Ningbese staffed the tobacco factories, local Shanghaiese worked in the knitting mills, workers from Changzhou and Wuxi almost exclusively made up the work force of cotton-weaving factories, and workers from Zhejiang villages dominated the silk-weaving factories.⁶

The European population was similarly diverse and while not necessarily to the same extent as Chinese society, certain categories were also determined by the origins of immigrants. British, French, and Americans established communities in Shanghai, as well as Germans, Dutch, Belgians, Scandinavians, Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, and what became the largest group of foreigners by the twenties, the Japanese. Both the British and French employed subjects from their empire; Sikhs were part of the International Settlement police, and in the French concession, police were recruited from Indo-China. Indian and Middle Eastern businessmen also became prominent figures, and emigre Russians were a large presence in the decade after the 1917 revolution, as were European Jews fleeing Germany in the thirties. Similar to many the Japanese, Indian and Middle-Eastern immigrants who prospered in business, some of these European groups did well for themselves in Shanghai, though the British, French and Americans were the *de facto* ruling class. Many Russian and Jewish refugees however, lived in impoverished conditions. In any case, despite the somewhat

overworked cliché that described Shanghai as the "paradise of adventurers", the city was a unique entity as a result of its Asian and Western composition.

In addition, because of the dominance of Western political and economic control in the International Settlement and French Concession, Shanghai was subject to the influence of Western institutions and values. This ranged from political philosophy, law, education, literature and publishing to civil administration, industrial production, architecture, consumerism, fine arts, drama and other forms of entertainment. Intellectual and artistic trends emanating from Europe and America, from elite to popular culture, found their way to Shanghai, augmented by a growing number of Chinese who went abroad for study and returned to settle in an environment conducive to their ambitions and lifestyles. As Marie-Claire Bergere suggests below, Shanghai offered new possibilities for the cultivation of cultural and political expression in Chinese society.

Compared to the aristocratic Peking culture, that of Shanghai looked to its opponents like a "comprador" culture, ruled by commercial gain and foreign fashion. But in reality, it was a dynamic culture, open to new ideas and able to interest wider social groups than those comprised by the traditional educated elites, and one on to which cosmopolitan romantic or revolutionary ideas could be grafted.⁷

Tradition and Change

Since the Tang dynasty, urban culture in China had continually evolved and each development brought new cultural forms. The most obvious of these was the emergence of narratives sung and performed

on the stage during the Yuan Dynasty and popular novels during the Ming and Qing dynasty. Certainly the Tang and Yuan periods were characterized by foreign influences, which both directly and indirectly had an impact on Han Chinese culture. In the age of European imperialism, however, China, and Shanghai in particular, experienced a wash of Western culture that was itself undergoing tremendous changes. Shanghai had access to new cultural forms, like cinema, which were not developed in situ, but arrived as an utterly foreign medium. Williams cites the importance of imperialism in creating the modern metropolis, but there are two important differences in the European context. What in Europe was "the magnetic concentration of wealth in imperial capitals and simultaneous cosmopolitan access to a wide variety of subordinate cultures", was in Shanghai an imperial center perched on the very edge of a vibrant non-European tradition.⁸ First, from the Chinese perspective, European culture was not available as a mere curiosity open for aesthetic exploration; rather, it was a tidal wave of ideas and practices with political and social implications for China. Cosmopolitanism emanating from the rest of the world towards Europe was a ripple by comparison.

Second, while Shanghai was not governed by an "orthodox colonial system", like other centers in the European colonial empire, it was subject to political and economic control by foreigners where the Chinese had unequal political status.⁹ Ultimately, the inequality inherent in this relationship became the focal point of resistance. Thus, both cosmopolitanism and

imperialism and their relationship to modernism, had a heightened role in the cultural history of Shanghai. Both these factors played a much more crucial role in what might be called "Chinese modernism" than they did in the West. The foreign presence exacerbated the tension between traditionalism and cosmopolitanism on one hand, but also inspired Chinese nationalism and a commitment to regaining political control over what had once been the Chinese Empire.

Such tensions were reflected in the aspiration for national and cultural rejuvenation after the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty were defeated by the Europeans in the first Opium war of 1839 to 1842. By the twentieth century, many Chinese intellectuals looked for answers in Western ideas and knowledge, with emphasis on Western science and democratic principles. While denouncing foreign political and economic infringement in China, the intellectuals who collaborated in the May Fourth movement of 1919 voiced the slogans of "science" and "democracy" in the same breath to promote national development and social change. Yet this eruption of vigorous social criticism alone does not necessarily correspond with Marshall Berman's evaluation in **All That is Solid Melts into Air**, that "modernist culture" in non-Western societies should be seen less as Western than as the cultivation of a "critical spirit".¹⁰ It could be argued that a "critical spirit" had existed among intellectuals for centuries, but with different qualities than that which evolved in the West. To highlight the inconsistencies of government that might threaten the well-being of China was viewed as the moral

responsibility of intellectuals and was itself part of the Confucian philosophy. Although much of May Fourth thinking deplored feudal ideas associated with Confucianism, May Fourth intellectuals were emulating a vital part of that tradition.

Furthermore, to draw upon Raymond Williams' emphasis on modernism and the metropolis, it is important to clarify how the May Fourth movement played a part in creating "Chinese modernism". The movement began in Beijing and quickly spread to the rest of China. Many of the intellectuals involved in May Fourth activism, however, were persecuted by local warlord governments in the early twenties and found refuge in Shanghai's international concessions. This is not to say that the foreign administration welcomed dissidents with open arms, but Shanghai was the "other China" that Bergere describes, where a different set of judicial and commercial priorities existed. As Bergere notes, "Peking, home of the intellectual renaissance of 1915-19 was gradually deserted by its writers and academics" and the majority of them went to Shanghai.¹¹ The presence of May Fourth intellectuals in Shanghai added another dimension to Shanghai's metropolitan culture that further contributed to the emergence of Chinese modernism. The presence of intellectuals advocating political and social change was enhanced by Shanghai's similar characteristics (at least relative to anywhere else in China) of "exceptional liberties of expression" which Williams says characterized the European capitals.¹²

This complex and open milieu contrasted sharply with the persistence of traditional social, cultural and intellectual forms in the provinces and in the less developed countries. Again, in what was not only the

complexity but the miscellaneity of the metropolis, so different in these respects from traditional cultures and societies beyond it, the whole range of cultural activity could be accommodated.¹³

The "cultural activity" of the West could be, and indeed was, "accommodated" in Shanghai, but not without dissent even from those Chinese who embraced certain aspects of Western culture. This again reflects the contradictory relationship between cosmopolitanism and the foreign political and economic presence. China's encounter with the West had already entailed an important shift in geopolitical thinking. By the early twentieth century very few Chinese in Shanghai referred to Westerners as "yiren", a word with derogatory connotations meaning "barbarian tribes from the East" and part of the geographic nomenclature that was used in the past to describe China's "uncivilized" regions beyond its borders.¹⁴ When they visited Shanghai in 1832 on behalf of the East India Company, Hugh Hamilton Lindsay and Charles Gutzlaff had been offended by this reference to themselves as barbarians.¹⁵ But after the Opium War and the establishment of the treaty ports, Westerners began to be referred to as "yang ren" and the foreign enclaves in Shanghai as "yangchang." ("ren" and "chang" meaning people and place respectively). The word "yang" means "ocean" but it also connotes the idea of something vast and impressive. It came to mean something foreign, especially Western, and thereby evoked the immensity of an Empire that was not Chinese, a world dominated by European expansionists. This was something the Chinese could not but themselves appreciate:

The use of "yangchang" to refer to the foreign concessions, besides relinquishing the disdainful suggestion embodied in the word "yiren", also expressed an aspect of admiration. From the use of "yang" to mean "Westerner", the old proverb, "yang yang hu da [zai]", "something that is of oceanic magnitude," easily comes to mind.¹⁶

The word "yang", however, in describing Westerners, also took on derogatory attributes, depending upon how it was used. The varied uses of "yang" reflects the ambivalent feelings that many Chinese felt towards the intrusion of Western "civilization" on Chinese soil, and nowhere was this more visible than in Shanghai, as Nicholas Clifford suggests in his work on the foreigners in Shanghai, **Spoilt Children of Empire**.

Imagine the psychological effect of the great structures on the Bund: The banks, the shipping companies, the hotels spoke of foreign domination. The physical presence of such buildings must have been a daily affront to those who lived there, a constant reminder of the arrogance of white Shanghai.¹⁷

The prefix "yang" could refer to that which was most modern and advanced, or in derision. "Chongyang miwai", is a saying still used today to criticize "the worship of things foreign". "Yangguizi" was a term used to mean "foreign devil" and a more cutting insult to describe a comprador was "jia yangguizi", a "fake foreign devil".¹⁸ Writing in the midst of the turmoil in Shanghai following the May Thirtieth movement in 1925, Zhou Jianyun, the versatile producer of the Mingxing [Star] film company gives an indication of the frustration many Chinese felt in the trend to adopt "foreign pretensions", or "yang qi".¹⁹

There are some people who take on the style of being foreign so completely it almost seems as if they have forgotten they are Chinese. They forget their people and

their ancestors. If it is not a foreign house, they won't live in it. If it is not foreign clothing, they won't wear it. If it is not a foreign product, they won't buy it. And when they look for diversion in films, if it is not a theatre owned by a foreigner, they won't enter it. If it is not a foreign film, they won't watch it. In the end, all the profits go out of the country. There are so many of such examples, I can hardly name them all. It is like courting evil by serving the tiger [weihu zuochang] and it makes my heart sick.²⁰

The May Thirtieth movement was a vocal challenge to imperialism in Shanghai. For a brief time it united intellectuals, labourers and merchants against foreign goods and operations. It also voiced some of the tensions between a "comprador culture", under which some Chinese prospered, and the vision of nationalists. In addition, it highlighted the social reality of Shanghai that was underscored by inequality and exploitation, subjects which became important themes in cultural expression, especially literature and drama.

Literature, which had been transformed and invigorated by the May Fourth movement, was also affected by the migration of writers and intellectuals to Shanghai, many of whom explored urban themes, like Mao Dun in his examination of Shanghai bourgeois society in the novel **Midnight**, written in the early thirties.²¹ Another form that flourished in Shanghai during the early twenties and thirties was spoken drama or "huaju" modeled on Western theatre. The content was varied but often consisted of plays adopted from foreign playwrights who highlighted social and political themes. One example was Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* which was popular among university students and intellectuals for its exploration of women's independence. In addition to providing a meeting place for

progressive intellectuals from all over China, Shanghai also became the location of a lively debate on how literature should best be applied to promote social transformation. The debate was led by the writer Lu Xun, who had moved to the city in 1927.²²

Yet in addition to this very serious pre-occupation with art and life, like other metropolitan centers in Europe or America, Shanghai possessed a thriving popular culture whose focus was less political than commercial. Generally looked upon with disdain by progressive intellectuals, this facet of Shanghai's culture was also expressed in literature and drama, and ultimately, films of the 1920's. Similar to the literature of the May Fourth movement, popular forms were a hybrid of Chinese and foreign influences, but with quite different priorities, highlighting entertainment over enlightenment. In drama, this was expressed in a style of stage performances called "wenmingxi" or "new theatre" [xinwutai or xinju] as it was sometimes referred to.²³ Wenmingxi first emerged as a platform for social and political reform before and shortly after the 1911 Republican Revolution but evolved into a more commercial form of theatre in the late teens. It absorbed certain elements of Western theatre, like the use of stage props and modern costumes, as well as spoken dialogue but also adapted works based on classical themes and repertoire from Chinese operas. While some crossover occurred between practitioners of spoken dramas and the style of wenmingxi, by the 1920's the former was considered to be a more serious and progressive style of theatre.²⁴

Popular literature in the form of novels had existed in China since the Ming dynasty but new printing technologies and the development of Chinese newspapers in the nineteenth century accelerated its dissemination and development. Stories were published in newspapers and as well as journals catering to a specific genre. A variety of popular genres emerged in the twenties, among them sentimental love stories known as the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School [yuanhupai], detective stories, [zhentan xiaoshuo] and martial arts adventures [wuxia xiaoshuo]. The most prominent writer of detective stories, for example, Zheng Xiaoqing, was clearly influenced by his reading of Conan Doyle's work, but direct Western influences were less of a factor in these novels than might be said of some May Fourth literature, inspired by Russian and other European literature. By the twenties, however, popular novels were also aimed at a market that was familiar with the various expressions of Western popular culture that existed in Shanghai, including Hollywood films. Similar to the patrons of wenmingxi, the audience for popular literature consisted of the large lower and middle class segment of the population that made up Shanghai society. Usually described in Chinese sources as the "xiao shimin" [petty bourgeois] audience, they typified the market for popular culture, both foreign and Chinese, that was characterized by urban sensibilities and lifestyles.²⁵ Here again I think the relevance of Raymond William's observations on metropolitan society are clear.

Moreover, within both the miscellaneity of the metropolis, which in the course of capitalist and

imperialist development had characteristically attracted a very mixed population, from a variety of social and cultural origins, and its concentration of wealth and thus opportunities of patronage, such groups could hope to attract, indeed to form, new kinds of audience.²⁶

Thus, culture in Shanghai was distinguished by attributes that incorporated political reform, Western influences and commercialization in a more rapid and condensed process than other urban areas in China. Indeed, as a burgeoning center for cultural activity, Shanghai was contrasted with Beijing, the seat of the Manchu government and the bureaucratic literati, which gave rise to the idea of "hai pai" or Shanghai School compared to that of Beijing, or "jing pai." This nomenclature was originally used to describe different styles in painting in the late Qing era and more commonly to the changes in Beijing Opera as it became a highly popular form of entertainment in Shanghai during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.²⁷ As a more general application though, "hai pai" and "jing pai" point to two different expressions of Chinese culture. The latter, characterized by life in the capital of Beijing, was a culture of orthodoxy, conservatism and established divisions between elite and popular forms. Conversely, the "hai pai" or Shanghai school was a culture that drew upon the vagaries and challenges of metropolitan living where the commercial component in cultural production created a far larger and complex audience.²⁸

Many intellectuals who were associated with the May Fourth movement and subsequently moved to Shanghai in the 1920's criticized its urban culture for its lack of ethical standards in

behaviour, its pre-occupation with money, or its appropriation of Western features that made many expressions of culture "neither Chinese nor Western" [buzhong buxi].²⁹ Yet they were also faced with a conundrum as to what could provide an alternative to Shanghai under the present political conditions of a repressive Republican government and warlord factions. From the end of the Qing Dynasty up to the Sino-Japanese war in 1938, the lack of press freedom was far more pronounced in other Chinese regions. Lu Xun, for example, recognized that both Beijing and Shanghai had failings, but that the latter gave people greater personal and political freedom from traditional restrictions. The juxtaposition of Beijing and Shanghai only deepened the contradictions of Shanghai's urban culture; aspects of Chinese tradition were transformed in a metropolitan setting but in a process that dissatisfied many intellectuals and paradoxically engendered a kind of perverse nostalgia or yearning for something representative of a Chinese tradition that had never existed yet could possibly be created.³⁰

A Shanghai Aesthetic

The urban setting of Shanghai gave rise to literary and artistic expressions that have a cross-cultural resonance with many concurrent developments in the West. What comes to mind here is something like Andre Malraux's **Man's Fate**, that describes a Western author's perspective of an imminent uprising in the city. Indeed, Malraux is rare among Western novelists writing about Asia in that

he emphasized political qualities in place of the tendency to indulge in the "orientalism" that typifies other Western works. Yet I would rather emphasize the particular aesthetic his novel evokes, the dark, expressionist shadows of Shanghai that were similarly reflected in various examples of Chinese visual expression in the 1930's.³¹

One striking example is the versatile artistry of comic artists in journals like **Modern Sketch** [shidai manhua] and other such publications that portrayed Shanghai life and Chinese political affairs in the thirties with satirical flair. Using pen and ink drawings, photo-montage and colour reproductions, many of these illustrations are reminiscent of work by George Grosz and other caricature artists influenced by the German Expressionism and Dada movements. Yet at the same time, each cartoonist developed a particular style that became his or her trademark.³² Together with certain films that highlighted urban themes in the 1930's, these portrayals of Shanghai suggest an aesthetic parallel with the dark urban visions of Berlin, Paris and London that characterized European literature and art at different times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In Sun Yu's film *Daybreak* [tianming] for example, the robot-like procession of workers filing into the factory reflects the industrial nightmare of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* with such precision one is convinced that this was the experience of Shanghai workers and not a director playing around with imitation. Other films like *Street Angels* [malu tianshi] and *Crossroads* [shizi jietou] express

the contradictions of urban Shanghai that would be quite out of place in another Chinese setting.³³ These films took as their inspiration, foreign works, but were instilled with characteristics recognizable to Shanghai citizens not the least of which was the quality of nationalism. A film-maker could juxtapose "the great structures of the Bund" with the urban proletariat in Shanghai without having to say anything else to drive the point home. Shanghai experienced the same industrialization process that Dickens' describes in nineteenth century London. Child labour, urban squalor and the frank division between rich and poor were features which were equally relevant to Chinese intellectuals examining the urban world around them.

My point here is that these artists were not creating an image of Shanghai in a misplaced appropriation of Western styles. Rather, it was the metropolitan experience that allowed Western aesthetic influences to have as much resonance in Shanghai as any other European or North American city. This is what I understand to be the crucial relationship between Shanghai and the development of Chinese modernism which is echoed in Raymond Williams understanding of modernism in the Western context.

For it is not the general themes of response to the city and its modernity which compose anything that can be properly called Modernism. It is rather the new and specific location of the artists and intellectuals of this movement *within the changing cultural milieu of the metropolis*.³⁴ (my emphasis)

Of course, in reviewing the characteristics of modernism in China, it is very difficult for me as a Westerner to avoid certain presumptions. A Chinese viewpoint could be quite different, but to

elucidate a Chinese discourse on modernism requires a greater inquiry into the subject than I have done at this time.³⁵ When previous foreign incursions into China are discussed by Western scholars, a prevalent view is that foreign influences were always eventually absorbed and "sinified". Yet Western commentary on China's experience with Europeans often speaks of many processes as "westernization". Perhaps this is a result of the West's own "Middle Kingdom" syndrome. The process I have described was defined by the conflict and opposition towards "westernization" as much as it was influenced by Western ideas and concepts. This is, I think, the essence of what inspired the term "*Chinese modernism*" which Marie-Claire Bergere brings up so provocatively in her article. Understanding this, and its contradictory quality is important when trying to understand how American films fit into the context of the Shanghai audience and the development of Chinese cinema.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 1

1. Zhang Zhongli et al., eds. **Jindai Shanghai Chengshi Yanjiu** [Urban Research on Modern Shanghai] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Da Chubanshe, 1990), p. 938.

2. Marie-Claire Bergere, "*The Other China*": *Shanghai From 1919 to 1949*, in **Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis**, ed. Christopher Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 2.

3. From what I understand, much of the discussion on modernism in China among Western and Chinese scholars focuses on literature. With regard to the pre-1949 era, I have not read commentary on modernism in Chinese literature. However, I have taken some of my understanding of modernism in Chinese literature from Wendy Larson's article on contemporary developments, *Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-"Spiritual Pollution" Campaign in China*, **Modern China**, Vol. 15, No. 1, January (1989), p. 37-71. Despite the political and social differences between the contemporary era and the twenties and thirties, there are generalities regarding the question of modernism in China as a Western import, ie. "spiritual pollution" or as something that can express contradictions in Chinese society and be recognized as a genuine Chinese approach to literature. I would like to thank Maurice Gallant for giving me a copy of this article.

4. The development of Zhejiang province, or "Jiangnan" region in East China (Jiangnan refers to the portion Jiangsu province south of the Yangtze and northern Zhejiang) is mentioned in the discussion of Shanghai and its distinction from Beijing in the section on the "Shanghai school" [hai pai] in Zhang Zhongli et al, p. 1154. While they do not use the term "modernism", similar to William's analysis, the editors of this section do emphasize that the emergence of the "Shanghai school" as a way to describe cultural differences in Shanghai as compared to Beijing, which was characterized by urbanization on a much larger scale than what had occurred in the previous development of the Zhejiang/Jiangnan region. The "Shanghai School" is discussed in more detail below.

5. Raymond Williams, *Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism*, in his **The Politics of Modernism** (London: Verso, 1989), p. 45.

6. Emily Honig, **Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949** (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 70. Emily Honig's research has focused on Subei people in Shanghai and she has recently published a new book that chronicles the history and identity of the Subei ethnicity in **Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1850-1980** (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992). The term "subei" refers to the region of Jiangsu province north of the Yangtze River, but as Honig points

out, "[T]he name *Subei* referred to neither a city, prefecture, nor province, but to a region whose boundaries and coherence were debatable" (**Creating Chinese Ethnicity**, p. 3). Indeed, she reveals that an ethnic categorization for people from this region was created in Shanghai and the term "Subei" was a pejorative expression to describe immigrants from the northern Jiangsu region who were denigrated for their low social position and menial jobs.

7. Bergere, p. 13.

8. Williams, p. 64.

9. I take the term "orthodox colonial system" from Raymond Williams's discussion on the importance of imperialism in contributing to modernism. He uses it in the context of Europe's position as a global power and the accession of colonies by particular nations. But he also points out that colonialism abroad did not necessarily suggest that similar relationships to colonialism, albeit unorthodox, were absent in Europe (excluding Ireland of course). "Within Europe itself", he writes, "there was a very marked unevenness of development, both within particular countries, where the distances between capitals and provinces widened, socially and culturally, in the uneven developments of industry and agriculture, and of a monetary economy and simple subsistence or market forms." Williams, p. 44.

10. Marshall Berman, **All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity** (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 125.

11. Bergere, p. 12.

12. Williams, p. 44.

13. Williams, p. 44-45.

14. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 928-939. For example, people north of the border were categorized as "beidi, to the south, "nanman", to the west, "xirong" and to the east, "dongyi". One has only to look at the compound radicals making up these Chinese characters to comprehend their inner meanings, that those to the north and south are associated with animals and to the east and west, a proclivity towards war. In this instance, the ancients were certainly accurate in predicting the warlike behaviour of "the barbarians from the east".

15. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 938.

16. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 940.

17. Nicholas Clifford, **Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920's** (Hanover, New Hamp.: Middlebury College Press, 1991), p. 282.

18. Another insult directed at Chinese who had a tendency to believe in the superiority of things foreign was the expression "fang yangpi ye shi xiang" implying that such people even thought "the fart of a foreigner was fragrant."

19. The May Thirtieth movement erupted out of tensions between workers and management in Shanghai's industries. It was initiated by labour union organization among Shanghai's workers by the newly formed Chinese Communist Party. During an incident where workers were protesting management restrictions on union activity, a Japanese foreman killed a union organizer and a number of Shanghai students organized demonstrations in protest of the killing. On the afternoon of May 30, 1925 a British police chief ordered his men to fire upon a group of students protesting outside the Louza Police Station on Nanjing Road where other students were being held for their participation in previous demonstrations. A number of people were killed and the event touched off a national movement which boycotted foreign imports and companies in Shanghai and elsewhere in China.

20. Zhou Jianyun, *Wusa Canju Hou Zhi Zhongguo Yingxijie* [China's Film World After the May Thirtieth Tragedy], **Mingxing Tekan** [Star Special Issue], 27 July 1925, n. pag.

21. One of the major transformations in literature in the late teens and associated with the May Fourth movement was the use of vernacular Chinese [baihuawen] rather than the classical form [wenyanwen] that characterized refined and "serious" (as opposed to popular texts) literature in the past. Not only did this highlight the prospect of promoting a new literary consciousness among various sectors of society apart from the intelligentsia, it also emphasized a desire among May Fourth intellectuals to break away from classical themes and describe real life in, so to speak, real language.

22. Lu Xun is considered to be one of the greatest, if not the greatest, writer in Chinese modern literature. He was known for his highly critical viewpoints on Chinese society exemplified in such works as *The Story of Ah Q* [Ah Q zhengzhuàn), *A Madman's Diary* [kuangren riji] and *Medicine* [yao]. Besides fiction, he was also a prolific writer of essays, particularly during his time in Shanghai from 1927 until his death in 1936.

23. A direct translation of "wenmingxi" would be "civilized drama" but I find the translation awkward and have chosen to use the Chinese name throughout this paper.

24. My understanding of wenmingxi comes from diverse sources, but one comprehensive account is given in the section on wenmingxi (called "xinju" in the text) in Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1087-1105. Perhaps I have overlooked the presence of an equally comprehensive study of this popular theatre form by scholars in the West, but it

did not come to my attention in a cursory review of works on Chinese drama in English.

25. Material for this discussion on popular literature is from Zhang Zhongli et al. p. 1073-1087.

26. Williams, p. 45.

27. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1130-1134.

28. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1152. In addition, this section on the discussion between "hai pai" and "jing pai" makes the observation that elite traditions [ya] in Beijing were given a popular [su] quality in Shanghai, particularly in the example of Beijing Opera styles which found favour in the Manchu court and were transplanted for the public audience in Shanghai. Furthermore, the editors point out that at the height of Beijing Opera's popularity in Shanghai, the famous Tianchan Theatre had three-thousand seats. They use this example to highlight the importance of a "mass culture" [dazhong wenhua] in Shanghai's urban development, see p. 1154.

29. Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1136-1141. Here the editors refer to the controversy among writers over the respective attributes of Shanghai and Beijing [jinghai zhi zheng]. Commenting on the discussion, Lu Xun said both Beijing and Shanghai perpetuated opportunism among aspiring intellectuals, the former however depended on bureaucratic and official connections, the latter on commercial relationships, from p. 1138 and 1141. In other words, a dissatisfaction with both.

30. Lu Xun's reflections on the beneficial qualities of Shanghai in Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1150-1151. This section on "the Shanghai School" is much more comprehensive than I have described in this chapter but I have tried to highlight some of the major points. The editors touch upon a number of different subjects, from language, food, clothing, architecture to intellectual and commercial factors that can be explained as representative of "Shanghai School" characteristics. The section is very useful for identifying some of the cultural distinctions that emerged in metropolitan Shanghai.

31. Andre Malraux, **Man's Fate** [La Condition Humaine], trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Vintage Books, 1934). Andre Malraux's novel is set on the eve of the 1927 "revolution" when the Communist Party prepared for the arrival of Chiang Kaishek's troops to wrest control from the warlord governing Shanghai's Chinese territory. Labour groups were primed to participate, along with the Kuomintang support, in a general uprising. The Kuomintang however, betrayed the Communists, and a bloody purge of leftists followed. Malraux describes the events leading up to the disaster through the eyes of a Eurasian cadre who is involved in the movement.

32. These impressions come from looking at the work in **Modern Sketch** published in the mid-thirties, old editions of which I was able to buy in Shanghai. Further information on the artists and this period is found in the section on cartoon art in the thirties in Bi Keguan et al., eds. **Zhongguo Manhua Shi** [The History of Chinese Cartoon Art] (Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1986), p. 91-148.

33. For the benefit of people unfamiliar with these films I will briefly describe them here.

Daybreak (1933) describes the migration of two cousins, a young man and woman, from the countryside to Shanghai. After various difficulties in securing steady employment, the woman character (played by Li Lili) becomes a prostitute. Her cousin is arrested for his revolutionary activities and Li Lili is eventually executed for her part in rescuing him.

Street Angels (1937) is the story of a love affair between a musician in a street band (played by Zhao Dan) and a sing-song girl (played by Zhou Xuan). Zhou Xuan and her sister live with a couple who take a cut from the money Zhou Xuan earns by singing and her sister's work as a prostitute. When the couple decide to sell Zhou Xuan to be a concubine to an admiring patron, Zhao Dan and Zhou elope. Zhou Xuan's sister joins them, but dies after being knifed when the jilted patron sends the husband of the couple to track down the whereabouts of Zhou Xuan.

Crossroads (1937) is about recent university graduates who are unemployed in Shanghai because of the desperate economic conditions. The main character, (played by Zhao Dan) dissuades his landlady's demands for the rent with various excuses while one of his friends contemplates suicide. After a woman university graduate student (played by Bai Yang) moves next door, the two engage in a battle over the infringements on their privacy until they meet accidentally and, without knowing each others identity, fall in love. Bai Yang has a job in a factory and Zhao Dan finally gets a job proofreading. Eventually, Bai Yang loses her job as does Zhao Dan. In the end, they hear that their friend who has returned home committed suicide, while another classmate has joined the fight against the Japanese. The two get together with two other friends determined to build a new future together.

34. Williams, p. 44.

35. Certainly a good place to start would be with Li Zehou's book in **Zhongguo Xiandai Sixiang Shi Lun** [History of Chinese Modern Thought] (Beijing: Dongfang Chuban She, 1987). Li is a scholar associated with the Chinese Social Science Academy and his work on traditional and modern Chinese philosophical perspectives of aesthetics often came up in the film and literature classes I attended at the Beijing Film Academy. While I am familiar with some

of his arguments that juxtapose Western and Chinese philosophical traditions, I have not yet read his work.

CHAPTER 2

THE WESTERN SHADOW PLAY

Not in ancient times until today was there this curiosity, revealing the endless secrets of things. A place many ten thousands of miles away brought close at hand...one after another, all manner of forms appear, in whatever image cast, at one moment hidden, then revealed. Like a dream, yet with the realness of life, all this made to be seen.¹

Films arrived in China as "the product that comes from across the seas" [bolaipin] and since then, cinema has suffered at various times since 1949 from an association with foreign culture that made it a "suspect medium," at least through the eyes of political ideologues seeking to purge the country of foreign, and particularly Western, influences.² It is not difficult to imagine a similar reaction to the first foreign films shown in China among members of the Qing intelligentsia who saw it as another example of foreign technology arriving to hoodwink unsuspecting subjects. As Paul Clark suggests in his article, *The Sinification of Cinema*, literature, and, I would add, drama, "had antecedents centuries old" while cinema was a completely new cultural form. Furthermore, in addition to the premise behind Clark's observation that "the technical complexity of the film medium compounded its foreignness," in the early years, the setting up of venues for films in China was primarily done by foreign entrepreneurs.

The first film screenings were introduced in Shanghai as part of the Lumiere brothers' world travelling show promoting their new invention. Advertised as a "Western Shadow Play" [xiyang yingxi],

the first showing was in the city's Xuyuan gardens in 1896, and it quickly captured the imagination of the spectators.³ Following closely behind the French, an American promoter screened films from the Edison Company repertoire in 1897. More films continued to arrive featuring short pieces made up of vaudeville, dancing, and scenic clips. Film showings were purely commercial enterprises, set up in private gardens and teahouses and promoted by foreign entrepreneurs. Among them was a Spaniard named Antonio Ramos. He arrived in Shanghai in 1903 and purchased projection equipment and films from another Spanish businessman whose business in the teahouses had failed from lack of new material.⁴

Ramos exercised a shrewd showmanship to attract customers to his films at the Qing Lian Ge Teahouse on Fuzhou Road. To lure a crowd, he hired musicians, dressed them in colourful costumes, and had them perform in front of the teahouse. His shows were relatively cheap and the content varied enough to keep drawing an audience.⁵ Antonio Ramos prospered. Buoyed by his success, he began screening more films at larger venues and in 1908 constructed a building in Hongkou, the area on the north side of Suzhou Creek, with a seating capacity of two hundred and fifty.

After opening the Hongkou Theatre, as it was called, Ramos built what is considered to be Shanghai's first formal theatre, the Victoria. Also in Hongkou, at the corner of Haining Road and the North Szechuan Road thoroughfare, the Victoria was considered to be on a par with a high class bar. In the years up to 1927, when he finally returned to Spain with an accumulated fortune, Ramos built

four more theatres and effectively controlled half the cinema market in Shanghai at that time.⁶ Meanwhile, other foreigners entered the theatre business. To compete with the Victoria, a Russian with Portuguese citizenship named Hertzberg opened the Apollo Theatre in 1910. Both were situated in the Hongkou district and each had a seating capacity of approximately seven hundred. Nearby, in 1913 a British subject named Runjahn opened the Helen Theatre and, branching out to a new neighbourhood for theatre development, a Spaniard named Goldenberg (he was one of Ramos' managers) opened the Republic in the southern district [nanshiq] near the old, previously walled, city of Shanghai. Ramos' biggest competitor by the early twenties was the Russian, Hertzberg, but Ramos owned more theatres including the most luxurious one of all, the Embassy, which was built in 1914 on Bubbling Well Road in a more affluent and genteel district than Hongkou.⁷

As with most commercial enterprises in Shanghai, Chinese investors were quick to follow profitable trends. In 1917, an Italian named Enrico Lauro and a Cantonese businessman named Zheng Ziyi, both shareholders in the Helen theatre, added to the collection of theatres in Hongkou by opening the Isis with largely Chinese capital. In 1922, Goldenberg was mysteriously murdered, and the Republic Theatre was bought by another Cantonese businessman named Pan Chengbo. There is also mention of the sales agent for Ford automobiles, Lu Shoulian, opening the Hujiang Theatre in the late teens.⁸ In addition, numerous smaller theatres were started with Chinese capital in various districts and provided cinema

entertainment to audiences throughout Shanghai.⁹ Film screenings also took place on a sporadic basis in tents and on lawns outside during the summertime and the entertainment centers in Shanghai such as the Great World [da shijie] often showed films along with drama, opera, and acrobatic venues.¹⁰ Certainly by the twenties, the number of Chinese investors opening theatres increased as the popularity of film grew, but a more intense struggle for ownership over theatres and distribution began with the creation of a domestic film industry. Concurrent with this development, increasing numbers of Chinese financiers became involved in theatre investment.

The Rise of the Chinese Film Industry

Chinese film historians have found a variety of implications in the fact that the first film produced by Chinese film-makers was of a traditional opera, *The Battle for the Dingjun Hills* [dingjunshan], performed in Beijing by the famous Beijing Opera virtuoso, Tan Xinpei. Proprietors of the Fengtai Photo Studio borrowed equipment from a German businessman and filmed Tan's performance outdoors.¹¹ The historian Cheng Jihua, whose two-volume **History of Chinese Film Development** chronicles the era up to 1949, infers that this pioneering effort in the new technology, by filming a traditional cultural form, re-affirmed the recognition of Chinese tradition.¹² A younger film scholar, Ma Junxiang, gives another perspective. Ma argues that the inability of Chinese cinema

to develop as a "vanguard" of exploration with the new medium is rooted in these earliest beginnings.

The first film to come into being in China however, did not look to probe the mysteries of the real world, or use film to create another world of dream-like fantasy. The camera was merely placed and aimed at a traditional artistic form, rashly abandoning any effort to seek other possibilities of creating a new form of artistic expression and became simply a recording mechanism of another art form.¹³

Ma feels this oversight limited the capacity of Chinese film to develop both as a new medium of expression and as a commercial product to compete with innovations in foreign films. In a more pragmatic analysis, another viewpoint suggests that the Feng Tai Studio's foray into film-making was more closely associated with their business in still photography, a lucrative side of which was the sale of photographs featuring famous Beijing Opera performers. The geographical location of this first experiment may also have been significant. As the film historian Li Shaobai and his colleagues suggest in an article, "Beijing was the capital of three successive dynasties, and compared to places like Shanghai, Canton, and Tianjin, it was relatively conservative in the acceptance of foreign forms. In the end it was perhaps more by chance that Beijing was the site of China's first film production".¹⁴

In fairness to all these speculations, the obstacles facing prospective Chinese film-makers were practical as well as ideological. Shanghai was a more likely setting to acquire capital, equipment, and technical expertise. The first production companies all started with foreign input. In 1909 the Asia Film Company, initially formed by an American named Benjamin Polaski, was later

sold to the American managers of the Nanyang Insurance Company.¹⁵ They in turn invited a young acquaintance named Zhang Shichuan to produce Chinese features. Zhang Shichuan had no previous experience with films or theatre, but he was the head of the advertising department of an American firm and presumably, from this standpoint, was interested in the prospect of film production.¹⁶

To compensate for his lack of experience Zhang enlisted the help of Zheng Zhengqiu, a theatre critic associated with "new theatre", or "wenmingxi."¹⁷ In a collaborative venture, the Asia Film Company provided the equipment while Zhang and Zheng, under the name of the Xinmin [new people] Company, were free to develop scripts and direct. After producing a few films however, the lack of capital and the outbreak of World War I forced the company to close. The latter event was significant because they relied on German film stock. Nevertheless, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu's partnership persevered and they created the Mingxing [Star] Company in 1922.¹⁸

During this time another Chinese film company formed under the auspices of the well-known Commercial Press Publishing House.¹⁹ In 1917, an American who had come to shoot footage in China ran into difficulties and sold his equipment to Xie Binglai, the head of Commercial Press's Communications Department. The company then hired a student recently returned from studying in America to film local news events. Jay Leyda suggests that one of their early films, *The End of the Work Day at Commercial Press* [shangwu yinguan fangong], can be seen as "an innocent publicity echo of Lumiere's

first program".²⁰ Indeed, these early films produced by the Commercial Press were the first of what was to become a long tradition of documentary film-making in China. To expand its operations, the Commercial Press sent representatives to Europe and America to learn more about film production and in 1919 their camera supplies were supplemented by a gift from Hollywood's Universal Film Studio. A crew came to take footage in China and left their equipment with the Commercial Press company, who had helped the Americans arrange their trip in China.²¹

The Commercial Press Film Division built studios and concentrated on making educational, scenic, and news documentaries. In 1920 they also produced two Beijing Opera films, (singing was replaced by subtitles) starring the famous performer, Mei Lanfang. Despite the company's early successes, however, documentaries were not as profitable as feature films. They subsequently began producing films under the name of the Guo Guang Company but like many film companies at that time they were unsuccessful and stopped film production altogether in 1927.²²

The history of these early production efforts reveals the close association of Chinese film production with foreign businesses and contacts. Besides the names I have mentioned, people such as Enrico Lauro and Antonio Ramos were involved in Chinese film production as well as the theatre business. For example, besides Lauro's role as a cinematographer, Ramos also had a glass studio where many early Chinese productions were filmed. In the early twenties however, a wider interest in film developed

among Chinese financiers and entrepreneurs after the success of Zhang Shichuan's Mingxing Company production of *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* [guer qiu zu ji] in 1923. It attracted speculators who had failed in Shanghai's stock exchange and were looking for new investment opportunities in the burgeoning financial activity of this period. Film companies were formed overnight and by 1925 there were approximately one hundred and forty film companies registered in Shanghai alone though only a fraction of these actually produced films on a sustainable basis.²³

Throughout the twenties, the most successful companies were Mingxing, Da Zhonghua Baihe, and the Shaw brothers' Tian Yi. The repertoire included comedies, family dramas, love stories (after the manner of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School), detective stories, martial arts, and classical costume dramas. In their cinematic transformation, some of these works were inspired by American films, especially comedies, Westerns and detective films. In making the crossover to film, genres popular with the public from commercial literature created an audience for Chinese films. In addition, the legacy of wenmingxi had a tremendous influence on early film production; most of the writers and actors in early film production were associated with wenmingxi; as it was not a particularly refined form of theatre, its peculiar synthesis of Chinese and Western tradition was somehow appropriate for the equally unrefined practise of film-making at that time.²⁴

One interesting outcome of the relationship of wenmingxi, and indeed the development of Chinese film was the appearance of women

performers. In films, despite the presence of women actors as early as 1913, men still played female roles during the twenties, which had been the norm in wenmingxi which followed the practise of using male performers for female roles in Chinese traditional drama.²⁵ As more and more women performers appeared on the screen in Chinese productions their roles were accepted and, in fact, women actors were the first "movie stars" in China. According to Hu Die, who began her career in films in the mid-twenties, many performers in film were from the southern province of Guangdong. She suggests this was because people from Guangdong province were more open to foreign influences and less bound by traditional restrictions that might discourage individuals, particularly women, from other regions.²⁶ In any case, the success of Mingxing's production of *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple* [huoshao honglianshi] in 1928, caused an upsurge in the production of martial arts films and brought an unexpected dimension to women's roles. The genre regularly featured female martial arts fighters flying through the air and confronting villains with flair and daring equal to their male counterparts.²⁷

Thus, after a number of false starts, Chinese films made their explosive entrance into Shanghai theatres. Up to this time, the main films were foreign and most of these were American. After the exhilaration of seeing moving pictures for the first time had worn off, going to movies became a pastime and a prominent entertainment feature of Shanghai's popular culture. In this process, however, some distinct differences developed among audience tastes for Chinese films. Certain films became box office hits on the basis of

stories whose themes were quickly imitated, then flogged to exhaustion by overproduction. In the end, and for a number of reasons, the Chinese audience was far more critical of local productions in the twenties than they were of American imports.

The Shanghai Audience

Discussing the cinema audience of the early era is difficult because of the lack of material that relates directly to the subject and the lack of people still alive who are old enough to remember their impressions as early movie-goers. I was only able to interview a handful people who went to see American films in the early twenties. Consequently, much of my interpretation is extrapolated from sources that indirectly touch upon the response of the audience in this period.

The response to early film showings in China suggests that historical and geographical factors must be taken into account, factors which are revealed in the different commentary about the phenomenon of film in treaty ports like Shanghai compared to Beijing. One analysis suggests that society in Beijing, by the nature of its experience with European troops invading the city and the longstanding status of Beijing as a political and cultural center in China, was less enthusiastic in embracing the new "western toy."²⁸ In reference to a Beijing report, one article mentioned complaints of "eye strain" perhaps exacerbated by poor print quality, and the suspicion that films might be "a way for Westerners to garner the best of Chinese eyes and blind them" by

repeated exposure to movies.²⁹ In short, these historical vignettes suggest that while the less sophisticated patron might well have enjoyed the spectacle of film in Beijing, the city's "aristocratic culture" was not initially impressed.

Films came to Beijing in 1902, six years after Shanghai, and there were some ominous incidents in the two attempts to show films in the Imperial Palace. In 1904, a film screening arranged by foreign emissaries to celebrate the seventieth birthday of the Empress Cixi was deemed inauspicious when the projector exploded. In 1905, another explosion occurred in similar circumstances, gravely injuring the translator. Films were banned from the Palace until Emperor Pu Yi became a teenager. By 1909 films had become somewhat popular with the public in Beijing, but not to the same extent as in Shanghai, Tianjin and Canton.³⁰

The development of a cinema audience was more successful in places where contact with Western business and culture was more immediate. Commentary on films had already become a regular part of Chinese newspapers and magazines in Shanghai by the mid-teens. One publication introduced the life and times of Mary Pickford to the reading public, beginning what was to become a long relationship of Shanghai cinema-goers with American movie stars. In conjunction with the nascent film industry, journals devoted to film were published in the early twenties in an attempt to bring serious inquiry to the study of film. These publications, along with newspaper reviews and advertising marked the emergence of an established film culture in Shanghai.³¹

In the early twenties, Shanghai was a city of approximately one million Chinese. They constituted the main film audience, far outnumbering foreigners. Although foreign films overwhelmed the number of local productions, the situation for distribution and screening rights appeared to be more flexible than later on when the major American studios established distribution offices in Shanghai. In spite of the imbalance, Chinese films were very popular in the silent era.³² Chinese productions were a welcome development for viewers unfamiliar with English, who might have had difficulty comprehending films with complicated plots.³³ There were also members of the audience who simply preferred something Chinese as opposed to foreign. For example, Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Mack Sennet, and Harold Lloyd comedies had wide appeal among the general cinema-going population, but audience tastes also differed with respect to literary adaptations and historical epics, depending perhaps on the familiarity of the viewer with Western literature and history.³⁴

These distinctions can also help explain the success of the Shaw brothers' Tian Yi Company productions of classical costume dramas. In upholding a traditional approach to story telling and its incumbent values, already under attack by Western influences and the reform in literature inspired by May Fourth intellectuals, Tian Yi was able to satisfy a more conservative segment of the audience.³⁵ The rejection of China's feudal culture by May Fourth thinkers was not necessarily shared by everyone, even in "cosmopolitan" Shanghai. Indeed, this was an aspect of Shanghai's

"semi-colonized, semi-feudal" existence that many intellectuals found so abhorrent. Yet many people also saw Chinese films as being of a lesser quality or less interesting than American films, and perhaps many people, like one man I interviewed, simply refused to watch Chinese films.³⁶ My impression of the audience in the twenties is that it sought entertainment in both Western and Chinese cinema, depending on individual tastes and values.

Discussing the characteristics of any audience is extremely complex, but a few generalizations might tentatively be made for Shanghai. Chinese sources on the audience in the twenties frequently (and often disparagingly) refer to it as composed of "xiao shimin", or the petty bourgeoisie. This could represent a wide variety of people ranging from shop owners and clerks, company employees and bureaucrats and other people of modest income, not to mention various facets of Shanghai's gang-related underworld. It is very difficult to know what percentage of women made up the audience, but a Qing decree in early 1911 stipulated that cinemas provide separate seating for female patrons. Obviously some women went to the movies.³⁷

Most of the people I interviewed only became active film-goers in the thirties but their comments reflect the nature of Shanghai's film audience. Most of them could be considered "middle class", (many of them were students at the time) or "xiao shimin". Invariably, when I would ask them what type of people went to see American films, the most frequent answer was that labourers or workers from Shanghai's mills and factories were not part of this

audience. American films were too expensive, many theatres had dress codes, and workers preferred the entertainment centers and operas associated with their native place.

All this must be clarified. Especially in the twenties, American films were shown in a variety of different theatres catering to audiences of different income levels. There were first, second, and by the thirties, even third and fourth-run venues for American features. Although theatres were more numerous in central Hongkou and the department store district on Nanjing Road, between the Bund and the racetrack, there were also theatres in the working class districts of Zhabei and Yangshupu. American films may have been culturally alien to some, but I suspect the cinema audience in general was more diverse than it appears in historical memories.³⁸

One aspect of such diversity is revealed in Elizabeth Perry's study of workers in Shanghai's silk mills. Although she focuses on the 1930's, my point is to reflect the complexity of an audience if we are to designate its composition by social class. Perry makes a distinction between "traditional" and "modern" weavers. The former, having lost their livelihood with the demise of handicraft weaving in the countryside, were forced to seek jobs in the Shanghai mills. They came from particular rural areas surrounding Hangzhou and Huzhou in northern Zhejiang province and Suzhou in southern Jiangsu. It is probable that they had neither the income nor the inclination to seek entertainment in expensive movie houses. A similar situation existed for Subei women from northern Jiangsu province who came to work in the cotton mills. In her study of

Subei women, Emily Honig noted that on "rest days most workers went to hear Subei opera [huaiju] at places like the Great World in the Yangshupu Mill district."³⁹

The groups Perry categorizes as "modern" weavers, however, also came from the Zhejiang countryside but usually had more formal education and their "move to Shanghai was a form of upward mobility."⁴⁰ Known as the "labour aristocrat," or "guizu gongren," their taste in entertainment differed from the "traditional" weavers.

Differences in native place, educational level, and employment conditions were also reflected in the popular culture of these two groups of Shanghai silk weavers. The young, securely employed literates from eastern Zhejiang prided themselves on being sophisticated urbanites, fully attuned to the ways of the big city. When they had saved up some money, they spent it on the accoutrements of a "modern" lifestyle: Western clothing, leather shoes, trolley rides, movie tickets, foreign food. These young weavers were seldom religious, and their friendship and mutual-aid clubs were not of the traditional secret-society or sworn brotherhood sort. Marriages among them were rarely arranged by family heads back in the countryside; instead theirs were often love matches with a simple wedding ceremony, or no ceremony at all for those who preferred the cohabitation popular among the Shanghai students they so admired.⁴¹

The location and standard of theatres probably contributed to defining the audience as much as the films themselves. Antonio Ramos had the market cornered at both ends. His Victoria Theatre was plush and formal, and, like other theatres considered to be the best in Shanghai, an orchestra played during intermission as well as providing the soundtrack. Ticket prices in these theatres were more expensive. Ramos' original venue, the Hongkou, was considerably more spartan and cheaper while his Embassy Theatre

catered to a wealthier clientele.⁴² Competing with the Embassy in luxurious accessories, the Carlton Theatre had an enviable location across from the racetrack. It was built in 1923 and was owned by Marshall Sanderson, an Englishman whose China Theatre company had an extensive network of theatres in north China.⁴³

Mr. Guo, the man who never went to Chinese movies, remembers as a young man of twenty going to see D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (starring Lillian Gish) when it played at the Hongkou Theatre. He recalled that the bars on the ticket window were broken because of the crush of the crowd and said that was when he knew films had become very popular. Mr. Guo said he started going to movies in his teens, in the area where he grew up around Hongkou. While his family was of modest means, (his father was a captain's cook in the US Navy) his friends all went to foreign schools and he learned some English from them. His earliest memories of films were those with Charlie Chaplin, Eddie Polo and Fatty Arbuckle. He himself was a great admirer of Douglas Fairbanks, Clara Bow and other American movie stars of that era.

Chinese film production, however, was not held in high repute among intellectuals in Shanghai.⁴⁴ Indeed, Hong Shen, a playwright active in theatre circles and who had studied at Harvard, confronted this prejudice early on. When he began to write screenplays he was accused of "prostituting his art".⁴⁵ Like a few of his contemporaries, Hong Shen saw the importance of film as an educational medium that could uplift social consciousness, an opinion that many of his colleagues could not appreciate. One

exception was Hong's fellow writer and dramatist, Tian Han, who was inspired by the imaginative qualities of film, which he likened to the power of dreams. At that time Tian was deeply influenced by the aesthetic theories of the Japanese writer Junichiro Tanizaki who had published an essay on film that observed, "no matter how vulgar or absurd, the story, once it is portrayed on film becomes a wonderful and fantastic illusion."⁴⁶ Tian Han wrote his own rendition in a work titled, *The Silver Dream* [yinse de meng], but he later criticized these influences after becoming involved in leftist politics.⁴⁷

A public awareness of the potential depravity of film entertainment was awakened in 1921 after a film version was made based on a murder case that had occurred the year before and had already played successfully on stage in the wenmingxi style. The film *Yan Rui Shan* described the events leading up to the murder of a prostitute, the grisly act itself, and the pursuit and final execution of the murderer.⁴⁸ The screening of the film resulted in a public outcry by educators and members of the middle class. Both the Jiangsu Provincial Education Committee and the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce called for a banning of the film since its content was seen to be harmful to society because of its depiction of a violent crime. In addition, its phenomenal success at the box office alarmed citizens concerned about social stability in the context of the growing influence of gang elements in Shanghai society. Nevertheless, the film continued to do well at Ramos' Embassy Theatre and inspired a number of imitations. Despite the

highlighting of different themes in films throughout the twenties the stature of Chinese film among most intellectuals remained low until the early thirties.⁴⁹

The same was not necessarily true for American films. Lu Xun, who lived in Shanghai from 1927 until his death in 1936, was also an avid filmgoer and is said to have remarked that, "My only entertainment is watching films and it is a pity there are not better ones."⁵⁰ Out of the one hundred forty three films he is said to have watched, most of which were in the thirties, one hundred twenty-one were American. If these numbers reveal anything, it is certainly that Lu Xun kept meticulous notes on his visits to the cinema. He particularly enjoyed documentaries but also liked Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy comedies, American detective films and Hollywood musicals. He was less fond of literary adaptations because he felt they were disappointing compared to the original.⁵¹ With regard to Chinese films Lu Xun caustically criticized the actors in Tian Yi's classical costume dramas as "half-dead like the ancients themselves" but he also saw the importance of film in its cultural and communicative implications and once made the comparison of the Americans dumping old films on the Chinese market like the way Western nations off-loaded old weapons in China.⁵²

During the twenties, films were not influenced by the sweeping changes brought to other cultural forms, especially literature, by the May Fourth movement. On one hand, this characteristic is perplexing because many of the people involved in film production were clearly not outside the movement's sphere of influence. Yet

the film industry in Shanghai could not shake off its association with wenmingxi or what were considered by many intellectuals to be old-fashioned and insidious cultural values. Ke Ling, in his article outlining the relationship between the May Fourth movement and Chinese Cinema, mentions the example of how explanatory pamphlets for Chinese and foreign films, as well as subtitles, were written in the classical style. This further reflected that film companies were not aligned with May Fourth values that advocated vernacular writing. Ultimately it was not until the thirties that the some of the critical spirit of May Fourth penetrated the consciousness of Chinese film production and films became more accepted by intellectuals.⁵³

Similarly, the development of the Chinese film industry and its exploration of different themes reveals another dimension in the complexity of the audience during the twenties. At the instigation of Zhang Shichuan, no doubt due to his preference for American films, Mingxing's first efforts at production tried to imitate the successful American comedies. They hired a British actor, Richard Bell, to play Chaplin in *The King of Comedy Visits China* [huaji dawang youhua ji].⁵⁴ But such attempts to incorporate Hollywood-style comedy in a Chinese setting did not win the hearts of the audience. Commenting on one of the few films that survives from that period, *The Love Story of Lao Gong* [lao gong zhi aiqing], Ma Junxiang says that it reflects Zhang Shichuan's abilities as an innovator before his time but that the humanism and satirical qualities of *Lao Gong* were unacceptable to Chinese film-goers.

First of all, its production quality was not as polished as American comedy films, with the latter's greater capital expenditure and experience in production. More telling perhaps is that "Chinese feudal tradition" and "traditional morality" limited the audience's ability to appreciate Western style slapstick and satire in the Chinese context. In other words, what might have been acceptable to a Chinese audience in an American film had different implications in a local production.⁵⁵

For film scholars who share Ma's viewpoint, this limited vision is seen to have led inexorably to an emphasis on morality and melodrama in Chinese cinema that has continued to contemporary times most notably, for example, in the films of Xie Jin.⁵⁶ Zhang's failure to seduce the audience in these early productions prompted Mingxing to utilize Zheng Zhengqiu's keen appreciation of the audience as seen in the more profound theme of filial piety triumphing over evil in *Orphan Rescues Grandfather*. To some extent, Zheng emulated May Fourth values in his concern for various social issues, particularly the oppression of women in feudal China, but his social criticism was contained within a more traditional framework. Discussing Zheng's approach, Zhong Dafeng suggests that Zheng sought to educate the audience and criticize feudal ideas but that he emulated a reformist and democratic outlook associated with the 1911 Republican Revolution which was less radical than the calls for change advocated by May Fourth intellectuals.⁵⁷ Furthermore, others have suggested that Zheng's use of a foreign

medium to express this tradition was not accompanied by a desire to imitate Western styles.

Zheng Zhengqiu, in creating for film, did not follow the pattern of Western feature films, but drew lessons from the traditional Chinese characteristics of staged drama and formed his own personal style.⁵⁸

In any case, because of the success of *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* at the theatres when it played in 1923, Zheng Zhengqiu's style became Mingxing's trademark for a number of years.

The production of a comic genre was not successful in these early years and, with a few outstanding exceptions, the comic presence is sadly lacking in the rest of China's film tradition up to contemporary times. On the other hand, detective stories that were also modeled on American films were popular, but they had additional assistance from the reading audience who was familiar with the genre.⁵⁹ The film company, Da Zhonghua Baihe, which produced many of these films, was also successful with love stories set in the urban setting of Shanghai, complementing the popularity of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School love stories in popular literature. Similarly the rise of martial arts films in the later twenties was closely tied to the same genre popular among readers, but is also said to have been inspired in part by Hollywood Westerns.⁶⁰ In summary, it appears that certain Western influences were incorporated and successful in Chinese films, while others were not.

The correspondence between the reading audience for popular novels and viewers for Chinese films has been mentioned in many different sources. One example is the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly

School which Paul Pickowicz refers to in his article *The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930's*. He argues that the Butterfly genre carried over to certain films in the 1930's "to explore the controversial issue of spiritual pollution in ways that were familiar to readers of late-Qing and early Republican popular fiction."⁶¹ He goes on to suggest that the threat to traditional culture from Western influences, ie. spiritual pollution, appealed to "an audience whose fears and frustrations were not being addressed by May Fourth-style fiction."⁶² Disregarding for a moment the premise of anti-Western feelings he highlights in his essay (of which I am not entirely convinced), what may have been true for the thirties was even more apparent in the 1920's. The audience for popular fiction was drawn to the replication of these genres in Chinese cinema and this is what sustained film production during this era.

Yet it is also apparent that some Mandarin Duck and Butterfly fiction expressed its own critique of feudal ethics particularly with respect to love and marriage, albeit in a less direct manner than May Fourth writers. It is more difficult to say how much of this was because of Western influences or simply the continuation of a critique of the feudal restrictions on romantic relationships between men and woman that had been part of Chinese literary and dramatic repertoire for centuries. I would suspect it to be a combination of both. Furthermore, Zhong Dafeng illustrates how Zheng Zhengqiu chose to adapt many stories from the Butterfly genre to disseminate his views on the oppression of women because he knew

the novels had popular appeal. Zheng selected writers and works which he felt had social significance, but, again, neither his approach nor his own ideological outlook mirrored the more radical or revolutionary beliefs of May Fourth intellectuals.⁶³

Market Struggles

The particular tastes of the Shanghai audience notwithstanding, another major problem for Chinese production was securing venues to exhibit their films. Antonio Ramos was an astute businessman and he was certainly not adverse to catering to Chinese tastes if it were profitable. Besides exhibiting the premiere showings of Chinese films at his Embassy Theatre on Bubbling Well Road, the same venue was used for Kunju opera performances and attracted an audience who appreciated its classical style.⁶⁴ The famous Beijing Opera star, Mei Lanfang, also performed at the Embassy. Yet, at the same time, the reliance on foreign theatre owners like Ramos put Chinese producers at a disadvantage. In the spring of 1925, the Mingxing Company converted an old stage play theatre into the Palace Cinema and began showing their own productions as well as those of other Chinese companies.⁶⁵

Mingxing's purchase of the Palace Theatre sparked a development in the Chinese film industry which coincided with a growing political movement against imperialism and warlord factionalism, the antecedents of which came from the May Fourth movement of 1919. As I described in Chapter One, the May Thirtieth movement of 1925 galvanized into a nationwide boycott of foreign

goods after a series of events in Shanghai. The protest had little effect on the thematic content of Chinese films, but the concurrent uproar over foreign imports and the targeting of foreign-owned operations by protestors affected foreign-owned theatres. According to one account, the popularity of foreign films temporarily diminished as well.⁶⁶

Prior to these events, foreign producers were aroused by the success of *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* and the potential of a new market. Consequently, some foreigners attempted to make films in Chinese using Chinese performers. This development was an additional threat to Chinese companies who were already overwhelmed with the competition from foreign film imports. The owner of the Helen Theatre, Mr. Runjahn, began a company called the China Film Production Company and another company was formed with American investment called American Oriental Pictures. None of these were successful, however, and Cheng Jihua cites the failure of these "conspiracies" as due to poor production quality, their derogatory portrayal of Chinese, and the growing political consciousness of the audience in the midst of labour movements.⁶⁷

One interesting development in this trend was the involvement of the British-American Tobacco Company (B.A.T), especially since it became a major target of opposition during the May Thirtieth protests. B.A.T.'s production and marketing of cigarettes was among the most successful American commercial ventures in China.⁶⁸ Company agents had exploited the potential of advertising in China in the early 1900's and they were also aware of the potential of

film and the growing audience in urban areas. In 1923, they established a film department headed by a British cinematographer, William H. Jansen, and made advertisements, (distributed free to theatres) as well as various shorts featuring scenery, news, and "the social gatherings of beautiful women."⁶⁹ Reference to B.A.T.'s tobacco products were included in these vignettes. As a multinational with a large capital base, they had advantages over other foreign film companies trying to produce in China and decided to make feature films. Their failure at the box office was again attributed to the derogatory portrayal of Chinese in these productions, but this was not to be the end of B.A.T.'s foray into the world of Chinese cinema.⁷⁰

Described as an even more pernicious campaign to monopolize the Chinese film industry was B.A.T.'s attempt to control the theatres. While there was indeed an attempt to purchase theatres in Shanghai, the theatres B.A.T. actually bought were hardly among Shanghai's finest.⁷¹ The fact that B.A.T. bought theatres has, I think, led to some misconceptions. Quoting Cheng Jihua's book on Chinese film history as his source, Sherman Cochran, in his analysis of the cigarette industry in China, says that "according to a critique of B.A.T.'s motion picture operation by Chinese journalists in the mid-1920's,

the company directly or indirectly controlled so many of China's approximately one hundred movie theatres at the time that it determined the fate of the entire Chinese film industry because it was able to dictate whether any film would or would not be widely shown."⁷²

Throughout his book, Cheng Jihua has moments of hyperbole and this is one such example. First of all, I think some of B.A.T.'s motives may have been exaggerated by "Chinese journalists" in the heightened emotional atmosphere of the May Thirtieth movement. Cochran also mentions the Peacock Motion Picture Company run by a former director of B.A.T., James Thomas, which was a distributor of American films, but it did not own any theatres until 1927 when it purchased the Palais Oriental on Joffre Road.⁷³ Screening rights could be decided by the distributor, but the atmosphere in the twenties, with all the various interests involved, was not as restrictive as it later became.

