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International and Wartime Origins of the Propaganda State:
The Motion Picture in China, 1897-1955

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor in Philosophy

in

History

by

Matthew David Johnson

Committee in charge:

Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair

Professor Paul G. Pickowicz, Co-Chair

Professor Takashi Fujitani

Professor Daniel Widener

Professor Yingjin Zhang

2008

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University of California, San Diego

2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	xi
Vita.....	xiii
Abstract.....	xiv
INTRODUCTION: Cinema and State Formation.....	1
<i>Historiography of the Propaganda State</i>	7
<i>Mass Culture and State Formation</i>	16
CHAPTER 1. Colonialism, War, and Cinema from the Late Qing to the Republic, 1897-1927.....	25
<i>Colonialism and Early Cinema</i>	31
<i>War Films</i>	41
<i>Co-productions</i>	52
<i>Theorizing Cinema and Social Power</i>	59
<i>Envisioning National Culture</i>	65
<i>Exhibition and the State</i>	75
<i>Conclusions</i>	78
CHAPTER 2. Cinematic Partyfication and Internationalism: The Nationalist Revolution, 1924-1937.....	83
<i>Li Minwei and Sun Yat-sen</i>	89
<i>Newsreels, Publicity, and Propaganda during the 1920s</i>	95

<i>The Nationalist Party's Propaganda Plan</i>	108
<i>The National Educational Cinematographic Society</i>	117
<i>Building a State Film Industry</i>	135
<i>Conclusions</i>	152
CHAPTER 3. Wartime Propaganda States, 1937-1945.....	157
Free China: State Studios during the War of Resistance	161
<i>Wuhan: The China Motion Picture Corporation</i>	163
<i>The Nationalist Party in Shanghai and Hong Kong</i>	167
<i>The Studio System</i>	172
<i>Distribution</i>	184
<i>Intelligence, Propaganda, and Public Relations</i>	188
<i>De-commercializing Culture</i>	194
Red Capital: Film Production and the “Yan’an Way”	201
<i>Communist Party Cultural Policy: An Overview</i>	202
<i>Early Images of Yan’an</i>	207
<i>Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo’er, and the Yan’an Film Corps</i>	213
<i>Documentary Filmmaking and Wartime Mobilization</i>	218
<i>The Yan’an Film Corps after 1940</i>	224
<i>The Yan’an Film Studio</i>	230
Japan’s China: Manzhouguo and “State Policy” Cinema	235
<i>Japanese Filmmaking in Manchuria</i>	236
<i>The Manchuria Motion Pictures Corporation</i>	238
<i>Exhibition and Censorship</i>	248
<i>North and Central China</i>	251

Conclusions	255
CHAPTER 4. Propaganda, Disinformation, and Spectacle from the Civil War to National Inauguration, 1945-1949.....	262
Guerilla Cinema: Film and the Military	270
<i>The Northwest Trainee Film Team</i>	272
<i>The North China Film Team</i>	276
The Northeast Nexus: State Cinema and Communist Rule	282
<i>The Northeast Film Company</i>	284
<i>The Northeast Film Studio</i>	288
<i>The Democratic Northeast</i>	290
<i>Distribution and Exhibition</i>	295
<i>Northeast Filmmakers and the Central Committee</i>	298
Sovereign Rites and National Spectacle	300
<i>Filming Liberation</i>	301
<i>National Inauguration</i>	307
<i>Securing Recognition</i>	320
Conclusions	326
CHAPTER 5. State Cinema in New China, 1949-1955.....	331
<i>Film and Culture on the Eve of Liberation</i>	337
<i>Takeover</i>	341
<i>Campaigns</i>	358
<i>Centralization: Confronting Shanghai</i>	365
<i>Centralization: Planning and Uniformity</i>	372
<i>The Studio System</i>	383
<i>Conclusions</i>	391

CHAPTER 6. Cold War Culture Industry: National and International Contexts, 1949-1955.....	395
<i>Nationalizing Culture</i>	403
<i>The International Studio</i>	408
<i>Technology Transfer</i>	418
<i>Sino-Soviet Culture during the Early 1950s</i>	422
<i>Exhibiting China in the World</i>	437
<i>Conclusions</i>	444
CONCLUSION: Mass Media and War.....	447
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	455

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: City entrance ceremony, Beiping, February 3, 1949.....	302
Figure 4.2: City entrance ceremony, Beiping, February 3, 1949 (2).....	302
Figure 4.3: Poster depicting Fifteenth Night festivities, February 12, 1949. The caption reads: “Red flags wave and songs ring out, oceans of people celebrate liberation. The masses of people become masters, the ancient palace has been changed into a new red square”.....	304
Figure 4.4: Mao and assembled “democratic personages”.....	305
Figure 4.5: The movie camera as ritual observer.....	308
Figure 4.6: Viewing Tiananmen Square (<i>Tiananmen guangchang</i>) from the rostrum atop Tiananmen Gate (<i>Tiananmen</i>), October 1, 1949.....	311
Figure 4.7: Pronouncing the Central People’s Government established.....	313
Figure 4.8: Crowds bearing ceremonial banners, flags, and state symbols.....	317
Figure 4.9: Rostrum on Tiananmen Gate with cameras and other recording equipment visible, October 1, 1949.....	319
Figure 4.10: Sichuan advertisement for <i>China Liberated</i> , 1950.....	322

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Individual Commercial Press titles by year, 1917-1927.....	69
Table 1.2: Individual documentary, newsreel, and actualité titles by year, 1921-1927.....	73
Table 2.1: Individual documentary, newsreel, and actualité titles by year, 1921-1929.....	97
Table 2.2: Members of the Chinese film industry with overseas educational background, 1927.....	106
Table 2.3: Film theaters by province and municipality, c.a. 1936.....	149
Table 3.1: Chinese-language films produced between June 1937 and June 1940 by spoken dialect.....	167
Table 3.2: Individual film titles released by Nationalist Party-affiliated studios, 1938-1945.....	174
Table 3.3: Films produced by Hong Kong studios containing patriotic (<i>aiguo</i>) themes, 1934-1941.....	176
Table 3.4: Documentaries and newsreels produced by Yan'an-directed film organizations, 1939-1945.....	234
Table 3.5: “Cultural” and “enlightenment” films produced by the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation, 1938-1945.....	244
Table 3.6: Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation Personnel by place of origin, November 1944.....	245
Table 3.7: Film titles inspected by the Manzhouguo Office of Public Information, 1934.....	246
Table 3.8: Films inspected for exhibition in Manzhouguo by country of origin, 1936-1942.....	248
Table 3.9: Northeast theaters by province and territory, 1935 and 1940.....	249
Table 3.10: Ownership of theaters in Manzhouguo and the Guandong Leased Territories, 1937-1942.....	251

Table 3.11: Theaters owned by Japanese corporations before and after the establishment of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation.....	252
Table 3.12: China Motion Picture Corporation personnel by place of origin, 1939-1940.....	253
Table 3.13: Japanese studio-produced films shown in area of Shanghai concessions, 1937-1938.....	254
Table 3.14: Feature films (Shanghai) and documentaries (Hong Kong) produced by Chinese studios in cooperation with occupation authorities, 1942-1945.....	255
Table 4.1: State-owned studios by institutional affiliation, location, and type of production, 1945-1949.....	266
Table 4.2: Individual titles released by the Northeast Film Studio, 1946-1949 (excluding subtitled or overdubbed films).....	293
Table 5.1: Beijing-produced films (as numbers of reels), 1949-1955.....	379
Table 5.2: Feature and theatrical performance films (titles and total reels) produced by the Northeast Film Studio, 1949-1955 (years refer to production start date, not year of release).....	384
Table 5.3: Comparison of planned Northeast Film Studio full-length feature production with national targets overall. 1949-1955.....	385
Table 5.4: Features (full-length and “shorts”), theatrical and chorale performance films produced by the Beijing Film Studio (by year of release), 1949-1955..	386
Table 5.5: State and private studio releases (including full-length and “short” features, theatrical and chorale performance films) compared with total domestic output, 1949-1955.....	389
Table 6.1: Total Beijing film screenings by studio, country of origin, 1949-1955...	422
Table 6.2: Total Beijing film screenings by genre, 1949-1955.....	424
Table 6.3: Comparison of screenings and total attendance, Chinese-language and English-language films, Shanghai, 1949-1950 (does not include January-March 1949, December 1950).....	427

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

International and Wartime Origins of the Propaganda State:
The Motion Picture in China, 1897-1955

by

Matthew David Johnson

Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair

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This dissertation is a study of elite efforts to master new technologies of political communication in twentieth-century China. In particular, it focuses on an unlikely pair of topics—cinema and state formation. While motion pictures are not often included in discussions of the media, they too have played a role in the creation and exercise of political power. Numerous choices have been made throughout modern Chinese history concerning the proper role of culture in state affairs. A central argument here is that propaganda activities have shaped mass media production from the moment of China's

own “communications revolution” onward. Cinematic technologies—like those of the telegraph, radio, and journalistic press—were instantly appreciated for their powers to enhance political efficacy and shape mass opinion. The relentless pursuit of state prerogatives in each of these areas, partly in response to decades of foreign threat and social crisis, has creating an enduring institutional basis for centralized media management which has survived to the present day.

INTRODUCTION: Cinema and State Formation

This dissertation is a study of elite efforts to master new technologies of political communication in twentieth-century China. In particular, it focuses on an unlikely pair of topics—cinema and state formation. While motion pictures are not often included in discussions of the media, they too have played a role in the creation and exercise of political power.¹ Numerous choices have been made throughout modern Chinese history concerning the proper role of culture in state affairs.² A central argument here is that propaganda activities have shaped mass media production from the moment of China's own "communications revolution" onward. Cinematic technologies—like those of the telegraph, radio, and journalistic press—were instantly appreciated for their powers to enhance political efficacy and shape mass opinion. The relentless pursuit of state prerogatives in each of these areas, partly in response to decades of foreign threat and social crisis, has created an enduring institutional basis for centralized media management which has survived to the present day.

In the waning years of the Qing (1644-1911), China's territories were subjected to increasingly invasive modes of imperialist scrutiny. New mass communications systems accelerated the flow of information within far-flung political economic networks. The rise of elite-managed presses and newspapers (e.g. the *Shen bao*) reflected attempts to

¹ For an overview of the relation between communications media and politics in Western history, see: Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York, Basic Books, 2004).

² See: R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Patricia M. Thornton, *Disciplining the State: Virtue, Violence, and State-Making in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Center, 2007).

redefine social relationships around notions of “public” and “nation.”³ Yet any optimism generated by reformist initiatives could not mask the fact that on a global scale, the mass media continued to serve foreign agendas. Negative portrayals of Chinese people and political systems seemed calculated to deny non-white peoples an equal place within the European international system. Japan’s attainment of great power status, confirmed by victory over the czar’s armies in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), only added to the number of competing imperialist “imaginaries” which validated territorial expansion at China’s expense.

War and treaty port colonialism made possible the production of increasingly denigrating views of Qing rule, a phenomenon which extended from print culture to photography and, ultimately, to the cinema. The gradual transfer of motion picture technology across civilizational lines, however, further reshaped existing dynamics of media production. Ren Qingtai’s single-reel films of well-known opera performers (e.g. Tan Xinpei) are commonly associated with the true “birth” of Chinese cinema. Western entrepreneurs A. E. Lauro and Benjamin Brodsky, working at the same time as Ren, were equally active in recruiting local actors to join in their commercial filmmaking ventures (e.g. Lauro’s *The Curse of Opium* and Brodsky’s *Stealing a Roast Duck*)—one Brodsky performer, Li Minwei, would go on to play a pioneering role as Sun Yat-sen’s official film propagandist and the founder of Mingxin (China Sun) Motion Picture Company.

³ Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow, eds., *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow, eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge, M.A., Harvard University Asia Center, 2002); Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in China: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2004); Peter Zarrow, ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

Despite the fact that several Lauro and Brodsky efforts were reformist “civilized plays” (*wenming xi*) suggested by their Chinese performers, continued misrepresentation of non-Europeans in foreign films convinced many critics that this powerful new medium was being used to ruin the nation’s image abroad.

China was one of many societies with a long history of employing cultural forms as “vehicles” for spreading state-defined orthodoxy (*wen yi zai dao*).⁴ By the early twentieth century, however, elite communities had gained a new appreciation of the importance of vernacular, national culture as a tool of state-to-state political communication and national reform.⁵ These developments profoundly shaped domestic filmmaking efforts. In 1919, at the close of the May Fourth Movement, owners of the Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan*) submitted an official petition to begin producing “educational” films aimed both at promoting popular nationalist sentiment, and countering the effects of negative foreign stereotypes.⁶ Exactly half of the fifty-six

⁴ See, for example: James L. Watson, “Rites or Beliefs? The Construction of a Unified Culture in Late Imperial China,” in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, *China’s Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁵ Susan R. Fernsebner, *Material Modernities: China’s Participation in World’s Fairs and Exhibitions, 1876-1955* (Ph.D. dissertation) (San Diego: University of California, 2002). On vernacular modernism in China’s early cinema, see: Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). On elite and intellectual communities and cultural reform more generally, see: Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (3 vols.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958-1965); Chow Tse-tung, *The May 4th Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (third edition) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999 [1961]); Lin Yü-sheng, *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Radical Antitraditionalism in the May Fourth Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979); Jerome B. Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: The Free Press, 1981); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Q. Edward Wang, *Inventing China Through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001).

⁶ “Wei zizhi huodong yingpian qing zhun mianshui chengwen,” *Shangwu yinshuguan tongxun lu* (May 1919). Quoted in: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 11-12.

films completed by the Commercial Press between 1917 and 1927 were educational titles.

Political uses of film—in particular, the production of films on behalf of the Nationalist Party—also began after the May Fourth Movement. Through the personal support of Sun Yat-sen, former Benjamin Brodsky associate Li Minwei and his Minxin (China Sun) Motion Picture Company became trusted cinematic propagandists for the rising Nationalist figure Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek). By this time nonfiction film had reached a new level of technical achievement, as documentary filmmakers began popularizing the medium's uses as a tool of creating and shaping public awareness. Observers writing during the 1920s began using terms like “propaganda” or “publicity” (*xuanchuan*) to describe the effect of national film industries on international opinion. Contact between Chinese and foreign filmmakers hastened the emergence of a single standard of what was still described by many as “educational” cinema, but which in reality had become a vital tool of political statecraft. The National Educational Cinematography Association (*Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui*), established by a Nationalist Party coalition of propagandists, educators, and central political figures through consultation with the League of Nations, was modeled on Italy's Educational Film Union, the *L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa*, or *LUCE*. The early 1930s thus ushered in a period during which Nationalist-dominated institutions for centralizing political control over the domestic film industry, and lobbying for more favorable depictions of China overseas, proliferated.⁷ The resulting “educational cinematography

⁷ See: Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937* (Ph.D. dissertation) (San Diego: University of California, 1994); Zhiwei Xiao, “Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937,” in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*

movement” spread to provincial governments and national universities. As in other areas of education life, party-fication took hold.⁸

War between China and Japan both intensified and disrupted the Nationalist government’s attempts to redefine cinema in terms amenable to state needs. Intensified, because the sudden loss of control over Shanghai’s studios was somewhat compensated for by enlisting refugee filmmaking communities—including several members of the Communist Party—into the state studio sector. Disrupted, because relocation to the hinterland wartime capital of Chongqing also created severe cracks in the Nationalist political and material base. The result was the same. Nationalists and Communists agreed on the inadequacy of commercial production and distribution models as effective means of mobilizing the populace. New propaganda forms proliferated during the early years of resistance, as did condemnation of film industries in Shanghai and Hong Kong for failing to adequately serve the needs of the war effort.⁹ Nationalist-dominated Chongqing, Communist Yan’an, and Japanese client states throughout northeast, north, and central China competed intensely for recognition as legitimate representatives of the national interest, resulting in the imposition of robust political controls over cultural production in all three regions. Propaganda, once understood as a particular cinematic function, or mode, soon became the *raison d’être* of the entire industry.

(Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997); Zhiwei Xiao, “Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade,” in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁸ See: Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000).

⁹ Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Although commercial filmmaking continued after the war, capital became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the Nationalist Party. Studio facilities constructed in Chongqing at the behest of senior Nationalist figure, educational minister, and intelligence director Chen Lifu were relocated to Nanjing; to these were added extensive holdings confiscated from collapsing Japanese-backed governments. In north China, Yan'an-trained filmmakers honed their craft by devising anti-Nationalist disinformation and newsreels extolling the virtues of Communist rule. Following the brief People's Liberation Army occupation of Changchun, a coalition of base area filmmakers led by Soviet-trained director Yuan Muzhi oversaw construction of an independent facility near Ha'erbin—the Northeast Film Studio—in 1946. As during earlier years, motion pictures were primarily seen as a tool of mobilization. Northeast films urged audiences to produce for the front, accept the new Communist government, and overthrow Nationalist rule. When the People's Republic of China was established on October 1, 1949 Soviet-assisted film teams were present to record the ceremony. Documentaries like *Victory of the Chinese People* (*Zhongguo renmin de shengli*, 1950) and *China Liberated* (*Jiefang le de Zhongguo*, 1950) disseminated the regime's claims to sovereignty throughout the world, using images which evoked a broad range of “authenticating” strategies—China as civilization, China as nation-state, China as worker's paradise.

During the Korean War (1950-1953), patterns of wartime film production established during World War II were essentially repeated. In contrast to the Nationalist Party, however, Communist central leaders were able to swiftly establish control over the private studio sector in its entirety. Once again, state emphasis on propaganda as the

necessary and dominant mode of cultural production did not mean that “entertainment” disappeared. Instead, all films now fell under the domain of state planning, which nonetheless openly favored the introduction of specific political messages into entertainment contexts; profits, too, were returned to the state and reallocated throughout the economy according to Soviet-style central planning methods. While the Sino-Soviet alliance exposed China’s audiences to new representations of socialist experience, however, Maoist propaganda contained elements drawn from a consciously nativist and internationalist range of cultural models.¹⁰ The overarching thrust was a familiar one—to instill in domestic and overseas audiences alike set of positive dispositions toward the Chinese state, not toward the Soviet-dominated socialist bloc *per se*. Yet this carefully-orchestrated national performance often overlapped with a more particularist agenda of party authority. Within a competitive world order divided between political elites and other social groupings as well as between sovereign states, nationalism was one among many “identity projects” associated with the subtle ideational machinery of China’s state apparatus. In general terms, then, what defined the state as such during this period was not its pairing with a specific ideology, but the erosion of alternatives to its cultural reach.

Historiography of the Propaganda State

Much of this dissertation is based on sources which have only recently become available to historians: published memoirs; edited volumes of newspaper articles and other contemporary sources; specialized histories published on the one hundred-year

¹⁰ On Soviet films in the People’s Republic of China, see: Tina Mai Chen, “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s,” *Cultural Critique* 58 (2004), 82-114.

“anniversary” of the Chinese film industry; municipal and national archives of the People’s Republic of China. In addition, I conducted more than a year of interviews with retired members of the Beijing and Xi’an film studios. The initial goal of these activities was to construct a more empirically complete picture of the post-1949 state film industry. In time, however, it became obvious to me that both the international and pre-1949 contexts of the Communist-led “propaganda state” deserved fuller treatment—treatment which had been neglected by most previous scholarship on the topic

Following World War II, Chinese Communist Party attempts to mold mass opinion remained under the domain of existing propaganda (*xuanchuan*) institutions, an arrangement which partly reflected assumptions concerning the indispensable nature of such activities to party-based regimentation of social life during the subsequent Civil War.¹¹ By contrast, the United States reorganized similar programs into “cultural affairs” initiatives targeting foreign countries, or research into “public opinion” and “communications” on the home front.¹² “Propaganda,” by contrast, became associated

¹¹ For a suggestive account of propaganda institutions under the Nationalist Party and their subsequent influence on similar Communist Party structures, see: Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*. For a Communist-centered version of this history, see, for example: Lin Zhida, *Zhongguo gongchan dang xuanchuan shi* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1990). Collections of post-1949 documents related to the Central Committee Propaganda Department appear in: Zhonggong zhongyang xuanchuan bu bangong ting, Zhongyang dang’an guan bianjiu bu, eds., *Zhongguo gongchan dang xuanchuan gongzuo wenxian xuanbian* (2 vols.) (Beijing: Xuexi chubanshe, n.d.).

¹² See, for example: Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Christian G. Appy, *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000); Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., “*Here, There, and Everywhere*”: *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Salzburg, 2000); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (The Free Press, 2001); Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Potomac Books, 2005). Other important studies which more freely apply the term “propaganda” to these same activities include: Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Michal Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared!: The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* (Chronicle Books, 2001); Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002).

with the evils of Leninist political systems. Critiques of communism extended to the Soviet Union and its allies, and Chinese Communists were accused of “ideological remolding” and “brainwashing” from the early 1950s onward.¹³ Several early scholarly accounts, including one produced by future modernization theory architect W. W. Rostow, helped to reinforce the growing image of China—made popular by U.S. involvement in the Korean War—as an “all-powerful state whipping citizens into meek obedience.”¹⁴

Within Chinese studies, the 1960 Sino-Soviet split and subsequent tumult of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) resulted in a subtle de-emphasis on the Soviet origins of Chinese communism. Earlier work by Benjamin Schwartz had pioneered the view that Mao Zedong’s political rise was not the result of Kremlin machinations.¹⁵ However, subsequent studies of literary and artistic production under Communist Party rule primarily emphasized the repressive aspects of Maoist cultural politics in a manner reminiscent of earlier accusations of repression.¹⁶ Beginning in the mid-1960s, application of social science techniques to studies of post-1949 Chinese “politics” began

¹³ See, for example: *The Dead Hand ... Communism and Culture: A Selection of Articles Reprinted from the Review “Problems of Communism” published by the United States Information Service* (London: The United States Information Service, n.d.); Tak-kai Chin, *A Study on Chinese Communist Propaganda, Its Policy and Operations* (Hong Kong, 1954). An early and somewhat more nuanced perspective on “brainwashing” appears in: Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969 [1963]). Other “master texts” on the totalitarian nature of communist political systems also emphasized effacement of individual rights by party-defined, collective goals. See: Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965).

¹⁴ Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, “The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China: An Introduction,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁵ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (third edition) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966 [1951]).

¹⁶ See: C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (third edition) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990 [1961]); Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness: Studies of the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968).

to direct scholarly attention toward the structures and social relationships through which organization, control, and economic change had developed.¹⁷ Franz Schurmann's pioneering volume on postrevolutionary Chinese society—in particular its “organizational ideology”—represented one of the first efforts to systematically distinguish China from other states in the “international Communist movement.”¹⁸ Schurmann argued against associating Chinese mass media with “stereotyped” (i.e. crude, misleading) propaganda, arguing instead that the overall function of communications systems was to produce specific forms of social action.¹⁹ The result was a shift away from accounts which emphasized the pernicious effects of state-controlled

¹⁷ An early omen of this sea-change was undoubtedly W.W. Rostow's work concerning the “stages” of economic growth. See: W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (third edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1960]). On area studies and its history, see also: Wendell C. Bennett, *Area Studies in American Universities* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1951); Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Robert Marks, “The State of the China Field: Or, the China Field and the State,” *Modern China*, vol. 11, no. 4 (October 1985); Vicente L. Rafael, “The Cultures of Area Studies in the United States,” *Social Text*, vol. 41 (1994); Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: The State, the Foundations, and International and Area Studies during and after the Cold War,” in *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999); Harry Harootunian, “Tracking the Dinosaur: Area Studies in a Time of ‘Globalism’,” in *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds., *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002); Mark T. Berger, *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Andrew G. Walder, “The Transformation of Contemporary China Studies, 1977-2002,” in David Szanton, ed., *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹⁸ See: Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (second edition, enlarged) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 [1966]). Other monographs and conference publications which contributed to the new emphasis on politics and system (i.e. the “organization” paradigm) include: Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *China Under Mao: Politics Takes Command* (selection from *The China Quarterly*) (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966); A Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1967); Ping-ti Ho and Tang Tsou, eds., *China in Crisis: China's Heritage and the Political System* (2 vols.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968); A. Doak Barnett, ed., *Chinese Communist Politics in Action* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968); Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); John M. Lindback, ed., *China: Management of a Revolutionary Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971).

¹⁹ Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 62-67.

cultural production on human freedom, and toward an attempt to understand changes in media as a function of elite-driven national policy.

Subsequent studies of Communist Party propaganda networks shared Schurmann's communications-oriented approach. Scholars grouped around the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Center for International Studies (CENIS) sought to understand the role of media as a tool of "national integration" in decolonizing African and Asian nations.²⁰ With respect to China, references to totalitarianism and the Soviet Union persisted, yet the broader paradigm was now one of modernization, or political economic development.²¹ While post-Cultural Revolution revelations indicated that party-state "penetration" of the hinterland had been far more incomplete than previously assumed, analytically the problem remained of how innovations in mass media systems had allowed Communist leaders to overcome impediments to governmental control.²² The dual emphasis on diversity within the propaganda system—both in terms of elite policy and mass response—and expansion of the system itself continues to inform recent

²⁰ On CENIS, see also: Bruce Cumings, "Boundary Displacement: The State, the Foundations, and International and Area Studies during and after the Cold War," 189-191; Mark T. Berger, *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 63-69.

²¹ See: Vincent V. S. King, *Propaganda Campaigns in Communist China* (Cambridge, MA: CENIS, MIT, 1966); Alan P. L. Liu, *Communications and National Integration in Communist China* (new enlarged edition) (Berkeley: University of California, 1975 [1971]). These studies, conducted under the direction of Ithiel de Sola Pool and Lucien Pye, were primarily influenced by models developed by Pool, Pye and Karl Deutsch. See: Lucien W. Pye, ed., *Communication and Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (New York: Free Press, 1966). See also: Frederick T.C. Yu, *Mass Persuasion in Communist China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964); Godwin C. Chu, *Radical Change Through Communication in Mao's China* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i, 1977).

²² One permutation of this latter view, written concerning the origins of the Soviet Union, appears in: Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

scholarship on China's post-1949 cultural and intellectual networks.²³ In general, Communist Party management of public opinion is traced back to long patterns of interaction between Chinese and Soviet political leaders, thus reinforcing the perception that, as a historical phenomenon, propagandistic approaches to cultural production were exclusively a feature of socialist societies.²⁴

Where film arose in discussions of Chinese communications, it was viewed as an industry best understood in terms of its ability to reach domestic audiences, despite the fact that international exhibition had been ongoing since 1949. One of the first English-language works to treat Chinese films as art, rather than a mode of political indoctrination, was Jay Leyda's groundbreaking *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*.²⁵ As exchange between China and the U.S. tacitly increased after 1972, a number of other articles and accounts emerged which sought to interpret the new images as expressions of national experience. Many writers in this mode were formerly associated with the 1960s Left and contemporary anti-war movements, and already inclined to take a favorable view of Maoism vis-à-vis Soviet

²³ See: Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Daniel C. Lynch, *After the Propaganda State: Media, Politics, and "Thought Work" in Reformed China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Reformed China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

²⁴ See: Julian Chang, "The Mechanics of State Propaganda: The People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s," in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich, eds., *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).

²⁵ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972). Another important work of this period, written by Régis Bergeron following three years as a French language teacher at Beijing University, is: Régis Bergeron, *Le cinéma chinois, 1905-1949* (Lausanne: Alfred Eibel, 1977). Bergeron's multi-volume account of the post-1949 industry was later published as: Régis Bergeron, *Le cinéma chinois, 1949-1983* (3 vols.) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1984).

communism.²⁶ Leyda reinforced this perspective, attempting (not uncritically) to formulate a theory of Chinese national cinema based not on its relationship to the Soviet Union, but to what he perceived as China's traditional arts of opera and landscape painting.

Between 1959 and 1963, Leyda had worked as an advisor to the China Film Archive, and *Dianying/Electric Shadows* was profoundly influenced by a manuscript prepared by Cheng Jihua's "History of the Development of Chinese Cinema" research group as well as by Leyda's own observations. Cheng's two-volume work—parts of which appear to have been translated and inserted into *Dianying/Electric Shadows* verbatim—was produced at the order of high-ranking cultural figures (e.g. Xia Yan, Chen Huangmei) within the Communist Party. As the first major work of film history published in the People's Republic of China, its invaluable source material and filmographies were organized according to the notion that progressive, "left-wing" filmmakers under party direction represented the driving force in cinematic development prior to 1949.²⁷ What *Dianying/Electric Shadows* added to the narrative were accounts written by non-Chinese observers and an overview of post-1949 film culture, focusing primarily on production. Notes compiled by Leyda on the eve of the Cultural Revolution indicated that tensions between Maoist (i.e. Yan'an-based) and "Shanghai-based or non-Yanan" artists were then coming to a head.²⁸ Ultimately, many of the filmmakers

²⁶ On post-1960 Maoism and political radicalism in a global context, see: Robert J. Alexander, *International Maoism in the Developing World* (Newport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

²⁷ Cheng Jihua, Liu Shaobai, and Xing Zuwen, eds., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* (2 vols.) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]).

²⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, xv.

celebrated in Cheng Jihua's account were pushed aside during the Cultural Revolution itself, branded "betrayers" of the Maoist "cultural line" (*wenyi luxian*).

Both Cheng and Leyda, along with a steady stream of post-Cultural Revolution publications concerning individual and industry histories, shifted the discussion of Chinese film toward representational issues.²⁹ While many of these studies highlighted the importance of political context to film production, they remained somewhat limited by a selective emphasis on filmmakers identified with Cheng's left-wing canon—a consequence of the return of Xia Yan and other former Shanghai cultural figures to power, as well as Communist Party efforts to redefine international perceptions of China's national cinematic traditions following Mao's death.³⁰ By this point the communications paradigm in U.S.-based China studies had given way to research based on fieldwork; film became the domain of literary scholars and historians, rather than political scientists. Emphasis on "politics," however, remained. In attempting to divorce the artistic achievements of post-1949 Chinese filmmakers from their (often unpalatable) ideological positions, new studies of cinema—most notably those of Paul Clark—enlisted Cultural Revolution-era narratives of "two-line struggle" to claim that creative freedom had been routinely subjected to Maoist distortions.³¹

²⁹ See, for example: Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu, ed., *Zhongguo dianyingjia liezhuan* (2 vols.) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1982); Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo dianying shiye ershiwu nian, 1949-1984* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985); Chen Huangmei, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo dianying* (2 vols.) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989); Du Yunzhi, *Zhonghua minguo dianying shi* (2 vols.) (Taipei: Xingzheng yuan wenhua jianshe weiyuanhui, 1990).

³⁰ See: Chris Berry, ed., *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Papers, Cornell China-Japan Program, 1985).

³¹ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics Since 1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Clark's work emerged at the same time as Chinese cinema was gaining coherence as a subject of both university curricula and international film festivals.³² Its distinction between "cultural authorities" and "artists," however, had much in common with other studies of cultural production under Communist Party rule.³³ This view has also been taken up by a more recent group of Chinese scholars writing after Cheng Jihua. Rather than celebrating Communist guidance of the film industry, they criticize the interference of "politics" in post-1949 film production, offering this history as explanation for the comparative weakness of China's film industry with respect to contemporary Hollywood.³⁴ A leading voice in the field, Li Daoxin, describes the task as one of "construction" (*jian'gou*), focusing on technology, economics, social institutions, and representational form (e.g. genre) rather than cultural policy.³⁵ The favored perspective, instead, seeks to reinstall popularized notions of "art" as the basis for further discussion of historical development; discussion now tends to focus on great directors, genre studies, and pre-1949 Shanghai film culture.

³² See: Yingjin Zhang, *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, 43-113 (Chapter Three, "The Rise of Chinese Film Studies in the West: Contextualizing Issues, Methods, Questions").

³³ See, for example: Merle Goldman, *China's Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981); Anne F. Thurston, *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of the Intellectuals in China's Great Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Perry Link, *Evening Chats in Beijing* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992); Maria Galinowski, *Art and Politics in China, 1949-1984* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998); Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). The understudied notion of "establishment" intellectuals appears in: Carol Lee Hamrin and Timothy Cheek, eds., *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1986). See also: Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Literary System* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Richard Kraus, *The Party and the Arts: The New Politics of Culture in China* (Lanham, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

³⁴ Such views appear in a recent textbook, fifty-year overview of post-1949 Chinese cinema, and anthology of central archives and industry related documents. See, respectively: Su Xiaoming, *Zhongguo dianying yishu shi jiaocheng, 1949-1999* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2000); Yin Hong and Ling Yan, *Xin Zhongguo dianying shi: 1949-2000* (Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2000); Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, 1949-1979* (3 vols.) (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2005).

³⁵ See: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shixue jian'gou* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2004).

From a historian's perspective, reclaiming an idealized notion of China's "own" national cinema does not answer the question of how to interpret a far messier archive; one which points to the isolated nature of "Shanghai cinematic modernity" as a pre-1949 phenomenon. The fact that such an archive now exists—that is, that both Nationalist and Communist Party records concerning the construction of successive state industries under both governments are now available—makes this an opportune moment in which to revisit the propaganda paradigm once more.

Mass Culture and State Formation

State uses of mass culture have already become an enduring theme in twentieth-century historiography. Once identified with critical scholarship, these inquiries have become a standard means of understanding how it is that classes are "made," states "modernized," nations "imagined," and traditions "invented."³⁶ Indeed, during the early twentieth century, many prominent figures argued for the importance of strong leaders and a unified culture—nationalism—as the basis for the creation of politics itself.³⁷ Mass media technologies, in turn, became a vital means of creating political communities;

³⁶ Important critical perspectives include: Antonio Gramsci (Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, trans.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971); Walter Benjamin (Harry Zohn, trans.), "The Work of Art in the Age of [Its] Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968 [1955]); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (John Cumming, trans.), *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2001 [1944]); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life (Vol. 1)* (London: Verso, 1991 [1947]); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958); Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983 [1967]). Somewhat more recent works alluded to include: E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966); Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition) (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³⁷ James M. Jasper, "Culture, Knowledge, Politics," in Thomas Janoski, Robert Alford, Alexander Hicks, and Mildred A. Schwartz, eds., *The Handbook of Political Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 116.

cinema was one such technology. While early studies of film which accepted this insight tended to focus on moments of historical disruption (e.g. war, fascism, revolution and anti-Western movements), more recently the notion of “national” cinemas has acquired a ubiquity in the field as well.

Most studies, however, consider national motion picture industries solely as creators of “cultures of capital.”³⁸ The problem thus arises—how to explain the use of cinema for purposes other than capital accumulation? This issue lurks within studies of contemporary Chinese cinemas as well, many of which approach representation as if its explicit function were to create national identities, while addressing institutional structures from the perspective of production and profit-maximization.³⁹ Other recent studies have combined these two perspectives, focusing on how cinematic industries have pursued profits within specific politically- or linguistically-defined regions precisely by interpellating audiences as national/ethnic subjects.⁴⁰ While this latter approach is promising as a means of reconciling evidence for cinema-as-political-culture with cinema-as-capitalist-industry, it has in practice tended to focus only on the feature film, meaning that other genres and state institutions related to political culture, or propaganda, are excluded altogether.

As suggested above, many film studies trends can be related to more recent decades of competition between geographically-dispersed culture industries whose primary commodity—the “blockbuster”—has generated reams of scholarship purporting

³⁸ See, for example: Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, “Introduction,” in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, eds., *Theorising National Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), 1-14.

³⁹ See, for example: Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Poshek Fu, ed., *China Forever: Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ See: Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).

to define the genre's characteristics and implications. One could just as easily imagine, though, an approach to film which begins from the continued involvement of state institutions in shaping the markets, investment patterns, technologies and representational forms upon which these industries are based. This dissertation is intended as the first step toward such a research program. As such, its intended contribution is to the fields of history and political economy rather than film studies *per se*. While not focused on reception, another important goal is to understand how, from 1949 onward, state-produced culture in China was able to attain unquestioned dominance over non-state forms. Film teams, censorship, and socialist propaganda are often regarded as emblems of a "Maoist" film industry, yet few scholars have attempted to take advantage of recently-opened archives to understand the intellectual and institutional origins of these diverse phenomena.⁴¹ By continuing to treat Maoism as an aberration—either in terms of its monstrosity or its utopian promise—most histories of the People's Republic of China risk unintentionally dehistoricizing their object of study. Similarly, by looking first to the Maoist period for the origins of China's "era of reform" (*gaige shiqi*), political economists overlook longer patterns of change which may shed new light on the post-socialist condition.

Recent attempts to "cross the 1949 divide" have begun to address some of these lacunae, providing new perspectives on Chinese Communist Party policies in the process.

⁴¹ Indeed, there remain almost no institutional studies of pre-1949 Chinese cinema in general. For notable exceptions, see: Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937* (Ph.D. dissertation) (San Diego: University of California, 1994); Zhiwei Xiao, "Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937," in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); Zhiwei Xiao, "Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade," in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

So far, the focus has primarily been on institutional centralization and the politicization of everyday life, two themes which are also crucial to this dissertation.⁴² Looking at the state enterprise system and origins of post-1949 social welfare institutions, Morris Bian has suggested that China's "War of Resistance against Japan" (*Kang-Ri zhanzheng*, 1937-1945) provided the crucial context linking Communist organizations with those of the preceding Nationalist Party government.⁴³ Nearly a decade earlier, John Fitzgerald proposed a connection between Communist and Nationalist attitudes toward propaganda, noting that Mao Zedong had worked as a Nationalist propagandist during the party's Lenin-ization under Sun Yat-sen.⁴⁴ In this case, the dual crisis which "punctuated" China's political equilibrium was disunity in the face of Western imperialism. The argument which Fitzgerald lays out—that mass mobilization and cultural homogeneity were seen as important goals of propaganda activity—bears a striking resemblance to Peter Kenez's portrayal of the Soviet "propaganda state" as a solution to Russia's perceived backwardness as a modern nation.⁴⁵ Moreover, it implies that similarities between China's Nationalist and Communist governments can be situated within a shared context of twentieth-century imperialism—a theme elaborated in this dissertation as well.

⁴² On the former, see: William C. Kirby, "Engineering China: The Birth of the Developmental State," in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). On the latter, see: John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). See also: Joseph W. Esherick, "Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution," *Modern China*, vol. 21, no. 1 (January 1995), 44-76.

⁴³ See: Morris L. Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China: The Dynamics of Institutional Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*, 236-241.

⁴⁵ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)

In short, the political functions of China's mid-twentieth century state film industry may well be traceable to broader patterns of competition with other states. Yet unlike studies of Chinese cinema which assume that all film can read as "national" regardless of historical moment, this dissertation also seeks to describe the specific institutions and models which shaped an industry devoted to the state-directed production of political community.⁴⁶ How film—and modern technologies of mass media in general—played a part in China's nationalizing process is a question which is only now beginning to be answered by scholars interested in the emergence of twentieth-century elite print culture.⁴⁷ As accounts by Bian and Fitzgerald suggest, war certainly played a decisive role in legitimating the expansion of state activity on a seemingly unprecedented scale. Yet imperialism took forms other than war, and the forms of response to this crisis were by no means preordained. If Chinese responses to Western European expansion resembled equivalent modes of political organization within imperialist nations, this process must also be uncovered, rather than assumed.

The narrative presented at the outset of this introduction, which forms a summary of the chapters to follow, demonstrates that one of the consequences of colonial domination over China's treaty ports was a universalizing "world culture" of images—

⁴⁶ For a variety of such national readings covering nearly the entire spectrum of early twentieth-century Chinese narrative cinema, see: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ See: Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in China: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2004); Peter Zarrow, ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006). Other work on nationalism in Republican popular culture includes: Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Wen-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

including motion pictures—which served to delegitimize the civilizational standards of the Qing empire by highlighting perceived excesses of violence and barbarity.⁴⁸

According to Western international law, states which could not produce sufficient evidence (or force) to prove their adherence to civilized norms were not recognized as diplomatic equals.⁴⁹ Early twentieth-century China was already enmeshed in a process of sweeping political change, soon to be called revolution. That motion picture technology arrived in the midst of this process, at a moment when demeaning images of the non-West were seen as a further threat to China’s sovereign aspirations, had three important consequences which are developed over the course of this dissertation: 1) the cinema was almost instantly adapted to this “crisis mode” of anti-imperialist national mobilization, 2) images of a homogenous, revitalized Chinese civilization were simultaneously projected “outward” for foreign consumption, and 3) a growing distrust of foreign-dominated commercial market structures resulted in the gradual erosion of private enterprise, and the assertion of state prerogatives throughout the film industry.

As Roy Armes argues in *Third World Filmmaking and the West*—and Joseph Levenson also claimed in *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*—the “Western impact” has largely served to undermine other existing institutions and practices of self-representation.⁵⁰ What goes overlooked in this formulation is the degree to which

⁴⁸ See: Timothy Brook, Jérôme Bourgon, and Gregory Blue, *Death by a Thousand Cuts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴⁹ Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). See also: Lydia H. Liu, “Legislating the Universal: The Circulation of International Law in the Nineteenth Century,” in Lydia H. Liu, ed., *Tokens of Exchange* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999); Frank J. Lechner and John Boli, *World Culture: Origins and Consequences* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2005).

⁵⁰ See, respectively: Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (3 vols.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958-1965).

homogenized, mass-mediated national cultures in Western states have undermined, overturned, and reformulated preexisting political ideologies as well. These connections will be made explicitly clear throughout this dissertation. China's state film industry did not arise solely in "response" to the West. Rather, the official institutions through which representations of "China" were produced and distributed emerged more or less simultaneously with large-scale propaganda activities worldwide. Italy, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union—as well as the United States—all exhibited various degrees of state media control throughout the twentieth century. Elites within each of these countries exchanged technologies with allies and trading partners while attempting, often fruitlessly, to deny their enemies the same.⁵¹ In the context of a tumultuous century, during which new audiovisual media were seen as key elements in planning and mobilizing for war, the result was a world in which film easily became an extension of state agendas.

This is not to deny that material and institutional differences existed between China and other nations; indeed, a final goal of this dissertation is to attempt to assess how, and to what degree, Communist Party rule was able to produce the forms of cultural hegemony (i.e. propaganda) with which it has become associated. A central point, related to John Fitzgerald's overarching argument, is that the Nationalist Party also played a key role in expanding technologies of "awakening" throughout Chinese society. Yet as noted by Frederic Wakeman, Jr.: "When it came to mobilization, the Nationalists exhorted, passed down decrees, and herded. The Communists' instinct was to go to the

⁵¹ On communications networks as the products of transnational elite cooperation, see: Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ed., *Communications Media, Globalization, and Empire* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006); Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007).

primary or grassroots level and commence organizing there, calling on the ‘masses’ to participate actively.”⁵² By the time described in Wakeman’s observation the Nationalist Party had waged war on regional militarists, the Imperial Japanese Army, and Communists themselves for over twenty years; the ensuing devastation no doubt contributed to Communist advantages in terms of local control.⁵³ Nonetheless, Wakeman draws attention to the importance of “grassroot” institutions for understanding broader processes of cultural change, an issue addressed primarily toward this dissertation’s end (see Chapter Six).

As culture (*Kultur*, *wenhua*, *bunmei*) became an acknowledged area of political activity during the twentieth century, definitions of sovereignty came to include control of—or, within the international system, clearing a visible space for—national culture industries. Indeed, Nationalists and Communists alike pursued “national strengthening” according to these very sovereign norms. Taken as a whole, then, the history of China’s state film industry reveals unexpected patterns of production and exchange; patterns which only appear when this process of modern state formation is considered in advance of assumptions concerning the universality of Hollywood commercial models, or inevitability of Communist Party drift toward the “Soviet bloc” (as theories, both have been disproven). “Seeing like a state,” to borrow James Scott’s formulation, has always rested on a combination of technology and coercion through which society, represented

⁵² Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “‘Cleanup’: The New Order in Shanghai,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 42.

⁵³ This very preliminary observation is based in part on the “weak state” explanation for the collapse of both the Qing and republic. See: Joseph W. Esherick, “Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution,” reprinted in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, ed., *Twentieth-Century China: New Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2003), 49-50.

as a set of manageable categories, becomes visible.⁵⁴ Creating a twentieth-century China that could, in turn, be “seen like a state” has rested on these same combinations, yet their particularities should not distract us from the familiarity of the process itself.

⁵⁴ See: James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

CHAPTER 1. Colonialism, War, and Cinema from the Late Qing to the Republic,
1897-1927

The Qing empire faced incredible challenges in the nineteenth century. Domestic rebellion and foreign attack threatened the dynasty with collapse. Western colonial and imperialist endeavors radically reshaped the contours of East Asian international order, extracting commercial and territorial benefits from the embattled Manchu court. By 1905, the strongest army and navy in East Asia and the Pacific belonged not to China, or to any Western power, but to Japan.¹ Although trans-oceanic emigration increased substantially during this period, the Qing government remained too weak to substantially transform perceptions and treatment of Chinese subjects abroad, or the portrayal of China in the Western media. These negative images accompanied the erosion of Qing sovereignty. Western “sightings” of China may have included diverse perspectives, but their dominant mode of expression was one of suspicion and contempt.²

All of the East Asian powers, including Japan, made their power visible through ritual performance and dramatic display. Parts of China—particularly along the coast—were not only overcome in military and commercial terms, but epistemologically as well.³ As Joseph Levenson argued, existing universalist systems of representation were profoundly undermined by Western categories associated with modernization, or the

¹ Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 303.

² See: Harold R. Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views of China and India* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972 [1958]) (originally published under the title of *Scratches on Our Minds*); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

³ The territorial conquest of China did not only create foreign concessions and leaseholds, but also included de facto loss of large swaths of Qing territory to foreign (British, French, German, Japanese, Russian) control, loss of maritime outposts (Taiwan, the Pescadores, the Ryukyus), and loss of tributary dependencies and protectorates in Vietnam and Korea.

pursuit of “wealth and power.”⁴ Institutionally, these changes included new telegraph, railway, and postal networks through which simultaneous organization and communication in the language of reform became possible. Communications and transport also connected China with the “global media system” taking shape within the far-flung economies of empires or imperialist nation-states. Yet the growth of this multinational mass communications system was not only a consequence of accelerating market-based exchange:

As governments grew more and more convinced of the power of communications to move markets, affect foreign policy, and shape public opinion they strove to subject them to greater control, as instruments of imperial politics and by regulation at the national level and through international agencies.⁵

In China, the result was twofold. First, foreign multinationals controlled an overwhelming share of modern communications networks, particularly in the area of telegraph and cable communication. Some of these were laid during the 1870s without official authorization of the government; others were developed in cooperation with rising figures of the modernization, or “self-strengthening,” movement such as Li Hongzhang, Ding Richang, Sheng Xuanhuai, Shen Baozhen, and Zeng Guofan.⁶

Second, foreign-dominated communications networks were linked to a broader, European-dominated technological revolution which had not only accompanied the rise of the nation-state, but also aided in the creation of colonial “peripheries” to serve as

⁴ See: Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (3 vols.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958-1965).

⁵ Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

⁶ Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930*, 41, 117.

sources of revenue, raw materials, and projected military strength. As imperialist undertakings also spawned a culture “built on ‘scientific’ notions of white racial preeminence, novel theories of national and civilizational development (e.g. social Darwinism) and civilizing missions,” communications networks proved crucial in not only coordinating the mechanisms of empire, but also projecting images of colonizing “civilization” and colonized “backwardness” on an increasingly global scale.⁷ For China, as the Qing empire’s defenses against foreign incursion weakened, the result was an image which appeared largely bereft of markers denoting racial or sovereign equality within the international system.

* * *

This chapter argues that motion pictures must be thought of as a form of mass communications for the reasons outlined above. Extant photographs indicate that photographic technology first reached China during the 1850s; the earliest images are of coastal areas around Hong Kong. Thereafter, photographers traveled with troops and explorers to the northern cities (e.g. Beijing) and interior provinces. Images taken from the latter regions often presented an unflattering view of life stripped of its imperial grandeur. During the second half of the nineteenth century, “Western and Japanese journals of photographs of starving beggars, public executions, and humiliating

⁷ James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 13.

punishment of prisoners [were] instrumental in de-romanticizing the image of China.”⁸

The cinematic medium and its sequences of projected photographs largely repeated this pattern. And as with other forms of mass communications, it was not only foreign governments who became convinced of its power to “move markets, affect foreign policy, and shape public opinion.” Soon after the first recorded instances of filmmaking by Chinese photographers, there emerged a critical debate concerning the impact of foreign images on China’s international standing, and the potential of motion pictures to be used domestically as a mode of “education” for shaping national consciousness. Viewed from this perspective, the history of Chinese cinema is not simply one of late development or repetition of Western “early cinema” forms, but one of attempts to challenge and reclaim Western-dominated communications networks as part of a larger project of nation-state formation.

Most studies of this early period of Chinese cinema, however, have tended toward the former alternative. These borrow from antecedent studies of early American cinema to emphasize the “spectacular” aspects of the new medium, such as its vaudevillian origins and representation of singular events.⁹ Two notable themes are that: 1) motion picture technology was first adapted to indigenous patterns of cultural consumption and aesthetic understanding, and 2) Chinese film culture during the early twentieth century was primarily characterized by an “episteme” of “vernacular modernism,” and based on

⁸ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual (Revised and Enlarged)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2000), 591.

⁹ See, for example: Mary Farquhar and Chris Berry, “Shadow Opera: Toward a New Archaeology of the Chinese Cinema,” in Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 27-51.

reformulations and imitations of imported films.¹⁰ The first tends to obscure the impact of global forces on Chinese cinema; the second defines Chinese film culture almost solely in terms of the commercial feature and its “architectural infrastructure” of urban theaters. Other studies of the relationship between cinema and “the national” have likewise overlooked the connections between international or anti-imperialist politics and the course of China’s pre-1930s film history.¹¹ According to Jubin Hu:

Since the Chinese film industry was established later than those in many Western countries, the Chinese government was relatively late to realize the ideological possibilities of the medium. Nevertheless, it is clear that Chinese filmmakers, independent of state intervention, had intended to construct cinema as a national form in order to serve the Chinese nation. From the 1920s, the Chinese film world treated cinema as a component of the national industry, and Chinese cinema indirectly but profoundly reflected Chinese nationalist ideologies after the May 30th [1925] National Movement.¹²

Indeed, this assertion is partly correct—recognizable forms of state film production did not commence in China until the 1920s. A fundamental problem, however, resides in the tendency to view “Chinese cinema” solely in terms of a national film industry, or state intervention solely in terms of cinematic “construction,” or production, alone.

By contrast, nearly all of China’s earliest motion pictures—with, perhaps, the exception of filmed performances of Beijing opera produced after 1905—belied a

¹⁰ Concerning the latter theme, see: Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹¹ See, for example: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* (2 vols.) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]); Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996); Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003); Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Notable exceptions include studies by Jay Leyda and Zhiwei Xiao.

¹² Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 18.

preoccupation with disseminating new categories of social representation and reform. While Chinese ownership of cinematic technology was indeed achieved “later,” the production of cinematic representations of China began nearly immediately following the motion picture camera’s arrival in 1897. This fact highlights the importance of understanding the Chinese film industry and its development in relation to foreign-dominated networks of mass communications. Regardless of ownership, early film productions would not have been possible without the assistance of Chinese guides, performers, and camera operators. The fact that many of these films—views, panoramas, actualités, cinematographs, and so on—have fallen outside feature-based histories of the cinema has seemingly erased the medium’s enmeshment within relations of colonialism, imperialism, war, and internationally-circulated mass entertainment.¹³

In addition to considering these earlier, non-performative modes, it is important to consider other aspects of state activity vis-à-vis motion pictures beyond the director- and production-oriented paradigm. Regulation of cinematic exhibition began within the first decade of the twentieth century, if not earlier, and was undoubtedly based on a belief in the medium’s power to transform social attitudes. From 1919 onward, filmmakers appealed to commercial institutions for tax breaks by arguing that their productions possessed nationally beneficial attributes. Early Chinese filmmaking was not dominated by the state, yet nor were its participants politically quiescent. Commercial aspirations and national politics remained fundamentally inseparable. China remained framed by colonial worldviews and encircled by “the great powers” (*lieqiang*), with tremendous

¹³ The exceptions to this lacuna include several recent Chinese-language documentary and newsreel histories. See, for example: Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003); Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003); Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005).

consequences for sovereignty and self-perception. There was, quite simply, too much at stake.

Colonialism and Early Cinema

When does a representational technology become new? Within discussions of “film,” “cinema,” “motion pictures,” or simply “the movies,” answers to this question are often shaped by technological expectations defined by the present; these assumptions, in turn, may hide crucial characteristics which defined the medium at the moment of its emergence.¹⁴ Today many histories of Chinese cinema begin with Shanghai, focusing solely on those elements of the cinema associated with the medium’s evolution toward Hollywood-style feature film. According to this narrative, the first “Western shadow plays” were screened on August 11, 1896 in a section of Shanghai’s Xu Garden—an amusement park named “Youyi Village.” The description of these images which appeared in the *Shenbao* newspaper included only vague references to scenes of European “landscapes” (*fengguang*) and “social conditions” (*minqing*); the name of their supposedly French exhibitor has been lost to history (resonances with the Lumière-centered myth of cinema’s origins are obvious). Yet despite the fact that this novel event was sandwiched innocuously into a program including magic shows, fireworks, and acrobatics—and despite the fact that the prosaic descriptions of the films themselves would be difficult to reconcile with any known French-produced titles of the period—this

¹⁴ See: Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), particularly Chapter 2, “Crisis Historiography.”

imaginative conjecture has, according to film historian Chen Mo, attained the status of “generally acknowledged” historical fact.¹⁵

Recently, Hong Kong film scholars Law Kar and Frank Bren have questioned evidence for the Xu Garden hypothesis.¹⁶ In particular, they note that the evidence “appears to stem from Chinese material, itself based on loosely-worded advertisements for ‘Western shadow plays’ that constitute no definite evidence at all.”¹⁷ The August 11 date is wrong on two counts. First, references to “Western shadow plays” appeared in the *Shenbao* as early as late June 1896; second, the phrase “Western shadow plays” itself was also used at the time to refer to other forms of projected entertainment, such as magic lantern shows. Instead, Law and Bren argue that the first confirmed film screenings in China took place in April 1897 (Hong Kong) and May 1897 (Shanghai). Using Edison and Lumière technology, traveling exhibitors Maurice Charvet, Lewis M. Johnson, and Harry Welby Cook subsequently ignited a “teahouse craze” for the new moving pictures—not only in Shanghai, but also Tianjin and Beijing.

Perhaps the most plausible aspect of Law and Bren’s account is its insistence that China’s first film exhibition was not a singular phenomenon. Rather, the technology reached several major colonial port cities at roughly the same moment, and was

¹⁵ Chen Mo, *Bai nian dianying shanhui* (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 2000), 3. Some documentary historians have made specific claims concerning the films shown, naming 马房失火 (possible reference to the 1896 Edison short *The Burning Stable*) and 足踏行车 (possible reference to the 1896 Edison short *Trick Bicycle Riding* aka *Bicycle Riding* aka *Lee Richardson*) and alluding to “fourteen short films” in total. See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 7. Given the tenuous identification of the projectionist as “French,” it is perhaps possible that the films were in fact Lumière shorts, despite the fact that no Lumière representative is known to have reached China until the following year.

¹⁶ This claim, which has been reproduced verbatim throughout numerous works of Chinese film history, appears most prominently—from the perspective of recent historians—in the seminal multi-volume work by Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* [*History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*], parts of which first appeared in 1963.

¹⁷ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 5.

transported to several more shortly thereafter. Legations, hotels, and urban entertainment grounds provided the principal sites, while open-air evening venues attracting a broader Chinese audience seem to have appeared only by about 1900, after which dedicated theaters and regular screenings slowly became the norm for urban filmgoers. Yet emphasis on the commercial nature of cinema during this early phase, coupled with restrictive definitions which limit the first “Chinese cinema” to those early films produced in 1905 by Chinese camera operators, excludes filmic images of China produced during the late nineteenth century. Who, from the perspective of the medium itself, were the first filmmakers?

Like the question of when China’s first film was shown, the question of who first filmed China has not yet been given a reliable answer. Jay Leyda’s account makes reference to James Ricalton (1844-1929), an Edison employee, inventor, and war photographer who once seemed a likely candidate for the role of China’s first historically-verifiable film exhibitor; Leyda credits to Ricalton the now famous display which took place in Shanghai’s Tianhua Tea Garden during July 1897.¹⁸ However, Law and Bren’s identification of “Yong Song”—as the Tianhua projectionist was dubbed in the *Shenbao*—with Lewis M. Johnson also convincingly undermines Leyda’s Ricalton thesis. His assertion that Ricalton also filmed “short scenes” of Hong Kong, Canton, and Shanghai on behalf of Thomas Edison and the Edison Manufacturing Company has, until now, received considerably less scrutiny.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 2-3.

¹⁹ See, for example: Luke McKernan, “James Ricalton” in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/ricalton.htm>

There are no 1898 Edison films credited to James Ricalton listed in the Edison filmography. Yet further unwinding of the Ricalton thread leads to a remarkable series of Edison motion pictures produced by American James H. White and filmed by Frederick Blechynden, an Englishman, in early 1898. White was an early and important Vitascope producer for Edison's studios in 1896. His contact with China began at the same time. During Qing viceroy Li Hongzhang's diplomatic visit to the United States, Li was filmed disembarking from the S.S. "St. Louis" and later at the Waldorf Hotel in New York City by Edison camera operator William Heise, under the direction of White.²⁰ These news actualités—*American Line Pier, Baggage Wagons/Baggage of Li Hung Chang*, and *The Arrival of Li Hung Chang/Li Hung Chang*—appeared as Edison releases in August 1896. The American press largely fawned on Li, with one account describing him as "one of the three great men [in addition to Bismarck and Gladstone] who are now living who have built empires, fought battles that have saved their sovereigns, made laws that have secured them, lived lives which have been given as lessons to their countrymen."²¹ Reporters also noted that the steamship bearing Li had broken all existing speed records for travel between Southampton, England and New York.

In mid-1897, James H. White and Frederick Blechynden departed for a world tour which brought them to Japan and China by early 1898. They would return to American via Hawai'i that May, with White having fallen ill during the course of their journey.²²

²⁰ Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Smithsonian Institution Press/Le Giornate de Cinema Muto, 1997), 233-235.

²¹ "Hail! Puissant Li Hung Chang!" *New York Herald*, August 29, 1896, 3.

²² On James H. White and Frederick Blechynden, see: Frank Andrews, *Edison Phonograph: The British Connection* (Rugby: City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society, 1986); "Chats with Trade Leaders: No. 2—Mr. James H. White," *The Optical Lantern and Cinematograph Journal* (December 1904); Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner, 1990).

The trip, however, had already yielded the large cache of films attributed by Leyda to James Ricalton. A list of these titles and their Edison catalog descriptions appears in Musser's *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Bibliography* appears below. Such films are similarly excluded from most discussions of "Chinese cinema" altogether. However, their content indicates that these motion pictures were some of the first artifacts of a cinematic "China" produced anywhere. They are:

502. *Street Scene in Hong Kong*: "Here is an excellent view of one of the main business streets in the Chinese quarter of Hong Kong. Prosperous looking stores line both sides of the wide street, with their strange business signs reading up and down."
503. *Government House at Hong Kong*: "Our artist seized the opportune moment to catch this picture when the distinguished guests were gathering to do honor to Prince Henri, of Prussia at the official residence of the governor; the occasion being a garden party. The guests arrive at the pillared gates in chairs carried on the shoulders of Chinamen, who make their livings at this occupation."
504. *Hong Kong Regiment, no. 1*: "A splendid infantry regiment raised in India, composed of Punjabis, Paithans, and Hindoostanis, 1,023 strong, commanded by Major J.M.A. Retallick. They march forward and wheel by the companies during the Adjutant's parade under Lieut. Berger."
505. *Hong Kong Regiment, no. 2*: "Shows the same regiment at bayonet drill, keeping time with full regimental band. The uniform is the British scarlet coat and black trousers, bound tightly below the knee with their peculiar cloth leggings. The 'puggri' or turban, is of a dark blue and red."
506. *Sheik [Sikh] Artillery, Hong Kong*: "This picture shows a squad of men forming part of this fine regiment of Sheiks [sic.], from East India, under the command of their Subadar, or native commissioned officer. The may be seen working the 12 ton cannon in North Point Fort."
507. *River Scene at Macao, China*: "Here are the great warehouses and a forest of masts, indicating the enterprise of this Portuguese settlement. At anchor in the foreground lies a Chinese Junk with its high poop."

508. *Hong Kong Wharf Scene*: “A Macao steamer has just arrived, and the coolies are seen passing through the small gate on the left, jostling each other in their hurry to reach the steamer to unload both freight and passenger luggage.”
509. *Tourists Starting for Canton*: “Shows a party of English people in their chairs. This is the only way of getting about Canton, as the streets are indescribably filthy.”
510. *Canton River Scene*: “The large boats are used as freight carriers. The smaller boats carry passengers. They are the Sampans; the rickshaws of the water traffic. Women row them, as well as men.”
511. *Landing Wharf at Canton*: “An immense number of strange shaped river and canal boats are seen. One-half of the population of Canton lives on the water in these floating houses.”
512. *Canton Steamboat Landing Chinese Passengers*: [no description].
513. *Shanghai Street Scene, no. 1*: “The street in this picture is the Bund, or the road nearest the river Yangtse Kiang; really the principal business street; containing as it does nearly all the banks and offices. It is also the fashionable drive where at sundown the European residents turn out in full array.”
514. *Shanghai Street Scene, no. 2*: “Here is another view of the Bund, with The Garden on the left, with its high arched conservatory. As in the former scene, the peculiar wheelbarrows prove to be the central attraction. Evidently some tourists are enjoying the novel vehicle, as shown by the hilarity of the party that passes by in front of our artists. A barrow is often loaded with three or four passengers, although but one man propels it.”
515. *Shanghai police*: “Passing out of the gates the government offices, the Shanghai police pass in full view on their way to their respective stations.”²³

²³ Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography*, 398-403. Law and Bren refer to the titles of these films in “An Incomplete List of Early Film Production in Hong Kong and Mainland China: 1896-1908,” but provide no further details. See: Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 307-308 (Appendix 3). A description of *Canton Steamboat Landing Chinese Passengers* is given by the Center for Research on Intermediality as follows: “A camera, mounted on the front of a moving train, passes fields, trees, a cattle guard and street crossing, buildings, and a stream traversed by a bridge with people standing on it, waving to the train. Without stopping, the train moves slowly through a station where people stand and wave. After leaving the station, the train passes over a bridge crossing a stream. The camera was positioned on a dock to show the landing platform in the foreground as well as the paddlewheel passenger ship tied to the dock. Walking toward the camera position from the vessel are many Chinese in various forms of dress and carrying all sorts of packages, bags,

As colonial knowledge, White and Blechynden's films valorize the commercial and military activity of foreign ports, while depicting Chinese subjects as massed laborers or curiosities. While some descriptions reveal a certain appreciation for the wealth of Hong Kong's Chinese business owners, persistent allusions to "strangeness"—of the signs, of the transportation, of gender relations, of living arrangements—reinforce other artificial hierarchies of cleanliness, dress, and prosperity which place Europeans above Chinese.

Nonetheless, such images remain difficult to classify. Like early Lumière films, these White-produced motion pictures were most likely received by Edison audiences as evidence of Western "progress" abroad. The reality which they seemingly conveyed—at a time when such "geographic" films still possessed the authority of the photograph—was one marked by evolutionism, or the collection of facts within evolutionary structures.²⁴ Despite being made in mainland China and Hong Kong, the Chinese language (writing) which appears in *Street Scene in Hong Kong* is subordinated to an English-language description which anticipates the exoticism of "up and down" scripts for non-Chinese audiences. The "China" described in these films is one in which order (colonial) reigns over disorder (native inhabitants, crowded harbors, dirty streets).

The White/Blechynden films, and film technology itself, are part of the same constellation of imperialist forces which included extraterritoriality, fixed tariffs, and indemnities arranged for the benefit of Western powers following several decades of armed conflict along China's coast. Moreover, as products of filmmaking in China's

bundles, cases, etc. The distance between the camera and the ship does not permit better description of detail." See: <http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/proj-vues-exotisme-films2.asp>

²⁴ Sam Rohdie, *Promised Lands: Cinema, Geography, Modernism* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 9-10.

treaty ports during the late nineteenth century, they were surprisingly unexceptional. H. Welby Cook, one of the earliest Edison projectionists to arrive in Shanghai, screened several titles filmed in China including *The Arrival in Shanghai of the First Train from Woosung*, *The Meet of the Shanghai Bicyclist Association*, *Workmen Leaving the Shanghai Engine Works*, and *Diving at the Shanghai Swimming Bath* (all 1897).²⁵ Johnson and Charvet, who primarily exhibited Lumière titles using the Lumière-manufactured Cinematograph, may have also followed the practice of using their camera's dual recording/projection functionality to produce another unattributed short believed to have appeared in their screening repertoire—a “view” of Shanghai's Bubbling Well Road.

Other Lumière representatives were quick to arrive thereafter. Projectionist, cinematographer, and travel photographer Gabriel Veyre (1871-1936) visited China between February and April 1899, en route to Hanoi.²⁶ Another Lumière employee, Francis Doublier (1878-1948), toured Eastern Europe, the Middle East, India, China, and Japan in 1899 alone.²⁷ An English politician, Sir Ernest Frederic George Hatch (1859-1927), also embarked on a world tour in 1899. Accompanied by an unnamed camera operator, he produced nearly twenty titles in China, including *Street Scene in Peking* and

²⁵ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 307.

²⁶ On Veyre, see: Philippe Jacquier, “Un opérateur de la Maison Lumière, Gabriel Veyre,” in FIAF, *Le Cinéma Français Muet Dans le Monde, Influences Réciproques* (Paris: Cinematheque de Toulouse/Institut Jean Vigo, 1988); Jacques Rittaud-Hutinet, *Le Cinéma des Origines: Les Frères Lumière et Leurs Opérateurs* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1985); Gabriel Veyre, *Au Maroc: Dans l'Intimité du Sultan* (Paris: Librairie Universelle, 1905); Phillipe Jacquier and Marion Pranal, *Gabriel Veyre, Opérateur Lumière: Autour du monde avec le Cinématographe, Correspondance (1896-1900)* (Lyon/Arles: Institut Lumière/Actes Sud, 1996).

²⁷ On Doublier, see: Francis Doublier, “Reminiscences of an Early Motion-Picture Operator,” in Deutelbaum, *Image' on the Art and Evolution of the Film* (1979); Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960); Jacques Rittaud-Hutinet, *Le Cinéma des Origines: Les Frères Lumière et Leurs Opérateurs* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1985).

An Old Chinese Woman Spinning.²⁸ These films were later advertised to the English trade press as “genuine cinematograph films of China.” Hatch would also go on to write a book about his journey, in which he advocated for Japan and against Russia in the competition for control over Manchuria and Korea. His views were published, somewhat presciently, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War.²⁹

Surprisingly, Hatch was not the only European official to embark on a private filmmaking career while abroad. French consul Auguste François (1857-1935), stationed first in Longzhou (Guizhou) and later in Kunming (Yunnan), produced a wide range of photographs and cinematic shorts between 1896 and 1905.³⁰ Using a Lumière camera, François’ principal subjects of cinematic observation were public spaces (markets, courtyards), performers, officials, and beggars. These images included several scenes which appear to be clearly staged for the camera’s benefit, such as a mock trial in a courtyard and beggars forming a soup line in François’ kitchen. His responsibilities as consul during this same period consisted of promoting France’s colonial expansion into Qing territories, and supervising the construction of a railway between Yunnan and Tonkin. Several photographic images of judicial torture and beheadings, perhaps also

²⁸ Stephen Bottomore, “Sir Ernest Frederic George Hatch,” in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/hatch.htm>

²⁹ See: Ernest F. G. Hatch, M.P., *Far Eastern Impressions: Japan-China-Korea (with Three Maps and Eighty-Eight Illustrations)* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1904). On Hatch’s films, see also: *Optical Magic Lantern Journal* (September 1900 to February 1901).

³⁰ According to Law and Bren, François’ filmmaking activities took place between 1901 and 1904. See: Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 307 (Appendix 3, note 3).

obtained through these official connections, have also been attributed to François, and were published in the 1903 pamphlet *The Consul's Eye (L'œil du consul)*.³¹

Film production and exhibition in late nineteenth-century China cannot be attributed solely to commercial entrepreneurship and exchange. Many histories of Chinese cinema's "development" have nonetheless occluded important connections between the appearance of film technology and other forms of colonial power. By divorcing colonial representations of China from the corpus of "Chinese cinema," scholars have overlooked the fact that film, like other forms of modern communications, assisted in reproducing the ideology of colonial progress *within* China as well as facilitating the participation of Chinese audiences in a rapidly-expanding "vernacular modernism."³² The simultaneous appearance of this technology in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin during the summer of 1897 indicates that treaty port commercial networks played a crucial role in disseminating new media regardless of locale. That this process was fairly generic across time, as well as space, is indicated by the fact that the first recorded film exhibitions in Taiwan took place just after the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and subsequent Treaty of Shimonoseki.³³ Moreover, evidence for multiple screenings by itinerant projectionists who were themselves occasional film *producers* accords with other accounts of early cinema and its practices during the late nineteenth

³¹ Auguste François, *L'œil du consul* (1903). See also: Auguste François, *Souvenirs d'Indochine et de Chine (1886-1904)* (n.d.). Several of François' photographs, along with additional biographical information, appear online at: <http://turandot.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/Biography.php?ID=27>

³² On this latter point, see: Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*.

³³ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 7. These films were accompanied by a *benshi* narration of their content by the projectionist, 松浦章三. One account claims that a Japanese projectionist brought an Edison-produced Kinetoscope to Taipei as early as August 1896. See: Ye Longyan, *Ri zhi shiqi Taiwan dianying shi* (Taipei: Yushan she, 1998), 28. Cited in Liu Xiancheng, "Meiguo ji qi dianying ye jieru Taiwan dianying shichang de lishi fenxi," *Dianying xinshang* [Film Appreciation Journal], No. 130 (January-March 2007), 41.

century period. By the beginning of the twentieth century, filmmaking would already be a familiar mode of activity within the circumscribed colonial landscape of ports along the Chinese coast.

War Films

The Boxer Uprising, and subsequent Qing declaration of war on all Western powers, led to an international invasion of North China during the summer of 1900. This event effectively ended the Qing dynasty's ability to resist globalizing forces which promoted the benefit and prestige of Western civilization. Nonetheless, it also represented "new trends in modern China and in international relations."³⁴ Specifically, news of the uprising and subsequent Boxer War spread rapidly throughout the world during this period. Images and accounts from the war were linked to larger questions concerning the efficacy of empire, nature of European imperialism, and validity of the missionary cause. Newspapers and narrative accounts both stimulated and satisfied popular demand for tales of sieges, battles, looting, and anti-Christian atrocities.³⁵ Film, too, played a role in stoking enthusiasm for warfare in China.

The circulation of motion pictures based on the Boxer War was one manifestation of a larger communications network which had grown along with commercial exchange and Western territorial dominance during the nineteenth century. Information concerning industry, trade, war, and politics circled the globe with increasing rapidity as photographers, intelligence operatives, postal services railroads, steamships, and

³⁴ Robert Bickers, "Introduction," in Robert Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann, eds., *The Boxers, China, and the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), xii.

³⁵ Robert Bickers, "Introduction," xiv.

telegraphic cables radiated outward from colonizing countries during this “age of empire.” By 1900 a U.S. manufacturer of telephone equipment, AT&T, had set up branches in China as well as much of Europe.³⁶ Several decades earlier telegraphic cable had reached Australia and China via the British West Indies, while more localized lines traversed the seas surrounding China and Japan. International trade in films had already begun by 1896. Yet such networks were themselves shaped by tensions between states, and the emerging “international language” of cinema was no exception.³⁷ Within this context, the Boxer War triggered a significant shift in military intelligence concerning China, and in the types of images available to filmmakers who not only depicted the war, but also those territories which Western armies subjugated and controlled in the course of their reprisals against Boxer insurgents and the Qing state.

These two developments emerged from the same process of imperial expansion—in this case, the projection of foreign military power across the North China plain. The revolution in intelligence, which would prove particularly evident in the reports produced by relatively new colonial powers such as the United States, can be understood by comparing reports prepared before and during the Boxer War. Just prior to the occupation of Beijing by Allied forces on August 14, 1900, the U.S. War Department relied primarily on published works and collected communications produced by European powers. These included:

³⁶ Armand Mattelart (Susan Emanuel and James A. Cohen, trans.), *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 [1991]), 13.

³⁷ On European, American, and reformist Chinese attempts to “internationalize” China, and “remodel the existing structures of political organization and adjust them to what they perceived to be the realities of a modern world economy and nation-states,” see: Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930*, especially Chapter 4, “Electronic Kingdom and Wired Cities in the ‘Age of Disorder’: The Struggle for Control of China’s National and Global Communication Capabilities.”

James H. Wilson, *China* (D. Appleton & Co.).
 A. R. Colquhoun, *China in Transformation* (Harper & Bros.).
 Lord Charles Beresford, *The Break-Up of China* (Harper & Bros.).
Chronicle and Directory of China (Hongkong, 1900).
The Statesman's Yearbook (1900).
 The China Association of Great Britain.
 A report of James Ginnell, district engineer Imperial Chinese Railways, to
 the chairman and directors of the British and Chinese Corporation,
 Ltd.
 Information on Qing fortifications “translated from the Russian.”
 Information on the country from Taku to Beiping “compiled from various
 sources.”³⁸

By contrast, U.S. War Department reports on China from the following year included first-hand accounts of both European and Chinese armies, maps prepared by the Engineer Corps, reports on the murder of missionaries near Baodingfu (“as near a true statement of the horrible occurrence as is possible to attain”), and a chronicle of the “siege” of the foreign legations in Beijing.³⁹ As the armies made their advance toward the Qing capital, American officers made particular note of natural features, prominent architecture, transportation infrastructure, observed local practices (e.g. methods of plowing), and the extent of non-Chinese ownership of property and railroads. The American attitude—a mixture of curiosity and contempt—was effectively summed up by Lieut. Col. J. T. Dickman who, following a triumphal Allied march within the walls of the Forbidden City, noted that “the filth and decay prevalent in the heart of the Sacred Palace are a fair index to the condition of the Celestial Empire.”⁴⁰

³⁸ War Department, U.S. Adjutant General's Office, *No. XXX. Notes on China: August, 1900* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900).

³⁹ War Department, U.S. Adjutant General's Office, *No. XXXIII. Reports on Military Operations in South China and Africa: July, 1901* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 329-330.

⁴⁰ War Department, U.S. Adjutant General's Office, *No. XXXIII. Reports on Military Operations in South China and Africa: July, 1901*, 501.

Enter, finally, James Ricalton. The former New Jersey schoolteacher and world traveler was almost certainly not the mysterious “Yong Song” credited with the Tianhua Tea Garden film screenings of July 1897. Moreover, Ricalton’s career as an Edison filmmaker seems to have begun only in 1912, making him an unlikely candidate to have filmed the Boxer War or its aftermath; although biographical evidence on Ricalton is scant, his earlier tenure (1888-1889) with Edison was apparently as an overseas purchaser of various bamboo filaments for the inventor’s lightbulbs.⁴¹ Nor did Ricalton’s filmmaking bring him to China, as the Edison camera in his possession was used to film animals in East Africa until the death of his son, Lomond, of typhus.⁴²

What is certain is that James Ricalton returned to China in 1900 as a war photographer in the employ of Underwood & Underwood. His published record of that journey, accompanied by one hundred stereoscopic photographs and eight maps, reveals the degree to which war freed foreign producers of mass culture from China’s treaty port

⁴¹ Valeria Davis, “World Traveler, Explorer, Photographer: James Ricalton Brought the World to His Maplewood Students,” *Matters Magazine*, online at: <http://www.maplewoodonline.com/matters/ricalcon/>. The article is endorsed by Ricalton great-grandson James Ricalton Wilson, whose own online collection of Ricalton resources (a work in-progress) is available at: <http://www.ricalton.org/>. A recent reprint of Ricalton’s China travelogue, which includes a lengthy biography, makes no mention of any filmmaking activity during the schoolteacher’s first, Edison-funded trip. See: Christopher J. Lucas, ed., *James Ricalton’s Photographs of China During the Boxer Rebellion: His Illustrated Travelogue of 1900* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) (see especially Lucas’ “Introduction: The Life and Career of James Ricalton”).

⁴² The New York Times obituary for Ricalton makes no mention at all of Ricalton’s filmmaking activities. See: Special to the New York Times, “J. Ricalton Dies: World Traveler,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1929, 39. Coverage of a recent, and apparently exhaustive, Ricalton retrospective notes that his importance was as a producer of “photographer’s stereo views, magic-lantern slides, and textbook photographs,” although also mentioning, ambiguously, that “Thomas A. Edison also enlisted Ricalton to test his new movie camera on one of his journeys (a reference to Ricalton’s East Africa expedition?). See: David L. Shirley, “Maplewood Recalls a Little Man With Grit,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1980, NJ1.

allowing them access to sites which, in earlier decades, had remained almost inaccessible to Western instruments of visual reproduction.⁴³ As Ricalton wrote of his subject:

To see China is to turn back the wheels of time and gaze into the dawn of human history. We delight to stroll through a museum of antiquities and look at isolated objects that carry us back to former ages. In China, a veritable world of antiquities, relatively associated, moral, social, literary, political, and industrial, *are offered for our inspection*. The word change was not in Pa-out-she's dictionary, and China under the Manchus is China under Chow [Zhou?].

...

[In China] I stereographed many hundreds of places ... and these will take us to some of the more important treaty ports, some of the interior cities of China, and then into the midst of the Boxer uprising, or the war of China against the world; and this, it is hoped, will stimulate a desire to more fully understand this peculiar country and her people.⁴⁴

Stereoscopic "journeys" through China had existed in the West since the 1870s.⁴⁵ Where Ricalton's photography begins to truly diverge from existing precedents, however, is the section of his published travelogue entitled "The Boxer Uprising: Journey to the Seat of War." Following a preface concerning the inability of "the Confucian code" to prevent habitual violence in Chinese society, this narrative leads the viewer through a series of horrific images of sacked cities, gruesome wounds, executions, and mangled corpses.⁴⁶ At the end of his dark sojourn, Ricalton emerges in Li Hongzhang's offices; later he is in war-torn Beijing, receiving an audience with Prince Su of the Manchu royal family.⁴⁷

Having reached this destination under the protection of a U.S. military column en route

⁴³ The work described is: *China Through the Stereoscope: A Journey Through the Dragon Empire at the Time of the Boxer Uprising (Personally Conducted by James Ricalton)* (New York and London: Underwood & Underwood, 1901).

⁴⁴ *China Through the Stereoscope*, 10, 12 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ See, for example: John Thompson, *Illustrations of China and Its People* (4 vols.) (London, 1873-1874).

⁴⁶ *China Through the Stereoscope*, 176-181, *passim*.

⁴⁷ Prince Su, a member of the Mongolian royal family of Prince Demchugdongrub (Ch: *De Wang*), was father to the "Eastern Jewel" (*Dong zhen*) Jin Bihui, who would later be captured and executed as a pro-Japanese collaborator and spy.

from “Cheefoo” (Yantai), Ricalton proceeded to document the architecture and furnishings of the Forbidden City, along with surrounding sites related to the “siege of the legations” and subsequent Boxer War. A series of group photographs taken of those involved in the subsequent peace negotiations—Cixi’s “counselors” and the “ministers of the foreign powers”—completed the odyssey.

As an artifact of the publishing industry, *China Through the Stereoscope* reveals the degree to which military conflict created conditions for marketing the most prestigious symbols of Qing imperial authority to a Western public. The intended interpretation of these symbols was suggested by several concluding statements from Ricalton’s commentary:

We have passed from Canton at the south to the devastated capital at the north. We have witnessed in our wanderings the wretchedness of hopeless poverty and suffering, and the stupid and demoralizing luxuries of wealth; we have seen the “King of Beggars” and the Princes of the Empire; we have seen the poor, burden-bearing coolie whose labor feeds the luxurious mandarin; we have seen the Tankia in their little floating homes and the many palaces of sovereignty. We have been stoned by the superstitious rustics among the mountains; we have “chowed” with mandarins. We have looked upon the bloody and harrowing circumstances of war, and as we are about to make our leave-taking obeisance before this ancient contemporary of Egypt and Babylon, we cannot but wonder what is to become of her. She is weak by reason of her unpreparedness for defense, and the vultures of Western commercialism are “watching out.” Even now she has ceased to be a sovereign power when the allied nations can dictate enormous indemnities and the demolition of her coast defenses and the regulation of her own internal affairs. China has international obligations to perform; none will consider her blameless; yet the various nations need to be very careful that they do not come to play the part of vigorous young bullies mauling a feeble and helpless centenarian.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *China Through the Stereoscope*, 357-358.

Despite his Open Door-esque pleas for China's political survival, Ricalton's activities only confirmed that vast swaths of Qing territory had suddenly become available to Western communications and visual mass reproduction. The same war which had exposed imperial defenses to first-hand observation by American officers conferred upon popular culture an entirely new vocabulary of "real" sights and experiences, many of which served as further evidence of China's deterioration and civilizational decline for U.S. audiences an ocean away.

Hardly the legendary projectionist and filmmaker described in Jay Leyda's history of Chinese cinema, James Ricalton—or more specifically, those images and writings attributed to Ricalton—nonetheless exemplified trends in the cinematic medium from 1900 onward. Panoramas, landscapes, and foreign enclaves were the principal subjects of China-related titles since 1897. Until the Boxer War the majority of British and American releases were primarily comprised of "street scenes" shot in Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin. Three years later, images of beheaded and pilloried prisoners also entered circulation, as the Lubin Films titles *Beheading [a] Chinese Prisoner* and *Prisoner in the Chinese Pillory in the Streets of Tien Tsin* (both 1900) attest.⁴⁹ Organized retaliation against actual and suspected Boxers was accompanied by a frenzy of photographic activity.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 308 (Appendix 3). Siegmund Lubin (1851-1923) was an early Edison rival (in)famous for distributing remade ("counterparts") or simply retitled ("dupes") versions of films produced and released by his contemporaries. For this reason, the Lubin titles may reproduce those already in Méliès, Pathé, or other catalogs. On Lubin, see: Joseph P. Eckardt and Linda Kowall, *Peddler of Dreams: Siegmund Lubin and the Creation of the Motion Picture Industry* (Philadelphia: National Museum of American Jewish History, 1984); Linda Woal, "When a Dime Could Buy a Dream: Siegmund Lubin and the Birth of Motion Picture Exhibition," *Film History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1994); Joseph P. Eckardt, *The King of the Movies: Film Pioneer Siegmund Lubin* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, 196.

Perhaps the most prominent filmmaker in China during this period, Raymond Ackerman of the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company can be credited with having created cinematic equivalents of Ricalton's wartime photographs. By March 5, 1901, company catalogs offered "a complete series of authentic Chinese war pictures" at eight weeks' contract for the "low price of \$106 a week, and transportation charges for the operator, machine, and film."⁵¹ These were most likely *The War in China*, a title comprised of several post-Boxer War shorts photographed by Ackerman in December 1900 and January 1901.⁵² Also present to record Li Hongzhang's 1896 appearance in the United States, Ackerman later presented the viceroy with a Mutoscope camera in Beijing; an event which itself became the subject of the American Mutoscope & Biography Company short *Li Hung Chang and Suite: Presentation of a Parlor Mutoscope* (1902).⁵³ Following Ackerman's return to the United States, *The War in China* became a program of films, lantern slides, and commentary presented with the assistance of journalist Thomas Millard. Other China-related American Mutoscope & Biograph Company shorts from the period included *An Oriental Highway*, *Arrival of a Tonkin Train*, and *The Chien-men Gate, Peking, China* (all 1902).⁵⁴ These too, along with several other 1900

⁵¹ Kemp R. Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908* (Los Angeles: Locare Research Group, 1971), 56. The company also promised three showings per day "if desired," and required "110 or 500 volts direct current to operate."

⁵² Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 309 (Appendix 3). Two possible titles of segments within this longer series are *In Proud Array* and *Assault on the South Gate of Peking, China*, both credited to Ackerman elsewhere. See: Kemp R. Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908*, 455 (Cameramen).

⁵³ Luke McKernan, "C. Frank Ackerman," in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/ackerman.htm>. One catalog entry appears simply as *Li Hung Chang*. See: Kemp R. Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908*, 68 (title no. 1746).

⁵⁴ Kemp R. Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908*, 67-68 (title nos. 1739, 2051, 2052). The first title is credited to Ackerman, while the latter two were photographed by the company's future chief cameraman, Robert Kates Bonine (1862-1923). See: Luke McKernan, "Robert Kates Bonine," in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?).

titles, seem to comprise the entirety of Ackerman's production at the time of the Boxer War.

That Ackerman and Ricalton should have photographed many of the same subjects is perhaps a consequence of the quest for novelty which drove both toward the frontiers of Western expansion as cameramen. These were less individual undertakings than commercial strategies, or outcomes of war's tendency to expand the communications and visual networks which followed transcontinental business around the globe. To existing categories of visual representation—one might call them early genres—were added those encompassing warfare, military display, and conquest. In the year of the Boxer War, and for several more thereafter, this range of images was reproduced serially through the work of various producers. Japanese filmmaker Shibata Tsunekichi (1850-1929), already well-known for his productions of performances by famed *kabuki* actors Danjuro IX and Kikuguro V, accompanied Japanese forces to film the Boxer War in China in 1900.⁵⁵ The American lecturer Elias Burton Holmes, along

Entry appears online at <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/bonine.htm>. Another motion picture photographed in 1901, *The Forbidden City, Peking* (1902), is also credited to Ackerman in the company's November 1902 catalog (<http://cri.histart.umontreal.ca/grafics/fr/proj-vues-exotisme-films2.asp>). In 1903 the company also advertised a film of uncertain provenance titled *The Llamas of Thibet* (title no. U. 1032) and produced by the English cinematic innovator Charles Urban (1867-1942). The description reads: "The deep mystery surrounding the Llamas of Thibet makes this subject one of intense interest. Never before have they been photographed except when an occasional explorer at the risk of his life has succeeded in getting a few kodak views. This picture however shows a sacred procession of the Llamas with their Priests in all the regalia of their rank in the holy City of Jummau. It is very fine photographically and altogether a most unusual and desirable film" (*Biograph Bulletins*). Subsequent filmmaking in Tibet is described in: Peter H. Hansen, "The Dancing Lamas of Everest: Cinema, Orientalism, and Anglo-Tibetan Relations in the 1920s," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 101, no. 3 (June 1996), 712-747.

⁵⁵ Luke McKernan, "Shibata Tsunekichi," in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/shibata.htm>. Shibata also shot several early "geisha films" as well as other shorts. See also: Peter B. High, "The Dawn of Cinema in Japan," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (January 1984); Komatsu Hiroshi, "Some Characteristics of Japanese Cinema before World War I," in Arthur Nalletti Jr. and David Desser, eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). On the early Japanese film *The Boxer Incident*, a

with his projectionist and cameraman Oscar B. Depue, embarked on a 1901 world tour of Siberia, China, and Japan, during which Depue filmed Beijing “views” along with footage of Hong Kong including “Chinese porters carrying burdens on poles, rickshas, and sedan chairs.”⁵⁶ Lubin released *Four Hong Kong Sisters* (1902). Edison released *Procession of Chinamen in Peking* (1903) and *After the Siege Tientsin, Native City, China* (1904). The Charles Urban Trading Company released *Guns Outside Port Arthur* and *General Kuropatkin and General Mah*. Numerous companies—Urban, along with Pathé Frères and the Selig Polyscope Company—continued to produce and sell images of Chinese executions and beheadings.