On the other hand, a curious twist to this story reveals, as does Cochran, that B.A.T. did indeed take the May Thirtieth movement seriously. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to talk with a former accountant of B.A.T., Mr. Sun Danren. Mr. Sun cleared up a mystery for me surrounding the Odeon Theatre on North Szechuan Road which I had understood to be vaguely associated with the B.A.T. corporation. The Odeon, a plush and luxurious theatre with sixteen hundred seats, started under the auspices of the Yongtaihe Tobacco Company and held the rights to show Paramount pictures. It opened in October 1925, with *Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall*, starring Mary Pickford, four months after the May Thirtieth incident. As Mr. Sun told me, the Yongtaihe Tobacco company was really a subsidiary of B.A.T., which held most of the shares in the company. In order to keep a low profile in the anti-foreign atmosphere of 1925 none of this was public knowledge.⁷⁴ The Odeon

was seen to be a joint venture between American and Chinese interests. The head of Yongtaihe was Zheng Bozhao, who was an associate of B.A.T., but Mr. Sun says the staff at the Odeon were not aware of the direct company share in the theatre, and neither apparently, were Chinese journalists.⁷⁵

Mr. Sun felt that it was not a case of public pressure thwarting B.A.T.'s interest in theatres or film production but that the company's film bureau was dissolved because a new manager was hired who was not interested in film production. He added that Zheng Bozhao became disenchanted with investment in theatres, though he must have reconsidered because two branch theatres of the Odeon were opened in the 1930's, the Broadway Theatre in the Yanshupu district and the Strand Theatre in the downtown core near the department stores.⁷⁶ Perhaps this could have been another attempt by B.A.T. to control theatres, and Mr. Sun's memory, at the age of ninety, might have been less than crystal clear on this point. In any case, the Odeon Theatre was bombed in the 1932 Chinese skirmish with the Japanese, (Could this have been the reason for Zheng Bozhao's disenchantment with the cinema business?) and the Strand ironically became a first-run theatre for Mingxing productions in 1933.⁷⁷

The struggle with B.A.T., however, riled the passions of many in the Chinese film industry, one among them being Zhou Jianyun, the erstwhile producer of Mingxing. In conjunction with Zhang Shichuan, Zhou had a strong vision for Chinese film and was vocal in his criticism of the Chinese audience in the mid-twenties. From

an article he published in 1925 in the Mingxing Company's journal, it is clear that the issue of foreign ownership of theatres, such as the case of Ramos, was recognized by the cinema-going public after the May Thirtieth incident. Yet it was also evident that the audience was not necessarily clear about the details. Zhou chastised film-goers who continued to throng to a certain Chinese-owned theatre in Hongkou which refused to show Chinese pictures. My first reaction to this statement was that he must have been referring to the Odeon, but the Odeon opened in October 1925 and Zhou's article was published in July.⁷⁸ No doubt fearing libel, neither the theatre or the theatre owner's name was mentioned. Even B.A.T. was referred to as "a certain foreign tobacco company." Zhou's tone suggests that the Chinese spectator, though gripped by admirable patriotic intentions, was missing the point. He bemoaned the lack of consciousness among the audience in failing to support Chinese films, even with the efforts of the May Thirtieth movement.⁷⁹

Zhou Jianyun was a maverick and highly praised in mainland sources, despite his capitalist leanings. There is another possibly more objective account of Zhou in Du Yunzhi's history of Chinese film published in Taiwan. Zhou was a passionate believer in Chinese film and strove to promote and improve its standards as an educational and communication medium with social and cultural value. However, he was also a businessman. While he may have railed against the foreign infringement on local production and the lack of consciousness among the film-going public, he also competed

fiercely with the Tian Yi company operated by the Shaw brothers. In 1928 Zhou created an amalgamation of six companies, called the United Six Company [liuhe gongsi] to strengthen distribution among Chinese production companies. In conjunction with this, the Mingxing Company had acquired all of Ramos' theatres, except for the Embassy, after he returned to Spain in 1927. To compete with Tian Yi, Zhou also used the United Six strength to imitate Tian Yi films under the name Yi Tian to confuse the audience as well as to try to encroach on the large presence of Tian Yi productions in the Southeast Asian market. Discussions in mainland texts describe the "United Six" more in the order of a "united front against imperialists," but Du is more extensive in his explanation. As he puts it, Zhou, in focusing upon the struggle with Tian Yi,

forgot about the reasons for organizing the "United Six" group, which was to unite all the companies to "improve the standard of Chinese films [guopian]. Now, in fighting for the market and scrambling to imitate Tian Yi films, it all became pure commercial competition and had nothing to do with improving the standards of Chinese films.⁸⁰

According to Du, the end result of this effort was "a slipshod approach to production that created bad films" and the United Six group disbanded shortly afterwards.

Perhaps Zhou's vision was premature, for the real political impact of films only emerged later when Mingxing and new companies were influenced by political and patriotic issues in the early thirties. From the perspective of mainland historians, it appears that an attempt to incorporate political messages in films was not well received in the aftermath of the May Thirtieth movement nor after the upheaval of 1927, when the Kuomintang betrayed the labour

movement and persecuted members of the Communist party and other participants. The last years of the twenties were characterized by the popularity of martial arts films and other "escapist" entertainment.⁸¹ For the time being, the Chinese film industry failed to articulate a discourse of resistance or to explore new approaches to film-making.

Early Film Aesthetics

The struggle for theatre ownership and audiences by the Chinese producers was one part of the experience of foreign films and imperialism in Shanghai. Yet it would be erroneous, as Ma Junxiang suggests, to consider all foreign films as "cultural opium".⁸² For prospective film-makers, the theatres and the largely American content shown in them were, in essence, the place where film technique, such as lighting, camera movement, set design and editing, was learned.⁸³ In the martial arts films that flourished after 1927, Jay Leyda notes that "the form absorbed any foreign devices or plots that caught the fancy of the Chinese spectator or film-maker."⁸⁴

In the early years some companies hired foreigners with technical expertise to assist in film production. In 1922, Mingxing hired a consultant from Columbia University to advise on lighting and photography who also urged Zheng Zhengqiu to alter the exaggerated acting style, which was common among performers from the wenmingxi tradition, and employ a more natural approach.⁸⁵ Additionally, some directors created film scenarios roughly modeled

on Western literary works or Western plays, a trend that was particularly common among Chinese who had studied abroad like Hong Shen and the film director, Sun Yu.⁸⁶

There was in addition a rather complex interplay between traditional Chinese literature and theatre, Western drama, and Hollywood narrative style which influenced the development of Chinese films. The Western tradition in modern drama was one of dialogue and narrative built upon a linear progression of acts and scenes. Unlike Chinese opera, which one scholar describes as "characterized by [a] spatial and temporal flexibility in scene structure," and "lack of superficial resemblance to life," Western theatre developed a more concrete portrayal of reality, with particular emphasis on the script, set design, and props.⁸⁷ Western drama was introduced to China, first by foreign amateur productions and students who had studied abroad, and was later adopted by Chinese dramatists. Wenmingxi was one of the outcomes of this adaptation and its influence carried on to film production. As I mentioned previously, modern Western drama in China was usually performed on the basis of Western plays and taken more seriously by intellectuals than wenmingxi.⁸⁸ Ma Junxiang also points to the distinction between the Chinese and Western tradition of drama in that "the independent quality of Chinese opera, where sections can be performed quite separate from the whole work, further points to the absence in traditional Chinese performing arts of the structure required in film, (a contained progression of) suspense, tension, resolution and elucidation"⁸⁹.

Thus, Chinese film-makers applied the structural framework of Western drama to films, but they retained the ontological and functional aspects of the Chinese literary tradition as well. Theatre, like popular literature, played a social role informing as well as entertaining the audience. The emphasis on moral righteousness and social responsibility in the Chinese aristocratic literary tradition was reconstituted in Chinese dramatic forms with the rise of popular theatre during the Yuan dynasty.⁹⁰ Zhong Dafeng highlights the implications of these influences on Chinese film critics of the twenties who attempted to formulate a theory for the new medium. During this period the denomination of film as "yingxi" or "shadow play" evolved from seeing film as an entertainment novelty to seeing film as an artistic form. To justify its artistic qualifications, film theorists sought to highlight the association of film with theatre and literature, putting particular emphasis on the written script. "Yingxi" [cinema] is but one of the types of theatre", wrote Hou Yao in 1926.⁹¹ Thus the narrative qualities of theatre were emphasized over the visual aesthetics of film.

Zhong argues that Western film theory saw film as a distinct artistic form, while Chinese theorists grounded it in relation to stage drama.⁹² One major reason was that in order to give credence to film as an art form, which many intellectuals could not accept, it had to be associated with an established art form like theatre. Moreover, in using Western dramatic theory to explain the phenomenon of film, it was given a modern legitimacy. This approach, however, obfuscated the visual qualities of cinema and

its potential as a unique aesthetic form. Thus, the approach to early cinema in China did not highlight shooting and editing techniques and their potential to define the shape and texture of the narrative. On the contrary, shots were seen as the mere bricks and mortar holding the story together.⁹³ Adding to this fundamental aspect of early Chinese film theory was the influence of a Hollywood narrative convention which also tended to emulate theatre in comparison to other film styles.

On the y axis say there is the Chinese perspective of ancient times, the inheritance of traditional thought and its rational spirit, while on the x axis you have the influence of the Hollywood film narrative flooding the Chinese market, coupled with the particular historical conditions of that time and so on. This all represents an ontology of narrative which at its core has a far greater and deeper influence than superfluous questions of theatre technique. Even when the phenomenon of "shadow play" attached to cinema had long faded away, this core continued to influence thinking with regard to Chinese film theory in the long term.⁹⁴

In a provocative analogy, Zhong also points out that Chinese theorists' preoccupation with situating film within the confines of a Chinese ontological tradition parallels the late Qing idea of adopting Western technology while still maintaining Chinese tradition. The diction of "Chinese learning for substance [zhong xue wei ti], Western learning for function" [xi xue wei yong] was the premise among Qing intellectuals who took a less radical view of reforming Chinese society than visionaries like Kang Youwei.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the more moderate reformers recognized the urgency in mastering Western technology and other facets of Western expertise to "make China strong", but with an emphasis on utilitarian aspects.⁹⁶ To explain how the residual influence of this

supposition informed the thinking of early Chinese film theorists, Zhong cites their response to the use of montage and quick-cutting in D.W. Griffiths' *Birth of a Nation* compared to his later and more conventional work, *Way Down East*. For example, in an article reviewing the progression of Griffiths' work up to the mid-twenties, the writer complained that in *Birth of a Nation*, "the arrangement of sequences is so chaotic it is difficult for the viewer to know what it going on." This evaluation can be contrasted with the praise for *Way Down East*, which portrayed the progression of events in a more linear and logical fashion reminiscent of Western theatre.⁹⁷ As Zhong suggests, it exemplifies the tendency of film theorists to neglect the inherent potential of artistic expression within the cinematic form, just as the Qing intellectuals overlooked the political and cultural implications intrinsic to Western technology.

Chinese film-makers did not begin exploring new approaches to film-making, like montage, until the early thirties. When the work of the Soviet film-makers Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin was translated and published in Shanghai in 1928 (by Hong Shen), film-makers were captivated by the idea. Yet even in the midst of experimentation during the thirties, Zhong Dafeng sees that there was still a tendency to emulate Pudovkin's style of montage over Eisenstein's. Pudovkin's approach was closer to conventional forms. Zhong concludes that the continuation of this trend into the thirties and beyond was influenced by the early approaches to understanding film in the 1920's.⁹⁸

It is very difficult to understand the intricacies of this development without a thorough knowledge of Chinese aesthetics, Chinese literature and theatre, and Western film theory. I am hardly qualified in any of these fields, but the two articles by Ma Junxiang and Zhong Dafeng bring up important questions which are central to the problem of how Western culture influenced Chinese artistic forms. It reflects in part the contradictory nature of film and its development in China; a development at times seemingly about to find its own aesthetic, only to abandon it to traditional forms. Whether films were inspired by a Chinese or foreign sense of melodrama, both were essentially conservative and drew upon standards without the benefit of innovation.

For there is something in the sentimentality and melodrama common in many Chinese films which is reminiscent, not only of pre-war Hollywood productions, but Chinese opera as well. It brings to mind the possibility that Chinese film-makers recognized in Hollywood films something which corresponded to their theatrical tradition, not the least of which was the pleasure of a happy ending. But it also raises the question that had Chinese film taken a different route in those early days, what would have been the result? For example, what if it had drawn upon the traditional aesthetics of Chinese painting and its influence from Taoism instead of popular forms? It would seem that the particular circumstances of the era and the medium precluded such a development in China. I am not advocating a deterministic view of film history, but it is apparent among the various cinematic

traditions throughout the world, that, with some exceptions, both Chinese film and Hollywood revealed a staunch resiliency in adhering to conventional narratives that overlooked rather than enhanced the visual, indeed *cinematic* qualities, of film-making.

In this chapter I have tried to examine the many, often conflicting, dimensions of American films and their initial impact on culture and the development of Chinese film production. As Shanghai entered the thirties, the political struggles between various groups took on a greater urgency, particularly with the invasion of China by Japan. Film-makers and cinema-goers were not immune to this crisis and they both continued to play an important role in Shanghai society, while still evolving under the shadow of Hollywood.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 2

1. Quoted in Li Shaobai et al., *Zhongguo Dianying Fashen De Lishi Wenhua Beijing* [The Historical Background Of Chinese Film], **Yingshi Wenhua**, Vol. 4 (1991), p. 52. This passage originally came from a Shanghai newspaper, *Guan Meiguo Yingxi Ji* [Notes On Watching an American Film], **Youxi Bao**, 5 September 1897, n. pag.

2. Paul Clark uses the term "suspect medium" in the sentence referring to the political attention given to films after 1949 by the Communist government. Clark writes, "[D]uring the three recent decades, the men and women charged with shaping and implementing cultural policy have continued to regard films as an imported and therefore perhaps more suspect medium." All following quotations are taken from this same paragraph. Paul Clark, *The Sinification of Cinema: The Foreignness of Film in China*, in **Cinema and Cultural Identity: Reflections On Films From Japan, India and China**, ed. Wimal Dissanayake (New York: University Press of America, 1988), p. 175.

3. Li Shaobai et al, **Yingshi Wenhua**, p. 50. The term "xiyangxi" was used in the report on the screening in **Shenbao**, 10 August 1896.

4. Jay Leyda identifies the promoter of the Edison shows as James Ricalton who was also shooting footage in China. Leyda suggests that Ramos's predecessor was named Galen Bocca, taken from the Chinese transliteration of "jialun baike". Jay Leyda, **Dianying: An Account of the Film Audience in China** (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972), p. 2-3.

5. *Shanghai Dianyingyuan De Fazhan* [The Development of Shanghai Movie Theatres], **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II (1939; rpt. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chuban, 1984), p. 533. This source says that the musicians Ramos hired were Indian, but the exotic costumes may have given that impression. Other sources do not specify the nationality of the performers. A ditty was published in a Shanghai newspaper describing Ramos' film exhibition and is quoted (he does not note the specific source) in Shu Ping, *Zhongguo Dianying Zhi Mengya* [The Beginnings of Chinese Film], **Shangying Huabao**, Jan. 1990, n. pag. To give an idea of its content, I include a translation here.

Renting a room and showing a film,
The price is cheap beyond compare,
For 26 cents its easy to watch
and glues you fast within your chair.

People, things, streams and hills,
The scenes are bright and new.
Fields and houses, cities abound,
The commonplace made wonderful,
Even the merciless fires and floods

Seem true.

6. Altogether Ramos established six theatres, the Hongkou, Empire, Carter, China, Victoria and the Embassy.

7. Much of this information is compiled from various sources, including Jay Leyda, Zhang Zhongli et al., Cheng Jihua, **Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi** (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 1981), I, and **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao, Vol. II** among others. The man who opened the Helen Theatre is referred to as Linfa in Chinese but I assumed from his name that he was a British subject from India. However, I could not confirm this in my interviews or other sources.

8. The references to the Cantonese Zheng Ziyi and Pan Chengbo are from **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao, Vol. II**, p. 535. The sales agent for Ford Motors, Lu Shoulian, is mentioned in Du Yunzhi, **Zhongguo Dianying Qishi Nian** [Seventy Years of Chinese Film] (Taipei, Taiwan: Film Development Foundation, 1986), p. 29.

9. For example one man I interviewed, who began his career as a projectionist back in the 1920's, recalled the origins of the theatre he first worked for. The Orpheum was located in the northwestern outskirts of the International Settlement and was built by Zhu Yuchao. Zhu had returned to Shanghai after working in France, and did very well in Shanghai's construction industry. He built the Orpheum in 1926. From Zhu Zhang interview, June 1991. Further information about the Orpheum was given to me by a friend who obtained a rough draft on the history of the theatre from someone he knew who was writing its history. Unfortunately, I was unable to meet the researcher and know neither her name nor the prospective title and publication of her manuscript.

10. Reference to the various exterior venues for films are mentioned in **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao, Vol. II**, p. 550-552. In my interview with Jiang Shangxing, he mentioned that before air-conditioning became a feature in larger theatres, the Embassy showed films on the lawn of the Majestic Hotel during the summertime, interview, July 1991. Apparently, the Isis also made arrangements with the Majestic for summer showings, see **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao, Vol. II**, p. 551. The Majestic Hotel was owned by George McBain. It was demolished in 1936.

11. The Fengtai Photographic Studio was started in 1892 by Ren Qingtai who was a businessman running various enterprises in Beijing. He was inspired to enter the photography business after a visit to Japan. He also managed one of Beijing's first movie theatres and the lack of new material probably prompted him to try his hand at film production. From, Li Shaobai et al., **Zhongguo Zaoqi Dianying Zhipian Ye De Xingban** [Initial Production in Early Chinese Film], **Yingshi Wenhua**, 4 (1991), p. 66-67. in **Yingshi Wenhua**.

12.Cheng Jihua, I, p. 11.

13.Ma Junxiang, *Zhongguo Dianyng Qingxie De Qipaoxian* [Early Influences in Chinese Film], *Dianyng Yishu*, Jan. 1990, p. 8. Ma's mention of "the real world" and "dream-like fantasy" is in reference to his previous paragraph of the early use of film by the Frenchman, Louis Lumiere, (one of the inventors), whose early footage documented daily life, and another Frenchman, Georges Melies, who experimented with film to create fantasies. See, *Lumiere and Melies*, in Ephraim Katz, **The Film Encyclopedia** (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) p. 743 and 796-798.

14.Li Shaobai et al., 67-68.

15.The name Polaski has also been rendered in Chinese sources as "Bradsky" [bulasiji] but Jay Leyda uses the former spelling in his work and I assume he got it from English sources. Leyda also suggests that Polaski was in debt to the Nanyang Insurance Company and gave them his film company as collateral, see Leyda, p. 15. Other Chinese sources and Leyda give the name of Essler to one of the American managers of the Nanyang Insurance company, but two other works also say an Englishman named T.H. Suffert took over the Asia Film Company when it was purchased by the Nanyang group. See, Li Shaobai et al., p. 69 and Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1108.

16.Zhang Shichuan, *Zhongguo Dianyngjia Liezhuan* [Biographies of Chinese Film Personnel], 1:6 (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianyng Chuban She, 1985) p. 222. I have not been able to find the English name of Zhang's American firm, called Meihua, but possibly there might have been some connection between it and the Nanyang Insurance company.

17.Zhang is quoted as saying, "I had hardly seen any films, but because the task was to make "yingxi" (the old term for film) I immediately associated it with "xi", or Chinese theatre." Presumably this led him to seek out Zheng Zhengqiu who was involved with wenmingxi. From, Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1109.

18.Apparently, American film stock became available in China in 1916. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 30. After the closure of the Xinmin Company, Zhang Shichuan had attempted to form another film company, the Huanxiang Company, using equipment from the Italian Enrico Lauro and American film stock. See Cheng Jihua, p. 24. With Enrico Lauro as the cinematographer, the company succeeded in filming the wenmingxi play about opium, *Wronged Ghosts* [heiji yuanhun], which was successful, but the company folded shortly afterwards, see Leyda, p. 18.

19.One of the major Chinese publishing houses, the Commercial Press was established in 1897 and published a wide variety of educational and translated material.

20.Leyda, p. 18.

21. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 36-37.

22. Du Yunzhi, p. 28

23. Wang Chaoguang, Zhu Jian eds., **Minguo Yingtan Jishi** [Records of the Film World in the Republican Era] (Jiangsu Province: Jiangsu Guji Chuban She, 1991), p. 23. Other sources mention the proliferation of film companies as well, such as Cheng Jihua, Du Yunzhi, and others in historical accounts of the early Chinese film industry.

24. Another interesting development was the combination of film and drama on stage taken from the Japanese innovation of rensa-geki, or "chain drama" [lianhuanju]. Exterior scenes were shot on film and interior scenes performed on stage, providing the added sensation of actors appearing both on the screen and live on stage. See Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1101. The development of "chain drama" is discussed briefly in Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, **The Japanese Film: Art and Industry** (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 27-28.

25. The subject of woman performers and their emergence in film is worth a completely separate study, particularly in the context of examining the effect of the film medium on Chinese society. The first woman performer in film was in *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife* [zhuang zi shiqi] adopted from Zhuang Zi's parable about testing his wife's fidelity. The film was made in 1913 in Hong Kong and produced by Benjamin Polaski and directed by Li Minwei. According to Cheng Jihua and Jay Leyda, the film was brought to America by Polaski and played in theatres there. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 29 and Leyda, p. 17. Li's wife Yan Shanshan only played a supporting role. The dramatist Hong Shen, returning to China after studying at Harvard, introduced the first major role for a woman performer in his production of *Lady Windermere's Fan* staged in Shanghai in 1921. Similarly, Mingxing's 1923 production of *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* introduced the first "tragic heroine", played by Wang Hanlun, that was to become a trademark role for women in Chinese films up to the contemporary era. See Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 113-115. It is also interesting to note that during the same period a new style of opera emerged which only featured woman performers adapted from the Shaoxing style opera. The first performance was in Shanghai in 1923. From, *Nuzi Wenxi* [Women's Opera], **Zhongguo Xiqu Quyí Cidian** [Dictionary of Chinese Opera] (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Chuban She, 1981), p. 61.

26. Hu Die, Liu Huiqin, **Hudie De Huiyi Lu** [The Memoirs of Hu Die] (Taipei, Taiwan: Lianhe Baoye Shu, 1986), p. 20.

27. See Wang Chaoguang, Zhu Jian, p. 122-125. Hu Die, who later became famous in more placid roles, also starred as a kung fu heroine in one of the series of *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple*. She recalls in her memoirs meeting someone in Vancouver, (where she

had moved from Taiwan) who upon seeing her immediately recalled her scenes flying around suspended by a cable and other thrilling clips from the film. See Hu Die, p. 51.

28.Li Shaobai et al., p. 56-57. The term "western toy" [yang wanyi] is used in the text. In 1860, British and French troops occupied Beijing and destroyed the magnificent Yuanmingyuan Summer Palace as well as looting and terrorizing the city. A more recent memory for citizens of that time was the violent attack on Beijing by the "eight united armies" of Britain, France, America, Italy, Austria, Germany, Russia, and Japan to protect foreign legations in the Boxer uprising of 1900.

29.Li Shaobai et al., p. 57.

30.Li Shaobai et al., p. 57 and Leyda, p. 8. Leyda says the explosions occurred in 1906. Leyda also quotes sources that say Pu Yi was a fan of Harold Lloyd films and he mentions a story about another fire that occurred in the palace in 1923 where "the eunuchs were quick to blame Harold Lloyd and the cinema wiring..." See Leyda, p. 39.

31.The reference to Mary Pickford is in Shu Ping, **Shangying Huabao**, Jan. 1990, n.pag. Shu Ping published a number of articles chronicling the development of film journals. See, Shu Ping, *Zhongguo Zao Qi Dianyong Chubanshu* [Early Chinese Film Publications], **Shangying Huabao**, May 1990, n. pag. and Shu Ping, *Zhongguo Dianyong Zazhi Lunsang Lu 1921-1949* [series on the Chinese film magazines] **Dianyong Shijie**, Oct., Nov., Dec., 1988, p. 30-31, 26-27, 8-9, respectively.

32.Zhou Wenchang, interview, June, 1991. Although Zhou was born in 1919 and obviously too young to be an active cinema-goer in the twenties, (though he certainly enjoyed the cartoons for children) I take his observations on the basis of his understanding and knowledge as an ardent film fan. He suggested that Chinese films were more popular in the silent era because they could not compete as well with American films after the coming of sound when the grasp of the new technology took some time for Chinese film-makers to master for a variety of reasons I will explain in Chapter Three.

33.Du Yunzhi, p. 31. Film showings in Shanghai were usually accompanied by a pamphlet [shuomingshu] explaining the film in Chinese and English, but the problem of translation did not go unnoticed by film distributors and theatre owners. As early as 1914, translation was provided in the theatres by a narrator on the stage voicing the dialogue. This was similar to the *benshi* tradition used in Japan, and while some translators were coveted by theatre owners, the practise never developed to the degree in China that it did in Japan, where the performance abilities of the *benshi* narrator became as much of an attraction as the film. In 1922, the Peacock Film Distribution company began providing subtitles for

films and many theatre owners who received films from other distributors began following the same practise. I am uncertain as to whether the subtitles were printed directly on the film because many people I talked to said the Chinese dialogue was often screened on slides similar to the process used to provide the verses of song in opera productions today. In the late thirties subtitles were printed on the film directly, but the article I use as a source here does not specify, though it implies that subtitles were printed on to the film. Shu Ping, *Zaoqi De Dianying Yizhi* [Dubbing Translation in Early Films], **Shangying Huabao**, July 1990, n. pag. Explanation of the *benshi* phenomenon is found in Anderson and Richie, p. 23-26.

34. The popularity of Chaplin and other foreign comedians was referred to in many of my interviews. For example, Zhu Zhang, who was the projectionist at the Orpheum said that the audience there was largely Chinese and foreign comedies were often shown as opposed to other more serious American films. The theatre had initially screened foreign films exclusively and attracted a mostly foreign clientele until some local gang members objected to the dress code and threw a fire cracker into the audience. The attendance among foreigners dropped off and the theatre changed its program. Zhu Zhang interview, June 1991. Jiang Shangxing also referred to the popularity of Buster Keaton and told me there had been a saying in Shanghai to describe clumsiness, "ni shenme zuo zheyang "Buster Keaton", roughly, "why are you doing a Buster Keaton act?" Jiang Shangxing (pseud) interview, July 1991.

35. Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 54.

36. Guo E interview, May 1991. Mr. Guo was 92 years old when I interviewed him. He died shortly before I left Shanghai in 1992. A retired bank clerk, Mr. Guo had two passions in his youth, the movies and dancing. Speaking in English to a native speaker for the first time in many years, he introduced himself to me as a former playboy.

37. Apparently, as early as 1911, on the eve of the Republican Revolution, the Qing government issued a decree requiring all movie houses and other venues showing movies to have separate seating for women and men. Wang Yizhi, *Dianyingyuan Shi Hua* [History of Cinemas (Shanghai)], **Caifu Yuekan**, March 1988, p. 55. As far as I am aware, the decree remained at least up to the mid-twenties.

38. For example, the Orpheum theatre was situated in a fairly low-income and working class neighbourhood as well as being close to the mansions of foreigners and rich Chinese in the Western district. Zhu Zhang said that a large segment of the residents were Subei people and after 1949 the theatre often performed "Huaiju" which is the local opera style sung in Subei dialect. While it is doubtful that many residents in this area would make a habit of going to American films in the more expensive theatres downtown, I

think it is entirely plausible that low-income and working class residents would go to their neighbourhood cinema when they could afford it and take in a Chaplin movie. Moreover, after the Orpheum began catering to a primarily Chinese audience, it also added a section on to the theatre for local opera performances, which suggests the two entertainment venues could attract the same audience. Zhu Zhang, interview, June, 1991.

39. Honig, **Sisters and Strangers**, p. 159. The "Great World" Honig mentions is not to be confused with the larger and more famous Great World in the French Concession. Elizabeth Perry also mentions that traditional weavers went to amusement centers to see local operas and other entertainment. Elizabeth Perry, *Strikes Among Shanghai's Silk Weavers 1927-1937: The Awakening of Labour Aristocracy*, in **Shanghai Sojourners**, eds. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Yeh Wen Hsin (Berkeley, Calif: Institute of Asian Studies, 1992), p. 134.

40. Perry, p. 311.

41. Perry, p. 313. Again, her observation seems more applicable to the 1930's, but I use it here to suggest the complexity of the film audience. The question of literacy would also have determined the audience in the silent era, for both Chinese and American films, especially after subtitles for the latter became the norm. I have not come across any material discussing this distinction, probably because the film audience was assumed to be literate petty bourgeoisie. Cheng Jihua does mention that martial arts films appealed to people with limited literacy because of the special effects, but he gives no source for this statement, see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 136.

42. Shu Ping includes a quote from the director Zheng Bugao's memoirs which described the Hongkou as "a dirty muddy floor, very noisy, full of loud Cantonese". Shu Ping, *Shanghai De Zaoqi Dianyingyuan* [Early Cinemas in Shanghai], **Shangying Huabao**, Mar. 1990, n. pag. The Cantonese segment of the Shanghai population that attended films in Shanghai must have been significant. Shu Ping's article on translation for foreign films mentions a source saying that in the era before subtitles, the Helen Theatre in Hongkou gave two translations of the dialogue, the first in Cantonese and the second in Mandarin. Shu Ping, **Shangying Huabao**, July 1990, n. pag. The Cantonese were a significant group in Shanghai as merchants and investors, obviously at this time they were also a significant presence in the Hongkou district.

43. The emerging competition for Ramos is described in **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 535. Reference to Marshall Sanderson is found in Leyda, p.24.

44. Cheng Jihua emphasizes the low opinion of films, especially Chinese films in his section on the 1920's. The subject is covered in more detail however, in Ke Ling, *Shi Wei "Wusi" Yu Dianying*

Huayi Lunkuo [The May Fourth Movement and Chinese Cinema], **Zhongguo Dianying Yanjiu**, Vol. I (1983), p. 4-17.

45. There are numerous sources that mention the reaction of the intellectual community to Hong Shen's entry into the film world. See, Cheng Jihua, I, p. 72, Leyda, p. 50 and Ke Ling, p. 13.

46. Cheng, I, p.113 and Leyda, p. 54.

47. *Tian Han*, **Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan**, 2:6, p. 57. Tian Han joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1932.

48. The actual case is described in more detail in Liang Hongying, *Yan Rui Sheng Yousha Jiniu An* [The Case of Yan Rui Shan's Pre-meditated Murder of a Prostitute], in **Jiu Shanghai Shehui Baitai**, eds., **Xiao Ming, Yan Zhi**, (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), p. 155-184. The main character, having lost at the racetrack, is desperate for money. His friend introduces him to a rich prostitute who wears expensive jewellery, and thus the man plans a way to retrieve his losses. Along with an accomplice, they drug the woman and drive her to the outskirts of the city where she is killed and buried in a wheat field. After some time as a fugitive, the man is finally caught and executed. This, more or less, followed the actual events.

49. The response to *Yan Rui Sheng* is found in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 45. It is ironic that this production used the cinematic services of the Commercial Press studio, since the publishing company had a high reputation among educators for its translation and educational texts. It is also interesting that Du Yunzhi does not mention the controversy in his discussion of *Yan Rui Shan* on p. 31-32, nor does Leyda. Instead, Leyda mentions that the success of the film at the box office was mentioned in a report to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Leyda, p. 36.

50. Yao Xifeng, *Lu Xun Kan Meiguo Dianying* [Lu Xun Looks at American Films], Beijing **Wenyi Bao**, 16 November 1991, p. 8.

51. Yao Xifeng, p. 8.

52. Lu Xun's analogy between films and guns is quoted in Gao Jinxian and Gu Yuanqing, *Lu Xun Yu Dianying* [Lu Xun and Film], **Dianying Yishu**, April (1979), p. 45. The quote about Tian Yi productions is from Shu Jun and Yan Su, *Lu Xun Yu Dianying* [Lu Xun and Film], **Dianying Zuopin**, Oct. (1981), p. 55. Lu Xun also disliked the commercial side of film entertainment and misleading advertisements which implied that "if you didn't go see this film you would die with everlasting regret," quoted in Shu Jun and Yan Su, p. 57. Lu Xun was also familiar with Lenin's statement about film, "that cinema is our most important art" but lamented that in the 1920's this had not yet occurred in China. He also translated an essay on film by the Japanese film critic, Akira Iwasaki, under

the title, *Xiandai Dianying Yu Youchan Jieji* [Modern Film and the Bourgeoisie] in 1931, see Gao and Gu, p. 41-42.

53.Ke Ling, p. 5.

54.Leyda p. 37. Leyda notes that Bell was known in Shanghai social circles for his "Chaplin imitations at parties."

55.Ma Junxiang, p. 10.

56.A discussion of Xie Jin's relationship to the early influences in Chinese film is discussed briefly in Chapter Five.

57.Zhong Dafeng, *Qiantan Zheng Zhengqiu De Dianying Chuangzuo Yu Yuanyang Hudie Pai Wenxue de Guanxi* [A Brief Discussion About Zheng Zhengqiu's Creative Film Work and His Relationship With The Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School of Literature], **Dangdai Dianying**, May (1985), p. 148, 150. It is also interesting to speculate how much of Zheng's creativity and personality was influenced by his opium habit, instilling a complacency perhaps that more radical intellectuals wanted to transcend.

58.Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 91.

59.Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1082. In relation to the controversy over *Yan Rui Sheng* in 1921, Cheng Jihua also mentions the influence of American detective films on Chinese productions, see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 47.

60.Zhang Zhongli et al., p. 1081. The section on popular literature in **Jindai Shanghai Chengshi Yanjiu**, from which I base my observation, particularly emphasizes the influence of the young reading audience for martial arts stories and their subsequent presence as part of the film audience for the same genre. Cheng Jihua suggests the influence of American Westerns on the martial arts films in Vol. I, p. 135. The same observation about Hollywood Westerns can and has been said about contemporary Hong Kong martial arts films.

61.Paul Pickowicz, *The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930's*, **Modern China**, Vol 17, No. 1, January (1991), p. 40

62.Pickowicz, p. 44.

63.Zhong Dafeng, **Dangdai Dianying** (1985), p. 148. In particular, Zhong mentions one of the Butterfly writers who worked for Mingxing named Bao Tianxiao, whose novels were considered to possess more serious content on reform and social criticism.

64. Wang Yizhi (pseud.), p. 56. "Kunju" or "kunqu" is a southern style opera known for its refined literary style and is generally popular among older opera-goers. In the mid-Qing dynasty, its popularity began to wane with the rise of Beijing opera.

65. **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, p. 562. This source also says that part of the investment for buying the theatre came from the Shanghai branch of the Pathe Record Company, with which Mingxing appears to have had a close relationship. This account and other sources do not elaborate on the details regarding the Pathe investment in Mingxing.

66. **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, 562. Despite the suggestion given in this source that theatres and foreign films were affected, I could not substantiate this claim in my interviews or other sources, besides, of course, Zhou Jianyun's article on the May Thirtieth tragedy and Chinese film circles in **Mingxing Tekan**.

67. Cheng, I, p. 123. He also mentions a Japanese production company which was associated with a Japanese theatre in Hongkou, but he does not go into details.

68. The success of B.A.T. is chronicled in a comprehensive history of the company's experience in China in Sherman Cochran, **Big Business in China: Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry 1890-1930** (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

69. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 122.

70. References to the films' failure is found in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 124. B.A.T. also built a modern film studio on the former property, (near present day Fudan University) of Ye Chengzhong, a prosperous businessman in the late 1800's. This information is from Sun Danren, former accountant with B.A.T., interview, February, 1992. Jay Leyda also cites a Western visitor to China saying (no source) that the B.A.T.'s film facility was "one of the most modern and best motion picture studios that at that time could be found anywhere in the world outside the United States of America." See Leyda, p. 44.

71. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 125. The theatres were the Zhabei, Daying, Xinfang, Baoxing and Ziyou, but none of them are mentioned in the comprehensive list of theatres included in **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 541-550.

72. Cochran, p. 135.

73. **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 544.

74. After my interview with Sun Daren, I later discovered that Cochran also discusses the relationship of Yongtaihe to B.A.T., see, Cochran, p. 130.

75. That is, the relationship of B.A.T. to the Odeon is not mentioned in Cheng's reference to articles written by the journalists he refers to, nor does Zhou Jianyun mention it in his article on the May Thirtieth movement in **Mingxing Tekan**, another source cited by Cheng on the B.A.T. "conspiracy."

76. **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 546, p. 547.

77. **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 563.

78. Cochran mentions that Zheng Bozhao began constructing the Odeon in 1923, but the source he cites in **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao** is also my source, and it says, 1925, see Vol. II, p. 535.

79. Zhou Jianyun, **Mingxing Tekan**, n. pag.

80. Du Yunzhi, p. 71. The six companies were Mingxing, Da Zhonghua Baihe, Minxin, Shanghai Yingxi, Huaju and Youlian. Zhou had also mentioned the need for a united effort to improve Chinese film his 1925 article in **Mingxing Tekan**.

81. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 135-136. In his analysis of the late twenties, Cheng suggests that the audience sought relief from their frustration over the failed 1927 revolution but were unable to recognize that their martial arts heroes were "still only serving the reactionary ruling class." He also suggests that the audience of this time was "feeding themselves on illusions." Cheng Jihua, I, p.136.

82. Ma Junxiang, p. 18.

83. There are other sources which mention the practise of learning film technique by watching foreign films in the theatres and I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Three. Pertinent to the discussion on the twenties however, see Ma Junxiang, p.18 and Shu Ping, *Zaoqi De Zhongwai Dianying Jiaoliu* [Early Exchanges Between Foreign and Chinese Film], **Shangying Huabao**, September (1990), n. pag.

84. Leyda, p. 63.

85. Shu Ping, **Shangying Huabao**, September (1990), n. pag.

86. Jay Leyda mentions the influence of Alexandre Dumas's **Les Dames Aux Camelias** and this is also noted in a Russian account of Chinese film history. See Leyda, p. 63, 65 and C.J. Toroptsoff, **Zhongguo Dianying Shi Gailun** [Outline On Chinese Film History] (1979; rpt. Beijing: Zhongguo Dianyingjia Xiehui, 1982), p. 5. Many of the film-makers and writers who became prominent in the 1930's and initially began their careers in the late twenties had studied abroad.

87. Description of Chinese opera characteristics is taken from William Huizhu Sun, *Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky and Brecht on China's Stage and Their Aesthetic Significance*, in **Drama in the People's Republic of China**, eds. Constantine Tung and Colin MacKerras (Albany, NY.: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 137. Ma Junxiang also discusses the distinction between Western theatre and Chinese opera, p. 19.

88. Ke Ling, p. 9.

89. Ma Junxiang, p. 19.

90. The invasion by the Mongols in the 13th century and their subsequent rule in China had implications for the Chinese intelligentsia. For example, Jacques Gernet briefly mentions that although "the Mongol domination was not very favourable to the learned and serious literature, which in China was the prerogative of the literati and politicians, it seems to have stimulated, by way of compensation, as it were, all forms of popular expression:..." One of these outcomes was the rise of a vibrant theatre performed in urban centers and towns. Jacques Gernet, **A History of Chinese Civilization** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 382.

91. Zhong Dafeng, "*Yingxi*" *Lilun Lishi Suyuan* [Origin of the "Shadow Play" Film Theory], **Dangdai Dianying**, March (1986), p. 76. A discussion on Hou Yao in English which is somewhat similar to Zhong's article, but with more emphasis on Hou is Chen Xihe, *Shadowplay: Chinese Film Aesthetics and Their Philosophical and Cultural Fundamentals*, in **Chinese Film Theory**, eds. George S. Semsel et al., (New York: Praeger, 1990), p. 192-203. The article was also originally published in **Dangdai Dianying** in the spring of 1986 (no month given).

92. Zhong Dafeng, **Dangdai Dianying** (1986), p. 76.

93. Zhong Dafeng, **Dangdai Dianying** (1986), p. 78.

94. Zhong Dafeng, **Dangdai Dianying** (1986), p. 79.

95. Kang Youwei's distinction among intellectuals discussing reform tactics in the late Qing was his argument that Confucianism itself must be adapted to meet the challenge of Western technology and political philosophy. Furthermore, Kang argued that institutional changes in the Qing administration were as important, if not more, than acquiring the mere utilitarian mastery of Western technology. See, W.M. Theodore De Bary et al., **Sources of Chinese Tradition, II** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 65-68.

96. De Bary et al., p. 85. From the translated essay *Exhortation to Learn* by Chang chih-tung [Zhang Zhitong], a moderate in the reform movement during the late Qing period.

97. Zhong Dafeng, **Dangdai Dianyng** (1986), p. 79. Zhong takes this quote from an article on Griffiths published in the journal **Dianyng** in 1924. It is entirely possible that many cinema-goers in North America also found *Birth of a Nation* confusing, but my understanding is that the film did very well at the box office and people were excited by the new perspective and techniques Griffiths used. Controversy arose over its portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan rather than its cinematic style. See the section on Griffiths, in Katz, p. 510-511.

98. The subtlety of this distinction between Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's style of montage is the idea that, "like Eisenstein's, Pudovkin's basic creative tool was montage. But where Eisenstein juxtaposed separate shots to achieve conflict and collision, Pudovkin used them as building blocks; while the masses were Eisenstein's collective heroes, Pudovkin's heroes were individuals, sometimes idealized figures, who personified the masses. By emphasizing narrative and characterization, Pudovkin was able to involve his audiences emotionally while driving home the same revolutionary message that Eisenstein approached intellectually." Katz, p. 936.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF ENTERTAINMENT

I ask you, will we wait for that day, when American capital has completely controlled the Chinese film industry? Will not the forces of imperialism want to retain their position and seek to destroy the will of resistance in the oppressed? Will we still think to make films opposing imperialism? Films about social revolution? Or even narrow-minded patriotic films for that matter? If this happens, we will have turned the sword upon ourselves and this vital weapon will be in someone else's hands. Every theatre will be a place to raise slaves, where you submissively accept their domination and oppression.¹

In 1930, the first sound picture featuring the American comedian Harold Lloyd came to Shanghai. Large advertisements were taken out in the numerous Chinese newspapers and the **North China Daily News**, the major English newspaper in the city. The byline for one ad proclaimed, "having never before uttered a word on the silver screen, Mr. Lloyd will today at this theatre open his golden mouth." The appearance of a Harold Lloyd comedy, popular in Shanghai since the twenties, was made more alluring with the prospects of his humour being reproduced in sound. The "talkies" were still relatively new in Shanghai. The first sound film, *Captain Swagger*, was screened at the Embassy in early 1929 and other major theatres were quick to follow in presenting sound films.²

The Lloyd film, *Welcome Danger*, played at the Grand Theatre on Nanjing Road and the Capitol located near the Bund. On the afternoon of Saturday, February 22, the matinee attracted a crowd

of cinema-goers, among them Hong Shen, who was at the time a teacher at Fudan University and a screenwriter for the Mingxing studio. *Welcome Danger* was set in San Francisco and Lloyd's heroism and humour in this instance was expressed against a backdrop of Chinatown portrayed as the proverbial den of iniquity and its residents as greedy and bumbling reprobates. One source relates that some non-Chinese patrons sitting among the audience laughed at the appropriate moments but Hong Shen, in any case, was not amused.³

After the film finished screening and the audience made their way to the street, Hong Shen chanced to meet some of his students whereupon they expressed their mutual indignation at the film. With the students' support, Hong attended the next showing and shortly before the film was screened he strode up onto the stage, explained that the film was derogatory to the Chinese people, and urged the audience to demand their money back. As the **North China Daily News** reported, he then "started for the box office and was followed by a greater part of the audience, some three hundred in number, who loudly demanded that their tickets be refunded." In the ensuing confrontation with the British house manager, Hong was detained by police for causing a disturbance and the event soon became a cause celebre in the Chinese press.⁴

Represented by the Cantonese lawyer, Wu Chengyu, Hong later appeared in court and argued his case successfully.⁵ Arising out of the press campaign in support of Hong's actions, legislation was drawn up in the Kuomintang department responsible for film

inspection as well as the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) to ban all films considered to portray negative or humiliating depictions of Chinese characters and the Chinese nation. An apology was demanded from Harold Lloyd and the promise that he refrain from making such films again and that Paramount cease from distributing the film. By February 25, *Welcome Danger* had been pulled from the screens at the Grand and Capitol and replaced respectively by two other Paramount films, *Jazz Heaven*, and *The Woman Trap*.⁶ Likewise, Harold Lloyd also lost stature as the most popular comedian next to Chaplin and was effectively banished from Chinese screens until 1936. Even then his role in *Welcome Danger* was not forgotten. When *The Milky Way* played at the Grand in 1936, a stink-bomb was released in the theatre to protest its screening.⁷

The incident has gone down in the annals of Chinese film history as a victory against forces that would malign the national dignity of the Chinese. As a result, films like *Shanghai Express* with Marlene Dietrich and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, starring Barbara Stanwyck, did not play in Shanghai. More importantly however, the "Welcome Danger" incident [bu pa si shijian] marked the beginning of a new era of political consciousness among film-makers and the audience. Yet it was not the first time that Chinese had protested against their portrayal in Hollywood films, condemning what became known as "fanhua" or "ruhua" films, films that were in "opposition" or "humiliating" to China.⁸

In 1920, a group of Chinese students studying in New York objected to two films screened at that time, *The Red Lantern* and

First Born, and made their concern known to the Chinese consulate. Moreover, with overseas Chinese funds, they set up the Changcheng Film Production Company to redress the balance. Unsuccessful in America however, they moved to Shanghai in 1922 and embarked on making films with a social message. Although Cheng Jihua says their attempt at social criticism was limited by their "bourgeois view," compared with many of the other films produced in Shanghai at that time, they revealed a glimmer of the critical spirit which became more prominent in Chinese films in the early thirties. The Changcheng Company, however, was unsuccessful in developing into a major studio and only continued film production up to 1930 when the company disbanded.⁹

Mingxing's Zhou Jianyun was also vocal in an article written for the company's journal in 1925 in which he criticized the presence of films with negative portrayals of Chinese. He pointed out the irony of the situation where such films could freely enter the market in China while Chinese films were strictly scrutinized by officials before being approved for export. There certainly was precedent for complaint, but it was only after Hong Shen precipitated a wider public consciousness of the issue that restrictive legislation was introduced.¹⁰

The image of Asians in Western cinema is in itself a subject that has become an issue for detailed analysis and research. The tendency of Western film-makers to portray Asian themes accompanied the rise of the feature film as mass entertainment and was complemented from popular novels on the same theme. Popular

perceptions about Asian exoticism and the prospect of the "yellow peril" were perpetuated by an emphasis on stereotypical plots and characterization. In North America, the swiftness with which Hollywood appropriated this trend was accelerated by the legacy of anti-Chinese feeling among many white settlers in California.¹¹

In many of the films produced in Hollywood after World War I that had references to China or Chinatowns, the Chinese characters were generally stereotyped as evil and immoral on one hand, or weak and submissive on the other. Jay Leyda suggests that the more virulent of these films, such as the depiction of Chinatown communities, were not screened in China, though *Welcome Danger* certainly was.¹² The blatantly racist adaptation of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu series produced in the late twenties and early thirties, apparently did not play in China, but Zhou Jianyun's remarks reveal that films he felt to be anti-Chinese could be found in Shanghai theatres.¹³ Though Zhou does not refer directly to it, I assume from the time he wrote his article that *The Thief of Baghdad*, starring Douglas Fairbanks and Anna May Wong, was one example. Seen by one contemporary critic as "representative of the West's "Yellow Peril" phobia", it was similarly judged by some Chinese viewers when it played in Shanghai in the mid-twenties.¹⁴ Yet others were either not convinced or simply unaware that *The Thief of Baghdad* indicated a Western denigration of the Chinese people.

With regard to an apparent controversy which erupted over the film, Lu Xun felt compelled to comment on the accusations that *Thief of Baghdad* was "humiliating to China" and that Douglas

Fairbanks was also implicated in this crime by participating in its making. He criticized the tendency to collectively categorize films as "humiliating to China" without examining their origins and content more closely. When the film was dismissed as being anti-Chinese, he said, "no consideration was given to the fact that the Caliph was really Mongolian and had no connection to us Chinese. One cannot blame Fairbanks, who, incidentally, did not direct the film but only starred in it, when the story itself comes from *One Thousand and One Arabian nights*."¹⁵

There were others who objected to the negative appraisal of *The Thief of Baghdad*. Indeed it was admired among some film-makers as, for example, in the case of the director Zheng Bugao who considered the film to be a great feat in cinematic achievement at the time.¹⁶ The question arises as to why certain types of Hollywood films with portrayals of Chinese were screened and others were not. Without any concrete legislation, the decision to show a film must have been at the discretion of the distributors and theatre owners; a judgment, which in the case of *Welcome Danger*, did not take into consideration the patriotic and critical sensibilities of people like Hong Shen.

The legislation of 1930 prohibited films that were seen to promote negative portrayals of the Chinese or China. But it did not necessarily preclude films which today seem blatantly stereotypical particularly when the main protagonists were usually played by white actors who often emphasized caricature over characterization. For example, the eight episodes of the Charlie Chan series were

screened in China, despite the fact that the actor Warren Oland had previously played the first Fu Manchu back in 1929. Most of the people I interviewed were not fans of the Chan series, not for its portrayal of a Chinese detective, but because they felt it was poorly produced and frivolous entertainment.¹⁷ Yet Lu Xun was fond of the series, found the plots interesting and admired Oland's ability to emulate Chinese characteristics. When the actor visited Shanghai, he received favourable press and was quoted without rancour "as returning to his homeland." The issue of foreigners representing Chinese characters was not an issue in the Shanghai press.¹⁸ On the other hand, Anna May Wong was not admired for the roles she played in films with anti-Chinese overtones, despite the fact that she was a fine and accomplished performer. Unfortunately, she was caught in a conundrum where substantial roles for Asians in Hollywood films were and continue to be rare.¹⁹

Film publications such as the widely circulated *Diansheng* [Movietone], alerted the public to films produced or in production that had unfavourable portrayals of China or even reference to China unconnected to the main theme. For example, Shirley Temple's *Captain January* was criticized for dialogue in the film derogatory to China, which included references to Chinese as "chinamen" and China as a backward, barbarous land full of thieves. While the plot had nothing to do with a Chinese theme, the report questions this perversity on the part of foreign film-makers asking, "why is it they like to see Chinese fall into disgrace and make them the butt of jokes?" Similarly, *Shanghai Express*, *The General Died at Dawn*

and *The Black Robe*, a film produced in Victoria, Canada also appeared on **Diansheng's** black list.²⁰

As a quintessential portrayal of evil, the spirit of Fu Manchu was resurrected in what the eminent Chinese literary scholar C.T. Hsia calls the "warlord films" of the 1930's, *Shanghai Express*, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* and *The General Died at Dawn*. All of them were banned from China's screens. In hindsight and with the approach of objective analysis that Lu Xun advocated with *The Thief of Baghdad*, Hsia takes a different tact towards these films than the view that barred them from Chinese theatres. He sees the warlord characters as having had a complexity about them overlooked by the critics and suggests they were less representations of evil than of pathos. This bears some resemblance to Emily Hahn's musings on Fu Manchu's vulnerability. Commenting on the popularity of this series in North America she writes, "indeed, his villains always came to naught because of a fatal chattiness, and never did he learn by experience to cease telling his victims just what he meant to do to them."²¹

Hsia certainly identifies fundamental racist innuendoes in the "warlord films" not the least of which was how the plot is inextricably linked to the warlord's lust for the white heroine. He also reveals a prevailing pre-war view among Westerners that East Asians typically resorted to devious cunning rather than brute force heroics and mentions that, in Josef von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express*, even the physically prepossessing warlord cowers below the upraised fist of the relatively scrawny white hero. Indeed, Hsia

adds that the possibility of a heroic Chinese male with macho values only became accessible to North American audiences with the popularity of Bruce Lee films in the 1970's.²²

Yet the indignant opposition to "fanhua" films like the ones Hsia describes also revealed certain contradictions. He ruefully points out how the caricature of the warlord and his evil ways was a strong component of popular Chinese novels, such as *The Love of Laughter and Tears* [tixiao yinyuan], which both Mingxing and another Shanghai company made into a film.²³ There was in addition the notoriety of the northern warlord, Zhang Zongchang whose concubines included several white women. "One can hardly blame the Westerners", Hsia observes, "for seeing the warlord as the 'oriental scoundrel' with an appetite for white women and a source of misery for his people."²⁴

Hsia is not an apologist for these films, but he does see in them a gleam of artistic merit obfuscated by their "anti-Chinese" designation. In *Shanghai Express* he refers to the innovative contrasting hues of beauty between Anna May Wong and Marlene Dietrich and in *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* he sees a more complex creation of a character than a mere stereotype of an "oriental despot." Instead he sees that Yen [yuan] portrays a type of "anti-hero" who evokes sympathy on the part of the audience in his love for the missionary, Barbara Stanwyck.²⁵ While the story itself has inconsistencies, Hsia feels it was the premise of the director to show that China cannot be judged by Western Christian values. Moreover, he points to the kissing scene between General

Yen and Mary, albeit in a dream sequence, as quite remarkable for the time.²⁶

After moving to the U.S., Hsia became a renowned scholar of Chinese literature, but it is obvious from this article that he was also a prodigious film fan. A self-described "maniac" for films during his middle-school years, his reminiscences are punctuated with a nostalgic fondness for those days, in a manner resembling many of my interviews with elderly film fans in Shanghai. Hsia remembers anxiously waiting for Gary Cooper's new film, *The General Died at Dawn*, only to find it was prohibited. Years later living in New York, he sought out these and other films of the period being resurrected in art house theatres. He recalls finding *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* featured in a double bill with *Lost Horizon*, starring Ronald Colman.

I never liked *Lost Horizon* when I saw it back in 1937 in Shanghai at the Metropol. Every time Hollywood makes films with Oriental themes that proselytize Oriental philosophy, it is always rather tiresome to watch. A few years back, Columbia did a remake and even though it starred Liv Ullman the reviews were bad, which of course made me even less inclined to go see it. Today I mainly came to see the 1933 production of *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* but after more than thirty years of not seeing Ronald Colman on the screen, what with his sophisticated style and pleasant British accent, it was like having the pleasure of meeting an old friend after many years of separation.²⁷

The China theme was explored again by Hollywood in the screen version of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* and *Oil Lamps for China*. When news of their production was publicized, **Diansheng** magazine referred to them as a continuation of the "anti-China" tradition but neither film was rejected by the censors.²⁸ The latter film had

lacked any major stars (at least this is why Hsia says he doesn't remember the film being shown in China), but *The Good Earth* starred Paul Muni who was well known among film fans in Shanghai. *The Good Earth* was produced under an agreement with the central Kuomintang government who insisted on the right to request changes to the script during production. When the Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer crew came to China to shoot background shots and pick up props (including two water buffalo sent back to California), they were accompanied at all times by a government-appointed supervisor. In addition, another official, named Du Tingxiu, was sent to Los Angeles to, in effect, chaperon the production in the U.S.²⁹

Jay Leyda describes the initial negotiations for the film which were not mentioned in my Chinese references. He writes that "Charles Clarke, a cameraman with the first crew recalled that Chiang Kaishek finally gave his permission after a private screening of the "wrong" kind of American film, probably *The Mask of Fu Manchu*...He (Chiang) does not seem to have realized that this was also a MGM production." Leyda also comments that Du Tingxiu was "a genial and popular companion of the people working on the film" but was dismissed after two years for allegedly having "committed the error of entertaining a disfavoured general in Los Angeles and thus was suspected of having been corrupted into permitting a bad picture about China to be made."³⁰

The account of *The Good Earth's* production published in **Diansheng** in 1937 is less revealing about such details, merely stating that Du's term of duty was up and the responsibility now

fell to the Chinese Consul in San Francisco, Huang Chaogin. Huang suggested some changes be made to the script and published a document describing the production process, portions of which were published in *Diansheng*. This also included the opinions of two well-known Chinese writers, Hu Shi and Lin Yutang, and an official who saw the previews, Jiang Baili. Of the three, Hu Shi was the most critical, laying most of the blame on Pearl Buck's original work and suggesting that the film was an improvement on the novel.³¹ Jay Leyda provides more detail and quotes sources saying there were objections to the various scenes depicting poverty and that these were deleted when the film was shown in China. Apparently even these revisions still led to mixed reactions from the audience, judging from the comments of people I interviewed. Some were angry at the film for a portrayal of peasant life that would give foreign audiences the impression that China was a backward country. Yet there were positive appraisals of the film as well. As one man, who was himself a fan of Pearl Buck's work, said, "I personally liked the film. It portrayed the countryside as it really was, very backward, but some people took offense at this because they thought it was humiliating to China. Chinese films showed people living in poverty and so on, why couldn't Westerners do the same thing?" On the other hand, whether or not so clearly stated, the appropriation of the Chinese setting in a Hollywood film, no matter how it was portrayed, was still unacceptable to many Chinese.³²

The process involved in the making of *The Good Earth* and its reception in Shanghai reflects an evolution in both Chinese and Western attitudes to Hollywood productions with Chinese themes. Compared with the relative mobility of foreign film crews in the previous era, the emergence of more political clout on the part of the Kuomintang government *vis a vis* foreign powers is demonstrated in the restrictions MGM faced in China. On the question of Chinese themes in the hands of foreigners the judgment of the audience was ambivalent. The **Diansheng** magazine might categorically denounce the production plans for *The Good Earth* in 1935 simply because, from past experiences with films made by foreigners, its derogatory intentions were assumed. In 1937, after much deliberation by everyone involved, the film was deemed acceptable.