Two notable examples highlight the use of cinema as a means of restaging or “illustrating” events understood as both real and noteworthy during this early period. James Williamson’s *Attack on a China Mission* (1900) was filmed using a derelict house in Hove, England.⁵⁷ Sagar James Mitchell (1866-1952) and James Kenyon (1850-1925), specialists in fake war films, released fictionalized scenes of Boxer War battlefield events, later distributed by numerous European and American companies.⁵⁸ Edison’s *Bombardment of the Taku Forts [by the Allied Fleets]* (1900) recreated the June 17, 1900

serial newsreel in sixteen parts, see also: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 16.

⁵⁶ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 309 (Appendix 3). See also: X. Theodore Barber, “The Roots of Travel Cinema: John L. Stoddard, E. Burton Holmes and the Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Travel Lecture,” *Film History*, vol. 5 (1993); Oscar B. Depue, “My First Fifty Years in Motion Pictures,” *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, vol. 49 (December 1947) [reprinted in Raymond Fielding, *A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television* (1967)].

⁵⁷ Martin Sopocy, “James Williamson,” in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/williamson.htm>. See also: Martin Sopocy, *James Williamson: Studies and Documents of a Pioneer of the Film Narrative* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998).

⁵⁸ Vanessa Toulmin, “Sagar James Mitchell and James Kenyon,” in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/mitchellkenyon.htm>. See also: Vanessa Toulmin, Simon Pople and Patrick Russell, eds., *The Lost World of Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).

event used models, smoke, and painted scenery to simulate this “very exciting naval battle.”⁵⁹ Another Boxer dramatization, *The Congress of Nations*, was allegorical, involved the use of costumed actors representing Germany, Russia, Ireland, England, China, and used camera effects to create a tableau incorporating all five “nations” and the American flag.⁶⁰

Images of China drawn from actual combat began appearing in 1904, when filmmakers arrived to cover the Russo-Japanese War. Joseph Rosenthal (1864-1936), cameraman for the Charles Urban Trading Company, recorded the siege of Port Arthur from behind a special shield constructed for the event.⁶¹ Japanese cameramen returned with film reels documenting the victory over Russian forces. In this sense as well, the use of film to mobilize support for an exhausting war effort anticipates the “total war” of Europe’s Great War of 1914-1918.⁶² Real scenes coexisted with reenactments, or may have been preceded by them—the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company’s *Battle of the Yalu*, announced in a September 27, 1904 bulletin, was advertised as being “in a class by itself” in comparison with other reproductions of the war.⁶³ While these depictions seem to have employed China as a backdrop, other filmmakers continued to churn out actualités whose primary draw was that they were filmed on location, as

⁵⁹ Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography*, 602 (catalog no. 837).

⁶⁰ Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890-1900: An Annotated Filmography*, 640 (catalog no. 919).

⁶¹ Stephen Bottomore, “Joseph Rosenthal,” in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who’s Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/rosenthal.htm>. See also: Stephen Bottomore, “Joseph Rosenthal: the Most Glorious Profession,” *Sight and Sound* (Autumn 1983).

⁶² Concerning the argument for considering the Russo-Japanese War as “World War Zero,” see: John W. Steinberg, Bruce W. Menning, David Schimmelpennick van der Oye, David Wolff, and Shinji Yokote, eds., *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2005).

⁶³ Kemp R. Niver, *Biograph Bulletins, 1896-1908*, 127 (catalog no. 2805). Here Ricalton appears again. His photographs of the siege of Port Arthur were among the most famous of the battle at the time, sold for immense sums of money (one photograph went for \$5,000), and earned him the commendation of the Japanese government. See: Christopher J. Lucas, *James Ricalton’s Photographs of China During the Boxer Rebellion: His Illustrated Travelogue of 1900*, 47-48.

indicated by titles such as Pathé's *Street in Canton* (1904), *In China* (1908), and *Shanghai, China* (1908), or Urban's *Through Hong Kong* (1907).⁶⁴

No doubt the meanings of this cinematic China varied depending on image and audience. Yet in most cases it would appear that films produced both before and after the year 1900—including the reenactments—purported to represent something that was not only real, but also represent-able by some combination of image, catalog description, and accompanying narration.⁶⁵ Representation may not of its own be pernicious. The history of early cinema in China, however, reveals that film production was typically accompanied by a simultaneous destruction or denigration of Qing representational modes (“strange business signs reading up and down”), coupled with the monopolization by Western companies of technologies and networks through which films were created, circulated, and consumed. Moreover, in the eyes of Western audiences these films themselves, by providing evidence of Chinese “superstition” (e.g. the Boxers), inculcated support for the very conduits of military and commercial imperialism through which filmmakers encountered their subject.

Co-productions

Filmmaking in China began well in advance of the first recorded instances of active Chinese participation in motion picture production. Scattered evidence of various Shanghai scenes projected for audiences by early and largely-unacknowledged individuals such as H. Welby Cook also challenges the thesis that early cinema was

⁶⁴ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 310 (Appendix 3).

⁶⁵ On Western representations of the non-West during the nineteenth century, see: Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

perceived purely as a “foreign spectacle” prior to 1905.⁶⁶ Additional evidence suggests that Chinese filmmaking efforts did not begin with Ren Qingtai (aka Ren Jingfeng, 1850-1932) and his production of Beijing opera scenes based on classic works of popular entertainment such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

While Ren’s first film *Ding Jun Shan* (aka *Conquering Jun Mountain* or *Dingjun Mountain*, 1905), is typically acknowledged as the first known work by a Chinese filmmaker, it would perhaps be more accurate to describe this as the first known motion picture photographed by a Chinese camera operator.⁶⁷ Italian A. E. Lauro (aka Enrico Lauro) also began shooting a film in 1905 using amateur Chinese actors. Called *The Curse of Opium*, the endeavor was ultimately abandoned, but several large stills published in a 1935 edition of the *North China Herald* attest to its existence.⁶⁸ Other Lauro titles which were released include the one-reel actualités *Shanghai’s First Tramway* (1908), *Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking* (1908), *Lovely Views in Shanghai Concessions* (1910), and *Cutting Queues by Force* (1911).⁶⁹ These were not all

⁶⁶ See: Mary Farquhar and Chris Berry, “Shadow Opera: Toward a New Archeology of the Chinese Cinema,” 33.

⁶⁷ The notion of Ren as China’s first “director” can also be scrutinized; not only because the term (*daoyan*) was not yet in usage, but because the camera was operated by Liu Zhonglun, a Fengtai Photography Studio employee.

⁶⁸ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 310 (Appendix 3); *North China Herald*, May 2, 1935. Lauro’s reminiscences concerning his early cinematic career appear in “Far East Cinema Pioneer Here,” *North China Herald*, May 15, 1935. Lauro was trained at the Cines Company (Italy), and produced several one-reel scene of Shanghai beginning in 1904. Both the title and Lauro’s story concerning *The Curse of Opium* are remarkably similar to those related to *Wronged Ghosts in an Opium Den* (*Hei ji yuan hun*, 1916). Ultimately produced, filmed, and released by Zhang Shichuan (Huanxian Photoplay), the latter—based on a popular civilized play of the same name—was originally to be an adaptation produced by the apocryphal Shanghai filmmaker “Mr. Yashell,” who along with one T. H. Suffert had taken over management of Benjamin Brodsky’s Asia Film Company in 1912. Lauro reputedly either leased or operated the camera used in this production.

⁶⁹ Richard Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 135. *Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking* included footage of the 1908 funeral processions of the Guangxu Emperor and Empress Dowager Cixi.

produced for export; beginning in 1907, the filmmaker also exhibited films for popular consumption on a rented lot, over which he arranged a tent and benches.⁷⁰

Yet theater would indeed become the dominant mode of early Chinese filmmaking. After filming the acclaimed Beijing opera performer Tan Xinpei (1847-1917) in *Ding Jun Shan*, Ren Qingtai and his Fengtai Studio produced a series of operatic films whose titles are given as *Chang Ban Po* (1905), *The Leopard* (*Jinqianbao*, 1906), *Granite Mountain* (*Qingshi shan*, 1906), *The Sunny Mansion* (*Yanyang lou*, 1906), *The White Beach* (*Baishui tan*, 1907), *Capturing Guan Sheng* (*Shou Guan Sheng*, 1907), and *Spinning Cotton* (*Fang mianhua*, 1908).⁷¹ While such operatic titles may have constituted a particularly “Chinese” cinema of attractions, films based on turn-of-the-century performing arts such as acrobatics, magic, comedy, and historical recreations also comprised an important component of early motion pictures around the world. Filmmaker Zheng Junli, writing in the 1930s, also noted the importance of “reformed operas” (*gailiang jiuju*) and “comedies in the modern form of spoken drama” as subjects of Chinese filmmaking after 1909.”⁷²

One important factor behind the emergence of Chinese film production was technological transfer across the “contact zone” created by the treaty port system. During the late nineteenth century, early motion picture screenings held in China were primarily staged by European and U.S. exhibitors who maintained control of the cameras,

⁷⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 18.

⁷¹ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 310 (Appendix 3). Some corrections by the author. See also: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 519. At least one of these performances may have been later re-filmed by the French company Pathé Frères.

⁷² Zheng Junli, “Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shi lue,” in *Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan*, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996). Originally appeared in *Jindai Zhongguo yishu fazhan shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai Liangyou Publishing and Printing Company, 1936). Quoted in Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 43.

projectors, and films in their possession. Several names—most notably Antonio Ramos, of Spain—have become synonymous with the early history of teahouse and theater-based cinematic culture in Shanghai.⁷³ By 1903, Chinese entrepreneurs were beginning to challenge this monopoly. Lin Zhusan, a businessman returning from Europe and North America in 1903, brought with him a projector purchased overseas and which he installed in a teahouse in Beijing.⁷⁴ The next year Yu Fengshun, a Guangdong native, is recorded as having rented out projectors and films for theatrical or private screenings.⁷⁵

The most notable example of such transfers concerns American filmmaker Benjamin Brodsky (aka Brasky/Polaski/Brody, 187?-1960), whose Asia Film Company (*Yaxiya yingxi gongsi*, aka Asia Films Company) has widely been credited with producing or financing some of the first Chinese-made films of the twentieth century. Brodsky, a Russian émigré, released what are believed to be two dramatic shorts in 1909 entitled *The West Dowager Empress* (*Xi taihou*, 1909) and *An Unlucky Fellow* (*Buxing er*, 1909). While the existence of these films is disputed, two Brodsky documentaries concerning the filmmaker's sojourns in China and Japan have survived. Concerning the former, Law Kar and Frank Bren have written:

A Trip through China (c. 1910-1915) begins in Hong Kong and roves north through China to include long takes in the Forbidden City (Beijing) and a legal slow-strangulation execution indicating Brodsky's "pull" in official circles. This extraordinary film, which is about two hours long, earned solid, even "rave," reviews in the *New York Times*, *Motography*,

⁷³ On Ramos, see: Luke McKernan, "Antonio Ramos," in Stephen Herbert and Luke McKernan, *Who's Who of Victorian Cinema: A Worldwide Survey* (The Projection Box, 1997?). Entry appears online at: <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/ramos.htm>. This entry is based primarily on information available in Leyda's *Dianying/Electric Shadows*, which also appears in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi*.

⁷⁴ "Beijing dianying shiye de fada," in *Dianying zhoukan*, no. 1 (Beijing: November 1921). Cited in Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 8.

⁷⁵ Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 8.

Variety, and other journals upon its 1917 release in America, where it was sometimes accompanied by a Chinese orchestra. Variations on the title, in sundry reviews and advertisements, included *Brodsky's Trip through China* and *A Trip Thru China*.⁷⁶

Press coverage of *A Trip through China* reflected the propensity of such images to reinforce racist attitudes shared by the American public. The title of one 1916 *New York Tribune* article on Brodsky and his films, "Bret Harte Said It: the Heathen Chinese Is Peculiar," conveys this relationship fully.⁷⁷

Brodsky's own relationship to Chinese cultural figures he encountered in the course of his travels, however, was far more complicated. A recently-surfaced autobiography suggests that he relied on a photographer to assist him in producing these "Chinese films," and published interviews with Brodsky seem to confirm this fact, emphasizing the filmmaker's cultivation of a "native" cast.⁷⁸ By the time of the 1911 Republican Revolution, opportunities for such early co-productions seem to have arisen with relative frequency. World-renowned magician Zhu Liankui (aka Ching Ling Foo, 1854-1922) is credited with *The Battle of Wuhan* (*Wuhan zhanzheng*, 1911), a title apparently filmed with the cooperation of a "foreign merchant" representing the "Meili Company," and depicting actual events following the Wuchang uprising of October 10, 1911.⁷⁹ The resulting footage was developed and screened in Shanghai as part of Zhu's

⁷⁶ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 30.

⁷⁷ George Kaufman, "Bret Harte Said It: the Heathen Chinese Is Peculiar," *New York Tribune*, August 27, 1916, 3 (section V.). Cited in: Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 43-44 (n. 16).

⁷⁸ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 35, 40-41.

⁷⁹ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 9. Much of this footage is no longer extant, but apparently depicted events following the uprising from October 12 to November 16, 1911, ending with the Qing army's [?] recapture of Hankou.

traveling act.⁸⁰ Advertisements in Shanghai papers trumpeted the “martial prowess of the New Army” as depicted in the film. Law and Bren credit to Brodsky the appearance of another title, *The Chinese Revolution* (aka *The Revolution in China*, 1912), advertised for sale by the Oriental Film Co., Inc. in the March 30, 1912 *Moving Picture World*.⁸¹ Brodsky’s Asia Film Company, although sold to Shanghai-based expatriates T. H. Suffert and “Mr. Yashell” in 1912, was also a co-producer of the title *The Battle of Shanghai* (*Shanghai zhanzheng*, 1913), which may have included actual battle scenes taken during the 1913 “Second Revolution” against Yuan Shikai’s presidency.⁸² Impetus for the film, however, is attributed to a group of Beijing opera and “civilized play” performers Xia Mingrun, Xia Yueshan, Pan Yueqiao, and Hong Jingling.⁸³ *The Battle of Shanghai* was advertised in newspapers as “a moving shadowplay without precedent” (*kongqian juehou de huodong yingxi*), and ran for three consecutive days beginning on September 29, 1913 as part of an exhibition which also included Asia Film Company production *A Difficult Couple* (*Nan qi nan fu*, 1913).⁸⁴

By this time, Benjamin Brodsky had already relocated to Hong Kong, which would set the stage for a fateful meeting with a group of young Sun Yat-sen supporters, including future Nationalist Party documentarian Li Minwei (Lai Man-wai, 1893-1953).

⁸⁰ Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 41. An advertisement for the film appears in the *Minli bao*, November 30, 1911.

⁸¹ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 37. Three hundred feet of the film have been preserved by the U.S. Library of Congress.

⁸² Other sources suggest that Brodsky sold the company in 1913, presumably making him co-producer of *The Battle of Shanghai*. See, for instance: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 21.

⁸³ Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 42.

⁸⁴ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 10. Use of the phrase “moving shadowplay” (*huodong yingxi*) suggests that neither “shadowplay” (*yingxi*) or even “Western shadowplay” (*Xiyang yingxi*) alone were adequate to conveying the meanings of cinema, motion picture, photoplay, and so on—even to Shanghai audiences. It is possible, however, that the use of *huodong* may have been intended to express the apparently “live” nature of the action (e.g. military maneuvers) depicted.

Li, the son of a large merchant family, was born in Japan and returned to Hong Kong as a student at Queen's College and St. Paul's Teacher's College. After participating in the unsuccessful April 27, 1911 Huanghuagang Uprising in Guangzhou, he joined the Qingping Vernacular Drama Society (*Qingping baihua jushe*), a pro-revolutionary organization with connections to Hu Hanmin and Chen Shaobai.⁸⁵ Li became a member of the Revolutionary Alliance in 1909 and the Chinese Revolutionary Party in 1915. He met Brodsky—along with Brodsky's companion, “Van Velzer”—in 1913, although elder brother Li Beihai (Lai Buk-hoi) acted the part of a policeman in the Asia Film Company production *Stealing a Roast Duck* (*Tou shaoya*), believed to have been produced in 1909.⁸⁶ Like *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (*Zhuangzi shi qi*, 1913/1914), the film for which the Li brothers would ultimately become famous as “pioneers” of Hong Kong cinema, *Stealing a Roast Duck* was not photographed by Brodsky—the two films were directed by Liang Shaobo (Leung Siu-bo) and Luo Yongxiang (Lo Wing-cheung), respectively.

The filmmaking activities of Li Beihai and Li Minwei may anticipate those of the earliest Shanghai dramatists-turned-directors, such as Zheng Zhengqiu and Zhang Shichuan, by several years. More significantly, however, the period between 1905 and 1919 marks a transition toward Chinese ownership within the emerging China-based film production industry. *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* was released by the Hua-Mei Film Company, an enterprise which united Brodsky and the Li brothers as collaborators and

⁸⁵ The Huanghuagang Uprising (aka the “3.29” Guangzhou Uprising) was planned by Revolutionary Alliance leaders Sun Yat-sen, Zhao Shen, Huang Xing, Hu Hanmin, and Deng Zeru in November 1910 as a decisive battle against the Qing governor of Guangzhou, Zhang Minqi. Posing as actors, Li and other young revolutionaries supposedly smuggled arms into Guangzhou by concealing them in “wardrobe chests” used to transport theatrical props. See: Li Xi, ed., *Li Minwei riji* (Xianggang dianying ziliao guan, 2003), 6.

⁸⁶ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 39; Li Minwei, “Sibaizhe zhi yan—Zhongguo dianying yaolan shidai zhi baomu,” *Dianying shuang zhoukan*, no. 375/376 (Hong Kong: 1993). Reprinted in: Luo Ka and Li Xi, eds., *Li Minwei: ren, shidai, dianying* (Hong Kong: Mingchuang chubanshe, 1999), 169.

whose films appear to have purposefully targeted Chinese-speaking audiences. Nonetheless, Chinese participation in these ventures appears to have been hampered by two factors—lack of immediate access to filmmaking equipment, and the subsequent difficulty of obtaining distribution rights to co-produced features. According to Li, Hua-Mei was controlled entirely by Brodsky and Van Velzer, while his own “Renwojing Theater Society” provided the creative direction and cast, receiving a one-time fee of several hundred Hong Kong dollars.⁸⁷

Theorizing Cinema and Social Power

Films such as *Stealing a Roast Duck* and *Zhuangzi Tests his Wife* may have been among the first titles photographed and acted by Chinese filmmakers to appear outside of China, although both were most likely exhibited by Benjamin Brodsky following his 1916 return to the United States.⁸⁸ Yet from this moment onward, Chinese-owned companies slowly proliferated. Filmmakers’ ambitions during this period remained mixed. Profits and entertainment were one objective; attempting to transform audience attitudes through the adaptation of “civilized plays” was another, as the early careers of Li Minwei, Zheng Zhengqiu, and Zhang Shichuan attest. Ownership was not the sole issue. The acquisition of motion picture technology by filmmakers in Hong Kong and Shanghai made it possible to represent “China” in an entirely new mode, one shaped by elite concerns for transforming society and the existing international order. As globe-

⁸⁷ Li Minwei, “Shibaizhe zhi yan—Zhongguo dianying yaolan shidai zhi baomu,” 169. The Renwojing Theater Society included many former members of the Qingping Vernacular Drama Society. The name may have been a reference to trick photography; Li had studied the trade since the age of fourteen. Additionally, one of the most startling aspects of *Zhuangzi Tests his Wife*, according to Li’s own memoirs, was the appearance of camera-created “ghosts” during various scenes in the film.

⁸⁸ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 39-40.

spanning media networks of production and consumption enfolded East Asia during the early twentieth century, cinema became an important interlocutor of China's present conditions, one which could potentially link its subject to narratives of civilization and enlightenment. In this sense, the motion picture technology represented the newest in a series of mass media technologies—which also included the printing press and photograph—which might be enlisted to shape popular consciousness in the service of national reform⁸⁹ Cinema was not only a form of “urban modernity,” but also a “politicized enterprise” almost from the moment of its emergence.⁹⁰

At first, this shift appeared to be perceptual. Some of the earliest recorded reactions to motion pictures emphasized the medium's “strange” or “exotic” (*qi*) qualities, as well as their foreign origin. In a famous passage from the anonymous 1897 review, “Notes on the Viewing of American Shadowplays” (*Guan Meiguo yingxi ji*)—the earliest extant record of Chinese filmgoing—the author marvels at the spectacle of movement. Comparing the new “electric light shadowplay” to conventional magic lantern (i.e. slide) show, s/he observes that this animated form possessed “marvelous, magical changes which exceeded all expectation.”⁹¹ The films, presumably shown by Johnson and Charvet using their “Cinematograph,” included scenes of women dancing, men wrestling, a woman bathing, a comedic short of a would-be sleeper disturbed by an insect, a magic

⁸⁹ Even examples taken from early U.S. cinema, such as *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), displayed a kind of self-consciousness concerning the communicative properties of the medium, which likened it to the telephone and telegraph. See: Paul Young, “Media on Display: A Telegraphic History of Early American Cinema,” in Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree, eds., *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 229-264.

⁹⁰ These phrases are borrowed from Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (“Introduction: An Amorous History of the Silver Screen”). For the time period discussed here, Zhang places far greater emphasis on the importance of the former mode.

⁹¹ Anonymous, “Guan Meiguo yingxi ji” [Notes on the Viewing of American Shadowplays], *Youxi bao*, no. 74 (1897). Reprinted in Ding Yaping, ed., *Bai nian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan, 1897-2001 (shang ce)* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2002), 3-4.

trick, and other images typical of early cinema at that time. The anonymous account describes approximately ten reels, in addition to “numerous others.” It concludes:

The invention of electricity has revealed historically unprecedented marvels, and divulged the inexhaustible mysteries of nature. Shadowplays, for example, bring the furthest things near to us, with no recourse to magical formulae. Myriad forms appear in profusion, like an image of our own lives; disappearing and reappearing—human existence resembles a flight of fancy. This is the nature of the electric shadowplay.⁹²

As the review suggests, motion pictures represented a “historically unprecedented” mode of fantasy, but also knowledge and verisimilitude—“bringing the furthest things near to us.”

This emphasis on realism as an important quality of the early cinema is evident from a wide range of subsequent advertisements and reviews which celebrate its life-like features. One 1898 advertisement appearing in Hong Kong claimed that spectators would “question whether they had not themselves entered into [the image],” while promoting the ability of the new medium to “imitate life to perfection” (*wei miao wei xiao*).⁹³ Over a decade later, belief in the cinema’s power to capture actual existence in arresting and engrossing ways had led some to claim that it was in some sense the ultimate art. Advertising for the Asia Film Company comedy *A Difficult Couple* did not only emphasize the film’s entertainment or social value, but also boasted that stage acting “could not attain” the level of perfection and beauty which filmmakers Zhang Shichuan

⁹² Anonymous, “Guan Meiguo yingxi ji,” 4. Subsequent convergence in the terminology used by Western and Chinese filmmakers during the early twentieth century suggests that the term “shadowplay” (*yingxi*) might appropriately be translated as “photoplay” in certain contexts during the 1920s. This is presumably the origin of English-language company names such as United Photoplay Service (*Lianhua yingye gongsi*) and Unique Photoplay (*Tianyi ... gongsi*).

⁹³ Yu Muyun, *Xiang Gang dianying zhanggu* (Hong Kong: Xianggang guangjiaojing chubanshe, 1985), 5. Quoted in Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 6.

and Zheng Zhengqiu had achieved in committing popular “family dramas” (*jiating ju*) to film.⁹⁴

From the perspective of proponents of the cinema, the medium did not lend itself to adaptation or accommodation vis-à-vis existing “Chinese” cultural forms, such as opera or martial arts. Part of the appeal of the cinema lay in its ability to supersede these cultural modes, which were themselves subjected to various post-May Fourth reforms designed to extend their popularity to larger and larger segments of the population—“the people.” In a 1921 article for the inaugural issue of the *Cinema Journal* (*Yingxi zazhi*), writer-director Gu Kenfu (??-1932) discussed the merits of motion pictures through a comparison with Chinese theater. While the latter was from ancient times a type of “diversion” (*xiaoqianpin*), recent May Fourth Movement emphasis on cultural change had transformed the performing arts into a mode of “popular education” (*tongsu jiaoyu*).⁹⁵ In this context, “realistic” (*xieshi*) or “true-to-life” (*bizhen*) drama had become an increasingly popular form. Borrowing techniques from Western playwrights, such as Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw, Chinese writers had fashioned a theater which broke down the boundaries between actors and audience using techniques which dispelled the aura of artifice surrounding the “old theater” of China’s past. Believing, however, that film—a kind of theater which surpassed existing, “live” modes—possessed “inexhaustible” realistic potential, Gu claimed that it would play a crucial role in building systems of effective popular education in China.

⁹⁴ *Shen bao*, September 27, 1913. Quoted in Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying piping shi, 1897-2000* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002), 26.

⁹⁵ Gu Kenfu, “‘Yingxi zazhi’ fa kan ci” [Words for the Inaugural Issue of *Cinema Journal*], *Yingxi zazhi*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1921). Reprinted in Ding Yaping, ed., *Bai nian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan, 1897-2001* (*shang ce*), 5-12.

In his article, Gu was eager to suggest that the economic advantages of film production, deriving from the medium's progressive, scientific qualities, would initiate a dramatic increase in scientific knowledge among China's people. In this respect, the great advantage of cinema lay in its ability to improve on existing theatrical modes by reaching the greatest possible number while expending the smallest possible amount of money, time, and human energy. This argument was echoed by the writer-director Zheng Zhengqiu (1889-1935), who asserted that film represented an important mode of "social education," (*shehui jiaoyu*).⁹⁶ Likewise, screenwriter Sun Shiyi (1904-1966) sought to establish the social value of cinema by drawing attention to its scientific properties, and powers to communicate visually across international boundaries.⁹⁷ According to Shi:

Sociologists tell us: the "indirect suggestion of the photoplay" possesses extraordinary power. This suggestive power can be a constructive force, and also a destructive force ... In short, this thing called the photoplay is capable of giving rise to a tremendous influence—a startling power of which we can be certain.⁹⁸

Shi's notion of "indirect suggestion" derived from his reading of Anglophone sociologists on the effects of the cinema.⁹⁹ Substantiated by the apparent effectiveness of film as a recruiting device during World War One, it was in part an argument against those who disparaged the nascent Chinese film industry as contributing little to the positive transformation of social behavior.

⁹⁶ Zheng Zhengqiu, "Wo xiwang yu guanzhongzhe" [My Hopes for Those in the Audience], *Mingxing*, no. 3 (1925). Reprinted in Ding Yaping, ed., *Bai nian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan, 1897-2001 (shang ce)*, 44-46.

⁹⁷ Sun Shiyi, "Yingju zhi yishu jiazhi yu shehui jiazhi" [The Artistic and Social Value of the Photoplay], *Guoguang*, no. 2 (1926). Reprinted in Ding Yaping, ed., *Bai nian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan, 1897-2001 (shang ce)*, 50-52. *Guoguang*, established in January 1926, was an offshoot of the Commercial Press Motion Picture Department.

⁹⁸ Shi Shiyi, "Yingju zhi yishu jiazhi yu shehui jiazhi," 51.

⁹⁹ The names cited in the reprinted version of Shi's article, "Bogarens" (*Introduction to Sociology*) and "Dacis" (*The Exploration of Pleasure*) make it difficult to trace the sources of his inspiration.

Shi may have been alluding to mid-1920s critiques which disparaged the cinema for its enervating effects and filmmakers for their profit-minded tendencies. Yet another issue which consumed the attentions of many Chinese film theorists during this period was that of Western filmmaking—specifically, the persistence with which Western motion pictures depicting China seemed to do so in the most degrading terms possible. Such indictments went hand-in-hand with paeans to the cinema’s transformative power. Thus, Gu Kenfu pointedly noted that foreign filmmakers arriving in China typically seized upon the society’s most “harmful” (*buliang*) customs and “base” (*xialiu*) social realities as their principal subject matter.¹⁰⁰ Zheng Zhengqiu complained of the gradual “extension” of foreign film into China, along with its displacement of local theatrical forms.¹⁰¹ Moreover, he argued, this cinema’s fundamental flaw lay in its profound “separation” (*gemo*) from Chinese society, and in the slanderous depictions which emerged as a result. Zheng’s proposal—perhaps unsurprisingly, given his personal investment in the domestic film industry’s economic viability—was that audiences should support only those filmmakers whose films provided the world with a “China” that entertained both foreign and domestic filmgoers, while avoiding dismal stereotypes.

The problem, as these filmmakers saw it, was not simply that foreign depictions of China were crude or insulting. Rather, they served to further damage China’s international reputation and standing, at a time when securing recognition of China’s sovereign rights remained a potentially uncertain prospect. In a written lecture given to the Changming Film Correspondence School, entitled “Introduction to the Photoplay” (*yingxi gailun*), Mingxing Motion Picture Company founder Zhou Jianyun and head

¹⁰⁰ Gu Kenfu, “‘Yingxi zazhi’ fa kan ci,” 11.

¹⁰¹ Zheng Zhengqiu, “Wo xiwang yu guanzhongzhe,” 15.

cinematographer Wang Xuchang noted that from an “international perspective,” European and U.S. filmmakers had proven extremely successful in promoting their nations’ respective images abroad.¹⁰² Accusing the Chinese people of “fawning on foreign powers,” Zhou and Wang traced this mentality to the “power of [Western] cinematic propaganda” (*yingxi xuanchuan zhi li*), as well as the policies of foreign government censors which restricted evidence of national shortcomings in exported films.¹⁰³ Thus, Hollywood films never portrayed “villains” (*huai ren*) as American or Mexican, but rather as Black or Chinese. Japanese filmmakers, already realizing the efficacy of such tactics, had promoted films overseas which offered convincing evidence that Japan had surpassed China as East Asia’s “superior race” (*shangdeng minzu*). Consequently, Zhou and Wang argued that cinema’s “efficacy” (*gongxiao*) did not only reside in the areas of entertainment or education. Rather, as a persuasive force, film exhibited a capability to directly impact international opinion, transforming the status of entire nations or peoples as a result.

Envisioning National Culture

One outcome of war in the early twentieth century was a growing consensus that new forms of mass media could be used for political purposes:

In ‘total war’, which required civilians to participate in the war effort, morale came to be recognized as a significant military factor, and propaganda began to emerge as the principal instrument of control over public opinion and an essential weapon in the national arsenal. In both

¹⁰² Zhou Jianyun, and Wang Xuchang, “Yingxi gailun” [Introduction to the Photoplay], *Mingchang dianying hanshou xuexiao jiangyi* (1924). Reprinted in Ding Yaping, ed., *Bai nian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan, 1897-2001 (shang ce)*, 22-28.

¹⁰³ Zhou Jianyun, Wang Xuchang, “Introduction to the Photoplay” (1924),” 23-24.

World War I and World War II the democracies and totalitarian regimes imposed constraints on the flow of information and used the media for their own ends.¹⁰⁴

In general, the threat of territorial annexation and conquest seems to have created a large degree of support for national causes among the private media. This was clearly the case in China, where foreign filmmakers produced images that further diminished China's international stature, while justifying the semi-colonial state of affairs which persisted even within the boundaries of the republic. The "European War" (*Ou zhan*), or World War I, created awareness among governments that cinema might indeed play an active role in shaping moral and public opinion. None of these efforts escaped the attention of Chinese filmmakers during the 1920s—some of whom, as described above, remained painfully aware of both the cinema's power and its overwhelmingly demeaning content with respect to those who were already considered beyond the bounds of civilization.

Nor, in fact, were all propaganda "weapons" dismantled during the inter-war period. The establishment of permanent propaganda ministries within so-called totalitarian and fascist regimes reveals that many governments continued to deepen their ties to existing media institutions for national purposes. With respect to this gradual rapprochement between cinema and the state, China was no exception, although this fact has frequently eluded historians who insist that political filmmaking only began with the rise of the left-wing cinema movement during the 1930s. Rather, the transition from "civilized play" and "family drama" private reformism to institutionalized "education" began in April 1919, when a petition from the Shanghai-based Commercial Press arrived

¹⁰⁴ David Welch, "Introduction: 'Winning Hearts and Minds': The Changing Context of Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003," in Mark Connelly and David Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), x.

at the northern Beiyang government's Board of Agriculture and Commerce. Entitled "Petition for Approval of Tax Exemption for Self-Produced Motion Pictures," this document represented part of the press' preparations to extend its educational printing activities into the realm of cinema. As its authors reasoned, many foreign imports depicting China:

[are] flippant and mendacious, extremely harmful to customs and popular sentiment, and frequently satirize inferior conditions in our society, [thus] providing material for derision . . . So as to [promote] the boycott of imported products which are harmful to decency, [we] hope to aid popular education, in part by exporting and selling [our films] overseas, glorifying our national culture, [and] mitigating foreigners' spiteful feelings, while simultaneously mobilizing the affections of overseas Chinese toward their homeland.¹⁰⁵

The Commercial Press petition portrayed film as a vehicle of state-sponsored mass enlightenment, and informal diplomacy. Moreover, it implied a challenge to foreign-dominated media networks which instilled in foreigners "spiteful feelings" toward China. Jubin Hu argues that the press' filmmaking objectives were always shaped by "an ideological project of maximizing a 'Chinese cultural awareness' that would later lead to a nation-building project."¹⁰⁶ Yet it is important to note that this same ideological project—already international in ambition, if not in scope—was explicitly tied to perceptions of China's national status abroad. While anticipating subsequent critics and filmmakers who proposed the same functions for Shanghai's commercial film industry, Commercial Press filmmakers were also intent on transforming the motion pictures into an educational medium.

¹⁰⁵ "Wei zizhi huodong yingpian qing zhun mianshui chengwen," *Shangwu yinshuguan tongxun lu* (May 1919). Quoted in: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 11-12.

¹⁰⁶ Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 46.

One crucial factor which enabled the press to propose this explicitly nationalist cinematic mode was bankruptcy. In 1917, Commercial Press Communications Department head Xie Binglai purchased a Pathé camera, film stock, and other equipment for approximately 3,000 silver dollars (*yinyuan*) from a U.S. filmmaker whose overseas filmmaking venture had come to naught.¹⁰⁷ The press then hired overseas-trained photographer Ye Xiangrong for the staggering annual salary of 150 *yuan*, perhaps to take advantage of financial opportunities created by the war in Europe and subsequent decrease in exports to China. Motion picture production began that same year. Following establishment of its Motion Picture Department in 1919, the Commercial Press contracted to develop film on behalf of the Universal Pictures Company for a serial production titled *The Dragon's Net* (1920).¹⁰⁸ Universal also provided informal training for press filmmakers.¹⁰⁹ With the addition of lighting, cameras, and production equipment purchased from the Universal film crew, the new enterprise's glass-ceilinged sound studio had the distinction of being the most technically advanced film production facility in China at the time.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 20-21; Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 28-29. See also: Yang Xiaozhong, "Yi Shangwu yinshuguan dianying bu," in Wang Hanlun et al., *Gankai hua dangnian* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1962), 7-18; Shangwu yishuguan, ed., *Shangwu yinshuguan jiuoshi nian (1897-1987)—Wo he Shangwu yinshuguan* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1987).

¹⁰⁸ This title also given as *The Golden Lotus (Jin lianhua)*. See: Yang Xiaozhong, "Yi Shangwu yinshuguan dianying bu," 8. The film, directed by prolific Canadian-born director Henry MacRae, is considered lost.

¹⁰⁹ Don Marion, "The Chinese Cinema's American Roots" (2006), *The Chinese Mirror: A Journal of Chinese Film History*. Appears online at: http://www.chinesemirror.com/index/2007/01/chinese_cinemas.html

¹¹⁰ Several of the earliest narrative features produced in China, including *Yan Ruisheng* (1921) and *The Vampires (Hongfen kulou)*, 1921), were produced by other companies using the Motion Picture Department's studio facilities.

Table 1.1: Individual Commercial Press titles by year, 1917-1927 (source: ChengJihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 1998 [1963]).

	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Feature films, theatrical adaptations			2	7	4	6	2		2	4	1
Actualités, newsreels, educational titles	2	7	3	5	9		2				

Educational filmmaking on behalf of the nation represented an important component of Motion Picture Department activities between 1917 and 1922. Moreover, it accompanied Commercial Press plans to create a distribution network “reaching every province in China.”¹¹¹ A comprehensive list of titles produced in this vein, taken from Cheng Jihua’s *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, includes:

- Closing Time at the Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshuguan fanggong, 1917)*
- Grand Funeral Procession of Sheng Xingsun (Sheng xingsun da chusang, 1918)*
- Grand Parade of the American Red Cross in Shanghai (Meiguo Hong shizi hui Shanghai da youxing, 1918)*
- Panorama of the Commercial Press Printing Facility (Shangwu yinshuguan yinshua quanjing, 1918)*
- Burning Confiscated Opium in Shanghai (Shanghai fenhui cun tu, 1918)*
- Victory March for the European War (Ou zhan zhusheng youxing, 1918)*
- Shanghai’s Longhua Temple (Shanghai Longhua, 1918)*
- Eastern Six Universities Games (Dongfang liu daxue yundonghui, 1918)*
- A Battleship’s Maiden Voyage (Junjian xiashui, 1918)*
- Scenes of West Lake (Xi hu fengjing, 1919)*
- Scenes of Mount Lu (Lushan fengjing, 1919)*
- Zhejiang Upsurge (Zhejiang chao, 1919)*
- Female Athletic Views (Nüzi tiyu guan, 1919)*

¹¹¹ “Wei zizhi huodong yingpian qing zhun mianshui chengwen,” *Shangwu yinshuguan tongxun lu* (May 1919). Quoted in: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 23.

Educating Blind Youth (Mang tong jiaoyu, 1920)
Scenes of Mount Putuo (Putuo fengjing, 1920)
Famous Sites of Beijing (Beijing mingsheng, 1920)
Famous Sites of the Yangtze (Chang jiang mingsheng, 1920)
The Fifth Far Eastern Championships Games (Di wu ci Yuan dong yundonghui, 1921)
Yangzhen Kindergarten (Yangzhen youzhiyuan, 1921)
The World of Boxing (Jiji daguan, 1921)
Scenes of Shanghai (Shanghai fengjing, 1921)
Philanthropic Education (Cishan jiaoyu, 1921)
Famous Sites of Nanjing (Nanjing mingsheng, 1921)
Famous Sites of Ji'nan (Ji'nan mingsheng, 1921)
Famous Sites of Mount Tai (Taishan mingsheng, 1921)
Famous Sites of Qufu (Qufu mingsheng, 1921)
Eradicating Insect Pests (Qumie wenying, 1921)
The National Assembly (Guomin dahui, 1923)

Admittedly, it is difficult to surmise how such titles might have contributed to national education as Motion Picture Department filmmakers conceived it. Like the magazines and textbooks produced by the Commercial Press in abundance during the same period, one possibility is that films of parades, sporting events, reformist undertakings, and stirring landscapes were intended to contribute to the “imagination” of a new community “produced as a cultural enterprise of ‘enlightenment’,” and through which national citizenship would be shaped and defined.¹¹² *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* notes only that certain landscape films (e.g. *Famous Sites of Ji'nan*) contained references to Japanese occupation, or other “political content.”¹¹³ Some films were apparently intended to accompany traveling lectures; others (e.g. *Educating Blind Youth*), by depicting foreign-run philanthropic institutions, urged Chinese to engage in similarly

¹¹² Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 46-47 (Chapter Two: The Flowering of Modernity in Print Culture).

¹¹³ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di yi juan)*, 32.

charitable enterprises. Determining the extent to which Commercial Press titles were distributed poses an equally difficult problem. Known purchasers included Chinese *huaqiao* entrepreneurs from Southeast Asia, which also represented an important market for press publications.¹¹⁴ Financial considerations and negative reviews of Motion Picture Department commercial features, however, led to the decision to stop filmmaking in 1926 following a series of shareholders' meetings.¹¹⁵ A separate enterprise from this point onward, the Motion Picture Department became the Guoguang Motion Picture Company, and the Commercial Press exited the film industry for good.

Ownership of motion picture technology provided the vital point from which departures into “nation-building” filmmaking became possible. While early figures such as Li Beihai, Li Minwei, Zheng Zhengqiu, and Zhang Shichuan may have transported images of nominally reformist “civilized plays” to the screen, the Commercial Press Motion Picture Department represents an important example of filmmaking for the sake of both raising China’s international status, and creating permanent networks (e.g. provincial distribution) of mass education. Nor was the press an anomaly. When racist Hollywood depictions stirred protest among Chinese-American communities in 1920, Los Angeles filmmaker James B. Leong founded his own company devoted to presenting “the real China on the screen, thereby correcting the general impression that Chinese life, as it may be seen through the camera’s eye, is chiefly concerned with tong wars, opium smoking, and strange methods of gambling.”¹¹⁶ Li Zeyuan, a director and

¹¹⁴ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 27.

¹¹⁶ “Screen: People and Plays,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1920. Leong had previously been involved in the production of one of the films at the heart of the controversy, *The Red Lantern* (1919). Other examples of offensive Hollywood depictions included D. W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms* (1919) and the Hayakawa

cinematographer living in New York City, produced two titles—*Martial Arts of China* (*Zhongguo de guoshu*, 1922) and *Costumes of China* (*Zhongguo de fuzhuang*, 1922)—promoting Chinese culture overseas before relocating his Great Wall Picture Company to Shanghai in 1924.¹¹⁷

Feature Play Company's *The First Born* (1921). It is unfortunate that Leong's company, James B. Leong Productions, Inc., seems to have met with little success.

¹¹⁷ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 12.

Table 1.2: Individual documentary, newsreel, and actualité titles by year, 1921-1927
 (source: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 1998 [1963]).

	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
China Motion Picture Production Company 中国影片制造股份有限公司	5		1				
Ming Sing (aka Star) Motion Picture Company 明星影片公司		5					
Great Wall Film Company 长城画片公司		2			4	1	
China Sun Motion Picture Company 民新影片公司			1	8	7	3	1
Dalu Film Company 大陆影片公司				2			
Zhonghua Film Company 中华电影公司				1			
British American Tobacco Company 英美烟草公司影片部				1			
Baihe Motion Picture Company 百合影片公司					1		
Youlian Motion Picture Company 友联影片公司				1			
Huaju Motion Picture Company 华剧影片公司					3		
Great China-Lily Pictures Company 大中华百合影片公司						1	
Minsheng Motion Picture Company 民生影片公司						1	
Xinqi Motion Picture Company 新奇影片公司						1	
Sanmin Company 三民公司						1	
Fudan Motion Picture Company 复旦影片公司						2	
Tianyi Motion Picture Company 天一影片公司							1

The Commercial Press Motion Picture Department was not the only filmmaking enterprise to trade in motion pictures which, by virtue of the fact that they eschewed actors and constructed sets, claimed to depict “reality” rather than studio performances. The 1920s was a revolutionary period in Chinese filmmaking for two reasons. First, the profitability of motion picture-based mass entertainment increased dramatically, leading to remarkable growth in China’s film industry during the early part of the decade. Second, multi-reel narrative features, rather than single reel “shorts,” became the dominant form of the medium. This does not mean, however, that earlier modes disappeared entirely. Many companies sporadically released newsreels, travelogues, and other realist presentations of contemporary events. Moreover, the profits to be made in the film industry did not distract some filmmakers from the fact that most foreign-produced portrayals of China continued to rely on crude stereotypes, some of which remained little-changed from earlier decades when the first European and U.S. camera operators had arrived in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing. Their response was not only to argue for national strengthening through the development of a shared culture based in part on the cinema—a “national spirit”—but also for actively promoting images which would improve China’s status in the eyes of overseas audiences. While there is little evidence for state-sponsored cultural production during this period, commercial filmmakers clearly shared the opinion of European governments that motion pictures, as a qualitatively new form of media, represented an important “instrument of public opinion” as well as a potential “weapon in the national arsenal.” The fact that such beliefs co-existed with multiple cinematic modes during the 1920s indicates that

while the narrative feature was a vital area of film production during this period, it was only part of the larger story.

Exhibition and the State

Commercial Press filmmakers were among some of the first in a new industry to suggest that motion pictures, as “education,” might play a powerful role in shaping China’s national culture and international reputation. In the wake of the May Fourth Movement, this attitude was echoed by many studio owners who argued for the importance of their commercial ventures to the national economy as a whole.¹¹⁸ Film companies also attempted to capitalize on audience sentiments by advocating nationalism in their films, and decrying the damage which foreign studios had wrought on Chinese self-perception and morality. In some cases, they appealed to the state directly, arguing—just as the Commercial Press had done in 1919—that insulting films be barred from import and further action be taken to promote domestic industry.

At this time state investment in the national film industry, let alone nationalization of sectors of the industry itself, was largely non-existent. Officials may have joined studios as shareholders, but there has been little evidence of active state involvement in cultural production until the “politicized” 1930s (an issue taken up in the following chapter). This does not mean, however that government attitudes toward motion pictures were indifferent throughout the early twentieth century. A somewhat allegorical account concerns how the West Dowager Empress, Cixi (1835-1908), refused to allow motion pictures to be exhibited on the palace grounds after one machine caught fire during

¹¹⁸ Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 47-48.

festivities held in honor of her seventieth birthday.¹¹⁹ Later, Cixi reportedly bestowed a gift of a projector and several films on another member of the royal family. Early regulations concerning film seem to have focused on the dangers presented by the technology itself. In 1909, Zhejiang police authorities prohibited Chinese rentals of “mechanized films” (*jiqi yingpian*) acquired via foreign import¹²⁰ Yet by this point, cinematic exhibitions had already reached cities in provinces throughout the empire.

As a source of both cultural novelty and questionable morality, the cinema elicited state responses which primarily focused on regulating consumption, rather than production. Zhiwei Xiao has demonstrated that late Qing efforts in this respect focused on ensuring social decorum during screenings, and preventing potentially “obscene” images from influencing audience attitudes.¹²¹ By the 1920s, police were joined by local education departments in their efforts to limit the detrimental social consequences of morally-suspect mass entertainment. A more centralized institutional arrangement began to emerge in 1928, with the establishment of the Shanghai Board of Film and Theater Censors. Soon thereafter, the Nationalist Party Propaganda Department issued a series of regulations and statutes intended to increase party control over the film industry in its entirety.¹²²

Much like filmmakers of the 1920s, cultural officials shared the belief that motion pictures possessed the power to influence audience attitudes. Rather than regulating film

¹¹⁹ Li Qingyue, *Ningxia dianying shi hua* (?: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1995), 1. Cited in: Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 8.

¹²⁰ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 13.

¹²¹ Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937* (Ph.D. dissertation) (San Diego: University of California, 1994), 86-87.

¹²² Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937*, 115-117. These would eventually lead to the establishment of the National Film Censorship Committee in 1931.

production, however, film inspection or “censorship” (*shencha* or *jiancha*) and surveillance of theaters became the most common methods of state intervention. Authorities in Heilongjiang province, for example, would only issue screening permits for films already approved by local censorship committees.¹²³ While such policies may have proven difficult to enforce with regularity, they did require that theaters be registered with local police, following which owners were subject to periodic inspections, surcharges, and taxation. By 1928, films shown in Heilongjiang—particularly those imported via the Soviet Union—were required to first be submitted to a permanent committee of educators, police, and government officials. These regulators of popular entertainment targeted films which “challenged the dignity of the Chinese people, violated the Three People’s Principles, harmed customs of decency or the public order, and advocated superstition and falsehoods.”¹²⁴ Similar committees and regulations existed throughout the Northeast. In 1929, the Jilin provincial education department issued an announcement forbidding any film harmful to the reputation of the Nationalist Party or state from exhibition.¹²⁵ Similar restrictions would become enshrined in national law later that year with the promulgation of the Nationalist Party Central Committee’s “Film Censorship Law.”

Local censor boards arose in order to neutralize the potentially harmful effects of motion pictures. While filmmakers pondered the possibility of reforming the medium for educational purposes, state activities during the first three decades of the twentieth

¹²³ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Heilongjiang sheng zhi: di sishiliu juan, wenxue yishu zhi* (Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), 648.

¹²⁴ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Heilongjiang sheng zhi: di sishiliu juan, wenxue yishu zhi*, 631.

¹²⁵ Changchun shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Changchun shi zhi: dianying zhi* (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992), 181.

century focused mainly on regulating exhibition, or ensuring that the behavior of theater patrons accorded with broader norms governing social decorum. Both groups, however, were convinced of the power of film to influence popular opinion. In short, views of the social function of the cinema did not merely relegate it to the sphere of “entertainment.” Film was not a harmless commodity, as demonstrated by numerous Hollywood films depicting China and its people in a demeaning light. Lawmakers at the end of the 1920s drew clear connections between the content of motion pictures, the reputation of political parties, and the interests of the state. From this perspective, there was nothing inherently “cosmopolitan” about the cinema. Rather, film appeared as a vessel through which an unpredictable range of ideologies might be transmitted. How this malleable medium might be regulated and employed for the good of the nation, after decades of foreign control, was a question which gained particular significance as mass party politics regained momentum during the early years of the decade.

Conclusions

The cinema of the late nineteenth century was not simply a “spectacle” to solicit attention, incite curiosity, or provide pleasure. Ironically, a broader perspective on the medium has been available to film historians in the form of Cheng Jihua’s *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, which scrupulously—if sometimes inaccurately—documents the first recorded instances of filmmaking in China without resorting to exclusions based on the imputed identity of the filmmakers or content of the films themselves. More recent film historians, by contrast, have attempted to construct a

history of “Chinese cinema” based on more narrow empirical research into Chinese-owned production and local exhibition alone.

Examining the history of cinema in China from the perspective of the medium, rather than these more limited contexts, illuminates a previously unacknowledged force which profoundly shaped the trajectory of filmmaking in China—colonialism.¹²⁶ In 1897, motion pictures arrived simultaneously in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Beijing, carried by entrepreneurs who capitalized on the “free” trade created by the post-Opium War treaty port system. Following these exhibitions, filmmakers like James H. White and Frederick Blechynden plied similar trade routes in their search for “views” which would interest and amuse Western audiences. While doubtless a commodity, film also described a China of technological and economic backwardness. During the Boxer War, conquest of Chinese territory by the other powers created a rapid expansion in communications networks used for the production, gathering, and dissemination of detailed information concerning the Qing empire. Like James Ricalton’s stereoscopic photography, the motion picture was part of this phenomenon. Subsequent productions, which continued to appear throughout the early twentieth century, depicted carefully selected or staged scenes of post-war China under the rubric of “reality.” While the effect of such films on

¹²⁶ James Hevia writes: “When colonialism is understood in broader, cultural terms or as a series of hegemonic projects, European and American diplomats, merchants, missionaries, and soldiers acted much like their counterparts in Africa and other parts of Asia. Certainly, this was the case with the forms of violence deployed by Western nation-states in China ... A second link to other colonial settings was the universalization of pseudo-scientific racial categories ... Anxiety over civilization and barbarism is a third important link between China and other colonial settings ... A fourth area in which China can be connected to other colonial settings is through practices of military plunder, the public exhibition, and the art market.” James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China*, 347-348. Hevia seems to overlook the important historical consequences of China’s residual sovereignty. Nonetheless, his definition is a useful way of understanding China from the comparative perspective of late nineteenth-century networks involving conquest, cultural technologies, and forms of knowledge. See also: Bernard S. Cohen, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*.

their audiences is uncertain, they undoubtedly represented the vast majority of cinematic images of China. From the perspective of motion picture technology, then, “Chinese cinema” remained a monopoly of foreign enterprises for at least a decade following Ren Qingtai’s *Ding Jun Shan*.

This monopoly was perpetuated by various filmmakers who, like Benjamin Brodsky, maintained ownership of their filmmaking technology while contracting with “native” actors and photographers on a film-by-film basis. Chinese-owned film enterprises flourished only after the end of World War I in 1919, a fact which is difficult to attribute solely to skepticism concerning the profitability of filmmaking as an investment. The second major transformation in Chinese filmmaking which occurred at this moment—one which has received little comment from film historians—was from filmmaking as a “mixed” commercial/social reformist activity to filmmaking as a form of popular education and international “publicity” (*xuanchuan*), or propaganda. This is not to argue that, from the perspective of the emerging industry overall, commercial considerations were in any way diminished; nor is it to argue that the vision of cinema promoted by the Commercial Press became the dominant cinematic mode during the 1920s, when unabashedly profit-minded attempts to create a viable “industrial nationalism” reigned supreme.¹²⁷ Rather, the point serves to emphasize: 1) within

¹²⁷ Another articulation of Commercial Press objectives appears in: “Shangwu yinshuguan de yingxi shiye,” *Dianying zazhi*, no. 3 (1924). Reprinted in: Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 19. Two other early enterprises which somewhat fit the Commercial Press “mold” were the China Film Production Company (*Zhongguo yingpian zhizao gufen youxian gongsi*) and Nantong China (*Nantong Zhongguo yingpian zhizao gongsi*). An interesting complement to Jubin Hu’s notion of “industrial nationalism” is Margherita Zanasi’s research into the relationship between 1930s official nationalism and theories of economic autarky. See: Margherita Zanasi, “Chen Gongbo and the Construction of a Modern Nation in 1930s China,” in Timothy Brook and Andre Schmid, eds., *Nation Work: Asian Elites and National Identities* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

international film markets of the twentieth century, representations of China were predominantly foreign-produced and based on demeaning stereotypes, 2) Chinese filmmakers and film critics were aware of this phenomenon, and concerned about its effects on Chinese audiences *and* audiences in other nations with which Chinese elites hoped to engage on a basis of equality, and 3) such concerns did undeniably produce a kind of national “counter-discourse” in motion pictures, one which notably employed non-performative (e.g. newsreel, documentary) filmmaking .

Focusing attention away from the rise of a “Chinese film industry” as defined by mass reproduction of the narrative feature reveals several things about Western early cinema as well. Most notably, its images were not solely derived from preexisting vaudeville entertainments or archetypes of urban experience, but also encoded a world-encompassing lexicography of colonial representations and practices. It is in response to *this* aspect of “cosmopolitan” modern culture that Chinese filmmakers began to seriously experiment with various realist cinematic modes under the rubric of education. This anti-colonial or anti-imperialist dimension of filmmaking activity during the 1920s finds no contemporaneous parallel in the West.¹²⁸ U.S. commercial officials promoted Hollywood exports as bearers of “intellectual ideas and national ideals” and “a powerful influence on behalf of American goods” following World War I, despite some historians’ assertions that positive attitudes toward propaganda were abandoned in democracies during the inter-war period.¹²⁹ Commercial Press appeals to the Beiyang government, by contrast,

¹²⁸ See: Roy Armes, *Third World Film Making and the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

¹²⁹ These are the words of then-Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover. Quoted in: Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell, “Film and Globalization,” in Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ed., *Communications Media, Globalization, and Empire* (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), 42. U.S. commercial attachés worked actively on

proceeded from the claim that these same U.S. exports represented a threat to China's international status.

That motion pictures could stimulate the human senses in fundamentally novel ways was not overlooked by early Chinese film audiences, as the anonymous 1897 "Notes on the Viewing of American Shadowplays" attests. Later, this realization was coupled with a belief in the cinema's powers to transform social mores and mass perception; in short, critics and filmmakers did not simply appreciate the medium for its entertainment value. State attempts to regulate film circulation and filmgoing also reflected awareness of the dangers of novelty, an aspect of Republican governance which shared much in common with municipal policing in the U.S.¹³⁰ Though initially dispersed among separate communities, the sense of film as more than a commodity—of possessing functions which far exceeded those of mere exchange—would soon give rise to an inchoate alliance between enterprise and officialdom from which emerged the twentieth-century propaganda state.

behalf of Hollywood in nearly every nation in which there existed a U.S. embassy. One of their chief tasks was gathering information about existing market conditions; these reports have provided at least one widely-cited source of information on patterns of Chinese film consumption in the early twentieth century. For a recent article claiming that inter-war democracies viewed their wartime cultural enterprises with remorse, see: David Welch, "Introduction: 'Winning Hearts and Minds': The Changing Context of Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003," in Mark Connelly and David Welch, eds., *War and the Media: Reportage and Propaganda, 1900-2003* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

¹³⁰ See: Lee Grieveson, "Not Harmless Entertainment: State Censorship and Cinema in the Transitional Era," in Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp, eds., *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 265-284.

CHAPTER 2. Cinematic Partyfication and Internationalism: The Nationalist Revolution,
1924-1937

During the early 1920s, anti-colonialism contributed directly to the impetus placed on educational cinema by reformist institutions such as the Commercial Press. Concern with demeaning, foreign-produced portrayals of Chinese civilization stemmed from perceived effect of these images on China's international status, and the self-perception of its citizenry. Manipulation of public opinion accompanied attempts to instill audiences with a newly national consciousness—an identification with China, fabricated by cinematic spectacle and biased toward the agendas of modernizing elites.¹ Just as student-led boycotts and provincial railroad “rights recovery” movements protested foreign exploitation of the faltering empire's labor and economic potential, filmmakers of the early republic pressed to regain control of “Chinese” images circulated via globe-spanning media and communications networks. As in previous decades, the principal obstacle to this effort was foreign domination over large swaths of China's coastal territory, which in turn constituted a critical inroad by which access to China could be maintained, and colonial imaginaries reproduced.

In China, the propaganda (*xuanchuan*) film emerged at the same moment as Sun Yat-sen's Guangzhou government began to mobilize a “Northern Expedition” for control of the entire country. Backed by the Soviet Union, as well as the recently-formed Chinese Communist Party, Sun:

¹ See: Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-3.

Reorganized his Guomindang [Nationalist Party] as a Leninist party ... This he did on the basis of Soviet advice, and in anticipation of assistance from the “General Staff of the World Revolution,” the Soviet-led Communist International, or Comintern. Even before the Comintern catalyzed, energized, and reorganized the Guomindang, it had actually founded the Chinese Communist Party, which would not have existed without it. But if, as Hans van de Ven has suggested, the CCP was not truly a Leninist party until 1927, then the Guomindang must be considered China’s first Leninist party adapting both the political and military lessons of the Soviet experience.²

One of these “lessons” clearly concerned the importance of cinema as a tool of publicity and mass mobilization—Li Minwei was made official filmmaker of the expedition by executive order just prior to Sun’s death in 1925.

Nationalist Party armies and their allies gained control of most of China by 1928, with the country now united under Sun Yat-sen’s apparent successor, Jiang Jieshi. Tariff autonomy was granted and Jiang’s Nanjing-based government formally recognized by each of the major powers, although negotiations concerning extraterritoriality would continue, unresolved, for years after. At the same time, as William Kirby has argued, the period of Nationalist rule was profoundly shaped by the “overhaul of Chinese culture, particularly political culture, according to international categories.”³ Despite the profound anti-colonial sentiments which lay behind the Nationalist Party’s “revolutionary diplomacy,” China’s emergent party-state resembled many governing institutions around the world, especially in its adherence to norms of international behavior codified within the “partnership” of the League of Nations. This similarity extended to the “party-

² William C. Kirby, “The Nationalist Regime and the Chinese Party-State, 1928-1958,” in Merle Goldman and Andrew Gordon, eds., *Historical Perspectives on Contemporary East Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 212-213.

³ William C. Kirby, “The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era,” in Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds, eds., *Reappraising Republican China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 180.

fication” (*danghua*) of political and cultural life during the 1930s; a trend whose origins have drawn comparison to Italian fascism, but which seems to lie in an organizational lineage stretching back to Lenin, anti-colonial movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and mass mobilization efforts during World War I.⁴ Militarization, and preparation for war, were clearly intertwined with Jiang Jieshi’s New Life Movement and other attempts to partify everyday life during the “Nanjing decade” (1927-1937).⁵ This political commitment to social reconstitution was felt in the film world as well. Yet rather than resulting solely in reform of the existing film industry, it triggered a notable proliferation of state-sponsored initiatives to re-imagine cultural production from the ground up, resulting in a network of “educational” cinema intended to harness public perception and human energies alike to the Nationalist cause.

* * *

This chapter argues that the Nationalist propaganda state, while taking up many of the anti-colonial and modernizing agendas begun by Chinese cultural reformers during the earlier twentieth century, also evolved in relationship to the global spread of media technology as a tool of social transformation. Already aware of foreign filmmakers’ predilection for portraying Chinese citizens as barely-civilized subjects, innovative

⁴ Concerning the effects of Leninist organization, anti-colonial nationalism, and European mobilization on (Chinese) cultural production during the twentieth century see, respectively: John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]); Robert Jackall, ed., *Propaganda* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

⁵ William C. Kirby, “The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era,” 197.

figures like Li Minwei began to form partnerships with various operators on China's political scene during the 1920s, promoting party organization, military discipline, physical culture, and new modes of social existence (e.g. women's rights) as cures for China's national ills. In this sense, their activities resembled those of propagandists, advertisers, and manipulators of public opinion worldwide, and whose activities belied a growing international belief in the power of technologically-mediated images to define and shape mass consciousness. Film producers, too, were caught up in the growing emphasis on sociology and "education" as consciousness-mapping and consciousness-raising tools of human betterment. While the term "propaganda" was not always employed, use of mass communication for political purposes became a ubiquitous phenomenon in Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, and liberal societies (e.g. the United States, Great Britain) worldwide. Similarly, institutionalization and partyfication of documentary filmmaking—and filmmaking in general—came to China just shortly after its arrival in the Soviet Union and Italy, both of which became important models of state cultural production for Nationalist figureheads like Chen Lifu during the early 1930s, when a completely new studio system began to emerge within the national capital of Nanjing.

Although Nationalist filmmaking did not consist solely of forays into nonfiction (e.g. newsreel, documentary) forms, it is important to note that documentary filmmaking became a named and identifiable cultural practice during this same period. Though the English-language term is attributed to John Grierson, filmmaker for the British government's Empire Marketing Board, filmmaking combining photographic realism and social persuasion was simultaneously pursued from the 1920s onward by a

geographically diverse group of practitioners and patrons including Grierson, Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Joris Ivens, the (U.S.) Workers' Film and Photo League, Henry Luce, and William Randolph Hearst. While the channels through which such techniques spread so rapidly remain a matter of some speculation, this chapter suggests that international institutions (e.g. the Comintern, League of Nations, universities) played perhaps the determinate role. As demonstrated by Akira Iriye, both intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations proliferated at the opening of the twentieth century.⁶ These were made possible by technological developments bringing peoples into closer contact, the development of worldwide networks, and the growth of a related global or “internationalist” ideology according to which the planet itself appeared as a comprehensible framework of human endeavor and exchange.

Nationalist attempts to maneuver within an East Asia dominated by Britain, Japan, and the U.S.—while at the same time hounding the Communist Party toward extinction— included increasing reliance on German aid as a means of revitalizing the movement for national sovereignty. In the case of film, Italian state studios played a surprising and, to this point, unacknowledged role as template for an equally overlooked institution, the National Educational Cinematographic Society.⁷ While nominally a participant organization in the League of Nations International Institute of Educational

⁶ See: Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002). While Iriye attempts to dismiss the possibility that such organizations arose as mere outgrowths of capitalism, he never fully confronts the role that imperialist geopolitics may have played in constructing notions and institutions of international “community.”

⁷ Cheng Jihua's *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* makes a brief reference to the society, describing it as an institutional mainstay of “reactionary” filmmaking after 1932 and tracing (correctly) its political power to associations with Chen Lifu, though failing to mention the society's ties to the League of Nations and inclusion of “left-wing” dramatists such as Hong Shen in its membership. See: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi (shang juan)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]), 294-296.

Cinematography, the society's activities indicate that Nationalist Party contributions to the formation of a state film industry *prior* to the outbreak of war with Japan were far more extensive than previously believed. Jay Leyda and Zhiwei Xiao, highlighting the effects of censorship on foreign (Leyda) and domestic (Xiao) film production in China, have focused primarily on the systematic and—for filmmakers—frustrating aspects of this “repressive” quality of the regime and its cultural policies.⁸ Hu Jubin, in one of the few serious English-language treatments of pre-1949 film history to discuss Nationalist filmmaking, defines the “Nationalist Film Movement” primarily in terms of party influence within existing commercial studios, while focusing entirely on feature filmmaking practices.⁹ Other recent histories of documentary cinema have referred elusively to the party-founded Central Film Studio (*Zhongyang dianying sheyingchang*), but little information concerning this institution has been forthcoming due to the apparent paucity of sources concerning its output of newsreels and occasional features.¹⁰

Both the National Educational Cinematographic Society and Central Film Studio were connected to a wider network of foreign studios, party committees, educational circles, and private enterprises which together constituted the multitudinous contexts of

⁸ See: Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), especially 60-113; Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937* (Ph.D. dissertation) (San Diego: University of California, 1994); Zhiwei Xiao, “Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937,” in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 35-58; Zhiwei Xiao, “Constructing a New National Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in the Nanjing Decade,” in Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 183-199.

⁹ See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press) (see especially “Chapter 4: Class Nationalism Versus Traditionalist Nationalism, 1931-1936”); Paul G. Pickowicz, “The Theme of Spiritual Pollution in Chinese Films of the 1930s,” *Modern China*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1991), 38-75.

¹⁰ See: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 304-305; Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhanshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 80-82; Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 50-51.

“state” filmmaking during the Nanjing decade. Binding this agglomeration of social forces together was a shifting coalition of individuals within the Nationalist Party itself, ultimately dominated by Jiang Jieshi’s powerful advisor Chen Lifu and members of the Central Department of Propaganda. In general, the party’s Central Executive Committee came to play an increasingly active role within China’s film industry during the early 1930s, at which time it moved rapidly to oppose racism in foreign media, pair film production with political movements, enforce guidelines governing commercial film aesthetics, and root out Communist Party influence (*chan Gong*) within the industry itself. Such measures dated back to World War I, when they appeared as tactics employed by the “Creel Committee” on Public Information (U.S.), Crewe House (Britain), and other national ministries charged with management of the press and media. Their reappearance—rather, their continued existence after 1919—signaled that the specter of war had failed to disperse following the Paris Peace Conference. In China, as elsewhere, culture was becoming reconstituted as a new kind of weapon.

Li Minwei and Sun Yat-sen

As an entrepreneurial partner of the U.S. filmmaker Benjamin Brodsky (described in Chapter 1), Li Minwei played a critical role in producing some of the most influential Chinese films of the twentieth century. Yet like the educational reformers of the Commercial Press, Li also sought to use cinematic technology as a catalyst of social and political change. Working with members of the Nationalist Party’s Guangzhou-based government during the early 1920s, he expanded the medium’s dimensions beyond entertainment and education. The result was early cinematic “party-fication”—a

commingling of commercial enterprise with mass organization and transformative political agendas. Viewed from the Nationalist perspective, this attempt to inject existing forms of cultural life with a new, purified morality was already a defining feature of Sun Yat-sen's Guangzhou-based government, and closely aligned with early republican efforts to disseminate symbols of political community on an ever-wider scale.¹¹

Between 1923 and 1925, Li Minwei traveled to Guangdong, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Beijing filming footage of Sun Yat-sen's political appearances. His early attempts at founding a private film studio had proven unsuccessful. On February 11, 1923, Li and several shareholders in the enterprise convened their first meeting; Li also arranged the purchase of a Bell & Howell camera.¹² Hong Kong authorities, however, were concerned that the new studio's founders would use the studio site as a base for revolutionary activity, and refused to issue a license. Refusal to pay a bribe apparently complicated the situation. Drawing on his connections to the Nationalist Party, Li turned instead to newsreels, having already filmed Sun Yat-sen's January return to Hong Kong following the military defeat of a regional rival, Chen Jiongmeng.¹³ Thereafter, as a representative of the newly-founded Minxin (China Sun) Motion Picture Company, Li made his way to Japan in order to shoot the Sixth Far Eastern Championship Games held in Osaka. A filmed record of the event, *Chinese Athletes Go to Japan to Compete in the Sixth Far Eastern Games*, was presumably Minxin's first release.

¹¹ William C. Kirby, "The Nationalist Regime and the Chinese Party-State, 1928-1958," 214; Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*, 93 (see especially "Chapter 3: The Republican State and the National Community").

¹² Luo Ka and Wu Minghua, *Xianggang dianying zhi fu Li Minwei* (DVD transcript) (Hong Kong: Dragon Ray Pictures, 2001), 10.

¹³ Li Xi, ed., *Li Minwei riji* (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying ziliaoguan, 2003), 10.

Li Minwei's subsequent films consisted of entertaining shorts mixed with unabashed "publicity," or propaganda, newsreels produced for the Nationalist Party. After a mysterious episode during which the multi-lingual Li shot films in Shanghai with an "American journalist," he next turned to documenting Sun Yat-sen and several prominent supporters traveling in Guangzhou by boat.¹⁴ During a subsequent trip to Beijing, Li produced several filmed performances by Beijing opera star Mei Lanfang, and "scenic views" of the Ming Tombs and Great Wall. The northern venture also resulted in a fateful meeting with rising theater magnate Luo Mingyou (1902-1967), whose Zhenguang Theater provided the backdrop for Mei Lanfang's renditions of excerpts from *Dai Yu Buries Flowers* (*Dai Yu zang hua*), *Mulan Joins the Army* (*Mu Lan cong jun*), *Madame Shang Yuan* (*Shang Yuan furen*), *A Heavenly Beauty Scatters Flowers* (*Tian nü san hua*), and *Xiang Yu Parts with Yu Ji* (*Ba wang bie ji*).¹⁵ According to Li these films were later edited and sent to a London competition as a single entry, for the purpose of "giving publicity to Chinese art."¹⁶

By 1924, Li Minwei, his brother Li Beihai, and camera operator Luo Yongxiang had positioned their Minxin Motion Picture Company to begin operation on several cinematic fronts. During that year the company released at least six individually-titled newsreels depicting events in Hong Kong, such as the burial of a prominent Catholic

¹⁴ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei rijì*, 11.

¹⁵ See also: Mei Lanfang, "Wo de dianying shenghuo" [My Cinematic Life] (1961), reprinted in Mei Shaowu and Tu Zhen et al., eds., *Mei Lanfang quan ji: di si juan* (Shijiazhuang: Henbei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001).

¹⁶ Li Minwei, "Yi wei lao zhipianjia de zishu" [An Old Filmmaker's Autobiography] (1930), reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 382. Originally appeared in *Yingxi zazhi*, vol. 1, no. 9 (1930). In 1924 Mei was beginning to attain a substantial international reputation. See also: Achilles, "Mei Lan Fang: China's Foremost Actor," *North China Herald*, March 22, 1924.

priest and dragon boat racing at the Duanwu festival.¹⁷ Production also began on Minxin's first feature, *Rouge* (*Yanzhi*, 1924), in which Li starred along with his second wife, Lin Chuchu (Florence Lim).¹⁸ In Guangzhou, working at the invitation of the Nationalist Party, Li also produced a series of films which depicted various personalities, rituals, and affairs of state. These included:

- Mr. Liao Zhongkai at the Opening Ceremony of the Young Workers School, Guangdong Arsenal/Liao Zhongkai Gives an Address* (*Liao Zhongkai wei Guangdong bingongchang qingnian gongren xuexiao kaimu/Liu Zhongkai yanshuo*, 1924)
- International Women's Day* (*Shijie funü jie*, 1924)
- Mourning and State Burial Rites for Dr. Wu Tingfang* (*Zhuidao Wu Tingfang boshi ji guozang li*, 1924)
- Mr. Sun Yat-sen Holds the Opening Ceremony of the Yunnan Military Cadres School* (*Sun Zhongshan xiansheng wei Dian jun ganbu xuexiao juxing kaxue li*, 1924)
- Mr. Sun Yat-sen Travels Northward* (*Sun Zhongshan xiansheng bei shang*, 1924)
- Generalissimo Sun Reviews Guangdong's Military Police and Merchant Associations* (*Sun dayuanshuai jianyue Guangdong quansheng jingweijun wuzhuang jingcha ji shangtuan*, 1924)
- A Record of Generalissimo Sun's Inspection Tour of the Bei River, Guangdong* (*Sun dayuanshuai chuxun Guangdong Bei jiang ji*, 1924)
- The Chinese Nationalist Party First National Congress* (*Zhongguo Guomin dang diyici quanguo daibiao dahui*, 1924)

Several of the titles refer to Sun Yat-sen's unsuccessful attempt to move his troops northward and enter the second Fengtian-Zhili war as an ally of Fengtian.¹⁹ Despite the

¹⁷ "Li Minwei dianying shiye jianbiao," in Luo Ka and Li Xi, eds., *Li Minwei: ren, shidai, dianying* (Hong Kong: Mingchuang chubanshe, 1999), 193.

¹⁸ Despite its reputation as Hong Kong's first feature film, *Rouge* was principally shot in Guangzhou.

¹⁹ See: Michael Tsing, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927*, 84.

failure of this endeavor, Li Minwei was made official documentarian and propagandist for the party's planned Northern Expedition, an order signed by Sun's own hand.²⁰

While waiting for the expedition to assemble, Li Minwei continued in his new role by filming a provincial athletic competition and the arrival of Comintern delegates, including Mikhail Markovich Borodin, in 1925. Worsening relations between the Hong Kong governor and Sun's Soviet-backed regime made it impossible for Li to continue operation of Minxin following the release of *Rouge*.²¹ Instead, he traveled with Sun to Beiping in March, and returned to Guangzhou to document the leader's memorial service when Sun died unexpectedly of cancer during the journey. Subjected to harassment by Hong Kong authorities during the May Thirtieth Movement, on suspicion of his role in organizing student strikes, Li relocated his entire family to Beiping in August 1925.²²

Li Minwei's brief stint in north China seems to have advanced his growing professional relationship with Luo Mingyou; the two met again in Luo's Zhenguang Theater during September. Moreover, Li's past relationship with Sun Yat-sen and the Nationalist Party provided him access to the homes of other important political figures, who invited Li to arrange private screenings of the footage of Sun filmed by Minxin.²³ Li's diary notes specifically a meeting with several Communist and "left" Nationalist Party members—Li Shizeng, Gu Mengyu, Chu Minyi, Yu Shude, and Li Dazhao—

²⁰ Xu Xin, "Li Minwei de dianying shiye yu Sun Zhongshan xiansheng lingdao de guomin geming (zhailu)," in Luo Ka and Li Xi, eds., *Li Minwei: ren, shidai, dianying* (Hong Kong: Mingchuang chubanshe, 1999), 160. Originally appeared in *Aomen ribao*, November 10, 1996.

²¹ Li Minwei, "Yi wei lao zhipianjia de zishu," 383.

²² Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 12. In one recollection, Li attributed the decision to the impossibility of transporting film from Guangzhou to Minxin's Hong Kong studio for developing. See: Li Minwei "Shibaizhe zhi yan—Zhongguo dianying yaolan shidai zhi baomu," in Luo Ka and Li Xi, eds., *Li Minwei: ren, shidai, dianying* (Hong Kong: Mingchuang chubanshe, 1999), 160. Originally appeared in *Dianying shuang zhuokan*, no. 375/376 (Hong Kong: 1993).

²³ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 12.

during which participants discussed “film issues” (*pian shi*). At the same time, Minxin’s shareholders finally broke through a deadlock concerning the future of the company by deciding to relocate to Shanghai. Operating from a large home at No. 38 Dumei Road owned by Shanghai “godfather” Du Yuesheng, the re-christened Shanghai Minxin was established with equipment and personnel transferred by sea from Hong Kong. Its primary studio completed on January 8, 1926, Shanghai Minxin entered production soon thereafter as Li, with director Bu Wancang and camera operator Zou Haibin, resumed filmmaking activities. While Shanghai Minxin released four features during 1926 alone, Li Minwei was also present to document the unveiling of Sun Yat-sen’s Nanjing gravesite (including a fistfight between Nationalist and Communist attendees), and military reviews by “Zhili clique” figures Sun Chuanfang and Lu Xiangting.²⁴

By the early 1920s, political figures of China’s growing number of political parties and military factions sought to incorporate film publicity, or propaganda, into their repertoires of mobilizing tactics. Filmmakers such as Li Minwei, professing revolutionary affinities, incorporated this demand into their production schemes. The result was studios such as Shanghai Minxin—commercial enterprises which nonetheless played a vital role in disseminating images of leading participants in China’s numerous, localized governments. Many of these films were apparently shown domestically and

²⁴ This early instance of Sun Chuanfang’s use of film propaganda perhaps foreshadows the warlord’s adroit manipulation of the press as recently described by Eugenia Lean. See: Eugenia Lean, *Public Passions: The Trial of Shi Jianqiao and the Rise of Popular Sympathy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). Additional newsreel titles produced by Shanghai Minxin in 1926 included a series of mountain landscape “views” shot in Anhui province, a funeral procession for Wu Peifei military colleague Xu Shuzheng (following his assassination by a member of Feng Yuxiang’s *Guominjun*), and an all-female athletic meet. See: “Xinwenpian, jilupian he kexuepian,” in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi (shang juan)*, 641.

throughout Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.²⁵ As another Minxin filmmaker, Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962), wrote in the company's declaration (*xuanyan*), film was to serve as a means of introducing Chinese ideas, morality, and customs to Europe, the Americas, and audiences throughout China itself.²⁶ Ouyang's sentiments resonated with earlier emphasis on the possibilities of cinema to shape public opinion and popular education for the nation's benefit. What they masked, however, was the degree to which this tool was simultaneously wielded by competing political interests.

Newsreels, Publicity, and Propaganda during the 1920s

Despite Li Minwei's privileged relationship with Sun Yat-sen during the Nationalist Party leader's later years, Minxin was not the only studio to produce publicity films celebrating the generalissimo's lifetime of political achievements. The short-lived Baihe (Lily) Film Company released *Sun Yat-sen (His Life and Times)* (*Sun Zhongshan (sheng qian yu si hou)*, 1925), a film in seven reels shot by Zhou Shimu. Numerous other political figures, still living, commissioned or served as the subjects of newsreels or publicity footage—the two frequently overlapped—bearing their names. The Dalu Film Company produced *Wu Peifu* (1924, dir. Cheng Bugao), the Zhonghua Film Company *Feng Yuxiang* (1924, dir. Chen Shouyin). Two additional titles promoted Northeast figurehead Zhang Zuolin and his “Fengtian clique.” British American Tobacco lent its film department to *Autumn Exercises of the Fengtian Army* (*Feng jun qiu cao*, 1925), while former Soviet Red Army colonel “Grinevskii” assembled an eighty-seven minute

²⁵ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 14.

²⁶ Ouyang Yuqian, “Minxin yingpian gongsi xuanyan,” (1926), reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 49. Originally appeared in *Minxin gongsi tekan*, no. 1 (1926, “Yu ji bing qing” hao).

documentary, *Modern Warfare in China in 1924-1925* (aka *Struggle Between Mukden (Fengtien) and Peking (Chihli) in 1924-1925*), extolling Zhang's military prowess.²⁷

²⁷ See: Arthur Waldron and Nicholas J. Cull, "'Modern Warfare in China in 1924-1925': Soviet Film Propaganda to Support Chinese Militarist Zhang Zuolin," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 13, no. 3 (August 1995).

Table 2.1: Individual documentary, newsreel, and actualité titles by year, 1921-1929
(source: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 1998 [1963]).

	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Commercial Press	5	9		1						
China Motion Picture		5		1						
Star/Ming Sing Motion Picture Co.			5							
Great Wall Film Company			2			4	1			
Minghua Company					1					
China Sun Motion Picture Co. (Li Minwei)				1	8	7	3	1		
Dalu Film Company					2					
Zhonghua Film Company					1					
British American Tobacco Co.						1				
Baihe Motion Picture Company						1				
Youlian Motion Picture Company						1				
Huaju Motion Picture Company							3			
Great China-Lily Pictures Company								1		1
Minsheng Motion Picture Company								1		
Xinqi Motion Picture Company								1		
Sanmin Company								1		
Fudan Motion Picture Company								2	3	
Shanghai Photoplay Company										1
Tianyi Motion Picture Company								1		

Unlike the Soviet Union, where nationalization of the film industry in 1919 created an institutional basis for serial news production, the relative independence of

Chinese studio ownership from the state resulted in sporadic release of nonfiction titles throughout the 1920s. Film markets reflected the uncertainty of the times. Foreign salesmen and theater owners complained that constant warfare between warlord factions disrupted their business, rendering it unprofitable.²⁸ Yet within foreign concessions and other areas surrounding Shanghai there emerged numerous new companies whose filmmakers claimed to represent China's "true" national culture (*guofeng*) for a wider audience. The playwright Hong Shen, hired by the China Motion Picture Production Company in following his return from the United States, penned a solicitation of film script submissions which called for a cinema capable of influencing "international sentiment" (*guoji ganqing*) concerning Chinese culture.²⁹ The company had already released a version of popular Beijing opera *Four Heroes Village* (*Si jie cun*, 1919), with the resulting film shown in Shanghai, Nantong, Nanjing, and New York City.³⁰ Subsequent nonfiction shorts depicting prominent local figures, governmental organizations, and scenery suggest that Li Minwei's Minxin Film Company was one of several post-Commercial Press film ventures to treat proto-newsreels as an important genre. Ties between realist representational modes and overtly nationalistic concerns deepened throughout the early 1920s. The China Motion Picture Production Company's sole newsreel release in 1923, *Citizens March and Rally for Foreign Affairs* (*Guomin*

²⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 40.

²⁹ Hong Shen, "Zhongguo yingpian zhizao gufen youxian gongsi xuanjin zhengqiu yingxi juban," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 24. Originally appeared in *Shen bao*, July 9, 1922.

³⁰ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 41.

waijiao youxing dahui, 1923), captured a Shanghai demonstration protesting Japan's claims to the city and port of Lüshun, and played for several days in local theaters.³¹

The May Thirtieth Movement of 1925, instigated by escalating labor disputes at a Japanese textile factory in Shanghai's foreign concessions, provided ample opportunities for filmmakers to continue experimenting with newsreel and nonfiction *agitka* production. Studio head Chen Kengran and cameraman Liu Liangchan of the Youlian Film Company managed to capture the mass arrest of student protesters along Nanjing Road, including a scene of recently-spilt blood being washed from the pavement.³² Additional scenes included in their *May Thirtieth Shanghai Upsurge* (*Wu sa Hu chao*, 1925) included the bodies of five deceased protest participants and a subsequent funeral procession. Screenings of the film incited further condemnation of the increasingly militarized foreign presence throughout Shanghai, until the film was forbidden to be played in concession theaters.³³ A copy distributed to local students served as part of a "double-feature" film event held for the benefit of wounded and unemployed workers. As effects of the strike spread to Guangzhou, Hong Kong film companies also recorded protests against U.S., British, and Japanese factories in the concession areas of Shamian (Shameen) Island.³⁴

The spread of "revolutionary" events in China elicited attention from foreign news sources as well. Ariel L. Vargas, a cameraman employed by William Randolph

³¹ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 43. As many as 50,000 individuals participated in the event. See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 12.

³² Xu Bibo, "Jilupian 'Wu sa Hu chao' paishe jingguo," reprinted in Wang Hanlun, ed., *Gankai hua dangnian* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1962), 29. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, no. 5 (1957).

³³ Xu Bibo, "Jilupian 'Wu sa Hu chao' paishe jingguo," 31. The Great Wall Film Company also released a single-reel record of May Thirtieth events, although circumstances of its distribution remain murky.

³⁴ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 19.

Hearst, traveled to various anti-imperialist flashpoints in south China; his images of “riots in Hankow” reached New York in 1927.³⁵ Soviet filmmakers took a more positive view. Director Vladimir Schneiderov and his assistant Georgi Blum, originally in China to document a “historic flight from Moscow to Peking via Mongolia,” extended their stay to also film “[May Thirtieth] demonstrations in Shanghai ... foreign intervention armies, and the people’s military defense against counterrevolution in Canton.”³⁶ The resulting footage was shown in the Soviet Union as two films, *The Great Flight* (1925) and *Civil War in China* (1925). The latter was shown widely in Europe as the first Soviet documentary film targeted specifically at international audiences, and expressed support for nationalist revolutions in the “Far East” while criticizing the U.S., French, and British presences.³⁷ Another Soviet filmmaker, former *Potemkin* production manager Yakov Bliokh, documented both the May Thirtieth Movement and subsequent anti-communist massacres carried out by the Nationalist Party in April 1927.³⁸ His *Shanghai Document* (1927) was described by a *New York Times* film critic as:

An informative and interesting film of life in Shanghai. Into it the producers have seen fit to show how the yellow men work and how the white men play or idle. No white man is depicted doing anything but enjoying himself or virtually yawning, while the coolies are perspiring under the burdens. Even on a steamship that is being unloaded by the scores of stoic Chinese the director delights in turning his camera on the immaculate form of an officer in white leaning over the rail ... When the foreigners of Shanghai are depicted having a game of lawn bowling, the Russian producer takes care to remind the audience that the Chinese are

³⁵ Mordaunt Hall, “THE SCREEN; A Civil War Farce,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1927, 21.

³⁶ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 47.

³⁷ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 21. Schneiderov’s memoirs concerning the film were later published in *Zhongguo dianying*, no. 2/3 (1958). The re-released version of *Civil War in China* was titled *Light of the East* (*Dongfang zhi guang*).

³⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows*, 58; Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 22.

pulling rickshaws, unloading vessels or working at lightning speed in factories. He calls attention to the presence of warships and the British naval ensign flutters on the screen ... so long as one can ignore the propaganda, there is a good deal of Shanghai's activities set forth with imaginative camera work.³⁹

No mention is made here of the violence which Leyda and others claim to have appeared at the film's conclusion. Yet *A Shanghai Document* may have marked a turning point as one of the first foreign-produced nonfiction films of China to pointedly criticize the persistence of Western military and economic imperialism.

Exploration of nonfiction genres, and particularly the newsreel or "indoctrinal" film, as an ideal form of revolutionary propaganda was not limited to Soviet filmmakers. Li Minwei's turn toward the Nationalist Party, of which he became a member in 1924, was evidenced by the number of films produced by Minxin and celebrating the party's leadership and achievements.⁴⁰ Yet just as Minxin was one among several enterprises to disseminate images of state affairs during the 1920s, so too did numerous Chinese filmmakers and critics begin to demonstrate an interest in the newsreel (*xinwenpian*) form. Other reactions (described in Chapter 1) to the cinema's powers of verisimilitude had been followed by a recognition that the new technology might serve as a powerful tool of moral and scientific "education" (*jiaoyu*), and even international propaganda. These observations were not purely speculative, but based on a growing awareness that the possibilities for motion picture production to develop into an important economic industry and communicative medium of limitless "advantages" were already being

³⁹ Mordaunt Hall, "THE SCREEN; Two Soviet Films," *New York Times*, October 16, 1928, 29.