Regardless of how *The Good Earth* was evaluated, it did awaken the American public to a different kind of China than that portrayed in previous films, with particular emphasis on the various tribulations that natural disasters, feudalism and political upheaval brought upon China's farmers. It might be tempting to wonder whether the Kuomintang, in cooperating with MGM, had some kind of hidden agenda to garner sympathy among the American public, particularly when Chiang Kaishek decided to fight the Japanese and appealed for American support. It is difficult to concede that the KMT possessed such crystal-ball premonitions back in 1933 when negotiations for the film began (it was not screened until 1937). Nevertheless, as Leyda also suggests, coupled with American support for China's war of resistance to Japan, *The Good*

Earth marked the beginning of a different cinematic stereotype for Chinese characters in Hollywood productions.³³

The Anti-Japanese Movement

Hong Shen's indictment of *Welcome Danger* and the ensuing protest against "anti-China" films was one development that typifies the activism that came to be associated with the film world in the 1930's. Other important factors in transforming the Chinese film industry was the growing interest in film among left-wing intellectuals and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931. Both had implications for Shanghai's film culture and shaped a highly successful link between political activism and entertainment. The arrival of sound films and the translation into Chinese of works by Russian film theorists laid the groundwork for leftist influence in film production. As early as 1924 Qu Qiubai, a communist leader on the literary front, recognized the potential of cinema but was wary of the film world's decadent image and feared it would corrupt or obliterate the leftist values of cadres if they began participating in film work.³⁴ In 1932 when Qu Qiubai gave his approval to a group of party workers to act as "script consultants" for the Mingxing company, he still admonished them with the warning "to be careful." This alluded less to the danger of police discovering the group's status as members of the Communist Party and more to a perception that linked the film world with debauchery and deprivation. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was cautious about film from the beginning but could not ignore its

propaganda value in accessing a much wider audience than was possible with literature or theatre, particularly with the invention of sound films.³⁵

Intellectuals had begun re-evaluating the status of film when a new company, Lianhua, was formed in 1929. Lianhua's productions brought a new approach to film-making with subjects that departed from the martial arts genre whose popularity was beginning to wane after dominating the market throughout the latter part of the 1920's. Hailed as the "new school" [xinpai] of film production, the company attracted talent from the other film companies. Lianhua's founder, Luo Mingyou, was a successful businessman who initially became involved in film as a law student in Beijing. Dissatisfied with the monopoly of theatre ownership by foreigners and the expensive ticket prices, Luo decided to operate his own theatre with inexpensive admission to attract the student population. With family money he leased one theatre in 1919, while still attending classes at university, and in keeping with his high sense of social propriety, refused to screen films "propagating sex and violence" [huiyin huidao]. Despite some early setbacks, his efforts were rewarded and with his father's assistance, Luo was able to attract capital to expand his business. By 1929 he owned more than twenty theatres situated in the main northern cities, including those in Manchuria.³⁶

Having established himself in the theatre business, Luo, similar to Zhou Jianyun's earlier attempt, put together a production company and a ten-point strategy to improve the content

of Chinese films. Lianhua amalgamated the Minxin (not Mingxing) and Da Zhonghua Baihe companies. Although Luo established studios in Beijing and Hong Kong, Shanghai was where the majority of production took place. Lianhua's early features attracted a new audience for Chinese films and gathered together many talented directors, scriptwriters and performers who shared progressive views and ultimately contributed to infusing the Chinese film industry with a new vitality.³⁷

Concurrent with the establishment of Lianhua, Communist Party members and a cadre named Xia Yan in particular, were beginning to have more contact with Hong Shen and Tian Han under the auspices of the League of Left-wing Writers and its offshoot, the Left-wing Drama League [zuolian xijujia lianmeng]. Film circles were closely associated with drama, as had occurred with wenmingxi or "new theatre" in the twenties, but the Drama League and the Lianhua company were supplemented with artists involved in huaju or "spoken drama" groups who performed many plays translated from Western works with vaguely progressive themes. Xia Yan, who was active as a Communist Party representative in the League of Leftist Writers, began working with such theatre groups. At the suggestion of Hong Shen, Xia Yan was invited along with two other party cadres, Chen Boqi and Ah Ying (Qian Xingcun), to assist the Mingxing company in script development. Among the stimuli for changing Mingxing's style was the declining audience interest in its traditional formats coupled with losses incurred in making the transition to sound.³⁸

In addition, the Mingxing company was acutely conscious of changes in audience tastes and the new competition from Lianhua. This situation was aggravated by the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and the subsequent attack on Shanghai the following January which had an immediate effect on Shanghai citizens. Aerial bombing caused considerable damage to the Zhabei district and the International Settlement and French Concession received a new influx of refugees. Patriotic outrage, already ignited among intellectuals by the invasion up north, spread among the general populace. The Kuomintang policy of non-resistance to the Japanese (with the exception of the initial defense of Shanghai by the 19th route army) created an atmosphere where the leftist movement gained greater support by demanding action against the invasion.³⁹ This transition did not go unnoticed by movie producers! Thus in a unique coalescence of leftist interests in promoting progressive ideas, and commercial interests on the part of studio heads like Mingxing's Zhang Shichuan and Zhou Yunjian and Lianhua's Luo Mingyou, China's film industry underwent a profound transformation that highlighted patriotic themes. Even the relatively conservative managers of Tianyi were affected by the change.⁴⁰

The role of the Chinese Communist Party as a catalyst behind this transformation has been well documented and somewhat embellished by mainland historiography, often for the benefit of contemporary political goals. Explaining this tendency, film scholar Chris Berry notes that "the leftist films of the thirties are figured as part of the cinematic heritage of the People's

Republic and the forerunners of its own cinema." One is reminded to exercise caution that it not "be taken for granted that such a close relationship existed between these film-makers and the Party."⁴¹ The often hagiographic references to participation by Party members in early film work supports this fundamental premise in many mainland texts. It is also important to remember that many political divisions existed within the Party and the League of Leftist Writers during this time on how to proceed with cultural work.⁴² Moreover, as Paul Pickowicz suggests in his article, *The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930's*, the left right dichotomy did not necessarily preclude opposing groups from articulating the same messages under different political labels. In this respect, Pickowicz argues that many leftist films emphasized the corruptive influences of Western culture which was echoed in attempts by the Kuomintang to extol Chinese puritanism over Western decadence.⁴³

Consequently, an intriguing aspect to this period was the network of relationships among forces seemingly antithetical to each other. For example, at the height of Lianhua's popular success in the early thirties, Luo Mingyou was heavily involved with supporting right-wing Kuomintang propaganda efforts with his own scripts.⁴⁴ That leftists and Party members might have had to compromise their politics is not surprising under the circumstances of a vigilant right-wing government. Yet the plethora of figures, from underworld gang members to Kuomintang fascists, who were mixed up together in the production of films propagating divergent

political views, gives the history of this era a depth of paradox that at times seems absurd. Some of this complexity is revealed in the production and censorship process.

Resistance, Compromise and Control

After 1927, when the Communist Party was forced underground, the Kuomintang government became increasingly ruthless in suppressing dissent by leftist activists.⁴⁵ Xia Yan's film group worked under pseudonyms and their Party status was revealed only to non-party insiders like Hong Shen. Even their home addresses were kept secret. Much of the anti-Japanese content in both Lianhua and Mingxing films was cloaked in allegory in order to pass the censors. The highlighting of social issues, without directly implying class struggle, was less scrutinized but nevertheless recognized as "leftist propaganda".⁴⁶

In the 1920's, before the Kuomintang gained control of East China after the Northern Expedition, inspection of Chinese films was conducted by the Jiangsu Province Education Association [jiangsu sheng jiaoyu hui]. Neither this organization nor a similar board formed earlier in the 1900's in Beijing was very effective, no doubt hampered both by the technical logistics of pre-screening films and the general political chaos of the era. Consequently, except for the issue of exporting films as noted by Zhou Jianyun, film companies were not unduly burdened by official interference. After 1927, the KMT government established a succession of institutions, vacillating between provincial and centralized

control of censorship until 1930, when central authority took precedence under the Film Inspection Law [dianying jiancha fa], administered by the department responsible for internal affairs and the Ministry of Education. In 1932 the Central Film Inspection Committee [zhongyang dianying jiancha weiyuanhui] was established under the leadership of the Propaganda Ministry. In addition, both foreign and Chinese films screened within Shanghai's International Settlement required inspection by a special committee approved by the Shanghai Municipal Council. The French Concession also had its own censorship committee.⁴⁷

Prior to when political references became an issue in films, censorship policy was directed at eliminating works seen to be harmful to moral values and after 1930, of course, films that were considered to be "anti-China". With the rise of the leftist movement in cultural work and the Japanese invasion, both the Kuomintang and foreign censorship boards examined films for political infractions. Although the Shanghai Municipal Council was initially dominated by British interests, it was influenced less by nationalistic ties than by the desire to maintain efficiency in commercial activity which was seen to require cooperation among all the foreign powers including Japan. Consequently, allusions to anti-Japanese sentiments in Chinese films could be equally censored by the Shanghai Municipal Council or the Kuomintang. Scripts of Chinese films required approval before production began as well as a pre-screening of the finished work. For example, references to social struggle had to be toned down in Mingxing's *Shanghai*,

Twenty-four Hours [shanghai ershisige xiaoshi]. Scripted by Xia Yan and directed by Shen Xiling, the film juxtaposed the lives of the bourgeois and working classes. Sometimes a film was given a new ending by censors, known as "adding a tail" [jia weiba], to suggest a less politically volatile resolution. Likewise, any direct reference to the Japanese invasions of 1931 and 1932 was prohibited.⁴⁸

Censorship of foreign films during the thirties was also influenced by the political atmosphere and is illustrated by the following examples. Zhu Manhua, who was responsible for translating American films screened at the Grand Theatre, recalls that in 1938 his translation of the title of the Warner film about the Mexican revolution, *Juarez*, was rejected by the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC). The patriotic connotation of his original translation as "Give Me Back My Country" [huanwo heshan] was changed to a more complacent "The Beautiful Land" [jinxiu heshan].⁴⁹ Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* was banned by the SMC, at the request of the German Consul in 1940 and scenes from MGM's *Marie Antoinette* were deleted lest they inspire revolutionary lust in the hearts of the audience.⁵⁰

With some exceptions, American films were evaluated more for depictions of excessive sex or violence rather than for content that might be potentially subversive. Zhu Manhua noted that the 1931 screening of *Frankenstein*, starring Boris Karloff, was felt to be too frightening for children and an admission restriction was applied for underage viewers. This factor was exploited by theatre

owners, however, who took advantage of the audience's predilection to see films given a restricted status by the censors.⁵¹ Similarly when the 1938 Warner's film *Road Gang* was banned by the Shanghai Municipal Council censorship board, advertisements for the film at the Isis theatre billed it as "the most dramatic revelation since *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang*." The latter film, starring Paul Muni, was very popular when it showed in 1932 and was apparently banned by the SMC as well. Zhu felt these films were singled out for their violent content, however, rather than their subversive potential.⁵²

The Isis Theatre was a popular venue for films banned by the Shanghai Municipal Council because its location on the borderline between Chinese territory and the International Settlement line in Hongkou put it outside the SMC's jurisdiction. It premiered many Soviet films beginning with Eisenstein's *Road Into Life* in 1933. Soviet films could enter the Chinese market after the Kuomintang restored diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union that year. A number of puzzling questions exist regarding both the SMC's and the Kuomintang's policy towards Russian films, but *Chapayev* was banned by the SMC in 1936 and likewise was shown at the Isis with considerable fanfare, stating in their ads "you will positively not see this film in any other theatre in the city of Shanghai!" Soviet films were also exhibited at the Doumer Theatre in the French Concession which catered to the Russian emigre population living in the area, but evidently *Chapayev* was not screened in the French Concession either. In addition, Russian films were screened

discreetly in smaller theatres so as to minimize interference from police.⁵³

The Soviet film screenings at the Isis in Hongkou attracted many students and intellectuals. While seemingly open to these events, the Kuomintang did step in on the occasion known as the "Abysinnia incident". Early in 1937 a Soviet documentary criticizing the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was screened and drew a large audience. The event also attracted over one hundred Italian soldiers stationed in Shanghai who took offense at the film. They stormed the theatre and destroyed the print ("all of a sudden the screen went black" recalled one viewer). The Kuomintang censors, having approved the film's screening, yielded to pressure from the Italian Consulate and banned further showings. They had reacted in a similar fashion when Japanese newspaper editorials opposed the screening of a Soviet satire on imperialism in Manchuria, *The Puppet* [kuilei], and pressure from the SMC compelled the Kuomintang to ban the film.⁵⁴

Censors were clearly less systematic in their examination of American films. Furthermore, a certain amount of flexibility also existed between censors and theatre owners. Major theatres like the Grand had special screening rooms for official evaluation and managers did their utmost to ingratiate themselves to the visiting authorities.⁵⁵

Although the Kuomintang and Shanghai Municipal Council surveillance of domestic productions was stricter, it too was not immune to similar inducements to bend policy. This is recalled by

Xia Yan who described his first meeting with Zhou Jianyun to discuss the terms for working in Mingxing. When Xia Yan asked about the problem of scripts passing the censorship boards, Zhou dismissed his anxiety with the following assurance.

Zhou nodded his head and said, "Of course the scripts will be examined but as long as they are not too "offensive" [ciyan] there is a way to get around this problem." Then he added in a somewhat enigmatic manner, that we perhaps didn't fully understand the situation, "whether the Shanghai Municipal Council or the Nationalist Government, as long as you know someone on the inside, if need be one can always make an offering [shaodianxiang]. The problem can always be resolved."⁵⁶

In an associated development, one of the most successful achievements of the leftist groups was their influence on film criticism in the city's major newspapers in the period between 1932 and 1934. Pertinent to the discussion here is what Cheng Jihua refers to as one of the first assignments to unify leftists and other progressive critics in the campaign against "the conspiracy by American imperialists to monopolize the Chinese film industry."⁵⁷

To take advantage of the Chinese film industry's difficulty in acquiring enough capital to make the transition to sound, American investors and Lu Gen, an overseas Chinese who owned a chain of theatres in Shanghai and other southern cities, planned to set up production facilities and published their intentions in one of the Chinese newspapers, **Xinwen Bao**, in 1932. A number of articles by Hong Shen and the critics' group appeared shortly afterwards in **Chen Bao's** film supplement *Meiri Dianyning* [Daily Film] that condemned the plan, but the public outcry may have been

disproportionate to the actual threat.⁵⁸ Jay Leyda suggests that the attempt to develop a "Chinese Hollywood" by American investors "may have been a convenient straw man at this revolutionary moment."⁵⁹ Hong Shen's article stating that "every theatre will become a place to raise slaves" may also have been his way of venting his dissatisfaction with his trip to America on behalf of Mingxing to negotiate technical assistance in sound production for the studio in 1931. In any case, as with the attempt of the British American Tobacco Company to produce films in China, the launching of the alleged American "conspiracy" was inauspiciously timed at a period when the anti-imperialist movement was resurgent.⁶⁰

The event touched off widespread commentary in the newspapers by leftist critics. Film review supplements such as *Meiri Dianying* [Daily Film] in the Kuomintang-sponsored newspaper **Chen Bao** became dominated by leftist critics. The reading public was also informed how certain films had been censored and what cuts had been made. Soviet films were widely covered and praised; indeed, fifty-five articles on Soviet films were published in 1933 alone.⁶¹ Reviews of American films were frequent as well though less serious films were often targeted for disapproval, such as one writer's criticism that said many were "downright propaganda for colonialist policy" and pointed to MGM's African adventure film, *Trader Horn*, as an example. Moreover, Hollywood "produced all types of films with romantic illusions and voluptuous women that drugged the brains of an oppressed populace."⁶²

Not surprisingly the upsurge of leftist influence in film criticism and production irritated the Kuomintang censors. One tactic for the government was to counteract with an organization to promote the improvement of films with values similar to those that later defined the neo-Confucianist and quasi-Christian-inspired New Life movement in 1934. In 1932, the same year as the leftist triumph in the press, the Kuomintang established the Chinese Educational Film Association [zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui]. Most of the members were government officials, yet, in another example of overlapping rationale, Mingxing's Hong Shen and Zheng Zhengqiu and Lianhua's Sun Yu and Luo Mingyou also participated. Du Yunzhi describes it as an attempt to foster communication between film companies and the government, but it was also a measure to try and counter leftist activity. In addition, the Kuomintang set up two film studios, Zhongdian in Nanjing and another studio in Wuhan, which eventually became the Zhongzhi studio during the war.⁶³

The clandestine methods against leftist activity that the government used to eliminate political opposition were also applied to film companies. Much of this was facilitated by the government's close association with Shanghai's gang underworld led by the triumvirate of Du Yuesheng, Huang Jinrong and Zhang Xiaolin, otherwise known as the Green Gang [qingbang]. Interestingly, gang involvement in movie theatres was negligible, though they were well entrenched in other facets of Shanghai's entertainment industry, particularly traditional opera venues.⁶⁴ The influence of Du Yuesheng in particular was far reaching because of his involvement

in Shanghai's financial institutions. For example, Zhou Jianyun was summoned by Pan Gongzhan, who threatened to curtail Mingxing bank loans unless the company changed the political content of their productions. Pan was a right-wing Kuomintang official in charge of the **Chen Bao** newspaper (which contained the film supplement *Meiri Dianying*) and other propaganda activity for the government. In spite of Mingxing's earlier association with Du Yuesheng (the latter had asked for Du's assistance in a lawsuit with another company) Zhou felt compelled to take Pan's threat seriously because of the close alliance between Pan and Du Yuesheng and Du's control over Chinese banks.⁶⁵

In order to placate the impatient Pan Gongzhan, it was rumoured that Zhou offered him free shares in Mingxing. Pan insisted, however, that a government agent also be appointed as "script consultant" to Mingxing, a proposition which posed an obvious threat to Xia Yan and his group in the studio. Yet in a bizarre twist of fate the agent, Yao Fangfeng was more interested in making films (and friends perhaps) than engaging in political disputes. According to Xia Yan's memoirs, Yao, formerly a script-writer with Tianyi, did not interfere in the group's meetings for script development. He also provided an unexpected boost to leftist writers in the *Meiri Dianying* film supplement by offering to exploit his relationship with Pan Gongzhan to ensure that writers were given a free rein in their film reviews. Yao qualified this "benevolence" by explaining that the film supplement's provocative writing had increased circulation for the newspaper.⁶⁶

Even allowing for Xia Yan's possible exaggeration of this arrangement, it is probable that Yao Fangfeng had little choice but to adhere to the leftist lobby in Mingxing. Zhou Jianyun supported the leftist involvement in Mingxing ostensibly because it was good for business. While Zhang Shichuan had reservations regarding their participation, he could not oppose his longtime partner without jeopardizing the company. (Zheng Zhengqiu apparently operated as a mediator between the two because Zhang Shichuan was known for his bad temper.)⁶⁷

Another anomaly to the Green Gang's involvement with government efforts to purge leftist dissent in Shanghai was the financing of two film studios by close associates of Huang Jinrong. The Yihua company was started by the opium merchant, Yan Chuntang, who had ambitions to become the main competitor with Mingxing, Lianhua and Tianyi in film production. Tian Han, by now a member of the Communist Party, was recruited as the head of script development working under the pseudonym of Chen Yu. For a brief time Yihua became the most politically daring among all the studios but paradoxically, not very successful at the box office. Unfortunately, Yihua became the target of a Kuomintang-sponsored quasi-fascist organization known as the Blueshirts [lanyi she] who destroyed the studio in 1933, barely a year after Yihua had begun production.⁶⁸ Production resumed but by 1935 Yihua had lost its left-wing influence.⁶⁹

Apparently, Yan Chuntang's influence was insufficient in government circles to thwart interference from anti-communist

vigilante groups. He also appears to have been dazzled with the prospect of becoming a famous movie producer surrounded by film stars. This apparently caused him to underestimate the political delicacy of his investment in leftist talent. In any case, unlike Lianhua or Mingxing, Yihua did not remain a bastion for left-wing film production and eventually began making light comedies and love stories.⁷⁰

The other company with Green Gang associations was the Xinhua studios formed by Zhang Shankun. Zhang had considerable experience in the entertainment field, having worked first under Huang Chujiu, who founded the famous Great World Entertainment Center in 1917. Zhang later became a protege of Huang Jinrong when the latter took over the Great World in 1932. He established the Xinhua company in 1935 and borrowed a number of talented directors and performers from Mingxing and Lianhua. Xinhua produced many successful films which entertained as well as highlighted patriotic and social issues.⁷¹

Ultimately the dominance of leftist film criticism in the press reached its *nadir* in 1934, when a counterpoint was launched by a journal arguing for film analysis on less political lines. Known as the advocates of "soft film" theory [ruanxing dianying], the writers for **Modern Film** [xiandai dianying] proposed the idea that film was meant to be "ice-cream for the eyes and a sofa for the soul." Leftist writers were quick to condemn the "soft film" theory, but in 1934 the controversy reached the pages of the *Meiri*

Dianying film supplement as the latter began publishing in the **Chen Bao** newspaper.⁷²

In addition, the patience of Pan Gongzhan, the Kuomintang official who ran **Chen Bao**, had its limits and he requested changes in the paper's film criticism. As a result the period of transition was marked, as Xia Yan recalled, by "the strange phenomenon" of articles published in one issue stating a particular view, which was vehemently opposed in the next.⁷³ A battle raged between the leftist front of Xia Yan (using the pseudonym Luo Fu), Tang Na and others against reviews published by the "soft" critic Huang Jiamo. Not surprisingly the critique of American films was one site of struggle. For example Huang's favourable review of the MGM production *Lady For A Day*, a comedy about an immigrant New York street vendor who poses as a grande dame to her daughter and prospective in-laws, prompted the following response from Tang Na.⁷⁴

....it is readily apparent that the theme (of *Lady For A Day*) expresses the philosophy of social climbing and so many coincidences are involved in the film that makes it contrived and the characters unrealistic. Without doubt, all the characters involved express a petty bourgeois mentality of compromise and reformism.⁷⁵

Cheng Jihua claims that the leftist battle with the "soft" critics "sharpened and refined their skills in using Marxist-Leninist art theory analysis as a weapon."⁷⁶ This could be true, but a cursory examination of some of the articles in *Meiri Dianying* during this episode reveals that the leftist attitude towards certain American films suggests they did not categorically denounce all Hollywood films, nor did the "soft critics" necessarily lack a

critical perspective on American society. Moreover, the reviews often appear to me more as an editorial offensive to discredit the opposition's political view under the guise of critiquing the films in question. In the war of words Xia Yan and Tang Na seem to have wielded a sharper pen but I was also struck by Huang's comment on the 1934 Warner film *Massacre* in response to Tang Na's favourable synopsis of the film.⁷⁷

The film depicts the judicial pardon of a native American played by Robert Barthemles who had killed a group of white men in revenge for the treatment of his family and his people on their Sioux reservation. Huang dismissed this as a film that embellished the American political system with unrealistic qualities and overlooked the enduring presence of racial inequality in American society. In conclusion he added that this was simply "another propaganda film for the American government and in terms of [political] consciousness it is far inferior to *I Am A Fugitive From a Chain Gang*."⁷⁸ In an exchange of articles outlining their various positions, Xia Yan (Luo Fu) pointed out that Huang was mistaken in assuming that *Massacre* was mere propaganda. Agreeing that the story may have been unrealistic in its portrayal of the events leading up to the judicial pardon, Xia Yan also argued how *Massacre* expressed the possibility that such an event could occur in contemporary American society. "This," he added, "is what allows us to believe in its quality of realism."⁷⁹

Further on in the same article, Xia Yan criticizes Huang Jiamo's limited view of the role films can play in arousing

political consciousness. With regard to Tang Na's attack on Huang's review of *Lady For A Day*, Huang had countered by arguing that "Tang Na's search for leftist consciousness in an American comedy is completely fruitless [yuanmu qiuyu] and he will waste his whole life trying to find it."⁸⁰ Extrapolating upon this statement to undermine Huang's argument, Xia Yan gave the following reply.

You say that you refute the idea that films are conditioned by the social system in which they are produced yet why do you also suggest that looking for progressive qualities in American films is fruitless? If, for example, all American films are lacking in progressive aspects that would express conflicts in the social system then does that not equal the idea that American films are conditioned by their social system and do not resist the dominating ideology? Well I'm sorry, but let me tell you something. The way the American social system is arranged is what causes conflicts and contradictions to arise that are expressed in thought and artistic works and thus allows human society to progress and change.⁸¹

The leftist opposition to the "soft film" theory was hailed as a victory against reactionary forces but the glory was largely rhetorical. Pockets of leftist film criticism still continued in some newspapers, but pressure from the ensuing debate caused Xia Yan, Tang Na, et al to discontinue writing for *Meiri Dianying*. Subsequently, Xia Yan and his film group were also compelled to leave Mingxing to work with the new Diantong studio. The studio lasted for only two years but produced a number of noteworthy films including a film originally written by Tian Han, *Children of the Storm*. The title song, written by the talented composer, Nie Er, eventually became the Chinese national anthem after 1949.⁸²

The tenacity of the leftist involvement in film production and criticism reflects some of the political complexities that

characterized Shanghai during the 1930's. When government and financial pressure forced the Diantong Company to close down in 1935, the disbanded talent merely reconstituted itself again in Mingxing, Lianhua and Xinhua studios. Of the various participants in the film movement only Tian Han and Yang Hansheng were actually arrested by the Kuomintang in 1934, shortly after the Yihua debacle. Otherwise the film industry was relatively successful in producing films that voiced political and social criticism. The most important factor in these circumstances was the film-makers' ability to grasp the patriotic urgencies of the moment, something the audience could appreciate and which in turn satisfied the commercial prerogatives of the studio producers.⁸³

The Kuomintang right-wing forces were not so successful *vis a vis* the film industry as they were in other circles of dissent. Indeed, they never did suppress opposition in Shanghai during the 1930's the way they were able to in Taiwan under martial law or as the Communists did in China after 1949. The political, economic, and social heterogeneity of Shanghai during the thirties played no small part in fostering the survival of dissident groups and the tenuous alliance between the Kuomintang and Shanghai's foreign powers never crystallized into a totalitarian force. Perhaps it was a result of the sheer number of different interests at stake that allowed antithetical groups to collaborate. In any case, despite the continuing dominance of American films in the theatres, this period spawned a cinematic phenomenon that combined the vigour of

art, entertainment, and revolutionary aspirations to produce films with a highly popular appeal.

Theatre Ownership and Distribution

In 1926 when Antonio Romas left Shanghai for Spain the Mingxing company's theatre subsidiary, the Shanghai Amusement Company, leased the majority of his theatres and finally purchased them in 1931. Hertzberg and his Far Eastern Entertainment Company leased the Embassy from Mingxing, but the Embassy's pre-eminence as the finest theatre in Shanghai, along with the Carlton and Odeon, faded with the construction of larger cinema palaces.⁸⁴ Among these was the Grand built in 1928. The Grand was established with both Chinese and American investment but registered as an American company under the China Trade Act, a procedure that was drawn up in the twenties to give American companies a concession from U.S. Federal taxes. Chinese investors utilized the Act to give companies foreign registration which protected them from undue interference from the Kuomintang who became increasingly manipulative in financial circles in the early thirties. Despite its frequent change of ownership the Grand remained registered as an American company until the Communist takeover in 1949.⁸⁵

Shortly after the "Welcome Danger" incident the Grand began losing revenue and was put up for sale. The theatre was bought in 1931 by Lu Gen, who embarked on building his theatre empire in Shanghai under the name of the United Theatre Company [lianhe dianying gongsi]. In the twenties, Lu had already established the

Puma company [liyi gonsi] to distribute American films. He also had plans to build a production studio in cooperation with the American-owned Huizhong Bank, but either due to the bad press of an imminent "Chinese Hollywood" or because of Lu's burgeoning financial troubles, the plan was never realized.⁸⁶

Lu Gen razed the old Grand and began building a new theatre designed in art moderne style by the European architect L. E. Hudec, who also designed the Park Hotel and other prominent buildings in Shanghai. Foreign investors in this enterprise included George McBain, owner of the Majestic Hotel and an American manager with the Huizhong Bank. The new Grand became Shanghai's largest and most famous theatre, a designation which despite its somewhat tattered appearance, it still holds today. Lu bought up a number of other theatres as well, including the newly built Cathay (1932) on Joffre Road.⁸⁷

The new Grand finally opened in June 1933 with the MGM production *Hell Divers* starring Clark Gable, but the massive investment into the building soon had debtors demanding payment from Lu Gen. Conflicts within the company and, most notably, its foreign investors brought the matter to the courts under American jurisdiction and the company was liquidated in 1935. Shanghai was at the time undergoing feverish speculation in real estate and the land was purchased, somewhat incongruously, by the Spanish Catholic Church, incongruous since the real estate included the theatre and a dance hall which was hardly in keeping with the church's image of

religious piety. In any case, whatever their motivations, they soon sold the land to a real estate broker.⁸⁸

At this time, the Kuomintang government was in the midst of changing China's economic standard from silver to printed currency [fabi] in order to capitalize on the rising silver prices on international markets after the U.S. Silver Purchase Act was passed in 1933. To protect themselves against losses incurred by the new currency, the Chekiang Industrial Bank [zhejiang shiye yinghang] had begun investing in foreign exchange and real estate. Ultimately the prospect of buying up the Grand property came to the attention of Percy Chu [Zhu Bochuan], an executive with the bank.⁸⁹

Percy Chu had invested in film-related enterprises in the past, but it was with the purchase of the Grand and Lu Gen's other theatre, the Cathay, that Chu made his mark on the history of Shanghai theatres. Trained at Columbia University with an internship at the First National Bank in New York, Chu had returned to Shanghai in the early twenties where he began working for the Chekiang Industrial Bank. By the 1930's he was well-known in financial circles and a member of various civic boards and clubs. After buying the Grand he also became a member of the committee for film censorship with the Shanghai Municipal Council.⁹⁰

Percy Chu combined the Cathay and Grand into the Guo Guang Company and made some major changes in the theatre's management. He hired and trained new staff, emphasizing, as a former worker Cao Yongfu remembers, the policy that "the customer is always right."⁹¹ To reduce the Grand's advertising overhead, Chu also started a

weekly bulletin to introduce new American films. One of the major problems Chu faced, however, was the unreasonable terms that the American distributors demanded for screening rights to first run features.⁹²

Up to the 1930's the distribution of American films was held through various private companies such as the Peacock Motion Picture company, owned by James Thomas and Chinese investors and Lu Gen's Puma company. Owners of theatre chains in China like Marshall Sanderson and Luo Mingyou apparently negotiated individually with American film companies.⁹³ By 1933, however, all the major American film studios, MGM, Paramount, Warners, Twentieth Century Fox, Columbia, United Artists, Universal and RKO had established offices and agents in Shanghai to deal directly with theatre owners in Shanghai and the rest of China. Compared with more systematic expansion of American distribution agents in Europe and Latin America, the studios were relatively late in setting up their offices in China, ostensibly because the market was considered too small, being situated only in urban areas.⁹⁴

The presence of the eight major companies, referred to as the "bada gongsi" or the "big eight", distinguished a new era in distribution for the China market where previously "adventurer" entrepreneurs like Romas came to Shanghai to make their fortunes and leave. The eight studios set up offices in Shanghai with a long-term interest in China in mind. Moreover they formed an agreement among themselves, a special board to minimize disputes in distribution which also allowed them to drive a hard bargain with

theatre owners who had no recourse in seeking out other avenues of American distribution. Lu Gen had met with this disadvantage early on, when United Artists demanded he pay seventy-percent of the profits for Chaplin's *City Lights*. As a monopoly the group cornered the market completely. Their offices were situated close together downtown and theatre owners likened negotiations as "going to pay a visit to the emperor." Percentages were charged according to the expected popularity of the film, usually as high as sixty percent for first-run rights. Second-run theatres usually ran films a year later, at thirty percent, and third and fourth-runs at lesser percentages.⁹⁵

Percy Chu recognized that a similar show of strength was required among Shanghai's major first-run theatres. Besides the Grand and Cathay, two more theatres drew the biggest first-run audiences, the Nanking (1930) and the Metropol (1933). Both were owned by He Tingran (T.J. Holt) who had started out with the Peking Theatre in 1926 and subsequently formed the Lianyi Company. Percy Chu decided to approach He Tingran with the idea of uniting together in order to secure better deals from the American distributors. On the basis of a "gentleman's agreement" they negotiated terms for screening rights where the American distribution agents were not to charge percentages above fifty percent. Within a year, the companies were still breaching the agreement on certain films so Percy Chu formed the Asia Theatre Company along with He Tingran in 1938. The company consisted of altogether six theatres, the Grand, Cathay, Metropol, Nanjing,

Rialto (formerly the Peking) and in 1941 included the newly constructed Majestic. Furthermore the company also registered itself as an American company and a local American businessman named Hager was named the nominal president, with Percy Chu and He Tingran the actual managers behind the operation.⁹⁶

The group of Asia theatres screened first-run features from Warner's, Paramount, Columbia, United Artists and RKO studios. Universal and Twentieth-century Fox films were generally shown at the Strand theatre operated by the Mingxing subsidiary, the Shanghai Amusement Company, though it appears they also were screened in theatres associated with the Asia Theatre Company. MGM opted out of the agreement with the Asia Theatre Company and set up its own arrangement with Pan Zhihen, who had recently constructed the Roxy Theatre on the site of the old Embassy. Asia Theatres continued its arrangement with the other American distributors until the outbreak of the Pacific War and the occupation of the foreign settlements by the Japanese army in December 1941.⁹⁷

These theatres formed the core of first-run venues for American films. There were very few other theatres which screened first-run American films with the exception of the Strand, the Isis and the Eastern Theatre in the Yangshupu district. A plan to build two other major theatres that were to outrank the Grand in stature reached the construction stage, but the projects were never finished due to funding problems.⁹⁸ Besides the Strand, other theatres associated with the Shanghai Amusement Company showed Chinese productions and largely second-run American films. The

majority of other theatres in Shanghai were run individually by private companies showing either Chinese, second, third or even fourth-run American and some European films. In 1933 statistics from a film magazine said that out of thirty-seven theatres in Shanghai, nineteen showed primarily American films and the rest Chinese films or a mixture of both. Varying both in size and quality, the total number of movie theatres in Shanghai by the late thirties numbered more than fifty.⁹⁹

Although it only existed for three years under Percy Chu's direction, the creation of the Asia Theatre Company is representative of how Chinese businesses sought to counteract foreign monopoly and government meddling in Republican-era Shanghai. Here, Percy Chu symbolized the quintessential "nationalist capitalist" who operated commercial ventures while trying to maintain patriotic convictions about China that were fundamentally at odds with foreign conglomerates and the ruling Kuomintang. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interview Percy Chu and when I asked if the Grand was ever able to show Chinese films he exclaimed excitedly, "I was the first, I argued with the distributors [bada] at the end of every year when the new program was being drawn up; Shanghai was a Chinese place so it should show Chinese pictures." He managed to get a concession from the American film distributors, that Chinese films could be shown at the Grand during mid-week, the first of which was Lianhua's *Lost Lambs* [nitu gaoyang] shown in March 1937. Unfortunately, when the Japanese took over the surrounding Chinese territory in Shanghai

and Hongkou in 1937, Shanghai film production was reduced considerably, though the Asia Theatre group continued to show the occasional Chinese film in their theatres.¹⁰⁰

The Audience

The end of the silent era in Hollywood brought a new challenge to Chinese film-makers and the ongoing quest for audience appeal. Among the early Hollywood sound films which were released, with their emphasis on music and dancing, Ernst Lubitsch's *The Love Parade*, starring Maurice Chevalier and Jeannette MacDonald, was an unprecedented hit when it played at the Grand in 1929.¹⁰¹ Hollywood musicals, [gewupian] became very popular in Shanghai throughout the thirties. The Mingxing, Tianyi and other companies experimented with sound pictures in the early thirties but were plagued with technical problems. Lianhua advertised *Wild Grass* [yecao xianhua] starring Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yan, as China's first sound picture, but in reality it was only a record accompanying the singing passages, in the manner of the American Vitaphone system developed in the mid-twenties. Recordings of both Western and Chinese music had long accompanied silent films in China, but Lianhua's experiment was an attempt to synchronize the actors' singing and required some dexterity in the theatre to achieve the right timing. The director, Sun Yu, recalls this experience in his memoirs.¹⁰²

In the theatre one sat with their eyes glued anxiously to the screen waiting for the scene where Jin Yan and Ruan Lingyu open their mouths and start to sing then quickly putting the needle on the record, where the position was marked with a red pencil. This type of "manual technique" utterly depended on one's ability to hit the right timing

by chance, and often it was far from perfect. More astounding was that this unenviable task fell upon me because as the director I was the one most familiar with the film. So there I was duty-bound in the narrow projection room, sweating profusely (even though it was wintertime) for three days until I could hand over the job to the theatre staff member responsible for music accompaniment.¹⁰³

Coincidentally, it was this experience in the theatre where Sun Yu gained valuable insight into how the audience reacted to his films, at which moments they laughed or became bored. Thereafter, Sun Yu took the opportunity to observe the reaction of different audiences to his films in order to improve his craft.¹⁰⁴

From the producer's point of view the audience is always the barometer of a film's success. The emergence of Lianhua and the influence of new energies involved in film production gave Chinese films a fresh audience particularly among young people who were attracted to less traditional themes. Yet, at the same time, the reworking of melodrama and better production standards gave films a wider public appeal. Mingxing's *Twin Sisters* [jiemeihua] and Lianhua's *Song of the Fishers* [yuguangqu], shown in 1933 and 1934 respectively, were huge successes at the box office, each running for well over a month.¹⁰⁵ While American films did not necessarily lose their position in the active political climate of the early thirties, it is also clear that Chinese films gained a substantial number of new viewers. Like many of his contemporaries, Zhou Wenchang was a middle-school student at this time and profoundly influenced by the leftist movement. He described to me the fashion of the times among male students posing as revolutionaries, wearing Chinese gowns, a long narrow scarf swung around their necks and

their hair parted with an obligatory forelock. The first Chinese films he saw were Lianhua productions and at one time he even vowed to boycott American films. His conviction weakened, however, after seeing a feature with Deanna Durbin and he went back to watching American movies.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, despite the growing popularity of Chinese films, Zhou remembers that many people would still go see an American second-run film rather than a Chinese first-run. Chinese sound films became more common in the late thirties but were considered to be technically deficient to American films.¹⁰⁷ Another cause of decline in the audience for Chinese films was the 1937 invasion when much of China's film talent left Shanghai with the retreating Kuomintang, newly unified with the Communist Party in fighting the Japanese. Film production continued on a reduced basis within the International Settlement but retreated back to the twenties, with productions of classical costume dramas and light love stories. Some of the former expressed concealed patriotism as in the production of *Mulan Joins the Army* [mulan congjun]. However, the spirit of the times was perhaps better represented by the example of another Xinhua Studio production, *Chinese Tarzan* [zhongguo taishan] in 1940, cheap, poorly produced films for the residents of a city surrounded on all sides by war. Conversely, this period when Shanghai was known as the "orphan island," precipitated a flourishing of spoken stage-dramas produced and performed by many artists formerly associated with Lianhua and other studios who had remained in Shanghai.¹⁰⁸

The sound era and the establishment of American distribution offices brought on increased marketing for American films. Two former workers from the Metropol remembered how advertisements for American films were everywhere during the thirties and made a big impression on people. American film magazines in English such as **Photoplay** and **Screen Romance** as well as journals devoted to Hollywood translated into Chinese were available at newsstands. The mainstream **Diansheng** magazine highlighted information on Chinese films and stars but printed a considerable amount pertaining to Hollywood as well.¹⁰⁹

There was also a trend to follow American fashions through the movies, though my impression is that this became more pronounced in the late forties, particularly among women. As Zhou Wenchang described to me, men might model their fashion accessories on Clark Gable's hat or Bing Crosby's tie. Latin Dancing became popular in Shanghai, partly influenced by films starring Delores Del Rio. After the 1938 film *Four Daughters* played in Shanghai, starring John Garfield, a cabaret was opened under the same name. The pursuit of romance highlighted in American films was well remembered by people I talked to. Generally speaking, the relationship between men and women became far more liberal among urban young people in the 1930's compared with the twenties. The ban against mixed seating had long been abandoned; Zhu Manhua said many couples then, as now, sought privacy in the cinema to court each other [tan lianai]. Furthermore, Hollywood films presented

audiences with the proverbial screen kiss, a moment rarely witnessed in Chinese films.¹¹⁰

Children's films were popular. Cartoons, Shirley Temple and Deanna Durbin all catered to the younger audience. Zhou Wenchang remembered going to matinees on Sunday mornings watching Popeye and Mickey Mouse. Walt Disney's production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* premiered in Shanghai in 1939 and shortly afterwards an ice-cream company marketed a product under the same name due to the film's popularity.¹¹¹ The advertising of films often went to extreme lengths, as with the promotion of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. J.D. Ballard mentions this in his semi-autobiographical novel set in Shanghai, the **Empire of the Sun**:

.....they ran through the entrance of the Cathay Theatre, the world's largest cinema, where a crowd of Chinese shopgirls and typists, beggars and pickpockets spilled into the street to watch people arriving for the evening performance. As they stepped from their limousines the women steered their long skirts through the honour guard of fifty hunchbacks in medieval costume. Three months earlier, when his parents had taken Jim to the premiere of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, there had been two hundred hunchbacks, recruited by the management of the theatre from every backalley in Shanghai. As always, the spectacle outside the theatre far exceeded anything shown on its screen, and Jim had been eager to get back to the pavements of the city, away from the newsreels and their endless reminders of war.¹¹²

The slight hyperbole of the novelist is allowed but the Cathay was not, of course, "the world's largest cinema" as it seems in the young protagonist's mind. (Actually the Grand was the largest cinema in Shanghai). Nor were two hundred hunchbacks present at the film's premiere. In 1940, however, a substantial number of people dressed as hunchbacks did cause a sensation and general pandemonium

on Tibet Road, which police finally deduced was a parade arranged by RKO to promote their new film.¹¹³

In the advertisement saturated streets of Shanghai, film companies and theatres competed to arrest public attention. All the major theatres had advertising departments to prepare billboards and newspaper ads, and they did their utmost to emphasize the most sensational aspect of a film, often regardless of its main content. Capitalizing on the publicity of the Frankenstein horror genre of a few years earlier, promoters of Maxu Weibang's film *Song At Midnight* [yeban gesheng], roughly modeled on *Phantom of the Opera* but with a strong anti-feudal message, the Xinhua Studio erected a huge billboard that depicted the female lead cowering before a menacing cloaked figure. The film received unexpected publicity when a young girl reportedly "died of fright" after coming across the billboard on the street.¹¹⁴

The big theatres also advertised their attractions such as air-conditioning and comfortable seats. Confectionaries inside sold soft-drinks, popcorn and American Hazlewood ice-cream, though the practise of serving alcohol in the early years of theatre in Shanghai appears to have been abandoned. Furthermore, a strict dress code was enforced for Saturday night at some theatres. Similarly, admission prices varied according to the amenities of the theatre and whether or not films were first-run features. Tickets for the Grand ranged from sixty cents to two dollars according to the Greater Shanghai 1933 Annual. Similar prices

applied to the Cathay, Nanking, and the Capitol (which at the time was still showing first-run Paramount films).¹¹⁵

Ticket prices did not go above one yuan (Chinese dollar) at more modest theatres such as the Paris, Carlton, and Peking. The cheapest venue for second, third, or fourth-run American films was at the Western Theatre, which was twenty cents for admission. The Eastern Theatre in the Yangshupu district was also cheap in 1933, but one man I talked to, Hu Jinhua, recalled that it was more expensive than the Grand by the late thirties and very comfortable inside. The Isis was also more expensive in 1936 compared to 1933 at fifty cents to one yuan fifty per ticket, though this might have been a result of increasing popularity of the theatre for showing Soviet films and movies banned by the Shanghai Municipal Council. Lianhua, Mingxing and Tianyi films had second-run houses as well with prices ranging from twenty to forty cents. Depending on the theatre, Chinese first-run films were cheaper than American films, as low as twenty cents at the Chekiang for example, and between sixty to eighty cents at other places.¹¹⁶

To put these prices in perspective, the average Chinese middle to lower-middle-class income was about fifty to sixty yuan per month. Zhu Manhua said that an income of one hundred yuan a month was considered to be very good.¹¹⁷ Among the working class, wages varied but daily income certainly made entertainment at the Grand Theatre an unaffordable luxury. For example, Emily Honig verified that women spinners in the cotton factories made less than fifty

cents a day in the mid-thirties, skilled male workers a bit more.¹¹⁸

In comparison to other entertainment in Shanghai, films were not necessarily the best value, but they did cover a broad range of affordability. For example, twenty cents was the standard entrance admission for the Great World entertainment complex. The "Small World" [xiao shijie] amusement center cost ten cents, but the admission price to entertainment centers covered a variety of shows, including local operas, throughout the day and night. Local opera performances were also inexpensive but Peking Opera shows featuring famous performers charged prices as high as four yuan. Dancing cabarets also varied in price, particularly for men who could "hire" dancing partners. One man I talked to remembers that a good place charged one yuan for three tickets, each ticket worth one dance with a hostess. Cheaper dance bars offered ten tickets for the same price. Similarly, the gambling, opium and prostitution establishments for which Shanghai was famous varied in price depending on the services and location.¹¹⁹

During the 1930's Hollywood films made the journey across the Pacific relatively quickly. Films premiered in the West usually arrived in Shanghai about two months later to show in the first-run theatres. Most of my information about the popularity of certain films and stars was obtained in interviews from which I can only generalize. Among them, love stories and wenyi [artistic or literary] films were popular, especially Warner's films (usually shown at the Grand) for their social themes and artistic quality.

Stars such as Bette Davis, Norma Shearer, Paul Muni, Gary Cooper, Charles Laughton, and Spencer Tracy were names that frequently cropped up in our discussions pertaining to the thirties.

All Quiet on the Western Front, *City Lights* and *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* were reportedly best sellers in the early thirties.¹²⁰ *Gone With the Wind* was popular with intellectuals in 1939 as were anti-fascist films in the interim just before and after World War II. The 1940 film *Blood and Sand* was invariably mentioned in people's reminiscences. Starring Tyrone Power and Rita Hayworth it chronicled the story of a matador led astray by a seductive Hayworth. Hu Jinhua, who was born in Japan and returned to Shanghai in the thirties, remembers the film specifically because two Japanese friends asked him to accompany them to see it at the Grand. Unable to speak Chinese they were nervous about entering the International Settlement where anti-Japanese feeling was high among the Chinese and the streets were not patrolled by Japanese soldiers as in occupied Hongkou.¹²¹

MGM was considered to be the best draw at box offices for their musicals and lavish productions. Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald were popular as well as RKO musicals with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Horror films produced by Universal Studios and Twentieth-century Fox Westerns often played at the Strand and had an additional audience in the cheaper, second-run theatres. *King Kong* and the Tarzan series were big events, especially for children. Zhou Wenchang remembers as a child that "everyone wanted to see King Kong." In addition to the general appeal of Chaplin

movies, Laurel and Hardy were another popular comedy genre. As one man put it, translation for these and the Tarzan series was not really necessary. On the other hand, the Marx Brother's comedy films did not find the same appreciation among the Chinese audience due to their brand of dry humour which required a high degree of linguistic and cultural familiarity with American society.¹²² Science-fiction was not a popular genre in contrast to the relative popularity of scientific biographies such as *Young Thomas Edison* or *Marie Curie*.¹²³

Translation of Hollywood films also became more sophisticated in theatres. Up until the late thirties, subtitles were generally not printed directly on the film, but screened below the frame or on the sides.¹²⁴ After Percy Chu took over the Grand, the American, Hager, invented a system for using earphones that a viewer could rent for ten cents and hear the simultaneous translation in Chinese. University students, usually young women, were hired to repeat the dialogue. The earphone system spread to other theatres in the Asia Theatres group, but Zhu Manhua said the Grand eventually stopped using them because they were frequently stolen.¹²⁵

Hollywood films dominated the market in Shanghai, but there were also a few theatres that showed European, Russian, Japanese and British films. French films played in the French concession and British films had some fans like Zhu Manhua, but they were never very successful among the general audience. The Ewo (Jardine-Matheson) company was the agent for Britain's Eagle-Lion

distribution and tried to set up an exclusive theatre for British films, but the venture failed. After a series of turnovers in management and an unsuccessful run at trying to survive on European and British films, the Capitol theatre finally became viable as a second-run house for selected American films.¹²⁶ Japanese films were screened in Hongkou but rarely patronized by the Chinese audience. Indeed, Hu Jinhua said that Chinese were generally barred from the theatre because Japanese residents were afraid of terrorist attacks.¹²⁷

One of the most striking influence of Hollywood films in Shanghai was the replication of the star system and the accompanying commercialization of fame. Studio contracts were not necessarily as rigid for performers as in the U.S. but certain studios like Mingxing and Lianhua became associated with various star billings. Chinese films from the twenties also had performers who became famous during the silent era but not to the same extent. In the thirties press coverage of love affairs and other gossip expanded the celebrity status of screen actors similar to what had occurred earlier in the U.S. Hu Die [Butterfly Wu] was an early performer with Mingxing and in 1933 was dubbed the "movie queen" [dianying huanghou] after Mary Pickford's visit to Shanghai prompted a local paper to run a poll choosing Pickford's Chinese counterpart. The endorsement of commercial products soon followed. The British-owned Lux Toilet Soap Company ran a contest to pick Shanghai's favorite movie star. Hu Die won and with her agreement became a spokesperson for Lux's advertisements. A number of

lawsuits followed as other companies rushed to use her name on their products without her permission.¹²⁸

Besides Hu Die, performers in Lianhua rapidly gained star status as well. The thirties also marked the rise of male stars such as Jin Yan whose roles were characterized by strong youthful heroes with progressive ideas. Jin Yan earned the title of "movie king" [dianying huangdi]. In the past, producers had emphasized major billing for women stars and male performers tended to be typecast in negligible roles.¹²⁹ Typecasting was still a problem for many male actors, however, such as Han Langen and Yin Xiuyan who were invariably cast as the skinny and fat characters modeled on Laurel and Hardy. Their last appearance in this guise was as late as 1957 in an ill-fated film, *Unfinished Comedy* [wei wancheng de xiju] that satirized bureaucracy and was made during the One Hundred Flowers movement. Other important male stars of this period were Yuan Muzhi, Zhang Yi, and in the mid-thirties Zhao Dan, Liu Qiong and Wang Gong.¹³⁰

The star status of women actors was heightened because the majority of films had women characters in the central roles. Li Lili, Wang Renmei, Chen Yanyan, Zhou Xuan and Bai Yang were well known among the public at different periods in the thirties. But one of Lianhua's greatest assets was Ruan Lingyu whose screen presence was uncommonly superb. When she committed suicide in 1935 her funeral procession drew huge crowds. Three young women followed her action in a dramatic gesture, leaving a note that said "without Ruan Lingyu in the world, what is there to live for."¹³¹

Ruan Lingyu was a victim of her stature as a public figure who could not endure her private affairs being sensationalized in the Shanghai press.¹³² Perhaps it was the sheer commercialism of Shanghai that crystallized the American-style admiration and fascination for film stars into such a viable phenomenon. Yet the lifestyles of performers purloined in the press, however free and easy their lives might appear on the surface, were not without social contradictions. Ruan Lingyu's reaction displayed how her public persona could not be detached from a moral context and particularly its consequences for women. The Shanghai film world was not unduly bound by conservative notions regarding relationships between men and women. Nor was it or the public necessarily harbouring traditional ideas about female performers as prostitutes. On the contrary, one former woman performer felt that cinema helped break down some of the traditional barriers for women. Nevertheless, Ruan Lingyu's suicide also reflected the personal demonstration of a social crisis in a society bombarded with conflicting values.¹³³

Production and Aesthetics

At a common juncture in history, the 1930's brought a heady mixture of politics, sound technology, and new cinematic explorations to the audience and film-maker alike in Shanghai. I have tried to outline the logistical background to this development but a question remains as to how these changes manifested themselves in the practise of film-making. Despite the tendency of

mainland Chinese historiography to emphasize the role of the Communist Party and leftist ideology in guiding the progressive movement, the uniqueness of this era was not entirely dependent on political motivation; many other factors were at play. These films possess an exquisite quality, infused with an energy that embodies the atmosphere of the time in a celluloid record. One asks the question, could the same process have occurred a decade earlier, as it did with literature? Perhaps not, but, while others may disagree with my impressions, I think that something of the May Fourth spirit was captured on the screen, its hopefulness and contradictions, in a way that we can better appreciate modern Chinese history through the lens of a camera.

One factor that affected Chinese film in this era was the incorporation of sound technology, and the process whereby it was adapted for the industry is worth chronicling here. The *projection* of sound in smaller theatres which could not afford foreign equipment was solved by an inexpensive adaptation designed in Shanghai by the Huawei company in 1930.¹³⁴ Shortly afterwards fifty percent of theatres in China were equipped to project sound films. The *production* of sound films, however, was a more complicated matter. The optical sound system required specialized cameras and recording machinery as well as a different system for editing and film developing. Cheng Jihua frames the problem as another setback in the promotion of class struggle that had leftist critics pointing to the threat of American musicals (the products of "sordid merchants" [shikuai de chanwu]) overwhelming the Chinese

market.¹³⁵ Regardless of the political implications, however, it is clear that the matter of acquiring sound technology was an urgent priority for all Chinese film production companies if they were to remain commercially viable. Furthermore, the situation was complicated by patents held by RCA and Western Electric which required film companies to pay royalty fees before distributing films using their equipment.¹³⁶

The three main studios at the time chose divergent paths in confronting the arrival of the sound era. Lianhua studios opted to stay with the less expensive Vitaphone system, using the method of recorded accompaniment until 1935. Mingxing had also produced a film using Vitaphone complete with dialogue, but the process required a tedious post-production recording session to add the speaking parts and this dampened the studio's enthusiasm for Vitaphone. Furthermore, projection was less than ideal because any change in the film speed or minor jump in the sprockets put the visuals out of sync with the record. This resulted in the humorous spectacle of performers mouthing silently in what otherwise was meant to be a serious moment. *The Sing-Song Girl Red Peony* [genu hong mudan] starring Hu Die was a success in China and the Southeast Asian market, but the film took an inordinately long time to produce. Mingxing subsequently produced both silent films and sound films until the latter practise became more common.¹³⁷

Consequently Mingxing and Tianyi chose to follow the newly-developed sound on film process and for that they needed to seek foreign technical assistance. In 1931 Hong Shen visited America

with the purpose of bringing back technical expertise and equipment. The trip was fraught with problems, but Hong eventually returned to Shanghai with a number of American technicians skilled in sound recording, editing and film processing. Hiring these foreigners was a major expense for Mingxing and the objective was for Chinese technicians to acquire the technological skills as quickly as possible, a goal the foreigners did their best to thwart by concealing their knowledge and skills. As Hudie remarks in her memoirs about the crew on location in Beijing, the sound process was not so much learned as "stolen" when the opportunity arose.¹³⁸

Although this episode was hardly a harmonious example of technology transfer in China's film history, the young Mingxing technicians successfully acquired the skills, if surreptitiously.¹³⁹ Eventually Mingxing bought the equipment and sent the foreigners home. But it was a Pyrrhic victory. After Mingxing's considerable financial investment in the three films, the company failed to recoup their cost at the box office. The first film, *Old Scenes of Beijing* [jiushi jinghua], was unfortunately premiered at the end of January just after the Japanese bombing of Zhabei in 1932 and did not garner the attention of a large audience. Moreover, while Tianyi had also suffered from expensive foreign technicians coveting the new technology, the studio had managed to release its first "sound-on-film" production in the previous year. As the first bona fide Chinese sound film, the lavish musical *Spring Colours in the Music Hall* [gechang

chunse] was extremely popular in China and the Southeast Asian market.¹⁴⁰

In any case, the acquisition of sound spawned the composition of Chinese songs to accompany the soundtrack that became equally successful on the popular music market. Ironically, though perhaps simply because the limitations of the Vitaphone system made music accompaniment easier to sync than dialogue, Lianhua was more successful than other studios in incorporating songs into the plot structure. The approach to music continued to be eclectic, utilizing Western classical works and Russian and American folk songs along with Chinese compositions. Jay Leyda feels that in the case of *Spring Silkworms* [chun can] the serious effect of the film is hampered by the mixture of music. Scripted by Xia Yan and produced by Mingxing, *Spring Silkworms* was a cinematic adaptation of Mao Dun's novel on the tribulations of peasants facing the loss of their livelihood in the wake of fluctuations on the silk market caused by the Depression. The narrative was supplemented by superb footage on silkworm cultivation but Leyda comments "it is fairer to see *Spring Silkworms* without its meaningless soundtrack: dinner music, Parisian and Viennese operettas, jazz, 'Old Black Joe', Aloha, church hymns make no attempt to reflect or to comment on the film's action or meaning." He is puzzled as to why the film-makers "ignore(d) the problem of finding the right music for their good film?"¹⁴¹

The presence of Western music was a salient feature of Shanghai's popular culture and film-makers recognized that the

evocation of feeling could be realized by various musical arrangements familiar to the urban audience. Leyda has a good point, considering the theme of *Spring Silkworms*, if one is arguing the validity of a film based on a consistent adherence to native cultural traditions. On the other hand, in the context of the film industry or the urban audience at the time, it is doubtful that the suitability of such music would be questioned and is perhaps more a concern of Western critics looking for cultural integrity in non-Western films. In many of the themes portrayed in films from the thirties, as, for example, the journey from the countryside to the city and subsequent clash of values, this mix of Western and Chinese styles highlighted the cosmopolitan and contradictory nature of the film's contents in situ. The 1936 film *Street Angels* employed this notion quite brilliantly; Chinese and Western music were juxtaposed to complement the contradictory setting of urban Shanghai in the film's opening montage sequence.¹⁴²

The addition of sound brought a change to production styles as well, and tasks became more specialized. Despite the observations of Ma Junxiang and Zhong Dafeng mentioned in Chapter Two, that film-makers adapted the script layout and scene divisions on the basis of Western dramatic theory, Xia Yan nevertheless recalled his surprise at the haphazard approach to the production process at Mingxing studios. Zhang Shichuan was responsible for camera placement, while Zheng Zhengqiu arranged actors seemingly without adherence to a formal script. The requirements of sound production

demanded more rigorous planning and inevitably changed the production style of the film industry.¹⁴³

In a far more complex development, the 1930's saw the emergence of film as a visual interpretation of social reality. Similar to the transformation of Chinese literature following the May Fourth movement, new influences contributed to expression in cinema that allowed it to evolve from its manifestation as "yingxi" in the 1920's. The pursuit of realism [xieshizhuyi] became a general tenet among leftist directors, writers and performers. Along with the scenarios, the camera moved outside the studio and into the streets and fields, not exclusively, but enough to significantly alter the aesthetics of Chinese film as it had existed up to that point. In addition, many directors attempted to free the camera from its immobile position on the tripod and used panning and tracking shots, as well as new editing techniques and special effects.