⁴⁰ On Li's history of political membership, see: Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 6.

developed in other societies.⁴¹ The language of film as a “tool” possessing social “functions” and social “value” reverberated throughout cinema-related print media published during the 1920s. One function discussed with increasing frequency during this same period concerned motion pictures as bearers of “news” (*xinwen*). Writing in 1924, Shanghai journalist Ge Gongzhen (1890-1935) portrayed the goal of newspapers as “transmitting impartial and correct information, promoting civility (*shehui de wenhua*), and working toward human happiness.”⁴² By creating new connections between the news and motion picture industries, Ge argued, such information could be made even more powerful in terms of its desired “outcome”—the inculcation of patriotic feelings. Citing French uses of cinema to document German-inflicted damage to villages and cities during the European War, Ge put forward a plan of filming “military lawlessness” and the “decadent lifestyles of the upper crust (*daren xiansheng*)” in order to stir up public emotions against warmongering.

Soon thereafter, director Cheng Bugao (1893-1966) published an essay which detailed the advantages of newsreels over newspapers. His thesis—which cited the precedent of newsreel production in “educationally developed nations” (*jiaoyu fada de guojia*)—was that the newsreel’s value lay in its “living” presentation of recent events, and its ability to convey visual information to otherwise illiterate or uneducated

⁴¹ See, for example: Wu Tiesheng, “Dianying de haochu,” reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 525-529. Originally appeared in *Dianying zhoukan*, no. 1 (1921).

⁴² Ge Gongzhen, “Yingxi he xinwen shiye,” reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 611. Originally appeared in *Dianying zazhi* (1924, chuangan hao).

audiences.⁴³ Cheng noted approvingly that in the United States, film censors blocked the screening of news stories concerning unsavory individuals, thus preventing the creation of “vile impressions” in the minds of audience members. While looking to the Pathé Frères serial titles (e.g. *Pathé Journal* and *Pathé Weekly*) and William Randolph Hearst’s Hearst-Vitagraph newsreels as important precedents, Cheng also urged Chinese filmmakers to produce their own newsreels in order to further advance the knowledge of their countrymen.⁴⁴ Other advocates of the “current events film” (*shishi pian*)—another designation for newsreels screened prior to the main act or feature—shared in Cheng’s belief that this potential medium of popular education should not be dominated solely by U.S. companies such as Universal and Fox.⁴⁵ Rather, current events films might serve as “methods of political propaganda” (*zhengzhi xuanchuan de shouduan*) for combating foreign slander against China’s patriotic movement (*aiguo yundong*), or the basis for a new kind of national history based on motion pictures.⁴⁶

In both practical and conceptual terms, Chinese filmmakers of the 1920s explored the social uses of cinema in ways which a filmmaker and critic of the following decade, Paul Rotha, would later associate with the documentary form. From Rotha’s perspective, education and propaganda were interdependent functions of nonfiction films produced during and after the First World War which, as he argued:

⁴³ Cheng Bugao, “Xinwen yingpian tan,” reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 613. Originally appeared in *Mingxing gongsi tekan*, no. 5 (1925, “Mang gunü” hao).

⁴⁴ Cheng Bugao, “Xinwen yingpian tan,” 615.

⁴⁵ See: Ji Wen, “Shishi pian jiyi tiachang” and Bo Jin, “Shishi yingpian tan,” reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 616-617, 618-620. Originally appeared in *Yinguang*, no. 1 (1926) and *Yinxing*, no. 7 (1927), respectively.

⁴⁶ Bo Jin, “Shishi yingpian tan,” 619. Bo noted approvingly the historical value of newsreels produced at the time of the Meiji emperor’s death, or during the Kantō earthquake.

[B]egan this era of mass-persuasion, but the rapid development of the radio and the cinema, as well as the increasing influence exerted by the press, has subsequently trebled the importance of this new factor in the social structure. There can be little question that the immense persuasive properties of the two electric mediums ... have played an incalculable part in the shaping of mass-thought in post-war Europe. It is being generally recognized, moreover, that propaganda may become, as indeed in some countries it already is, one of the most important instruments for the building of the State.⁴⁷

Rotha viewed propaganda filmmaking as distinct from motion picture production for entertainment. The former, in addition to enlightening and educating, worked to ensure public support for state policies, and built up “mutual sympathy and understanding between the people and the work of the public services.”⁴⁸ The latter existed mainly for the sake of the studio “balance sheet” or artistic endeavor, but contributed little to modern society. A frequent collaborator with documentarian John Grierson, Rotha described the evolution of documentary cinema as progressing from naturalist and realist origins to the newsreel and propaganda forms, and emphasized the vanguard role of Soviet and British filmmaking. While entirely unaware of Chinese nonfiction filmmaking during the 1920s, Rotha illustrated in his writings the degree to which filmmaking on behalf of state institutions had become a forceful trend after 1914, and the place of newsreel and propaganda production in understandings of documentary form.

An important principle in Paul Rotha’s theory of this form was that, although the state might come to play an increasingly important role in this history of motion pictures, nonfiction filmmaking was already the domain of private enterprise, mass organizations,

⁴⁷ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film: The Use of the Film Medium to Interpret Creatively and in Social Terms the Life of the People as it Exists in Reality* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951 [1936]), 57-58.

⁴⁸ Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film*, 59.

and industry. In China too, political and anti-imperialist newsreels represented only a portion of proto-documentary activity. Sports events and scenic views, which represented some of the first actualités distributed by the Commercial Press, remained relatively common subjects for studios involved in nonfiction production. Other endeavors received even less publicity. Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) contracted with Beijing University faculty to undertake a joint scientific expedition through northwestern China, following which several films from the journey were shown to a group of more than 1200 academics in 1929.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, fiction films undeniably dominated national markets, accounting for roughly two-thirds of almost three hundred titles produced in China between 1922 and 1926.⁵⁰ For most producers, profitability was inextricably associated with the martial arts or costume genres, which flourished during the 1920s as overall investment in filmmaking increased.

As the growth of ethnography and ethnographic filmmaking in China suggests, however, intellectual trends during the 1920s were profoundly shaped by the increase in contact between centralizing state projects and peripheral or subaltern peoples. This trend coincided with the emergence of a more general tendency toward identifying and studying elements of society through new disciplines as sociology, mass psychology, and political science—all of which converged in the concept of propaganda.⁵¹ European and

⁴⁹ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 29-30. Another Swedish archaeologist, J.G. Anderson, is also credited with ethnographic filmmaking activities in the Northwest. The 1927 Hedin expedition was preceded by *National Geographic* photographer Joseph F. Rock, who traveled to Yunnan, Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and other locations between 1922 and 1927. See also: Sven Anders Hedin, Folke Bergman, Gerhard Bexell, Birger Bohlin, and Gösta Montell (Donald Burton, trans.), *History of the Expedition in Asia, 1927-1935* (Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1943).

⁵⁰ See: Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 108, 121. Li and Hu's figures include films produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

⁵¹ On the relationship between propaganda and the modern intellectual disciplines, see: Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 5.

U.S. experiences during World War I had produced a belief in the “unlimited force” of large-scale political persuasion to manipulate ideas, and transform perception into action.⁵² While U.S. social scientists began to argue for the existence of limits to propaganda’s powers by the 1930s, governments in the Soviet Union, Britain, and Italy began experimenting with the use of newsreels and documentaries for indoctrination from the 1920s onward. In many cases, what linked these activities was the movement of documentarians across international borders, and open adoption of foreign theories and production models. British filmmaker John Grierson studied public and mass opinion at the University of Chicago, and prepared a U.S. release of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), prior to setting up the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit in 1930.⁵³

Education played an important role in advancing the spread of propagandistic activities within Shanghai’s filmmaking circles. The 1927 *China Cinematic Yearbook* (*Zhonghua yingye nianjian*) listed numerous individuals who had studied overseas before founding or joining domestic studios:

Table 2.2: Members of the Chinese film industry with overseas educational background, 1927 (source: Gan Yazhi and Chen Dingxiu, *China Cinema Yearbook, 1927*)

Country of study	Japan	France	United States	England	Germany
Number of individuals	5	8	17	1	1

⁵² Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 2-4.

⁵³ Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film*, 57-61.

More important, perhaps, was the emphasis placed on gathering information concerning the practices and attitudes of filmgoers during this same period. Many studies focused on theaters in a particular city, and included details concerning equipment and facilities as well as audience preferences.⁵⁴ Questions of what made for a successful film were often at the forefront of authors' concerns, as the domestic industry itself appeared threatened by foreign imports and their rising popularity. Screenwriter and actor Sun Shiyi (1904-1966), a future employee of Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei's Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company, urged other filmmakers to conduct "social surveys" (*shehui zhi kaocha*) of the lower classes. These, he argued, would help to provide new and popular material for commercial filmmaking, thus "opening a new pathway for [cinematic] art."⁵⁵ While Shi intended that films based on proletarian realities would revitalize the commercial prospects of Chinese filmmakers by capturing audience interest in life below the "poverty line" (*pinfan xian*) his comments anticipated a series of political efforts to control and reshape public opinion following the establishment of Jiang Jieshi's Nanjing government in 1927. Zhiwei Xiao has shown that film censorship during this "second stage" of the Nationalist revolution reflected attempts to centralize party propagandists' control over local cultural institutions.⁵⁶ The internationalization, and politicization, of cinema in China during this crucial moment occurred amidst a global shift toward the explicit use of cinema for non-entertainment purposes. From this perspective, the "mass"

⁵⁴ See: Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 182-206, 599-610 *passim*.

⁵⁵ Sun Shiyi, "Wang xiaceng de yingju," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 763. Originally appeared in *Yinxing*, no. 1 (1926). The terms "poverty line" and "social survey" are also used as English-language phrases in Shi's article.

⁵⁶ Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937*, 105-110. On existing 1927 regulations concerning film censorship and theatrical exhibition, see also: *Zhongguo yingye nianjian, Minguo ershiliu nian (di yi ji)* [*China Cinema Yearbook, 1927* (vol. 1)].

qualities of film referred not solely to its reproducibility and potential audience size, but also to its ability to represent and mobilize increasing segments of national populations for political and educational purposes.

The Nationalist Party's Propaganda Plan

Li Minwei's connections to the Nationalist Party made him a likely candidate to continue as its chief film propagandist during the years of the Northern Expedition (1926-1927). On February 19, 1927 Li and Ouyang Yuqian traveled to western Shanghai, hoping to shoot footage of workers' strikes as a means of demonstrating popular support for the incipient Nationalist occupation.⁵⁷ As the expedition progressed, Li and director Hou Yao drafted a "Military Affairs Film Propaganda Plan" (*Junshi dianying xuanzhuang jihushu*), which they submitted to officials in the party's Political Department; copies of the plan were also sent to Central Executive Committee chairman Hu Hanmin and Jiang Jieshi spokesman Wu Zhihui. According to Li and Hou's basic outline, one important task would be the completion of a feature-length biography of Sun Yat-sen. After a brief period filming newsreels of Shanghai under Nationalist martial law, Li traveled to Longhua and filmed Jiang reviewing and addressing his troops. During his brief audience with the commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary Army, Li seems to have gained Jiang's endorsement, noting in his diary that "Mr. Jiang inquired concerning

⁵⁷ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 13. Li Minwei's diary also notes that Ouyang Yuqian "introduced" the playwright Tian Han as a possible producer for the never-completed film *To the People* (*Dao minjian qu*), which was based on a Japanese poem concerning the Russian *narodnik* movement. Tian is credited with having written the screenplay while an employee of the Shenzhou Motion Picture Company; the reference in Li's diary may refer to Tian's attempt to produce *To The People* using Minxin studio facilities.

conditions at the Minxin Company.”⁵⁸ Thereafter, Li shot celebrations “on land and sea” marking the one-year anniversary of the expedition and its success, which his films credited to the leadership of Sun Yat-sen and Jiang Jieshi—the latter cast in the role of Sun’s heir-apparent.

In fact, several filmmakers and photojournalists covered the Northern Expedition as it set out from Guangzhou in 1926. Hearst cameramen Ariel L. Varges and H. S. “Newsreel” Wong operated with the permission of Jiang Jieshi and other Nationalist generals.⁵⁹ Both had been dispatched following World War One to enhance the U.S. media mogul’s coverage of the “Far East,” and much of their footage addresses the perceived anti-imperialist overtones of the expedition and its consequences for foreign extraterritorial privilege.⁶⁰ Riots in Hankou, Nanjing, and Shanghai, which reminded many international observers of the May Thirtieth movement, remained a primary focus of the newsreels later distributed by Hearst (*International Newsreel*) and Fox (*Movietone News*). Jay Leyda notes that several filmmakers who remained skeptical of Jiang focused on the “terror” unleashed in Shanghai and Guangzhou by anti-communist pogroms.⁶¹ By contrast, Da Zhonghua Baihe, Sanmin, Mingxing, Wuzhou, Da Zhongguo, and Chang Cheng (Great Wall)—all local companies who released newsreels concerning the expedition in 1927—appear to have taken a pro-Jiang angle in their coverage.⁶²

⁵⁸ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 13.

⁵⁹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 48-49.

⁶⁰ On Varges and Wong, see: Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 315.

⁶¹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 54-58.

⁶² Da Zhonghua Baihe’s film of the expedition was filmed with the cooperation of frequent Jiang ally Bai Chongxi. See: Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 273.

Where Li Minwei's *The National Revolutionary Army's War on Sea, Land, and Air* (*Guomin geming jun hai lu kong dazhan ji*, 1927) broke new ground, however, was in its incorporation of years of compiled footage of Sun Yat-sen's public life into a nine-reel narrative documentary. This format exhibited striking similarities with *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), a Soviet "compilation" film edited by Esfir (Esther) Shub and which reconstructed recent Russian history through the use of "earlier newsreels, home movies, and other sorts of record [sic] material [Shub] somehow managed to locate."⁶³ Li's film, by contrast, also made use of actual battle footage (including several aerial shots) and his own newsreels promoting Jiang Jieshi. Like these earlier efforts, *The National Revolutionary Army's War on Sea, Land, and Air* explicitly depicted Jiang as Sun's successor, despite the fact that conflict between Jiang and high-ranking "left" Nationalist Party figures (e.g. Wang Jingwei) continued to smolder as the Northern Expedition continued toward Beijing. Li also employed his growing stock of Sun/Jiang footage in the production of a two reel film, *History of the Northern Expeditionary War* (*Bei fa dazhan shi*, 1927).⁶⁴ Several Minxin titles from 1927 also included "live" war footage, including *Mulan Joins the Army* (*Mulan cong jun*, 1927). General Fang Zhenwu provided several thousand soldiers for the feature; one distinguishing characteristic of *Mulan Joins the Army* was its gigantic military scenes, staged for Li's camera while actual combat took place further north.⁶⁵

⁶³ Jack C. Ellis and Betsy A. McLane, *A New History of Documentary Film*, 35. See also: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 18-19.

⁶⁴ "Li Minwei dianying shiye jianbiao," in Luo Ka and Li Xi, eds., *Li Minwei: ren, shidai, dianying* (Hong Kong: Mingchuang chubanshe, 1999), 194.

⁶⁵ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 13-14; Luo Ka and Wu Minghua, *Xianggang dianying zhi fu Li Minwei* (DVD transcript) (Hong Kong: Dragon Ray Pictures, 2001), 12.

Li Minwei was by this point a trusted film propagandist for the Nationalist Party. Lin Sen, a leading member of the anti-communist Western Hills faction, visited Minxin's Dumei Road studio to oversee production of *The National Revolutionary Army's War on Sea, Land, and Air*.⁶⁶ When party emissary Cai Gongshi was assassinated by the forces of Japanese commander Fukuda Hikosuke during the April 1928 "Ji'nan Incident," Minxin released a docudrama of the event which combined newsreel footage with actors' performances.⁶⁷ His career was gradually furthered by talks with the theater magnate and politically well-connected film producer Luo Mingyou.⁶⁸ The two had resumed their talks concerning "film business" in August 1927. By 1929, following a brief trial period of co-productions, Li and Luo had solidified plans to establish the Lianhua (United Photoplay) Film Production and Printing Company, with Luo providing the bulk of the capital.⁶⁹ The new venture opened in both Hong Kong and Shanghai in March 1930; Li Minwei's brother, Li Beihai, managed the company's Hong Kong site, dubbed the "Number Three Studio." While Luo Mingyou's repeated public calls to "revive national films" (*fixing guo pian*) expressed dissatisfaction with Hollywood dominance, they also hinted at a broadly-defined notion of "national benefit and public interest" which transcended Chinese studios' share in the domestic film market.⁷⁰ Rather, Luo's vision

⁶⁶ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 15.

⁶⁷ Li Xi., ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 15. This film was first a Li-produced stage play.

⁶⁸ On Luo's theater operations, see: Zhiwei Xiao, "Movie House Etiquette Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Modern China*, vol. 34, no. 4 (October 2006), 513-536.

⁶⁹ Other studios merged into Luo's Lianhua enterprise included Huabei, Da Zhonghua Baihe, and Shanghai.

⁷⁰ See: Luo Mingyou, "Wei guo pian fuxing wenti jinggao tongye shu," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 768-769. Originally appeared in *Yingxi zazhi*, vol. 1, no. 9 (1930).

included plans for popular social education through newsreels and political indoctrination (*zhengxun*).⁷¹

Emphasis on mass mobilization and opening of the “hinterland” (*neidi*) to nonfiction film production illustrates the growing confluence between international propaganda trends and the aspirations of party-affiliated filmmakers like Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei for China’s domestic industry. Since at least World War One, private companies had served the propaganda and communications needs of governments at war. William R. Hearst cameraman Ariel Varges had served as a captain in Britain’s intelligence department in 1916.⁷² Hearst himself championed U.S. president Franklin Delano Roosevelt and, later, the Federal Bureau of Investigation in his newsreels of the early 1930s; he also played a vital role in distributing the Nazi party’s own propaganda overseas, signing an agreement with UFA (Universum-Film-Aktiengesellschaft) in 1934.⁷³ In the case of the Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company, connections to prominent political figures were initially financial in nature. The board of directors included: Yu Fengzhi, wife of northern warlord Zhang Xueliang; Xiong Xiling, former premier of the Republic of China; Luo Wengan, Luo Mingyou’s uncle and a former foreign minister; Feng Gengguang, director-general of the Bank of China (*Zhongguo yinhang*); Lu Gen, southern China’s “king of the film business” (*ying ye wang*).⁷⁴

⁷¹ Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 202-203. See also the article published by film theorist and Lianhua associate Xu Gongmei: Xu Gongmei, “Dianying de jiaoyu di jiantao,” reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 564-566. Originally appeared in: *Lianhua zhoukan*, no. 1/2 (December 3-10, 1932).

⁷² Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies*, 138. A former Hearst editor, Albert A. Sander, later served as foreign press minister for Germany’s state-founded UFA company from 1918 to 1931. Sander was later exposed as a German spy by the U.S. Secret Service; in 1933 he became foreign press chief for the Reich Culture Chamber. See: Pizzitola, 315-316.

⁷³ Louis Pizzitola, *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propaganda in the Movies*, 317.

⁷⁴ Li Suyuan and Hu Jubin, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi*, 204.

Combined with the relationships cultivated by both Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei to the Nationalist Party, this constituted significant economic and political backing for Lianhua's vertically-integrated production, distribution, and exhibition chains.

Film historian Hu Jubin has argued that until 1931, the Chinese film industry focused solely on increasing its economic position in domestic and Southeast Asian markets:

Industrial nationalism arose from the complicated relationship between Chinese nationalism and the Chinese film industry in the 1920s. It relates to the various ways in which the Chinese nation was constructed and represented by films and related discourse, and the strategies that were adopted to build up a national film industry. The general tendency was that the increasing popularity of nationalist rhetoric interacted with the deepening industrialization of Chinese film production ... National cinema in this period can therefore be understood as centrally related to the construction of a national film industry.⁷⁵

However, film production during the 1920s also demonstrated that the medium's uses had expanded well beyond nakedly commercial aims. By 1931, faced with war in northeast China and Communist resurgence in remote Jiangxi province, the Nationalist Party began to move beyond sporadic financial support for Li Minwei's propaganda reels. Members of the Central Executive Committee approved plans for a Central Film Cultural Propaganda Committee (*Zhongyang dianying wenhua weiyuanhui*) on March 19, 1931.⁷⁶ Government censors limited exhibition of Hollywood features deemed racist or otherwise

⁷⁵ Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 74.

⁷⁶ "Zhongyang dianying wenhua xuanchuan weiyuanhui zuzhi tiaoli ji jinxing jihua dagang—Zhongyang changhui yi'ersan ci huiyi tongguo," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 137-138. Originally appeared in *Yingxi zazhi*, vol. 1, no. 11/12 (1931).

offensive to public sensibilities.⁷⁷ Members of the central party Propaganda Committee worked with Lianhua employees on the studio's *Lianhua News* (*Lianhua xinwen*), a monthly news serial; thirty editions of this title were released between Lianhua's founding and May 1933.⁷⁸

Throughout the early 1930s, film companies released documentaries and newsreels depicting China's northern war with Japan, and Japan's aborted 1931 invasion of Shanghai. Many of these appealed to popular demand among Chinese-speaking communities for images of the conflict: Mingxing's *Battle of Shanghai* (*Shanghai zhi zhan*, 1932), *The Bloody Battle to Resist Japan* (*Kang Ri xue zhan*, 1932), and *The Nineteenth Route Army's Bloody Battle of Resistance to Japan* (*Shijiu lu jun xue zhan kang Ri*, 1932); Lianhua's *History of the Nineteenth Route Army's Battle to Resist Japan* (*Shijiu lu jun kang Ri zhan shi*, 1932), *Memorial for the Fallen Soldiers of the Song-Hu Garrison* (*Song-Hu kang Ri zhen wang jiang shi zhuidaohui*, 1932); Tianyi's *Shanghai's Great Catastrophe* (*Shanghai haojie ji*, 1932). Smaller studios also released a host of similarly-titled productions between 1932 and 1934, just as the Nationalist Party ordered a prohibition on all direct references to subjects that might influence ongoing Sino-Japanese negotiations.⁷⁹ At the same time, the Communist Party-affiliated Left Wing Dramatists League began advocating a realist cinema of "exposure" of social

⁷⁷ Zhiwei Xiao, "The Expulsion of American Films From China, 1949-1950," *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 30, no. 1 (November 2004), 77.

⁷⁸ "Dianying shi hua," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 1383. Originally appeared in *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao* (1936).

⁷⁹ Hu De, "Jingqiu Zhong xuan bu zhijiao (shang)," reprinted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 292-293. Originally appeared in *Diansheng ribao*, vol. 1, no. 43/44 (June 12/13, 1932). Many of the "prohibited" films were eventually shown, albeit with altered titles.

conditions.⁸⁰ While Communist influence within Shanghai film circles was mainly confined to the league's "film critics group"—within which existed the underground Communist "film group"—and the screenwriting teams of certain studios, criticism of the Nationalist government was hardly unknown within the industry as a whole.⁸¹

In short, nonfiction film production was not the sole domain of state-sponsored filmmakers, nor was the Nationalist Party alone in its attempts to turn Shanghai's commercial film enterprises to political ends. Yet the differences between Communist and Nationalist attempts to shape motion picture production in their parties' respective interests produced far greater consequences than a simple division of commercial filmmaking into "class nationalist" and "traditional nationalist" camps.⁸² The early 1930s marked a major turning point in the organization of China's domestic film industry, and party-fiction of individual companies gave way to a massive Nationalist centralization project intended to place all facets of cinematic representation under state control. In May 1933, informal consultations concerning Lianhua newsreels were replaced by an explicit contract between the Central Propaganda Committee Film Section (*Zhong xuan wei dianying gu*) and Lianhua representatives Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei. Lianhua camera operators took to the field according to committee orders; the "joint production" effort yielded forty-five editions of a new serial newsreel, *China News (Zhongguo*

⁸⁰ "Zhongguo zuoyi xijujia lianmeng zuijin xingdong gangling" [Outline of Recent Activities of the China Left-Wing Dramatists League]. Reprinted in Chen Bo, ed., *Zhongguo zuo yi dianying yundong* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1993), 17-18. Originally appeared in *Wenxue dao bao* (September 1931). The outline's final article announced the formation of a new cinematic movement, "Prolet-cinema" (*puluo jinuo*). This name bears a striking resemblance to an earlier Prokino organization—the Proletarian Film League of Japan (*Nippon puroretaria eiga dōmei*)—established in 1929. See: Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 19-47.

⁸¹ See, for example: Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

⁸² See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 75-114 ("Chapter 3: Class Nationalism Versus Traditional Nationalism, 1931-1936").

xinwen), within a single year.⁸³ By 1934, construction began on a state-run film production site, the Central Film Studio (*Zhongyang dianying sheyingchang*), just beyond Nanjing's Jiangdong Gate.⁸⁴

In addition to the reconstituted National Film Censorship Committee's efforts to minimize exhibition of Hollywood films demeaning representations of Chinese subjects, the suppression of obvious revolutionary (i.e. pro-communist) imagery in domestic filmmaking began in earnest from June 1932 onward.⁸⁵ Faced with a rising tide of Japanese-produced propaganda defending the war effort in Shanghai and militarization of the Northeast, China's government mounted a cinematic counter-offensive by distributing films in Europe; 1933 brought tighter restrictions on all foreign filmmaking activities taking place on Chinese soil. New central organizations, like the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China (*Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui*), promoted mass propaganda efforts and rewarded companies for advancing the cause of "national film." Luo Mingyou, with support from the government, began an overseas fact-finding mission that November, while Lianhua's *Humanity* (*Rendao*, 1932) was awarded national honors.

⁸³ *Dianying shi hua*," 1384. Thirty editions of Lianhua's previous newsreel title, *Lianhua News* (*Lianhua xinwen*), were released between 1930 and 1933. Prior to the joint Lianhua-Propaganda Committee agreement, ten editions of *China News* had already been released. Construction of the Central Film Studio ended Lianhua's involvement in state newsreel production for good, although Lianhua films and personnel would continue to play key roles in promoting state agendas until at least 1937.

⁸⁴ With the passing of the silent era, this location proved inadequately isolated for construction of a sound stage, and construction was later moved to the vicinity of Xuanwu Gate. Its facilities, occupying twenty *mu*, included two enclosed stages and offices for staff, which together constituted one of the largest studio complexes in East Asia. See: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 96.

⁸⁵ "Zhongguo daxing dashiji," reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 1333. Originally appeared in *Diansheng zhoukan*, vol. 3, no. 22 (1934).

Yet private studios like Mingxing and Lianhua no longer represented the sole basis of support for Nationalist filmmaking efforts. By 1933, state institutions had assumed many of the functions associated with the international propaganda “turn” of previous decades. Just as the party attempted to equate itself with the nation, notions of how motion pictures might address national needs expanded well beyond advocacy of an internationally-competitive film industry. Many of these functions—education, political propaganda, and mobilization of a wide-range of social classes—had already been proposed by filmmakers and critics active during the 1920s. Experimentation in such areas was mainly conducted through various genres grouped under the rubric of the nonfiction film. Institutional management of public opinion, however, developed from the apparent realization that too many contending voices existed within the industry as a whole. Li Minwei and Luo Mingyou had supported the party in addressing these problems, but their Lianhua studios did not represent an adequate solution to persistence of cultural and class division within China’s republican society. When, in September, the Central Propaganda Committee established several sub-committees charged with oversight of economic planning, screenwriting, and censorship for the industry as a whole, the move signaled not only an assertion of party power within the industry as a whole, but a deep dissatisfaction on the part of Central Executive Committee figures with the existing state bureaucracy.⁸⁶

The National Educational Cinematographic Society of China

⁸⁶ See: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 296; Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937*, 124-127.

Many of the institutions linking the Nationalist Party to state film production during the early 1930s were directed by the prominent Jiang Jieshi supporter Chen Lifu (1900-2001). Like Huang Ying, a former journalist and party propagandist who later headed the Central Film Censorship Committee, Chen publicly made use of his positions to transform the cinema into a medium which served national interests.⁸⁷ His organizational skills and connections as one of Jiang's top political confidantes meant that Chen effectively spoke for the party center. A top official in the Nationalist investigative apparatus since 1928, Chen's "primary political mission was to consolidate and strengthen the political position of Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi]."⁸⁸ In cultural terms, this meant combating Marxist-Leninist theories associated with the Communist Party through organizations such as the National Cultural Reconstruction Association (*Zhongguo wenhua jianshe xiehui*), which aimed to "revive and unify the Chinese race (*minzu*)" and "reconstruct China's own culture."⁸⁹ Along with elder brother Chen Guofu, who then served as head of the party's Organization Department, Chen Lifu also stressed the use of mass media to enhance loyalty to the center and Jiang, its leader. While for the Nationalists, party-fication (*danghua*) principally referred to increasing influence over state institutions (e.g. provincial governments and schools) during the 1930s, it might also be understood—as in this chapter—to refer to the harnessing of commercial enterprises to political ends. Previous party filmmaking had relied on the facilities and

⁸⁷ Huang Ying's brief tenure as a party filmmaker began in 1926 when Huang—then head of the Central Propaganda Committee Cultural Section Artistic Subsection (*Zhongyang xuanchuan weiyuanhui wenyi ke yishu gu*)—led a film team during the Northern Expedition. A ten-reel silent documentary attributed to Huang, *Jiang Jieshi on the Northern Expedition (Jiang Jieshi Bei fa ji)*, is listed in the party's February 1947 film catalogue. See: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 80. Huang, a Guangdong native, was also a close colleague of Li Minwei.

⁸⁸ "Ch'en Li-fu," in Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China, Volume I: Ai-Ch'ü* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 207.

⁸⁹ Fan Xiaofang and Li Yongming, *Chen Lifu yu Chen Guofu* (Wuhan: Wuhan chubanshe, 1993), 95.

expertise of private studios like Lianhua to achieve propaganda objectives. Control of dissenting views was achieved via censorship or, in the case of the infamous 1933 attack on Yihua Film Studio, violence and intimidation.

Chen Lifu's efforts to strengthen Nationalist control over the film industry, and increase its effectiveness as a tool of mass mobilization, represented the introduction of a new paradigm—creation of parallel state institutions whose functions supplemented, exceeded, or even displaced existing commercial modes. The Nanjing-based *Capital News (Jing bao)*, *Current Events Monthly (Shishi yuebao)*, modeled on the American magazine *Time* and French *Le Monde*, Zhengzhong Book Company, and Central Broadcasting Station were all founded or supervised by Chen, and existed to:

Make the youth of China appreciate the past glories of Chinese culture and gain a new spirit of national self-confidence; to popularize scientific developments which would enable China to catch up with the Western countries; to spur the development of such communications devices as a Chinese typewriter, telegraph decoding machine and typesetting machine; and to encourage the study of the doctrines of Sun Yat-sen.⁹⁰

Chen's notion of a Chinese "renaissance" rested heavily on the possibilities which he believed to exist in communications technology and educational reform. His attitudes and policies toward film, made public beginning in 1932 with the establishment of the Educational Cinematographic Society of China, accompanied general reform of the national schools begun a year earlier.⁹¹ Chen rarely deviated from the notion that Jiang Jieshi should be promoted as the "top leader" of the Nationalist Party, or that the existence of a single party and ideology for China would solve many of the nation's

⁹⁰ "Ch'en Li-fu," 208.

⁹¹ Xiaofang and Li Yongming, *Chen Lifu yu Chen Guofu*, 152, 157.

domestic and international problems.⁹² Nonetheless, state filmmaking in China during the early 1930s drew on a wide range of international models and institutional mechanisms which extended this project well beyond the domains of education and pro-Jiang propaganda.

Beginning in the late 1920s, the Nationalist Party began actively purging the nation of “religious” and “superstitious” practices deemed incompatible with a renewed focus on economic growth, political centralization, and national prestige. At the May 1931 session of the Council of the League of Nations, the Chinese government requested assistance with “reform.” The league responded by dispatching a mission of “advisors who would assist the development of the Chinese educational system and facilitate intercourse between the [centers] of intellectual activity in China and abroad.”⁹³ One priority of the mission was to aid Chinese reformers in overcoming independent, privatizing tendencies in the educational system, believed to result in “the insufficient strength of public spirit in China.”⁹⁴ Instead, emphasis was placed on creating “an organized system of public education related to immediate social problems,” and which would incorporate various existing, “modern” educational institutions based on Japanese, European, and United States precedents. Like Chen Lifu, mission members believed that Chinese curricula should draw on “indigenous” history and literature, creating “the materials for a new civilization that will be neither American nor European, but

⁹²Ch'en Lifu (Sidney H. Chang and Ramon H. Myers, eds.) *The Storm Clouds Clear Over China: The Memoir of Ch'en Li-fu, 1900-1993* (Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1994), 100-101.

⁹³ League of Nations' Mission of Educational Experts, *The Reorganisation of Education in China* (Paris: The League of Nations' Institute of International Co-Operation, 1932), 11. Mission members included C. H. Becker (Germany), M. Falski (Poland), P. Langevin (France), and R. H. Tawney (England).

⁹⁴ League of Nations' Mission of Educational Experts, *The Reorganisation of Education in China*, 19.

Chinese.”⁹⁵ Other recommendations for reform focused on scientific training and universal rights to education, rosily described as benefiting “the interest of the one and the interest of all.”⁹⁶ Produced in consultation with the Ministry of Education, the mission’s report outlined a new direction for mobilizing national consciousness, one focused primarily on enhancing governmental power over the constituent elements of Chinese society.

It was no coincidence that the League of Nation’s Mission of Educational Experts visit of 1931 coincided with the rapid growth of Nationalist-dominated state film institutions taking education as their stated goal. Another league “expert” was Italian delegate Alessandro Sardi, “entrusted to with a special mission to enquire into the conditions concerning the possible use of educational films in China.”⁹⁷ Sardi, as president of the Educational Film Union (*L’Unione Cinematografica Educativa*, aka *LUCE*), was not only well-versed in the theory and practice of cinematic education, but also presided over an entire state monopoly devoted to nonfiction film production by which the Fascist party had “set about engineering its own representation” during the 1920s.⁹⁸ Like Italy, China was in the process of becoming a single-party state in which the government sought to regulate all cinematic production, whether through censorship or direct engagement in creative cultural practices. Film, which “made available terms of reference that large segments of the population could share for the first time,” had played

⁹⁵ League of Nations’ Mission of Educational Experts, *The Reorganisation of Education in China*, 29.

⁹⁶ League of Nations’ Mission of Educational Experts, *The Reorganisation of Education in China*, 33.

⁹⁷ League of Nations’ Mission of Educational Experts, *The Reorganisation of Education in China*, 12. See also: Piero Garofalo, “Seeing Red: The Soviet Influence on Italian Cinema in the Thirties,” in Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo, eds., *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922-1943* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 232.

⁹⁸ Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 13.

an important role in politicizing Italian society during the industry's early years.⁹⁹ LUCE had been established on October 11, 1925 according to Mussolini's instructions; the new institution produced and distributed all Italian newsreels thereafter. Along with government subsidies to the feature film industry which aimed to promote images of Italian national identity, the institute represented an important force for intervening against forms of culture which might disrupt the Fascist Party's hegemonic agenda. By the early 1930s, this government was in the process of acquiring and consolidating private companies already beset by worldwide economic crisis, and creating a vertically-integrated, state-owned cinematic network in the Hollywood model.

The experience of Sardi and other Italian cultural policymakers had convinced them that short-format nonfiction films (e.g. newsreels, educational films) constituted one of the most effective means at their disposal for addressing a large audience and molding opinion in the party's favor. Belief in the cinema's possibilities was apparently shared by the League of Nations, which in 1927 established the International Educational Cinematographic Institute in Rome at the invitation of the Italian government; Italy also provided funding and personnel.¹⁰⁰ League member nations were encouraged to construct similar institutions, and on July 8, 1932 [check date] the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China (*Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui*) was established in Nanjing under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.¹⁰¹ Sardi's participation in the Mission of Educational Experts seems to have been timed to facilitate organization of the

⁹⁹ Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Hilla Wehberg, "Fate of an International Institute," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1938), 483-484.

¹⁰¹ *Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu xiehui, Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui chengli shi* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1934), 5.

society and provide guidance concerning its activities. International standards remained the norm: “since the development of the film industry, neither Europe nor the United States have failed to employ the motion picture as a tool in the assistance of education or promulgation of culture.”¹⁰² Despite reaffirmation of League of Nations commitments to the “eradication of misunderstanding between nations (*minzu*) and initiating a mission of [creating] peace for all humanity,” however, the society’s twenty-one member executive committee focused on tasks which seemed primarily devoted to strengthening the national body:

- 1) Researching methods for the improvement of educational cinema, 2) calculating and propagandizing the efficacy of educational cinema, 3) investigating domestic social conditions such as hygiene, physical training (*tiyu*), agricultural and industrial enterprises and all other undertakings related to manufacturing and reconstruction, which will serve as material for the production of educational films, 4) dispatching personnel to observe and study the existing state of educational cinema in other nations, 5) compiling educational film scripts and publishing books and newspapers, 6) producing films concerning famous sites and important news within our nation, 7) producing short films of educational significance, 8) planning the co-production of educational films within the film industry, 9) arranging for the exchange of educational film exhibitions with other nations, 10) planning and preparing expenses, 11) recommending the entrustment of specific matters to film-related administrative institutions and administrative institutions responsible for the handling of films.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershiyi niandu* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1933), 1. The executive committee consisted of: Chu Minyi, Chen Lifu, Yang Quan (assassinated in 1933), Duan Xipeng, Qian Changzhao, Peng Baichuan, Guo Youshou, Luo Jialun, Zeng Zhongming, Gao Yinzu, Zhang Daofan, Xu Beihong, Yang Junmai, Li Changxi, Xie Shoukang, Tian Han, Hong Shen, Fang Zhi, Chen Panzao Wu Jiuyin, and Ouyang Yuqian. Several notable politicians and educators—including Chen Guofu, Wang Jingwei, Cai Yuanpei, and Hu Shi—occupied positions on the society’s two separate supervisory committees. Funding was provided by the National Film Censorship Committee and the Nationalist Party’s Ministry of the Interior (*Neizheng bu*) and Ministry of Education.

¹⁰³ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershiyi niandu*, 2.

As envisioned by the society, “education” (*jiaoyu*) possessed specific functions across a variety of contexts. Educational films would enhance school curriculums, improve comprehension of strategy and discipline within the military, and assist in the transformation of existing of social conditions toward desired ends.

The National Educational Cinematographic Society of China relied heavily on Alessandro Sardi’s published writings concerning the Istituto Nazionale LUCE as a guideline for society organization and planning. This document, translated by society members Peng Baichuan and Zhang Peirong, detailed the method of LUCE’s establishment, organization of its institutions, and techniques of film production and dissemination. In it, Sardi placed particular emphasis on LUCE’s origins in the state absorption of existing private studios, and the important role played by state policies requiring that LUCE films be exhibited prior to all regularly-scheduled feature screenings.¹⁰⁴ The institute profited from these arrangements by charging theater owners a rental fee for their compulsory use of its products, advertised on the pages of *The LUCE Gazette* (*Giornale LUCE*). “Travelling shows” in the Italian countryside and collaboration with the state Ministry of Agriculture had allowed LUCE to expand beyond its urban distribution patterns, while other educational and governmental institutions provided free screenings of institute materials to students, officials, and the public. Sardi elaborated the various genres—commemorative, agricultural, technical training, natural science, social/geographical/historical and propaganda—through which the Fascist Party’s vision of education and political news had been articulated in film. LUCE

¹⁰⁴ Sa’erdi [Alessandro Sardi] (Peng Baichuan and Zhang Peirong, trans.), *Yidali guoli jiaoyu dianying guan gaikuang* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1933), 2.

distributed slides and printed matter; incorporated film screenings into larger mass spectacles of state pageantry; promoted experimentation with small-format exhibition technology and sound film recoding. According to Sardi, the institute “served the use of propaganda and cultural development.”¹⁰⁵ His Chinese interlocutors, describing Sardi’s presentation of the document as a “gift,” appeared to concur with this estimation of LUCE’s efficacy.

The LUCE experience represented a formal standard against which Alessandro Sardi had measured China’s existing state film industry during his 1931 tour. A published report, *Cinema and China (Dianying yu Zhongguo)*, indicated that he brought with him publications and films produced by the Istituto Nazionale LUCE and International Institute of Educational Cinematography, the latter a League of Nations organization recently established in Rome with LUCE assistance.¹⁰⁶ Accompanied by a cameraman, Sardi disseminated and screened these materials as propaganda—some of which had been specially prepared in advance of the China mission—extolling the virtues of Italy’s state film industry in the capacity of its director. His tour took him to Shanghai, Nanjing, Tianjin, and Beijing, and Sardi noted with satisfaction the coverage and discussion which his lectures received in the Chinese press.¹⁰⁷ The talks also spurred jockeying for position within the incipient organization among officials, educators, and members of China’s international business community; representatives of the German

¹⁰⁵ Sa’erdi, *Yidali guoli jiaoyu dianying guan gaikuang*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ See: Sa’erdi [Alessandro Sardi] (Peng Baichuan and Zhang Peirong, trans.), *Dianying yu Zhongguo* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1933). The full title of this document is given in the Chinese translation as *China and Cinema—Report on His Work as a Member of the Commission Sent by the League of Nation for the Reform of Education in China, By Baron Alessandro Sardi, Deputy of the Italian Parliament* (filed in Geneva under accession number 5B/30440/28134).

¹⁰⁷ Sa’erdi, *Dianying yu Zhongguo*, 5.

company Carlowitz and Eastman Kodak both expressed an interest in supplying film for future productions, while Shanghai filmmakers sought contracts for cooperative ventures.¹⁰⁸ It was in Nanjing, however, that Ministry of Education officials Wang Depu and Li Zheng informed Sardi of their plan to build upon National Film Censorship Committee institutions by making educational cinema a project of the state. In his report, Sardi wrote that this conversation would serve as the “focus of actual research” into the issue of educational film and its dissemination.

Yet constructing effective educational cinematic institutions in China appeared a daunting task. Among the universities listed on Sardi’s itinerary, only those founded by British, United States, or French organizations seemed to already possess facilities and equipment for educational film screenings, and even these were currently being used for “entertainment” rather than more serious purposes.¹⁰⁹ Other major obstacles to the endeavor included an overall lack of transportation infrastructure needed for rural screenings, and shortage of adequate, up-to-date equipment (e.g. slow motion projectors and “ambulatory cinema cars”) which distinguished the Italian LUCE from other national models. Consequently, Sardi called for a partnership between the Chinese state and private institutions, such as had fueled LUCE expansion during the early 1920s.¹¹⁰ He envisioned a state-dominated “new institution” linking China’s politically-divided regions and overlapping national, provincial, and municipal cultural bureaucracies. Indicating, perhaps, where LUCE’s own interests in the endeavor lay, he also noted that

¹⁰⁸ Sa’erdi, *Dianying yu Zhongguo*, 8. 11

¹⁰⁹ Sa’erdi, *Dianying yu Zhongguo*, 9.

¹¹⁰ Sa’erdi, *Dianying yu Zhongguo*, 20.

in educational cinema in China would depend heavily on imports for its future success, before finally achieving a mature and productive form.