I use the word realism here cautiously because, as a word to describe a particular style, it harbours a relativity which eludes straightforward definition. The premise of objectivity inherent in the idea of realism as an aesthetic expression is very weak indeed. In its most basic application, leftist screenwriters understood realism to mean constructing narratives that revealed political and social inequities. For like-minded performers it meant approaching the consciousness of the character as closely as possible. Indeed, in spite of a tendency towards melodrama that often characterizes Chinese acting styles, some performers of this period went to great

lengths to express a realistic rather than stylized portrayal of their characters. Distinct personal styles between directors, however, make it difficult to assume, for example, that Sun Yu's work was more "realist" than Cai Chusheng's, or vice-versa.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, if an understanding of cinematic realism is already problematic because of the inherent subjectivity of the film-maker-artist, then the theoretical supposition of realism and its origins in Western civilization make it difficult to know how it might be understood in a non-Western context. In China the situation is further complicated by a preoccupation with defining realism in Marxist terms and a legacy of political interference that has dominated artistic analysis among Chinese film scholars. Generally speaking this has led to an understanding of artistic realism which has emphasized content over methodology, the latter being the practise of representing reality by accurately and meticulously describing the object in question.¹⁴⁵

The former approach maintains that "art reflects life and the artist's attitude must embrace the spirit of realism and artistic works must spring from social reality and express the situation and aspirations of the people."¹⁴⁶ Mao's famous *Yanan Talks on Art and Literature* in 1942 defined the purpose for art in more rigid terms than this but suffice it to say that the above statement serves as a useful guideline to explain the understanding of realism among leftist film-makers during the 1930's.¹⁴⁷ *Spring Silkworms* was recognized as one of the earliest films to adapt a "realist" style in film-making and became a benchmark for future reference.¹⁴⁸

At the same time, traditional Chinese aesthetics were not grounded in the process of representing reality as had occurred in Western civilization. Thus, in Chinese film, it is possible to see a synthesis of traditions. As one writer rather cryptically suggests, "most of the prominent film artists from the 1930's were subjected to the corrupting influence of traditional culture as well as learning from foreign artistic theories and methods. When looking at their creative output, rather than saying they adhered to a strict application of realist technique it is more fitting to suggest that some of these works shone with a glimmer of the realist spirit."¹⁴⁹ This mention of the "corrupting influence of traditional culture" gives credence to the idea that cinema, as a cultural form borrowed from abroad, resulted in the continuation of both popular and refined traditional aesthetics and the synthesis of new influences.

Film can be seen both as a visual and performing art and consequently, Chinese traditional influences were incorporated into film from two very different forms. For example, Zheng Zhengqiu and his understanding of the audience was articulated in film by the expression of popular sentiments, an extension of the "popular" [tongsu] quality associated with Chinese traditional drama.¹⁵⁰ Cai Chusheng is seen as one director who reiterated this "popular" quality along with the format of the Hollywood-style narrative. Two other directors, Fei Mu and Wu Yonggang developed their own styles that suggested the aesthetic tradition of the Chinese literati [wenren wenhua]. Their works were less the articulation of

collective sentiments than expressions of subjective introspection and inner meaning.¹⁵¹

Other directors such as Sun Yu synthesized traditional forms and foreign influences in different ways. Perhaps Sun's early training in America led him to frequently adapt the themes of foreign works into his films and his vignettes of comic malapropisms suggest an appreciation of American slapstick humour.¹⁵² Equally so, however, Sun Yu's designation as the "poet director" (and my understanding of his work) evokes his rich coalescence of European Romanticism and Chinese poetic expression inherited from the Tang and Song dynasty. Finally, in the films of Shen Xiling and Yuan Muzhi, one finds a preoccupation with the clash of culture itself, whether that be Chinese and Western or rural and urban, and its articulation in experiments with montage. The urban themes of *Crossroads* and *Street Angels*, films that I proposed earlier on to represent a "Shanghai aesthetic," seem to exemplify a thoroughly, and somehow suitably, chaotic mixture of different traditions and cinematic innovations. These two directors also appear to have been the ones most influenced by Eisenstein's technique of montage.¹⁵³

The discussion of cross-cultural influences in film analysis is fraught with the tendency to overemphasize Western contributions. Chris Berry raises this important question at the beginning of his article *Poisonous Weeds or National Treasures: Chinese Left Cinema in the 1930's*. He writes that "all too often films and film-makers have been appropriated for deployment in

already established Western discourses, with only superficial attention paid to their place in original cultures."¹⁵⁴

Without contradicting the premise of Berry's observation it is clear that Chinese film-makers were influenced by foreign styles. As an international commodity, the nature of cinema seems to make this factor unavoidable. Indeed, despite the seemingly dominant and invulnerable position of American films, it is difficult for any cinema, even Hollywood, to develop in isolation. The more intriguing question, as was raised earlier by Zhong Dafeng in his discussion of the Hollywood narrative and the Soviet theorist Pudovkin, is why film-makers in China emulated the conventional narrative over other styles? This is especially interesting because Soviet film theory and Russian films were held in high esteem by leftist scriptwriters and directors.¹⁵⁵

Thus, analogous to the appropriation of realism, the ideological thrust of Soviet films was embraced but not, with few exceptions, the methodological approach of Eisenstein's use of montage. The use of the "Soviet shot" [sujian jingtou] in high and low angle compositions was certainly experimented with but rarely defined the body of whole work.¹⁵⁶ In his article, *The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Reconstructing Chinese Leftist Film of the 1930's*, Ma Ning notes that film-makers had access to Soviet cinema and while "subject to its influence, they opted to work within the Hollywood tradition. But the ultimate political goal of film-making for them meant they had to deviate from the norm of Hollywood film-making."¹⁵⁷

From the standpoint of *political* content, many Chinese films in the thirties did "deviate" from Hollywood films. Ma adds that the "leftist films of the thirties do not provide the narrative with a resolution in the Western sense of the word. This is because the main purpose of the leftist text is to invite the viewer to relive those social and political contradictions."¹⁵⁸ Aesthetically and technically, however, the "Hollywood norm of film-making" had the greater influence in Chinese film production. The Japanese film critic Tadao Sato comes to the same conclusion in an article comparing the dominant influences in early Japanese and Chinese cinema. He discovered that the respective traditions had a common link that certain American films were inspirational to Japanese and Chinese film artists of the same era.¹⁵⁹ From a recent discussion on film history from a mainland Chinese source, the influence of Hollywood films is frequently noted. Xia Yan for example grounded his basic training in cinema by watching American films in Shanghai. The movie theatre, as for many others, was his film school.¹⁶⁰

First I took the introductory pamphlet for a film and read the outline of the story. Then I imagined how I would go about writing the script. How would I introduce the characters and the period? How would I have the plot unfold? What sort of language would I use to portray the personality of the characters? How would I express time and place? First I made a rough draft in my mind then I would go see the film. This was a good approach. Some directors set up their films much better than I had envisioned and expressed things in a way I hadn't even thought of. And if it was a good film I went over it repeatedly...¹⁶¹

I agree with Ma Ning's idea that "most leftist film-makers saw their task as a dual one: to transform the mode of film expression,

as well as the mode of spectatorship." Yet I would also suggest that emphasis was put on the latter assignment. To "invite the viewer to relive those social and political contradictions" the film-maker also had to ensure an audience was present. Whether consciously or not, this often meant highlighting political issues by borrowing Hollywood styles already popular with the audience. This was evident in the creation of Han Langen's and Yin Xiuchen characters modeled on Laurel and Hardy. Xia Yan also incorporated a Shirley Temple character in his film *New Year Coin* [yasuiqian] which was modeled on the 1932 film *If I Had A Million*, starring Gary Cooper. Xia's intent in this film was to chronicle the vagaries of rich and poor and criticize the Kuomintang's tampering with the currency standard. Although love stories are a familiar genre in the Chinese dramatic tradition, the illumination of the romantic relationship on the screen similarly recalled the Hollywood version as well, though women characters seem to have greater allegorical resonance and individuality in Chinese films from this period than their American counterparts.¹⁶²

In addition, I would like to add here that Chinese film-makers found an ample amount of material in local expressions of popular culture as well. One example in particular is the Mr. Wang [wang xiansheng] series that was adopted from the comic strip drawn by Ye Qianyu and appeared in various journals and newspapers from 1927 to 1937.¹⁶³ Mainland sources tend to dismiss the Tianyi productions of Mr. Wang as "abandoning the social satire component of the original work," but the films were nevertheless popular though perhaps less

so than the comic strip which revealed the contradictions of lower-middle-class life in Shanghai with a sharper wit.¹⁶⁴ Ye Qianyu's trademark character of Mr. Wang and his sidekick Mr. Chen were representative of a Shanghai phenomenon, creations that may have been inspired by foreign forms or examples yet unique to Shanghai in the way that, for example, Laurel and Hardy were not. Rather, the similarities between the two series exist in the exploits of Mr. Wang, who, wearing his British-style pith helmet together with Bermuda shorts (or a Chinese gown depending on the occasion), was as much stymied as rewarded by forces beyond his control in the various opportunistic ventures his elongated face led him into.

The problems of "cross-cultural critical discourse" and being overly preoccupied with deciding what is or is not quintessentially Chinese makes it difficult to address categorically how American films might have influenced film-makers during this period. The question certainly warrants a more in-depth and detailed analysis than I am able to discuss here and this attempt at describing the aesthetic motivations in Chinese films from the thirties is necessarily condensed and inconclusive. My main purpose is to reveal the richness of Chinese cinema during this time, its eclecticism and energy and its combination of social criticism and political opposition which found an appreciative mass urban audience. It was not an "alternative" cinema in the sense of disassociating itself from the mainstream. As Berry emphasizes, "film distribution and exhibition was beyond the control of the

leftists, and the financial and political restrictions of the time would have prevented them from moving toward an alternative structure."¹⁶⁵ In commercial terms, the audience for films is a standard currency everywhere but the distribution of their wealth depends on who is able to command their attention. Perhaps not even in the guise of an "alternative" to Hollywood, this Chinese cinema seemed more like a mismatched but vigorous contestant in the big game, a team of erstwhile thieves robbing the vaults of a trans-national treasury.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 3

1. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 189. This is a quote from Hong Shen's article in the film supplement, *Meiri Dianying* [Daily Film] in **Chen Bao**. Hong Shen, *Meiguoren Weishenme Yao Dao Zhongguo Lai Ban Dianying Gongsì She Zhongguo Pian* [Why Americans Come To China to Start Film Companies and Make Chinese Films], Shanghai **Chen Bao** [CB], 21 July 1932, n. pag. I was unable to find the original article from **Chen Bao**. It was missing from the newspaper issues I requested from the Shanghai Library and missing from the microfilm in the Beijing Library.
2. The byline for Harold Lloyd is from the advertisement in Shanghai **Xinwen Bao** [XWB], 23 February 1930. The first sound film to play in Shanghai is documented in many sources, for example see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 157. The **North China Daily News** [NCDN] made a full report in *Sound Films Make Their Debut*, Shanghai **NCDN**, 7 February 1929, p.17.
3. The plot of *Welcome Danger* revolves around Harold Lloyd's investigation of opium smuggling in San Francisco. He plays the son of a San Francisco police chief who takes over his deceased father's job. Eventually he breaks the smuggling ring run by a man named Middleton. A description of the response of foreigners in the theatre is from Jiang Shangxing (pseud.), *Da Guangming Dianyingyuan Yu "Bu Pa Si" Yingpian* [The Grand Theatre and the Film "Welcome Danger"], **Shanghai Tan**, November, 1988, p.26. The "Welcome Danger" incident is frequently mentioned in mainland texts on film history, but the film is often confused with Josef Von Sternberg's *Shanghai Express*, which never played in Shanghai. Both Xia Yan's memoirs and Jay Leyda's account of the incident refer erroneously to the film involved in the "Welcome Danger" incident as *Shanghai Express*. C.T. Hsia refers to the film in his article but uses an English title, *Cat's Paw*.
4. The quote is from *Sensation In A Local Cinema*, **NCDN**, 25 February 1930, p. 12. Other accounts for the incident were published in Shanghai's Chinese newspapers such as **Shen Bao** [SB], **Xinwen Bao** [XWB], and **Minguo Bao** [MGB], etc.
5. Hong Shen's testimony in court was published in *Hong Shen Zhengshi Tiqi Susong* [Hong Shen Begins Formal Litigation Process], **MGB**, 5 March 1930, n. pag.
6. Chinese sources differ on whether Paramount actually ceased distributing the film in other markets besides China, but Harold Lloyd did apparently issue an apology through the U.S. consulate in San Francisco. See, Jiang Shangxing, p. 27. Information on replacement ads for Paramount films is from Shanghai **NCDN**, 25 February 1930, n. pag.

7.Regarding Harold Lloyd's fall from grace among the Shanghai film audience, an interesting notice was published in **Shen Bao** to accompany an advertisement for the Chaplin film, *The Circus*[?] [wuliao shenghuo]. The notice proclaimed that *Welcome Danger* had ruined Lloyd's reputation in China and he was therefore out of Chaplin's league as "a great comedian warmly welcomed by everyone whose films have never humiliated Chinese." See advertisement, **SB**, 25 March 1939. The stink bomb episode for Harold Lloyd's picture *Milky Way* was reported in *Da Guangming Xiyuan Bei Ren Touliu Wuwasidan* [Stink Bomb Thrown in the Grand Theatre], **Diansheng**, 3 April 1936, p. 304.

8.China was not the first country to legislate against stereotypical portrayals in Hollywood films. In 1922, Mexico banned films from production companies which depicted derogatory stereotypes of Mexicans. A similar attempt occurred in Japan in 1924, ostensibly to protest the U.S. law limiting Japanese immigration. See, Thompson, p. 140-141. Protests against American film imports were also organized in Europe and an International Film Congress was held in 1926 associated with the League of Nations. Among other issues, the congress also drew up recommendations to encourage films that were anti-war and "to avoid presenting foreign nations or races in a degrading or ridiculous light on screen." From Thompson, p. 115.

9.Regarding the opposition to *First Born* and *The Red Lantern* see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 90 and Leyda p. 44. Cheng Jihua discusses the "bourgeois view" of the Changcheng film-makers on p. 96-97. Another company was created by a student who returned to Shanghai after studying cinematography in France. He established the Shenzhou Film Production Company and attempted to make films with a serious social message. At a conference on film performance held in Shanghai in April, 1991, one film scholar's presentation (a Ms. Wang, I didn't get her full name) on this era called the Changcheng Company's productions China's first "tansuo" or "exploratory" films, using the term sometimes given to describe the new generation of film-makers in the 1980's. From the available literature, however, it is suggested that these films were not progressive to the extent of sparking a new movement in cinema.

10.Zhou Jianyun, **Mingxing Tekan**, n. pag.

11.Novels like Thomas Burke's stories about London's Limehouse district and Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu serial are examples of some of the popular fiction in English. In addition, Jay Leyda describes early Chinese themes in German films and comments, "many of the best actors in the German silent film seem to have acquired their basic film training beneath Oriental makeup." See Leyda, p. 29. He also comments on the relationship between anti-Chinese feeling in California and Hollywood's production of films about Chinatowns in North America, Leyda, p. 30.

12. Leyda, p. 32.
13. The Fu Manchu series may have played in China, but I did not find references to it in either historical or contemporary mainland sources. I also had the impression from people I interviewed that Fu Manchu movies were not shown.
14. The *Thief of Baghdad* is seen to suggest the expression of the "yellow peril" idea in the characterization of the evil Mongol Caliph. See, Ng, Chun-ming, *The Image of Overseas Chinese in American Cinema, Overseas Chinese Figures in Cinema* (Hong Kong: The 16th Hong Kong International Film Festival, 1992), p. 84. I am not sure of the exact date that the film played in Shanghai, but it was produced in 1924 and presumably would have played in the next year overseas, as well in second-run shows throughout the twenties.
15. Quoted in Gao Jinxian and Gu Yuanqing, p. 45. Actually, though Lu Xun was probably not aware of it, Douglas Fairbanks was given production and writing credits for the film under the name Errol Thomas. See Katz, p. 399.
16. Ma Junxiang, p. 19. Ma refers to Zheng Bugao's appraisal of *Thief of Baghdad* in Zheng's memoirs.
17. Zhu Manhua and Zhou Wenchang, interviews, July, 1991.
18. Lu Xun's appreciation of Warner Oland is from Yao Xifeng, p. 8. Warner Oland's visit was reported in *Diansheng*, 27 March 1936, p. 295, 297.
19. Zhu Manhua mentioned the unpopularity of Anna May Wong among many Chinese cinema-goers, interview, July, 1991. A report in *Diansheng* on Wong's visit to Shanghai also mentioned her roles in "anti-Chinese" films, *Diansheng*, 24 January 1936, p. 110.
20. The report on the Shirley Temple film *Captain January* is from *Pianzhong Yingyu Duibai Ru Wo Zhongguo* [Film's English Dialogue Insults China], *Diansheng*, 1 May 1936, p. 412. Other articles include: *Yi Nian Jian Waiguo Suo She De Ruhua Pian* [Various Anti-Chinese Films Shot in the Last Year], *Diansheng*, 1 January 1935, p. 23, and a report on *The Black Robe*, May 3, 1935, p. 356 and *The General Died At Dawn*, Jan. 1, 1937, p. 10-11, p. 84.
21. Emily Hahn was an American writer and journalist who lived in Shanghai during the 1930's. This quote is taken from her article on various Western attitudes towards China. See Emily Hahn, *The China Boom, T'ien Hsia Monthly* (Shanghai), Vol. 6, No. 3 (1938), p. 197.
22. C.T. Hsia's comments in Xia Zhiqing [C.T. Hsia], *Haolaiwu Zaoqi De Huaqiaopian He Junfapian* [Overseas Chinese And Warlord Films In Early Hollywood Movies], in his *Ji Chuangji* (Taipei, Taiwan: Jiuge

Chuban She, 1984), p. 146-147. I would like to thank Law Kar of the Hong Kong Film Festival for giving me this article.

23.Hsia, p. 144.

24.Hsia, p. 144-145.

25.Hsia, p. 146, 149.

26.Hsia, p. 150, 151.

27.Hsia, p. 138.

28.**Diansheng**, 1 January 1935, p. 13.

29.The mention of water buffaloes being sent to California and other exploits of the MGM crew in China is in Shu Ping (pseud), "*Da Di*" *Shezhizu De Zhongguo Zhi Xing* [The Film Crew of "The Good Earth" in China], **Dianying Shijie**, Aug. 1989, p. 10. Details of the filming and premiere of *The Good Earth* in Guanyu "*Da Di*" *Yingpian* [About the Film "The Good Earth"], **Diansheng**, 19 March 1937, p. 515-517. Du Yunzhi also mentions that the Lianhua Film Company producer, Luo Mingyou, was involved in approving *The Good Earth*, see Du Yunzhi, p. 150-151. Luo Mingyou was in America to promote two of Lianhua's productions, *Humanity* [ren dao] and *Filial Piety* [tian lun] and both were eventually screened in the U.S. According to Du Yunzhi, *Humanity* was screened for MGM producers and may have been used as a rough reference for the filming of *The Good Earth*. Details of Luo's trip to the U.S. also appear in Guan Wenqing's memoirs, **Zhongguo Yingtan Waishi** [History of China's Film World] (Hong Kong: Guang Jiao Jing Chuban She, 1976) p. 141. Guan, or Moon Kwan as he was known in English, had worked in Hollywood and became active in Shanghai and Hong Kong film production. He accompanied Luo on the trip to the U.S. I am grateful to the Hong Kong collector, Yu Manyun, for giving me a copy of Guan's book.

30. See Leyda, p. 110, 111 and 112.

31.Hu Shi's verdict was published in **Diansheng** 19 March 1937, p. 516.

32.For complaints about the film, see Leyda, p. 110. The quote comes from an interview with one of my elderly film fans whose name I would prefer not to mention. My own view after watching *The Good Earth* on video is that the film emphasizes the use of honorific language and expressions in Chinese translated into English to the point that the dialogue is contrived and unnatural. Similarly, the acting by Paul Muni and Louise Reiner are caricatures of the Chinese characters which makes their roles somewhat less believable. The best performances in the film come from the Chinese actors, Keye Luke, Roland Lui and Chingwah Lee.

33. Leyda suggests that *The Good Earth*, along with Joris Iven's documentary *Four Hundred Million* on the anti-Japanese effort, are the "two films that gained the greatest support for China's defense against Japanese aggression..." See Leyda, p. 110. My speculation on the hidden agenda in the KMT support for *The Good Earth* could also be refuted by the fact that Chiang Kaishek was preoccupied with fighting the Communists and not the Japanese when plans for the film was being made. Could it be, however, that his wife Soong Meiling, with her keen understanding of the American psyche, persuaded Chiang of the value of preparing the ground for American public support, should the need arise?

34. Qu Qiubai's opinion of film in 1924 is from Yang Hansheng's reminiscences in Yang Hansheng, *Zuoyi Dianying Yundong De Ruogan Jingnian* [Some Experiences With the Leftist Film Movement], *Dianying Yishu*, November 1983, p. 2.

35. Qu's caution to cadres participating in film work is mentioned in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 184. It is also described in more detail in Xia Yan, *Lanxun Jiumeng Lu* [Memoirs of Xia Yan] (Beijing: San Lian Chuban She, 1985), p. 227.

36. Lianhua was called the "new school" and Mingxing and Tianyi the "old school" [jiu pai]. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 155. Regarding Luo Mingyou's beginnings see, Du Yunzhi, p. 109 and *Luo Mingyou, Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan* I, p. 183-186.

37. Du Yunzhi p. 112. Some of these early Lianhua films that attracted a new and younger audience were Sun Yu's *Spring Dream* [gudu chunmeng] and *Wild Grass* [yecao xianhua]. According to Jay Leyda, the latter was roughly modeled on Alexandre Dumas's *Les Dames aux Camelias*. See Leyda, p. 69.

38. Details of Xia Yan's work with the League of Leftist Writers can be found in his memoirs p. 145-224. He gives an interesting account of his first meeting with Mingxing's Zhou Jianyun at the DD Cafe on Joffre Road, p. 227-228. Information on the change in Mingxing's approach to film-making is mentioned in Du Yunzhi p. 138 and Cheng Jihua, I, p. 200-201.

39. Xia Yan comments on the change in public perception towards the leftist movement after the 1931 and 1932 incidents of Japanese invasion and aggression. He makes the comment that "before the September 18 [jiu yi ba] and January 28 [yi er ba] incidents, for those among us who were underground party workers and were active in general society, finding accommodation, renting a room in a hotel, or conducting relations with a bookstore or newspaper was difficult if people were at all aware of our leftist inclinations. They were not hostile, but were reluctant to be closely associated with us because they were afraid of the danger of conducting business with anyone who might be associated with the Communist

Party." He goes on to describe the evident change in the atmosphere towards leftists after 1932. See Xia Yan, p. 207.

40. In describing this process where the Communist Party was able to take advantage of the patriotic element in Chinese society, one film scholar makes the comment that "...the KMT government, for fear of provoking further Japanese military action in China, decided to censor any artwork that openly expressed anti-Japanese feelings. The Communists saw patriotism as the particular form in which a cultural hegemony could be achieved." Ma Ning, *The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical*, **Wide Angle**, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1989) p. 24. Tianyi's shift to patriotic themes is mentioned in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 281-285 and Hu Die, p. 26.

41. Berry, Chris *Poisonous Weeds or National Treasures*, **Jump Cut**, No. 34, (1989), p. 87.

42. Xia Yan describes some of the infighting within the Communist Party particularly on the "leftist" trend and the policy of "closed doorism" [guanmen zhuyi] as opposed to uniting with other sectors of society. More interesting is the personality conflict between Lu Xun and other writers, among them Tian Han. The latter clearly irritated Lu Xun with his gregarious personality, Xia Yan refers to this in the incident when Xia Yan, Tian Han, Zhou Yang and Yang Hansheng told Lu Xun to beware of his protege Hu Feng. This issue later arose during the Cultural Revolution when Xia Yan, Tian Han et al were accused of having opposed Lu Xun in the "liu tiao hanzi" affair. See Xia Yan, p.264-267. Leo Ou-fan Lee also recalls this incident and Lu Xun's disagreements with the Sun and Creationist Societies, literature groups that predated the founding of the League of Leftist Writers. Leo, Ou-fan Lee, **Voices From The Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun** (Bloomington, Indiana: University Press, 1987), p. 183.

43. Pickowicz, p. 55-56, p. 59. Pickowicz discusses a number of Chinese films of this period in detail to support his argument that the anti-Western premise in the "spiritual pollution" campaign in the 1980's is paralleled in many leftist films of the 1930's. In addition, he describes the continuity between films influenced by the popular-melodramatic style of the twenties, like *Peach Blossom Weeps Tears of Blood* [taohua qixue ji] with leftist works such as Sun Yu's *Queen of Sports* [tiyu huanghou], *Children of the Storm* [fengyun ernu], scripted by Tian Han and *A Bible for Daughters* [nuer jing], scripted by Xia Yan and others. To this he also adds films associated with the New Life Movement, Fei Mu's *Filial Piety* [tian lun] and Wu Yonggang's *Little Angel* [xiao tianshi]. There are certain details regarding the films he chose to highlight where I do not entirely agree with Pickowicz's analysis but his question of the curious coalescence between Kuomintang and leftist expression against Western bourgeois values is certainly worth pursuing with further research.

44. For details on Lianhua's producer see *Luo Mingyou, Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan*, p. 90. I find some of the complexity of this era to be personified in the example of Luo Mingyou, the producer and founder of Lianhua Studios. Luo Mingyou is highlighted in mainland sources for his "reactionary" position and it is evident that he "had close ties with the Blue Shirt faction of the ruling Guomintang (Kuomintang) party ..." as Paul Clark mentions in his brief description of Lianhua in his book, **Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 11. The Blue Shirts were a fascist organization in the Kuomintang that was virulently anti-communist. Clark suggests that Lianhua was influenced by the leftists because Luo was preoccupied with the financial considerations of the company's main investors. Unfortunately, Clark does not elaborate on this point or his observation that Lianhua's main "financier's personal rivalry with Luo [that] enabled [Xia Yan's] Film Group to secure a strong influence in this studio." (Clark, p. 11.) The financing behind Lianhua was complex to say the least. Investors in the company were prominent members of government and financial circles, see *Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan*, p. 186. In any case, the paradox of Luo's position, which Clark also refers to, is an intriguing feature of China's film history, since Lianhua played such a major role in the early years of the development of Chinese cinema.

45. The KMT were particularly brutal in the arrest of Chinese Communist Party members in the early part of 1931. Five writers were executed, an event which became known as the "five martyrs incident" [wu lieshi shijian] in leftist historiography.

46. Du Yunzhi's account of this period is useful for describing the Kuomintang viewpoint of leftists becoming involved in the film industry where he gives a different analysis of certain films which are praised by Cheng Jihua.

47. For information on censorship see Du Yunzhi, p. 142. The Jiangsu Province Educational Association is mentioned by Cheng Jihua in reference to the 1921 film about the murder of a prostitute, *Yan Ruisheng*, p. 45. Regarding ineffective censorship by authorities Shu Ping, describes how officials with the Jiangsu provincial government approved Mingxing's film *One Small Worker* [yi ge xiao gong ren] in 1926, but prior to their approval, the film had already been playing in Shanghai for over a month. Shu Ping (pseud), *Zaoqi De Dianying Shencha* [Film Censorship in the Early Period], **Shangying Huabao**, Oct. 1990, n. pag. Additional details on censorship policy are in Zhu Manhua, *Zujie Dianjianhui De Qiedao* [The Knives Among the Foreign Concession's Film Censorship Boards], (Shanghai:n.p., n.d.).

48. Information on the censorship process comes from various sources. For example, Shu Ping, **Shangying Huabao**, Oct. 1990 and Cheng Jihua, I, p. 220-221. The practice of censors "adding on a tail" is discussed by Cheng Jihua, p. 226. Du Yunzhi discusses

ensorship on p. 143. Xia Yan suggests that censorship by the Shanghai Municipal Council became less severe in the wake of the patriotic movement during 1936 and up to the beginning of the anti-Japanese war. See Xia Yan, p. 316-318.

49. Zhu Manhua, *Zujie Dianjianhui De Qiedao*, n. pag and Zhu Manhua, interview, June, 1991.

50. Information on the Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* is mentioned in many sources but primarily in Wu Yunmeng and Wang Zhaopei, *Yang Jianchaguan De Yinwei* [Despotic Power of the Foreign Censors], Shanghai *Xinmin Wanbao* [XMWB], n.d., November 1984. This article was part of a series on film history published in *Xinmin Wanbao* in 1984. These articles were given to me by Percy Chu [Zhu Bochuan], but he did not write the exact date on this particular article. The writer Wu Yunmeng was formerly an employee at the Grand in charge of advertising. Some questions remain regarding the Kuomintang attitude towards *The Great Dictator*. Cheng Jihua says it was withheld by "reactionary forces" and finally played in Chongqing in 1942. Xia Yan wrote a review in the Chongqing newspaper *Xinhua Ribao* which Cheng cites. Cheng Jihua, II, p. 126. In addition, while the U.S. premiere of *The Great Dictator* was mentioned in the *Asia Theatre News* [yazhou yingxi], the film bulletin published by the Asia Theatre Company, the film did not play in Shanghai before the war. This was confirmed in my conversations with Elfrieda and George Read who were residents in Shanghai through the 1930's and the Japanese occupation. Interview, July 1993. Elfrieda Read's cousin remembered seeing *The Great Dictator* at a private screening in the Cathay Hotel some time in 1942 after the Japanese occupation. Scenes from MGM's *Marie Antoinette* were apparently deleted by KMT censors in 1939 according to C.J. Toroptsoff, p. 22. He does not mention whether the film was censored in Shanghai by the SMC.

51. Zhu Manhua, *Zujie Dianjian De Qiedao*, n. pag. and Zhu Manhua, interview, June 1991.

52. Advertisement for *Chain Gang* in *NCDN*, 12 April 1936. The popularity of *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* is mentioned in Zhang Aihua, *Xia Yan Zaoqi Dianying Pinglun Chuxi* [Early Film Reviews by Xia Yan], in *Lun Xia Yan* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 1989), p.215. Additional information comes from interviews with Zhu Manhua, June and July, 1991.

53. After 1936, the Isis Theatre and the showing of Soviet films were associated with Jiang Chunfang, a Russian-speaking leftist who worked for the theatre and the distribution company that handled Soviet films. After 1949, Jiang was head of the Soviet Friendship Society. While the Kuomintang permitted the Isis to show Soviet films, they apparently deleted scenes from certain films considered to be too politically sensitive. See, Chen Bingyi, *Ji Jiang Chunfang Tongzhi Zai Shanghai Chuqi* [Memories of Comrade Jiang

Chunfang's Early Period in Shanghai] in *Wenhua Lingmiao Bozhong Ren* (Beijing: Zhongguo Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990), p. 12-14. I would like to thank Mei Duo's wife, Yao Fangzao, for lending me this book. Regarding the Chapayev advertisement, see *NCDN*, 12 April 1936. Other details on Soviet films banned by the SMC and shown at the Isis Theatre are from Wang Zhaopei, Wu Yunmeng, *Yangjianchaguan De Yinwei*, n. pag. Mention of Soviet films shown secretly in small theatres is from *Abixiniya Shijian* [The Abyssinia Incident], in Cao Maotang, Wu Lun, *Shanghai Yingtan Huajiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987), p. 195.

54. The popularity of Soviet films that played at the Isis is mentioned in many mainland sources and Zhou Wenchang, who was a middle school student at the time, recalled this as well. Interview, July 1991. The "Abyssinia incident" is described in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 566 and Cao Maotang, Wu Lun, p. 193-194. Zhou Chuanji, a professor at the Beijing Film Academy told me his recollection of the "Abyssinia Incident". The banning of *The Puppet* is mentioned in Cao Maotang and Wu Lun, p. 193. In 1937 Chinese editorials criticized the screening of a Japanese-German co-production about Manchuria called *New Land* [xin tu] that played at the Toho [donghe] Theatre in Hongkou, but apparently the film was not banned.

55. Zhu Manhua, *Zujie Dianjian De Qiedao*, n. pag.

56. Xia Yan, p. 228. In a following meeting with the producers of *Mingxing*, Xia Yan was surprised when Hong Shen talked openly about the need of the group to rigorously examine the censorship rules in order to avoid making unnecessary mistakes, Xia Yan p. 229-230.

57. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 188. Xia Yan et al also started up a leftist journal called *Dianying Yishu* [Film Art] but it only lasted four issues.

58. In conjunction with the leftist influence in the film studios, a leftist film critics group [yingping xiaozu] was established in 1932, see Xia Yan, p. 235.

59. Leyda, p. 77.

60. Regarding the "Chinese Hollywood" controversy, see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 188. It is also discussed in Zhu Manhua, *Tanhua Yixian De "Zhongguo Haolaiwu"* [The Short Life of the "Chinese Hollywood"], n.p., n. pag. Neither Du Yunzhi nor Guan Wenqing mention the threat of the "Chinese Hollywood" in their histories. Xia Yan mentions how the "Welcome Danger" incident raised Hong Shen's political consciousness. See Xia Yan, p. 164. Other references on Hong Shen, however, suggest that he already had a keen critical insight into American society and foreign policy before the "Welcome Danger" incident.

61. See Xia Yan, p. 238-239.

62. Comment on American films quoted from *Meiri Dianying* film supplement in Sha Sipeng and Xu Daoming. **Zhongguo Dianying Jianshi** [Concise History of Chinese Film] (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe, 1990), p. 171.

63. Information on the various film organizations set up by the Kuomintang government is from Du Yunzhi, p. 145. The origins of Zhongdian and Zhongzhi studios is from Cheng Jihua, II, p. 11.

64. According to Zhang Yinghong, former worker at the Metropol, the Crystal Palace, (1930), a second-run house, was owned by Green Gang interests but changed to an opera theatre after a few years. Interview, May 1991.

65. Xia Yan refers to Zhou Yunjian's fear of Du's position as the head of the "Constant Club" [heng she] an organization which Du used to exert influence on the government, police and financial circles, Xia Yan, p. 240. Information on Du Yuesheng is from Ji Yonggui, *Haishang Wenren Du Yuesheng* [The Shanghai Celebrity, Du Yuesheng], in Yang Hao, Ye Xian, **Jiu Shanghai Fengyun Renwu** (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), p. 353. Zhou Jianyun's earlier association with Du Yuesheng is mentioned in Du Yunzhi, p. 131-132.

66. Xia Yan, p. 240-244.

67. This is supported by Du Yunzhi's account of the same period regarding the leftist influence in Mingxing, p. 147 and p. 138-141. Zheng Zhengqiu's patience and Zhang Shichuan's bad temper ("all the actors were afraid of him") is also mentioned in Hu Die's memoirs, p. 37.

68. For a detailed discussion of the Blue Shirt organization and other right-wing cliques, see Lloyd Eastman **The Abortive Revolution** (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975), Chpt. 2, p. 31-84. I would like to thank Chen Lanyan for bringing this book to my attention.

69. A discussion of the Yihua studio is found in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 271-272. Du Yunzhi suggests that the attack on Yihua was linked to Tian Han's status as a Communist Party member after suspicion was aroused when he refused to be registered at a hospital after a car accident which involved Tian and other personnel from Yihua. See Du Yunzhi, p. 206-208. Du, however, erroneously chronicles the Yihua incident as occurring in 1934 instead of 1933.

70. Xia Yan initially suspected that the attack on Yihua was linked to a banquet that Yan Chuntang funded for visiting anti-imperialist representatives from France and Britain. He quotes from Tian Han's memoirs regarding the rather incongruous spectacle of the opium

merchant's presence at the banquet along with the foreign visitors and Shanghai's leftist film community. Xia Yan p. 251-253. Hong Shen suggested that Yihua was vulnerable because Yan had negligible status and Yihua was not an established studio, Xia Yan, p.258-259. In 1935, Yan Chuntang recruited Huang Jiamo et al, advocates of the "soft film" theory which is described below. In addition, a description of Yan Chuntang's behaviour suggests he was somewhat malleable. See Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 144-146.

71.Regarding Xinhua and Zhang Shankun, see Du Yunzhi p. 212 and Cheng Jihua, I, p. 483.

72.Quotations are from Cheng Jihua, I, p. 397. Numerous mainland texts refer to the "soft film" theory controversy, but Du Yunzhi does not discuss it in any detail nor does he refer to the term "soft film".

73.See Xia Yan, p. 262.

74.Cheng Jihua discusses the controversy and various reviews by Huang Jiamo on p. 398-399.

75.Tang Na, *Tai Fu Ren* [Lady For A Day], *Meiri Dianying*, Shanghai **Chen Bao** [CB], 10 June 1934, p. 12.

76.Cheng Jihua, I, p. 411.

77.Tang Na wrote an introductory description of the film in "Tu Sha" ["Massacre"], *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 6 June 1934, p. 10. (Tang Na used a different Chinese title than Huang.) Huang Jiamo followed with a scathing review of the film in "Minzu Jingshen" ["Massacre"], *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 9 June 1934, p. 10.

78.Huang Jiamo, "Minzu Jingshen" ["Massacre"], *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 9 June 1934, p. 10. Huang's mention of *I Am A Fugitive From A Chain Gang* is apparently directed at Tang Na's evaluation that *Massacre* compared favourably with the latter. This is not mentioned in Tang Na's introduction to *Massacre* on June 6 and I assume he must have said something in another article that I did not read. Huang refers to Tang's comparison of the two films in Huang Jiamo, *Ruanxing Dianying Yu Shuo Jiaoyu Dianying* [Soft Film and Films That Educate], *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 28 June 1934, p. 10.

79.Luo Fu (pseud. for Xia Yan), *Boli Wuzhong Toushi Zhe* [He Who Throws Stones At Glass Houses], *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 29 June 1934, p. 10.

80.Huang Jiamo, *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 28 June 1934, p. 10.

81.Luo Fu (pseud. for Xia Yan), *Meiri Dianying*, **CB**, 29 June 1934, p. 10.

82. Xia Yan discusses the retreat of leftist writers from *Meiri Dianying* on p. 287. For description of the Diantong Film Studio, see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 378. Jiang Qing, who eventually became Mao's wife, acted in two of Diantong's films. Her lover, the critic Tang Na, was also an actor for Diantong.

83. Absorption of Diantong staff is described in Du Yunzhi, p. 166-167. Tian Han and Yang Hansheng were arrested and released after the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang agreed to unite in resisting the Japanese.

84. Details on the change in theatre ownership is from **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 536-538.

85. The Grand Theatre was registered under the State of Delaware. See **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 545. Shanghai's Chinese newspaper **Shen Bao** was also registered under the State of Delaware and I am not sure if there is any significance in this or how many other Chinese companies were similarly registered under the State of Delaware. Chinese companies under American registration usually had an American citizen on the board of directors, whose presence was mainly a nominal position. The China Trade Act is briefly discussed in Clifford, p. 43. The history of the Grand Theatre is mentioned in many different sources, here I use the **Xinmin Wanbao** newspaper articles given to me by Percy Chu and my interview with him in May 1992. Three separate articles on the Grand Theatre were written in **Xinmin Wanbao**. Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *Lao "Da Guangming" Keran Chai* [The Sudden Demise of the Old "Grand"], **XMWB** 7 November, 1984, n. pag. Wang and Wu, *Huitian Wushu De Xin "Da Guangming"* [Fruitless Efforts to Save the New "Grand"], **XMWB**, 8 November, 1984, n. pag. Wang, Wu, *Gao Lianying Cuobai Xipian Shang* [Creating a United Enterprise to Foil Western Film Distributors], **XMWB**, 9 November, 1984, n. pag.

86. Regarding Lu Gen's United Theatre Company, see **Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao**, Vol. II, p. 539-540. Other details in Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, **XMWB**, 7,8,9, November, 1984, n. pag. The November 8th article in **Xinmin Wanbao** relates the origin of Lu Gen's "foreign sounding name". Apparently his original name was Lu Dianxue, but his frequent dealings with foreigners prompted him to change it to Lu Gen, similar to the name "Logan" perhaps?

87. This information on the Grand comes from another article given to me by Percy Chu. Zhu Xiaowei, *"Da Guangming" Yu Zaoqi Guochan Pian* [The Grand and Early Chinese Films], **Da Xing Jie**, No. 51, January (1987), n. pag. Interview with Percy Chu, May 1992. Chu mentioned the American from the Huizhong Bank as a man named Grandmart, Guan Wenqing mentions his last name as Mark in **Zhongguo Yingtian Waishi**, p. 195. The building bears a striking resemblance to the Radio City Hall in New York.

88. Percy Chu, interview, May 1992. Apparently Chu found out about the sale from a Dr. Sellet, a lawyer with the Chekiang Industrial Bank who was a close friend of the American judge in charge of the proceedings, a man by the name of Herech. Guan Wenqing mentions the possibility that Lu Gen might have been swindled by his foreign partners but does not go into details, see Guan, p. 195. Obviously a number of questions remain concerning these details of the Grand's history.

89. Interview with Percy Chu, May 1992. The KMT initiated their currency change after November 1934.

90. Percy Chu, interview, May 1992. For example, among the many organizations Chu participated in was the American Rotary Club and he was president from 1934-35. He also said that he was a member of altogether one-hundred and eight different companies and boards throughout his career. Biographical information on Percy Chu is from Zhu Miaosheng, *Zhu Bochuan Yu Shanghai Piaoju Jiaohuansuo* [Percy Chu and Shanghai's Clearing House], **Shanghai De Jinrongjie**, Shanghai Wenshi Ziliao Xuanji (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Da Chubanshe, 1988), Vol. 60, p. 305. Information on Chu's membership on the film censorship committee with the Shanghai Municipal Council is from my interview with Percy Chu and also appears in Zhu Manhua, *Zujie Dianjian De Qiedao*, n.p., n. pag.

91. Cao Yongfu, retired worker from the Grand Theatre, interview, July 1991.

92. Wang Zhaopei, Wu Yunmeng, **XMWB**, 9 November, 1984, n. pag.

93. For a discussion of Marshall Sanderson's theatres, see Leyda, p. 24. I found it very difficult to find information on details about American film distribution during the twenties. The Greater Shanghai 1933 Annual briefly mentions the Peacock Company as the biggest dealer in foreign films, obviously prior to when the American studios opened up their distribution offices. From, **Shanghai Da Guan** [The Greater Shanghai] 1933 Annual (Shanghai: Wenhua Fine Arts Press Ltd., 1933).

94. Ruan Renrong, a former employee with MGM in Shanghai, said that the American distributors didn't set up offices until 1933, interview, Oct. 1991. Zhu Manhua said he remembered United Artists set up an office before the others. Interview, July 1991. Kristin Thompson's detailed chronicle of the world market for American films has very few references to China but mentions the establishment of distribution offices of Universal studios in Japan in 1916 which was closely followed by the other companies. Her description of the China market suggests that distribution in the twenties came through Hong Kong but not through established offices. See, Thompson, p. 74.

95. The "Visit to the Emperor" remark is from Zhu Manhua, *Pianshang Yingyuan Doufa Ji* [Chronicle of the Struggle Between Film Distributors and Theatres], n.p., n. pag. Other information is from interviews with Zhu Manhua, June 1991 and Percy Chu, May 1992. Lu Gen's difficulty with United Artists is mentioned in Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *XMWB*, 8 November, 1984, n. pag.

96. Information on He Tingran is from *Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao*, Vol. II, p. 540-541. Details on the Asia Theatre Company are from interviews with Zhu Manhua, July and October 1991 and Percy Chu, May 1992. The American Hager owned an office appliance business in Shanghai and Percy Chu knew him through the Rotary Club. Percy Chu and He Tingran knew each other from alumni meetings of Shanghai University. Percy Chu attended Shanghai University before the 1920's when it was known as the Shanghai Baptist College.

97. Reference to MGM opting out of Asia Theatre Agreement is in Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *Zishi Eguo De Da Hua Dianyingyuan* [The Roxy Theatre Reaps Its Own Bitter Fruit], *XMWB*, November (no date), 1984. The Roxy was owned by the son of the comprador for Ewo, the Chinese name for the Jardine Matheson Company. He opened the Roxy in 1939.

98. These new theatres were to be the Cosmopolitan and the Alhambra. The latter was designed by the architect Houde, see *Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao*, p. 549-560.

99. The most comprehensive material on some of Shanghai's second-run theatres is from *Shanghai Dagan* [Greater Shanghai] (1933) in the section on theatres. Information on the Eastern Theatre is from my interview with Hu Jinhua, June 1991. Hu recalls seeing first-run American films at the Eastern Theatre and remembers it was managed by a Jewish man, though he was uncertain to whether or not he was also the owner. The 1933 statistics are taken from a film magazine from that period, quoted in Zhu Manhua, *Pingshang Yingyuan Dou Faji*, n.p., n. pag.

100. Percy Chu, interview, May 1992. The 1937 screening of *Lost Lambs* is also mentioned in Zhu Shaowei, *Da Xing Jie*, n. pag. *Lost Lambs* was directed by Cai Chusheng and chronicled the life of street kids in Shanghai. Jay Leyda says that Cai was inspired by Sergei Eisenstein's *The Road Into Life*, Leyda, p. 106.

101. Reference to *Love Parade* is in Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *XMWB*, 7 November 1984, n. pag. and Tang Xiaodan, retired film director, interview, April 1991.

102. The bigger theatres often used orchestral accompaniment which also played during intermission. One might surmise that with the sound era also came a number of unemployed musicians. Hu Die also mentioned that many of the Cantonese performers had to hire language teachers to improve their Mandarin if they wanted to

continue working in films in Shanghai. Apparently, Ruan Lingyu's Mandarin was heavily accented. Hu Die, however, because she had spent her childhood near Beijing, spoke Mandarin well. See Hu Die, p. 68.

103. Sun Yu, **Yinghai Fanzhou** [Sun Yu's memoirs] (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1987), p. 71-72.

104. Sun Yu, p. 72.

105. The popularity of *Song of the Fishers* and *Twin Sisters* is mentioned in Cheng Jihua, I, p. 239, 334. The latter is mentioned as running for 84 days and Zhu Manhua remembers that *Song of the Fishers* played for up to three months, interview, Oct. 1991. *Song of the Fishers* was directed by Cai Chusheng and received an award at the 1935 Moscow International Film Festival. It chronicled the story of a fisher family forced to migrate to the city and was certainly one of Cai's best films. *Twin Sisters* was written and directed by Zheng Zhengqiu and starred Hu Die. It is a highly melodramatic tale about the different fates of twin sisters who are eventually reunited. Hu Die played the two roles. It should be noted here, however, that Hu Die's popularity contrasted with the attraction that many young students found in the stars of Lianhua's productions, such as Li Lili or Ruan Lingyu. When I interviewed Li Lili, her husband made the point that as a young student, he and his friends never went to see Hu Die's films, which they found too traditional. He and his friends were more interested in films like Sun Yu's **Big Road** [da lu]. Li Lili, interview, June 1992.

106. Zhou Wenchang, interview, June 1991.

107. On the continuing popularity of American films, Zhou Wenchang and Zhu Manhua made similar comments. It is clear, however, that in the first half of the 1930's Chinese films had a boost in audience appeal. One reference also suggests that American films were not as popular as in the twenties. See Zhang Deming, *Xia Yan Xianshizhuyi Dianyingguan Chuyi* [My Humble Opinion on Xia Yan's View of Cinematic Realism], **Lun Xia Yan**, p. 24. Zhang suggests that "the Hollywood films which the audience had consumed 'like poison to quench their thirst' no longer sold the seats."

108. *Mu Lan Joins The Army* was based on a traditional story about a daughter who replaces her father to join the troops in battle against foreign invaders. Zhang Shankun produced this as part of the Huacheng company. Description of this period is in Cheng Jihua, II, p. 94-113 and Du Yunzhi, 264-272. I talk about this period in more detail in Chapter Four. *Chinese Tarzan* is from an advertisement in **Shen Bao**, 18 April 1940. Description of the drama activity in the late thirties and early forties is covered in detail in Edward Gunn, **Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-1945** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). See his Chapter Three in particular.

109. Wang Genfu and Zhang Yinghong, retired workers from the Metropol Theatre, interviews, May 1991 and additional interviews with other filmgoers from this period. The Shanghai Library has a number of these magazines but they were very difficult to access and fortunately I was able to use the copies of **Diansheng** in the library of the Shanghai Theatre School. Private collectors in Hong Kong also have some of these journals.

110. Interviews, Zhou Wenchang, June 1991, Zhu Manhua, June 1991, Hu Jinhua, June 1991, Gu Bingxing, July 1991. While kissing scenes were rare in Chinese films, my impression from watching these productions from the 1930's is that affection between women and men was displayed far more openly than after 1949.

111. Zhou Wenchang, interview, June 1991. The Snow White ice-cream story is from the Metropol workers, Wang Genfu and Zhang Yinghong, interview, May 1991.

112. Ballard, J.G. **Empire of the Sun** (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1984), p. 23-24.

113. The hunchback story is mentioned in Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, "*Yeban Gesheng*" *Chu Yin Zhi Shi* [First Showing of "Song At Midnight"], **XMWB**, November, (no date), 1984.

114. Reported in **Diansheng**, March 19, 1937. Apparently the eleven year old girl had recently moved to Shanghai from the countryside and died later that day of symptoms resembling a heart attack. Also mentioned in Wang Zhoupei, Wu Yunmeng, "*Yeban Gesheng*" *Chu Yin Zhi Shi*, **XMWB**, n.d., November 1984.

115. Descriptions of the various theatres are from my interview with Guo E, May 1991. Ticket prices are from the section on theatres in **Shanghai Daguan** [Greater Shanghai] Annual 1933, n. pag.

116. Theatre prices are from **Shanghai Daguan** 1933. Hu Jinhua also recalled that the Eastern Theatre had a rubber screen which supposedly enhanced viewing. The screen was later moved to the Metropol after 1949. Interview, June 1991. Prices for the Isis Theatre come from ads in **NCDN**, 25 April 1936 and 12 April 1936.

117. Zhu Manhua, interview, June 1991. Cao Yongfu said that salaries at the Grand theatre varied. Chinese workers like himself maybe earned 7 yuan a week (he worked in accounting) and the Russian emigre managers perhaps 100 yuan a month, though his former estimate seems a bit low, interview, June 1991.

118. On cotton workers' salaries see Honig, p. 55. Honig gives an exchange rate of one yuan to 30 cents U.S. in 1931. Prices in Shanghai for this period are further complicated by the use of "small money" [xiao yangqian] and "big money" [da yangqian], the latter being notes of ten, twenty, and fifty cent denominations

making up one yuan. Silver and copper coins were known as "small money" and their rate of value changed with market fluctuations on of the silver dollar. Obviously the relation of these currencies and changing rates of exchange make the accuracy of the ticket prices and wages suspect, but I include them here to give a very rough idea of the affordability of films during the thirties. Information on money from **All About Shanghai** (1934-35; rpt., Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 103.

119. Prices on admission to entertainment centers is from **Shanghai Daguan 1933**, no pag. The dancing cabaret prices are from my interview with Guo E, May 1991. Guo said he never went to Peking Opera performances because they were too expensive. After 1949 he became an aficionado of opera, especially Kunqu.

120. The popularity of these American films are mentioned in Zhang Deming, **Lun Xia Yan**, p. 34.

121. Hu Jinhua, interview, June 1991.

122. Comments on Tarzan and Laurel and Hardy are from Gu Xingbing, interview, July 1991. Gu had a friend selling ice-cream at the Metropol and he went to many films there free, let in by his friend. He was a big fan of Laurel and Hardy. On Marx Brothers' films, Zhou Wenchang said that one indication of their lack of appeal in Shanghai was that there were no Chinese imitations, as with Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy. Zhou said people didn't find the routines humorous, and they didn't like Groucho's mustache or Harpo's hat, interview July 1991.

123. Zhou Wenchang, interview, June 1991.

124. An article from **Da Gong Bao** in 1949 mentions an Italian company in Shanghai that began printing subtitles on films in 1937 for the American distributors. Major Chinese films were also subtitled in English for sales abroad at the same company. Zuo Bqing, *Zhongwen Zimu De Mimi* [The Secret Behind Chinese Subtitles], **Da Gongbao** [DGB], 3 March 1949, p. 4.

125. Zhu Manhua interview, June 1991. Zhu says the translations were spoken in Shanghai dialect, but Zhu Xian, a retired actor and drama teacher said she remembers the translation being in Mandarin which is more logical given that Chinese sound films were in Mandarin. Zhu Xian, interview, June 1991. Shu Ping's article on translation says that use of the earphones only began in 1939. Shu Ping, **Shangying Huabao**, July 1990, n.pag. Apparently the Roxy Theatre that showed MGM films dubbed the Tarzan series into Chinese because of their popularity, but I am uncertain as to whether this meant real on print dubbing or simply simultaneous translation. Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng *Zishi Eguo De Da Hua Dianyingyuan*, **XMWB**, n. d., November 1984, n. pag.

126. The **North China Daily News** ran two articles on the poor showing for British films in Shanghai, attributing it in part to the inability to compete with Hollywood productions. *British Films in Shanghai*, **NCDN**, 3 May 1936 and 17 May 1936. The May 3rd article describes the "scarcity of good British films in Shanghai" due to problems in distribution. "The distributors in China have had to take films on terms which have compelled them to show whatever they receive, with the result that in many cases the box office returns have actually failed to cover the duty paid on the films..." At different times there was an attempt to establish the Lyceum and Capitol as exclusive theatres for British films. Details from Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *Tanhua Yixian De Lanxin* [Brief Span of the Lyceum Theatre], **XMWB**, n. d., November 1984, n. pag. Wang Zhaopei and Wu Yunmeng, *Jian You Baoxiang De Dianyingyuan* [Cinemas With Built-in Box Balconies], **XMWB**, 6 November 1984, n. pag. Jiang (?) Liyong, *Lanxin Yu Guanglu De Bujie Zhi Yuan* [The Resolute Bond Between the Lyceum and Capitol Theatres], **Shanghai Xinwen Bao** [XWB], 14 March 1992, p. 4.

127. Hu Jinhua, interview, June 1991. Zhu Manhua and Zhou Wenchang also mentioned lack of Chinese audience for Japanese films and the section on theatres in the 1933 *Shanghai Annual* reiterates this observation, **Shanghai Daguan** 1933, n. pag.

128. Hu Die, p. 110. Hu Die was not the first "movie queen" in Chinese film history, the actor Zhang Zhiyun was given this designation in 1925. See Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 119. Shu Ping discusses the Lux advertisements and other commercial sponsorships in Shu Ping (pseud), *Zhongguo Zaoqi De Mingxing Shangye Guanggao* [Early Movie Stars and Commercial Advertisements], **Dianying Shijie**, March 1990, p. 10.

129. The producer's preference for women stars is from, Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 282. In the twenties, one runs across the term "slippery fellow" [hua tou] that characterized many male roles. This characteristic continued to highlight corrupt negative characters in the thirties. I am uncertain whether the term "hua tou" (literally slippery head) also has a meaning that connotes the use of prodigious amounts of hair oil, or hair cream, that defined the coiffures' of many a slick playboy out to trick unsuspecting women with an additional reference to the influence of corrupt Western fashion. One sees the trend continuing throughout the forties, and as well, I find the use of hair oil is frequently a feature of negative Kuomintang characters in mainland films after 1949, including the films made recently describing the various military campaigns in the civil war. Needless to say, in the thirties, the heroic characters like Jin Yan and others appear more commonly sporting the "natural look" epitomized to adventurous extremes in Sun Yun's famous nude bathing scene among the road workers in *Big Road* [da lu] in 1934.

130. Yin Xiuyan usually played the fat character modeled on Oliver Hardy. Though he personally preferred straight roles the audience liked him better when he played comic roles and he was usually slotted for comic relief. See, Yin Xiuyan, **Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan**, Vol. I, p. 297. Yin's fat role was preceded by another actor Liu Jicun, and the three of them Han, Yin and Liu played in a short piece in Lianhua's composite of six short films, *Lianhua Symphony* [lianhua zuoxiang qu] in 1937. Han Langen preferred comedy, learning from Chaplin and Buster Keaton films then adapting the Stan Laurel role, see *Han Langen*, **Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan**, p.303. Both performers were persecuted in the 1957 anti-rightist movement for their roles in *An Unfinished Comedy* and their careers on the screen were finished. Certain actors were often typecast to play negative characters, such as Zhang Zizhi who played the evil pimp in *The Goddess* [shen nu] and the evil detective in *The Storm* [lang tao sha], both directed by Wu Yonggang (in the latter film Zhang Zizhi resembles Edward G. Robinson, complete with cigar). Sun Yu also used Zhang to play off his bulk in contrast to Han Langen in *Big Road* [dalun], referring to the Laurel and Hardy device.

131.Quote from the suicide notes of three young women is from Du Yunzhi, p. 196. Ruan's suicide was apparently prompted by gossip in Shanghai's tabloids spread by her former husband, Zhang Damin in the midst of Ruan's relationship with the tea merchant, Tang Jishan. The Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan [Guan Jinpeng] also suggests in his recent film on Ruan Lingyu, that she was having an affair with the director Cai Chusheng, a subject that mainland histories not surprisingly avoid, but Kwan's research revealed Cai's possible implication in Ruan's desperate act.

132.Lu Xun wrote a scathing criticism of public gossip and the irresponsibility of the press in his eulogy for Ruan Lingyu entitled *Lun Renyan Kewei* [On Gossip Is A Fearful Thing] published in the bi-monthly journal **Tai Bai** on May 20, 1935. It is also included in his collected works. My source is a book which accompanied Stanley Kwan's film, Shu Qi et al., eds. **Ruan Lingyu Shen Hua** [The Legend of Ruan Lingyu], (Hong Kong: Chuanjian Chuban She, 1992), p. 111-115.

133.Again, the subject of cinema and its relationship to women in Chinese society is something that has to be covered in a separate discussion. The role of cinema in breaking down traditional barriers is from, Zhu Xian, a retired woman performer and drama teacher, interview, June 1991. Ruan Lingyu was not the first suicide among Shanghai's women movie stars. Ai Xia, who performed in *Spring Silkworms*, was a performer and writer who killed herself in 1934 in a strikingly similar problem involving male lovers. Du Yunzhi mentions that leftist writers cited that the cause of her death was due to "capitalist class feudal thinking", p. 197. Indeed, Ruan Lingyu's suicide came shortly after she finished Cai Chusheng's portrayal of Ai's death in *New Woman* [xin nuxing]. Du

Yunzhi comments that Shanghai reporters protested the blemish on their profession suggested in the film *New Woman*, where a journalist acquaintance of the main character publishes the news of her death before she has actually died. Du Yunzhi, p. 194-195. The last scene in *New Woman* has Ruan Lingyu protesting from her hospital bed, calling out (in subtitles) "I want to live! I want to live!". Despite the melodramatic tendencies in Cai Chusheng's films, *New Woman* is a remarkable film for its expression of the dilemma faced by women seeking an independent life on their own terms.

134. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 157. Cheng does not go into details, but I suspect that the Huawei Company had some association with Mingxing and the Pathe Record Company [baidai changpian gongsi] in Shanghai. *Shanghai Daguan* 1933 refers to Pathe as the biggest distributors of Chinese films and its association with Mingxing has been noted in other sources, ie., *Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao*, II, 536.

135. Cheng Jihua, I, p. 161. The quote on American musicals is attributed to Feng Naichao from the March, 1930 issue of *Yishu* [Art], a journal on drama and other arts edited by Xia Yan.

136. Regarding the American companies RCA and Western Electric and their patent regulations, see, Cheng Jihua, I, p. 161-162. This difficulty is also mentioned in Hu Die, p. 69. However, there is no explanation of whether or not Chinese film companies respected the patents after they finally did acquire the sound equipment.

137. The details on the early sound process in Chinese films is mentioned in many sources. The description Hu Die gives in her memoirs is perhaps the most entertaining, p. 70.

138. Zhu Manhua mentions that Hong's negotiations in the U.S. were problematic in his account, *Zhongguo Zui Zao Yousheng Pian* [China's Earliest Sound Film], n. p., n. pag. Reference to learning the new technology is in Hu Die, p. 76. The American technicians who came to China are listed by Cheng Jihua, a producer Harry Garson, cinematographer, Jack Smith, and assistant camera, James Williamson and others. Altogether fifteen Americans. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 166. Also see Leyda p. 67, but he does not mention the producer Garson.

139. The remarkable thing about the Mingxing technicians was their age. He Zhaozhang was only sixteen years old when he was working for Mingxing. Apparently he learned how to use the sound recording machine by obtaining a key with the help of Zhang Shichuan to gain access to the equipment after the Americans had gone to sleep. Similarly, Huang Han, also sixteen, learned the editing techniques with sound by asking questions through Hong Shen, whose relationship with the American editing technician was amiable. See Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 307-308.

140. Tianyi hired cinematographer Bert Cann and sound technicians Leo Britton and Bryan C. Guerin. See Cheng Jihua, I, p. 165. Leyda lists only Guerin and a man named Charles Hugo, see Leyda, 67. Tian Yi's expertise from foreign technicians was also "stolen", mentioned in Wang Chaoguang, Zhu Jian, p. 308. An earlier sound film, *After Rain, Clear Sky* [yuguo tianqing] was produced with Japanese assistance and shot by an American cinematographer. The film was shown in Shanghai just prior to Japan's occupation of Manchuria, but its Japanese associations were uncovered and it did not do well at the box office, according to Leyda, p. 66 and Cheng Jihua, I, p. 165.

141. Leyda, p. 79.

142. The problem of Western critics *vis a vis* Asian cinema is raised by Chris Berry in *Poisonous Weeds or National Treasures*, p. 87-88. Another provocative article on this same theme is by Stephen Teo, *The Legacy of T.E. Lawrence: The Forward Policy of Western Film Critics in the Far East*, in **Hong Kong Cinema in the Eighties** (Hong Kong: The 15th Hong Kong International Film Festival, 1991), p. 85-90. *Street Angels* chronicles the love story between a band musician and a sing song girl, see my earlier note in Chapter One, n. 33. Musical "incongruity" in *Street Angels* noted in Ma Ning's, *The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Reconstructing Chinese Leftist Films of the 1930's*, p. 24.

143. For comments on Mingxing production methods, see Xia Yan p. 232-233. In addition, it is worth noting here, that the term "director" was only introduced to Chinese film-making in the mid-twenties, after Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu began their work with Mingxing. Hu Die mentions in her memoirs that she recalls the use of the term "director" [daoyuan] after film theory began being discussed in various journals in the mid-twenties and the term was taken from the English word, "director." See Hu Die, p. 35-36.

144. In Cheng Jihua's description of the biographies of Chinese performers, he tends to emphasize their social origins which supposedly gave them a better appreciation of how to characterize roles that were meant to highlight the plight of the lower classes. Many performers like Ruan Lingyu for example came from impoverished circumstances, but their portrayals of workers and so on often had more to do with the vision of the directors, who, for the most part, were of the educated middle and upper classes. This was pointed out to me by a film critic I talked to with regard to the portrayal of road workers in *Big Road*. He said that, regardless of whether or not the film was well received, it did not portray road workers in a realistic light, considering the language they used and the fact that one of them is a university student from the Northeast fleeing the Japanese invasion. It was improbable at that time that a student would go work on a road gang. On the other hand, actors like Yuan Muzhi and others tried to improve their craft by social observation, often referred to in Chinese as "tiyan

shenghuo," to observe and learn from real life. For example, at the conference on film performance I attended in Shanghai in April 1991, one participant, Hu Dao, a professor and retired actor from the Shanghai Drama Academy, mentioned the influence of the Russian drama theory on Yuan Muzhi who, when researching a role he was to play as a White Russian, took to observing Russian emigres on Joffre Road. The actor Zhao Dan was also strongly influenced by Yuan's approach.

145.A brief description of this distinction among Chinese film theorists is mentioned in Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 180.

146.Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 180. Articles in **Lun Xia Yan** discuss the issue of realism is much more depth, but I feel the essence of definition is described in the source I have used here.

147.The Yanan Forum on Art and Literature advocated that art and literature must represent the people and serve to promote socialism. Mao's talks at Yanan guided film policy after 1949, though the emphasis on portraying worker, peasant and soldier [gongnongbing] heroic roles was not always successfully adhered to. For a comprehensive discussion of this in the post-49 era, see Paul Clark, **Chinese Cinema**. Another discussion which has some relevance to the question of *whose* realism to portray was a dispute within the Communist Party in the late twenties and early thirties on displaying "middle characters", usually bourgeoisie who are dealt with sympathetically (in this case the topic was literature). Xia Yan goes into some detail on these questions and the division within the party among those who advocated a "the closed door policy" [guanmen zhuyi] and the notion of the middle character. In addition, Xia mentions his own fear of being called "rightist" like Chen Duxiu, one of the founders of the Communist Party, who was later expelled for becoming a Trotskyite, and criticizes the tendency among some party members towards ultra-leftism and "dogmatism" [jiaotiaozhuyi]. p. 180 and 212-217.

148.Cheng Jihua, I, p. 211.

149.Wang Chaoguang and Zhu Jian, p. 180.

150.Certainly this can be seen in the films Zheng directed before he died in 1935, as, for example, *Twin Sisters*.

151.I cannot quote this idea to published material, (though Pickowicz touches upon the subject of Cai Chusheng and his first film) but it comes from Zhong Dafeng's film history class I attended at the Beijing Film School and for anyone familiar with these film-makers, the logic of this statement is clear. Fei Mu directed a number of films in the thirties that reveal his aesthetic subtlety, but his most mature work is in the 1948 film, *Spring in a Small Town* [xiaocheng zhichun]. Likewise, Wu Yungong employed a distinct style in *The Goddess* and *The Storm*.

152. Li Lili, interview, June 1992. Li was a favorite performer for the director Sun Yu and embodied in her characters his celebration of youth and naturalism. Confirming many of the written sources on Sun Yu, she said Sun was more influenced by American directors than Russian.

153. Besides *Street Angels* another film employs some interesting visual techniques. Directed by Yuan Muzhi, *Scenes of the City* [dushi de fenguang] (co-starring Tang Na and Lan Ping (Jiang Qing)) highlighted the contradictions of the city in humorous vignettes of four characters on a visit from the countryside. The final scene uses an overhead shot to portray them caught between the tracks of two trains going in opposite directions, caught between two worlds. In addition, Shen Xiling's *The Boatman's Daughter* [chuan jianu] has a wonderful opening montage of boats on the lake and goes on to describe the contradictions between decadent Western/urban culture and country life.

154. Berry, *Jump Cut*, p. 87. He discusses this in the context of Western criticism of Japanese film, pointing to the work by Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, who emphasise the influence of Hollywood, and Noel Burch, who evaluates Japanese film on its departure from Hollywood tradition.

155. Zhong Dafeng, *Yingxi Lilun Lishi Suyuan*, p. 80.

156. The "soviet shot" is mentioned as one outcome of the accessibility and translation of Russian film theory, as well as the emergence of Russian film showings in the early thirties, see Cheng Jihua, I, p. 195. Li Lili also mentioned the use of the term among directors in the thirties to describe high/low angle camera shots, interview, June 1992.

157. Ma Ning, *The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical*, p. 24.

158. Ma Ning, p. 24.

159. Tadao Sato, *Le cinema japonais et le cinema chinois face a la tradition*, in *Le Cinema Chinois*, eds. Marie-Claire Quiquemelle and Jean-Loup Passek (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), p. 81, 83.

160. The theatre as "film school" is referred to in Luo Yijun, *Zhishi Jiu Shi Liliang* [Knowledge is Power], *Lun Xia Yan*, p. 358. The movie house as a training ground for film-makers in Shanghai was reiterated by Li Lili, who added that the same could be said for performers, who observed the technique of foreign actors, interview, June 1992. She herself was partial to Marlene Dietrich, a style she emulates very well in Sun Yu's *Volcano Passion* [huoshan qingxue]. Li Lili plays a worldly singer in a sailors' bar on a South Sea Island who is attracted to the sullen young man in exile. The man is brooding over the destruction of his family by a vicious

warlord. The same warlord arrives at the same South Sea Island and the two finally confront each other and fight it out on the flanks of the island's volcano which is in the midst of an eruption. Certainly not one of Sun Yu's finer works, but the performance by Li Lili is superb.

161. Luo Yijun, **Lun Xia Yan**, p. 358, quoting from Xia Yan's **Dianying Lunwen Ji** [Collected Essays of Xia Yan], p. 95. I was often told that Xia Yan studied the movie pamphlets of American films. Fortunately I was able to find this reference here. Another reference to the role of American films in teaching film craft was given to me by Li Tianji, who later acted in films in the late forties. During the war he was working in theatre in Chengdu and recalled how the director of his troupe arranged for a local theatre to privately screen John Ford's 1940 film, *The Long Voyage Home*. The director requested all the members of the troupe to come and watch the film while he instructed them on what to look for, how aspects of lighting were used and so on. Li Tianji, interview, Oct. 1991.

162. Quotations from Ma Ning, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical", p. 23. The reference to Xia Yan's inspiration for *New Year Coin* is from Zhu Yun, *Yishu Fengge De Duchuangxing* [Individual Characteristics of Artistic Style], **Lun Xia Yan**, p. 159. The love story genre certainly requires more analysis than I give here in one sentence, but people I interviewed seemed to feel that Chinese films were influenced by the Hollywood love story. This was pointed out very early to me by the late Gao Bo, a stage and film actor from the thirties and forties, interview, May 1991.

163. Information on the Mr. Wang comic strip is from, Bi Keguan, Huang Yuanlin **Zhongguo Manhua Shi**, p. 116-121.

164. Quote regarding the Mr. Wang series is from Cheng Jihua, I, p. 373. Du Yunzhi discusses the series' popularity, p. 179-180. Du also says that the film did not reproduce the satirical bite of the comic strip. He adds that the actor, Yang Jie took his role as Mr. Wang very seriously and continued producing the film after leaving Tian Yi. As Du describes, despite the watered-down version of the comic strip, the characters bore a remarkable resemblance to Ye Qianyu's drawings. I was unable to view the series at the archives but from photographs of the films the resemblance to the comic strip is striking. While few of the people I interviewed liked the series, they did say it was popular. Shu Ping, in two articles on the Wang series also mentions that Tianyi made a large profit on these films. Shu Ping, *Cong Lianhua Dao Xiliepian De "Wang Xiansheng"* ["Mr. Wang", From a Cartoon Strip to Film Series], **Dianying Shijie**, January, 1990, p. 30.

165. Berry, *Poisonous Weeds or National Treasures*, p. 94. Berry's article positions Chinese film from the thirties in relationship to

the various approaches to Third Cinema theory which defines "alternative" cinema as that opposed to the mainstream.

CHAPTER 4

WAR, VICTORY AND REVOLUTION

American films, are they good or bad?
Bad! Ha ha,
They teach the people to rob and steal,
Loot and plunder, harm and kill,
To learn from this is terrible.

American films, are they right or wrong?
Wrong! Ho, ho,
The temptress and her sexy smile
Lures with flesh and charming ways
'Til all are lost within her maze.¹

It rained the night before the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Shanghai as if to wash clean the city in expectation of their arrival, one of those spring storms that descend upon the land like an assault from the heavens. The Communist government brought great changes to this bulwark of foreign presence in China, but Shanghai also posed unique challenges to the Party administration; it was to be a "battlefield of a different type,"² the struggle to develop a new consciousness among its remaining citizens and to transform the historical legacy of Western influence and capitalism. While secondary to the most immediate tasks at hand, the film industry and film screenings became important factors in rehabilitating Shanghai's popular culture to a condition more fitting with the new regime. Since the 1930's the nature of film production and the audience had undergone many changes, precipitated as much by extraneous historical events as by film-makers themselves. In many ways, the eclectic quality of leftist-inspired cinema was buried by the exigencies of propaganda

required in the anti-Japanese war and the final battle for Communist supremacy in China. In addition, American films had become even more entrenched in the market prior to and after the Pacific War period.

The roots of change began after the Xian incident at the end of 1936 when Chiang Kaishek was compelled to unite with the Communists against the Japanese.³ In the summer of 1937 Japanese troops invaded Shanghai and occupied all Chinese territory surrounding the city, including the Hongkou district. The remaining portion of the International Settlement across Suzhou Creek and the French Concession were outside the direct jurisdiction of the Japanese, though they still had representation on the Shanghai Municipal Council. The Japanese occupation not only curtailed anti-Japanese dissent in the film industry but the battle itself destroyed many film studios, including Mingxing's and Lianhua's production facilities in Zhabei. For both practical and political reasons, a large part of Shanghai's progressive film personnel moved to Wuhan, which was still held by the KMT, or on to Hong Kong.

In Wuhan, the newly allied Communist and Kuomintang forces continued film production under the auspices of the Political Bureau headed by Zhou Enlai. Using the Zhongzhi film studio managed by the Ministry of Defence, three feature films and numerous documentaries were produced in Wuhan until the Japanese advance in 1938 forced the studio and its staff to move to Chongqing. The first of these features, *Protect Our Land* [baowei women de tudi],

was permitted to explicitly denounce the Japanese. Jay Leyda suggests that the simple plots and dialogue of this and other films were designed for a peasant audience, which, if nothing else revealed the film-makers' perception of how to approach a vast audience who were unfamiliar with the film medium. The sheer logistics involved in organizing rural screenings appears to have limited the possibility of productions reaching their intended viewers. However, in order to encourage foreign aid for the anti-Japanese war of resistance, the films were screened for metropolitan viewers overseas.⁴ The themes of these and later films produced in Chongqing centered on the war against the Japanese, but the tenuous spirit of cooperation failed to extinguish the political differences between the leftist film-makers and the Kuomintang. Cheng Jihua describes Zhongzhi films as being more progressive than those of the other government film studio operating at this time, Zhongdian, the latter reflecting the right-wing influences of the Kuomintang, a factor which created conflicts for leftist participants. In addition, the Xibei film studio, established by a Kuomintang general, Yan Xishan, in 1935, absorbed leftist talent from Shanghai after 1937.⁵

Since I have seen only two films of this period, I can only rely on descriptions given in various sources, but my impression is that the war effort emphasized anti-Japanese propaganda with little room for ambiguity. One remarkable work of this period was *The Light of East Asia* [dongya zhiguang], a film about Japanese prisoners of war who are persuaded by the Chinese attendants and

hospital workers to denounce the militarism of the Japanese invasion. While hardly a subtle piece, the film is interesting for its documentary approach. Actual Japanese prisoners of war took part in the project and put on a tremendous performance considering they were neither actors nor fluent in Chinese. Moreover, their character portrayal upstaged the stereotype of the brutal Japanese soldier that was and still is frequently adhered to in Chinese films both on the mainland and elsewhere.⁶

Film production during this period was severely hampered by the practical difficulties of producing in wartime conditions. Consequently, many film personnel concentrated their efforts on theatre in Chongqing and troupes touring the southwest. Cheng Jihua suggests that government meddling in film production prompted many leftists to join theatre troupes, but it is equally clear that theatre was a more practical way to reach audiences than films at this time.⁷ Hong Shen and Tian Han were very active in this respect in the early forties. The theatre troupes also became a training ground for new performers and artists who joined the anti-Japanese movement and lived quite precariously in impoverished conditions.⁸ For many of these young people who had grown accustomed to life in urban areas, this experience gave them a new understanding of China's interior rural regions. At the end of the war, they returned to Shanghai with a greater insight into the problems facing China's rural population.

Meanwhile, in Shanghai, the film industry quickly adapted to exploiting the market left in the foreign settlements and took on

quite a different orientation in film production than what was occurring in the interior. Impetus for renewed film production came from the resourceful manager of Xinhua studios, Zhang Shankun, who surveyed the destruction and decided a viable audience still existed in the foreign settlements alone. Soon afterwards, other companies followed his approach and were nominally registered as foreign companies to avoid any Japanese interference. The patriotic content of films which had flourished in Shanghai under the leftists was now incorporated into the long-standing tradition in Chinese literature and drama of portraying themes from the past to explain the present [jiegou yujin]. Although film companies were cautious about admitting their films to Japanese inspection for screening in occupied areas, this allegorical subtlety gave them openings to a larger market.⁹

Ironically, one of Zhang Shankun's first productions, *Mulan Joins the Army* [mulan congjun], was misinterpreted as exalting the Japanese when it was screened in Chongqing. While the reference to patriotic duty was clearly understood in Shanghai, some viewers in Chongqing took exception to the first line of the film's song that read, "the rising sun covers the land", seeing it as a reference to Japanese supremacy in China. The print was taken out into the streets and burned by a group, who Du Yunzhi described as leftist troublemakers "plotting to create disputes and unsettle the unity among film circles." Zhang and the director Bu Wancang quickly took action to remedy the misunderstanding. Notices were published in the Chongqing papers explaining the line's origin from a folk song

against foreign invaders from the late Ming and early Qing dynasty and the film was shown again without incident.¹⁰

The lifespan of these patriotic works disguised as classical costume dramas was brief. Similar to what had occurred in the 1920's, the commercial prerogative in film production created a situation where certain genres were popular until the audience tired of the tendency among filmmakers to duplicate a popular theme to oblivion, often to the extent of different companies making the same films. In the late thirties, the classical costume drama, which leftist filmmakers had rejected because of its tie to the feudal past, was reclaimed and followed by a resurgence of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly stories, horror and detective films, as well as more direct imitations of American genres. This included Chinese versions of the Charlie Chan series, Tarzan, and Robin Hood. Additionally, Mingxing's success with the martial arts film *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple* was resurrected on screen as a remake and film versions of traditional operas also became popular.¹¹

Cheng Jihua describes the audience for these films as the proverbial "petty bourgeoisie" [xiao shimin] encompassing as well the numerous landlords who had fled occupied regions to take refuge in Shanghai. In an analysis strikingly reminiscent of his conclusions on the late 1920's, Cheng implies that this audience, like its predecessors, lacked a critical consciousness and revelled in escapist entertainment.¹² Under the circumstances, however, they had little choice since nothing remained of the vibrant Chinese film industry of the early and mid-thirties. Similarly, the frantic

pace of output brought down production standards in Chinese films while American productions gained in popularity. As Leyda suggests, Hollywood movies "enjoyed a pre-Pearl Harbour boom, as if Shanghai knew that its favorite cultural aggressor was about to vanish for four years."¹³

Shanghai During the War Years

This era marked the beginning of a new player in Shanghai's film production, the Japanese. Contrary to their presence in many of Shanghai's numerous commercial enterprises, Japanese influence in film production prior to 1938, from both a financial and cinematic perspective, was almost negligible.¹⁴ Of course, Japanese had made their contribution indirectly by infusing Chinese films and their audience with patriotic outrage in the early thirties. After occupying the East China region and installing the puppet government of Wang Jingwei, Japanese authorities aspired to duplicate in Shanghai their successful film industry in Manchuria. The task was given to Nagamasa Kawakita after an earlier predecessor had failed to produce results.¹⁵

Kawakita had lived in China as a young man, spoke fluent Mandarin, and appears to have had a genuine respect for his Chinese colleagues and adversaries. In 1938, as the head of Japan's International Film News Association, he had advocated a policy of restraint towards film production in China that would incorporate Chinese film personnel and downplay the political content. After the Japanese army occupied the International Settlement in December

1941, Kawakita combined the various Chinese companies and personnel into Zhonglian, the China United Film Studio. Not all film artists and performers were willing to participate. For example, the talented director from the former Lianhua studio, Fei Mu, turned his energy towards theatre. To avoid screening films made under the Japanese occupation, the Liao brothers changed their Lyric and Golden Gate cinemas into venues for stage performances. Many others joined Zhonglian, however, encouraged by Kawakita's policy to emphasize entertainment over Japanese "co-prosperity" propaganda.¹⁶

Prior to the Japanese military success at Pearl Harbour, enterprises like Asia Theatres were under less pressure from the Japanese because of their American registration and association with the Hollywood distribution offices. Although the foreign registration of Chinese companies was effective, it did not necessarily protect individuals in the companies. Zhang Shangkun, the producer for Xinhua, was relentlessly courted by the Japanese, who wanted him to cooperate in film production. He managed to avoid open collaboration until the outbreak of the Pacific War. Even then he was simultaneously labelled a traitor by leftists and the Chongqing government as well as criticized by Japanese authorities for his "passive resistance." He eventually escaped to Chinese-held territory where he was held in detention and then released.¹⁷ Percy Chu faced similar pressure from the Japanese, less for his position as a theatre owner than his role in Shanghai financial circles. He stayed in Shanghai after 1937 to supervise financial operations and managed to avoid implicating himself in a traitorous relationship

despite numerous threats. At one time he was kidnapped by agents for Wang Jingwei. After the invasion of the International Settlement in 1941 there were, as he said in our meeting, "no more places to hide."¹⁸

The Pacific War also disrupted the dominance of American films in Shanghai. Yet, contrary to many reports that American films disappeared completely after the Japanese occupied the foreign concessions, Hollywood reruns continued to play up to the end of 1942. Movie pamphlets of the time show that Hollywood reruns were screened at the Paris, Nanking, Rialto, and Roxy at various times in 1942, though the latter two appeared to have more frequent showings. Many of these were popular hits from the past, like *Smiling Through*, or innocuous comedies, Westerns and love stories.¹⁹ While I have no evidence to support the idea that Kawakita may have used American films to placate the Shanghai audience, it seems reasonable to suggest that his understanding of Chinese cinema-goers would warrant such an approach. I could find no film pamphlets listing American films in 1943, and this would correspond to concurrent pressure exerted on Kawakita by Japanese authorities to increase the political content in productions. Yet, as Kawakita had predicted, Chinese audiences maintained a "passive resistance" towards Japanese propaganda films by staying away from the theatres. In 1943, Zhonglian was amalgamated into a larger company incorporating both distribution and production channels. Called Huaying, it continued under Kawakita's supervision. Initially meant to increase the production of propaganda films,

Huaying ended up producing films in much the same vein as Zhonglian, love stories, family disputes, and comedies. While the technical standard of these productions was very high, it is also clear that Japanese films never achieved the box office success of Hollywood movies.²⁰ Instead the audience for drama in Shanghai experienced a tremendous growth that lasted for the duration of the war.²¹

Victory and Civil War

At the end of the war, the Kuomintang government returned to Nanjing and relationships with the Communist party deteriorated into civil war. Film-makers who had spent the anti-Japanese war scattered throughout the interior made their way back to Shanghai, together with the new talent who had taken part in the touring theatre troupes. Many of these people were absorbed into the film industry as the renaissance of theatre which had occurred in Shanghai during the war ended abruptly. Films, particularly Hollywood movies, regained their place in the cinemas. A new and bitter struggle began among the various players vying for an audience in a troubled society where the euphoria of victory over the Japanese was rapidly fading away.

The political and social atmosphere of the 1940's in Shanghai lacked the idealistic optimism of the 1930's. The growing dissatisfaction among the populace towards the returned rule of the Kuomintang created a resentful bitterness that could not be sweetened into a vibrant hope to rebuild the country. People were

tired of fighting. There were exceptions of course, particularly among students. The highly visible American military presence in China during this time generated anti-American protests that at their most extreme suggested that America had replaced Japan as China's foremost enemy. Nor was this necessarily wishful Communist propaganda that saw the Kuomintang-American alliance as a threat. The cavalier behaviour of American Marines and Navy men stationed in Shanghai and other parts of China inspired genuine indignation among many citizens.²²

In addition, American aid flowed into Shanghai and directly into the pockets of corrupt government officials while unbelievably high rates of inflation created havoc in the economy. The bellowing anti-communist stance of the Kuomintang was drowned out by their own inability to deal with the social and economic crisis as ongoing corruption alienated the business class and intellectuals. Meanwhile, to escape the dissonance of a crumbling political, economic and social environment, those who could afford it took refuge in the Hollywood dreamworld. In the last years of the Kuomintang regime in mainland China, American films garnered the largest audience they had ever known in Shanghai. Along with other components of American mass culture, the films also ignited feelings of animosity towards America among Chinese intellectuals, as T.D. Hutters has explained in his article, *Transformation of the May Fourth Era*, on intellectuals of this period.

Most cultural figures felt both envious of the American success (while wishing somehow to emulate it) and resentful of the consequences for the future of Chinese culture. Such a

mixture of feelings led inevitably to very strongly held convictions. The tremendous hostility toward the United States that came into existence among left-wing intellectuals by 1949 thus, plainly, had other than strictly political roots. To the extent that American culture had by then pre-empted the local market, Chinese authors regarded the U.S. as a primary obstacle to the creation of an indigenous cultural milieu; and to the extent that American cultural artifacts appealed to their audience's escapist tendencies, rather than to the high seriousness that wartime experiences had imbued in 'orthodox' Chinese writers, the United States was regarded as a force for cultural reaction regardless of its activities in the civil war.²³

The number of new American films on the market was not substantially higher than the 1930's. According to statistics cited by Cheng Jihua, 345 American films were imported in 1934, making up nearly eighty-five percent of the total import market. In 1946, 383 American films were shown in first-run theatres but the second-run market was also supplemented by the re-screening of numerous films produced before the war such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Waterloo Bridge* and *Blood and Sand*.²⁴ Moreover, Hollywood entertainment had a definite appeal for the Shanghai audience after its long absence during the war years. Zhu Manhua made the remark that "people were hungry for American films" and the viewing population was perhaps twice as large as it had been during the thirties.²⁵ While some American films were screened in the interior during the war, the number was minimal compared to the previous era in Shanghai. After 1942, Shanghai citizens had had no access to American films.

After the war, the American film distributors returned to the China market with renewed vigour. Similar to their collaboration in

the thirties, the eight studios formed a board to coordinate film marketing. They also benefited from a U.S. trade agreement formed with the Kuomintang government at the end of 1946, the Sino-American Trade Treaty. This official alliance caused a dispute in 1947 when American distributing agents protested to the American Embassy after a Shenyang theatre owner in North China dissolved a screening rights contract to show more Chinese films.²⁶

In Shanghai, the MGM office made grandiose plans to build a theatre and apartment complex but instead eventually bought the Roxy theatre in 1946. Former MGM staffer, Ruan Renrong, explained to me that the owner, Pan Zhihen, persuaded them to buy the Roxy when he heard about the plans to build a new theatre. On one hand, Pan knew that if MGM built their own theatre, he would be out of business. In addition, Pan was pessimistic about the Kuomintang's ability to overcome the communist threat and wanted to sell off his remaining assets while he still could. In any case, MGM was unable to proceed with their new building on Nanjing Road because the city administration turned down their proposal, ostensibly because the project lacked parking space. Thus, in the history of Shanghai's theatres, only one among the major first-run theatres was ever directly owned by an American studio, from 1946 to 1951.²⁷

The Asia Theatre company also faced changes after 1945. Disputes over profit sharing had developed between Percy Chu and He Tingran prior to the Japanese occupation of the International Settlement. Consequently, after 1945, the two men split their respective holdings to their former companies. Percy Chu retained

control over the Grand, Cathay, and Majestic and He Tingran continued to manage the Nanjing, Metropol and Rialto. One outcome of the Kuomintang return to Shanghai was the policy of confiscating properties formerly administered under the Japanese. Many theatre owners suffered losses as officials rushed to denounce proprietors as "collaborators" and seize ownership, often with little supportive evidence. The former Asia Theatres consortium was untouched because of its American registration, but Percy Chu himself was jailed for four years until 1949 as an "economic traitor" for his work with the Japanese during the war years in Shanghai. It is difficult to know if the coalition of Asia Theatres might have been effective in challenging the American film distributors during this time, had Percy Chu not been jailed or the company become defunct.²⁸

MGM brought in the most films during this period, and one of its big hits shown early on in 1946 was *Bathing Beauty* starring Esther Williams. The film ran for six weeks at the Roxy with continuous full houses and was to retain a peculiar legacy after 1949. Li Tianji, an actor who saw the film in Chengdu during the war, remembers being overwhelmed by the crowds in this interior city when he tried to buy a ticket and his leather shoes were completely ruined.²⁹ Likewise, in Shanghai, *Bathing Beauty* was referred to as "dazzling" or "qicai" [literally seven colours] rather than the usual term to describe colourful movies as "wucai" [five colours]. Other MGM films drew large crowds as well. One person mentioned someone's sister who saw *The Great Waltz*, about

Johann Strauss, nine times. *Waterloo Bridge*, shown in Shanghai before the war, was screened again at the Roxy in 1946, as was *Gone With the Wind* in 1948. Films like *Watch Over the Rhine*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Address Unknown* were other successful films, particularly popular with intellectuals for their anti-fascist themes.³⁰

Despite dissatisfaction among intellectuals with the burgeoning presence of American culture in post-war Shanghai, American films were still admired by many film artists and performers. For example, Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer were widely praised for their screen presence while Rita Hayworth was known for her sex appeal. Li Tianji, himself an *aficionado* of comedy, recalled his fondness for Bob Hope. Other Hollywood stars like Dorothy Lamour, Clarke Gable, Gregory Peck and Errol Flynn were appreciated by the Shanghai audience. Furthermore, the issue of American films with Chinese themes seemed to lose its political resonance in the changed post-war environment. Many of the American war movies highlighted the struggle against the Japanese and some included the role of China. Yet there appeared to be little debate about characterization in these films until after 1949.³¹

One curious and somewhat obscure film was RKO's *First Yank in Tokyo* that I found featured in a movie pamphlet. It played sometime in the late forties, though the exact date was not listed. The explanation in English described how the protagonist Ross, played by Leonard Strong, undergoes plastic surgery to make him look Japanese in order to infiltrate enemy lines and rescue an atomic

engineer. His fiancée Abby, who Ross believed had been killed in the Philippines, is discovered in Japan incarcerated along with the atomic scientist. The plot revolves around the spurious premise that Ross "dare not test Abby's love with a Japanese face" and he conveniently dies in the process of rescuing her and the scientist. Referred to in other passages as his "oriental features...[that]... Ross will retain for the rest of his life," the film implies he agreed to the plastic surgery in the first place, not for patriotic reasons but because he believed the love of his life was dead. Regardless of the Japanese element, the anti-East Asian message in the English version is devastatingly apparent. Indeed, the Chinese-language version in the pamphlet, while heightening the anti-Japanese component, felt compelled to add a byline stating that even with his altered face, Leonard Strong, the actor, "is still beautiful [hai shi hen piaoliang]." One wonders how Tang Na or Hong Shen might have responded to such a racist scenario back in the vigorously critical days of *Meiri Dianyings* editorials.³²

Despite the massive popularity of American films and the attraction of their technical virtuosity for film artists, their monopoly on the audience also irritated leftist film-makers. Chinese film production took some time to become reestablished in Shanghai and film-makers who had previously been involved in the leftist film movement of the thirties did not begin producing features until 1947. The Kuomintang Zhongzhi studio reverted to making anti-communist documentaries with the help of an American consultant and Zhongdian took over the formerly Japanese-controlled

Huaying.³³ After some deliberation as to whether they were traitors, much of the Chinese talent who had worked under the Japanese were absorbed into Zhongdian.

The issue of collaborators among film artists was a problem for the Kuomintang, explained in somewhat different terms by Du Yunzhi and Cheng Jihua. Du suggests that filmmakers returning from the interior objected to the enlistment of former Huaying staff and that this was part of a "leftist conspiracy" to instill opposition to the government. In a contrary opinion, Cheng maintains that the Kuomintang's attempt to monopolize the film industry after returning to Shanghai was jeopardized by the lack of talent outside leftist circles and they had little choice but to hire the former Huaying staff. In any event, the audience appeared unconcerned with the issue. Zhongdian's production of *Code Name No. 1* [tianzi diyihao] was made by in the Beijing studio and starred Ouyang Shafei, a former performer with Zhonglian and Huaying during the war. The story combined the adventure of a spy thriller and a complicated love story about a female Kuomintang agent in Japanese-occupied territory during the war. According to Du Yunzhi and others it set an unprecedented record for ticket sales when it played in Shanghai in early 1947. Following its success, the spy thriller became entrenched as a new genre among film companies resuming production after the war.³⁴

Zhongdian studios also produced a film more critical of the Kuomintang that highlighted the disillusionment of intellectuals upon their return to Shanghai. Described as the director Tang

Xiaodan's turn toward a more progressive approach to his films, the technical standard of *Spring Dream of Paradise* [tiantang chunmeng] was very high, with lighting and composition techniques drawing on Hollywood techniques. The message in the film, however, was critical of Shanghai under Kuomintang rule. The story portrays an architect and his wife who envisage returning to Shanghai from the interior and designing their dreamhouse. Instead, they end up unemployed and living in the cramped attic of a mansion occupied by a former traitor. Betrayal and disappointment are the main theme in *Spring Dream*, with a direct attack on the duplicity of Chinese who grew rich under the Japanese and were able to buy their way out of traitor status. The traitor turned Kuomintang supporter was a frequent theme in subsequent productions produced by the leftist Kunlun studio set up in 1947.³⁵

The Kunlun studio absorbed filmmakers who had belonged to the leftist movement in the thirties and many of the theatre troupes who toured the interior during the war. Initially spawned by a film company that was set up by former members of Lianhua, the group later amalgamated into the Kunlun Company using the old site of Lianhua's Siccawei [xujiahui] studios.³⁶ The early Lianhua group produced two melodramas which were screened in early 1947 and were very successful at the box office. *Eight Thousand Miles of Clouds and Moon*, [baqianli yunheyue] directed by Shi Dongshan and *The Spring River Flows East* [yijiang chunshui xiangdong liu], co-directed by Cai Chusheng and Zheng Junli, chronicled again the theme of shattered dreams after victory but in epic proportions.

The latter film in particular was a huge success, replicating Cai's triumph with *Song of the Fishers* [yu guangqu] over a decade before.

Besides Kunlun, the Zhongdian studios continued to make films, though entertainment value was emphasized over government propaganda.³⁷ Another major film company was Wenhua studios established by Wu Xingzai, an independent producer who was content to finance films for both entertainment and artistic purposes. As part of the Wenhua group, Fei Mu directed one of his final films in 1948 before he left for Hong Kong where he died in 1951. *Spring in a Small Town* did poorly at the box office but remains a masterpiece in cinema history.³⁸ Other films by Wenhua were the well-crafted comedy, *Long Live My Wife* [taitai wansui] and a film featured in **Life Magazine**, *The Barber Takes a Wife* [jiafeng huhuang].³⁹ In addition to these larger companies, there was the ubiquitous presence of smaller enterprises that had clung to the Shanghai film world since the twenties. They continued a precarious existence exploiting various genres, ranging from love comedies to American imitations, such as Westerns, including one story advertised in the newspaper called *Sharpshooter Heroine* [shuangqiang nuxia] seemingly inspired by the legend of Annie Oakley.⁴⁰

Spring River Flows East is remembered by cinema-goers of the time as being more popular than the big box office American films and in this it brought a new impetus for Chinese film production.⁴¹ It also reflects Cai Chusheng's ability to strike a chord with the audience and pull their heartstrings with the tale of the loyal wife deceived by her philandering husband against the background of

war, victory, shattered hopes and dreams. While unable to equal the success of this film at the box office, the same topic of disillusionment informed the critical films of this period, whether expressed satirically as in Zhang Junxiang's *Diary of Returning Home* [huanxiang rijì] or tragically as in Shen Fu's *Myriad of Twinkling Lights* [wanjia denghuo]. They lack the spirit of resistance and struggle emphasized in the leftist films of the thirties, but they also served the purpose of expressing the frustration of the time. Du Yunzhi mentions the recollection of one former member of Kuomintang film circles, who, in reviewing this era after the Kuomintang had retreated to Taiwan, observed that "in the struggle for propaganda and psychological power [these films] were not inferior to ten tank commanders."⁴²

Critical portrayals of the Kuomintang was one objective of these films, but some alluded to American economic and military domination as well. American jeeps and hardware are prevalent in *Eight Thousand Miles of Clouds and Moon* and boxes stamped with "made in America" are given a negative association in *Myriad of Twinkling Lights*. On the other hand, Cheng Jihua may have taken his semiotic analysis to extremes in suggesting that the negative stepmother character in *Eternal Light of Spring* [guanbuzhao de chunguang] represented American imperialism because her patterned Chinese-style dress [qipao] was meant to symbolize the stars and stripes. He also argues that the Japanese element in such films as Tian Han's *The Story of Women* [lirenxing] and Shen Fu's *Hope for*

Humanity [xiwang zai renjian] used the theme of anti-Japanese resistance as an allegorical reference to American imperialism.⁴³

There certainly appears to be some continuity in Kunlun productions where female characters who are meant to be negatively portrayed are dressed in unmistakably American 1940's fashions or wearing fancy Chinese dresses with American-style coiffures. The downtrodden heroine in these films is strikingly plain in contrast, while patriotic youth, including women, are often portrayed as wearing work overalls, as if to suggest their solidarity with the working class.⁴⁴ Despite American misdemeanours in China throughout the late forties, however, it is difficult to presume the audience would associate the American presence with Japanese militarism regardless of the intended allegory. The Americans may have been resented, but it is difficult to imagine many Chinese equating American infringement in China as comparable to the remembered atrocities of the Japanese.

In terms of distribution and funding, the Kuomintang exerted more control over the film industry than in the thirties, but they were still ineffective in eliminating opposition. Censorship of films continued, but Zhang Junxiang, who directed *Diary of Returning Home*, commented that censors were easily bribed and did not pose an insurmountable threat. Film studios were also hindered by their dependence on imported film stock which required foreign exchange, available only after application to the government. Yet even in the chaotic economy of the time, the practise of film craft matured in Shanghai, and film-makers developed politically and

artistically.⁴⁵ Part of this must be attributed to the intense experience of the theatre troupes during the war as well as a better grasp of cinema technology. Indeed, in 1949, an article in the leftist newspaper *Da Gong Bao* concluded a report on the problems in the Chinese film industry on a decidedly optimistic note with the insinuation that things would change with the imminent arrival of a new government.⁴⁶

Yet Chinese film did not necessarily progress aesthetically. With the exception of Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* which explored fresh cinematic dimensions and established a new territory in Chinese film, most of the films produced during the late forties were less ambitious cinematically, strong on narrative, and relied on dialogue rather than visual expression. As with the development of cinema in other parts of the world, one is left wondering if the richness of sound technology did not in itself diminish the aesthetics of film in China. The tendency to explain verbally rather than utilizing a more visually based form of expression was firmly established in Chinese productions by the 1940's and indeed this factor has continued to exert its influence on mainland film production up to the contemporary era. The use of melodrama also reached its *nadir* in Chinese film practise during the late forties in conjunction with a similar trend in American films. Such a synthesis, or coincidence perhaps, is best exemplified in the popularity of *Waterloo Bridge*, to the extent that the film script was adapted for Huju performances, a Shanghai-based opera genre. As it has been observed, the story of the love between a prostitute

and a soldier in *Waterloo Bridge* contains the elements of love and tragedy that possess "a moral sense that fits the Chinese idea of sentimentality." In the last drawn out days of Hollywood's bloated presence in Shanghai, this coalescence of moral sensibilities had a poignant irony, for it occurred against the background of an intense struggle where two diametrically opposed notions of political culture and social development were vying for supremacy.⁴⁷

The Liberation From Hollywood

The arrival of the Communist troops in Shanghai after May 27, 1949 was met with a mixture of relief and anxiety on the part of Shanghai citizens. While there was hope for the future, it was coupled with a fear of what the new administration would bring. The city was taken with a minimum of casualties and the following months were full of street festivities with parades of Shanxi folk troupes and exuberant revolutionaries. The behaviour of PLA soldiers was in stark contrast to what Shanghai citizens had experienced with belligerent American and Kuomintang recruits. The Communist troops were polite and respectful and made no demands on residents. Shanghai was a new experience for the PLA forces as well. Reports mention how many were both bemused and awed by metropolitan society. Daily life did not change drastically in the city as the government set about to consolidate its power and remove the most obvious threats to its rule. Unlike more violent episodes which had accompanied early land reform efforts in the

north, the situation in Shanghai remained calm and a celebratory atmosphere pervaded the streets. While Shanghai's newspapers were quickly transformed to represent the new regime and foreign publications and foreign reporting curtailed, American films continued to play. Indeed, as an incongruous welcome for the rural arrivals, MGM's *Bathing Beauty* was playing another extended run at the Roxy.⁴⁸

The imports of new American films ceased due to the Kuomintang blockade in the Zhoushan archipelago at the mouth of the Yangtze, but reruns continued to be screened in the theatre. Although many of the head agents had left prior to the arrival of communist troops, the staff remained at work in the American distribution offices. Beverley Hooper, in her study of Shanghai's early days under Communist administration, provides a comprehensive analysis of the issue of American films under the new regime in her chapter on education and culture. A fundamental problem was both the lack of material to replace the abundance of Hollywood entertainment and that a "complete withdrawal of American and British films would certainly have antagonized a large part of Shanghai's huge movie-going population."⁴⁹

Xia Yan, who returned to Shanghai to supervise cultural work, was well aware of the problems of fostering new cultural attitudes among residents. Party authorities had also learned from experiences in Tianjin that to extinguish entertainment that was not in keeping with socialist ideology was misguided unless something viable was able to replace it.⁵⁰ Although there were

different opinions on how to proceed with cultural work in Shanghai, including recommendations to ban inappropriate entertainment outright, the general consensus among cadres like Xia Yan was one of caution. There was also the problem of massive unemployment and the ensuing consequences for people involved in all forms of the performing arts, from local opera establishments to cinema workers, if the party took drastic measures to curtail "unhealthy" forms of entertainment. In his memoirs, Xia Yan includes parts of a four-hour speech to intellectuals by the new Communist mayor, Chen Yi, in June 1949. An excerpt reveals the dilemma facing the party in transforming Shanghai culture.

Shanghai has many theatres, book markets and entertainment centers like the Great World. The number of people who directly and indirectly depend on such enterprises for their livelihood must amount to more than three-hundred thousand. If we take a hard line approach to this issue we will immediately have the problem of feeding these people [in the entertainment sector] who no longer have employment. At present, we have no new entertainment programs. In the last few years, only *The White-haired Girl* [baimaonu] has been produced. No one can expect people to watch *The White-haired Girl* day after day. Therefore, it is important to implement change gradually. I reckon it will take ten years to be in line with the demands of worker-peasant-soldier [gongnongbing] policy. If we take everything and turn it around now, that would be very satisfying but there will also be those three hundred thousand people with nothing to eat. If people have no food, they will come and petition the city government. At that point, if you try to tell them about the worker-peasant-soldier policy, they'll tear your head off. It is easy to turn everything upside down and criticize this and that. It is not so easy, however, to assess the real situation and from there try to change it step by step.⁵¹

Hooper's account of the film audience in **China Stands Up** chronicles some of this process and reveals the extent to which the Shanghai audience preferred to watch American films. After some

months, the authorities tried to circumvent the popularity of Hollywood movies by endorsing theatres to screen Soviet films as well. Much of the content of Hollywood films was seen to contradict socialist values in addition to representing a nation who supported the Kuomintang, now ensconced on Taiwan, and vocal in their opposition to the People's Republic government and their Soviet ally. Despite their popularity with leftist intellectuals in the past, however, Soviet films had a difficult time attracting the general audience.⁵²

Therefore, instead of implementing restrictive policies directly on theatre owners, the government embarked on a massive propaganda drive. Approximately three months after the Communists occupied Shanghai, the issue of American films became an important target for cultural workers to try to change the legacy of Hollywood among the Shanghai audience. The first indication of a concentrated propaganda effort came with a press campaign in mid-September that criticized American films and their continuing presence in Shanghai. Articles were written by film critics detailing the harmful effects of American films. In keeping with the Party's approach to solicit a popular response, seminars were conducted and their proceedings published in the newspaper. Beginning the campaign in September 15, 1949, **Da Gong Bao** ran the comments of artists, film and drama personnel, students and housewives describing their opinions of American films on the front page. One artist demanded the government "stop this traffic in opium," while a representative from Shanghai's housewives'

association called for a more careful examination of Hollywood films and retaining only those with educational value.⁵³

From mid-September to the end of the month, headlines criticizing American films dominated the cultural sections of **Da Gong Bao** and the evening edition of **Xinmin Bao**. While the number of articles are too numerous to discuss in detail, it is clear that the tenor of these criticisms had precedent in the past, if one refers to editorials from the *Meiri Dianying* film supplement in the early thirties and even sporadic articles criticizing American films in the late forties. The difference of course was the official advocacy, indeed instigation, of the campaign to influence public perception about American films.⁵⁴

The many articles by people in the film industry seems to indicate their support for this campaign. I also had this impression from two directors active in the late forties, Zhang Junxiang and Tang Xiaodan. A daily newspaper for drama and film established in October 1949, the **Juying Ribao**, devoted considerable space to discussion of the negative qualities of American films during its short three month existence. It also published a nine-part series chronicling the history of foreign films in Shanghai and four articles on the "Welcome Danger" incident. The description of the latter event was somewhat loose in its interpretation. It was now the masses that had objected to the film and Hong Shen's role in the protest was relegated to that of spokesperson. In addition, numerous letters and opinions were published written by

movie-goers who denounced their former slavish behaviour towards American films.⁵⁵

Yet it appears that much of the general audience remained unconvinced. Indeed, the inclination of people to keep watching American films in the midst of their condemnation was an intriguing question and one that I sought to illuminate further by talking to people who remembered this period.⁵⁶ Picking up on Hooper's observation that Soviet films were less popular and that efforts to attract a substantial audience were unsuccessful, I found a mixed response depending on with whom I discussed this question. Tang Xiaodan and Zhang Junxiang, for example, felt that Soviet films found a ready audience, whereas both Hooper's work and other people I talked to refuted such a viewpoint. While Soviet films were welcomed by intellectuals, American films continued to attract a large audience, perhaps even an increase as Zhou Wenchang had speculated with his observation that the upheaval of revolution instilled a nostalgia for Shanghai's quickly fading past among merchant and business people who sensed their lives would be irrevocably changed under the new administration.⁵⁷ Throughout the year, after the beginning of the press campaign in September 1949, the resiliency of the Shanghai audience in keeping their old habits is readily apparent in press editorials as, for example, the observation in one article that states, "there are not a few film fans who still cherish an admiration for reactionary and low-grade American films."⁵⁸

Writing in *Da Gongbao* in mid-1950, the film critic Mei Duo lamented that their work highlighting the evils of American film had not penetrated the consciousness of the "petty bourgeois" audience. He further suggested that the critical articles often had a "backfire effect" where the audience "reads about something being criticized and for that reason go to see the film...

For example, when *The Outlaw* was shown, film critics denounced the sex scenes and that was a big draw for everyone to go see it. What does this reveal? It shows that in the past film critics have not properly understood the audience. In the past we were too subjective.⁵⁹

One important change after the revolution was the dissolution of the American distributors' long-standing screening rights over first-run theatres. Qian Bing, a retired worker with China's film distribution bureau said that some negotiation with the remaining distribution staff and Communist authorities must have occurred shortly after May in 1949 because Russian and Chinese productions were screened at the larger first-run theatres. In any case, the American film distribution offices were hardly in any position to argue. Profits from the American screenings still went to the distribution offices but were mainly used to pay staff overheads and other expenses. Ruan Renrong was sceptical that any profits made their way back to the U.S. and recalled that only Twentieth Century Fox earned a profit in the year after 1949, and that was deposited in a Chinese bank. In addition, ticket prices for American films were priced higher than Soviet or Chinese productions to garner a larger tax revenue for the government.⁶⁰

Private ownership of theatres was not immediately affected by the revolution and it was only after the outbreak of the Korean war that theatre properties registered as American were investigated and discovered to be Chinese investments.⁶¹ Except the Roxy, which, because of its American ownership, came under government administration early in 1951, other theatres were not nationalized until after 1954. In order to implement some kind of internal management and supervision, a cinema guild was formed that included theatre owners and distributors, but Hooper's chapter reveals that theatre owners still retained some autonomy to decide how they structured their film showings. For example, realizing that Soviet films yielded a lower box office take than Hollywood reruns, Russian films were often screened in the morning.⁶²

Yet the guild may also have tried to counteract this tendency. One viewpoint expressed by a theatre worker in the September campaign advocated that theatres "should not only be for making money...films of educational significance should also be shown to win over the audience, labouring classes, and general citizens. Business will still be good and theatre owners need not worry."⁶³ Here, as with later assertions regarding the superiority of Soviet films, there is an assumption that the proletarian class, never a large part of the American film audience, would flock to the cinema for political sustenance. At the same time, a new cinema audience was being created among the working class by free showings of Soviet films and Chinese revolutionary docu-dramas in factories and workers clubs.⁶⁴

The policy regarding American films was administered gradually in keeping with the Party directive given to Xia Yan by Zhou Enlai after their briefing in Beijing.⁶⁵ Press reports solicited opinions on American films from various sectors of society and by the spring of 1950, when a new influx of Soviet films appeared, the press focused on comparing the two approaches to cinema. In an attempt to reach a larger audience, Soviet films were dubbed into Chinese before they were released from Russia, but their poor translation and elocution did little to enhance their audience appeal. Soon afterwards, Soviet films were dubbed more successfully by the Changchun Studio in Northeast China.⁶⁶

Further evidence that Soviet films were less appealing to the Shanghai cinema-goers is clear from frequent editorials that criticized the audience's failure to recognize the value of Soviet cinema. Part of this oversight was attributed to an unfamiliarity with socialist ethics and lifestyle, but the main culprit was the long-standing influence of "poisonous" American films in Shanghai society where, "like the addiction of smoking opium, it becomes impossible to distinguish the abnormality of one's cravings." Another problem cited was the sense among cinema-goers that American films were technically superior to Soviet cinema and thus more interesting to watch. This argument was also refuted in the press on the basis that "technique must be aligned with politics or it loses its meaning" and the criticism of using technological innovation for mere entertainment. One commentator suggested that Soviet films "don't play with technology but see the advantages in

portraying reality...[while]...American films deliberately dally with technology and should not be followed as an example."⁶⁷

The juxtaposition of Soviet and American films became a major focus of discussion beginning in the spring of 1950, when a number of Soviet features were screened at major theatres. Frequent references were given to the narcotic effects of Hollywood movies that played neatly into the opium metaphor and its accompanying resonance in Chinese modern history. A less sensational approach compared American films to unwholesome eating habits. One report made the analogy that "seeing Soviet films is like taking medicine to treat a sickness while watching American films is like drinking coffee for stimulation."⁶⁸ Discussing the view that Soviet films lacked the technical appeal of American films, the author Mao Dun compared this oversight to the way "people accustomed to meat feel that fresh produce is dull and lacking in flavour when they eat it for the first time." Nevertheless, despite their celebration in the press, Soviet films could not usurp American films until the latter were banned completely. Up to the end of 1950, the Shanghai audience still preferred the taste of "sugar-coated poison" to Soviet socialist realism.⁶⁹

Audience

Despite the proclivity for bombastic hyperbole in many of these articles criticizing American films, it is interesting that qualities deemed harmful are similar to views raised in discussions on American media in the contemporary global context. Many

criticisms focus on the propensity for sex and violence in American films as well as their tendency to celebrate consumerism and the superiority of American values. Chinese critics were also sensitive to the Hollywood tradition that tended to place non-white or non-American characters in one-dimensional portraits and stereotypes. All of these issues had engaged critics in the past, but the degree to which editorials probed the depths of the Hollywood mentality during the campaigns after 1949 often overestimated the direct effects that Hollywood films may have actually had on Shanghai society. For example, considerable emphasis was put on the role of American films promoting criminal activity among youths which blithely ignored the contribution of other social factors.⁷⁰

The influence of American films on cultural behaviour and social conduct, particularly among young people, was often mentioned in conjunction with styles of dress such as tight jeans that narrowed at the ankle [xiaoku jiaoguan] and flowery print shirts. This fashion was associated with hoodlum-type characters, or "Ah Fei" types, as they were called in Shanghai. In the 1964 film, *On Guard Beneath the Neon Lights* [nihongdengxia de xiaobing], such costume symbolized the depravity of a character who attempted to challenge the purity of PLA soldiers by hawking tickets to films such as *Bathing Beauty*.⁷¹ The critical focus on personal appearance, whether jeans, or high heels, or the wearing of make-up, suggests not only a disapproval of what could be considered bourgeois or Western influence, it also reflects a preoccupation

with the sexual suggestion in American fashion that was antithetical to moral standards of the Chinese Communist Party.⁷²

The legacy of MGM's *Bathing Beauty* as a target for criticism after 1949 exemplifies one major problem that the new socialist administration had with sexual content in American films. The film was raised as a contrast to the Chinese revolutionary opera *The White-Haired Girl* to highlight the depravation of Western bourgeois decadence compared to Chinese revolutionary puritanism.⁷³ Yet one person who recalled this period felt that the Communist authorities denunciation of the film also disclosed an almost perverse fascination with it. "The more they criticized it, the more they revealed their appreciation of it," he recalled and suggested that *Bathing Beauty* became more sensational after 1949 because many of the PLA cadres wanted to see the spectacle of foreign women in swimsuits. Beverley Hooper and Xia Yan both mention the fear among Party authorities that Shanghai would exert unhealthy influences on PLA soldiers. There is good reason to suppose that Communist leaders were as anxious about the seductive allure of American entertainment within their ranks as they were about the need to transform the Shanghai audience. That this should still be an issue in 1964, when *On Guard Beneath the Neon Lights* was released as a film, illustrates the lasting presence of Hollywood's influence in the minds of cultural cadres.⁷⁴

Some of the richest material in the campaign against American films are the stories chronicling the past lives of American film fans, usually with examples of teenagers who had extended their

worship of Hollywood movies into a mediated experience for real life. The first of these was a serial entitled, "Biography of a Film Fan" [yingmi zhuan] that appeared in an October issue of **Juying Ribao** and satirized the antics of young film fans. A play with the same title also appeared in 1950, advertised as a work "opposing American and British cultural invasion."⁷⁵ The stories I cite here appeared in the magazine **Popular Film** [dazhong dianying] which began publishing in June 1950. Usually featured in the form of letters submitted to the magazine, the accounts typically describe an incremental descent of a young man or woman into a Hollywood dreamworld whereupon they are eventually awakened by political revelation of their misconduct, often through the vehicle of watching a film from the Soviet Union for the first time.

To paraphrase one example, a young worker describes how he sought refuge in watching American films after 1945 and how, in the difficult economic times of the late forties, he adopted various strategies for coping by emulating a progression of different Hollywood genres. *The Thief of Baghdad* convinced him that acquisition of wealth would solve his problems, while gangster films prompted him to purchase a gun. After seeing *Bathing Beauty* he felt compelled to wander in the park looking for a woman to fall in love with.

But when every mirage finally faded I was always unsatisfied with reality. I often thought of emulating the character in *The Man in Black*[?] [heiyiren] who robs a rich household, and then I would retreat to anonymity to a small village in the manner of *Living Outside the*

Law(?) [xiaoyuan fawai]. Ah! How dangerous it was for me to think like this...⁷⁶

The author goes on to explain how his fantasy life continued until he saw his first Russian film in 1949 and was finally awakened to the values of communism portrayed in the film and their benefit for Chinese society. Other accounts described similar progressions punctuated by the same conclusion. In short, American gangster films promoted violence, musicals induced sexual fantasy, art films negated political realities and romantic love stories caused young men and women to marry without adequately considering their compatibility for each other.⁷⁷

One story published in **Popular Film** was compiled under the title of "Biography of a Film Fan" and may have inspired the work that played later in 1950. The article highlights the admiration of teenagers for Errol Flynn and his roles as swashbuckling and gallant heroes like Captain Morgan and Robin Hood which became curiously aligned with the heroic gunslinger characters in Hollywood Westerns. The story describes a young university student who adores Westerns and often dresses up in jeans and cowboy attire. He also changes his first name to "Errol" [ailuo]. One day he goes to the market to buy a rope in order to make a lasso. By chance he comes upon a woman in the midst of being robbed whereupon the student takes up his rope and captures the robber. Seeing his outfit, the grateful woman exclaims, "Ah, you really are China's Errol Flynn." After this climatic scene, however, and the help of political instruction, the student realizes that the woman's flattery was misguided. In an amazing coincidence, her husband was

a sales agent for American consumer goods who tricked fans like himself into buying his wares by saying such and such item was modeled on "Errol Flynn's hat" or "Lana Turner's garters." The piece also reveals that, in using the actor to represent the ethic of Hollywood Westerns, even though he did not appear in them, the creators of this particular vignette were seemingly unfamiliar with Errol Flynn's films. In a less sensational example, the young woman in the story changes her name to Dorothy after the film star Dorothy Lamour.⁷⁸

These accounts are political epiphanies, something like the confessions of reformed drug addicts or the recollections of religious converts. For example, one student wrote that she "started liking American films at the age of seven or eight.....

they were colourful and dazzling and had beautiful women. When I was 12 or 13 I started going to war films with my brother. I began to adore American heroes, so handsome, brave and victorious. I never set foot in a theatre showing Chinese films.