These reports suggest that the Nationalist Party-supported state film industry took shape amidst a period of intense contact with the cinematic arm of the League of Nations, which in 1931 referred to the Italian LUCE institutions and nascent International Institute of Educational Cinematography in Rome. Yet while LUCE's history served as an important guide, the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China was also shaped by agendas which reflected both earlier patterns of anti-imperialist educational filmmaking and more contemporary party politics. Early society work plans cited the writings of member Xu Gongmei, a film theorist associated with the Shanghai cinema world and Commercial Press, and whose *Cinematic Education (Dianying jiaoyu)* articulated many of the themes promoted by Sardi during the latter's 1931 tour.¹¹¹ These documents also referred to Chen Lifu's recently-published *A New Orientation for China's Film Enterprise (Zhongguo dianying shiye de xin luxian)*, which called for: "1) Development of a national (*minzu*) spirit ... 2) encouragement of economic reconstruction, 3) imparting of scientific knowledge, 4) development of a revolutionary spirit, [and] ... 5) establishment of a citizens' morality." Chen's formulation was described as establishing a new "criterion" (*guinie*) for Chinese film circles; both the society and Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company pledged to disseminate them

¹¹¹ Cinematic education for the sake of national strengthening became a recurrent theme in film-related publications of the 1930s and 1940s. See, for example: Zong Liangdong, *Jiaoyu dianying gailun* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936); Chen Yousong, *Yousheng de jiaoyu dianying* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937); Gu Jianchen, ed., *Jiaoyu dianying* (Shanghai: Shanghai Zhonghua shuju, 1937); Chen Youlan, *Dianying jiaoyu lun* (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938); Chen Yi, *Dianying jiaoyu* (Fujian: Fujian sheng zhengfu jiaoyu ting, 1942). This should not be confused with education *about* cinema, e.g. publications concerning film aesthetics and appreciation, Hollywood slang, acting/directing/screenwriting techniques, or theater architecture and etiquette.

widely. Another prominent society figure, Nationalist Party elder and education official Chu Minyi, presented a lecture to the party center (also published) entitled *The Use of Film for Facilitating Realization of the Three People's Principles and Assisting in the Advancement of Every Enterprise* (*Liyong dianying cucheng Sanmin zhuyi zhi shixian ji fuzhu gezhong shiye zhi jinxing*).¹¹² Chu envisioned film as a tool of “national salvation,” capable of mobilizing every sector of society for the sake of a common cause. As he observed, mounting international threats to China’s very existence demanded an orchestrated mass response employing the cinema’s power to educate minds and stimulate nerves. Questions of racial survival, rather than cultural exchange, animated the concerns of society members. Taken as a whole, writings by Xu Gongmei, Chen Lifu, and Chu Minyi suggest that the National Educational Cinematographic Society reproduced global trends toward “complex” relations between national governments and international organizations which had characterized international relations during the 1920s, and continued to do so during the early 1930s.¹¹³

The League of Nations linked Italy’s Istituto Nazionale LUCE to the Nationalist Party’s growing state film effort. By 1933, National Educational Cinematographic Society emissaries had traveled abroad on fact-finding missions to education cinema’s “birthplace” in Europe and the United States. Society meeting notes also record Chen Lifu’s insistence on the importance of Italy and the Soviet Union as models for further research, as well as his proposal to adopt *A New Orientation for China’s Film Enterprise*

¹¹² See: Chu Minyi, *Liyong dianying cucheng Sanminzhuyi zhi shixian ji fuzhu gezhong shiye zhi jinxing* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying chubanshe, 1933).

¹¹³ See, for example: Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, 23.

as the society's overall work plan.¹¹⁴ Newsreels produced by Germany's UFA studios played in Chinese theaters; executive committee members traveled to Rehe province promoting anti-Japanese resistance using documentaries of the 1932 Battle of Shanghai, and returned complaining of linguistic barriers to effective propaganda work. Yet society accounts of their organization's "genesis" (*yuanqi*) touched upon another, familiar argument for the importance of cinematic technology in China's national affairs—the predominance of foreign-produced images which “gather our shortcomings, manipulate flaws to conceal our merits, and [use these] as a source of laughter.”¹¹⁵ The profound effect of these images on China's own citizens required an equally powerful effort to extol difference—in this case, national history and civilization—using it as a new rhetoric of social cohesion in the process.

Creating a psychically effective state cinema was both an institutional and an epistemological project. Hu Jubin has drawn attention to Chen Lifu's anti-imperialist nationalism, and use of “traditional Chinese moral concepts” to promote Nationalist Party principles while opposing Communist advocacy of class struggle as a tool of national renewal.¹¹⁶ Yet the educational apparatus which impelled viewers to accept these visions of a spiritually-unified society by far exceeded the studios of the private film economy. In 1933, members of the National Educational Cinematographic Society accepted League of Nations requests to station a representative of the league's own educational cinema organization in China; plans for co-operation and the exchange of printed materials and

¹¹⁴ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershiyi niandu*, 9, 12.

¹¹⁵ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershiyi niandu*, 20.

¹¹⁶ Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 86-88.

information concerning China's domestic film industry and film-related government organizations soon followed.¹¹⁷ Within the republic, society representatives visited twenty-nine county and municipal governments promoting their plans, and had established one regional office with another in the preparatory stage and five more planned. The society's Shanghai chapter included Lianhua studio figurehead Luo Mingyou along with other prominent civic and cultural representatives. Some of these, such as Nationalist Party organizer Pan Gongzhan, were cultural and political rivals of Chen Lifu and his "CC clique" associates, but their participation in the society's Shanghai chapter appears to have been essential to its operation.¹¹⁸ Despite purchasing several projectors, film stock, and other necessary technology, early educational efforts were primarily confined to screening existing educational films—accompanied by slides advertising "national goods" (*guohuo*) and "humorous" shorts intended to appeal to audience members—in Shanghai schools, factories, and public halls. During December, 263 screenings at 187 locations attracted 153,862 attendees.¹¹⁹ Yet for the society as a whole, production remained an unrealized objective and purchases from abroad, including a series of League of Nations films on "historical Rome," represented the most reliable option for educational film distribution in the short term.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1934), 5.

¹¹⁸ See: Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 109.

¹¹⁹ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 12. Screenings began in October 1933, and were initially conducted free of charge. With no League of Nations yet forthcoming, Chu Minyi provided a large collection of films to the Shanghai chapter; these were presumably donated from Ministry of Education holdings.

¹²⁰ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 20.

By early 1934, however, the National Educational Cinematographic Society had begun to amass enough organizational and financial momentum to produce a more detailed vision for China's own program of motion picture pedagogy. Guided by Chen Lifu's "new orientation," and the moralizing rhetoric of the emerging New Life Movement, production plans focused on themes of family hygiene, student life, reconstruction, agriculture, industry, and music.¹²¹ A speech by Chen to society members indicates addition concern with combating the "proletarian" art and literature movement taking place in Shanghai, and counteracting the appeal of Hollywood films to urban audiences.¹²² For these reasons, the society also relied on the National Film Censorship Committee to create an atmosphere in which domestic cinema shaped by the Nationalist Party and its educational principles could thrive. While deepening ties with the League of Nations—in its second year the society received recognition as a national committee of the International Institute of Educational Cinematography—Chen Lifu and other members of the executive committee drafted a letter to Hollywood studios protesting the influence of exported films on China's youth and social order.¹²³ Another statement drafted by the society, *A Way Out for [China's] Film Enterprises (Dianying shiye zhi*

¹²¹ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 20. It appears that the society may have announced the completion of six educational titles in May 1933. While few production specifics are given, these were identified in *Diansheng zhoukan* as including the following themes—1) family hygiene, 2) student life, 3) domestic reconstruction, 4) Chinese porcelain production, 5) rural reform, and 6) Chinese music (the latter billed as the sole sound film in the series). See: "Zhongguo daxing dashiji," 1342.

¹²² Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 32.

¹²³ Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu xiehui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui chengli shi*, 9-12. In this document the society also articulated its philosophy of educational cinematography based on Chen Lifu's "five great guiding principles" (*wu xiang fangzhen*)—national spirit, economic reconstruction, scientific knowledge, revolutionary spirit, and citizens' morality.

chulu), called upon state censors to deny screening rights to any foreign production which failed to adhere to the principles of Chen's five-point "new orientation."¹²⁴

In 1932, the year of the National Educational Cinematographic Society's founding, film censorship had become an affair of the Nationalist Party's Central Department of Propaganda. Initially reorganized under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Interior, the department's nascent censorship committee functioned as a "repressive" partner to "positive" Nationalist attempts to produce films extolling the party and its leaders.¹²⁵ Chen Lifu and Chu Minyi, along with propagandists and educators in their respective circles—Chen was a fervent Jiang Jieshi loyalist, while Chu followed Jiang's rival, Wang Jingwei—later worked to combine these features of the Nationalist film apparatus within their new society, which became a kind of coordinating body for managing the party's film-related institutions and executing its policies. While Chu, an extremely influential figure within the government's educational bureaucracy, may have overseen many of the endeavor's organizational aspects, Chen remained its most persuasive cultural ideologue. In addition to his contributions to various publications concerning the future of film enterprise in China, his theories of "vitalism" (*weishenglun*) echoed in the title of the first film planned by the National Educational

¹²⁴ Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu xiehui, *Dianying shiye zhi chulu* (Nanjing: Zhongguo dianying xiehui, 1933), 14.

¹²⁵ "Zhongguo daxing dashiji," 1332. On central party frustrations with the existing National Film Censorship Committee and its resulting dismantling in 1934, see: Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937*, 124-127. For an official perspective on film censorship under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Interior, and the subsequent transfer of these responsibilities to the Central Film Censorship Committee, see Peng Baichuan, "Jiaoyu bu dian jian xingzheng gaikuang"; Yang Junmai, "Neizheng bu dian jian xingzheng gaikuang"; Wu Jiuyin, "Jiao Nei liang bu qian dian jian weiyuanhui zuzhi gaiyao"; Luo Gang, "Zhongyang dian jian hui gongzuo gaikuang." All reprinted in Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan, ed., *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 159-169, and originally appearing in Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Zhongguo dianying nianjian* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying chubanshe, 1934).

Cinematographic Society, *New Vitality (Xin shengji)*.¹²⁶ Indirect support for Chen's theories also came in the form of Central Department of Propaganda moves to prohibit films of a "revolutionary nature" (*geming xing*) in June 1932, striking against perceived Communist Party and left-wing influence in the private film industry.¹²⁷ For two years afterward, the society represented an important institution for those in the party frustrated with the political unreliability of the National Film Censorship Committee, whose members were mainly outside of Jiang Jieshi's political circle at a time when the generalissimo's influence was gradually surpassing that of his competitors. As a testament to the key role played by Chen Lifu in China's cultural circles, many subsequent party initiatives intended to reshape the film industry—such as the establishment of a screenwriting research committee—appear to have been generated during society meetings held between 1932 and 1934.¹²⁸

What the society's early publications reveal is that Chen Lifu and other members shared an intense interest in the transformation powers of the cinema, perhaps somewhat akin to that of Lenin, who considered film a "most important art," and political weapon. Their belief that the medium could both stimulate self-confidence and bodily strength in China's citizens was a notable characteristic of numerous Nationalist cultural ideologies promoted during the 1930s, particularly Chen's "vitalism" and Jiang Jieshi's New Life Movement. Concerning another Nationalist "new life" organization, the Chinese Cultural Study Society, Frederick Wakeman observes that:

¹²⁶ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 62. Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company was slated to film and release the production.

¹²⁷ "Zhongguo daxing dashiji," 1333.

¹²⁸ See: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 49.

The primary goal ... was, correspondingly, to “renew life” by moving people’s hearts and minds to a common public purpose. The essence of this movement was a program of “militarization” (*junshihua*) that would be extended to the public at large through the mechanism of the New Life Movement Promotion Association.¹²⁹

The goal was not only national unity, but direct social action; policing and behavioral training, or mobilization, went hand-in-hand. Another important aspect of this Nationalist “film movement,” was its institutional basis in the party center and expansion from Nanjing into municipal and provincial bureaucracies, particularly those related to education. In early 1934, the National Educational Cinematographic Society calculated its membership as totaling 461 persons—186 based in Nanjing; 140 in Shanghai; forty in Beijing; sixteen in Hangzhou; eleven in Ji’nan; nine in Wuchang; eight in Wuxi; six in Zhenjiang; five in Qingdao; four each in Chengdu and Anqing; three each in Tianjin and Fuzhou; two each in Changsha, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Wuzhou, and Nanning; one each in Suzhou, Kunshan, Xuzhou, Nanchang, Fuyang, Xingzhou, Kaifeng, and Wenzhou; two in the United States; one in Belgium; three in Japan; two recently deceased.¹³⁰

International support from the League of Nations, and Italian National Fascist Party, had provided a template for the kind of party-fied film industry clearly desired by members of the Nationalist government. As crises mounted, possibilities for social mobilization which seemed inherent to the motion picture became an invaluable

¹²⁹ Frederic Wakeman, Jr, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 235.

¹³⁰ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershi'er niandu*, 63. On the cultural/educational/provincial “nexus” of Nationalist government party-fication (*danghua*) sanctioned by Jiang Jieshi and carried out by Chen Guofu and Chen Lifu, see: Fan Xiaofang and Li Yongming, *Chen Guofu yu Chen Lifu*, 96; Li Haisheng and Zhang Min, *Minguo lia xiongdi: Chen Guofu yu Chen Lifu* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2000), 160-164; Fan Xiaofang, *Guomindang xiongdi jiaofu: Chen Guofu yu Chen Lifu* (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 2005), 131-148; Frederick Wakeman, Jr, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service*, 89-109.

component of the Nationalist (and Communist) vision for national revival. The Nationalists, however, held the upper hand. Rather than operating under the cover of private studios like their Communist opponents and other “left-wing” critics, party members attempted to construct a parallel state film industry while co-opting or restricting expression in the private sector.

Building a State Film Industry

Fear of internationally damaging portrayals of China led to the strict curtailing of foreign filmmaking activity in July 1933. The next month, Chinese residents of Germany staged protests against a planned film rumored to again depict China in an unflattering light, this time in the context of earlier armed clashes between China and Japan.¹³¹

Diminished international prestige was not the only state problem shaping Nationalist Party film policy at this time, and domestic films were carefully monitored for subversive content as a result, resulting in a “de-revolutionized” cinema and occasional threats of violence against filmmakers and studio owners.

Against this volatile backdrop, deeper changes in the film industry and organization of a coherent film plan came to the fore. With National Educational Cinematographic Society and Central Department of Propaganda representatives in control of the Nationalist Party’s cinematic initiatives, a Central Film Enterprises Guiding Committee (*Zhongyang dianying shiye zhidao weiyuanhui*) was established in September 1933 with Chen Lifu’s elder brother, Chen Guofu, and fourteen other members at the

¹³¹ “Zhongguo daxing dashiji,” 1344.

helm.¹³² That same month, the committee began investing 10,000 *yuan* a month in construction of a Central Film Studio (*Zhongyang dianying sheyingchang*). Previously, it was private enterprises—primarily Lianhua and Mingxing—which had sporadically produced films for the party on a contract-by-contract basis. Trusted studio heads like Luo Mingyou, who also reported to Chen Lifu in National Educational Cinematography Society meetings, would continue to provide consulting and post-production assistance for years to come. Gradually, however, these responsibilities were being shifted toward organizations within the party center. In November, the Central Department of Propaganda expanded and divided its Film Section into planning, production, and editorial-censorship (*bian-cha*) groups. This was the same month in which Luo also began his overseas studio tour, as the Central Film Studio moved from the planning phase into full-fledged construction under the auspices of Film Section head Zhang Chong.¹³³

Financially, China's film industry was in a period of crisis and uncertainty. Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei faced a struggle with other Lianhua investors for studio control.¹³⁴ Yet momentum to establish a national studio using state funds carried forward into 1934, despite the fact that many hired into the new enterprise required extensive training and received only paltry wages by industry standards.¹³⁵ This regimented approach to film production provides another example of the state taking on functions previously associated with private enterprises—in this case, the numerous small

¹³² “Zhongguo daxing dashiji,” 1344.

¹³³ Zhang Chong replaced Huang Ying as studio head when the latter died unexpectedly. Huang's death also seems to have ended the role played by Li Minwei as a principal advisor to the Film Section on matters of studio construction. See: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 80-81. Educated in the Soviet Union, Zhang was a member of the Central Organization Department, and was likely a close colleague of Chen Lifu.

¹³⁴ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 73. Eventually, Shanghai Lianhua was sold to Wu Xingzai and his investment group in 1936.

¹³⁵ “Zhongguo daxing dashiji,” 1347.

correspondence and technical schools devoted to performing arts which had comprised a segment of Shanghai's educational community since the 1920s. Actors attended courses in general cinematic knowledge, projection, costuming, cinematic theory, technical competency, and conducted dress rehearsals for actual shooting conditions. Those working in production learned general knowledge related to shooting and post-production, cinematography, film printing, developing, exposure, projection, and editing.

Experienced filmmakers, significantly better-compensated for their participation, played the role of instructors.¹³⁶ Following Luo Jingyou's return, studio plans apparently incorporated designs based heavily on Soviet and United States facilities; in its initial form, however, the Central Film Studio was outfitted only with a full complement of French equipment suited only for silent film production.¹³⁷ Sound equipment was provided soon after by Film Section production head Yan Heming. Nonetheless, during its first year of operation alone state-employed filmmakers produced over two hundred unique serial editions in the newsreel, education, "national turmoil" (*guo nan*), and "bandit suppression" (e.g. anti-Communist) genres.¹³⁸ The studio also farmed out scripts and scriptwriters to private producers, in keeping with Nationalist policies of making state cultural institutions the ultimate directors of aesthetic orientation for the nation as a whole.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Zhou Ke, a renowned Lianhua cinematographer, was one of the studio's most prominent hires.

¹³⁷ Yang Yan, *Guomindang zhengfu guanying dianying fazhan kaolüe* (M.A. dissertation) (Xi'an shifan daxue, 2002). Cited in: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 95. See also: "Zhongguo daxing dashiji," 1347-1348.

¹³⁸ This conventional figure appears debatable when compared with other estimates (discussed in the following paragraph) of individual documentary and newsreel titles, or editions, released by the Central Film Studio between 1934 and 1937. It is possible that the two hundred films include military and anti-Communist propaganda produced by the Film Section of the Nanchang Field Headquarters Political Training Office.

¹³⁹ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (shang juan)*, 305.

Taste-making powers notwithstanding, this massive new institution undeniably changed the balance of domestic film production power. Studio recruitment studio attracted personnel from numerous cities along China's coast, particularly the existing commercial entertainment capitals of Tianjin, Beijing, Hankou, and Shanghai.¹⁴⁰ Feature film releases between 1934 and 1937 were meager; only *The Warrior (Zhanshi)* and *Secret Telegraph Code (Mi dianma)* were ever exhibited for public screening. Yet in addition to *Springtime for Farmers*—a documentary co-produced with the National Educational Cinematographic Society and Jinling University for international exhibition in 1935—the Central Film Studio completed nine additional documentary and wartime propaganda titles, as well as fifty-three serial installments of the newsreel *China News (Zhongguo xinwen)*. These films were shown both domestically and abroad, most notably *The Lugouqiao Incident (Lugouqiao shibian)*, a single-reel nonfiction film criticizing Japanese sudden military invasion of the Northeast. During this same period the military also began plans to construct its own production facility. In 1933, the Nanchang Field Headquarters Political Training Office (*Nanchang xingying zhengxun chu*) established a separate Film Section headed by Sichuan journalist Zheng Junsheng (aka Zheng Yongzhi), and began producing anti-Communist documentaries and military instructional films thereafter.¹⁴¹ Another military Film Section studio, built in Hankou in 1935, would become an important center of wartime cultural production after 1937. Nor was the Nationalist Party alone in these state-led filmmaking efforts. Yan Xishan,

¹⁴⁰ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying changye shi*, 96.

¹⁴¹ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying changye shi*, 96-97. Concerning the Nanchang Field Headquarters Political Training Office, see especially: Junshi weiyuanhui weiyuanzhang Nanchang xingying zhengxun chu, *Minzhong jiaoyu xian shuo (saodang congshu zhi shi)* (Junshi weiyuanhui weiyuanzhang Nanchang xingying zhengxun chu, n.d.), 54-58.

“warlord” of Shanxi province, constructed his own facility, the Northwest Film Company (*Xiebei yingye gongsi*) in 1935 as well. While initially a commercial failure, this enterprise soon attracted a cohort of entrepreneurial Shanghai filmmakers who managed to release one title before abandoning the operation due to financial difficulties in 1936. Like the military’s Hankou facility, Northwest would briefly serve as a center of hinterland propaganda operations during the first years of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

Other important components of the Nationalist Party’s film policy included securing venues for state-sponsored films, and recruiting cinematic innovators into state-managed public service. Satisfied with the results of educational screenings in Shanghai schools during the previous year, in late 1934 the National Educational Cinematographic Society General Affairs Committee (*zongwu hui*) designated Nanjing an important “site” (*changsuo*) for forays into theatrical release. Plans called for educational films to be screened as “supplements” to commercial fare, with the screenings subsidized by an additional tax added to each ticket sold, or flat “rental” fees charged directly to theater owners.¹⁴² As in Shanghai, the society also promoted reduced rate traveling screenings to schools and other public institutions. Films shown consisted of those purchased from the League of Nations, borrowed from educational filmmakers at Nanjing’s Jinling

¹⁴² Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1935), 2. One source of profound frustration to arise in Shanghai concerned concession authorities’ attempts to block the screening of state films in foreign-owned theaters. While the society resolved several times “not to allow any willful interference” on the part of the authorities, their plans appear to have been limited to those parts of Shanghai lying outside of the International and French concessions.

University, or produced by state educational and hygienic institutions.¹⁴³ Science, hygiene, physical culture (*tiyu*) and history were dominant film themes [list titles]. State film censors with competency in Western languages provided translations for imported films. Screening teams, many employing 16mm projectors, traveled as far afield as Hankou, Wuchang, Tianjin, and Xiamen. Often, the “inviting” institutions were branches of the Chen Lifu-sponsored Scientific Advancement Association (*Kexuehua yundong xiehui*) The society also published a cinematic yearbook—for which Chen served as editor-in-chief—promoting recent advances and positive “developments” in the film industry as a whole.

Educational films did not represent the entirety of Central Film Studio output, but were an important focal point of state investment nonetheless. Subject matter touched upon rural issues, Nanjing’s revolutionary history, and Sun Yat-sen’s mausoleum; titles produced at Jinling University under the direction of instructor Sun Jingming included *Silkworms* and *Rural Reconstruction*.¹⁴⁴ Yet while the successful importation and production of films seemed an early success for party propagandists, obstacles to their dissemination proved more difficult to overcome. Many primary educational institutions lacked necessary facilities conducive to screenings. Factory managers appeared indifferent to state efforts at reaching workers. Schedules were jeopardized by shortages

¹⁴³ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu*, 4. The Ministry of the Interior Hygiene Office (*weisheng shu*) and Nationalist Party cultural and educational official Chu Minyi were credited with supplying these state-produced films. Chu later sponsored the production of a film on Chinese physical culture (*Zhongguo tiyu*), the German-language version of which was prepared by the Mingxing Film Studio and submitted on China’s behalf in conjunction with the 1936 Berlin Olympics. See: Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan*, 54. Subsequent versions also appeared in English and French.

¹⁴⁴ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu*, 13. Jinling University educators were, by 1934, recognized participants in League of Nations efforts to establish a partnership with educational filmmakers in China.

of operating funds at the local (*fenhui*) level. Yet society offices continued to expand in Zhejiang (Kunshan county), Qingdao, Shandong (Ji'nan), and Chongqing, while the League of Nations provided an important forum for attracting international attention to films produced under National Educational Cinematographic Society auspices.¹⁴⁵ A 1934 international conference on educational cinema held in Rome attracted attendees representing forty countries, while subsequent exhibition confirmed Chinese delegates' faith in the efficacy of film as a tool of popular propaganda (*xuanchuan*), providing cutting-edge models for its implementation and use.

Despite reliance on imports as a source of film stock and other essential materials, the optimism expressed by Chu Minyi concerning the medium as a whole—which he described as being “without temporal or spatial limitation”—reveals a preoccupation with the power of technology to overcome various kinds of cultural difference confronting domestic and international policymakers. Motion pictures would simultaneously “unify China” while creating parity between China and other nations.¹⁴⁶ Belief in the cinema's effects on human mental and physiological conditions, however, was not limited to Nationalist Party members. Beginning in 1930, faculty at Nanjing's Jinling University College of Science (*Lixue yuan*) had begun an ambitious plan to produce scientific education films, and had screened these at schools and colleges between Shanghai and

¹⁴⁵ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu*, 25-39 One forum for this kind of international display included the league's recently-inaugurated contest for films on rural improvement, first held in 1935. China placed third in this competition with the Central Film Studio release *Springtime for Farmers* (*Nongren zhi chun*, 1935).

¹⁴⁶ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu*, 42.

Beiping.¹⁴⁷ In an effort to tailor their production to “national conditions,” Jinling filmmaking initiatives also extended into areas such as martial arts and scholastic athletic meets; educators’ faith that film could serve as a medium of “popular” (*minjian*) education had ultimately prompted them to expand the range of their screening activities into rural areas. These educators had already established their own connections to the League of Nations, filmmaking circles in the United States such as the Los Angeles Committee on Visual Education (*Luoshanji shi shijue jiaoyu weiyuanhui*), and the Shanghai branch of the Eastman Kodak Company. From a filmmaking perspective, Jinling University thus represented an early and important point of contact between educational circles and the government; Jinling films were distributed nationally as part of educational programs, and co-produced films with the National Educational Cinematographic Society from 1934 onward.

Increasingly, the society seems to have played the role of a coordinating body, dominated by the Nationalist Party Central Committee and Department of Propaganda, which supplemented the productive work of the department’s Film Section and Central Film Studio. In particular, it represented an important institution through which foreign film propaganda techniques passed into China, and domestically-produced motion pictures promoting the Nationalist regime abroad flowed toward other nations. Society members believed that cinema had already played a vital role in unifying the “small countries” of Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria.¹⁴⁸ Yet methods for attaining cultural renewal, “spiritual national defense,” and other objectives described repeatedly in

¹⁴⁷ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu hui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisan niandu*, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu xiehui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui chengli shi*, 14.

speeches and reports were sought in the same “developed” (*fada*) societies, including those which threatened prospects for China’s future existence.¹⁴⁹ Transmuting education into other forms of individual, collective, and national strength became a preoccupation; in the context of incipient national emergency, all film was expected to be “educational.” Society educators looked to United States universities and the Soviet Union, toured overseas studio facilities, and established ties with Japanese counterparts by participating in the October 1935 Japan-China Educational Cinematography Conference (*Ri-Hua jiaoyu dianying zuotanhui*), hosted in Tokyo.¹⁵⁰ Society members appeared particularly drawn to the Japanese government’s use of a unified “national film policy” (*dianying guoce*) to guide multiple institutions within a mixed public-private film economy and which had existed, it was claimed, since 1920.¹⁵¹ Yet despite affirmations from both Japanese and Chinese conference participants to promote “Eastern culture” (*Dongfang wenhua*) abroad, little in the way of collaborative ventures emerged from this point of contact. Rather, the lasting impression created by Japanese official use of “visual culture” (*shijue wenhua*) to forge a close-knit national identity reinforced Chinese perceptions of institutional inadequacy.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example: Fang Zhi, “Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui de shiming,” in Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying weiyuanhui, 1935), 5-7. On the relationship between educational cinema and national emergency (*guo nan* or *feichang shiqi*), see: Xu Gongmei, *Feichang shiqi de dianying jiaoyu* (Nanjing: Zhongzheng shuju, 1937). Extensive national studies appear in: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui nianhui tekan* (Nanjing: Zhongshan gongji yinshuguan, 1935?).

¹⁵⁰ A transcript of the meeting appears in: Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan*, 81-85. Chinese representative Xu Gongmei’s observations were subsequently published by the Commercial Press. See: Xu Gongmei, *Riben dianying jiaoyu kaocha ji* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936).

¹⁵¹ Xu Gongmei, *Riben dianying jiaoyu kaocha ji*, 6. By contrast, the Soviet model of total state ownership appeared impracticable to society planners. See: Lu Shibai, “Jiaoyu dianying shangyehua de shangque,” in Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan*, 49-52.

It was not only lack of provincial distribution channels, but also competition with private industry for human talent and lack of control over the commercial theater economy which thwarted National Educational Cinematographic Society ambitions. While the 1934 New Life Movement created some opportunities for wider dissemination and cooperation between state cultural reformers, regular theatrical exhibition of educational films remained confined largely to Nanjing. By 1935, sixty-six titles consisting of a total ninety-four reels had been screened for films audiences in this manner.¹⁵² In Shanghai, by contrast, mobile screenings and rentals to coastal universities remained the norm, although theater owners proved receptive to the idea of “children’s film days” (*ertong dianying ri*) as a means of recouping business lost to recent municipal injunctions against selling children tickets for “ordinary” (*pubian*) screenings.¹⁵³ Society members hoped to make exhibition of educational films a mandatory accompaniment to any domestically-produced film, regardless of theater or location; other proposals included imposing strict quotas on the number of imported commercial films shown nationwide.¹⁵⁴ Perceptions of heightened national crisis may have fomented dissatisfaction with these limited gains. Despite far-reaching society objectives, the organization was only one of several film-related institutions supported by the Nationalist Party center. The National Office for Promotion of Educational Cinema (*Quanguo jiaoyu dianying tuiguang chu*) also received Department of Propaganda and Ministry of Education support. Established in 1933, its founders purchased and promoted 16mm educational films—including those produced by the National Educational

¹⁵² Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan*, 60.

¹⁵³ In general, the age limit appears to have applied to children of 6 *sui* and younger.

¹⁵⁴ *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui nianhui zhuankan*, 11-12, 67-81.

Cinematographic Society—for distribution across five provinces and four municipalities.¹⁵⁵ While this Shanghai institution appeared smaller than the society in membership and scope, its existence suggests that Nationalist Party reform of the film industry lacked the clearly definable center desired by cultural architects. Administration of the Central Film Studio fell to the party's Film Section, while society educators depended on a loose confederation of co-producers which included state and private studios alike.

Co-optation via institutional confederation, rather than outright monopoly, characterized Nationalist approaches to the film industry during the 1930s. Educational cinema, for all of its limitations, represented one mode of “controlled mobilization” through which high-ranking leaders connected to the party center attempted to unify an existing society characterized, in the eyes of state officials, by paralyzing fragmentation.¹⁵⁶ Initially, the National Film Censorship Committee had coordinated party film policy under the direction of the Department of Propaganda, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of the Interior.¹⁵⁷ Committee members had greeted Alessandro Sardi and other League of Nations delegates upon the latter's arrival to Shanghai in 1933, commissioning the production of a special “compilation” documentary of Chinese culture in anticipation of the event.¹⁵⁸ Since then, the film industry as a whole had been profoundly shaped by two distinct trends in state management. Censorship—the

¹⁵⁵ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, *Zhongguo dianying jiaoyu xiehui huiwu baogao* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1936), 99-101.

¹⁵⁶ See: Julia C. Strauss, “The Evolution of Republican Government,” in Frederic Wakeman, Jr and Richard Louis Edmonds, eds., *Reappraising Republican China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88-90.

¹⁵⁷ See: Zhiwei Xiao, *Film Censorship in China, 1927-1937*; Jiaoyu Neizheng bu dianying jiancha weiyuanhui, *Jiaoyu Neizheng bu dianying jiancha weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao* (n.p., 1934?).

¹⁵⁸ Jiaoyu Neizheng bu dianying jiancha weiyuanhui, *Jiaoyu Neizheng bu dianying jiancha weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao*, 40.

“repressive” force—continued without interruption, though after 1934 this responsibility was fulfilled almost entirely by officials of the Central Department of Propaganda. By contrast, production—the “ideological” or “productive” force—fell to a diverse range of institutions. Filmmaking activities were primarily coordinated by the Central Film Studio and National Educational Cinematographic Society, yet also drew private enterprise and university researchers into the process. Official committees staged prize competitions for commercial filmmakers, encouraging the spread of Nationalist Party-endorsed imagery in China’s theaters.¹⁵⁹ Screenwriters and other established filmmakers were recruited to legitimize “new life” principles and service to the state among China’s commercial film communities.¹⁶⁰ The Central Department of Propaganda convened meetings of studio heads to discuss national policy and express the party’s “intentions” for the industry as a whole.¹⁶¹

Such reforms did not only aim at purging leftist elements from Shanghai’s commercial studios, but also targeted foreign imports for promoting an “entertainment” mentality among audiences. Censorship, production, and industry surveillance were thus accompanied by the construction of exhibition venues intended to completely divorce filmgoing practices from their association with mental idleness. This, ultimately, was the significance of the educational cinema movement, and what differentiated it from

¹⁵⁹ Multiple Lianhua productions, including *Humanity* (*Rendao*, 1932), *Song of China* aka *Filial Piety* (*Tian lun*, 1935), and *National Customs* (*Guo feng*, 1935), either received official honors or were actively promoted by the state as national entries in competitions abroad. See: Li Xi, ed., *Li Minwei riji*, 17-20. National Educational Cinematographic Society members acted as some of the most active organizers of these events, reprinting plot synopses as models for the industry as a whole. See: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Liang nian lai guochan yingpian benshi huikuan* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1936).

¹⁶⁰ See: Hong Shen, *Dianying jie de xin shenghuo* (Nanjing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1934).

¹⁶¹ See: Guo Youshou, *Ershisan nianfen guochan dianying fada gaikuang* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1935).

movements generated within the industry to promote national cinema while maintaining its commodity form. In an April 1935 speech to the Central Broadcast Radio Station (*Zhongyang guangbo wuxiandian tai*), educator and propagandist Guo Youshou described the cinema as “a new method for disseminating ideology (*sixiang*) and ideals.”

As he continued:

It is an acknowledged fact that the cinema can influence the daily habits of humans, social ideals, and can [moreover] penetrate every community (*geji minzhong*). It can not only raise every individual’s intellectual and moral standard, but can even transform the ideas of humanity as a whole. As a result, the modern Euro-American nations have attached significance to these characteristics; as for Asia, we can look to see that Japan is much the same in this regard.¹⁶²

Guo emphasized that the League of Nations film initiatives had emerged as a response to the “pernicious influence” of Hollywood exports—a compelling argument in light of the post-war French film industry’s economic collapse, which had cleared the way for U.S. domination of global markets.¹⁶³ Japan’s national film policies, he argued, also encompassed an “educational” understanding of the cinema’s social function which took seriously the effects of Hollywood’s hegemony on Japanese society as a whole. In China too, imported films “incited sex and violence” (*hui yin hui dao*) or demeaned audiences.¹⁶⁴ In short, they perpetuated anomic social behavior or national shame in ways deemed incompatible with goals of unity and collective strength. In Guo’s formulation, China’s “educational cinematography movement” thus consisted of two intertwined objectives—decoupling of the national economy from sources of culturally

¹⁶² Guo Youshou, *Woguo zhi jiaoyu dianying yundong* (Nanjing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1935), 4-5.

¹⁶³ Between 1927 and 1931, the League of Nations convened three separate conferences devoted to issues of international cinematic education.

¹⁶⁴ Guo Youshou, *Woguo zhi jiaoyu dianying yundong*, 6.

harmful trade, and reinforcement of film's political functions as a tool of state-managed social influence.

In 1935, however, fending off Hollywood while transforming domestic viewing practices—let alone broader categories of social behavior—remained distant prospects. Beyond the educational system, cinematic planners were left an unevenly distributed network of commercial theaters which, outside of Nanjing, could not be easily drawn into existing educational circuits. Such complaints appeared frequently in the minutes of National Educational Cinematography Society meetings. Nonetheless, attempts to integrate the propaganda state's "educational apparatus" into existing society persisted. Chen Guofu, upon becoming governor of Jiangsu in 1933, gradually opened the door to provincial educators eager to experiment with the new social technology. One of these was Zhao Hongqian, an official of Jiangsu's Provincial Educational Department (*Jiaoyu ting*) who had presided over the organization of Soviet- and Italian-style touring (*xunhui*) state education teams in rural areas.¹⁶⁵ Dispatched from the Zhenjiang Municipal Mass Education Hall (*Shengli Zhenjiang minzhong jiaoyu guan*), the teams visited local schools, county institutions, and villages. Statistics gathered during the screenings suggest that audiences numbered in the thousands, or tens of thousands. Zhao's experience, which he summarized for the society in 1935, suggested that educational "force" (*liliang*) per exhibition could be increased by applying additional technologies such as phonographs, slide projectors, and megaphones or amplifiers. The enterprising director (*guan zhang*) concluded by outlining his plans to print and circulate detailed information concerning the program, accompanied by materials intended to facilitate

¹⁶⁵ Fang Zhi, ed., *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui di wu jie nianhui tekan*, 69.

mass acquisition of new knowledge concerning cotton production, dental health, hygiene, Communist failures, and Nationalist achievements in confronting “national calamities caused by foreign aggression” (*guonan*). Many of the films referred to had been produced by the National Educational Cinematographic Society itself. Zhao’s proposal thus illustrated the degree to which, as a result of the proliferation of local provincial institutions under Nanjing rule, state education and propaganda now reached audiences in ways that commercial and university-based distribution networks had yet to achieve.

Table 2.3: Film theaters by province and municipality, c.a. 1936 (source: *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui zongwu zu, Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui huiwu baogao, ershisi nian si yue zhi ershiwu nian san yue, 1936*).

Province or municipality	Number of film theaters	Province or municipality	Number of film theaters
Jiangsu	13	Shandong	10
Zhejiang	13	Yunnan (Kunming)	2
Anhui	3	Guizhou (Guiyang)	3
Jiangxi	4	Ningxia	1
Hu’nan	11	Gansu (Lanzhou)	2
Hubei	12	Fujian	9
Hebei	5	Guangdong	28
Shaanxi (Xi’an)	3	Guangxi	3
Shanxi (Taiyuan)	2	Heilongjiang (Ha’erbin)	12
Sichuan (Chongqing)	4	Liaoning	5
Shanghai <i>shi</i>	40	Tianjin <i>shi</i>	20
Nanjing <i>shoudou</i>	10	Beiping <i>shi</i>	9
Qingdao <i>shi</i>	6	TOTAL	228

Ultimately, it appears that Zhao Hongqian circulated several reports concerning the social use of educational cinema in Zhenjiang and surrounding environs. All of these were produced with the sponsorship of the Eastman Kodak Company’s Shanghai branch;

the Zhenjiang Municipal Mass Education Hall film team(s) had been employing Kodak-provided films on citizenship, physical culture, hygiene, botany, zoology, numerous other topics since 1934.¹⁶⁶ That Zhao failed to mention this arrangement in his report to the society may have been little more than a calculated omission designed to draw attention away from the substantial role played by his corporate benefactor—whose offices provided for purchase “educational dramas” (*jiaoyu xiju pian*), entertainment films, and a wide range of cinematic equipment—or it may have been an attempt to avoid repetition of common knowledge. Nonetheless, in subsequent years the Zhao’s municipal organization briefly became a model of patriotic education and disseminator of instructional methods, apparently due in no small part to these fortuitous connections. Two researchers in the organization’s employ, Zong Binxin and Jiang Shecun, literally “wrote the book” on Zhenjiang experience, which they compared measured frequently against audiovisual learning experiments already underway in universities around the world. *Educational Cinematography and Its Implementation* (*Jiaoyu dianying shishi zhidao*) emphasized the importance of moving “education” beyond the educational system: “do ordinary people have no need to understand knowledge taught to students in schools?”¹⁶⁷ Citing Alessandro Sardi, Zong and Jiang defined educational cinema as consisting of those films which “increased the people’s knowledge of politics, society, art, and technology.”¹⁶⁸ Elsewhere, they equated the term with its “broad meaning” (*guangyi*) the world over—propaganda (*xuanchuan*).

¹⁶⁶ See: Jiangsu shengli Zhenjiang minzhong jiaoyu guan, *Jiaoyu dianying jianyi sheshi fa* (Shanghai Keda [Kodak] gongsi, 1935).

¹⁶⁷ Zong Binxin and Jiang Shecun, *Jiaoyu dianying shishi zhidao* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 16.

¹⁶⁸ Zong Binxin and Jiang Shecun, *Jiaoyu dianying shishi zhidao*, 13.

Much like Guo Youshou, Zong Bingxin and Jiang Shecun expressed opposition to “anti-educational” tendencies inherent to the global film industry as a whole. Taken from this perspective, their stated admiration for the fully nationalized institutions of Italy and the Soviet Union reveals a deep antipathy toward capitalist cycles of mass consumption and production—a defining characteristic of much social reform undertaken throughout the 1930s.¹⁶⁹ Zong and Jiang had little use for China’s commercial studios in the absence of censorship and state guidance. Their objective, rather, was to inculcate and stabilize values that would serve society as a whole rather than the “superstitious” fantasies of the *wuxia*-obsessed individual. The paradox—one which would soon shatter the world economy into autarkic blocs—was that their utopian visions of social transformation rested upon ceaseless trade with representatives of Kodak and other “foreign” powers for the very technologies that China seemed to lack. Yet understood in terms of state organization, the model cohered. In April 1937, Zhejiang provincial authorities issued a detailed report concerning implementation of an educational film network composed of cultural halls, touring film teams, and bearing an unmistakable resemblance to the Zhenjiang municipality template.¹⁷⁰ If anything, the Zhejiang-based Office of Audiovisual Education Services (*Dianhua jiaoyu fuwu chu*) demonstrated the ubiquity of

¹⁶⁹ See: Harry Harounian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Commodity in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), ix-xxxii (“Preface: All the Names of History”).

¹⁷⁰ See: Zhejiang sheng jiaoyu ting di san ke dianhua jiaoyu fuwu chu, *Zhejiang sheng dianying jiaoyu shishi gaikuang* (Zhejiang: Zhejiang sheng jiaoyu ting gongbao shi, 1937). The Zhejiang Provincial Educational Department Third Section Office of Audiovisual Education Services worked closely with both the Hangzhou chapter of the National Educational Cinematographic Society and the Zhejiang Provincial Nationalist Party Committee. Its policies were, in short, most likely shaped by patterns of institutional influence extending to the apex of the national government. Nonetheless, this remarkable document represents a significant transformation of the key concepts concerning the state/cinema/society nexus, most notably “audiovisual education” (*dianhua jiaoyu*, which would be used throughout the anti-Japanese war effort) and “film education network” (*dianying jiaoyu wang*, which strikingly anticipates Communist “projection network”—*fangying wang*—concepts and institutional structures employed during the post-war period).

centralized, regimented, technological solutions to social “unevenness” and perceived national shortcomings during the Nanjing decade. William Kirby has also argued that China’s “developmental state” arose from exactly this pairing of an internationalist, industrializing technocracy with Leninist political organization.¹⁷¹ By mid-1937, then, the question was already posed, albeit tacitly—how, if at all, could diverse developmental initiatives be reshaped into a single social “weapon” capable of ensuring China’s continued survival?

Conclusions

The beginning of all-out war between China and Japan on July 7, 1937 only accelerated the ongoing party-fication and centralization of film production begun by the Nationalist government. One reason for the lack of an abrupt transition between two periods—the “Nanjing decade” and “wartime”—was that both were shaped by similar constellations of internationalism, imperialism, and militaristic political organization intended to reconstitute and preserve “the nation” under heightened duress. Another reason was that many of the same patterns of cultural production which characterized the Nanjing decade were also Japan’s; not only in terms of similarities between two discrete systems, but because Japanese occupation entailed the physical construction of immense studio facilities for empire’s sake (e.g. Xijiang, Beiping, Shanghai). While these comparisons and connections will be explored at greater length in the following chapter, here it is important merely to note that during the period between 1923 and 1937—a span

¹⁷¹ See: William C. Kirby, “Engineering China: The Birth of the Developmental State, 1928-1937,” in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 137-139.

of time including Sun Yat-sen's war with Chen Jiongming, the Northern Expedition, battles fought to preserve Nanjing's hegemony over the Republic's numerous "warlord" governments, "mopping-up" of Communist forces, and mechanized combat between China and Japan—that film was continuously employed as a tool of wartime mass mobilization.

And yet it was much more. A rich history of cinematic experiments in education, ethnography, and nonfiction entertainment was also taking shape, making Li Minwei one among numerous filmmakers who competed for financial patronage and audience attention. More than ever, these audiences were international. Nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations had proliferated after World War I, and the Republic of China competed with other nations for prominence on a world stage supported by emerging cultural institutions (e.g. League of Nations film festivals, the Olympics) which sublimated inter-war bellicosity within spectacles of "world" standards and "human" accomplishment. The production of newsreels and documentaries in China, as elsewhere, was equally transformed by international forces and domestic exigencies. Overseas universities, the global circulation of revolutionary (or merely novel) cultural forms, and peripatetic filmmakers themselves all contributed to the simultaneous proliferation and codification of a cinematic art-for-society's sake during the 1920s. While mass produced fantasies of "amorous" and "anarchic" escape were undoubtedly the viewing norm, nonfiction images spoke a new language of propaganda which demanded more of spectators than the price of theatrical admission.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Concerning the former, see: Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Thanks to Nationalist sympathizers like Li Minwei, the party's fluency in this language was well assured. With it came a renewed focus on transforming the institutional dimensions of production and consumption alike. *Contra* many contemporary historians of Chinese cinema, the Nanjing government did not begin "paying attention" to cinema in 1933, as the first left-wing films began appearing on Shanghai screens. Nationalist party-fication of commercial film enterprises (e.g. Minxin, Lianhua, Mingxing) can be dated to at least 1924, when Li became Sun Yat-sen's favored director and, by default, the party's sole cinematic propagandist. Ten years later censorship, anti-Communist campaigns, and the "educational movement" in state cinema had marshaled considerably more private capital to the Nationalist camp than has been previously recognized. Directed by Chen Lifu, and inspired by internationalist examples of state-led cultural reform, the National Educational Cinematographic Society spearheaded a massive effort to reaffirm the party's anti-imperialist agenda by reinvigorating the Chinese people with "new life."

By paying little or no attention to the institutional foundations of this movement, and the spread of state educational institutions along the Yangtze and northern coast, historians of film and China alike have thus ignored the depth of Nationalist commitment to ideological stability and change. Jiang Jieshi and his followers are portrayed first and foremost as believers in a hollow "loyalty"—to the nation and to the leader (Jiang), who are one and the same.¹⁷³ By contrast, scholars stepping away from the elite politics of the

¹⁷³ See: Lloyd E. Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Nanking decade, 1927-1937," in Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Ch'en, Suzanne Pepper, and Lyman P. Van Slyke, *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1991]), 18-21; Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "A Revisionist View of the Nanjing Decade: Confucian Fascism," in Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds, eds., *Reappraising Republican China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 141-178.

Nanjing decade have discovered a remarkably consistent commitment to producing a unified society and nation;¹⁷⁴ vibrant political cultures based on mass performances and symbols of public citizenship;¹⁷⁵ the canonization of political texts explicating values of technological utopianism, self-discipline, and economic efficiency;¹⁷⁶ developmentalism and “authoritarian high modernism.”¹⁷⁷ To put it simply, while elite politics “mattered,” the massive range of party-sponsored initiatives undertaken during the early 1930s alone makes it difficult to determine the degree of Jiang’s overall significance. This chapter argues that changing techniques of inter-war social management also mattered, not only for film, but cultural production as a whole. Recombination of audiovisual technologies into state-dominated projection “networks” (e.g. the based Office of Audiovisual Education Services and its *dianying jiaoyu wang*) represented a kind of innovation specifically engineered to counter the spread of anomic Hollywood “entertainment” into Chinese society, while overwriting existing codes of “superstitious” local customs. According to the new sciences of communication, information, education, signals, and propaganda, social power lay not in isolated acts but in structures—specifically, those which made visible a “public” as a precondition of shaping, informing, or educating public consciousness. Whereas colonialism had produced anti-colonial filmmaking practices which targeted existing audiences, militarization and party-fication of society

¹⁷⁴ Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3-15 (“Introduction: Social Unity and Modern Governance”); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution*.

¹⁷⁵ Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*;

¹⁷⁶ Terry Bodenhorn, “Chen Lifu’s *Vitalism*: A Guomindang Vision of Modernity circa 1934,” in Terry Bodenhorn, ed., *Defining Modernity: Guomindang Rhetorics of a New China, 1920-1970* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002).

¹⁷⁷ William C. Kirby, “The Nationalist Regime and the Chinese Party-State, 1928-1958,” 217.

made anyone a potential target for indoctrination. As war spread inland from eastern China, the mass culture *of* war spread with it.

CHAPTER 3. Wartime Propaganda States, 1937-1945

By the 1930s, the Empire of Japan had taken a dominant position in East Asia, based in no small part on agreements with Western powers brokered through the League of Nations, and Washington Conference. Militarily, the empire continued to expand at the expense of the Soviet Union and its allies, including China. Like other nations with ties to China's markets, Japan initially responded to the anti-imperialist politics of the Nationalist Party through negotiations and treaties.¹ Beginning in 1931, however, military operations for the construction of an autarkic economic zone in the northeast began in earnest, leading to the construction of the client state of Manchuria a year later. By 1937, Japan and China were at war, and north China had already been incorporated into a semiautonomous regional government backed by the Guandong Army and Japan's civilian government. Two wartime governments emerged from the former Republic of China—the Communists in Yan'an, and the Nationalists first in Wuhan, then in Chongqing. Later, a separate Nationalist Government in Nanjing was established and recognized by Japan and other states of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1940.

Despite this process of political fragmentation, historians have argued that the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) resulted in a unified Chinese “wartime” culture.²

¹ Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2; Marius B. Jansen, *Japan and China: From War to Peace, 1894-1972* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, 1970), 354-409 (Chapter Ten, “The Road to the Pacific War”).

² Specifically, Chang-tai Hong argues for the significance of the “rise and spread of urban popular culture during the War of Resistance, [and] particularly how this culture was politicized and popularized by Chinese resisters to wage a concerted battle against the invading Japanese.” See: Chang-tai Hong, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 3. See also: Suisheng Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 79-119 (Chapter Three, “Building a Chinese Nation-State: Elite Nationalism versus Mass Nationalism”).

Intellectuals—including filmmakers—are seen to have initiated a populist campaign to forge a unified national culture, and to bring that culture to cities and villages still free from enemy occupation.³ More recent perspectives have begun to challenge this view by demonstrating that divergent attitudes toward culture survived the shock of war. It was, to quote Edward Gunn, “not a decisive era . . . but a pivotal one” in the cultural history of twentieth-century China; “not decisive” because no true cultural center existed, and “pivotal” because several claimants to that title nonetheless emerged.⁴ Nonetheless, one undeniable consequence of the wartime period was the increasing emphasis placed by government officials and intellectuals alike on the necessity of propaganda as the dominant mode of cultural production. On both sides of the battle lines separating Chinese and Japanese forces—and throughout the world—programs for “information,” “education,” “enlightenment,” “publicity,” and “propaganda” expanded at an astonishing rate. In single-party and democratic societies alike, the state of emergency brought on by war was seen to necessitate combat at the level of morale, perception, and psychology. While a homogenous national culture did not necessarily arise in China as a result of Japanese invasion, the institutional and conceptual structures for creating such a culture continued to flourish as “total” war created pressures for total mobilization.

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³ Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 115. The definitive single-volume work on wartime Chinese filmmaking in the hinterland, base areas, concessions, and occupied regions remains: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945* (Beijing: Shoudu shifan daxue chubanshe, 2000).

⁴ Edward Gunn, “Literature and Art of the War Period,” in James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine, eds., *China’s Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1945* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 235. See also: Edward M. Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking, 1937-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993);

Of course, the notion that society could be transformed by mass indoctrination was hardly unique to the wartime era, and the use of symbols, rituals, and mass media as tools for inculcating national consciousness can readily be identified with the “politicization of vast areas of life” associated with mass politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”⁵ This chapter argues that the most important transformation to take place during the wartime period was not the emergence of a new national culture or East Asian “anti-colonial” culture, both of which had existed in varying forms prior to the war, but rather a new dynamic of institutional change by which state structures began to displace existing commercial (or simply non-state) modes of production and circulation.⁶ The solution to crises engendered by war, inflation, and political uncertainty was, in the eyes of one sociologist, increasingly colossal bureaucratic modes of social

⁵ Lyn Gorman and David McLean, *Media and Society in the Twentieth Century: A Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 79. See also: Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1953); George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975); Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); E. J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books for the United Nations University, 1986); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (second edition) (London: Verso, 1991); John Schwarzmentel, *Socialism and the Idea of the Nation* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

⁶ See: Joseph W. Esherick, “War and Revolution: Chinese Society During the 1940s,” *Twentieth-Century China*, vol., 27, no. 1 (November 2001), 1-37; Morris L. Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China: The Dynamics of Institutional Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

organization, under which “humans as well as natural resources had to be completely mobilized” to cope with an ongoing sense of systemic crisis.⁷

Further expansion of state authority into China’s film industries created several specific outcomes. First, an unrelenting emphasis was placed on the importance of cultural production to larger “identity projects” within which individual subjectivities became crucial sites on which the claims of wartime governments were established over and above human inclinations toward passivity.⁸ While features were still released in relatively large numbers, documentary, newsreel, and educational filmmaking surged as state studios were enlisted to inspire mass audiences with convincing accounts of success in the war effort. These films adopted a persuasive tone by addressing why the war was being fought; in other instances, they attempted to impart knowledge concerning roles and techniques for further action. Narrative filmmaking was undeniably affected by this realist turn, and in both Chongqing and Yan’an domestic film culture was marked by a focus on “model” individuals based on identifiable occupations (e.g. worker, soldier, intellectual).

Representing national unity required further distinguishing friends from enemies. However, competition also existed between the Nationalist and Communist parties for international recognition as the China’s primary contributor to the “anti-fascist” war effort. Media globalization, while perhaps limited to wartime blocs of allies, did not collapse after 1937; propagandists targeted foreign leaders and mass audiences, while

⁷ Yamanouchi Yasushi, “Total-War and System Integration: A Methodological Introduction,” in Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann, and Ryūchi Narita, eds. *Total War and ‘Modernization’* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 1998), 3.

⁸ On cultural production as “identity project” in wartime East Asia, see: Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

commercial studios continued to court overseas markets (albeit with films whose imagery was inevitably limited by state institutions and international politics). Cultural internationalism mainly followed patterns established by diplomats and foreign aid programs, yet as this chapter shows, all wartime societies borrowed from globally-circulating models of effective propaganda and its institutions.⁹ While armed conflict created great destruction, waging “modern war” required the construction of elaborate intelligence and communications networks in order to facilitate the implementation of high-stakes policies—“from this point of view, World War II was without a doubt the first full-scale laboratory of the modern sociology of mass communications.”¹⁰ Filmmaking was not of vital importance to military strategy. Nonetheless, it was seen as one of several of audiovisual media (e.g. photography, the radio) capable of redefining state-society relations by introducing greater capability for systematic persuasion and control.

Free China: State Studios During the War of Resistance

A series of hastily-signed treaties and agreements concluded during 1935 could not prevent the progress of Japanese military designs on North China. Many filmmakers

⁹ See: Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1965); Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); Michael Balfour, *Propaganda In War 1939-1945: Organizations, Policies, and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); K. R. M. Short, ed., *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983); Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (New York: Free Press, 1987); George H. Roeder, Jr., *The Censored War: American Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media At War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

¹⁰ Armand Mattelart (Susan Emanuel and James A. Cohen, trans.), *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 [1991]), 86.

in Shanghai, believing that the Nationalist government had conceded too much, jointly issued a series of “declarations” (*xuanyan*) demanding immediate defense of the five northern provinces. The Shanghai Film Circles National Salvation Association, established on January 27, 1936 called for the abolishment of all organizations—including concession censorates—and films opposing “national liberation” (*minzu jiefang*). Filmmakers of all political bents rallied publicly around the cause of “national defense cinema” (*guo fang dianying*). While many such films were approved by the Central Film Censorship Committee in Nanjing, English and French refusal to allow public screenings of anti-Japanese titles offended cultural workers and government officials alike. Outrage reached its zenith during the summer of 1937, when foreign censors sanctioned the exhibition of *The New Land* (*Xin tu*), a Japanese-German co-production promoting Japanese migration to Manzhouguo.¹¹ With the National Educational Cinematography Society throwing its weight behind a petition to abolish foreign control of film censorship in the concessions entirely, control of the national salvation (*jiuwang*) movement slowly shifted to the Nationalist Party:

On July 15, a few days after the campaign committee’s inauguration, the [Nationalists’] *Zhongyang ribao* (Central daily) reported the event and published a part of the campaign’s manifesto. The Nationalist Party’s Central Propaganda Committee also sent a request to the Executive Yuan, asking its permission to allow the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to settle the affair with the concession authorities. But before any result came out of this campaign to abolish censorship in the concessions, the war with Japan

¹¹ Zhiwei Xiao, “Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937,” in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 48-49. Another controversial documentary of the period was the Soviet anti-Italian film *Abyssinia*, first screened in China on January 21, 1937. When Italian marines destroyed a Shanghai theater after an edited version of the film was approved by the Nationalist government, numerous cultural figures registered their protest and demanded reparations. See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 47.

broke out full-scale. All nationalist organizing shifted attention to the new crisis. New organizations were formed, new programs declared. China now needed cooperation from, not confrontation with, the British and the French.¹²

As Zhiwei Xiao argues, the “confrontation with foreign forces” created a coalition between filmmakers and the government, including those “leftist” studio workers subsequently identified by historians as opponents of the Nationalist regime.

Wuhan: The China Motion Picture Corporation

This unifying effect of the war effort, which focused filmmakers’ attention on mass mobilization and international propaganda for a common cause, only intensified after the start of total war on July 7, 1937 following the Lugouqiao Incident. The All-China Film Circles Wartime Resistance Association (*Zhonghua quanguo dianying jie kang di hui*), established in the provisional headquarters of Wuhan on January 29, 1938 included among its council members:

Communist Party members: Xia Yan, Tian Han, Yang Hansheng, Situ Huimin, A Ying, Chen Bo’er; *other “progressive” filmmakers:* Cai Chusheng, Hong Shen, Shen Xiling, Shi Dongshan, Yuan Muzhi, Sun Yu, Zhao Dan, Ying Yunwei, Sun Shiyi, Su Yi, Wan Laiming; *studio owners and investors:* Luo Mingyou, Shao Zuiweng; *Nationalist Party cultural officials:* Zhang Daofan, Fang Zhi, Luo Xuelian, Zheng Yongzhi.¹³

With its emphasis on national unity and cinematic functionalism, the association’s manifesto showed little discernible divergence from previous theories associated with the

¹² Zhiwei Xiao, “Anti-Imperialism and Film Censorship During the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937,” 51.

¹³ Huangfu Yichuan, *Zhongguo zhanzheng dianying shi* (Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 59. The association’s planning committee (*choubei hui*), established on January 20, 1938, also included Chen Lifu. Chen’s name, however, apparently did not appear alongside those of the seventy-one council members elected upon the association’s official establishment nine days later. See: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 22-23.

National Educational Cinematography Society or pre-war movements for cinematic “national defense.”¹⁴ There was, however a substantial shift in intensity:

In the heady atmosphere of Wuhan, the momentum of this earlier [mass culture] movement turned the tricity into a laboratory for experiments in cultural change. Many cultural leaders believed that propaganda was as important as weapons in fighting the war. Thus, in the production of a new mass-directed culture, Chinese intellectuals, especially the young students who flooded into Wuhan as refugees, considered themselves to be in the vanguard. A consensus formed that China’s chances for survival would improve if the cultural apparatus were reorganized and put on a wartime propaganda footing.¹⁵

In keeping with this spirit of experimentation, film became a “powerful weapon in the War of Resistance,” and form of “propaganda” (*xuanchuan*) for disseminating news of China’s “reality” (*xianshi*) to compatriots and international “friends” abroad.¹⁶

Spokesman Yang Hansheng decried the “numbing” effects of popular entertainment films, promoted expedient formats such as newsreels and “short features” (*duanjian de gushipian*), and advocated construction of a national “projection network” (*fangying wang*).¹⁷

Following the capture or destruction of Shanghai’s film industry in August 1937, early wartime propaganda production fell almost entirely to state-employed filmmakers.

The Lianhua Film Production and Printing Company managed to release three titles

¹⁴ Indeed, the two forms of organization were often combined. For cinematic theories of “national defense” published by a prominent National Educational Cinematography Society member, see: Xu Gongmei, *Feichang shiqi de dianying jiaoyu* (Nanjing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1937), 60.

¹⁵ Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 63.

¹⁶ Quoted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]), 16-17. Originally appeared in *Kangzhan dianying (chuangkan hao)* (Hankou), March 31, 1938.

¹⁷ Yang Hansheng, “Guanyu guofang dianying zhi jianli.” Quoted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 18-19. Originally appeared in *Kangzhan dianying (chuangkan hao)*, March 31, 1938

during this period, including a comedy showcase and two features.¹⁸ By contrast, production of newsreels and documentaries purporting to depict wartime realities was an entirely state-managed affair. The Central Film Studio (*Zhongyang dianying sheyingchang*, aka *Zhong dian*) completed two Mandarin (*guoyu*) newsreel editions, two “wartime records” (*zhanzheng shilu*), and one musical despite being transferred from Nanjing to Anhui’s port city of Wuhu, and thereafter to Chongqing. The China Motion Picture Corporation (*Zhonghua dianying zhipianchang*, aka *Zhong zhi*), built in Wuhan on the site of the military’s former Political Training Office Film Section, attracted numerous refugee filmmakers from Shanghai and quickly became the temporary center of wartime film activity. Subordinate to the reorganized Nationalist government’s Political Department Third Section (*Zhengzhi bu di san ting*), the China Motion Picture Corporation became an important focal point of “united front” cultural production.¹⁹ Propagandist Zheng Yongzhi supervised Yuan Muzhi, Qian Xiaozhang, and Luo Jingyu—all of whom would later become important figures in the Communist-led film industry after 1949—in assembling forty-six reels of documentary and news footage evacuation of Wuhan began in September 1938.²⁰ Early animation pioneers the Wan brothers (*Wan shi xiongdi*) completed five reels of images accompanied by Nationalist “party songs” (*dang ge*).²¹ Shi Dongshan, Wu Weiyun, Yang Hansheng, and Yuan

¹⁸ According to Li Minwei’s diary, China Motion Picture Corporation head Zheng Yongzhi assigned Li to supervise wartime documentary production in Shanghai, on behalf of the army’s Wuhan Field Headquarters Film Section (*Wuhan xingying dianying gu*). When war broke out in July, however, Li and his family soon fled for Hong Kong. See: Li Xi, ed., *Li Minwei riji* (Hong Kong: Xianggang dianying ziliaoguan, 2003), 20.

¹⁹ The Political Department took the place of the former Political Training Office following reorganization of the Nationalist Party Military Affairs Committee in February 1938.

²⁰ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 19-20. This figure is based on eighteen individual documentary titles or separately-numbered serials.

²¹ *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji*, 11.

Congmei wrote, directed, and shot three short features in Wuhan prior to evacuation—*Defending Our Soil* (*Baowei women de tudi*), *Eight-Hundred Heroic Soldiers* (*Babai zhanshi*), and *Warm Blood, Loyal Spirit* (*Re xue zhong hun*). Jinling University filmmakers contributed another three wartime educational titles after successful completion of a trial film, *Defense Against Poison Gas* (*Fang du*), in 1936.²²

According to Li Daoxin, the principal characteristics of these works were that they exposed the inhumanity of enemy atrocities, aimed to inspire military bravery, and portrayed China as possessing a long history of heroic national achievement.²³ Such films were not only intended for refugee audiences, but also for soldiers and rural people, and represented the intensification of trends—begun in part under the National Educational Cinematographic Society—toward indoctrinating larger and larger segments of the populace under the rubric of propaganda or education. A new wartime aesthetic and state-directed communications network were taking shape in the emergency capital of Wuhan, which Li identifies as the birthplace of China’s “state-managed” (*guoying*) film industry.²⁴ Production, dissemination, and exhibition were collectively administered as militarized “politics,” an enterprise which extended to foreign cities as well as domestic theaters. *Defending Our Soil* appeared in New York and the Philippines; *Eight-Hundred Heroic Soldiers* received screenings in Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaya,

²² This latter film appears on a recent three-disc retrospective concerning the work of Jinling educator-filmmaker-photographer Sun Mingjing. See: *Shiji chang jingtou: jiaopian shang de jiyi / Dai sheyingji de lüren (shang)* (Zhongyang dianshi tai, n.d.).

²³ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 24.

²⁴ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 27.

France, and Switzerland. However brief, the Wuhan period also witnessed continued attempts to mobilize rural audiences through the formation of rural film teams.²⁵

The Nationalist Party in Shanghai and Hong Kong

Beyond Wuhan, Mandarin- and Cantonese-language filmmaking continued as an outgrowth of cultural and commercial networks linking occupied and semi-colonial Shanghai with colonial Hong Kong.²⁶ During the war-troubled months of late 1937, forty-three of sixty-six titles released by studios spanning these two territories and the occupation-free hinterland were recorded with “dialect” soundtracks.²⁷ Throughout the early years of the war, Cantonese cinema continued to account for more than half of all Chinese-language films produced.

Table 3.1: Chinese-language films produced between June 1937 and June 1940 by spoken dialect (Source: ZJDX, *Guochan yingpian kaocha, di san ji*, 1940).

	1937	1938	1939	1940
Cantonese	43	75	119	48
Mandarin	23	64	74	35
Total films produced	66	139	193	83

Owing to the relatively stable investment environment provided by Shanghai’s international concessions and British rule in Hong Kong, both cities represented attractive

²⁵ See: Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 116-117. Leyda’s account is based primarily on the wartime travel writings of Christopher Isherwood and W. H. Auden, later published in 1939 as *Journey to a War*.

²⁶ See: Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji* (Chongqing: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, 1940). 4.

destinations for filmmakers prior to 1941.²⁸ Yet despite the fact that “patriotic” Cantonese titles accounted for more than a quarter of all films screened in Hong Kong between 1937 and 1938, Nationalist Party publications later carried the complaint that the vast majority of “new films” produced after June 1937 had not been “submitted for inspection according to law.”²⁹

The Nationalists had long been suspicious that linguistic and cultural fragmentation might arise from the rise of a viable Cantonese film industry spanning Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong. The National Language Movement, begun in the 1920s, had little effect on southern film production until 1936, when Guangdong warlord Chen Jitang was driven from the province.³⁰ Thereafter, a new law banning Cantonese film production was promulgated by the Central Film Censorship Committee and scheduled to take effect on July 1, 1937. Following negotiations between committee representatives and the South China Filmmakers Association (*Hua’nan dianying jie hui*), the deadline for phasing out Cantonese screenings from China’s national film market was extended to June 30, 1940.

War disrupted many of these plans. However, having lost much of Shanghai’s Mandarin film industry to financial disarray following Japanese occupation of East China—a situation compounded by the flight of many filmmakers to Hong Kong—the Nationalist Party remained focused on the goal of achieving some measure of control in

²⁸ Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*, 6-10.

²⁹ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji*, 1.

³⁰ Stephanie Chung Po-yin, “A Tale of Two Cinemas: Prewar Tug-of-War Between North and South,” in Hong Kong Film Archive, ed., *The Hong Kong-Guangdong Film Connection* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005), 61.

the south.³¹ During May and June 1938, the Central Film Censorship Committee was reorganized into the Emergency Period Film Censorship Bureau (*Feichang shiqi dianying jiancha suo*), and the committee's Hankou offices disbanded. Instead, the new organization was relocated to Guangzhou and Hong Kong, ports which represented important economic and communications links for the anti-Japanese war effort. In an August 1938 speech to Hong Kong filmmakers, bureau head Xu Hao explained the shift by noting that much of China's film industry had already shifted operations toward Guangzhou.³² Xu criticized several companies for continuing to produce "feudal" and "superstitious" films, while praising other for their recent contributions to "national defense cinema." Relaying directives of the Nationalist Party central leadership, he added that in the future all Chinese people would be expected to support the War of Resistance, and that maintaining separation from China proper (e.g. the Nationalist-controlled mainland) would not be permitted.³³ The war effort depended on Guangzhou- and Hong Kong-produced propaganda. For this reason, Xu claimed that the Emergency Period Film Censorship Bureau would continue to inspect all domestic and foreign productions prior to screening. A similar address, delivered to cultural and educational figures on August 23, touched repeatedly on the importance of uniting commercial or artistic ambitions with wartime policies.

³¹ On the frequent movement of filmmakers between Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong prior to the war, see, for example: Zhou Chengren, "Ebb and Flow: Early Guangzhou and Hong Kong Film Industries," in Hong Kong Film Archive, ed., *The Hong Kong-Guangdong Film Connection* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005). See also: Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*.

³² "Xu Hao lai Gang zhengchi Yueyu pian teji," Lingxing zazhi she, ed., *1938 zhi Zhongguo dianying: Minguo ershiqi nian dianying nianjian* (Hong Kong: Lingxing zazhi she, 1939), 22. Previously, the Hankou-based Central Film Censorship Committee had maintained two offices, one in Hong Kong and one in Shanghai.

³³ "Xu Hao lai Gang zhengchi Yueyu pian teji," 23.

Cantonese filmmakers had in fact been producing identifiably “national defense” titles since 1936, when the movement was renewed by the Nationalist Party in earnest following the Xi’an Incident. A 1937 joint petition by the South China Filmmakers association to the central government pledged full support for the policies of “national salvation,” and was reinforced by the opening of the Central Film Censorship Committee’s Guangzhou office in October 1937.³⁴ Despite the fact that “leftist” filmmakers from Shanghai had yet to arrive in South China, national defense titles accounted for approximately twenty percent of all Cantonese releases in 1937 and 1938. After 1938 the number of such films declined sharply, indicating that leftism and patriotism were not always inextricably linked during the war (an argument put forward by Cheng Jihua et al. in *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*). It is possible that adoption of national defense rhetoric simply amounted to one strategy for moving new releases past the censors, yet imagery remained largely consistent:

With resistance to foreign aggression as the subject matter and patriotism and nationalism as themes, quite a few national defense films contain a scene of hoisting the national flag intending to strengthen national unity among audiences. Some of the films had the inter-titles “Long Live the Chinese Republic” and “Army and People United to Regain Lost Land” inserted in the opening and closing sequence [sic.]. Caught in the great drama of wartime, Cantonese films made in Hong Kong, too, set the stage for the promotion of nationalism and made a patriotic quilt dividing a socially divided audience.³⁵

³⁴ Han Yanli, “National Defence Cinema: A Window on Early Cantonese Cinema and Political Upheaval in Mainland China,” in Hong Kong Film Archive, ed., *The Hong Kong-Guangdong Film Connection* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005), 73.

³⁵ Han Yanli, “National Defence Cinema: A Window on Early Cantonese Cinema and Political Upheaval in Mainland China,” 74.

As Japanese forces approached Hong Kong in 1939, and Nationalist censorial influence waned, national defense films declined in both number and frequency, replaced by folktales (*chuanshuo pian*), martial arts epics, and love stories. This trend did not escape the notice of cultural officials in Chongqing, who complained of the abandonment of patriotic and “ethical” (*lunli*) filmmaking by Hong Kong studios.³⁶

Many Nationalist frustrations concerned the nature of commercial filmmaking itself. By 1940, charges that those in the film business were engaged in “poisoning” (*duhai*) the minds of South China compatriots surfaced in official reports.³⁷ Cantonese studios were deemed unwilling to produce the kind of educational and small-format (e.g. 16mm) titles needed to effectively propagandize the war effort. Hinterland studios—the Central Film Studio, China Motion Picture Corporation, Northeast Film Studio, and Jinling University College of Science Film Department—accounted for less than two percent of all films circulated in Hong Kong between July 1939 and June 1940. Wartime propaganda films accounted for less than five percent of all Mandarin films screened in South China overall during the same period. Nonetheless, Hong Kong studios did produce approximately fifteen War of Resistance documentary films and newsreels during the late 1930s.³⁸ *The War of Resistance in Guangzhou* (*Gaungzhou kangzhan ji*, Dagan yingye gongsi, 1937), *Defending South China* (*Baowei Hua 'nan*, Da Zhonghua yingpian gongsi, 1937), and *Flames of War in South China* (*Hua 'nan fenghuo*, Zhongguo xinwen she, 1937), *Bloody Battle in Xiamen* (*Xiamen xuezhan ji*, Jianhua yingpian gongsi, 1937) and other titles all attest to the rise of a realist wartime film culture, and may have

³⁶ See: Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji*, 4.

³⁷ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji*, 6.

³⁸ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 61-62.

represented an effective extension of Nationalist film policy to the Cantonese film industry during the war's earliest years.³⁹ Yet while many Hong Kong filmmakers would later claim to have resisted Japanese cultural policies after occupation of the colony in 1941, the post-1938 decrease in national defense filmmaking observed by Nationalist officials served as sufficient cause to criticize the entire industry thereafter.⁴⁰

The Studio System

Following evacuation of Wuhan in September 1938, Chongqing became the new center of Nationalist Party-directed film production. Each of the three studios established on this site fell under the jurisdiction of a separate governmental bureaucracy: the national government's Military Affairs Committee Political Department administered the China Motion Picture Corporation; the party's Central Executive Committee Propaganda Department administered the Central Film Studio; the national Ministry of Education, now headed by Chen Lifu, administered the China Educational Film Studio (*Zhonghua jiaoyu dianying zhipianchang*), completed in 1942.⁴¹

The China Motion Picture Corporation, originally the Nationalist Party Military Affairs Committee Political Training Office Film Section (*Guomin dang junshi weiyuanhui zhengxun bu dianying gu*), was originally constructed in Nanchang during

³⁹ On divisions within Hong Kong's Cantonese film industry itself, see: Yingjin Zhang, "Beyond Binary Imagination: Progress and Problems in Chinese Film Historiography," *The Chinese Historical Review*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 71-82.

⁴⁰ Recently, more detailed perspectives on filmmaking in Japanese-controlled Shanghai between 1942 and 1943 have begun to emerge. See: Qiu Shuting, *Xunzhao Yazhou dianying gangluo zhi yuan: Gang-Ri dianying guanxi* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxian gongsi [Cosmos Books], 2006).

⁴¹ On the China Educational Film Studio, built in 1942 near Chengdu, see: Zhang Yue, "Kangzhan shiqi Beibei dianying huodong huimou," in *Di qi jie Zhongguo jinji baihua dianying jie zhiweihui xueshu yantao bu*, ed., *Chongqing yu Kangzhan dianying yishu lunwen ji (di qi jie Zhongguo jinji baihua dianying jie)* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1998), 249-251.

1933 as a propaganda arm of Nationalist operations to encircle and destroy Communist forces.⁴² Studio head Zheng Yongzhi (aka Zheng Junsheng) was a Sichuan native and graduate of the Huangpu Military Academy.⁴³ Creative personnel included filmmakers of nearly all political stripes; the studio released thirteen features between 1938 and 1945, making it the most successful film enterprise in “Free China” during the war years. Experienced personnel, such as writer-director Shi Dongshan, would later become instructors at the China Educational Film Studio, where experimentation with small-format “audiovisual education” (*dianhua jiaoyu*) films yielded twenty-three 16mm titles by November 1944.⁴⁴ Although officially a state-owned facility, this studio’s distribution was directly managed by the Nationalist Party’s Central Film Studio, which like the China Motion Picture Corporation nonetheless employed numerous “leftist” film figures as creative personnel and consultants.

The Fifth Plenum of the Nationalist Party’s Fifth National Conference, convened in Chongqing from January 21 to January 31, 1939 mapped out a complicated policy of uniting with Communist forces for anti-Japanese military maneuvers while working to “dissolve, limit, defend against, and oppose” the spread of Communist influence in other areas. Within this context, studio supervision reinforced support for the war effort while opposing any potentially critical or subversive themes vis-à-vis Nationalist Party

⁴² On the establishment of the Military Affairs Committee and its Nanchang Field Headquarters, as well as the role played by foreign advisors in developing effective plans for culture and education in anticipation of war with Japan, see: Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

⁴³ Ren Yining, “Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu,” in Di qi jie Zhongguo jinji baihua dianying jie zhiweihui xueshu yantao bu, ed., *Chongqing yu Kangzhan dianying yishu lunwen ji (di qi jie Zhongguo jinji baihua dianying jie)* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1998), 6. Wu Shuxun, Cai Jingjun, and Luo Jingyu also played important roles in studio affairs. The studio was rebuilt within Chunyang Cave, Guanyin Cliff in order to ensure its protection from aerial attacks.

⁴⁴ Ren Yining, “Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu,” 7.

prestige.⁴⁵ By 1940, the China Motion Picture Corporation employed 300 actors and creative personnel, 116 workers, and a total of 466 individuals overall.⁴⁶ By contrast, the Central Film Studio—primarily a producer of newsreels and documentaries—consisted of a staff of more than 100 individuals including five directors, approximately twenty actors, and upwards of sixty technical personnel.⁴⁷

Table 3.2: Individual film titles released by Nationalist Party-affiliated studios, 1938-1945 (Sources: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945, 2000*; *Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, Guochan yingpian kaocha, di san ji, 1940*).

	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	Total
China Motion Picture Corporation									
Features	3	2	5			1	2	2	15
Animated films	6	4							10
Newsreels and documentaries	20	6	7					1	34
Central Film Studio									
Features		2	1						3
Newsreels and documentaries	13	6	4	2		1			26
Northwest Film Studio									
Features		1							1
Newsreels and documentaries		2	1						3
China Educational Film Studio									
Newsreels and documentaries									23?
Other organizations									
华北新闻社	2								2?
大地影业公司		1	1						2
金陵大学理学院电教系	1	4	4						9?

⁴⁵ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 60. One means of effecting these policies given the overwhelming numbers of left-wing filmmakers within the studio system was to preserve continuity in leadership. Luo Xuelian, for example, remained head of the Central Film Studio throughout the entire 1938-1945 period.

⁴⁶ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 64.

⁴⁷ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 69.

Repeated air raids, coupled with a severe 1942 fire which destroyed many of the Central Film Studio's limited raw materials, placed almost insurmountable restrictions on War of Resistance film production during the 1941-1943 period. Prior to these events, the Nationalist-controlled studio system had also included several additional enterprises. The Northeast Film Studio, founded by Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan in May 1935, was later relocated to Chengdu under the regional command of the Northwest Second Headquarters (*Xibei di er zhanqu silingbu*).⁴⁸ The Dadi Film Company (*Dadi yingye gongsi*), established in Hong Kong by the China Motion Picture Corporation, produced two Mandarin feature films directed by Guangdong natives Cai Chusheng and Situ Huimin before also closing its doors after 1940.⁴⁹ In the eyes of National Educational Cinematography Association officials, desired film genres included "educational, industrial, patriotic, and ethical" titles.⁵⁰ Statistics compiled by the association reveal a marked decline in officially-sanctioned filmmaking concerning wartime themes after 1938, as well as concern with the overwhelming preponderance of Cantonese releases by Chinese film companies located in the commercial film center of Hong Kong. Chinese-language studios in Shanghai's international concessions posed similar cause for concern; although Chongqing observers were aware that some releases might be considered

⁴⁸ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 71. This studio employed approximately fifty individuals, and ran on a budget 1/22 the size of that allocated to the China Motion Picture Corporation and 1/6 that allocated to the Central Film Studio. Another film, *Defend China (Baowei Zhonghua, 1939)*, produced by the Fifth Route Army Political Department, also serves as an important reminder that "proxy" cultural production under hinterland generals and local commanders played a far more important role in wartime mass mobilization than has previously been assumed. On the relationship between warlordism and the press during the 1930s, for examples, see: Stephen R. MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China*, vol. 23, no. 1 (January 1997), 7, 10.

⁴⁹ Both films, *Paradise on Orphan Island (Gudao tiantang, 1939)* and *White Clouds of Home (Baiyun guxiang, 1940)*, performed well in Hong Kong markets. See: Yingjin Zhang, "Beyond Binary Imagination: Progress and Problems in Chinese Film Historiography," 74. See also: Yu Muyun, *Xianggang dianying shihua* (vol. 3) (Hong Kong: Ciwenhua tang, 1998).

⁵⁰ Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui, *Guochan yingpian diaocha, di san ji*, 4.

“patriotic” (*aiguo*) in content, they expressed displeasure with lack of institutional control over coastal film production overall.

Table 3.3: Films produced by Hong Kong studios containing patriotic (*aiguo*) themes, 1934-1941 (Source: Qiu Shuting, *Gang-Ri dianying guanxi*, 2006).

Year	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941
Titles	1	3	3	16	34	9	11	12

In addition to material shortcomings, fabricating images of war proved one of the more consistent obstacles to filmmakers seeking to depict enemy savagery and Chinese heroism in equal measure. Early victories against Japanese forces at Tai’erzhuang, clashes in Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces, and iconographic sights of the national capital at Nanjing were filmed and edited into some of the earliest documentary films of the war effort.⁵¹ Newsreels such as *China News (Zhongguo xinwen)* celebrated the growing Sino-U.S. alliance, extolled the military, and promoted Jiang Jieshi and other Nationalist Party figures as capable national leaders. The early 1940s also gave rise to a series of ethnographic films depicting minority life along Sichuan’s borders with Tibet and the Northwest. Like other releases, these documentaries often contained images of non-Han peoples’ support for the war effort. Others, however, reflected a growing emphasis on “scientific” ethnography. Jinling University filmmaker Sun Mingjing recorded numerous reels of Tibetan customs and rituals over the course of research trips through the Xikang region.⁵² During the 1930s, Sun had contributed his filmmaking services to the causes of

⁵¹ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 50-51. See also: Pan Jienong, *Wutai yinmu liushi nian—Pan Jienong huiyi lu* (Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1994), 390-391.

⁵² Zhao Huikang and Jia Leilei, *Zhongguo kejiào dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 26-27.

rural economic reconstruction and national defense. Once relocated to Chongqing, he also established a pioneering program in “audiovisual education” (*dianhua jiaoyu*), which had also become an obsession of new educational minister Chen Lifu.⁵³

Indeed, the programs begun under the National Educational Cinematography Association seem to have played a crucial role in generating an appreciation for film as a form of “social education” thereafter. Subsequent efforts developed during the war years attempted to suffuse educational settings with mass communication technologies. Graduates trained in the theory and practice of visual education at the [Jinling University?] Science College served in “visual education departments of provincial education commissions and municipal education bureaus and in schools where they promote[d] cinematography.”⁵⁴ Educational filmmaking efforts, however, remained hampered by inflation, hoarding, profiteering, and a general scarcity of U.S. film imports, which soon became the sole source of film stock and other materials during the 1940s. The China Educational Film Studio produced mainly slides, rather than actual films; between 1942 and 1943, what resources were available went primarily to production of Chen Goufu’s *Transforming Social Traditions (Yi feng yi su)*, a script of short vignettes intended to renew public morality through the restoration of ancient ethical concepts and ritualized nationalism.⁵⁵ Two installments of the planned series were completed.

⁵³ See: Ch’ en Li-fu, *Chinese Education During the War (1937-1942)* (Chungking: Hsing cheng yüan, Chiao yü pu, 1943); Ih-chi Fan, *A Study of the Program of Audio-Visual Education for Teacher Education in China, 1930-1949* (Ph.D. dissertation) (Indiana University, 1952).

⁵⁴ The Chinese Ministry of Information, *China Handbook, 1937-1943: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Six Years of War* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943), 401-402.

⁵⁵ See: Chen Guofu, *Jiaoyu dianying ‘Yi feng yi su’ neirong shuyao* (Chongqing: Jiaoyu bu Zhonghua jiaoyu dianying zhipianchang zhidao weiyuanhui, n.d.); Zhao Huikang and Jia Leilei, *Zhongguo kejiào dianying shi*, 30.

Generally, when the resources needed to continue production dried up many filmmakers turned to theater as an alternate means of pursuing educational and mobilizing causes.

Despite these obstacles, Nationalist Party control of the Chongqing film industry created the conditions for a radical transformation of film's role within broader state agendas. While only infrequently described as a form of "communications" (*jiaotong*), perhaps because its transmission over large distances remained impracticable under wartime conditions when compared within the radio, cinema now undoubtedly served similar purposes in terms of psychological mobilization and information management. Emergency measures demanded the procurement of human attention as well as conscripted bodies and material resources. Writing in 1927, U.S communications theorist Harold D. Laswell had argued that the novelty of World War I lay in the fact that:

During the war period it came to be recognized that the mobilization of men and means was not sufficient; there must be a *mobilization of opinion*. Power over opinion, as over life and property, passed into official hands, because the danger from license was greater than the danger of abuse. Indeed, there is no question that government management of opinion is an inescapable corollary of large-scale modern war ... [I]t is no longer possible to fuse the waywardness of individuals in the furnace of the war dance; a newer and subtler instrument must weld thousands, even millions, of human beings into one amalgamated mass of hate and will and hope. A new flame must burn out the canker of dissent and temper the steel of bellicose enthusiasm. The name of this new hammer and anvil of social solidarity is propaganda.⁵⁶

Chinese filmmakers and educators had espoused similar views since the 1920s, although in their writings the impetus for national unity seemed to arise primarily from persistent

⁵⁶ H. D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1927), 14, 220-221. Quoted in Armand Mattelart (Susan Emanuel and James A. Cohen, trans.), *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 [1991]), 66. See also: Neal Curtis, *War and Social Theory: World, Value and Identity* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 135.

threats posed by imperialism and economic dependence. By 1938, however, war was indeed perceived as the most compelling reason for channeling cultural production into propaganda work, which constituted one of the methods by which a “new China” (*xin Zhongguo*) would be established and maintained.⁵⁷ One writer for the Nationalist army’s *Mopping-Up News* (*Saodang bao*) described “going down to the villages,” “entering the armed forces,” and “leaving the country” as urgent tasks facing filmmakers in 1938, meaning that motion pictures would play an important role in mobilizing support for the war effort among audiences virtually untapped by commercial filmmakers during pre-war decades.⁵⁸ State ownership of the industry was justified in terms of breaking previous patterns and creating a Soviet-style “national policy” (*guoce*) for cinema.⁵⁹ Yet just how to “popularize” the medium—that is, how to ensure acceptance of its message—remained an open-ended question.

In principal, communicating with “the masses” (*dazhong*) required more than a single, encompassing aesthetic strategy. The belief that propaganda should be “multi-faceted” (*duofangmian de*) involved two considerations: first, it should be tailored to address multiple audiences and second, it should promote multiple forms of activity and consciousness required by the war effort. One argument which seems to have supported

⁵⁷ See, Yu Shangyuan, “Zhanshi xiju yu dianying de tici,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 1-3. Originally appeared in *Shishi xinbao* (Chongqing), September 25, 1938. At the time, Yu was a well-known educator, playwright, and theorist, and spoke specifically of the need to found a new state (*jianguo*) amidst the destruction of war.

⁵⁸ Shi Yan, “San ze jianyi,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 4-6. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao* (Chongqing), December 4, 1938. Here, “leaving the country” clearly referred to non-Chinese overseas communities.

⁵⁹ Tang Huang, “Dianying guoying lun,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 7-9. Originally appeared in *Guomin gongbao* (Chongqing), February 12, 1939.

the flourishing of documentary film in Chongqing studios concerns filmmakers' realization that peasants, soldiers, and hinterland urbanites appeared captivated by newsreels yet confused by the "Euro-American" (*Ou-Mei*) conventions of feature films.⁶⁰ Propagandists noted that documentary-style "reports" (*baogao*) appealed to the sensibilities of rural folk whereas fictionalized "plots" (*juqing*) involving urban settings did not—the former were regarded as "movies about us Chinese" (*women Zhongguoren de dianying*), while the latter appeared incomprehensible or foreign. This growing faith in realism, which echoed earlier theories of the 1930s, spilled over into the writings of prominent state filmmakers like Su Xuling, who argued that "without facing up to reality (*xianshi*), [cultural producers] cannot recognize reality's demands."⁶¹ Rejecting the studio-based star system for sequestering filmmakers from "living truth," he called for a cinema based upon documentary techniques of recording and which spoke directly to audience concerns. Xu had no expectation that these concerns would diverge from the overall aims of the war effort. Rather, the point of the battlefield film practice that he suggested seems to have been making mass mobilization more palatable to non-urbanites, at a time when the Nationalist Party was already beginning to expand its military influence to an environment which many believed to be the very edge of a known cultural frontier.