Then in middle school my English level improved. I took more interest in American films and read the film magazines. I saw how the movie stars lived, how they dressed, designed their clothes, had love affairs. Most of my classmates were like this too and all of us had a favorite movie star. I didn't go to films for knowledge but to see my favorite star.

I learned from films how a boy is supposed to behave with a girl at dances and I regretted that my mother didn't give birth to me in America. I knew I would go there someday. After liberation [1949] the thing I couldn't stand the most was that there were less American films.⁷⁹

Despite the obvious propaganda intent of these articles, they provide a useful glimpse of the experience of many young cinema-goers who grew up in Shanghai during the late forties. Although the

idea that young people were radically transformed by exposure to Russian films and suddenly imbued with a socialist spirit is no doubt more than a little contrived, it is not difficult to believe that the Hollywood mystique held a powerful attraction for teenagers and young adults and that the Communist party felt the need to replace this fascination with values more conducive to the construction of socialist sensibilities. It becomes clear from the articles in **Popular Film**, that their approach was not to eradicate film culture per se, but to re-direct the gaze of the audience toward a different tradition from that which had dominated Shanghai's screens for more than thirty years.

By the end of 1950, the progression in criticism of American films reached the point of categorically condemning *all* American films, including those which in the past had been widely admired by leftist filmmakers. Even the usually sacrosanct Chaplin was doubted because in his satirical jabs at the capitalist system, he never provided a proper program for opposition. That films like *Bathing Beauty*, *Lady From Shanghai*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *My Mother Wore Tights* or *Constant Nymphs* might be rejected by communist cadres and leftist intellectuals alike is hardly surprising. But in an interesting twist, many films from the early and late forties that were then seen to be anti-fascist in spirit were now labelled as testimonies against the Soviet Union. Some of this backlash can be attributed to the outbreak of the Korean War, but it was also apparent in some articles prior to the beginning of actual fighting between American and Chinese troops in September

1950. Thus, along with genres like musicals, comedies and gangster films, American artistic and literary films [wenyi pian] once favoured by Shanghai intellectuals, were also singled out for criticism.⁸⁰

The film critic Mei Duo, who in the past had praised such films as *Madame Curie*, *Polonaise* and *A Guy Named Joe* for their humanistic and political consciousness, underwent a significant transformation judging from articles published in 1950.

We are against the idea that says even though Russian films are good doesn't mean they have no shortcomings and even though American films are bad doesn't mean they don't have good points. This point of view has no principle and is not a position of the people. Why? Because though Russian films may have artistic highs and lows, they serve and educate the people and are basically good. But American films are basically bad, they serve American imperialism and capitalism. Yes, Hollywood had progressive filmmakers, but they have been silenced.⁸¹

Yet even taking into consideration the spectre of repression in the American film industry during the McCarthy era, three months after writing the above opinion, Mei goes further to criticize films once lauded for their progressiveness. In the midst of a new thrust in the campaign to target American films, Mei writes that admirers of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* overlooked the fact that it too promoted American imperialism. He argues that the American hero comes to help the Spanish guerrillas with the implication that they would be lost without his guidance, "inferring that American imperialism ought to rule the Spanish people and rule the whole world." Furthermore, the love between the characters played by Ingrid Bergman and Gary Cooper seduces the audience into admiring

"this American spy" and the film's artistic quality hides its real purpose as "reactionary propaganda."⁸²

The Last Picture Show

The escalation of the Korean War and Chinese and American intervention in the fall of 1950 brought an urgency to the focus on American films. Hitherto there had been no outright ban. The remaining Hollywood reruns were still showing in the theatres, though the lack of new material resulted in less frequent showings. However, fighting between American and Chinese troops and the mobilization of popular forces in the "resist America aid Korea" [kangmei yuanchao] movement provided a new impetus for prohibiting the continued showings of American films in Shanghai. The first indication of change came with requests by citizens in early November for newspapers to discontinue publishing ads for American films.⁸³ This action was followed by an announcement from the theatre owners that they would henceforth ban American films from all theatres to support the "aid Korea" movement. Finally, on November 17, the organization for staff at the American film distribution offices (also associated with the cinema guild) declared that they would cease distribution of films.⁸⁴ By early December it was reported that a new committee was being formed to review foreign and Chinese films and anyone in possession of such material was required to submit them to the authorities for inspection.⁸⁵

This development facilitated a more systematic approach to the problem of American films in Shanghai than had so far been implemented. In the year before, numerous recommendations had been put forth to censor films for anti-Chinese or lascivious content. Yet judging from the ads in the newspapers which continued until the end of 1950, it is unlikely any comprehensive censorship took place. Many of the films targeted by press criticism, which would presumably fall into such categories, like *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Outlaw* and Pearl Buck's *Dragonseed*, continued to play in theatres after the first press campaign began in September 1949.

It is improbable that the urban administration could have expended energy in examining the remaining American films circulating in Shanghai after May 1949 when more immediate problems like prostitution, opium, and gambling needed to be resolved. Eliminating aspects of entertainment that were considered to reiterate bourgeois or feudal values relied more on propaganda published in the newspapers than direct censorship to change audience behaviour. Given the skillful organization of popular forces that was a trademark of the Chinese Communist Party's propaganda tactics, the eventual fate of American films in China was predictable. Furthermore, the lack of new Hollywood imports meant that reruns would eventually play themselves out. By late 1950 the screenings of American films had already declined.⁸⁶ The action taken by the cinema guild and associated organizations simply hastened the process. The spectre of Americans and Chinese in armed combat made the prospect of American films staying in

Shanghai less tenable than it might have appeared six months earlier, regardless of how much of an audience remained.⁸⁷

The Korean War also prompted the government to confiscate American property and the MGM-owned Roxy became one of the first major theatres to come under government administration in March 1951. In order to provide revenue to MGM's staff until they could be absorbed into a nationalized distribution network, the government leased the theatre from the MGM office. As the market for American films did indeed disappear overnight, staff at the other American distribution offices were faced with a similar predicament. Ruan Renrong recalled how he was transferred from his position at MGM to become manager of the new Hengshan Theatre. As a gesture that symbolized the spirit of the new era, Rong took part in the theatre's construction along with other new staff members.⁸⁸

With the elimination of American film showings, the only source of revenue for the beleaguered distribution offices was the sale of prints to the government. Other films ended up being sold in second-hand markets on the streets. Ruan told me that Weiner, MGM's foreign representative who had remained in Shanghai, had to sell old MGM prints in the street after the lease of the theatre expired. From Ruan's description, I could not help but imagine the picture of a forlorn Weiner hawking movie prints in the market to pay his way to Hong Kong while songs condemning American imperialism were performed by theatre troupes celebrating the "resist America aid Korea" movement.⁸⁹

Within two years of the communist takeover of Shanghai, the period of grace for American films was over and the films banished to an internal exile for perusal by film scholars and government officials. After a legacy of more than thirty years in Shanghai, Hollywood movies, like so many other cultural artifacts from the earlier period of the Western presence, became virtual museum pieces locked up in the vaults of warehouses and in the memories of their former audience. One might assume that with the demise of American films, the Chinese film industry could look forward to a new era of unparalleled growth and development, yet even the Chinese film industry as it was known became archaic. And to give added poignancy to the revolution, many of those veterans who had devoted their creative lives to progressive film-making were themselves caught unawares by the rigidly defined program for film production under the new regime.⁹⁰

I have purposely avoided in this section a discussion of Shanghai's film industry after 1949. The issue itself is far too complex to do it justice here. Suffice it to say that smaller companies continued producing until they were gradually absorbed into a national system. Leftist studios like Kunlun were not necessarily given any special compensation for their political approach. A film directed by Sun Yu, the *Biography of Wu Xun* [wuxun zhuan], was singled out for virulent criticism by Mao Zedong when it played at the end of 1950, and other film-makers at Kunlun met similar fates with film scenarios whose progressive spirit did not adequately match the new socialist ideology.⁹¹ Despite the relative

lack of actual film production in communist base areas during the anti-Japanese war and civil war, a conscientious effort had been made to establish a communist ethic in film-making and replace the Shanghai sensibility of progressive film-making with that of the Yanan spirit.⁹²

On the other hand, Hollywood techniques in film-making continued to exert a strong influence on Chinese productions throughout the fifties and early sixties in spite of the influx of Soviet film consultants and Russian films. With few exceptions, cinematic style tended to stay locked in the tradition of the 1940's, while the parameters of content swung within the limited arc of political prerogatives. I am not suggesting that Chinese cinema did not develop after 1949, but its thematic possibilities were determined within a far narrower spectrum than had existed prior to the revolution. New film-makers emerged and some veterans continued their craft, but all of the major political movements after 1949 inevitably impinged on film production in China. It is this aspect of Chinese film history which exudes a particularly tragic irony, if one considers that many of the film artists who had such faith in the revolution, lost their careers and often their lives. This story too, in its own way, is related to the history before it and to the legacy of American films in Shanghai, but it requires another time and place for the telling.

ENDNOTES: Chapter 4

1. These lines come from the song, *Meiguo Hao Bu Hao?* [America, Is It Good or Bad], *Da Jia Chang* [Everybody Sing], Kangmei Yuanchao Baojia Weiguo Zhuanji [Resist America and Aid Korea Protect the Country Special Issue] (1951), p. 45.

2. I take the term "battlefield of a different" type from Nicholas Clifford's quotation from the play *On Guard Beneath the Neon Lights* [nihong dengxia de xiaobing] which chronicled the perils faced by PLA soldiers encountering the pleasures on Shanghai's Nanjing Road after the Communist takeover. The line is spoken by Lu Hua, the army unit's leader who also says, "either we fall here on Nanking Road or we transform it." See Clifford, p. 282.

3. The Xian incident occurred when Zhang Xueliang, one of Chiang Kaishek's generals, who was ordered to retreat from the Japanese in the Northeast, kidnapped Chiang in Xian. Zhang was unwilling to continue fighting the Communists while Japanese occupied Chinese territory; he demanded Chiang unite with the Communists to fight the foreign enemy. Zhou Enlai arrived later to smooth out negotiations for a united effort.

4. Leyda, p. 117. This period is well documented in the opening chapters of Vol. II of Cheng Jihua's history. Film showings in China's rural areas were rare but the KMT had had an extensive mobile film team associated with the Ministry of Defence since 1933 and it became more developed during the war, though most of the films were newsreels and documentaries.

5. Regarding the differences between the two studios Zhongdian and Zhongzhi, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 59. The Xibei [Northwest Studio] was started in 1935 in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. The studio moved to Xian in 1937 and later to Chengdu.

6. Besides *Light of Asia*, the one other film I have seen from this period is *Storm on the Border* [saishang fengyun] made in 1940. The latter starred Li Lili and decribed the anti-Japanese movement among Mongolians. For details on *Light of Asia*, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 44-45.

7. Cheng Jihua, II, p. 8.

8. Edward Gunn mentions that these troupes reached less of a rural audience than was hoped saying that "few artists working in theatre had the stamina to remain in rural areas or near the front lines but flooded back to the cities. There the goal of reaching the masses fell behind that of acceptance by the educated and the elite audiences." See Edward Gunn, *Development of Modern Drama in Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in the PRC: 1949-1979*, ed. Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 46. At the same time, however, I was struck by Li Lili's

comment that many performers were willing to work for the war effort on drastically reduced salaries. Li Lili, interview, June 1992. In addition the reminiscences of other people I interviewed like Gao Bo, Zhu Zhang and Zhu Xian, who had spent the war touring the countryside, suggests that many artists did have the stamina to remain in rural areas. Gao Bo was in the southwest with Tian Han and Hong Shen and despite the difficulties in finding supplies and props, he clearly had fond memories of the experience.

9. The foreign registration of movie companies is mentioned by Du Yunzhi, p. 292. Cheng Jihua and Du Yunzhi differ on many of the details of this period. Cheng maintains that the film companies in Shanghai were cautious about dealing with the Japanese, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 97. Du says some of them did distribute films in the occupied areas, see Du Yunzhi, p. 270.

10. Du Yunzhi, p. 268. Cheng Jihua also mentions the line from the folk song but does not elaborate on any controversy. On the contrary, he says the song became popular after the film was released, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 101. *Mulan Joins the Army* was a story based on a folk tale about a patriotic daughter who replaces her father in a battle to resist the Manchu invaders at the end of the Ming Dynasty.

11. Jay Leyda has some detailed descriptions of films produced in Shanghai during this period, see p. 143. Also see Du Yunzhi, p. 284. Cheng Jihua concedes to the usefulness of the classical costume drama under the circumstances but adds that their feudal settings resulted in film "developing in a backward direction," Cheng Jihua, II, p. 102.

12. Cheng Jihua, II, p. 102.

13. Leyda, p. 143. Leyda adds a footnote regarding the Chinese film version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* that reveals the decline in production standards. *Chinese Princess White Snow* [no Chinese title given] (1940) "was made and released so hastily that some clapper boards were left in!"

14. An interesting question is raised by Tadao Sato, however, as a prospect for further research, regarding the extent that Japanese films from the 1920's may have influenced Chinese students studying in Japan, such as Xia Yan or Tian Han (who, as mentioned above, once acknowledged his appreciation of Tanizaki), who later played major roles in Chinese film production. See Tadao Sato, p. 79.

15. Wang Jingwei was a brilliant orator who was Chiang Kai-shek's main rival in the Kuomintang. His co-optation by the Japanese is another sad chapter in Kuomintang history, for it is possible he may have led China on a different path had the circumstances been different. My sources for Kawakita come from Du Yunzhi's history of Chinese film. The man sent to Shanghai before Kawakita is only

identified by his last name, Kaneko [Jinzi]. According to Du, Kaneko's unfamiliarity with the Chinese situation and his arrogance limited his effectiveness in persuading Chinese producers and film artists to cooperate in the days before Pearl Harbour, see Du, p. 290-291. In the late thirties and early forties Shanghai was a treacherous environment for anti-Japanese activists and traitors alike, all of which is colorfully described in Pan Ling, **Old Shanghai: Gangsters in Paradise** (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984). Besides the various assassins and thugs hired to terrorize the opposition to the Japanese within the International Settlement, the Kuomintang general Dai Li also had an organized network of agents to target collaborators in Shanghai.

16. Material on Kawakita is from Du, p. 291-292 and p. 294-299. Jay Leyda also details the period under Japanese occupation though he only mentions briefly the role of Kawakita, see Leyda, p. 144-148. One example of Kawakita's policy to promote Chinese stars and upbeat film content was the film *Love For Everyone* [bo ai] that included the "Chinese Laurel and Hardy team," Leyda, p. 147. The movie pamphlet I saw for this film advertised the participation of forty movie stars. There is also a photograph in Du Yunzhi's book portraying a scene for another Huaying production called *A Blaze of Colour* [wanzi qianhong] which is clearly an amalgamation of Hollywood influences. In the background a woman sits on top of a huge cake surrounded by a group of dancers wearing Mickey Mouse ears in the foreground.

17. Du Yunzhi describes Zhang Shankun's experience under the Japanese. After the Japanese surrender in 1945, Zhang left for Hong Kong and eventually became an important figure in the Hong Kong post-war film industry, see Du p. 298-299. Cheng Jihua is less kind on Zhang's status as a traitor, and, given the sensitivity of the collaborationist issue, it is very difficult to construct an objective picture of Zhang. Edward Gunn describes a play called *Vicissitudes of the Film World* [yinhai cangsang] that features a character "designed as a satire of the movie magnate S.K. Chang [Zhang Shankun]" which played in the early forties. It is clear he was not particularly admired by some people in Shanghai's film and drama circles. See Gunn, **Unwelcome Muse**, p. 139.

18. Many prominent Chinese used different tactics to avoid working with the Japanese. Mei Lanfang, for example, grew a moustache to thwart Japanese requests that he perform his famous female roles [huadan] in Peking Opera. Percy Chu remained in Shanghai because he felt it necessary to try and maintain stability in financial institutions and ensure that the clearing house operations ran smoothly. He was kidnapped by agents sent by Wang Jingwei's government in November 1940 but was released ten days later. By 1942, however, when the Japanese took over all Chinese banks in the International Settlement, Chu had little choice but to cooperate. This information is from Zhang Miaosheng, p. 310-312 and Percy Chu,

interview, May 1992. Percy Chu also became well acquainted with Nagamasa Kawakita.

19. Sources on American films during the Japanese occupation of the International Settlements is from the movie pamphlet collection at the Shanghai Drama Academy library. That American films were screened throughout 1942 was confirmed by my interview with Elfrieda and George Read, July, 1993.

20. Kawakita material from Du Yunzhi, p. 295. I was unable to see any of the Shanghai productions made under the Japanese, though I assume they were similar in technique to films made by the Manchurian studios, some of which I have seen. Ni Zhen, a professor from the Beijing Film Academy, was able to view some of the Shanghai productions with the Japanese film critic Tadao Sato. He said their technique was of a very high standard for the times. Regardless of their technical standards however, except for Hu Jinhua, who spoke Japanese, people I interviewed said they rarely went to Japanese films or Huaying productions.

21. Edward Gunn discusses in detail dramatic productions between 1941 and 1945 in Chapter Three of **Unwelcome Muse** and in *Development of Modern Drama*, p. 47-48. The occupation of the International Settlement obviously limited how far plays could go in portraying patriotic resistance themes, though the trend continued to some extent. Other groups highlighted entertainment for commercial purposes.

22. One incident related to anti-American protests in Shanghai and other cities was the alleged rape of a Beijing university student by American Marines in 1946. Known as the "Case of Shen Chong" [shen chong an] it was frequently cited after 1949 as evidence of American atrocities in China. Another case was a trishaw driver beaten to death by American soldiers after an argument over the fare. Similar reports were published under the heading *Crimes by U.S. Soldiers in China During 1945-1949* in **Shanghai News** [SN] 19 November 1950, p. 3. (**Shanghai News** was the English paper for the new government after 1949.) Many people I interviewed remembered the impolite behaviour of American military personnel in Shanghai, soldiers and sailors who were often drunk and cavorting in the streets, insulting women, and so on.

23. T.D. Hutters *Transformation of the May Fourth Era*, in **Popular Chinese Literature and the Performing Arts in the PRC: 1949-1979**, ed. Bonnie S. McDougall (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), p. 63. While he was in the U.S. during the late forties, Sun Yu planned to make a film called *American Spectacle* [meiguo daguan] highlighting two different visions of America through the eyes of two journalists, one who praises American society and the other who criticizes it. It was to star Jin Yan and Li Lili, but only a fraction of the footage was shot until the

group ran out of money. Li Lili, interview, June 1992. Also see Sun Yu, p. 157-160.

24. Cheng Jihua, II, p. 161-162.

25. Zhu Manhua, interview, June 1991. Former workers at the Metropol, Wang Genfu and Zhang Yinghong, speculated that the audience was twice as large after 1945. Zhang referred to the period as "the Golden Age of American cinema in Shanghai," interview, May 1991.

26. The formation of a special board by the American distributors is mentioned by Cheng Jihua, Vol. II, p. 162 and Qian Bing, interview, June 1991. The role of the Sino-American Trade Treaty in aiding American film distributors is suggested by Cheng Jihua, II, p. 161-162. Apparently, the owner of the theatre in Shenyang explained that after fifteen years of Japanese occupation in Manchuria, people should be able to watch Chinese films. Cheng Jihua also describes a plan to market American films in rural areas with "mobile cinemas" [liudong yingyuan], but the project was never realized before 1949, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 162-163.

27. Cheng Jihua says that the MGM purchase of the Roxy was initially part of plan by American distributors to strengthen their interests further by buying up theatres. With the exception of the Roxy however, the American studios did not buy up any other theatres in Shanghai suggesting that Cheng or the newspapers he uses as sources may have exaggerated the potential threat. Details on the Roxy purchase were told to me by Ruan Renrong, interview, Oct. 1991.

28. Zhu Manhua mentioned that the disagreement between He Tingran and Percy Chu began early on but was not known publicly or among most of the staff at Asia Theatres. Zhu Manhua, interview, Oct. 1991. Percy Chu ruefully described his incarceration in Shanghai's Tilanqiao jail as a blessing of sorts, which suggests the conditions for persons of his prominence were tolerable. "Before that time," he explained, "I always had stomach problems because I was very busy, always eating in restaurants and so on. After my stay in jail all my stomach problems cleared up." Nevertheless, Chu's house on Joffre road was confiscated. From Percy Chu, interview, May 1992.

29. Li Tianji, interview, Oct. 1991.

30. The "qicai" reference is from Gu Bingxing, interview, July 1991. Other interviews regarding films in the late forties were with Zhou Wenchang, June 1991, Gao Bo, May 1991, Mr. Ma, a former worker at the Cathy Theatre, May 1991 and others.

31. Some examples of Hollywood films featuring the war in China were *Night Plane from Chungking*, *China Sky*, *Flying Tigers*, *Keys to the Kingdom*, *Friend of China*(?) [zhongguo zhiyou]. These films were criticized after 1949 as works disguised as "friendly films...creating illusions in the minds of people that America was China's best friend," from Zhao Han, *Guiqing Meidi Dianying Yinxiang* [Sweep Clean the Influence of American Imperialist Films], *Da Gong Bao* [DGB], 16 November, 1950, n. pag.

32. *First Yank in Tokyo* was hardly a prominent film. The actor Leonard Strong is not mentioned in Ephraim Katz's **Encyclopedia of Film** nor does it list the film in one of the supporting actors, Keye Luke's, filmography.

33. Cheng Jihua mentions the presence of an American consultant in Zhongzhi studios after 1945, II, p. 170.

34. The controversy over film artists who worked under the Japanese is covered by Du Yunzhi, p. 300 and Cheng Jihua, II, p. 170. For the success of *Code Name No. 1* and Ouyang Shafei see Du Yunzhi, p. 311-312. Cheng Jihua dismisses this film and barely mentions its popularity. Beijing Film Academy professor Ni Zhen remembered *Code Name No. 1* in particular because as a young boy he recalled seeing the advertisements in the paper months after it had premiered.

35. For Cheng's comments on Tang Xiaodan, see II, p. 186. The issue of collaborators is still a sensitive topic for film-makers in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, the Hong Kong film director Yim Ho made the film *Red Dust* [gungun hongchen] which was a story roughly based on the relationship of the writer Eileen Chang and Hu Lancheng, the latter who worked in the Ministry of Culture under the Wang Jingwei regime. When it was released in Hong Kong in 1990, the film was severely criticized by KMT factions in Hong Kong who took issue with Yim's sympathetic portrayal of the Hu Lancheng character.

36. Luo Mingyou had attempted to resurrect the former Lianhua studio, but he was unsuccessful. He eventually ended up in Hong Kong where he worked for an evangelical radio station and expounded on passages from the bible. He died in 1967. See *Luo Mingyou, Zhongguo Dianyingjia Liezhuan*, p. 190. Lianhua's studio in Siccawei [xujiahui] in southwest Shanghai was used by the Japanese for Huaying productions and confiscated by the KMT in 1945 until the property was returned to various private owners in 1946, see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 206-207.

37. Zhongdian became the Zhongyang [Central] studio in 1947. Cheng Jihua refers to its entertainment films as "American imitations", II, p. 175.

38. Fei Mu's status as an accomplished director was resurrected in the 1980's and *Spring in a Small Town* was also acclaimed after being somewhat dismissed in Cheng Jihua's history for its "passivity". It was also criticized by leftist critics when it was released in 1948 for "embellishing the landlord class," but many people I talked to feel this criticism was misplaced. Fei Mu left Shanghai before the Communist takeover in May 1949. There is some speculation that part of the reason he left was after hearing that the former actress Lan Ping (Jiang Qing) was Mao's wife. Fei Mu and Lan Ping had quarrelled during the filming of the anti-Japanese film *Blood on Wolf Mountain* [langshan diexue ji] when he refused her requests to be given more time on screen. Perhaps he had a premonition, unlike some of his less insightful colleagues, of how he would fare under the new regime.

39. *The Barber Takes a Wife* starred Shi Hui and Li Lihua. It was about two people looking for marriage partners who try to pass themselves off as upper class. The film was featured in *Life* magazine, which reported that barbers in Shanghai had protested the film, "claiming their profession was libeled by the hero, who touched lady customers and attempted suicide with a razor. A few changes mollified them, however, and now *The Barber* has a surefire audience: 50,000 barbers in Shanghai alone." *Chinese Movie: Comedy About an Amorous Barber is Breaking Records in Shanghai*, *Life* October (1947), p. 75.

40. Ad section, *Da Gong Bao*, 6 May 1949, p. 3.

41. The success of *Spring River Flows East* is documented by Cheng Jihua, II, p. 217 and Jay Leyda, p. 167 and by various interviews.

42. Du Yunzhi, p. 335. Du does not mention any names here and apparently this observation came out of discussion regarding the failure of film production supported by the Kuomintang.

43. Cheng Jihua's mention of the anti-American reference in *Eight Thousand Miles of Sun and Moon* from II, p. 213. The "Made in America" reference in *Myriad of Twinkling Lights* is taken from my own viewing of the film. Cheng Jihua's reference to the American flag in *Eternal Light of Spring* is on p. 230. The rape of a Chinese worker by Japanese soldiers in *The Story of Women* was apparently inspired by Tian Han's reading of the "Shen Chong case," see Cheng Jihua, II, p. 236. Anti-American connotations in *Hope for Humanity* is mentioned on p. 234.

44. The fashion element for highlighting negative characters is particularly evident in *Spring River Flows East* where the character played by Shu Xiuwen lounges around in American high fashion while seducing the husband of the beleaguered heroine. Bai Yang, in contrast wears simple clothes and faithfully awaits her husband's return from the interior. The worker's overalls as a costume worn

by young woman characters is common in films from the forties, as well as works on the pre-1949 era produced after 1949.

45.Zhang Junxiang, interview, June 1991. He also commented that film artists matured during this period. The Kunlun production of *Crows and Sparrows* [wuya yu maque] was one example among others where the government interfered in production. Completed after May 1949, *Crows and Sparrows* was still encountering difficulties from Kuomintang censors on the set as late as April 1949 on the eve of the Communist takeover.

46.The newspaper article cited the problem of film stock and poor box office returns for artistic films but the author suggested that a new era for cultural development was dawning and that producers should look forward to it. Jiang Foxi, *Zhipianren de Huanghuo* [Anxious Producers], *DGB*, 1 January 1949, p. 9.

47.A professor at the Beijing Film Academy, Zhou Chuanji, confirmed my feeling that *Waterloo Bridge* had much in common with the sense of melodrama in Chinese drama. I was also influenced by his conviction that Chinese film had failed to evolve from a theatrical premise that was related in part to the development of sound.

48.Beverley Hooper discusses changes in the newspapers and policy towards foreign publications and correspondents on p. 143-146, see, **China Stands Up: Ending the Western Presence 1948-1950** (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986). One person I talked to also mentioned the emergence of a black market in foreign publications and speculated that government officials confiscated many for their own use. Ads for *Bathing Beauty* were present throughout the month of May and June in **Da Gong Bao**.

49.Hooper notes that "in Beijing and Tianjin the proportion of American films being screened was reportedly already down to 10% . . .," p. 153. The quote about Shanghai's audience is from Hooper, p. 154. I think Hooper may have overemphasized the influence of British films in Shanghai, though they were occasionally included in the campaign to criticize American films. I also talked with someone who was directly involved with the process after 1949. Wang Shizhen was a film critic who was part of the cultural group responsible for evaluating how to handle American films. The group recognized their high entertainment value and adopted a gradual approach to reducing their influence, Wang Zhizhen, interview, Oct. 1991. This approach is also mentioned in Xia Yan's memoirs.

50.Xia Yan, p. 591.

51.Xia Yan, p. 627-628.

52.For a discussion of the relative lack of appeal of Russian films, see Hooper, p. 156-157.

53. *Buxu Meiguo Yingpian Sanbo Dusu* [Don't Allow American Films to Disseminate Poisonous Elements], *DGB*, 15 September 1949, p. 1.

54. *Da Gong Bao* was the one newspaper I had convenient access to at the Shanghai Drama Academy library, as well as some issues of *Xinmin Bao* evening edition from the late forties and early fifties. Other newspapers published similar types of articles, especially those newly founded by the Communist administration, such as *Jiefang Ribao* [Liberation Daily] referred to by Hooper. One article published in *Da Gong Bao* on Mar 17 was strikingly similar in tone to the pieces published six months later. The only exception was the writer first highlighted "rare" exceptional films like *The Great Dictator*, *Pancho Villa* and *My Country My People*(?) [wutu wumin] from Hollywood. *Wo Kan Meiguo Dianying* [Looking at American Films], *DGB* 17 March 1949, p. 6.

55. The revision of Hong Shen's role in the "Welcome Danger" incident appears in *Waiguo Yingpian Zai Shanghai Shi Ruhe Kaishi Jieshou Jiancha De* [How Foreign Films in Shanghai Began Accepting Inspection], *Juying Ribao* [Drama and Film Daily] [JYRB] 24 October 1949, p. 2. A typical example of such letters was one sent from a group of bank clerks who were critical of the continuing presence of advertisements for American films in the newspapers. In keeping with their vocation, they blamed American films for engendering a materialistic lifestyle, especially among bank clerks. They argued that certain films encouraged people to live beyond their means and this resulted in them borrowing money from loan sharks and so on. From *Meiguo Huaiyingpian De Duhai* [The Harmful Poison of Bad American Films], *DGB*, 19 September 1949, p. 2.

56. Besides Hooper's work on this period, Paul Fonoroff has also written a paper titled *The Campaign Against "American Imperialist Films" From 1949 to 1952* given at the Annual Meeting of the College Art Association, San Francisco, 1989. I would like to thank Maurice Gallant for giving me a copy of this paper. It highlights similar issues such as the fact that American films were still popular after 1949 and uses some of the same sources I have used here. Paul Fonoroff is a film critic in Hong Kong and has an extensive knowledge of Chinese film history.

57. Tang Xiaodan was particularly reticent in this respect but Zhou Manhua, Zhou Wenchang and others verified Hoopers' argument that Russian films had political appeal for leftist intellectuals but found little response for the majority of movie-goers.

58. This quote comes from a seminar of various organizations in Shanghai discussing the problem of American and British films. *Saochu Youdu De Meiying Yinpian* [Clear Away Poisonous American and British Films], *DGB* 18 September 1949, p. 1.

59. *The Outlaw*, starring Jane Russell, had played in Shanghai during the late forties and continued as a rerun after 1949. Mei Duo, *Ba Meidi Yingpian Ganchu Zhongguo Qu* [Get American Imperialist Films Out of China], **DGB**, 30 July 1950, p. 3.

60. Qian Bing, interview, June 1991 and Ruan Renrong, interview, Oct. 1991, and Wang Shizhen, interview, Oct. 1991. A report in **Juying Ribao** also criticized the continuing presence of black market tickets available on the street sold by scalpers [huangniu] at the entrance to cinemas. From, *Guanzhong Xiezu Wugou Heishipiao Xiaochu Jiushehui De Jishengzhe* [Assist the Audience to Stop Buying Black Market Tickets and Eliminate Parasites from the Old Society], **JYRB** 22 December 1949, p. 3.

61. According to Qian Bing, authorities in charge of investigating theatre properties had previously assumed that properties like the Grand Theatre and Nanjing etc., were American-owned, interview, June, 1991.

62. Hooper, p. 156.

63. The statement meant to reassure theatre owners came from a worker at the Grand Theatre, published in *Qudi Youdu De Meiyingpian* [Stamp Out Poisonous American and British Films], **Xinmen Bao** [XMB] 15 September 1949, p. 2.

64. Hu Jinhua remembers that free showings [baochang] of Russian and Chinese revolutionary films were screened in various factories and companies. Employees were required to attend.

65. Xia Yan, p. 589.

66. One person I interviewed remembers that these early dubbing attempts were very poor [bu haoting] and ridiculed by youngsters and perhaps less publicly by adults.

67. These citations are taken from three articles respectively. *Weile Kuoda Sulian Dianying De Yingxiang Er Nuli* [Work Hard In Order to Widen the Influence of Russian Films], **DGB** 1 March 1950, p. 6. This article was a combined effort by a group of prominent people involved in the performing arts, Ke Ling, (critic and dramatist), Huang Zuolin (dramatist), Sang Hu, (director), Chen Xihe (director) and Shi Hui (actor). Feng Ding, *Zhuhe Sulian Dianying* [Congratulations to Russian Films], **DGB** 2 March 1950, p. 2. Gu Zhongyi, *Sulian Dianying yu Meiguo Dianying* [Russian Films and American Films], **DGB** 19 March 1950, p. 7. The March 19 article was included with other articles which published the results of a seminar on Russian films held by intellectuals.

68. Zhang Jinyi, *Sulian Dianying Zhide Xuexi* [Russian Films Are Worth Studying], **DGB** 19 March 1950, p. 7.

69. Mao Dun's article appeared earlier than the seminar notes in, *Meiguo Dianying He Sulian Dianying* [Comparing Russian and American Films], *JYRB* 3 November 1949, p. 1. The expression "sugar-coated poison" or "sugar-coated bullets" [tangyi paodan] was used generally to refer to harmful effects of bourgeois lifestyle and entertainment, though it was used in some of these articles to more specifically allude to the hidden corruptive dangers in Hollywood entertainment.

70. In conjunction with the growing anti-American campaign associated with the Korean War, many articles highlighted the role of American films in promoting criminal behaviour. One report in *Da Gong Bao* cited an actual case of four university students arrested for robbery. After undergoing labor reform and political education in Shanghai's Tilanqiao jail, they made a statement attributing their unlawful actions to the influence of American films and mentioned one film in particular, *The Man With the Big Hat*[?] [Da Maozi Yingxiong] as the specific inspiration for their crimes. *Meiguo Dianying Hairen Buqian* [The Harmful Effects of American Films Runs Deep], *DGB* 14 November 1950, p. 4.

71. *On Guard Beneath the Neon Lights* was made into a film in 1964. *Bathing Beauty* is featured briefly in the film as a threat to the integrity of the PLA soldiers. Hu Jinhua, who was an astute observer of fashion trends, mentioned in our interview that jeans became popular in the late forties because of American movies, interview, June 1991. The negative symbolism of tight jeans or tight-fitting pants in Chinese society after 1949 was actively targeted during the Cultural Revolution when remnants of this kind of fashion apparently remained. Red Guards would confront people wearing questionable clothing, and in the case of pants, they would have to be baggy enough so that a pop bottle could be inserted at the ankle. I heard stories about this in China and this practise is also mentioned in Gao Yuan, *Born Red: A Chronicle of the Cultural Revolution* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987). Describing a group of Red Guards who set up a kind of fashion-testing station at one of the city gates, Gao writes, "They also checked for tight pants. If there was not enough room for a soda bottle to drop down to the cuff, they would slit the legs up to the thigh," p. 95.

72. Not all of the criticism of fashion was necessarily because of its association with Western influences. The traditional long gown for men [changpao] and Chinese dress for women [qipao] also disappeared gradually after the revolution. Hu Jinhua remembers that by 1956 women no longer wore make-up. Others recalled that many people were reticent to reveal their ability to speak English after 1949. Certainly those who were aware of the political consequences were cautious in revealing their association with Westerners. I also heard that when many of the foreigners among the Grand Theatre were preparing to leave Shanghai after 1949, they offered their houses to their Chinese colleagues, but no one took

them up on their offer. It appeared that, for a short time anyways, the Communists were able to obliterate an old tradition of Shanghai, rampant opportunism.

73. This observation regarding *Bathing Beauty* was related to me by Jiang Miaoling, the librarian at the Shanghai Drama Academy.

74. There were a number of prints of *Bathing Beauty* circulating in Shanghai. One person associated with the film industry also mentioned that the film was a favorite of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing and that she also retained copies of the film. Regarding the fear of Shanghai influencing PLA cadres and soldiers, see Hooper, p. 152. Xia Yan, p. 594.

75. I have no details on *Biography of a Film Fan* other than an advertisement in *Da Gong Bao* during November 1950. It is possible that the work described in *Da Zhong Dianying* [Popular Film] below is related to the play or film which was advertised. I assume the work was a play because the advertisement lacked the name of a production company that usually accompanied notices for movies.

76. Hao Dang, *Meidi Dianying Haile Wo Jingshi Wo Renwei Laodong Kechi* [American Films Made Me Be Ashamed of Labour], *Da Zhong Dianying* 16 October 1950, p. 25. I was unable to find the corresponding English titles of the American films he mentions here and have translated them directly from the Chinese. It should also be noted that the *Thief of Baghdad* he refers to is the colour version made in the late thirties.

77. One account about a former American film fan revealed how he and his girlfriend courted each other as if they were Tyrone Power and Rita Hayworth. His fiancée eventually called off the marriage, causing him great distress, because he lost his job at the stock exchange. He criticized American films for emphasizing romance over reality. Wang Yuanzhou, *Meidi Yingpian Dui Wo De Duhai* [How American Imperialist Films Harmed Me With Poison], *Da Zhong Dianying* 16 November 1950, p. 24.

78. Du Jindan, *Ailuo Lin He Taolesai Yao: "Yingmi" de Gushi* [Errol Lin and Dorothy Yao: The story of "Biography of a Film Fan"], *Da Zhong Dianying* 20 July 1950, p. 9.

79. Zheng Yiliu, *Xianzai Zhengtuo Meidi Yingpian De Mozhang* [Throw Off the Evil Grasp of American Imperialist Films Now], *Da Zhong Dianying* 20 July 1950, p. 11.

80. The shortcomings of Chaplin's approach was noted in one of the seminars on Russian films published in *Da Gong Bao*, *Jiangkang Xiangshang De Sulian Dianying* [The Healthy Progression of Russian Films], *DGB* 19 March 1950, p. 7. The anti-Soviet message in what were previously considered to be anti-fascist films was mentioned for films like *The Second World War*, *Atom Bomb Spy* and *Air Force* in

Zhao Han, *Saoqing Meidi Dianying De Yingxiang*, **DGB** 16 November 1950, p. 1. (already noted). One example of a re-evaluation of artistic or literary films is exemplified in the criticism of *Gone With The Wind*. According to Wang Shizhen, criticism of the film evolved from seminars conducted on American films after 1949. A middle-school student who formerly admired artistic and literary American films said she was influenced by reading a review that criticized *Gone With the Wind* and changed her position on American films. From Feng Jiazhen, *Meidi Yingpian Lanfei Wo De Xiaoshiguang* [I Wasted My Childhood Days on American Imperialist Films], **Da Zhong Dianying** 20 July 1950, p. 10. Similarly, another article criticized so-called artistic films for basing their stories on great literary works to attract an audience. For example, the film version of *Anna Karenina*, starring Greta Garbo, "took this great literary work of Tolstoy's and debased it to a level on par with Chinese Saturday school style pulp novels." (Saturday school novels, [libailiupai xiaoshou] refers to a popular novel style associated with the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School of literature during the twenties.) You Gu, *Meiguo Dianying Youxie Shenme Dongxi* [What's In American Films], **DGB**, 1 January 1950, p. 12.

81. Mei Duo, *Ba Meidi Yingpian Ganchu Zhongguo Qu*, p. 3. Mei lent me a book of his collected reviews which included his work as a critic before 1949 and contained his reviews of the films I list above. **Mei Duo Dianying Pinglun Ji** [Collected Film Reviews of Mei Duo] (Sichuan Chuban She, 1985), p. 131-224. It is interesting that Mei's strongly worded reviews criticizing Hollywood films in the immediate post-1949 environment were not published in this collection. Mei's career was suspended after 1957 when he was labelled a rightist. He spent twenty years in the countryside and only resumed writing film reviews after 1978.

82. Mei Duo, *Meidi Dianying Zhong De Wenyi Pian* [Artistic Films and American Imperialist Movies], **Da Zhong Dianying** 16 November 1950, p. 25. Mei makes the point in the article that while viewers might see the evils of American imperialism in films like *Saratoga Trunk* (also starring Ingrid Bergman) by its treatment of non-white Americans, they must also be alerted to American imperialism disguised as anti-fascism in *For Whom The Bell Tolls*.

83. Interviews with Qian Bing, June 1991, Wang Shizhen, Oct. 1991, and Ruan Renrong, Oct. 1991. *Popular Demand to Ban VOA Reception and American Films*, **Shanghai News** [SN] 10 November 1950, p. 2. The November 11 issue of **Shanghai News** included a notice signed by Shanghai's newspapers announcing they had received many "letters stressing the impropriety of publishing advertisements of American films". The request was also reported in *Hu Gebao Ying Duzhe Yaoqiu Tingkan Meiguo Dianying Guanggao* [Readers Demand Shanghai's Newspapers Stop Publishing Ads for American Films], **DGB** 10 November 1950, p. 1.

84. *Ge Yingyuan Zidong Tingyan Meipian* [Theatres Voluntarily Stop Screening American Films], *DGB* 12 November 1950, p. 4. *Cinema Guild Decides to Stop Showing American Movies*, *SN* 14 November 1950, p. 4. According to Wang Shizhen, interview, Oct. 1991, the action of theatre owners in the cinema guild was prompted by the suggestion of the Grand Theatre manager, Hu Zhifan(g?). Distribution staff published their statement in support of the "resist America aid Korea" movement on Nov. 17. *Xipian Faxingye Zhigong Shengming Jianjue Yonghu Tingyan Meiguo Pian* [Distributors of Western Films Resolutely Endorse Stopping Screenings of American Films], *DGB* 17 November 1950, p. 2. Also see, *Foreign Film Co. Workers Support People's Demand: Suppression of U.S. Movies*, *SN* 18 November 1950, p. 2.

85. *New Committee to Examine Old Chinese and Foreign Films*, *SN* 2 December 1950, p. 2.

86. Hooper mentions this on p. 157 and Paul Fonoroff also notes that the screening of American films had declined fifty percent by late 1950, p. 4.

87. Anti-American propaganda was certainly evident in newspapers immediately after the revolution but the campaign was intensified considerably during the Korean War. For example, a series of San Mao [three-hairs] cartoons by Zhang Leping ran in *Da Gong Bao* beginning in 1951 and depicted various scenes of San Mao enduring unfortunate encounters with drunken American sailors and so on. Yet at the same time, an actor I talked to who participated in street theatre during the "resist America aid Korea" movement pointed out to me the differences between anti-Americanism and the anti-Japanese movement of the 1930's. She remembers singing the anti-American songs on the street in 1950, but says they were not performed with the same intensity of feeling that informed propaganda work against the Japanese during the war. Although the government tried to make similar comparisons in their emphasis on American imperialism, she said that hatred for the Japanese was much more deeply embedded in Chinese society than anti-American feelings. Indeed, she observed that even with the outbreak of the Korean War the movement never raised antagonism towards Americans to the level that the government was hoping for.

88. Under orders of the military command in Shanghai, American property and companies came under government control. *Meiguo Zai Hu De Qiye Danwei Yi You Ershiwu Ge Bei Guanzhi* [Twenty-five American Enterprises In Shanghai Already Under Military Control], *DGB* 4 January 1951, p. 4.

89. M. Weiner had come to Shanghai as a Jewish refugee during the thirties and eventually ended up managing the Roxy for MGM. After 1949 he was in charge of the MGM office following the departure of an American manager named Farrell, who left prior to the Communist takeover, Ruan Renrong, interview, Oct. 1991.

90. One actor from Shanghai studios recounted an interesting story to me about finding old American prints in a warehouse where he was assigned to do manual labour during the Cultural Revolution. He remembers being surprised that they had not yet been destroyed by Red Guards.

91. Sun Yu's film was set in the Qing dynasty and told the story of Wu Xun, an impoverished man who became an educational reformer and raised money to provide education for the children of poor peasants. The film was publicly attacked by Mao for its emphasis on passive reform as opposed to armed struggle and revolution. Zheng Junli, another veteran of the 1930's leftist film movement, also made a film that was criticized. A *Married Couple* [women fufu zhijian] was made in 1951 and described the changes a revolutionary couple go through when they move to Shanghai after 1949. The husband in the story becomes progressively "bourgeois" in his outlook and lifestyle. The film was criticized because it suggested that cadres could be corrupted by the city.

92. Paul Clark highlights the tension between Yanan and the legacy of Shanghai's film industry throughout his book which is the most comprehensive account of China's post-49 development available in English. See, **Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949** (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: THE NEW CHINA MARKET

The "Grand Incident" [*Welcome Danger*] happened now sixty years ago. Reflecting on the past in light of the present one feels in the joyous victory of that "struggle" a simultaneous feeling of deep anxiety that is impossible to dispel. To be sure, such examples of films humiliating to China never again played on Chinese soil. That one small incident touched off a great reaction. Yet, has the tendency of powerful Western merchants to look down upon and underestimate the traditions of the Chinese people really changed? As I see it, the situation is not exactly the same. Since the founding of New China forty years ago many upright Westerners have confronted the reality that their previous attitudes towards China were wrong. But I also believe that some things have not changed. If we think about this issue, we can see today that the wild ambitions of Westerners are still bent on subjugating our country. This is not a mere case of "crying wolf." In the new terrain, Westerners have become shrewder! Although they have discarded the thinly veiled approach of Harold Lloyd to humiliate China, the objective to enslave China has not been abandoned. They have simply taken on cleverer methods in the way of political pressure, economic enticements and cultural infiltration.¹

At the end of the seventies, Chinese policy towards the West took an abrupt turn. Mao Zedong was dead, the Cultural Revolution was over and most significant of all the government under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping embarked on a new program to stimulate production and development by initiating economic reforms in agriculture and industry. In addition, new relationships were forged with Japan, Western Europe and North America to promote trade, education and cultural exchange. Generally referred to as the era of "openness and reform" [*gaige kaifang*], the changes wrought not only on the economy, but on Chinese society as a whole, continue at a frantic pace today, a factor that makes any kind of

analysis very difficult. Assumptions or conclusions gleaned from an absorption of the information accessible today may very well implode upon themselves and descend into a black hole of irrelevance tomorrow.

Thus, it is with some trepidation that I offer these observations on China and its "transformation" in the last decade. One is forever conscious of that pithy statement, "the more things change the more they stay the same." My focus throughout this thesis has been an inquiry into the history of American films in Shanghai, but what bearing does this have on the present? After 1949, Shanghai was drawn into the national embrace. Its foreign connections were disgraced and continually repudiated by the new government in Beijing. One striking manifestation of this is the complete lack of attention to urban development that up to the early nineties has left Shanghai's cityscape, one of the most modern in Asia in 1949, intact like some dinosaur from the pre-war era left stranded on the beach. Shanghai culture itself, with its ambivalent mixture of foreign influence and local ingenuity, was seen to be tainted with both bourgeois and feudal characteristics by the political commissioners whose legacy of government came from the caves of Yanan, deep in the cultural heartland of the "yellow earth" [huangtudi] loess region of the Northwest.²

Furthermore, after 1949 film became much more of a national manifestation rather than an urban phenomenon. Rural audiences had not experienced the proliferation of Hollywood films shown in Chinese cities in the past. Mobile film teams and rural cinemas

introduced a new cultural form to rural areas beginning in the 1950's. Although Shanghai remained an important center for film production, it was substantially augmented by studios throughout China, particularly in Beijing and Changchun.³

Since the late seventies, another factor that has connected the country on a national level is television. The latest statistics suggest that seven hundred million people watch television on a daily basis.⁴ Compared to film however, the distribution of which is centralized in Beijing, television stations in China have a degree of local autonomy that has gradually created a situation in which television culture is influenced at both a national and local level. Moreover, since the mid-eighties, VCR ownership and videotape distribution have increased to the point that video entertainment cannot be overlooked as a significant factor in China's media environment.⁵

Therefore, whereas Shanghai was a logical site to explore the subject of film entertainment before 1949, it can no longer serve as a logical focal point for discussing the contemporary era. There are of course differences in the Shanghai audience compared to the rest of China that can be explained in part by historical continuities such as the inclination to highlight commercial priorities over political affairs and a receptiveness to foreign culture. On the other hand, much of Shanghai's population today, while certainly influenced by its previous legacy as a commercial and metropolitan center, are not necessarily the offspring of Shanghai natives. The city experienced a huge influx of immigrants

from other provinces during the 1950's and today the population of the city and its environs is approximately 12 million. This too is a factor which must be taken into consideration. It is clear that Shanghai society has marked differences with that say of Beijing or other urban centers in China. Yet, with some exceptions, I am not sure that these differences would exclude Shanghai from certain generalizations about the urban audience for film and television in contemporary China. In other words, in an attempt to describe what American films and television programs mean in contemporary Shanghai, I must also extrapolate from observations regarding the urban Chinese audience as a whole.⁶

The Re-encounter With Hollywood

Shanghai, not to mention China, was unique in East Asia in that it lay outside the expansion of American media culture into global markets after the Second World War. Besides the short period between 1949 and the early fifties, China did not experience the effects of America's post-war dissemination of mass culture that entered the markets of Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. Consequently, for those who had been familiar with Hollywood films in the past, their understanding of American film remained locked in a kind of time warp of the 1940's.

In addition, when new American films did begin to appear in China again in 1979, the official response tended to highlight their political meaning over their entertainment value. Despite the saturation of political analysis that had come to dominate life in

China during the Cultural Revolution, this approach to American films did not inhibit their popularity. This was revealed when I began talking to people about their response to screenings of foreign films in the late seventies. One enduring impression was given to me by a professor from the Shanghai Drama Academy who described the public screening of Chaplin's *Modern Times* in 1979. He recalled with a nostalgic poignancy how, on one of those rare winter nights in Shanghai when the city was struck by a snowstorm, people flocked to the theatres and talked about the film for days afterward.

There is one generalization that can best describe the Chinese film audience at the end of the Cultural Revolution and that is the quality of cultural deprivation. After the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution film production ceased in China from late 1966 to 1970. Up to 1974, film production consisted of "model operas" [yangbangxi] based on revolutionary themes that followed the directives of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. These were re-released and broadcast to the few television sets *ad nauseam* up to 1978. Paul Clark's calculations from statistics for audience attendance for one model opera film, *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy*, "suggests that every man, woman, and child in China had seen the film at least seven times."⁷ In 1974, film production increased slightly and departed from the opera format. Many of these films were directed collectively and strictly adhered to the depiction of revolutionary heroes triumphing against evil capitalists, imperialists and other class enemies. In addition, there were

limited showings of Albanian, North Vietnamese, and North Korean cinema which attracted huge crowds during this time when China had little contact with other foreign countries.

Consequently, after the Cultural Revolution, foreign films had a wide appeal to the extent that the Chinese audience was eager to see any foreign film. Public screenings of Yugoslavian, Japanese, and East European cinema preceded Hollywood films, but in 1979 the movie *Convoy* was publicly released in China. Besides public screenings of older American films from the 1940's, newer films from the sixties and seventies were held internally [neibu] for government officials, intellectuals and university students.⁸ In 1980 and 1981, American Film Weeks were scheduled showing films such as *Kramer vs Kramer*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Star Wars*, as well as older films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Singing in the Rain*.⁹ China Central Television [CCTV] began broadcasting two American television series, *Man From Atlantis* and *Garrison's Guerrillas* in 1979. These were gradually followed by other programs throughout the decade of the eighties. In 1985, the release of *Rambo: First Blood* was a sensation in urban cinemas throughout the country, especially among middle school students who one observer says often went to see the film two or three times. For many people in China, *First Blood* was the first American film they had ever seen. Another phenomenon was the release of the film *Breakdance* in 1986 that sparked an interest in breakdance style dancing among urban youth.¹⁰

Political Priorities and Social Expression

There are two ways to analyze the early response to American films in this period. One is to examine the official response in newspapers as a reliable indication of the government's attitude towards the new foreign media. The other is a less accurate and elusive attempt to try to understand how the audience responded to American films and why they were popular. In some ways, the latter investigation can rely on publications but requires some reading between the lines, since critics often heightened a political or social analysis of American films in order to guarantee their legitimacy and contribute indirectly to "keeping the door open." The best way to gain an understanding of any audience is by personal interviews and observations, some of which I have done, though my investigation was primarily limited to intellectuals involved in film and television research.¹¹

Press reviews of *Convoy* and *Garrison* reveal an emphasis on political and social imperatives to explain American media content in China during the late seventies and early eighties. But it is also clear that much of this evaluation came after the productions had been screened or broadcast. *Convoy* was apparently given to the Chinese government free of charge, presumably to promote further trade relationships between Hollywood and China. The story describes the exploits of renegade truckers who, led by a driver who goes by his CB radio handle of "Rubber Duck," embark on a battle against a corporate conspiracy and law enforcement agencies. Reviews in the Chinese press praised the film for revealing

injustices in capitalist society but also criticized it for its limited approach to political struggle. One report noted that "Rubber Duck", played by Kris Kristofferson, "expresses the excellent quality of America's labouring classes" but is nevertheless "insufficiently enlightened politically" in his struggle that emphasized individualism over organized proletarian struggle.¹² The reviews also criticized the excessive violence and sex scenes. For an American film it was viewed as "progressive" but not realistic.

We must maintain a critical perspective and at the same time must pay attention that young people are not adversely influenced. From what this film provides in its content and various scenes, we must help them recognize and have a greater understanding about the intrinsic qualities of capitalism.¹³

As one of the first new Hollywood films to be screened in China in thirty years, *Convoy* was popular for its sheer novelty and its glimpse of American society. Older filmgoers accustomed the well-crafted American films of the 1940's were less impressed and perhaps comforted by the thought that they had not missed much if this was all that Hollywood could offer.¹⁴ The television series *Garrison's Guerrillas*, however, had a much bigger impact on the viewing habits of China's nascent television audience. Produced in 1967, the show depicted the story of prisoners on leave from U.S. penitentiaries who took part in special services against the Germans in World War Two. One professor I talked to about this series was a university student when *Garrison* was first broadcast in 1979. Stressing to me that she was not engaging in nostalgic

hyperbole, she said that when the show was broadcast every Saturday night, the streets of Beijing were empty because everyone who could find a television was inside watching *Garrison*.¹⁵

The show was so popular that when it was abruptly cancelled, students were indignant enough at one point to discuss organizing a protest. Shortly afterwards, articles began appearing in the newspapers saying that young people were inspired by *Garrison* to commit criminal acts. A rumour developed that a top government leader had objected to the series and ordered its cancellation. Many people felt that blaming the show for crime among youths was simply an excuse. For example, one person told me about a public security official who said the offenders whose crimes were attributed to the show were influenced by the interrogation process. Apparently they were asked directly if *Garrison* had inspired their activity and they responded with somewhat predictable answers. It is difficult to imagine that a campaign could be so skillfully crafted, from a disgruntled high-level official to a local police station, but there was certainly a precedent back in 1950 when the Shanghai university students blamed their crime on an American film. In an ironic coda to this incident, the public security official had added ruefully that since the broadcast of *Garrison*, Saturday night was in fact quieter than usual for the police because all potential offenders were inside watching the show.

A similar viewpoint was expressed in an internal publication discussing the cancellation of the program. Apparently CCTV

initially received twenty to thirty letters criticizing the show, one which said, in another curious echo of the past, that a television newspaper promoting the show as "a heroic American secret group battling Fascism was a distortion of history."¹⁶ On the other hand, the station also received more than two thousand letters and three hundred telephone calls criticizing the show's cancellation. The article published selected excerpts from some of the letters which categorically refuted the idea that *Garrison* caused youth to commit crimes. Many of them pointed out that youth crime already existed before the show was broadcast. A letter from Wuhan said,

All kinds of kids play with knives, steal things and so on, you can't blame this on *Garrison's Guerrillas*. Weapons and murder have always existed in history. During the ten year turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, there was no *Garrison* on TV but there were still vagabonds and thieves, terrorizing people. To take some of the social problems today and blame them on *Garrison* is an injustice.¹⁷

A striking feature of these letters from this period is their candour and lack of reference to the supremacy of socialist society. Another article two months later stated that "Garrison" youth gangs emerged in four different districts in Beijing after the show was broadcast and that consequently the program must have had an effect.¹⁸ In any case it remained cancelled, but these examples reveal the degree to which such criticisms concealed a much deeper struggle going on behind the scenes.

A film scholar I talked to suggested that critics played two roles in their evaluation of American and indeed other imported

media. One was the expression of disapproval that genuinely saw American films as a threat to socialist beliefs. The other was a political or social analysis of works to highlight their benefit to Chinese society, that they promoted an understanding of the Western world and were educational. In his recent work on Chinese television, James Lull suggests the influence of the latter expression. "By the 1980's," he writes, "the mass media in China were no longer 'tools of class struggle'...[but] had become instead tools in the service of modernization..."¹⁹ Similarly, the thrust behind the need to qualify American media in politically positive terms was to ensure that it would still be made available. Letters about *Garrison* were not published for the benefit of media scholars, they were meant to be read by officials. As Paul Clark rightly points out with regard to the censorship of Chinese films in the eighties, "care should be taken to avoid assuming that all cultural bureaucrats shared a single collective outlook".²⁰ If the tumultuous decade of the eighties up to 1989 has revealed anything, it is certainly that factionalism and disagreements on the reform policy are a constant feature of the Chinese Communist Party.

When the professor talked about why she and her classmates found *Garrison* so interesting, she mentioned the quick rhythm of the shots and depth of feeling between the characters and added, "I would expect that among my generation of students, everyone of us was in love with one of the actors." Indeed, the quality of nostalgia for this show was so strong that when the video was released in 1987, this professor and many of her friends hastened

to purchase a copy. Another side to the program was its depiction of former criminals who, "become people again through their own efforts".²¹ I suspect that in the atmosphere of Chinese society after the Cultural Revolution where many people formerly labelled "class enemies" were rehabilitated this particular aspect of *Garrison* had a special resonance.

The example of *Garrison*, simply by the way it was handled, also reveals that the policy approving the release of American films and television programs was hardly set in stone. Ostensibly the new policy that was drawn up in 1979 sought to import films that were educational, did not distort historical events and did not portray negative views of the Chinese or the People's Republic.²² Yet one other important consideration for the Film Bureau and television stations was not political content but the price of purchase. This explains why *Convoy* was released for general distribution rather than a better crafted and more expensive film. Furthermore, the people responsible for selecting films for the Chinese market were as unfamiliar with American media as the general public.²³

The idea that particular shows were chosen to highlight the negative sides of American life is certainly compelling, but I am sceptical that this was an intentional consideration.²⁴ For all the shows like *First Blood* or the police series, *Hunter*, which began playing in the mid-eighties there were an equal number of benign family programs and cartoons such as the widely popular *Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck*. The success of *Rambo* in China and the

circulation of Hong Kong police and gangster movies suggests that the genre's appeal for the audience was more important than the idea that these works would reveal the shortcomings of capitalist society. Furthermore, the Rambo film was finally pulled from the theatres because there were many complaints about its excessive violence.²⁵ In addition, following the popularity and government approval of *First Blood*, a different evaluation was expressed by government officials towards the content of *Superman* after it was screened in late December 1985. By mid-January, the film had been pulled from Beijing theatres, apparently because officials felt it portrayed an unrealistic approach to solving problems and promoted following the "American road" [meiguo daolu].²⁶

Another interesting response in the press was the evaluation of an American film called *High Ice* which played in 1982.²⁷ The film is about a mountain climbing accident in the wilderness where a forester named Mike Tanner sacrifices his life to save the others in the group. Commentary began on October 15 in the Shanghai newspaper **Youth Daily** [qingnian bao] and continued until early November in a series of articles published under the headline "Does Mike Tanner Equal Lei Feng?". (Lei Feng was a model worker and soldier who died in a truck accident at the age of twenty-two and was immortalized by Mao as a symbol of socialist altruism for youth to aspire to in the mid-sixties.)

The articles in **Youth Daily** began with a letter written to the paper by a middle-school student. In a discussion with his classmates after watching the film, he was puzzled by the

contradiction of Tanner's actions in that his gesture to save the group and his ultimate demise made him seem like an "American" Lei Feng.

Another classmate revealed his uncertainty by saying that we usually talk about how relations between people in capitalist society are cold and unfeeling. Yet, in order to save three young mountain climbers, did not the rescue team...gleam with the brilliance of a self-sacrificing spirit? Did their action not seem like a triumphant ode to communism? I replied that this was just a film, of course it was a made up story! My classmates nodded their heads but after some reflection once again said, who would have thought that America also makes propaganda about proper conduct [wu jiang simeil] and advocates spiritual civilization [jingshen wenming] for society.²⁸

The letter continued with more questions concerning the complexity of understanding the difference between socialist and capitalist societies. Could not Mike Tanner be seen as America's Lei Feng? Does the concept of "spiritual civilization" have a class character? And perhaps the most important question of all, "if all societies pursue a similar goal of spiritual civilization then what need is there for us to add on the prefix of socialism?"²⁹

The letter prompted a number of different replies. One discussion went through various questions point by point that included a reminder for readers on a major tenet of Marxist theory, the law of surplus value and historical materialism which will ultimately lead to the withering away of the state. In more simple terms, a parallel was constructed with the premise that "just because a fish needs water, water does not necessarily need the fish."

As long as a person has an ideological perspective based in Communism, they will definitely have a sense of self-sacrifice. But just because someone has a sense of self-

sacrifice does not necessarily mean they possess a Communist ideological perspective.³⁰

The response in the letters that followed this issue were mixed. One writer, who had spent some time at Harvard, criticized America for its emphasis on individualism and said that Tanner's self-sacrifice had its origins in Christian religion and Western humanism. "Superficially, it seems that [Tanner] and Lei Feng have similarities, but in essence, his character cannot be discussed in the same context as Lei Feng's sense of personal duty to serve China and his Communist spirit to whole-heartedly and meaningfully serve the people."³¹ Yet there were also other letters that said a more objective stance towards capitalism must be taken and in the past information about capitalist societies was distorted. Showing this film was a sign of improvement.³² Another letter also argued that Tanner's actions were closely related to the Lei Feng spirit and that capitalism must also be recognized for its positive aspects.³³ One student asked, in the past, did not China learn from people who came from a capitalist society, such as Marx, Engels, Bethune, Marie Curie, Edison and Shakespeare?³⁴

It is clear from these examples that the subject of an American film prompted a debate that revealed various attitudes towards capitalism in the early days of the reform period. While not so boldly stated in the newspaper of course, an underlying question in the debate was this. If it was possible to cultivate the spirit of Lei Feng in capitalist society then of what use was the Communist Party?

Many people I talked to recognized that the American films shown in the early eighties gave them a perspective of the United States which was quite different than what they had known in the past. They also realized this altered perspective mythologized America in ways that were equally unrealistic. But the allure of American films was not simply their function as a window to a foreign country. It is also evident that many people found the quality of humanism and romantic love attractive in foreign films, something that was particularly identified with old Hollywood films from the forties which were re-screened in China after 1978. Such expressions were refreshing and poignant after a long period of time where cultural production had emphasized political relationships over personal and emotional expression. As Chinese film production responded to the new era, the early eighties also saw Chinese directors exploring themes of love and humanism that went beyond a political perspective, some of which attracted a substantial audience. Yet even those films had their limits. If the theme of recent historical retroreflection couched in emotional portrayals of grief came too close to questioning the legitimacy of China's experience with socialism, the creators were criticized and in the case of some productions, the films were banned.³⁵

The Rise of Commercialism

By the mid-eighties, the Chinese urban audience had gradually become accustomed to the presence of foreign media on television and in the cinemas. The practise of watching television had also

assumed its place as a part of daily life, as sets increasingly became part of major household purchases. James Lull goes as far to say that "the introduction of television into the homes of Chinese families may be the single most important cultural and political development in the People's Republic since the end of the Cultural Revolution."³⁶ While it is more difficult to gauge the dimensions of television's political influence, the cultural and perhaps social influences are readily apparent. In the past, because of the scarcity of sets, many people watched television collectively, similar to the way people watched films in the cinema. By the mid-eighties, television was well-established as a major entertainment and information medium in individual households.

The influx of American programs on television also increased gradually. In 1983, CCTV and CBS made an arrangement to provide programming in exchange for advertising time that CBS could then sell to American companies. The U.S. based Lorimar Pictures set up a similar agreement with Shanghai Television in 1985. This gave television stations a distinct advantage over the China Film Corporation which had to actually purchase films. In the minds of many people this restricts the Chinese market to inexpensive low-quality Hollywood films that did poorly in their domestic markets. Program exchanges were also conducted at "television festivals" where foreign stations were invited to exchange various material. Because of their high market value however, most American programs are obtained through advertising agreements. In addition, exchange agreements are not as feasible for U.S. productions because

American television stations rarely produce serial dramatic television but rely on the major networks and private companies.³⁷

Concurrent with the rise of television in China and the availability of foreign films in cinemas, the Chinese film industry faced an economic crisis as audience levels for Chinese productions dropped considerably. The brief arousal of audience interest in Chinese film in the early eighties diminished with the greater convenience of and variety on television, foreign films, and other entertainment options.³⁸ The success of *First Blood* was particularly galling for many studios because it jeopardized their subsidized position with the China Film Corporation, who were responsible for the purchase and distribution of studio productions. One of the people I interviewed said that China Film berated Chinese film studios for the lack of marketable output and implied that three or four Rambo films a year made enough money to support overhead costs of distribution and screening. In contrast to this, Chinese studios were a drain on resources when their output could hardly fill the theatres.³⁹ For example, after the mid-eighties, the cinema audience in Shanghai became so reduced that theatres began setting up other attractions like video parlours and dance halls to attract patrons. Indeed, Shanghai theatres did their best business in the summertime because of the air-conditioning rather than the films. Videos became particularly attractive because theatre managers could approach local distribution offices and design their own programming without having to rely on films assigned from Beijing.⁴⁰

Entertainment and Education

The question why the audience preferred foreign media as opposed to Chinese productions is more complex. Some people feel it is due to government policy that restricts reform in areas of cultural production compared to what has occurred in other areas of economic development. One writer argued that "reform in the economic system has initiated new ideas in the approach to culture and the concept of censorship must also undergo reform."⁴¹ Another article suggested that less restrictions in television programming and video distribution meant that disparities in audiences were not so much a question of media competition but that the competition was unfair because of the greater political censorship in film production.⁴²

It is equally evident, however, that those Chinese films which had censorship problems during the eighties, many of which were created by a new generation of film-makers known as the "fifth generation" would not have drawn an audience whether they were censored or not. The "fifth generation" generally refers to young directors who were teenagers at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and went on to study film at the Beijing Film Academy after it re-opened in 1978 and were among the first graduating class in 1982. Some of these films, like Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* [huangtudi] excited Chinese and Western film scholars because of aesthetic innovations that suggested a new development for Chinese cinema. Yet, with the exception of Zhang Yimou's release of *Red Sorghum* [hong gaoliang] in 1988, most of these films were complete

and utter box office failures. The continuation of strict censorship practise over the Chinese film industry limited the possibility of a director exploiting various genres without worrying about official intervention, but the market was also becoming a factor in stifling aesthetic exploration.⁴³

Consequently, similar to the North American film industry, the development of Chinese cinema as an art was now influenced by commercial considerations. There was considerable discussion in the mid-eighties that endorsed the production of films with more emphasis on entertainment. This was expressed in films that began to explore different genres and multiple plot structures roughly modeled on American developments in film and television.⁴⁴ Some of these films were successful, but political restrictions continued to pose difficulties for Chinese film-makers seeking to break free from an ideological constraints and to gain more experience in producing commercial features that might find a viable market. As a medium which after 1949 was highlighted for its ideological function rather than its entertainment value, however, the commercialization of Chinese cinema still faced political barriers.

Paradoxically, almost as if the supporters of a rigid film policy had remained locked in a celluloid closet since the 1950's, the advent of videotapes resulted in a virtual absence of systematic evaluation or censorship process. Many foreign films or episodes of television programs that were cancelled or not shown publicly for various reasons became available on video. This oversight gives credence to Lull's view that the growth of

television and videos in China "reflects the inability of the government to predict the consequences of the new medium."⁴⁵ Moreover, the question of censorship, regardless of whether one is discussing Chinese or foreign media, has relevance at both a structural *and* cultural level.

For example, both foreign and Chinese films are subjected to a process of inspection that is centralized in Beijing. Television programs, on the other hand, foreign or Chinese, are determined at a local level. How this is manifested is strikingly evident in the differences in television content among various regions in China. Shanghai for example, has a far more varied programming content than Beijing. As the center of government, Beijing is conscious of maintaining political standards that are more loosely interpreted in other areas. As one researcher in the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television commented in our interview, "there is a saying among people in the broadcasting industry. In Beijing, CCTV dispenses distilled water, in Shanghai, boiled water, and in the county stations its coca-cola."⁴⁶

The other aspect of censorship is the sense that what is permissible in foreign films or television for the Chinese audience is not considered appropriate in Chinese productions. Hu Ke, who is responsible for choosing programs for Shanghai TV that Lorimar Pictures provides, says that something as politically sensitive as the notion of individualism, for example, is a part of Western culture and would logically be expressed in Western cultural production. Thus, rejecting a show because it emphasizes

individualism would be inappropriate and futile. The question of individualism in Chinese productions is more of a problem, however, since it is often seen as the essence of "bourgeois liberalism" [zichan jieji ziyouhua] and a threat to a socialist collective spirit.⁴⁷

The most visible expression of the different approach to censorship in foreign and Chinese media is the issue of sexual content. Extended scenes of kissing or lovemaking are certainly censored from foreign films and television and are equally absent in Chinese productions. Open displays of physical affection between men and women, however, are far more visible in American films and television programs shown in China. There are more direct suggestions of sexual titillation in Chinese television productions than film but not to the extent it is allowed to pass in foreign programming. This distinction does not go unnoticed by the Chinese audience. James Lull includes the observation of one woman he interviewed who said, "the content of television should be more open. It's not dangerous to show hugs and kisses. We see this sometimes in foreign programs, but not in Chinese dramas. Why?"⁴⁸

Sexual content in films has always been a problem for the Communist Party. One has only to recall the furore over *Bathing Beauty* after 1949.⁴⁹ Yet the sexual issue can almost be seen as a metaphor for what the Chinese government fears most from the influence of Western values; that Western values will somehow negate and diminish a sense of cultural and national pride that the Communist Party utilized so effectively in their struggle against

imperialism and ultimate ascent to power. With regard to the contemporary era, this fear has been expressed in the different standards applied to Chinese and foreign media. There is a conscious effort to portray Chinese society as a distinct cultural entity that operates on a different and perhaps higher moral plane than non-Chinese cultures. Moreover, there is an assumption that the Chinese audience will absorb those aspects of foreign, especially Western, culture that will enhance social and economic development in China and reject those that will not.

Invasion or Inspiration

The flow of foreign media products into China, like many of the other consequences of China opening the door to Western trade, produced ambivalent reactions. The difference with the experience a century before is that the balance of power lies within the grasp of the Chinese government rather than foreign battleships. Nevertheless, the increased and continually increasing presence of foreign media was also seen in some circles to constitute a "cultural invasion," and not only by conservative factions in the government. However, despite the very real worry that Chinese culture may be threatened by foreign imports, closing the door is also recognized as a an overly drastic solution. Thus, as if controlled by the force of the capricious ideological winds flowing through the corridors of China's political institutions, the gate swings tentatively back and forth between divergent interests.

When a debate arose over the question of foreign media imports in 1988, the most prominent response was one which endorsed the spirit of the open door policy with regard to imported cultural products. In April an article appeared on the front page of Shanghai's **Wenhui Bao** reporting on a recent seminar on imported media attended by members of the city's film and television industry. The discussion was prompted by the head of the Shanghai's Film Bureau, member of the People's Congress and film director, Wu Yigong who made a statement advocating the need for more control on imports because they threatened local culture and China's film industry. Articles disagreeing with Wu's statement appeared in Shanghai's **Wenhui Bao**, **Xinmin Wanbao** and other publications.⁵⁰

The response to Wu's suggestion identified two main problems with government restrictions. One was the idea that if a country is protectionist in the realm of mass culture and does not compete with foreign products, then domestic quality will inevitably be diminished. The other viewpoint, which I think has the most currency among officials who support the open door policy, is that imported programs are educational and help the audience understand the cultural, social and economic characteristics of other countries. Another predicament was also made clear. If television stations decrease the foreign programming the audience complains, but if the station increases the foreign content then some people complain about programming bureaus "worshipping things foreign" [chongyang miwai]. Overall, everyone agreed that one of the problems with foreign media in China was that much of it was low

quality, and efforts should be made to obtain better programs.⁵¹

Ultimately, the discussion of foreign media in China is complicated by the Cultural Revolution which utterly rejected a pluralistic approach to foreign culture. Although Hollywood films were banned from China after 1950, Russian, East European, Indian and some films from Western Europe continued to play in China and were very popular up until the mid-sixties. One irony in contemporary Chinese debates on Western culture, and this is not only restricted to films, is that it is difficult take a critical stance without being aligned with conservative or "leftist" thinking. The strategies of leftist criticism as it is understood in the West have different implications in China because of the various political movements that culminated in the Cultural Revolution.

This phenomenon was reflected in a seminar given in 1986 on a recent exposition of American films. The seminar was attended by scholars of various ages, one of whom related to me the following incident. Apparently many of the older participants were reminiscing on Hollywood films and directors like John Ford and D.W. Griffiths. In the spirit of the discussion, other participants pointed to the high entertainment value in films from the forties, such as *Bathing Beauty*. At this point, one scholar felt compelled to bring up the question of "cultural invasion" and what this meant for Chinese cinema. Much to her surprise, she was accused of harbouring leftist sentiments and that those criticisms should be buried along with the Cultural Revolution. Having herself suffered

the consequences of excessive "leftism" during that time, she found the response to her statement disturbing and remarked on this phenomenon as one of the tragedies of contemporary China, that the politicization of criticism has obscured the real issues at stake.

The years between 1987 and the spring of 1989 were a relatively outspoken period in the history of the People's Republic. Despite the campaign against "bourgeois liberalism" in early 1987, a flowering of expression and exploration continued in the press, television, literature, art and popular culture. Some of the films produced during this period also reflected a desire to re-examine the Chinese experience under socialism. Xie Jin's *A Town Called Hibiscus* [furongzhen] tested the limits in presenting a critical view of how political opportunism and extremism affected the lives of ordinary people. Xie Jin inherited from Cai Chusheng an appreciation for the audience's love of melodrama as well as a technique well-grounded in Hollywood sources. In this suitably stirring combination, the film attracted a large audience.

In the meantime, younger film-makers had been trying to instill a new aesthetic for Chinese film and break away from Xie's emphasis on moral retribution and what they saw as an archaic Hollywood tradition from the 1940's.⁵² Many of these film-makers had been introduced to new aesthetics of cinema from post-war European and Japanese cinema during their time as students at the Beijing Film Academy. Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1985) and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Horsethief* [daomazei] (1985) and *On The Hunting Ground* [liechang zhasha] (1984) are the most prominent examples

cited by Western film scholars, but the "fifth generation" was equally unpopular with the film audience as they were with many older members of the film establishment, not to mention the government. Apart from Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* and some other films which combined both a commercial prerogative and artistic innovation, the openness of the late eighties was not as fruitful for Chinese film, in either aesthetic or economic terms, as it might have been.

An attempt at cultural criticism had more success on television with the broadcast of a six part documentary probing the depths of China's historical legacy. *River Elegy* [heshang] was broadcast on two separate occasions in 1988 and was apparently watched by more than 400 million people.⁵³ Videotapes of the series were also released through official distribution channels. Part of its popularity was the fact that it combined a provocative critique of Chinese culture within a conventional documentary style utilizing voice-over narration, interviews and plethora of both historical Chinese and foreign footage.

River Elegy prompted a vigorous debate in the press but more importantly perhaps, the producers used the television medium to engage the public in issues usually reserved for intellectuals. One report noted that "for the first time, intellectuals have entered the homes of the common people".⁵⁴ Whereas the new generation of film-makers sought to express historical and cultural critiques within the sphere of a new film aesthetic, the creators of *River Elegy* were more concerned with getting the message to as many

people as possible. Rather than focusing on artistic innovation they sought a wider public audience using a conventional style where, "accustomed to historical allegories, the viewers were surely fascinated by the new interpretation of well-known events hammered into them on a melodramatic pitch."⁵⁵ The judgment of government officials, however, was mixed. In the end, the series was banned after its second broadcast in late 1988 and a new attack on *River Elegy* and its producers began in the more severe political atmosphere following the Tiananmen Square incident in June 1989.⁵⁶

Framing these developments in film and television, the reform fever of the late eighties reflected a pre-occupation with making money which stimulated the economy but also caused inflation. Commercial priorities were highlighted in the publishing industry, television and consumer goods production. Advertising, both foreign and Chinese assumed greater visibility in magazines, billboards and particularly on television. It was difficult to perceive at the time, but the events that led up to the confrontation in Tiananmen Square have a conspicuous logic to them in hindsight. Inflation, corruption among Party cadres, and an apparent lift on the ceiling which had restricted dissent in the past were volatile ingredients. Despite the collective shock of the Party's actions, it was certainly not the first time the army had been sent in when things appeared to be getting out of hand.

Tradition and the Consumer

The student demonstrations in the Spring of 1989 and the resulting crackdown by the government had repercussions in film and television production. As a curious juxtaposition to the popularity of *River Elegy*, another television series was an unprecedented success with the audience in late 1990, yet for somewhat different reasons. The issue in the fifty-part dramatic series *Anticipation* [kewang] was not a critique of traditional Chinese ideology but a clarion call to resurrect moral values that could counter what was perceived to be a decline in social mores stemming from the new market economy. *Anticipation* chronicled the tribulations of a household from the Cultural Revolution through to contemporary times. Not only were its ratings among the highest in Chinese television history for a domestic production, it was also praised by government officials. Consider, for example, the observation on the series by the Political Secretary of the Standing Committee of the Politburo, Li Ruihuan:

Like the old saying, "in pleasure, imply learning" [yujiaoyule], the people must first enjoy artistic and literary productions before they can learn from them. We must be adept at using forms the masses love to see and hear in order that the advocacy of socialist ethics and morality will unconsciously and imperceptibly broaden their acceptance among the majority of the people. Under the conditions of socialism, benefits for the masses of the people are the same. This determines new relations where people should be sincere and generous, helpful to each other on an equal basis and harmoniously united in fraternal love. In this new type of relationship between people the inherited moral excellence of the Chinese tradition will carry on under new historical conditions. Our literary and artistic works should put forth the effort to express this type of relationship. *Anticipation* has expressed this very well.⁵⁷

I myself have not seen the series, but it was still being widely discussed when I began research in Shanghai in the spring of 1991.⁵⁸ The evaluation was generally positive, tinged with a perceptible euphoria that a domestic production had been so successful. Yet, when I went to Beijing the following autumn to attend classes there, a more critical appraisal of *Anticipation* was expressed by many people I talked to. Although it was a television show, some of this criticism was directed at the aesthetics of the production, that it relied on melodrama and a conventional shot structure that many Chinese film scholars see as the block which prevents Chinese cinema from transcending the burden of theatrical influences.

Some intellectuals simply abhorred the content itself with the view that *Anticipation* was a ploy to rekindle "the moral excellence of the Chinese tradition" to detract the audience from demanding further political and economic reform in government policy. This is reflective of the period in late 1991 where the resurgence of conservative forces in the Party dismayed many Beijing intellectuals, and indeed, ordinary citizens, who were still recovering from the shock of 1989. Generally speaking, I did not perceive the same sense of despair and bitterness among people in Shanghai which was undergoing a new period economic rejuvenation.

The propaganda aspect of *Anticipation* was highlighted in the main character, Hui Fang. She possessed a sense of personal duty and self-sacrifice that was meant to portray a model against the growing alienation and selfishness in Chinese society seen to be a

result of the economic reform process. Although not so explicitly stated, she might well reflect a contemporary version of the "Lei Feng" spirit. However, another reading of her characterization suggested that *Anticipation* had a more insidious message. Hui Fang's self-sacrifice and "moral excellence" is expressed through her willingness to give up her job and personal comforts to raise an abandoned child. One elderly woman I talked to said this reiterated the traditional role of women as care-givers who sacrificed their independent development and was not realistic. For this reason, she was disgusted with the popular hoopla over the series and its capacity to mesmerize viewers.

Nevertheless, the success of *Anticipation* gave Chinese television producers new confidence in their abilities. The series was produced by a newly-established studio run by people imbued with a keen awareness of marketing and production based on Western models. In addition, *Anticipation* was unique in its treatment of contemporary issues, shrewdly embossed by the proverbial melodrama that the general audience adores. My impression is that other television productions popular with the urban audience usually had themes based in periods prior to 1949 which allowed for more flexibility where an emphasis on the superiority of socialism and the Party can be expressed obliquely. More attention could be given to the story itself to depict a variety of social classes with more ambiguous portrayals than might be possible in contemporary settings.

Anticipation managed to provide a highly entertaining narrative and strong character development that surpassed previous productions exploring contemporary themes. It was also aided by technological developments since most Chinese television, like film, is dubbed in post-production which often gives the dialogue and other sound qualities a decidedly contrived feel. Conversely, *Anticipation* was shot completely in a studio, which gave the producers greater control over sound quality and, as far as I know, sync-sound was used to record the dialogue in situ. The superiority of this method was evident in the studio's next production, *Stories from the Editing Department* [bianjibu de gushi] where the use of sync-sound gave the producers greater accuracy and flexibility for the recording of the rapid-fire comic dialogue. As one of the first situation comedy series in Chinese television, the show was well-written and featured a satirical edge rarely expressed in Chinese television dramas. It depicted the exploits of a group of people publishing a lifestyle magazine in Beijing and was very popular with urban audiences when it ran in early 1992. It is clear from these two productions by the Beijing Television Art Center, simply by their high ratings, that the potential for Chinese television to develop a more appreciative and interested audience faced better prospects in the early nineties than the besieged film industry.

The political atmosphere after 1989 did not have the same effect on foreign media that it did with Chinese. With regard to American television programs, aside from stricter limitations on foreign media for the Beijing audience, other areas in China were

relatively unaffected. Hu Ke said the only change for their programming at Shanghai Television was the cancellation of a proposed series about the French Revolution. There was an apparent resurgence of political critiques in evaluations of American films, but this, as far as I know, also appears to have been limited to Beijing. For example, a short article introducing the broadcast of the *Dynasty* series to Beijing viewers emphasized that it was "a necessary product of American society and authentically shows the imminent danger of the upper classes and the uncertain future of a dark reality". A somewhat surprising conclusion was the suggestion that *Dynasty* "reveals the theme of critical realism in contemporary American film and television."⁵⁹ The views of the director who dubbed *Dynasty* into Chinese were published in another report which used stronger language.

This show resembles a kaleidoscope that refracts the dark and repulsive background of capitalism's extreme competitiveness. Speaking about the significance of broadcasting this series, Wu Shan (the dubbing director) said that in spite of the difference between lifestyle and national conditions [of our two countries], the lifestyle and moral outlook of a decadent and moribund capitalism must be criticized.⁶⁰

The consequences for the film industry in this revival of politicized bluster after 1989 were far more visible. Millions of yuan were invested in film productions chronicling revolutionary history and heroes. "China's hardline media masters have [had] plenty of recent experience creating prettified icons out of the unprepossessing flotsam of communist history" was how one Western reporter described the trend in a suitably irreverent language.⁶¹ With the releases of *Jiao Yulu*, *Birth of New Nation* [kaitian pidi],

Mao Zedong and His Son [maozedong he ta de erzi], *Zhou Enlai* and a three part series, *Great Strategic Battles* [da juezhan], it was as if Beijing's conservative factions were trying a different propaganda tact by marketing official versions of history with a magnitude equal to that of any self-respecting Hollywood promoter. The fanfare which accompanied these films was impressive, but urban theatres were mostly filled by reviving the policy [baochang] of dispensing free tickets to all work units.⁶²

It is ironic that a highly successful accompaniment to the emphasis on revolutionary history was a concurrent commercial phenomenon at the grass-roots level. In 1990 and early 1991, a number of revolutionary songs were revived and broadcast on television and radio as part of an official program. An interesting and related offspring to this new propaganda drive was the appearance of well-known songs from the Cultural Revolution re-issued in modified disco beat versions. During the 1992 Spring Festival holiday in Shanghai it was difficult to avoid hearing these songs blaring out from private-enterprise [getihu] tape shops and other retail outlets. Although their popularity may seem somewhat perverse, (one friend of mine swore he would never allow any of this music to be played in his house) these songs clearly struck a nostalgic chord in the hearts of many patrons, now erstwhile consumers, who grew up during that era.

It was at this time that Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai decals were also creeping their way northward, after taxi-drivers in Guangdong province began hanging pictures of Mao from their rear-view

mirrors. Some say they emerged as a talisman for leadership in uncertain times, while other explanations suggested they were commemorations for the one hundred year anniversary of Mao's birth. In any case, Mao's picture began appearing everywhere as a marketable item, on decals, T-shirts and cigarette lighters. We might recall the allure of the China market for Europeans in the nineteenth century and see its national manifestation as another incarnation of the opium metaphor, this time highlighting the somewhat dubious glory of Mao's political leadership. For the entrepreneur in contemporary China of what importance are the scars or blessings of history "when you have a market of consumers in thrall to your product, to whom you have no responsibilities whatsoever?"⁶³

The Power and the Glory

"Wherein lies the power of American film", a reader of **Popular Film** asked Shao Mujun in 1985 in a letter to the veteran Chinese scholar of foreign films. Shao attempted to explain his feelings on the subject. He began by outlining the success of Hollywood movies in cornering the markets of the world. No, he said, it was not in the huge expenditures of capital, the marketing and advertising or the technical proficiency or the depictions of sex and violence. He cited the views of indignant European film-makers who pointed to imperialism and unfair trade practices and concluded that these too were important aspects, but secondary. "In the end," he said,

"people are interested in American films because they are interested in America."

So what is it in the final analysis that attracts the world audience? As I see it, the main attraction is in the American way of life....What can be called American lifestyle primarily refers to material aspects, from the luxurious buildings to beautiful clothing and brilliant cars to the dazzling entertainment venues, colourful city lights and the bizarre motley world of technology. Because of its wealth of natural resources, immigrant population and respect for individual freedom that encourages and allows for the development of talent, it has achieved the highest production and living standards in the world. For all the millions of people in the world who live under difficult conditions, America seems like a golden paradise. The strength in American films is their ability to reflect this lifestyle which the whole world fixes its attention on. It is this portrayal of a dazzling image that has given American films their long-lasting and enduring competitive edge.⁶⁴

Not a few of us would feel compelled to refute Shao's claim. His correspondent was certainly offended and fired off an angry reply, indignantly asserting that he and his comrades [tongzhi] objected to Shao's implying they were interested in American films because they admired American lifestyle. Unfortunately their argument was not nearly as polished or convincing as Shao's reply. If we relinquish the tendency to dismiss Shao's musings as insufficiently grounded in political economy and focus on his emphasis on what American films reflect about America then his observation is more interesting. Shao is among the generation of intellectuals who were educated at Western-style universities in Shanghai. He graduated in an era when American films were about to fall from the pinnacle of domination in Shanghai's cinemas. We might conclude then that he has pondered the various political, economic and cultural qualities that inform Hollywood's success in

the global market from a unique position. In the end he chooses an explanation which in many ways provides an essentially cultural basis to the "cultural imperialism" thesis.⁶⁵

Despite Shao's conviction that American films dominate the world market for their universal appeal, however, he has at the same time been influenced by China's particular experience with American films. His tendency to give global dimensions to the quality that makes American films attractive in the Chinese context may not be applicable to other situations. John Tomlinson is sceptical of the idea of universalism and the attempt to use it as a viable component of the "cultural" in the discourse on cultural imperialism. He refutes the presumption that the films of one culture necessarily convey the same information to another and questions the argument expressed in an article written by Michael Tracey who suggested that the films of Charlie Chaplin were universally appealing. Tracey asks, "[W]as it not Chaplin's real genius to strike some common chord, uniting the whole world of humanity? Is that not, in fact, the real genius of American popular culture, to bind together, better than anything else, common humanity?"⁶⁶

Tomlinson points out the "ideological and hermeneutic" problems in this analysis. First of all, how is it possible to know that a comic representative from another culture could not have similar appeal if their channels for marketing were as universal as they were for Chaplin.

One major reason why Chaplin's humour can be plausibly seen as universal is that it is universally *present*.

Quite obviously, if his films had never been distributed outside America, he would never have been a candidate. The force of this argument is seen when we think that no Mongolian or Balinese comedian has been suggested, by Western critics, as striking the chord of common humanity. We cannot sensibly separate this fact from the difference in global media power between these countries and the United States.⁶⁷

Secondly, and this to me is the most intriguing question, how is it possible to know that audiences the world over are enjoying American media on the basis of a common interpretation.⁶⁸ This is where the role of history comes strikingly into play. Could not a plausible argument be constructed to suggest that what appealed to the middle-school students who flocked to screening of Rambo's exploits in *First Blood* was similar to the enthusiasm among middle-school students for Russian films that were shown at the Isis theatre in Shanghai at the beginning of the 1930's? The political dynamics informing the reasons for the appeal of films from Soviet films in the 1930's is quite evident, but from a *cultural* perspective certain parallels emerge. Russian films in the thirties were an alternative to anything that had been seen in the past. Could not the same qualities be attributed to such a film as *First Blood*? What in fact was so evidently a part of mainstream film culture in North America was not in the Chinese context in 1985.

The response to American films in the early 1980's came from a cultural environment quite unfamiliar with the context in which these films were created. Much of their attraction was both in their exotic quality and the expression of issues that were interpreted as relevant to the Chinese context. Whether or not the appeal for Chinese films differs from that of Americans is

difficult to determine. Rather I think it is more fitting to see the question in terms of degrees, where certain aspects have an *accentuated* appeal in China.

For example, Chaplin appealed to Shanghai audiences before 1949 for his irreverent swipes at authoritarian structures. Leftist intellectuals admired his criticism of capitalism.⁶⁹ Yet the former characteristic is something that appealed to the new audience for his films in the late seventies and throughout the eighties. The popularity of the *Hunter* television series in China is a similar example inasmuch as viewers appreciated the impatient detective Hunter and his partner McCall, who frequently thwart bureaucratic and authoritarian intransigence. At another level, the American series *Falconbridge* was popular for its depiction of family intrigue among the rich upper class and the family comedy *Growing Pains* was entertaining for its humorous approach to raising children.⁷⁰ These characteristics are generally absent from Chinese mainstream film and television dramas. Hence, whether as novelties or something representative of a deeper meaning, these shows had a high ratings success with urban audiences.

But it is also evident, at least from my impression of the contemporary Shanghai audience, that as viewers become more accustomed to foreign media, they are also becoming more demanding. By the late eighties, not all American shows on Chinese television or films in the cinema were a guaranteed success. For example, letters to the Shanghai Television Station expressed a lukewarm response to an American drama set in a television news station,

Studio No. 5 that played in 1991. Viewers complained that the interwoven plot structure was often confusing to follow and that there were too many references to events in contemporary America which were unfamiliar to the Chinese audience. Similarly, the detective-cum-comedy series *Matt Houston* had poorer ratings than the previously broadcast *Hunter* series. The audience did not apparently warm to a combination of comedy within the detective genre.⁷¹

Another example was a Michael Mann production set in the early sixties. *Crime Story* experienced a short run on the U.S. networks and had an equally short lifespan on Chinese television because of poor ratings. People I talked to in informal conversations had difficulty understanding my appreciation of the show's attention to detail in replicating the design styles and fashion from the early sixties. They thought it was merely old-fashioned and did not grasp the periodicity of the setting. Indeed, some people thought it was not a contemporary production but an old series sloughed off for release in foreign countries.

Perhaps the most striking example of how cultural specificity plays a role in determining the appeal of certain productions over others was revealed in my interview with Cao Lei, a woman who directs the dubbing of foreign films at Shanghai Film Studios. She had many reservations regarding the films imported into China, particularly those with excessive violence exemplified in works like *Running Man* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. Yet she added that certain films considered to be high quality cinema among film

scholars would have difficulty in attracting an audience in China because of esoteric or highly contextual language. She said that Woody Allen's films were virtually impossible to translate with voice-over dubbing, which is in the norm in China, as opposed to subtitles. The cultural differences that shape how the urban audience interpreted American media productions was further reflected in the limited appeal of American programs among the rural audiences, who preferred Chinese shows and series from Hong Kong and Taiwan.⁷²

It is also important to realize that the variety of foreign media production in China gives an international dimension to film and television culture that influences audience tastes. Melodramas from Japanese television had wide appeal for a short time until audiences tired of their repetitiveness. Similarly, Latin American soap operas were very popular in the late eighties, primarily among middle-aged women, for their emotional episodes about love and romance. Productions from the former Soviet Union and East Bloc countries had resonance in China because of the satirical jabs aimed at bureaucratism and dogmatism in socialist governments that could be appreciated on the basis of common experience.⁷³

American films and programs are preferred by some people, but the mere presence of other options creates a different cultural dynamic than what exists in other countries where American media tends to dominate the airwaves. Since the development of video distribution in China, the demand for Hong Kong and Taiwan films, both through official and illegal channels, has grown enormously.

I hesitate to predict the future but it is difficult to imagine a situation where American media productions will assume the dominant position it had in the past in China. In this light then, the political transformation in 1949 indirectly gave China certain advantages over other East Asian countries who did not choose the path to socialist revolution. After a long period of isolation, its television and film culture in the contemporary era is far richer in an international sense than can be said about most other areas in the world.

Furthermore, to end this discussion on an optimistic note, by the time I left China in September 1992, the resurgence of support for more economic reform inspired by Deng Xiaoping's visit to the southern economic zones appears to have prompted officials to take a more flexible approach to cultural production. A speech in the summer by the Political Secretary, Li Ruihuan, hinted that cultural policy would become more relaxed and, in contrast to his statement given in connection to *Anticipation* in January 1991, he added that "artistic and literary" production did not necessarily have to emphasize an educational component.⁷⁴ Concurrently, the previously banned films directed by Zhang Yimou, *Ju Duo* and *Raise the Red Lanterns*[dahong denglong gaogao gual], played in Chinese cinemas that August.⁷⁵ As a result of the controversy these films and their director had incited in the past, the films were drawing audiences in Shanghai before I left, giving a much needed boost to Shanghai theatre managers who have seen their film audience dwindle so drastically in recent years.

Whether the release of these films was a direct indication of a less stringent approach to cultural policy or the fact that Zhang Yimou was in favour with government officials who praised his most recent production of *Qiu Ju's Lawsuit* [qiuju daguansi] is difficult to say.⁷⁶ In any case, it suggests that the short-term prospects for Chinese film-makers may be more promising than they were in 1990 and 1991. At that time, many intellectuals feared cultural production was entering an era reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution where political themes emphasizing the superiority of socialism were resolutely and strictly endorsed.

Revolutionary Dreams and Nightmares

It is clear to me that much of the criticism against American films that emerged among intellectuals in the pre-1949 era was grounded in nationalist aspirations and cultural pride aroused by Western and Japanese imperialism. Yet at the same time, as I have tried to point out, American films influenced both intellectuals and the popular audience in ways that cannot necessarily be explained in political terms. An emphasis on the positive or negative effects resulting from the dissemination of foreign cultural values, particularly when those cultural values are backed up by powerful forces, tends to obscure the complexity of culture itself. Highlighting such effects is useful for the purposes of political resistance or inspiration, but it is difficult to know the result for cultural expression and continuity. In the age when China was struggling against Western and Japanese economic and

political domination it is fairly obvious that Hollywood movies instilled a variety of reactions in the Chinese, not all of which can be evaluated using concepts derived from the notion of cultural imperialism or critical theory. What John Tomlinson refers to as "the ambiguities of cultural modernity" in his review of various theories on Western development and its global implications applies equally well to the history of American films in China since the 1900's.⁷⁷

Furthermore, a revolution based on Marxist principles occurred in China yet it did not necessarily engender a rejection of what might be called "capitalist" or "bourgeois" values. Many critical Westerners are dismayed at China's turn towards an economic system that resembles capitalism. The presence of American products like Coca-cola and MacDonaldis on the Chinese market is a disturbing trend to Westerners who see it in the context of what diminishes the quality of culture in North America, excessive commercialism. American television shows might also be seen as one more nail in the coffin for socialist ideals. Certainly the rampant commercialization and commoditization taking place in China today worries many Chinese as well. More specifically, many film scholars bemoan the influence of Hollywood films on aspiring film-makers and the gradual migration of talent into the advertising agencies.

It is undeniable that changes in Chinese society because of economic reforms have created problems which at their most extreme threaten to destabilize social and political order. The government and populace alike fear the spectre of a chaotic future and the

former often uses this fear to legitimize political repression. Yet I am convinced that trends towards the "worship of things foreign" and commercialism are exacerbated by a lack of openness in public discourse that would allow a greater discussion of these issues outside that which is officially condoned.⁷⁸ In short, if all criticism of Western influences is appropriated by the government for propaganda purposes, it will only increase the appeal of these influences among people dissatisfied with China's current political structure. The logic in the equation of Chinese pride and identity with the legacy of the Chinese Communist Party has already begun to disintegrate in many sectors of Chinese society.

Foreign influences have provoked a variety of responses in Chinese society over the last century. The presence of American media is but one small cog in the wheel of change propelling history, but it continues to incite both fears and hopes for the future among Chinese. Ultimately, the issue of maintaining a distinct Chinese identity forms the core of these reactions. Patriotic beliefs are, as everywhere, expressed in a variety of different ways and reveal a tension between viewpoints on what constitutes tradition, what should be enhanced and what should be discarded. If we recall a section of the quote included at the beginning of this chapter, where "the wild ambitions of Westerners are still bent on subjugating our country," such indignation can be seen as an invocation for Chinese pride. Yet it also obfuscates a more pressing and long-standing issue in Chinese history that combines patriotism with a critical examination of Chinese culture

itself. The same writer concludes his article with the observation that Hong Shen's denunciation of the film *Welcome Danger* "displayed a keen sense of respect and obligation to defend the Chinese nation that set an example well worth remembering." Indeed, what nationality willingly succumbs to the ridicule of foreigners? Yet his last line is more problematic, lamenting how, "it appears, that in our creative productions of recent years, examples of this type of grand patriotic aspiration are far too rare, really far too rare."⁷⁹

It is difficult to know what Hong Shen would make of this statement. He died in 1955 but had he lived through the anti-rightist movement, the Cultural Revolution and up to contemporary times would he have turned his critical eye inwards in remembrance of the May Fourth movement which sought to radically change Chinese culture? That May Fourth intellectuals were "unpatriotic" is a spurious suggestion yet such a premise has legitimized the repression of May Fourth-style criticism in both the Kuomintang and Communist regimes. The lack of patriotic expression the writer mentioned above laments is not necessarily a factor, as he thinks, of "worshipping things foreign" but reflects a crisis among intellectuals engaged in defining what Chinese culture is supposed to represent. The people? The past? The Communist Party?

My understanding of Chinese history since 1949 leaves me with the impression that the Chinese government have themselves succeeded in undermining the foundation for a national identity far more effectively than foreign invasions, cultural or otherwise.

Indeed, the struggle against imperialism is what brought the Communist Party to power *because* they highlighted the promise of a "new" China and the prospect of cultivating a new tradition unencumbered by the past. Cinema is but one aspect of cultural expression where none of these promises have bared fruit. Film production was harnessed to confine criticism rather than liberate unexplored dimensions of Chinese culture. One could even argue that, with some exceptions during periods of greater political openness, the tendency in most Chinese films since 1949 was to stereotype good and evil in political terms which has belittled Chinese reality to the point of inspiring parody not pride. If he were here today, reviewing the surrounding wreckage of excessive revolutionary zeal and the bleak skeleton of the critical consciousness he fostered, would that Hong Shen might feel the compunction to rise up on a stage, in his long gown and scarf, and proclaim, "this show is an insult to the Chinese people and we demand our money back." Who knows what retributions of history will be paid back in the future?

ENDNOTES: Chapter 5

1. Shi Feng, "Da Guangming Shijian" Zagan [Random Thoughts on the "Grand ("Welcome Danger") Incident"], **Shanghai Tan**, June (1990), p. 32.
2. People in Shanghai frequently complain of the high tax revenue from Shanghai's industrial sector which is collected by the Beijing government every year. The policy has left little funding for improving the city's infrastructure. In recent years, foreign investment, particularly in the new Pudong development and the construction of a subway system, has been one source of funds for upgrading communication and other urban facilities.
3. There are altogether sixteen film studios in China that produce feature films and numerous other production operations throughout the country. The largest are in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Changchun. Since the early eighties, however, the most interesting films in China have come out of the Guangxi and Xian Film studios. Furthermore, there has been an increasing trend of studios producing films with foreign investment and co-productions, particularly from Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.
4. Zhang Lin, *TV A Big Turn-On For China*, **China Daily** [CD] 18 November 1991. It is estimated that there are 140 million television sets in China, but this seems to be a rather low figure.
5. A discussion of the video market and other media developments in China is a rich area for research. In the interests of time and space, I cannot include a comprehensive discussion on this subject here. A newspaper article written in 1990 estimated that 10.5% of households in Shanghai had VCRs. Wu Baiqi, *Luxiangji Jinru Jiating Zhihou* [After the VCR Enters the Household], **Shanghai Dianshi**, June (1990), p. 27-28. Again, I think this is a low figure. Some people I talked to suggested a figure around 15%. The General Manager of Shanghai Video, Gao Xiangrong, suggested in a newspaper interview in 1988 that one third of Shanghai households would have VCRs by 1990, from Ren Guicun, *Guanyu Luxiang De Duihua* [Dialogue About Video], **Jiefang Ribao** [JFRB] 4 June 1988, n. pag. In addition, video parlours constitute a more abundant entertainment venue than cinemas. In Shanghai there are more than 500 places registered to show videos. While many videos are passed around by friends and acquaintances, it is also possible to rent videos from various rental outlets. Cable systems and satellite TV is another area of rapid development as well.
6. The difference in attitudes between Shanghai and Beijing citizens is strikingly evident when it comes to discussions of politics. My own generalized impression is that people in Beijing are much more pre-occupied with current political affairs while in Shanghai the subject takes a secondary role to various strategies on how to get better accommodation, how to become commercially successful, and

among young people, how to leave the country. With regards to the audience for film and television, many people I interviewed pointed out this difference among the two regions, particularly Lou Shifang from the Shanghai Television Station Research Institute (interview, June 1991) and Jin Wenxiong, research associate at the Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television in Beijing (interview, July 1992).

7. Clark, *The Sinification of Cinema: The Foreignness of Film in China*, p. 181. It should also be noted here that Jiang Qing frequently brought in American films through Hong Kong for her own private screenings. One among her favorites was *The Dove*. There was also some speculation among some film artists I talked to that "model operas" were in part inspired by Jiang Qing's appreciation of Hollywood musicals.

8. The practise of "neibu" internally circulated screenings still continues today in China. The films are usually not obtained under copyright regulations, nor are they censored. In Shanghai such films are primarily shown at the old Strand theatre [xinguang] and scalpers hawk tickets on the street. People who are obviously foreigners (like myself) are regularly refused entrance ostensibly because of some perverse paranoia that they will alert the copyright police abroad. I once experienced a regretful altercation with a door manager when a friend arranged for a group of us to see *Prizzi's Honour*. At the time I didn't understand the situation (nor did anyone enlighten me) and was unduly upset when my Japanese and Chinese companions sauntered through the entrance while I had to wait outside until the film was over. Similarly, the foreign affairs office at the Drama Academy politely explained that I couldn't attend the seasonal "neibu" screenings and hoped I was not offended.

9. *Yuandan Qijiang Shangyin Yi Pi Zhongwai Yingpian* [Chinese and Foreign Film Screenings Will Be Shown on New Year's Eve], **Renmin Ribao** [RMRB] 29 December 1978, p. 4. *Chunjie Yingmo Fengfu Duocai* [Spring Festival Movie Screens Will Be Rich and Colourful], [RMRB] 23 January 1979, p. 4. *Meiguo Dianying Yizhou De Jingpin Zhanlan* [Exhibition To Show Excellent Examples of American Film Art], [RMRB] 9 May 1981. *Youyi De Jiaoliu* [A Beneficial Exchange], **Guangming Ribao** [GMRB] 16 May 1981, p. 3. Some of these early screenings also included old Chinese films such as *Spring River Flows East*, *Crossroads* and others.

10. The screening of *First Blood* was reported in the U.S., which is where the comment came from about it being the first American film for many people. Wu Jian (trans), *Meiguo Xinwenjie Dui "Di Yi Dixue" Zai Hua Shangyin De Fanyin* [The Response of American Journalists To The Screening of "First Blood" in China] Translated article from the **Chicago Tribune**, *Shijie Dianying Dongtai*, January (1986), p. 31.

11. James Lull conducted extensive interviews in households for his book **China Turned On: Television Reform and Resistance** (New York: Routledge, 1991). Altogether he talked to approximately three-hundred people in Shanghai, Beijing and Xian in 1986. Although I referred to his work for my research, his study was not specifically directed at the question of foreign or American media.

12. Quotes taken respectively from Cui Cunren, *Tan Meiguo Yingpian "Che Dui"* [Talking About the American Film "Convoy"], **Heilongjiang Ribao** [HLJRB] 4 August 1979 and Nan Sheng, *Li Jiexing, Zenme Yang Kan Meiguo Yingpian "Che Dui"* [How To Look At The American Film "Convoy"], **Hubei Ribao** [HBRB], April 11, 1979. Unfortunately, these were the only reviews I could find on *Convoy*. They were compiled, along with another review from **Jiangxi Ribao**, in the foreign film reviews collection at the Shanghai Drama Academy library. I assume there was more press coverage of *Convoy*, but it was not listed in the Chinese Press and Periodical Index and I felt these examples were sufficient.

13. Nan Sheng and Li Jiexing, **HBRB**.

14. Indeed, people whom I interviewed for the pre-1949 era often spoke of the newer American films they had seen in the theatres with disdain but said they enjoyed some of the TV series.

15. Of course, skeptics might point out that in 1980, the streets in the evening, even on a Saturday night, would hardly be teeming with people in any case. However, I don't think the observation here is exaggerated.

16. Zhao Cun, *Meiguo Dianshipian "Jialishen Gansi Dui" Ting Bo Qianhou* [The Before and After of the Cancellation of the American Television Show "Garrison Guerrillas"], **Wenyi Qingkuang** 21 February 1981, p. 10.

17. Zhao Cun, **Wenyi Qingkuang**, p. 11. The author included the information that CCTV purchased this show for 39,000 USD, which must have been seen as a terrible waste of money when it was cancelled after only three months. CCTV bought 26 episodes, 15 were broadcast.

18. Ge Jin, *Ye Tan Meiguo Dianshi Pian "Jialishen Gansidui" Tingbo Qianhou* [More Talk about the Before and After of the Cancellation of the American Television Show "Garrison's Guerrillas"], **Wenyi Qingkuang** 23 April 1981, p. 5.

19. Lull, p. 4-5.

20. Clark, Paul, *Two Hundred Flowers on China's Screens, in Perspectives On Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 57.

21. Zhao Cun, **Wenyi Qingkuang**, p. 11. This comment was from one of the letters to the TV station regarding the cancellation of *Garrison*.

22. Li Man (trans), *Zhongguo Shuru Yingpian De Yuanze* [China's Film Import Policy] (Translated From Spanish Film Journal), **Shijie Dianying Dongtai**, (month?), 1985, p. 31. This article was given to me by someone at the Film Bureau with whom I was discussing import policy. He did not include the dates of publication.

23. This is a frequent complaint from film scholars with regard to American films released in the cinema, that those responsible for film selection are not knowledgeable about film art and have little sense of what constitutes a good film. On a more general level, people also complain that the films chosen are not interesting.

24. I often heard this idea expressed in general conversations with friends and acquaintances and it was certainly a popular perception in the West during the 1980's regarding China's broadcasting of American films and television shows. See, for example, *China's View of America: Crime, Poverty, Tension*, **U.S. News and World Report** 26 September 1983, p. 39.

25. Information on the cancellation of *Rambo* after a long run at the theatres was given to me by a researcher at the Film Bureau. Another internal publication surveyed both the response from Chinese and Western press sources to the release of *First Blood* in China. One surprising citation was from a Beijing newspaper that said the film possessed "a serious theme and wholesome content [neirong jiankang], deep social significance and comparatively high artistic standards. It was a fine example of recent American cinema," quoted in Xu Shuping, *Weishenme You Jingkou Zheyang De Yingpian* [Why Import This Kind of Film], **Wenyijie Tongxun**, March (1986), p. 28. This statement was originally published in Beijing *Wanbao* [BJWB] 8 July 1985. Wu Jian's translated article in **Shijie Dianying Dongtai** mentioned that government officials promoted the film as an anti-war film, p. 31. Not surprisingly, American reports thought such evaluations were grossly misplaced (as did many film scholars in China) and were perplexed why Chinese authorities would allow such a film into China, particularly with its emphasis on questioning authority. The article also mentioned the criticisms of long time British resident in Beijing, David Crook who had written a letter to the *China Daily* protesting the film. Negative opinions of the film in the article were attributed to foreigners and supportive views to Chinese sources.

26. He Wei (trans.), "*Chaoren*" *Cong Beijing Xiaoshi* [The Disappearance of "Superman" from Beijing] Translated Article from the **New York Times**, **Shijie Dianying Dongtai**, (month?), 1986, p. 34. The disapproval of *Superman* was confined to Beijing. The film continued to play in Shanghai and other regions in China.

27. I would like to thank Pat Howard for telling me about this film and the response in the Chinese press.

28. He Ming, (letter to the editor), *Maiké Tangna = Leifeng Ma?* [Does Mike Tanner Equal Leifeng?], **Qingnian Bao** [QNB] 15 October 1982, p. 1. The expressions "wujiang simei" and "jingshen wenming" were used widely in the eighties reform period to promote a public awareness of public hygiene, environmental aesthetics and proper social and moral behaviour. Wendy Larson translates "wujiang simei" as the "five concerns and the four beauties," see Larson, p. 68. "Jingshen wenming" which I roughly translate as "civilized spirit" is a more elusive concept, but alludes to the development of "civilized values" that adhere to the policy of the four modernizations.

29. He Ming, **QNB** 25 October 1982, p. 1.

30. Huang Jingyao, *Juyou Gongchanzhuyi Sixiang Ma?* [Does It Possess A Sense of Communist Ideology?], **QNB** 25 October 1982, p. 4.

31. Ni Shi ?, *Jinyuan Shijie Gei "Renxing" Yushangle Shenme Secai* [What Hues Does The World of Money Give To "Human Nature"], **QNB** 5 November 1982, p. 7.

32. For example, as expressed in, Li Guojian, *Yi Ge Jinbu* [A Progressive Step], **QNB** 5 November 1982, p. 7.

33. Lu Guojian, *Maiké Tangna Shi Lei Feng De "Zhangbei"* [Mike Tanner Is Lei Feng's "Elder"], **QNB** 5 November 1982, p. 7.

34. Wu Kan, *Ni You Changchu, Jiu Xiang Ni Xue?* [You Have Good Qualities, Can I Learn From You?], **QNB** 5 November 1982, p. 7.

35. Paul Pickowicz discusses three films from the early eighties that explored sensitive subjects, *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* [tianyun shan chuanqi], *A Corner Forgotten by Love* [bei aiqing yiwang de jiaoluo] and *At Middle Age* [Ren Dao Zhongnian]. See, *Popular Cinema and Political Thought in Post-Mao China in Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic*, eds. Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul Pickowicz (London: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 37-53. He mentions here the controversy and banning of *Bitter Love* in 1981 which alarmed many writers, artists and film-makers that cultural expression would never be able to transcend political boundaries.

36. Lull, p. 59. James Lull discusses this in more depth throughout Chapter Five. One Chinese television researcher I talked to offered a similar view that "the presence of television in the last ten years is an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of China in that all areas of China have a window on the outside world." Perhaps because both he and Lull are scholars in media studies I

think they may put more emphasis on the influence of television in China than might be warranted. A situation has not arisen, as occurred in the U.S. during the Vietnam war, where television content has the potential to sway public opinion to the extent it may reject the policies of the ruling party. Television's flexibility in China, relative to film, still rests on the structure of its dissemination, the local factor as opposed to the centralization of film distribution, but it is still wholly within the bounds of state control. Lull touches upon this briefly in his mention of the autonomy of TV stations, (p. 26) but I'm not sure how much of this is a factor of the medium itself or of the government structure which can permit some local autonomy in programming.

37. Gao Xinhua, Dept. of Advertising at the Shanghai Television Station (STV), interview, May 1991. Zhou Fanyang, Senior Journalist and former Director of STV, interview, June 1991. Liu Jingqi, Vice-director of International Bureau, interview, STV, June 1991.

38. Some people I talked to felt that part of the reason cinema attendance fell off in Shanghai was the inconvenience of getting to the theatre when one could just as well stay home and watch television. In addition, besides the lack of good entertainment on film, the theatres are in poor repair and uncomfortable to spend time in. For these reasons, at least one person said he never goes to the cinema anymore.

39. The decline in attendance for Chinese films is well-documented in English sources. See, Ma Qiang, *Chinese Film in the 1980's: Art and Industry*, pp. 165-173 and Shao Mujun, *Chinese Film Amidst the Tide of Reform*, pp. 199-208 in Dissanayake. This subject is also discussed in Chris Berry, *Market Forces: China's "Fifth Generation" Faces the Bottom Line* in his **Perspectives on Chinese Cinema**. The latter book also features a letter from a cinema worker on page 125 lamenting the loss of an audience for Chinese films. He includes the following observation on why Chinese audiences prefer foreign films. "Some filmgoers are very sarcastic about it: 'When you go to see a foreign film, your chances of being taken for a ride are four to one against, but when it's a Chinese film, four times out of five you're duped. Who wants to pay more money to be made a fool of?'" From Mo Zhong, *A Reader's Letter That Will Make People Think* [yifeng qi ren shensi de duzhe lai xin], **Popular Cinema**, Aug. 1987, p. 2 (translated by Chris Berry).

40. This advantage of videos over film was expressed in my conversations with Shanghai theatre managers.

41. This is from an anonymous article commenting on viewpoints that were aired at a seminar on censorship policy in Guangzhou. *Wo Guo Dianying Shencha Zhidu Ji Dai Gaige* [China's Censorship System Urgently Awaits Reform], **Yingmu**, January (1987), p. 5.

42. Chen Chaoyu, *Dianying Huhuan Falu* [Film Calls Out For Law], *Shanghai Fayuan*, November (1990), p. 43.

43. A detailed discussion of members of the "fifth generation" can be found in Tony Rayn's introduction to **King of Children and the New Chinese Cinema** (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 1-58.

44. The discussion on entertainment films [yulepian] was covered extensively in Chinese film journals. It is also discussed in Chris Berry's article, *Market Forces: China's "Fifth Generation" Faces the Bottom Line*. Different approaches to genre and plot structures is discussed in Hua Jian, *Leixinghua De Tiaozhan He Qid*: [Inspiration and Challenge of Patternization: On the Impact of American Films and TV Plays On Chinese Visual Art Productions], **Zhongguo Bijiao Wenxue**, February (1991), pp. 129-140. My thanks to Hua Jian for giving me a copy of his article.

45. Lull, p. 28. Many people I talked to expressed the confusion of the government on how to manage videos in China. In the mid-eighties, all personal VCRs were supposed to be registered but as ownership became more abundant it became impossible to enforce this policy. The most vocal fear about videos appears to be directed at their influence on children. See, for example, the newspaper article *Jiaqiang Dui Zhong Xiao Xuesheng Kan Luxiang De Yindao* [Strengthen Guidance Towards Video Viewing by Primary and Middle School Students], **JFRB** 3 October 1991, p. 2. In addition, the illegal distribution of pornographic videos is a widespread phenomenon throughout the country.

46. The flexibility in programming also operates on a quasi-illegal basis, as became clear in my interviews with television personnel. For example, pirating of both domestically and foreign produced shows occurs which are then broadcast on local stations. This also occurs with advertising. Claudine Schmuck notes the example where a "local television station in the countryside had simply pre-empted national network commercials without informing the network's headquarters in Beijing"... and replaced the ad slots with local advertising. See *Broadcasts For a Billion: The Growth of Commercial Television in China*, **Columbia Journal of World Business**, Fall (1987), p. 27.

47. Hu Ke, interview, May 1991. I specifically asked Hu Ke whether television in Shanghai had been affected by various political movements during the eighties. She said the effect in Shanghai was minimal. Yet it is also clear that each political campaign is accompanied by editorials about cultural production, though foreign media are not necessarily targeted. For example, articles like Li Ju, *Dianshiju Yao Dizhi Jingshen Wuran* [Television Shows Must Resist Spiritual Pollution], **Wenyijie Tongxun**, December (1983), p. 34-35, give somewhat vague directives on proper "socialist content" for domestic production.

48. Comment from a 46-year-old woman accountant for a printing company, Shanghai. Lull, p. 132-133.
49. *Bathing Beauty* was released again in the 1980's and did very well at the box office.
50. *Zenyang Pingjia Yinjin Yingshipian Deshi* [How To Appraise The Plus and Minuses of Media Imports], **Wenhui Bao** [WHB] 17 April 1988, p. 1. The articles reporting in more detail on the seminar is, Zhou Dao, *Yinjin Waiguo Yingshipian Shi Huo Shi Fu? Shi You Shi Xi?* [Importing Foreign Media, Is It A Blessing or a Curse? Sorrow or Happiness?], **Dangdai Wentanbao** 9 August 1988. The seminar included many veterans of the film industry, as well as representatives from television.
51. Zhou Dao, **Dangdai Yingtanbao**. The comment on audience complaints was by Liu Jingqi, International Dept., Shanghai Television Station, p. 33.
52. Xie Jin was publicly criticized for his cinematic style and preoccupation with heavy moral themes by a young film critic named Zhu Dake. The incident is discussed in Tony Rayns' article *Breakthroughs and Setbacks: The Origins of the New Chinese Cinema, Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, p. 109. Zhu's article criticizing Xie Jin mentioned, among other things, Xie's reliance on the Hollywood model. See, Zhu Dake, *The Drawback of Xie Jin's Model*, in **Chinese Film Theory**, p. 145. Zhu's article was originally published in **Wenhui Bao** 18 July 1986.
53. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Towards An Azure Culture*, **Times Literary Supplement** 28 April-4 May 1989, p. 454.
54. Quoted in *Chinese Culture: Of Tradition and Symbols*, **China News Analysis** (Hong Kong), No. 1376, 1 January 1989, p. 4.
55. **China News Analysis** 1 January 1989, p. 2. Leo Ou-fan Lee touches upon a similar idea, at least in the lack of ambiguity in *River Elegy*, that is itself tied to the style of delivery. "The visual images are unified by the omniscient voice of the narrator, a voice that is authoritarian and certainly "undemocratic" in its dismissal of Chinese tradition and its eulogy of the West as an undifferentiated "azure" culture." See, Lee, **Times Literary Supplement**, p. 454.
56. A number of articles in particular appeared in Beijing's **Guangming Ribao** throughout the month of August criticizing the series.
57. These comments came from a seminar conducted with various high-level government officials reported in "Kewang" *Wei Dianshiju Dianying Chuangzuo Chuangchu Xinlu* ["Anticipation" Breaks a New Path for Television and Film Works], **WHB** 9 January 1991, p. 1.

58. Besides my discussions with people, I also used material published in the journal **Zhongguo Guangbo Yingshi** [China Radio, Film and Television], February (1991). Peng Li, *Bafang Renshi Tan "Kewang"* [Talks About "Anticipation"], p. 9-10 and Wang ?, *Fajue, Hongyang, Chaoyue* [Explore, Expand, Surpass (Seminar on Anticipation)], p. 8-9.

59. Li Feng, *Haomen Enyuan* [Dynasty], **Zhongguo Dianshi** 5 November 1991, p. 7.

60. *Yizhi Daoyuan Wu Shan Tan "Haomen Enyuan"* [Studio Dubbing Director Wu Shang Talks About "Dynasty"], **BJWB** 17 September 1991.

61. Lincoln Kaye, *Peking Passion Play*, **Far Eastern Economic Review** 31 October 1991, p. 54. Also, for more Western reviews of these films, see Walter Allen, *Romancing the Goons*, **Far Eastern Economic Review** 25 October 1990, pp. 30-31.

62. *Jiao Yulu* was one of the first films to begin the trend in reviving revolutionary history. Jiao Yulu was a model cadre from the sixties. His reputation as an honest and hard-working official was made into a film with the purpose of improving the image of party cadres and providing a model for government officials to follow. *Birth of a New Nation* recounted the origins of the Chinese Communist Party. *Great Strategic Battles* covered famous battles from the civil war against the Kuomintang.

63. Timothy Mo, **An Insular Possession**, p. 24.

64. Shao Mujun, *Meiguo Dianying De "Weili" Hezai?* [Wherein Lies the "Power" of American Films], **Dazhong Dianying**, February (1985), p. 16.

65. Shao Mujun graduated from the English Department at St. John's University in Shanghai in 1949. Biographical notes from, Semsel, **Chinese Film Theory**, p

66. Tomlinson, p. 53. Quote is from Michael Tracey, *The Poisoned Chalice?*, **Daedalus**, 114, No. 4, (1985), p. 40.

67. Tomlinson, p. 53.

68. Tomlinson, p. 53.

69. My understanding of the response to Chaplin comes from various interviews. I also referred to an article regarding an official appreciation of Chaplin and his usefulness as a guide for developing "socialist comedy with Chinese characteristics." *Benkan Bianjibu Zhaokai Zhuo Bielin Yingpian Zuotanhui* [Editor's Department of **Contemporary Film** Conduct Seminar on Chaplin], **Dangdai Dianying**, July (1979), pp. 62-63.

70. Gao Xinhua, interview, May, 1991 and others.
71. *Studio No. 5* and *Matt Houston* information from Gao Xinhua, interview, May, 1991.
72. Cao Lei, interview, May, 1991. The preference of the rural audience for Chinese productions, overseas and mainland, as opposed to non-Chinese productions was often mentioned in my interviews with film and television personnel.
73. Luo Shifang, interview, June, 1991 and others. Many people I talked to complained about the low quality of the Latin American soap operas. This complaint is also mentioned in Zhou Dao, **Dangdai Wentanbao**, p. 34.
74. I have no documentation of this speech. Someone told me about its contents.
75. Yu Wentao, *Zhang Movies Finally to be Screened at Home*, CD 3 August 1992, p. 5. This article on Zhang Yimou's films felt compelled to describe the formerly controversial depiction of struggle between concubines in *Raise the Red Lanterns* as a film which "illustrates in an indirect way the importance of unity and mutual understanding to a family, a company or even a nation. A good and harmonious relationship among the Chinese people is particularly necessary during the current reforms."
76. *Qiu Ju's Lawsuit* was openly released in China in 1992 and early pre-screenings in the summer drew praise from officials. The film describes the perseverance of a peasant woman demanding justice for a village leader's treatment of her husband. In a skilful approach, Zhang criticizes corruption and bureaucracy while at the same time highlighting the possibility of achieving justice through a good official.
77. John Tomlinson discusses divergent views on modernity and its relationship to cultural imperialism. See p. 146. The "ambiguity" refers here to his discussion of Marshall Berman's work, **All That is Solid Melts into Air**.
78. My feeling on the issue of press freedom comes from numerous conversations in China on the frustration felt by intellectuals under current conditions. In addition, I was impressed by the richness in content of cultural production and press publications in Taiwan, which experienced greater press freedom in the late eighties. This greater openness and re-evaluation of history has contributed to expressions in Taiwan cinema, as, for example, in the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang, that are able to probe deeper questions than their counterparts on the mainland.
79. Shi Feng, **Shanghai Tan**, p. 32.

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Chen Bao	CB
Da Gong Bao	DGB
Juying Ribao	JYRB
Min Guo Bao	MGB
North China Daily News	NCDN
Shanghai News	SN
Shen Bao	SB
Xin Min Bao	XMB
Xin Wen Bao	XWB

Contemporary

Beijing Wanbao	BJWB
China Daily	CD
Guangming Ribao	GMRB
Jiefang Ribao	JFRB
Qingnian Bao	QNB
Renmin Ribao	RMRB
Wenhui Bao	WHB
Xin Wen Bao	XWB
Xinmin Wanbao	XMWB

Photographs

Fig. 1 was given to me by a publisher. Fig. 2 from **Xia Yan De Dianying Daolu** [Xia Yan's Path to Film] (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chuban She, 1985), p. 32. Fig. 13 from V.D. Jiganoff, **Russians in Shanghai**, n.p., pub. in the 1930's. Fig. 3,4,5,6,7,8 are all from the archives of the Grand Theatre. Fig. 15,16,17,20 are from the archives of the Xinhua Theatre. The movie pamphlets are from the Shanghai Drama Academy library.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The idea for this thesis came from two separate sources. In the mid-eighties I read a review of Beverley Hooper's new book, **China Stands Up: Ending the Western Presence 1948-1950** and ordered a copy. I was intrigued by her section on the management of American films in Shanghai after the Communist government came to power. The second source was in 1988, when, in my efforts to improve my reading ability in Chinese, I tried to find publications that might be interesting to read in an attempt to thwart some of the boredom that comes with learning a foreign language. Since I had a strong interest in the history of Shanghai during the pre-1949 era, the popular magazine of Shanghai history, **Shanghai Tan** seemed a good place to start. In the November issue I came across Jiang Shangxing's article on the "Welcome Danger" incident and was very interested to learn that a large protest had taken place against the portrayal of Chinese stereotypes in American films in 1930. If I recall correctly, the article was so compelling it forced me to look up all the new words in the dictionary that night, one of those rare occasions where my study of Chinese was not interrupted by more attractive and pleasurable diversions.

Being a child of the television era who grew up in Canada, I have had my share of exposure to the proliferation of American media that streams across the border. Like many Canadians, I also harboured strong opinions about the influence of American culture on Canadian society and its visible presence in other nations. Thus, the history of American films in China held some appeal,

particularly since the Communist revolution succeeded in closing off its culture to further influence from Hollywood after 1950. Since I first went to China in the 1980's, I also had the impression of being a witness to a new era, as American films and television programs entered the market once again. Moreover, having long had an interest in film production and the role of film in society, as well as an interest in Shanghai history, the two subjects coalesced to provide the basis for this project.

Initially, I planned to focus my study on the contemporary era to understand what the new influx of American media meant for Chinese audiences and Chinese socialism. However, I could not shed the desire to first understand the historical dimensions, the details of which I was wholly ignorant. Hoping to combine the two time periods, I gathered materials relevant to the past and the present. As my research in China progressed, the wealth of available historical material influenced my decision to concentrate on the period before 1949. Yet, as is explained in the introduction, I could not resist the temptation to comment briefly on contemporary developments (an indulgence more refined readers of history wisely avoid) because I was struck by the sense of continuity with the past in response to American media, as well as certain differences.

Before discussing my research methods in more detail, I would like to emphasize what is lacking here. My grounding in political and social theory is not yet as developed as it could be. The same can be said for film theory, the literature of which is so

voluminous and, at times, esoteric, that I doubt my current ignorance of it will ever be enlightened. The dearth of theoretical material in this paper is in part a result of a lack of relevant material and my own scepticism on many theoretical treatises regarding media studies. To explain the former, there has, as far as I know, been little work done on the situation of societies under communist governments which import media productions from capitalist societies since it is a fairly recent trend. Wolfgang Haug mentions the idea in his **Critique of Commodity Aesthetics** (1971) that imported media from the West makes people "feel betrayed by socialism" (p. 106) but after examining both the official and general response to American films and television in contemporary China I am not convinced of the validity of this assumption. In the past, I have used the work of Herbert Schiller and Armand Mattleart as a basis for looking at questions of American media influence in East Asia, but again the relevance of their work to China is tenuous when one begins to examine the historical details. Subsequently, I found a more flexible approach to the idea of cultural imperialism in John Tomlinson's book and have thus chosen to draw upon it here.

In addition to a lack of confidence in certain theoretical approaches, my experience of living in China, a country which ostensibly operates under a socialist system, has influenced my interpretation of Marxist theory from which the idea of cultural imperialism arose. A certain amount of questioning begins when one encounters the hierarchical and exploitative social relationships

in the People's Republic that mirror those found in capitalist society, and which have developed over the years since 1949. The new economic reforms are *both* breaking down some of those relationships *and* exacerbating their destructive effects. Despite a hopeful beginning in the early fifties, with land reform and new rights for women, few of the political movements since then have been particularly effective in eliminating social disparities. After the Cultural Revolution, many Chinese intellectuals have pondered this question and blamed the failing of Chinese socialism on the remnants of "feudalism" in Chinese culture. Twenty-five years ago critics might have found fault in the insidious presence in the government of "capitalist roaders" such as Liu Shaoqi and his follower, Deng Xiaoping. Liu never survived to refute this claim, and it is difficult to know whether Deng Xiaoping is indeed a "capitalist roader" or simply an innovative socialist. My point is that economic transformation in China after 1949 did not result in the social transformation envisioned by Marxist theory.

A viable alternative to capitalism must be possible and perhaps another approach to socialism will eventually serve that need. However, none of the nations which chose the road to socialist revolution created state systems that cultivated Marx's vision for human development. The changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe make it plainly clear that neither capitalism or Marxist-Leninism have been particularly effective in any real social transformation that would allow people the opportunity to determine their own fate on the basis of their abilities and

aspirations. Thus, it is with these thoughts that I approach the use of social theory with caution. In its most benign form theory can be a useful way to interpret and perhaps predict change, but it often seems to be locked up in a historical and political vacuum, where paradoxically, its application to real social experiences is negligible. At the other end of the spectrum, it has the potential to determine rather than explain reality, with often devastating consequences.

In closing, I would like to say that the subject of Chinese history and culture is such a vast and rich terrain of exploration, it is doubtful I will ever get beyond the outer shores of its contours in the span of one lifetime. The description of history here is necessarily brief despite the number of pages in this thesis. My research in China revealed that there is enough material available (and some not so available) on the subject of film history alone to fuel the combines of academic research for years to come. Fortunately the Chinese tradition of writing everything down has been equally applied to the study of film which makes the prospect of further research practical and rewarding. I hope the efforts of such erstwhile scribes have not been wasted or misinterpreted in this thesis.

Written Sources

Much of my work relied on Cheng Jihua's **The History of Chinese Film Development** Vol. I and II. From it I was able to get a comprehensive history of Chinese film before 1949. An equivalent

work does not exist in English. The book was written prior to the Cultural Revolution but only became available for general circulation in 1981 because the book was banned when Cheng came under attack for his laudable view of leftist films in the thirties and forties, a view that was refuted by the new cultural policy on film endorsed by Jiang Qing. Only a limited number of copies had been published in 1963. The introduction to the contemporary edition is written by the film scholar Chen Huangmei and he discusses at great length the reasons why the leftist film tradition is a legitimate subject of Chinese revolutionary history, even though these film-makers operated under the influence of bourgeois and capitalist values. He also includes an attack on the "gang of four" and their persecution of film-makers and performers from the thirties and forties. Cheng Jihua's interpretation of Chinese film history emphasizes political rather than aesthetic aspects but his detailed description of the films and other events made it an invaluable source, even though I did not always agree with his conclusions.

Another extensive history of Chinese film is Du Yunzhi's **Seventy Years of Chinese Film**. Du provides a counterpoint to Cheng Jihua's work in highlighting aspects that Cheng dismisses for political reasons. Du's work however, also reflects his political beliefs, from a standpoint that supports the Kuomintang government. Consequently, the two works often offer contrasting explanations to various issues and developments that are extremely useful for interpreting the history through the political hyperbole.

Unfortunately, Du does not include notes or sources. He also covers the development of the Hong Kong and Taiwan film industry after 1949 but this was not relevant to my discussion here.

For Chapter 3 I drew extensively from Xia Yan's memoirs, published in 1985. Unfortunately, I did not begin reading this book until I returned to Canada and there are numerous questions he raises which would have been useful to pursue during my research in China. His section on his involvement with the film industry in the 1930's is only one part of the book but is extremely rich for its description of various people he encountered during his time in Shanghai. One gains valuable insight into the personalities of Lu Xun, Hong Shen, Tian Han, Qu Qiubai and others who played prominent roles in Shanghai's literary and cultural circles in the late twenties and early thirties. Another important book was **Records From the Film World in the Republican Era** edited by Zhu Jian and Wang Chaoguang and published in 1990. It provided details on various aspects of the film industry and personalities that supplemented both Cheng's and Du's accounts. It was also somewhat refreshing for its relative lack of partisan commentary.

For my research on movie theatres, the two volume **Research Materials for Shanghai History** [shanghai yanjiu ziliao] was extremely helpful. The book is a compilation of reprinted articles and surveys on Shanghai history originally published in 1939 and provided articles outlining the development of theatres in Shanghai up to that time as well as a list of theatres, their names in Chinese and English, and often with the name of the film that

premiered at their opening. The book, **Urban Research on Modern Shanghai** [jindai shanghai chengshi yanjiu] was another general reference I referred to for information on Shanghai culture and theatre and film development in the 1920's. Besides other memoirs from former participants in the film industry and books on Shanghai history, the rest of my written research material came from newspapers and film magazines in the pre-1949 era and contemporary film journals and newspaper articles discussing film history. Newspapers and journals also informed my research on the contemporary era, though I tended to rely more on interviews.

English materials on Chinese film history are not so abundant particularly for the era before 1989. Jay Leyda's **Dianying: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China** was published in 1972 and appears to rely substantially on Cheng Jihua's history. Although Leyda did not have Cheng's book during the time he was in China, from 1959 to 1964, he did later transcriptions from abroad. Leyda also includes interesting material from foreign sources on the pre-1949 period, especially regarding American films and American film production in China. He was also useful for me in providing English titles for many of the Chinese films of the period. Some Western writers who study Chinese film have criticized Leyda's book for inaccuracies, but I still think his research was an amazing feat, considering the period of time he was in China and that he did not speak or read Chinese.

The work on Chinese film by Chris Berry, Paul Clark and Tony Rayns is very useful for their comprehensive knowledge on both

China and Chinese film. Ma Ning is another scholar who writes in English and is currently working on his doctorate in Australia. In addition, Paul Pickowicz has applied his former scholastic achievements in Chinese politics and literature to film and has published a number of articles on Chinese film in various journals. There is also a large group of graduate students from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan who are studying abroad and occasionally publish papers in English.

Besides the work published by Chinese and Western scholars of Chinese studies, there are also two recent books edited by George Semsel, a film professor at the Ohio University who was a foreign expert at the China Film Corporation in 1984. His first publication in 1987, **Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic** has some interesting articles, but there are many inaccuracies in the Chinese names and titles. His other book, **Chinese Film Theory** published in 1990 was more useful. It included various articles written by Chinese film scholars, critics and film-makers translated into English. I am also aware of Frederick Jameson's interest in Chinese film. He provided an analysis of the Taiwan film-maker Edward Yang's film *The Terrorizer* [kongbu fenzi] when at a seminar he gave in Taipei in 1990 and which I attended. He discusses the film in his new book **The Geopolitical Aesthetic**. I feel compelled to add here, however, that while he brings interesting insights to the discussion of world cinema, his talk in Taipei and his references in the book lack a thorough understanding of certain historical and cultural factors and familiarity with a

general history of Chinese film that I think weakens his analysis. Much the same can be said about many Western film reviewers, certainly well versed in the more well-known cinematic traditions, but whose writing about new cinema from mainland China is often superficial and simplistic. As more Chinese films enter the global film market and more publications are made available, the quality of Western evaluations of Chinese film will no doubt improve.

Library Resources

With the exception of the English material, all of my Chinese written references were collected in China. A common complaint of foreign graduate students conducting research in China is inaccessibility to many documents. Fortunately, because my work was neither politically sensitive nor required archival research, I was able to find most of the information I needed through the ordinary channels at libraries in Shanghai and Beijing. Much of my information was collected in the Shanghai Theatre Academy and the Beijing Film Academy libraries. Both were extremely helpful in allowing me to photocopy journals and newspapers.

It goes without saying that research in China ultimately depends on who you know and cultivating such relationships takes time. In the end, my initial difficulties in getting material were unimportant. Many articles and references were given to me by people who knew the subject I was researching. I also contacted and talked to the authors of some articles for more details and these experiences were rewarding. For example, the two authors who wrote

under the name of Shu Ping and Jiang Shangxing were very helpful in answering some of my queries about their articles as well as directing me to other sources.

One major problem in this research was reference to American films using their Chinese titles that often had little relevance to the original English. Many of the English titles could only be deduced if a synopsis for the film or the director's name and the major performers were mentioned. Other than that, the only recourse was to peruse advertisements in the Chinese newspapers where the English title was often, though not always included. The film pamphlets in the Shanghai Drama Academy library were useful in this respect though the pamphlet material was limited. The **Diansheng** magazine occasionally had lists for film names in Chinese and English and I also asked people I interviewed to describe the film if the title was mystifying though none of this was done as systematically or as comprehensively as it could have been. Consequently, many American films were mentioned in texts for which I was unable to find a corresponding title. Therefore, I have generally avoided mentioning minor films for which I could not find titles. Otherwise I have included a question mark for titles translated directly from the Chinese. Other than titles, all translations from Chinese sources in the text are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Study in China

I began the spring semester at the Shanghai Drama Academy in 1991 taking two courses, one on film and society and the other in Chinese theatre history. I was not required to write papers or exams for these courses though I tried to keep up with the readings. The rest of the time was spent on collecting material for my thesis. The Shanghai Drama Academy is only now beginning to offer courses on film and television but because of the close ties between theatre and film in China, it was through this institution that I was able to meet and talk with many people associated with film and television in China.

From September 1991 to July 1992, I attended the Beijing Film Academy under the Scholars Exchange program between Canada and China. I did not continue doing research in Beijing because I was taking classes on Chinese film history, literature, and directing at the film school and working on different projects unrelated to my thesis. In Beijing I did, however, take the opportunity to view films from the pre-1949 era at the school and Film Archives that were not available in Shanghai, as well as films produced in the fifties and early sixties and contemporary era. Many teachers and classmates there were also helpful in providing me with suggestions for my research and directing me to various written materials that I brought back to Canada.

Interviews

Field research for this thesis took place in Shanghai during the spring of 1991 and this included interviews conducted with elderly film fans, former film and theatre personnel and, for the contemporary era, people working in television and film. Altogether I talked to about fifty different people. The interviews were fairly informal, though I took notes throughout. I did not use a tape recorder because I have learned from past experiences that some people in China are reluctant to speak freely into a recording machine, no matter how politically innocuous the topic of conversation might seem to be. A rough outline on the numbers and types of people I interviewed is given below.

Retired Performers	4
Retired Directors	2
General audience, age 60+	10
Retired critics/journalists	3
Retired theatre/distribution personnel	15
Contemporary film/TV researchers	13
Contemporary film/TV personnel	7

With regard to historical research on the audience, I sought out people who would have been active cinema-goers during the thirties and forties. For this, I relied on friends who introduced me to their neighbours, parents or grandparents, etc., and it was this aspect of my research which was the most rewarding. In

addition, with the help of teachers and other acquaintances, I sought out retired film artists and performers and people associated with the Shanghai Drama Academy. I arranged most of the interviews myself, contacting people by phone or through the mail. Other interviews were set up by a teacher or friend who would accompany me for an initial introduction. Sometimes, as for example, in the case of Zhu Manhua, I went back on several occasions to ask more questions. I found the interviewing process one of the most efficient ways to obtain information because names or topics brought up in one interview inevitably led to interviews with other people who knew the subject in more detail or had personally been involved with the event in question.

I also wanted to find information about the theatres and when I told this to one of the librarians at the Drama Academy, Jiang Miaoling, he offered to take me around various theatres and introduce me to the managers. This approach was extremely fruitful. At the theatres I was able to talk with retired workers and we also discovered that every theatre was in the process of writing up their own history and often had rough manuscripts available. Usually this work was being done by retired workers who had been at the theatre for many years. At the old Roxy Theatre (now the Xinhua) a young technician who ran the air-conditioning was given the task when no one else offered to do it. After beginning his research, he ultimately became very interested in the work and was able to give me many details from his work in the library and archives. He also persuaded the manager of the cinema to let me

photograph their archives and introduced me to Ruan Renrong, the former staff member at MGM.

Altogether I visited about six of the major theatres, but among these the Xinhua, Metropol, Majestic, Carlton [changjiang] and Grand were the most useful. The managers of the Grand Theatre in particular were very helpful and had the best archives, a large package of old photographs that they pulled out of a dusty cupboard. It was these photographs that gave me my first impression of Percy Chu, a man of conviction staring resolutely out towards the camera amidst the tuxedos in Shanghai's Lido Ballroom. The managers pointed him out somewhat excitedly, "you see," they said, "he is the only one wearing the Chinese gown."

I heard various rumours about where Percy Chu might be but Zhu Manhua finally located him for me. We went together to his small apartment and when the door opened, a tanned elderly man of 93, who seemed to be dancing on his toes with energy, welcomed us in. It was not hard to imagine him as a Shanghai businessman more than fifty years ago. When I brought up the subject of his taste in fashion he explained that his decision to wear the Chinese gown resulted from his experience as a student in America. At Columbia University he wore Western-style suits, but he and his friends were horrified for often being mistaken as Japanese. At the time he did not feel it was appropriate to wear Chinese gowns in New York, but on his return to China he decided to always wear Chinese clothes. That is, he added, until after 1949 when he returned to wearing

Western attire and we all laughed at the evident irony of this remark.

Like many nationalist capitalists who remained in China after the Communists took power, Percy Chu had a difficult time in the political upheavals of the 1950's. During the anti-rightist movement of 1957 he was removed from his executive position at the former Wing On cotton factory to become a sweeper on the factory floor, a job he held for the next twenty years. He remarked on his good fortune. "That year I had just turned sixty so I was allowed to stay in Shanghai instead of being sent out to the countryside." He was interested to see the copies of the photographs I had taken from the Grand archives since his own had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Closing Remarks

Throughout my interviews with elderly people and my reading of film history I could not help but be influenced by stories that left me distressed by the political history of the last forty years in China. The persecution in Hollywood during the McCarthy era in the U.S., as one indication of the volatile and devastating effects of political interference in film-making, pales in comparison to what happened in China, not only during the Cultural Revolution but in other periods as well. In addition, besides its role as an important propaganda tool, the position of film in the People's Republic has a unique status because of Jiang Qing's relationship to Mao Zedong. The extent of her power became clear during the

Cultural Revolution. Contrary to the official line on history popularized in China and elsewhere, it is mistaken to assume that Jiang Qing and rest of the "gang of four" were wholly responsible for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution. Yet, with regard to the persecution of film artists in the 1960's, the role of Jiang Qing cannot be overemphasized. She personally attacked individuals who were associated with her during the 1930's. Many of these people committed suicide or died in jail. Moreover, her legacy as Mao's wife continues to haunt the Chinese film world, to the extent that it is difficult for researchers to gain access to films she once performed in and other related material.

The political factors that have influenced Chinese film since the 1930's continue up to the present day. At one time, it inspired film-makers to transform an entertainment and artistic form into a device for social action. Unfortunately, in the hands of the state, this quality of cinematic expression lost the vitality it once had. It does, however, provide a rich bed of material for analysis and investigation by historians. Perhaps more Chinese film-makers in the future will be able to explore that irony in more depth than has been possible since 1949.

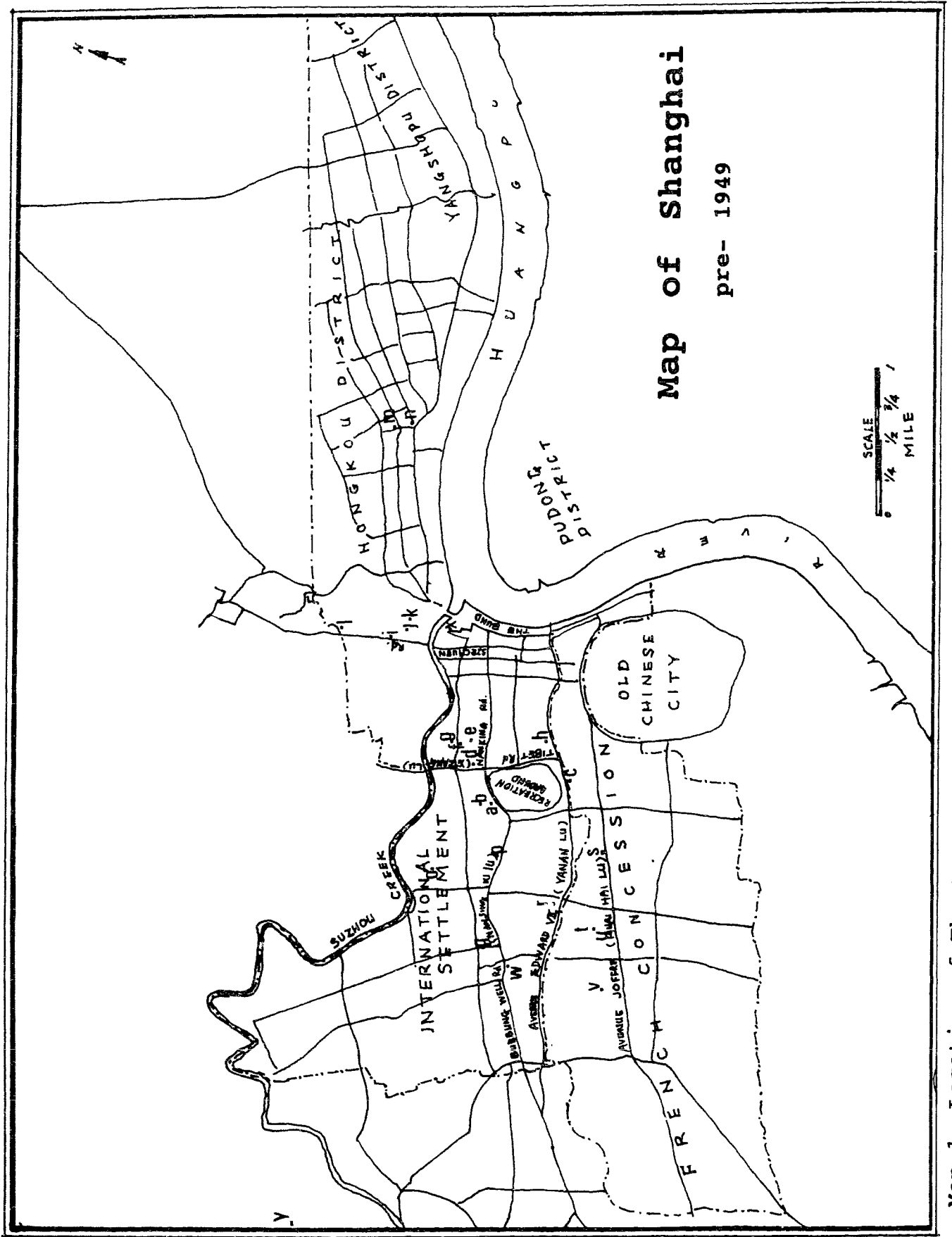
MAJOR SHANGHAI THEATRES

<i>Historical Name</i>	<i>Post-1949</i>	<i>Seating</i>
a. Grand [da guangming]		1951
b. Carlton [kaerdeng]	[changjiang]	1000
c. Nanking [nanjing]*	[yinyue ting]	1494
d. Metropol [da shanghai]		1629
e. Strand [xingguang]		1400
f. Lyric [jincheng]	[guizhou]	1630
g. Rialto [lidu]	[huangpu]	1015
h. Central [zhongyang]*		-
i. Victoria [weiduoliaya]*		750
j. Ritz [rongguang]	[guoji]	-
k. Willie's [weili]*		-
l. Isis [shanghai]	[cunzhong]	704
m. Eastern [donghai]		947
n. Broadway [bailaohui]	[dongshan]	647
o. Western [xihai]		1610
p. Roxy [dahua]	[xinhua]	1153
q. Majestic [meiqi]		1633
r. Golden Gate [jinmen]	[ruijin]	1050
s. Paris [bali]	[huaihai]	760
t. Lyceum [lanxin]	[yishu juchang] [pres. lanxin]	
u. Cathay [guotai]		1000

v. Doumer [dumei]	[donghu]	808
w. Uptown [ping an]		-
x. Capitol [guanglu]*		800
y. Orpheum [oufeimu]	[huxi]	-

*Buildings no longer used as cinemas.

Please see map for corresponding locations.



Map 1. Location of Theatres.

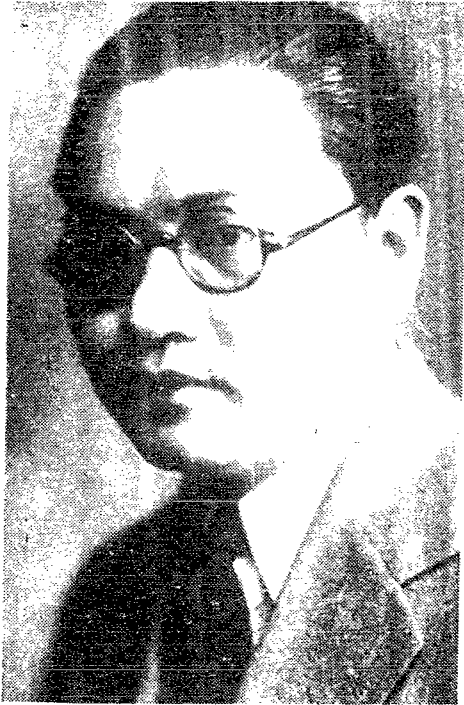


Fig. 1. Hong Shen
1894-1955.



Fig. 2. Xia Yan and
Cai Shuxin
on their
wedding day,
Shanghai 1930.



Fig. 3. Asia Theatre Staff. Percy Chu, bottom, fourth from the left. Hager sits next to him. He Tingran is on Hager's right.

Fig. 4. Percy Chu and Zhu Manhua, Shanghai, May 1992.



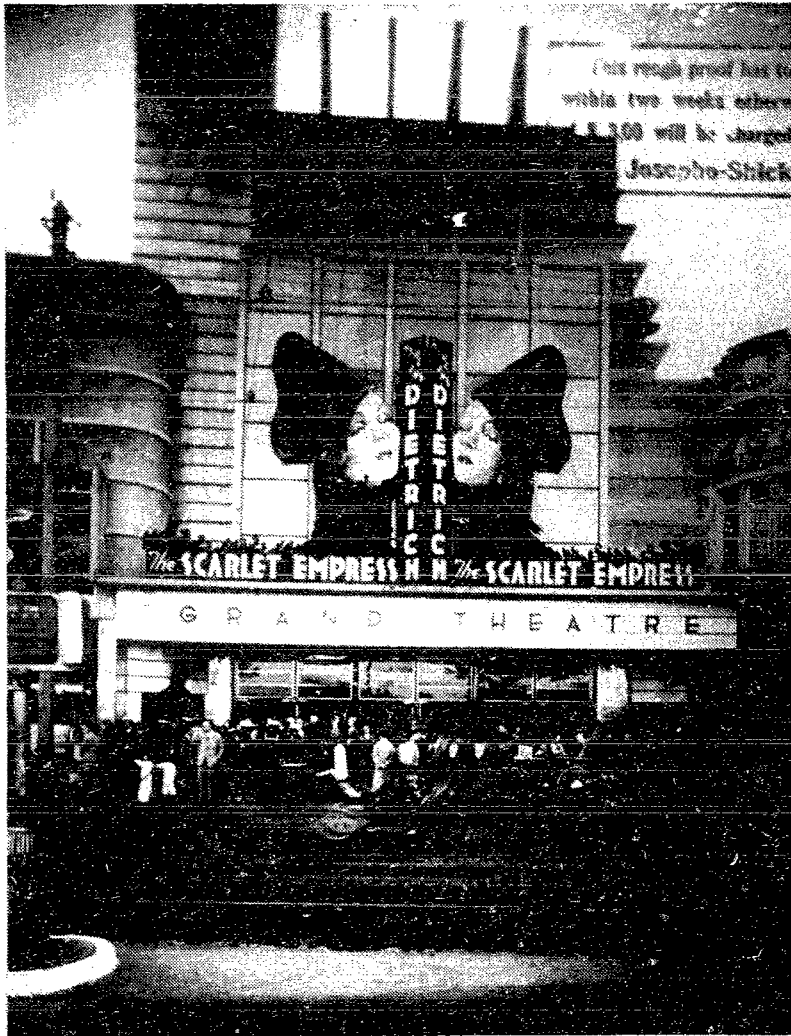
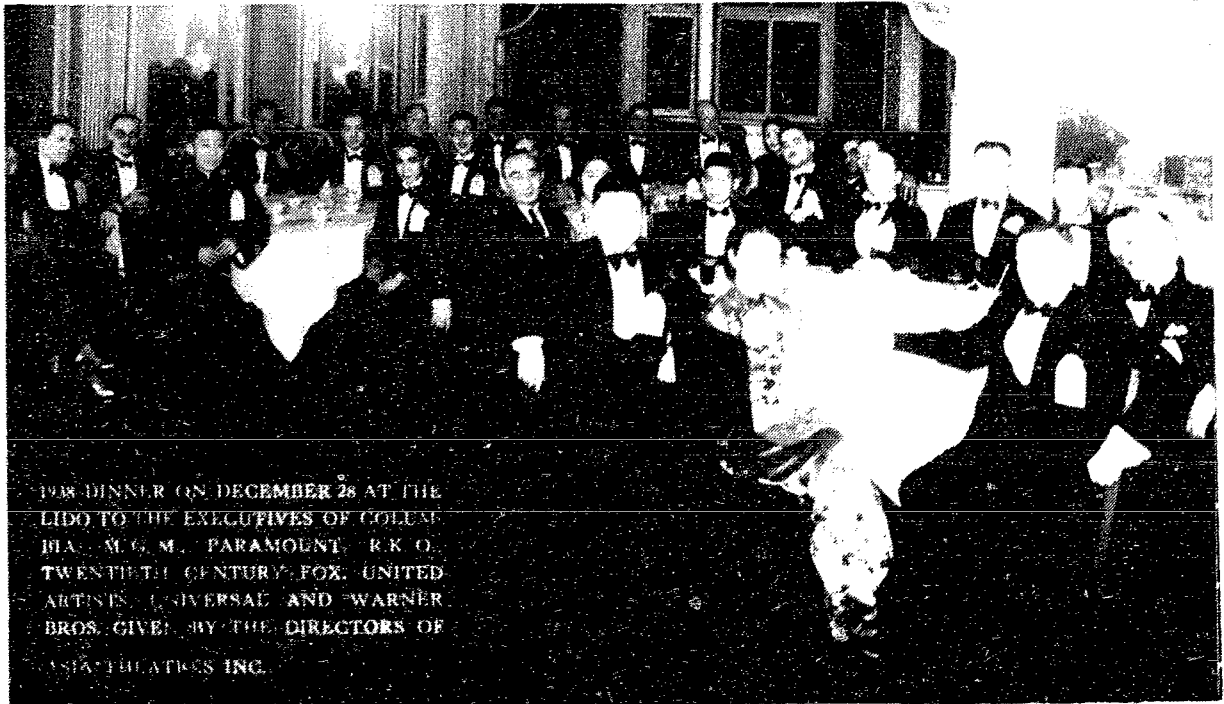


Fig. 5.
Grand Theatre

Fig. 6. Meeting of American Film distributors and Asia Theatre Staff at the Lido Ballroom, below.



1938 DINNER ON DECEMBER 28 AT THE LIDO TO THE EXECUTIVES OF COLUMBIA, M.G.M., PARAMOUNT, R.K.O., TWENTIETH CENTURY-FOX, UNITED ARTISTS, UNIVERSAL AND WARNER BROS. GIVEN BY THE DIRECTORS OF ASIATHEATRES INC.

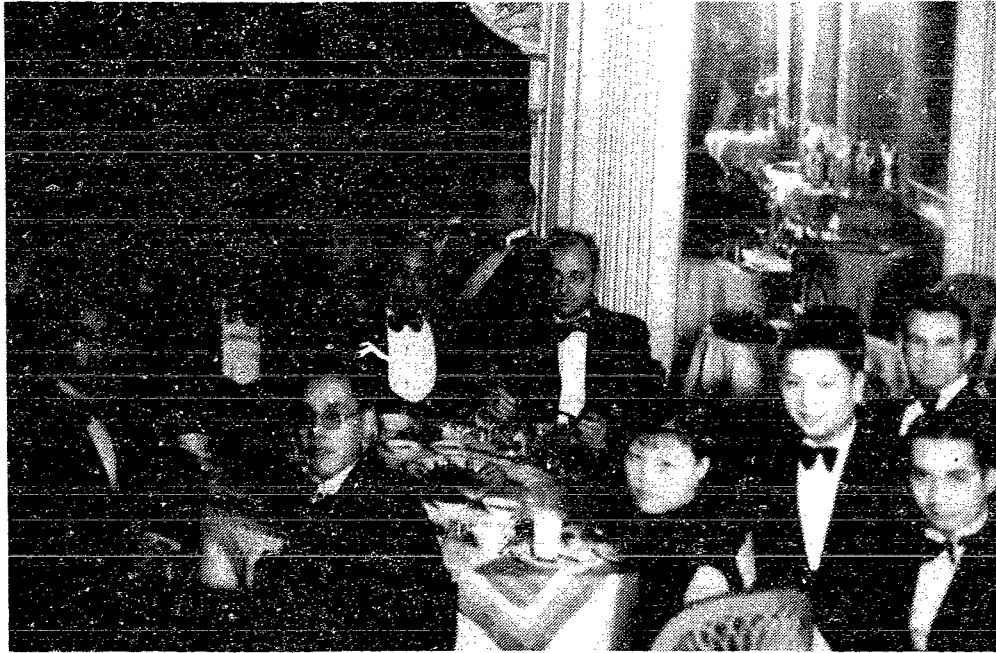
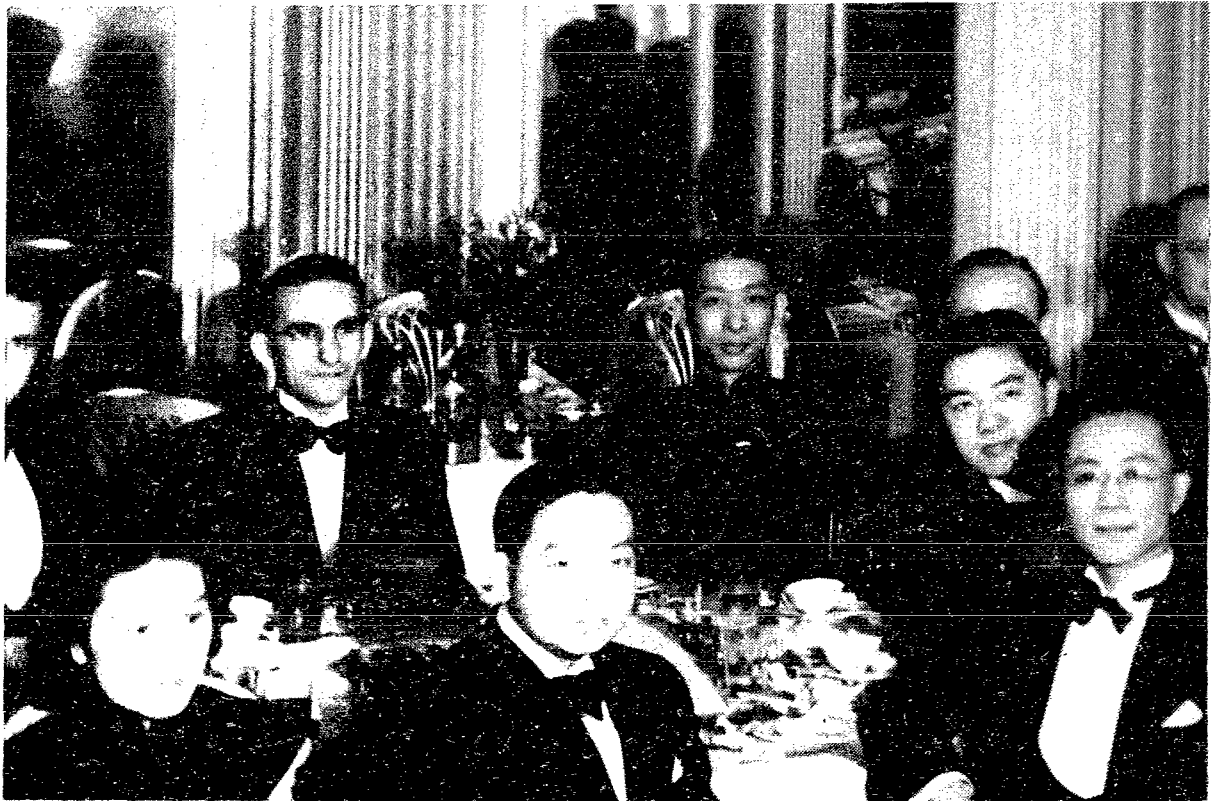


Fig. 7. Lido Ballroom meeting, He Tingran is seated between the two Westerners.

Fig. 8. Lido Ballroom meeting, Percy Chu center back.



美優最音發 一九三五 映開日 今院戲大陸光

度一年一穿欲眼望 傑唯生僅絕羅大滑 構一平有無克王稽

是滑稽大王有生以來第一張完全對白滑稽巨片

是滑稽電影史上開天闢地最長最好開口笑片

本大二十全

本院為精益求精起見自今日起特易全新銀幕加大鏡頭發音益益清晰物像愈益放大美且雅并務使觀衆萬分滿意請答惠顧諸君之盛意

欲免擁擠 請速定座

驚喜交集 驚心動魄 避腸溢氣 忍俊不禁 別有風味 變幻奇異

有言滑稽 有冒險 有驚險 有驚奇 有機關

滑稽大王羅克之名片 以演之價重將事每年播 丹維爾相得益彰女角壯 中劇之中心名角有作紅 科熱烈之四洋感徒至表 演之切話情之纏綿笑料 片無遺之危險之總非尋 精唯一偉大傑作可比實近今




Fig. 9. Ad for *Welcome Danger* (reduced), XWB 21 February 1930.

Fig. 10. Ad for Grand Theatre film in a store window, 1930's.



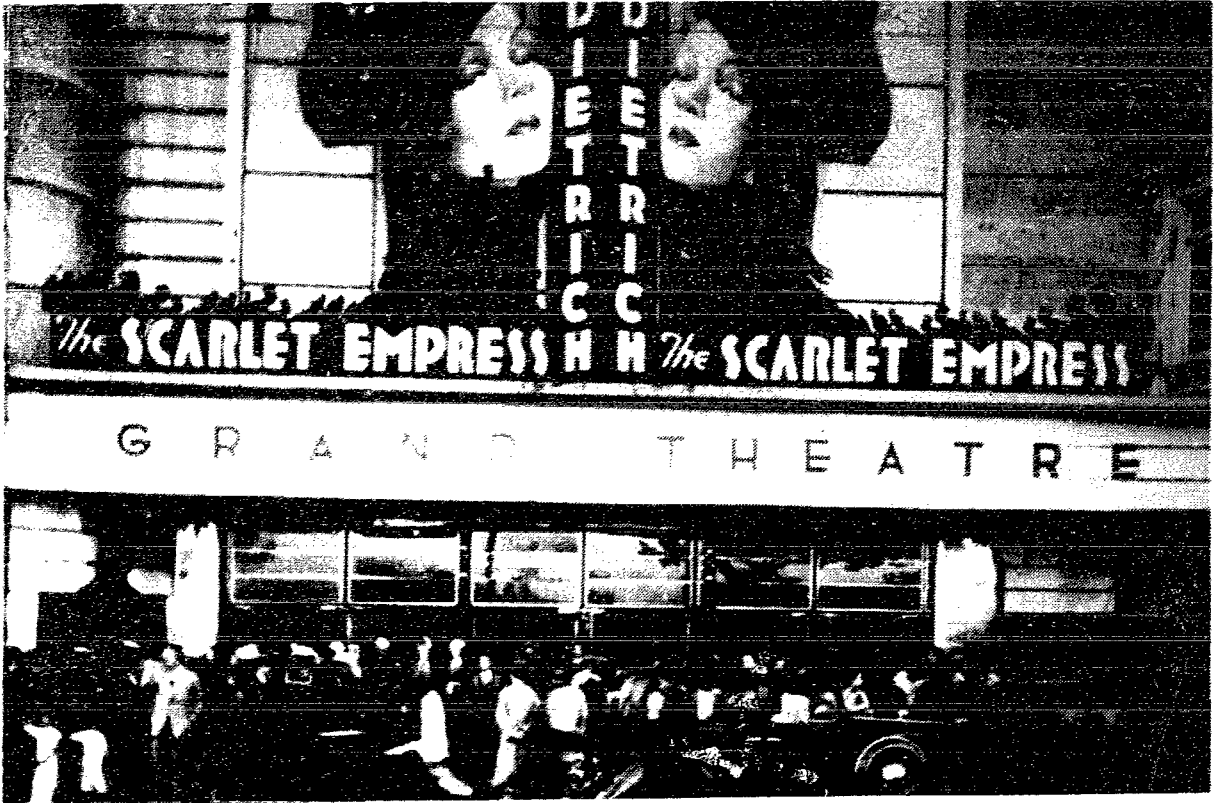


Fig. 11. and 12. Audience at the Grand Theatre, 1930's.





Fig. 13. Nanking Theatre. The film being shown is *Tarzan and his Mate*.

Fig. 14. Audience for matinee showing at the Nanking Theatre.





Fig. 15. Roxy Theatre staff. The MGM representative Farrell is second from left. Beside him on his right is the Roxy manager Weiner.

Fig. 16. Farrell in the MGM office. Apparently, most of the of the people in this photograph are theatre agents from other cities in China.





Fig. 17.

Audience outside the Roxy. The words hanging across the street spell out *Bathing Beauty* in Chinese. The photograph was probably taken during its 1946 screening.

Fig. 18. Movie pamphlet for *Bathing Beauty*.



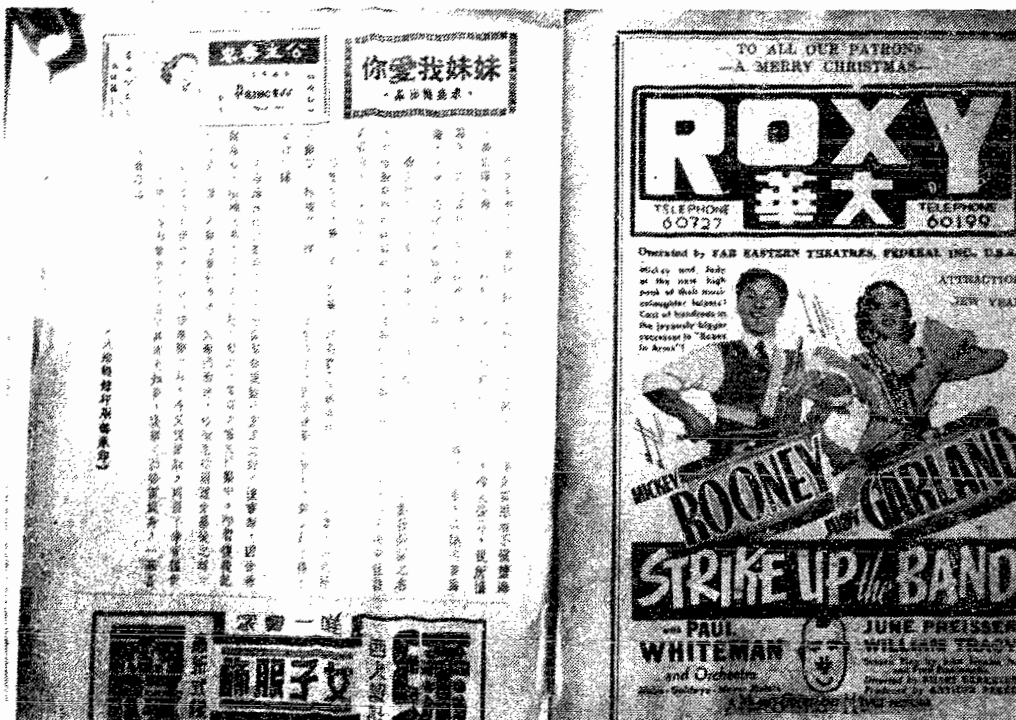


Fig. 19. Movie pamphlet.

Fig. 20. Audience at the Roxy, late forties.



美帝的政治把戲
謀基作

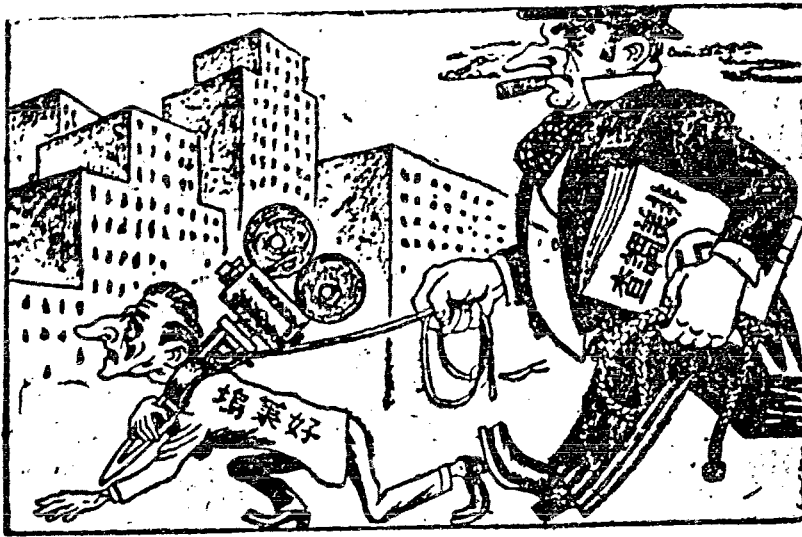


Fig. 23. Cartoon that shows a man labelled "Hollywood" being led on a leash by the man with the carrying a file that says "investigation into Un-American activities. The caption on the left reads "the political games of American imperialism From, JYRB 23 October 1949, p. 1.



造成青年一代墮落的
美國文化
陶謀基

Fig. 24. The caption reads, "The American culture that creates a generation of corrupted youth." DGB 24 January 1951, p. 4.

三毛的控訴

(漫畫連載)

張樂平

(六) 酗酒逞兇

路MAXIM'S酒吧門口。
一九四六年十月廿三日，在上海環球金神分

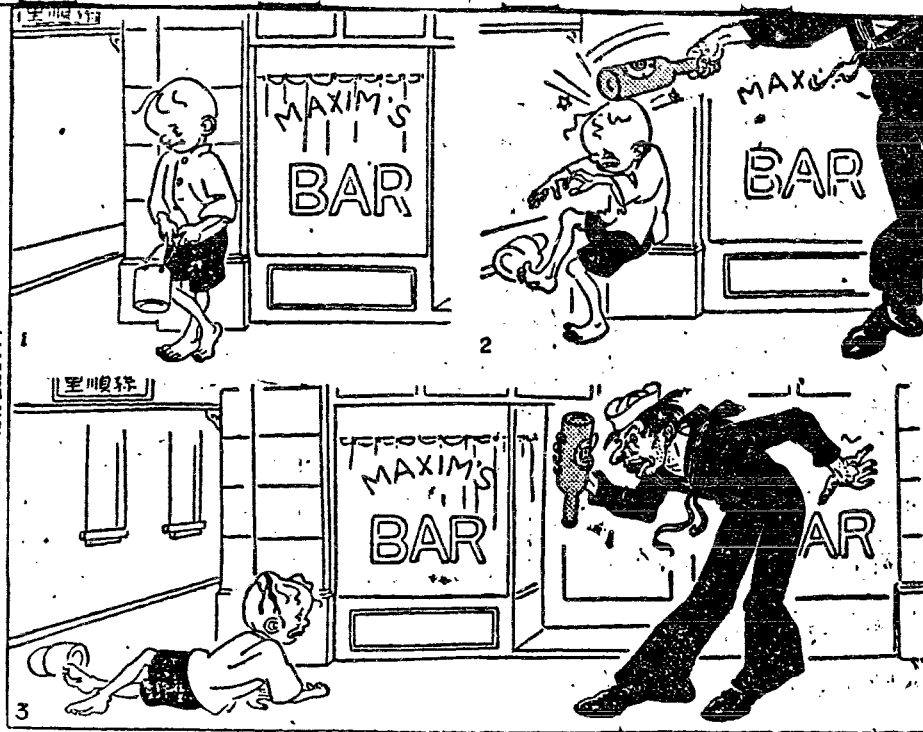


Fig. 25. *The Frustration of Three-hairs* [san mao de cuozhe]. The orphan San Mao has the misfortune to meet a drunken American bully outside Maxim's bar. From, DGB 7 January 1951.

三毛的控訴

(漫畫連載)

張樂平

(十一) 在我們的領土上 (上)

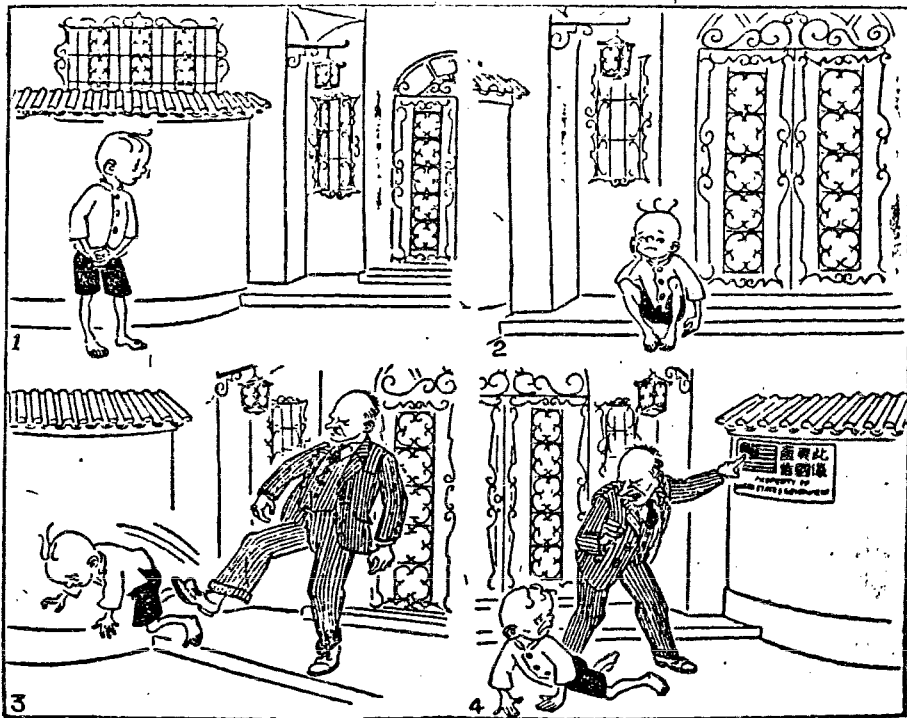


Fig. 26. *Three-hairs*. The caption on the left reads, "on our own (Chinese) territory."