⁶⁰ Yang Cunren, "Nongcun yingpian de zhizuo wenti," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 93-97. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1941).

⁶¹ Su Xuling, "Jilu dianying zhi gujia," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 97-101. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1941); [Zheng] Junli, "Guanyu jilu dianying de tezheng," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 218-220. Originally appeared in *Xinmin bao wankan* (Chongqing), February 26, 1943.

In this sense, the proliferation of documentaries filmed among minority peoples reflected not only an effort to propagandize non-Han wartime participation, but also part of a larger ethnographic project which accompanied the integration of diverse political communities into the Nationalist Party's hinterland government. Releases such as *Moving Genghis Khan's Relics* (*Chengjisihan yiling*, 1939), *Tibetan Pilgrimage* (*Xizang xunli*, 1940), *Long Live the Nation* (*Minzu wansui*, 1940), and *Scenes of Xinjiang* (*Xinjiang fengguang*, 1940) all purported to capture the lived realities of "border peoples" (*biandi minzu*).⁶² Within the context of documentary and newsreel production—films which served to depict "the indomitable will of the nation" expressed through military exploits and the efficacy of state policies—these minority-focused films attested to the consolidation of areas west and northwest of Sichuan. More than features, such genres functioned to control information concerning all forms of Nationalist activity. The potentiality for control of popular opinion was not lost on Communist agent Yuan Muzhi, who wrote that:

If [one] possessed a thorough and concrete plan [for filming] prior to an actual event, or after that event [one] was able to put together a thematic edited sequence using plentiful materials, that would be something new in Chinese filmmaking. This method could be adapted for use at every battlefield in North China and the Jiangnan [region]; moreover, it should be used in close coordination with the evolving political situation (*zhengzhi xingshi*). For example, at the very moment when the traitor Wang Jingwei fled [to Japan?], it would have been possible to immediately construct an effective propaganda weapon for the "Oppose Wang Movement."⁶³

⁶² See: Xu Suling, "Guanyu 'Xizang xunli'," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 556-558. Originally appeared in *Zhongyang ribao*, February 15, 1941.

⁶³ Yuan Muzhi, "Tan jilu dianying," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 130-121. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1, 1941).

Yuan was attempting to describe how Soviet film techniques might be profitably implemented by Chinese filmmakers, yet in many ways his words provided an accurate description of ongoing documentary- and newsreel-making projects. These, according to another military newspaper account, were being produced to show that victory in the War of Resistance was “absolutely possible” (*juedui keneng de*), and to serve as conclusive proof that the conditions for victory already existed.⁶⁴

Viewed from the perspective of Chongqing, wartime film production took place within an institutional network dominated primarily by the military and propaganda branches of the Nationalist Party. Explicit bans on depicting the Communist-led Eighth Route and New Fourth Route armies, or depicting an overly bleak view of wartime society, tended to limit possibilities for much of the iconography typically associated with patterns (e.g. pro-Communist, socially critical) of leftist film production prior to 1949. Yet despite the relative success of Nationalist efforts to draw skilled filmmakers into the studio system, serious concerns over the presence of ongoing cultural division represented by Cantonese cinema remained. Any authority possessed by the Central Film Censorship Committee and subsequent organizations seems to have waned quickly after 1938.⁶⁵ Questions concerning the presence of Communist supporters within the state studio system further intensified between 1940 and 1941, during which military

⁶⁴ Jin Bo, “‘Xinwen yingpian’ yu ‘jilu yingpian’ di yi qi Kangzhan yu di er qi Kangzhan zhong,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 130-121. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, April 30, 1940.

⁶⁵ Prior to this point, it can be argued that the committee succeeded in establishing models for wartime filmmaking by bestowing awards on titles by the Shanyue and Duguan film companies in 1937 and 1938. See: Lingxing zazhi she, ed., *1938 zhi Zhongguo dianying: Mingguo ershiqi nian dianying nianjian* (Hong Kong: Lingxing zazhi she, 1939), 17. Increasing Japanese military dominance in the region of Southeast Asia may be another reason for the decline in patriotic titles depicting wartime imagery; unwilling to lose their *Nanyang* profits, Hong Kong filmmakers opted for a policy of self-censorship in order to conform to colonial authorities’ policies of maintaining a neutral stance vis-à-vis the Japanese war effort.

hostilities between Nationalist and Communist forces developed into open conflict (e.g. the “Wannan Incident”). In September 1940 the Nationalist Party abolished the Political Department Third Section, which had coordinated united front cultural work since its establishment in Wuhan. By January 1941, “clean-up and rectification” (*suzheng*) programs swept the Chongqing film world, and production ground to a halt for several years thereafter.⁶⁶ New regulations concerning mobilization methods and outlines of acceptable propaganda, formulated by cultural officials who shared the anti-Communist stance of the Chen brothers and Revival Society (*Fuxing she*), were promulgated in 1942 to ensure that the Nationalist Party center, not suspect filmmakers, would determine the future parameters of wartime cultural production. The Central Book and Periodical Censorship Committee (*Zhongyang tushu zazhi shencha weiyuanhui*), charged with rooting out critical portrayals of the Nationalist war effort, also took to turning down submitted film scripts with a renewed zeal. At a meeting of more than sixty representatives of the Nationalist cultural bureaucracy and state studio system, Zhang Daofan (a former “central staff member” of the Chen Lifu-founded Association of Nationalist Party Loyal Comrades during the 1930s), relayed orders that filmmakers were to focus solely on depicting the “achievements of heroic individuals” sanctioned by the party.⁶⁷ While in public the united front survived through institutions such as the Military Affairs Cultural Work Committee (*Junshi weiyuanhui wenhua gongzuo weiyuanhui*), the behind-the-scenes reality was that Chen and the Ministry of Education

⁶⁶ Huangfu Yichuan, *Zhongguo zhanzheng dianying shi*, 77. It seems difficult to agree with Huangfu’s assertion that material sources were merely an official pretext for the slow-down. Nonetheless, Nationalist reorganization of the film industry commenced in earnest after 1942, beginning with the establishment of the China Educational Film Studio.

⁶⁷ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 62.

seem to have risen to the top of the Chongqing studio chain, producing more films through the China Educational Film Studio than any other unit from 1942 to 1945.

Distribution

Emphasis on motion pictures as a means of social mobilization and education did not arise with the war itself. Nonetheless, the “emergency period” was characterized by increasing attention on the part of filmmakers and theorists to a “new line” (*xin luxian*) emphasizing smaller-scale productions while targeting larger segments of the population. One notable conference devoted to discussion of this new orientation took place on October 5, 1940, at which Central Film Studio filmmaker Pan Jienong criticized Chinese filmmakers for failing to develop a coherent theory of cinema as a form of propaganda (*xuanchuan*) and education (*jiaoyu*), and for failing to communicate effectively with segments of society beyond those “petty urbanite” (*xiao shimin*) audiences typically associated with commercial productions.⁶⁸ The problem, however, remained one of maintaining a profitable enterprise model; few filmmakers believed that the expansion of their industry could be supported solely by government and military aid. In essence, filmmaker aspirations to “Sinicize” (*Zhongguohua*) or “popularize” (*tongsuhua*) their cinematic practice by producing images appropriate to national unity and mass mobilization—a commonly agreed-upon wartime exigency—were difficult to reconcile with the fact that that studios remained dependent upon both domestic and overseas markets for their financial viability. Motion pictures remained a costly weapon, which

⁶⁸ “Zhongguo dianying de luxian wenti—zuotanhui jilu,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 67-68. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1941).

made arguments for an entirely “non-commercial” cinema difficult to sustain given material constraints on production throughout the War of Resistance period.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, state ownership and small-format production did constitute a revolution of sorts, as evidenced by profound changes in the character of film distribution and exhibition after 1938.

Even in 1933 and 1934, when the first Nationalist-managed studios had been founded to “propagate the Three People’s Principles and expose the crimes of the Communist Party,” China’s state film industry had relied on private talent, Hollywood and Soviet studio plans, and U.S.-manufactured technology.⁷⁰ During the early years of the war studio head Luo Xuelian traveled to Shanghai, hoping to solicit non-state studios to contribute their capital and facilities to the wartime cause, but appears to have left with no firm commitments.⁷¹ Consequently, studio administrators hoping for a breakthrough in the efficacy of their medium began to emphasize the need for technological and human solutions. China Motion Pictures Corporation assistant studio head Luo Jingyu, citing the achievements of Soviet filmmakers in creating “persuasive” (*ganhua*) films which diverged from the Hollywood model, argued that China too needed to reinvent its film industry along iconoclastic lines.⁷² Luo proposed establishing state-managed cinemas as

⁶⁹ Hu Jubin, by contrast, argues that these debates were resolved unambiguously in favor of non-commercial models, despite the fact that advertisements for state-produced features contained much of the same emphasis on star power and production values which had dominated pre-war Shanghai cinema. See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 139-140.

⁷⁰ Zheng Junsheng (aka Zheng Yongzhi), *Ruhe zhuazhu dianying zhe wuqi (Junweihui weiyuanzhang Nanchang xingying zhengzhi xunlian chu congshu)* (n.d.). Quoted in: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 95.

⁷¹ Yang Yan, *Guomindang zhengfu guanying dianying fazhan kaolue* (M.A. dissertation) (Xinan shifan daxue, 2002). Cited in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 96.

⁷² Luo Jingyu, “Lun dianying de guoce—bing huhuan yingjie dianying jishu de da geming,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing:

a solution to the studio system's unprofitability; human innovation, paired with state funding, would generate solution to domestic film and equipment shortages. While such suggestions appeared fanciful at best—and were subsequently criticized as such by Pan Jienong during a subsequent industry meeting—Luo's additional emphasis on small-format film projection and mobile teams as remedies to the faltering commercial distribution system pointed to important changes in post-1940 cinematic policy.

Whereas prior to the War of Resistance China's domestic film theaters had numbered approximately two-hundred and ninety, by 1941 the number of total venues available to state filmmakers had dropped to seventy-nine scattered across ten provinces, with the vast majority concentrated in Sichuan. Both the Central Film Studio and China Motion Picture Corporation maintained their own distribution offices; other Chongqing agencies included the China Film Service (*Zhongguo dianying fuwushe*), the Asia office of the Soviet Film Export Company (SOVEXPORTFILM), and representatives of each of the eight Hollywood "majors."⁷³ Domestically, films produced in Chongqing reached twelve provinces total. In the absence of theaters, projection teams from the Military Affairs Committee Political Department were dispatched to remote areas where motion pictures often remained a novelty. Established in July 1939, this propaganda service employed approximately 100 projectionists and team members, and between 1939 and 1941 conducted 493 screenings, recording 27 million attendances (approximately 9

Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 86-92. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, no. 1, vol. 1 (January 1, 1941). Nonetheless, U.S. theater chains remained important models for state-managed enterprise in this area. See: Bei Lu, "Dianying yewu de guanli," reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 172-1833. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, June 9-July 2, 1941.

⁷³ Ren Yining, "Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu," 8. Other sources refer to the presence of British (Merchant Eagle-Lion) and Indian (India Film Exchange) distributors as well.

million per year).⁷⁴ Central Film Studio teams—six in total—received smaller subsidies despite traveling between schools, factories, street corners, villages, and even the front lines.⁷⁵ Sometime after 1942, the China Educational Film Studio also sponsored a series of regular monthly screenings, subdividing Beibei into ten separate regions and conducting experimental audiovisual education activities in each.⁷⁶ Just as filmmakers began to move out from their studio confines in search of more compelling images for the propaganda effort, film distribution also gained a tenuous foothold in regions which had previously remained beyond the reach of private enterprise.

Nonetheless, despite the persistence of China Educational Film Studio, Jinling University, and Nationalist Party International Propaganda Office (*Guomindang zhongyang xuanchuan bu guoji xuanchuan chu*) filmmakers in attempting to revolutionize film production through the implementation of small-format motion picture technology, this attempt to improve upon the perceived flaws of the commercial system proved less successful. Owing to ongoing scarcities of equipment, 16mm film projection teams only reached a select number of schools and villages during the course of their activities.⁷⁷ Despite the increasingly broad propaganda connotations carried by terms like “social education” during the wartime period, it seems that experimentation with audiovisual mobilization techniques did indeed remain largely confined to the immediate radius of educational facilities. As Chen Lifu recalled, “the shortage of audiovisual

⁷⁴ Ren Yining, “Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu,” 9.

⁷⁵ Luo Xuelian, “Kangzhan si nian lai de dianying,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 443. Originally appeared in *Wenyi yuekan* (August 1941).

⁷⁶ Zhang Yue, “Kangzhan shiqi Beibei dianying huodong huimou,” 251.

⁷⁷ Luo Xuelian, “Kangzhan si nian lai de dianying,” 440.

equipment and materials was a big problem.”⁷⁸ Chen would later accuse representatives of the U.S. Information Service of obstructing his attempts to obtain film projectors for use in remote areas and interior provinces.⁷⁹ He suggested that the conjoining of education and propaganda was akin to “human engineering” approaches adopted by U.S. universities—reform of cultural and educational circles for the sake of wartime success was the goal. Material shortages, coupled with deep Nationalist suspicions of united front cultural institutions, would ultimately undermine Chen’s ambition to create an ideologically- and systematically-unified hinterland mobilization network.

Intelligence, Propaganda, and Public Relations.

Control of information concerning China’s war effort, and developments within the Pacific and “CBI” (China-Burma-India) theaters of operations in general, proved to be a consistent concern for all participants in the war. During 1942, U.S. support for Jiang Jieshi’s forces was secured partly through the cooperation of secret service mastermind Dai Li and his Military Statistics Bureau (*Juntong*) with Navy representative Milton “Mary” Miles on procuring reliable predications of weather patterns and Japanese troop movements.⁸⁰ The resulting Sino-American Cooperative Organization (SACO)

⁷⁸ Ch’en Lifu (Sidney H. Chang and Ramon H. Meyers, eds.), *The Storm Clouds Clear Over China: The Memoir of Ch’en Lifu, 1900-1993* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1994), 161.

⁷⁹ In particular, Chen claimed that Harvard University professor, OSS and OWI staff member, and U.S. Information Service (USIS) director John King Fairbank undermined his plans with accusations of “thought control” and educational party-fication. For the Fairbanks’ side, see: Wilma Fairbank, *America’s Cultural Experiment in China, 1942-1949* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 1976). On U.S. claims concerning educational films as a form of aid to China after 1943, see: Meiguo xinwen chu [U.S. Information Service?], *Meiguo guowu yuan dui Hua wenhua yuanzhu* (Chongqing: Meiguo xinwen chu, 1945), 15-16.

⁸⁰ See: Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) (especially Chapter 20, “Dai Li, Milton Miles, and the Foundations of SACO); Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

was intended in part to accelerate “technical collaboration in securing signals intelligence,” and played a crucial role in securing U.S. Navy support for Jiang’s regime during the last years of the war.⁸¹

Equally important then, from the perspective of Nationalist officials loyal to Jiang, was maintaining a monopoly on U.S. support.⁸² Following removal of the “emergency period” state apparatus to Hankou, the Communist-Nationalist united front appeared to be leading East Asia’s “democratic struggle against fascism” in the eyes of “reporters and demi-diplomats” from all over the world.⁸³ As the war dragged on, however, U.S. journalists recruited by the Office of Wartime Information (OWI) became critical of Chongqing propaganda extolling—or inventing—Nationalist successes while restricting the flow of information concerning Communist territories.⁸⁴ Even during the 1930s, writers like Edgar Snow, Nym Wales (aka Helen Foster Snow), Tillman Durdin, Harold Isaacs, and Agnes Smedley had arrived in China supportive of “the revolution” and critical of the Nationalist regime. This “younger generation” of semi-professional China correspondents, who followed on the heels of pre-war business reporters like J. B. Powell and Thomas Millard, were heavily courted by urbane figures like Song Qingling (“Madame Sun Yat-sen”), Zhou Enlai, and public relations operatives working under

⁸¹ Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service*, 284. As Wakeman also notes, successful infiltration of Nationalist intelligence networks prior to 1942 created helped to push the Nationalists toward a deal with U.S. advisors who would help them to develop new counterespionage measures.

⁸² On the propaganda policies of Jiang and Hollington Tong (Dong Xianguang) vis-à-vis the English-language press, and origins of the New York -based China News Service (an overseas office of the Ministry of Propaganda), see: Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 104-109.

⁸³ Stephen R. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 38.

⁸⁴ Stephen R. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s*, 60, 108-109. This ban was protested by John Service, appointed U.S. Foreign Service Officer, China from 1933 to 1945.

Zhou like Gong Peng.⁸⁵ *Time* and *Life* publisher Henry Luce, by contrast, maintained a glamorous image of Jiang Jieshi and his wife Song Meiling in the U.S. press, and played a crucial role in “marketing” the couple to readers as a means of building support for a growing Sino-American alliance based on ties between Washington and Chongqing.⁸⁶

In short, international dimensions of the media and cultural production during China’s War of Resistance were overwhelmingly shaped by the politics of wartime alliances—a politics made even more complicated by the outright hostility which marked Communist-Nationalist relations after 1941, which clearly threatened to spill over into civil war by 1944. Initially, “international propaganda” (*guoji xuanchuan*) produced in Hankou and, later, Chongqing studios had aimed to elicit foreign support for Free China’s war with Japan by establishing the Nationalist government as a reliable ally of anti-fascist politics worldwide.⁸⁷ And by depicting Japanese military outrages—footage from the Hankou retreat purported to depict Japanese planes dropping chemical bombs in the vicinity of other foreign concessions, and was shown at a Geneva conference on the prohibition of such weapons. This strategy created additional momentum toward the use of photojournalistic realism in motion pictures, as filmmakers were charged with carefully crafting positive images concerning the “true” state of the hinterland resistance

⁸⁵ Peter Rand, “A Quixotic Adventure: The American Press in China, 1900-1950,” in Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), 209-210. See also: Harrison E. Salisbury, “China Reporting: *Red Star* to *Long March*,” in Chin-Chuan Lee, ed., *Voices of China: The Interplay of Politics and Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990). According to Salisbury, Snow’s invitation to Yan’an (most likely arranged by Song Qingling and Liu Shaoqi) followed a directive “brought out by the brother of Lin Biao and strongly [urging] the Communists to establish some connections with the outside world.”

⁸⁶ See: Robert E. Herzenstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) (especially Chapter 2, “Learning to Market Chiang’s China”).

⁸⁷ See: Lü Kuiwen, “Guanyu guoji xuanchuan yingpian” [Concerning International Propaganda Films], reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 10-12. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, April 10, 1939.

effort. As foreign correspondents flocked to China during the early years of the war, Nationalist officials like Vice-Minister of Information Hollington Tong maintained relatively lax policies concerning the ease with which these visitors were allowed firsthand access to the front. As Steven MacKinnon has argued, one result was an early stream of reporting in a mode largely “sympathetic to the Chinese cause.”⁸⁸ Yet the case of celebrated filmmaker Joris Ivens, whose arrival in China was celebrated by the press and whose film *The 400 Million* (aka *China’s Four Hundred Million*, 1938) was undoubtedly one of the fullest depictions of Chinese society’s wartime reorganization, indicates that limitations in coverage were purposefully created by Tong and others in order to restrict any foreign awareness of Communist contributions to the united front.⁸⁹ Immediately after his arrival in early 1938, the famous director of *Spanish Earth* was placed under constant surveillance by order of Jiang Jieshi.⁹⁰ Although Ivens’ camera equipment reached Yan’an after passing through the hands of Zhou Enlai, the director never did, despite persistent requests delivered through his assigned handlers.⁹¹

Chinese filmmakers also played important roles in moving images of the war from the front to overseas audiences. Writer-director Fei Mu returned to Hong Kong with several reels of footage after he and his production team visited Zhengzhou and

⁸⁸ Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*, 100.

⁸⁹ Ivens’ film was made on behalf of the U.S. Film Service, established in 1938 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as part of the National Emergency Council. Pare Lorentz, the service’s director, had been a documentary filmmaker for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and would later become a director of training films for pilots in the Air Corps. In 1946 he became Chief of Motion Pictures, Music, and Theatre in the Occupied Areas of Germany, and played an instrumental role in documenting the Nuremberg Trials.

⁹⁰ See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 65-66.

⁹¹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 112-113, 116.

Hankou, filming what they could along the way.⁹² San Francisco's Chinatown represented another important conduit for the dissemination of international propaganda, with the result that mobilized émigré communities briefly became an important site for fundraising. News of such events, which traveled through print media outlets such as *This World* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, represented another opportunity to influence opinion in other countries.⁹³ Yet other channels remained overwhelmingly closed. The advance of Japanese forces and consolidation of Japanese control over coastal media industries from 1939 onward left Chongqing-based cultural circles despondent concerning their inability to counter the “numbing” effects of occupied-area culture on its recipients.⁹⁴ Nor, from the perspective of hinterland observers, did Hong Kong's studio heads appear eager to sacrifice profits by producing films which met the standards of the Nationalist government's wartime propaganda policies.⁹⁵ Cantonese companies had produced numerous newsreels and documentaries concerning the war in 1937 and 1938; of these, at least one title was compiled by China Motion Picture Corporation representatives Cai Chusheng, Situ Huimin, and Qian Xiaozhang.⁹⁶ Yet in this area as well, Nationalist censorial control remained limited, particularly with respect

⁹² “Jiu wang huoju,” in Lingxing zazhi she, ed., *1938 zhi Zhongguo dianying: Minguo ershiqi nian dianying nianjian* (Hong Kong: Lingxing zazhi she, 1939), 22. Still other Hong Kong-based directors participated in emergency fundraising to benefit the war effort.

⁹³ See: “Xinqin jiuyu yi wan fan yundong,” in Lingxing zazhi she, ed., *1938 zhi Zhongguo dianying: Minguo ershiqi nian dianying nianjian* (Hong Kong: Lingxing zazhi she, 1939), 36-37. Included is a translated article covering the movement by “Will Connelly.” The article title refers to activities sponsored by Song Qingling's China Defense League (*Baowei Zhongguo datongmeng*), which later became the subject of a 1941 documentary by the Daguan Film Company.

⁹⁴ See: Ya Ying, “Cong diren de edu zhengce shuodao Shanghai de dianying jie,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 289-291. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, January 15, 1939.

⁹⁵ Su Yi, “Dianying qingjie yundong de wo jian,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 349-351. Originally appeared in *Guomin gongbao*, May 19, 1940.

⁹⁶ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying zhi*, 61-62. Qian, a Communist Party member, travelled to Yan'an in 1941.

to the tacit media ban on pro-Communist images, as newsreels like *The Eighth Route Army Attacks Pingxingguan* (*Ba lu jun gong Pingxingguan*, Guoji Film Company, 1938) and *On the Northwestern Front* (aka *Scenes of Yanan*, Young Photojournalists Group, 1938/1941) attested.

Cultural exchange represented another means of managing popular opinion, yet this too took on a variety of forms. Roman Karman arrived in Chongqing during December 1938 as a guest of the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association. Although his filming activities had previously taken him to Wuhan, Xin'an, and Guangdong, Karman is largely remembered for his 1939 trip to Yan'an, which became a centerpiece of the two films which resulted from his activities, *China at War* and *In China*.⁹⁷ More successful, from the Nationalist perspective, was the opportunity for international propagandizing afforded by commercial trade. China Motion Picture Corporation newsreels and features reached New York, the Philippines, Malaya, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian (*Nanyang*) cities during the early years of the war.⁹⁸ By 1941, the studio had circulated 183 copies of its productions worldwide, altogether screening eighteen titles in ninety-two cities.⁹⁹ Likewise, Chongqing proved a frequent destination for foreign imports—by 1944, of 870 films exhibited by hinterland theaters 256 were produced within China, 419 in Hollywood, 56 in the Soviet Union, and 140 in Great Britain.¹⁰⁰ In earlier years, these totals would have included titles produced in the “orphan island” studios of Shanghai’s

⁹⁷ Ren Yining, “Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu,” 16. Karman’s account of his filmmaking project appeared in the Chinese press in January 1939. See Ka’erman, “Jiang Zhongguo de kangzhan gaosu quan shijie de renmen,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 501-503. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, January 2, 1939.

⁹⁸ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 100.

⁹⁹ Zheng Yongzhi, “San nian lai de Zhongguo dianying zhipianchang,” *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 1941). Quoted in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 100.

¹⁰⁰ Ren Yining, “Kangzhan shiqi Chongqing dianying gaishu,” 17.

foreign concessions. While the majority of these were “period pieces” (*shizhuang pian*) disdained by the Nationalist censorate’s remaining Shanghai office (*dianjian hui*), they were nonetheless screened—though sometimes in heavily edited form—alongside more acceptable wartime fare further inland.¹⁰¹ Second-run theaters showing films from the 1920s and early 1930s contributed to the relatively freewheeling cultural atmosphere. Interregional economic forces did not only afford additional pathways to effective propaganda on a national and international scale; they also represented the most immediate threats to the stability of representation and meaning on which effective propaganda was seen to depend. As a New York Times reporter “Luolunsi” [Lawrence?] noted in 1941, the major obstacle to the Nationalist government’s film-based propaganda activities remained scarcity of equipment and funds.¹⁰² In short, establishing a viable propaganda network in the face of overwhelming imports, limited venues, and competition arising from relatively “free” market structures constituted a difficult challenge for state planners. Although some within the state studio system supported a unified production, distribution, and exhibition system based on the Soviet model as the basis of future wartime cultural planning, this vision also succumbed to the exigencies of economic survival.¹⁰³

De-commercializing Culture

¹⁰¹ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 88-89.

¹⁰² “Luolunsi” (Li Wei, trans.), “Zai kangzhan zhong chengzhang de Zhongguo dianying zhipianchang,” reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang-Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 665-670. Originally appeared in *Saodang bao*, April 12, 1941.

¹⁰³ See: *Zhongguo dianying de luxian wenti—zuotanhui jilu*,” 78-82.

Enhancing the Nationalist government's reputation abroad as a means of garnering overseas and Allied support did not rest solely on itinerant journalists and a reorganized film industry still largely dependent on commercial models. Many propaganda efforts remained subsumed within a larger field of international amity and education, as they had been during the early 1930s. Hinterland organizations for cultural exchange, many of which were founded during the early war years, included: Chinese-American Institute of Cultural Relations (1939); Sino-British Cultural Association (1933); Sino-Burman Cultural Association (1939); Sino-French-Belgium-Swiss Cultural Association (1939); Sino-Indian Cultural Association (1935); Sino-Korean Cultural Association (1942); Sino-Polish Cultural Association (1933); Sino-Soviet Cultural Association (1935).¹⁰⁴ The importance of such institutions to China's defense and alliances was spelled out at length by Chen Lifu:

Culture is the life of collective existence. Since the outbreak of war international cultural cooperation has attained an unprecedented importance among the United Nations, and various steps have been taken along reciprocal [sic] basis by the United Nations toward the consolidation of our cultural front. The exchange of goodwill missions, professors, students, films, books, magazines, the organizations of cultural campaigns, the widening of publicity scopes—these and other measures indicate the growing realization of the importance of culture as a means of self-defense and the growth of cooperation among the United Nations. In this respect China did not stay behind, and for the accomplishment of this goal, the Division of Cultural Relations was inaugurated in the Ministry [of Education] in May, 1940 ... This division undertakes to establish the chain of cultural cooperation between China and other nations and to systematize our efforts towards this end. Its work covers three fields, namely, international cultural enterprises by means of propaganda and cooperation, the exchange of students with all nations and the sending of

¹⁰⁴ The Chinese Ministry of Information, *China Handbook, 1937-1943: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Six Years of War*, 822-823.

students to study abroad, and the control of overseas Chinese higher education. The exchange of professors, lecturers, students, books, magazines, films, art articles, the recording of some 316 institutions of higher education in sixteen countries, the publication of a series entitled “The International Series” which includes outstanding translations and original writings in various languages along all lines, and the organization of goodwill missions represent some of the major activities of the division.¹⁰⁵

The “chain of cultural cooperation” which Chen sought to establish through education, exchange, film, and other media was not explicitly market-based. Rather, he emphasized the interrelation of “education and national reconstruction, [and] between the cultural and national defense programs.”¹⁰⁶

Assigning a larger role for the state in cultural affairs did not only influence cinematic representation, but also multiplied the points of contact between state agendas and existing film institutions. Since 1937 the industry had been nationalized; thereafter, its policies shifted toward more explicit forms of systemization and control. One of the most significant shifts in this respect was toward cooperation with the U.S. and United Nations. After 1941, intelligence cooperation between Nationalist and U.S. military organizations spilled over into numerous areas of wartime state activity. Despite the fact that Chongqing’s cultural policies reflected insecurities concerning Jiang Jieshi’s image abroad, international reporting on Nationalist failures, and the lack of a unified voice within various cultural realms, “Free China” remained the undeniable center of technical and strategic collaboration for participants in the East Asia-based war against Japan. As Chongqing filmmakers groped toward a Soviet-style industry capable of resolving the

¹⁰⁵ Chen Li-Fu, *Chinese Education During the War (1937-1942)* (The Ministry of Education, 1943 [1942]), 4.

¹⁰⁶ Chen Li-Fu, *Chinese Education During the War (1937-1942)*, 41.

dilemmas inherent in Hollywood's business model, their positions were gradually marginalized by the dominance of new initiatives connected directly to Chen Lifu and this rising tide of Sino-U.S. cooperative ventures.

The Ministry of Education's China Educational Film Studio was the most productive hinterland film-producing institution during the later years of the war. Of the estimated twenty-three 16mm films that it released, titles such as *Chongqing Amidst the War of Resistance* (*Kangzhan zhong de Chongqing*), *The Fabi* (*Fabi*), *New Sichuan* (*Xin Sichuan*), *Tung Oil* (*Tung you*), and *New Xikang* (*Xin Xikang*) were used exclusively in schools and as international propaganda.¹⁰⁷ Directors Shi Dongshan and Sun Yu, both veterans of Shanghai's commercial studios, shot from scripts produced within the ministry under the supervision of studio head Li Qingsong, a well-known educator. Future studio employees received training through the Academy of Social Education Audiovisual Education Special Training Course (*Shehui jiaoyu yuan dianhua jiaoyu zhuanxiuke*), later the Audiovisual Education Special Training School (*Dianhua jiaoyu zhuanxiuke xuexiao*).¹⁰⁸ While in earlier years, Beibei had served as the shooting location for feature films produced by other Nationalist studios, it had also become a locus for international experimentation in mass propaganda methods. Allied news and publicity offices, working with local educators and officials, designated the area and "audiovisual education experimental zone."¹⁰⁹ Both domestic and international newsreels were screened at regular intervals as part of larger "social education" (*shehui jiaoyu*) programs.

¹⁰⁷ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Yue, "Kangzhan shiqi Beibei dianying huodong huimou," 250.

¹⁰⁹ Zhang Yue, "Kangzhan shiqi Beibei dianying huodong huimou," 251.

One of the pioneering institutions in this respect was the University of Nanking (*Jinling daxue*), whose faculty included documentary filmmaker Sun Mingjing.

Viewed in this light, educational film represented an attempt to finance effective propaganda through state and foreign capital. While earlier state studios had relied on state funds as well, their dependence on profit-oriented theater networks created concerns that filmmakers would be indefinitely bound to the conventions of narrative features. Competition and scarce resources continued to limit cultural reform. In addition to the return to educational models after 1942, another important attempt to skirt this impasse was direct collaboration between Chinese filmmakers and their better-funded U.S. peers in the area of international wartime propaganda. One of the most famous examples of such a cooperative effort was Luo Jingyu's work with Hollywood director Frank Capra on *The Battle of China* (1944), the sixth title in Capra's U.S. Army-funded "Why We Fight" series.¹¹⁰ Luo was a former director and technical advisor for the China Motion Picture Corporation; Capra had been recruited by the armed services as a propagandist and filmmaker.¹¹¹ In 1941, Luo received an invitation to attend a U.S. conference of engineers working in cinema, and under this cover he transported numerous reels

¹¹⁰ On the "Why We Fight" series, see: Thomas William Bohn, *An Historical and Descriptive Analysis of the "Why We Fight" Series, With a New Introduction* (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Tevis Hutchinson, *In Times of War: A Description and Analysis of the "Why We Fight" Series Made by Frank Capra for the U.S. War Department During World War Two* (M.A. thesis) (University of New Orleans, 1982); Charles Burgess Ewing, *An Analysis of Frank Capra's War Rhetoric in the "Why We Fight" Films* (Ph.D. dissertation) (Washington State University, 1983). For a general history of World War Two films, including documentaries, see: Roger Manvell, *Films and the Second World War* (New York: Delta, 1974).

¹¹¹ See: Jiang Sishen and Luo Zhengsheng, "Luo Jingyu," in Zhongguo dianying jia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu, ed., *Zhongguo dianying jia liezhuan, di er ji* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1982), 216-222; Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971); Charles J. Maland, *Frank Capra* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980). Luo joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1928, and thereafter served as a propagandist for the National Revolutionary Army and editor before joining the Military Affairs Committee-built China Motion Picture Corporation in Wuhan in 1937.

concerning China's war effort overseas. Although Luo is not mentioned in English-language discussions of the "Why We Fight" series, recent Chinese-language histories are adamant that he assisted in the production and editing for *The Battle of China*.¹¹² Subsequent histories have also suggested that Luo, under the influence of Zhou Enlai, was effective in using the opportunity to portray Jiang Jieshi's Chongqing government in a negative light.¹¹³ Contemporary observations differed:

The Battle of China was regarded as the least satisfactory of this series. Though notable for its record of the visual vastness of the Chinese land and its people, it was forced to omit any reference to the Communist armies, and to balance accounts it omitted more than passing references to Chiang Kai-shek [Jiang Jieshi]. The resulting incomplete assessment of the total Chinese situation was also judged to be impolitic: the film was not seen by the public and was ultimately withdrawn from circulation to the armed forces. Because of such policy difficulties, the film was more than a year and a half in the making, and gives an indication of the kind of problems faced by the Army film-makers during the last phases of the war.¹¹⁴

With no access to alternative information channels, Chongqing's international propaganda aims remained beholden to the interests and agendas of other wartime powers.

¹¹² See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 59. In an undated Chinese-language poster for the film, Luo is credited with the producer's role while Capra is misleadingly described as the film's "editor." *The Battle of China* itself was billed as "the first Sino-American cinematic co-production." It also included footage smuggled out Nanjing. See: Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 112.

¹¹³ See: Jiang Sishen and Luo Zhengsheng, "Luo Jingyu," 219; Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 59; Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (second edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 161.

¹¹⁴ Richard Griffith, "The Use of Films by the U.S. Armed Services," in Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film: The Use of the Film Medium to Interpret Creatively and in Social Terms the Life of the People as it Exists in Reality* (third edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 351. To this day, studies of the effects of documentary films on attitudes among U.S. military trainees remain some of the most thorough English-language studies available on the strengths and limitations of "propaganda" as an opinion-shaping tool. See, for example: Carl Hovland, *Experiments on Mass Communication* (1949); Bureau of Social Science Research, Inc., *Evaluation of the Film "The Road to the Wall"* (preliminary report submitted to: Directorate for Armed Forces Information & Education, Department of Defense) (1962); Barry E. Cardwell, LTC, ADA, *Film and Motivation—The "Why We Fight" Series* (unclassified) (Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 1991).

Although Jiang Jieshi had the support of Roosevelt and the State Department, such relations existed only within the context of the war against Japan, with the Chongqing government encouraged to make “more active efforts to measure up to the full responsibilities of a major power.”¹¹⁵ From the perspective of Chinese filmmakers in both parties, however, much of the aid that was forthcoming from U.S sources during the wartime period remained inadequate to larger political goals.

Films in the “Why We Fight” series were originally intended to convince military trainees and the U.S. public to rejection isolationism in favor of an interventionist role in foreign affairs. Like wartime propaganda films worldwide, they were powerfully influenced by Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*, and represented a dramatic shift in military filmmaking from the training reels to ambitious documentary projects intended to reshape audience opinions on the nature of war of war itself.¹¹⁶ Whereas “intelligence” required secrecy, “information,” “education,” “propaganda,” and “publicity” aimed at mobilizing the widest possible audience. Chongqing filmmakers, in cooperation with the state, military, and secret service, were bound by this model even if they did not fully support it. Yet other constraints—most notably the commercial exhibition model and lack of adequate resources—remained. Despite international cooperation with other government agencies and infusions of overseas assistance, the Chongqing industry never resembled the kind of centralized cultural bureaucracy deemed capable of overcoming these challenges. In relation to its allies and competitors alike, the Nationalist Party

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*, 83. See also: Maochun Yu, *OSS in China: Prelude to Cold War*, 274-278.

¹¹⁶ See: Frank Capra, *The Name Above the Title: An Autobiography*, 328-329.

remained just strong enough to establish itself as the focus of world attention, yet unable to dictate the terms of how it would be represented.

Red Capital: Film Production and the “Yan’an Way”

Like the Nationalist Party in Chongqing, the Communist Party made courtship of the international media a priority during the war years. That the impression created by foreign journalists’ visits to the “red capital” of Yan’an was largely positive when compared with images of Chongqing was later cited by Vice Minister of Information Hollington Tong as a crucial factor in the breakdown of the relationship between Jiang Jieshi’s government and Washington.¹¹⁷ Yet while the press offensive began in 1944, Communist leaders had courted foreign filmmakers and photojournalists much earlier. These individuals provided an important “window” on the realities of the base areas, and were consequently perceived by the party center as potential conduits for future international support. Additionally, the Yan’an Film Corps was established in 1937 as the party’s first independent institution for producing cinematic propaganda at home. While initial efforts to attract filmmakers from Shanghai via Wuhan proved numerically underwhelming, those who did make the journey became intermediaries between the base area leadership, and a new group of party-trained cultural workers who collectively represented one of the Communists’ most significant human gains in the area of wartime propaganda.

¹¹⁷ See: Hollington K. Tong, *China and the World Press* (1948).

Communist Party Cultural Policy: An Overview

Generally speaking, the dominant Communist Party cultural policies of the 1920s and early 1930s tended toward a kind of “gradualist iconoclasm,” according to which China’s cultural heritage was viewed as something backward to be critically evaluated and replaced over time.¹¹⁸ This phenomenon cannot be limited solely to Communist theorists and writers. Even commercial ventures such as the *Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo jindai wenxue daxi*), a series begun in 1935, reveal a profound fascination with the possibilities for social and political change inherent in a purely “literary” canon based upon the symbolic authority of Western norms.¹¹⁹ Early members of literary circles like the Creation Society, and Sun Society seem to have identified literature as a weapon for revolution or revolutionary propaganda from the 1920s onward.¹²⁰ In this respect, instrumental theories of cultural production were not the sole domain of Leninist organizations. They did, however, take a particular cast when combined with other revolutionary ideologies focused on China’s rural society. Although Mao Zedong was by no means the party’s leading cultural theorist during this period, his 1927 “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” argued that the function of Party-disseminated propaganda should be to “indicate the motions” that would lead peasants toward “cast[ing] the idols” of religion and custom aside “with

¹¹⁸ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 16-17.

¹¹⁹ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 214-238.

¹²⁰ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution, 1927-1949,” in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 197-199. The aphorism concerning literature as a weapon of revolutionary propaganda is attributed to Upton Sinclair.

their own hands.”¹²¹ While such formulations were not always heeded, they point toward a larger trend of emphasizing propaganda and political work as an important function of Red Army and Communist Party activity. In other words, they indicate the existence of a postulated connection between culture, popular consciousness, and social change.

Nor were such messages reserved strictly for peasants. In urban centers like Shanghai, the Party “had embarked upon a general program in late 1929 and early 1930 to create ... a series of cultural ‘front organizations’ in order to attract sympathetic fellow travelers like Lu Hsun [Lu Xun].”¹²² Simultaneously, at the December 1929 Gutian Conference Mao, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping successfully argued for the establishment of party units within the Red Army organization, one objective of which was to increase the spread of pro-communist messages—employing drama, songs, and visual materials—among soldiers and peasants alike.¹²³ These changes mirrored an emerging orientation toward “the arts” (*wenyi*) in general, one that stressed the importance of “Red Army propaganda work” (*Hong jun xuanchuan gongzuo*) as an important component of all artistic activity.¹²⁴ In short, both became modes through which the Party sought to build support among popular segments of society, while simultaneously pointing away from practices identified with the feudal or superstitious past—a domain that clearly included much present village culture and custom in areas where party-supported peasant unions remained weak.

¹²¹ Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (March 1927), *Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Volume I* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 46.

¹²² Leo Ou-Fan Lee, “Literary Trends: The Road to Revolution, 1927-1949,” 203.

¹²³ Ellen R. Judd, “Revolutionary Drama and Song in the Jiangxi Soviet,” *Modern China*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 1983), 130.

¹²⁴ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]), 337. Similarly, the Jiangxi Soviet area’s Arts Bureau (*Wenyi ju*) was directed by the Party-led Committee for Educating the People (*Jiaoyu renmin weiyuanhui*), headed by Qu Qiubai.

By the time of the 1931 founding of the Jiangxi Soviet, however, it is clear that the emphasis placed on cultural change by various groups within the party did not preclude use of local artistic forms. As educators in “literacy, modern scientific knowledge, and loyalty to the CCP,” artists and performers trained by the Ruijin government employed both European and indigenous cultural models (e.g. Chu theater) when engaging in propaganda activities.¹²⁵ One reason for the jarring combination, which found provisional support from both Mao and Minister of Education Qu Qiubai, was that party cultural planners feared alienating members of local society with radical attacks on treasured or simply familiar practices.¹²⁶ Another was the absence of a single orthodoxy within the party’s Soviet area organization, whose cultural institutions became increasingly populated by Wang Ming-led Internationalists (linked closely with the Soviet Union), activists from the cities, and revolutionary students.¹²⁷

Not until after the establishment of a post-Long March Yan’an government, and outbreak of total war with Japan, did this relatively varied approach to the problem of cultural change gain some measure of resolution from the perspective of Mao and his supporters.¹²⁸ A considerable body of scholarship has already testified to the human costs of various purges carried out under the rubric of artistic rectification (*zhengfeng*) during the two-year period following Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature

¹²⁵ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 23-30.

¹²⁶ On Jiangxi leaders’ agreement “that the emphasis should be placed on traditional forms such as [Chu] drama and other performing arts already familiar to and welcomed by the people,” see: Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in China: The Influence of Ch’ü Ch’iu-pai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 205.

¹²⁷ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 23.

¹²⁸ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 139.

and the Arts.”¹²⁹ Yet the emergence of cultural policies that placed an agenda of Party “self-protection” in tension with ideological diversity can be traced back at least as early as June 1938, with the drafting of the party’s “Propaganda Outline Issued by the Central Committee on the Seventeenth Anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party.” While indicating that the party’s aims should include establishing “a democratic republic based on national independence, democratic liberty, and the people’s welfare,” and “stand[ing] firm in the anti-Japanese united front,” Central Committee writers also concluded that the party should “steadfastly maintain [its] political and organizational independence, expand and reinforce its forces, [and] threefold, a hundredfold, greatly strengthen Marxist-Leninist training within.”¹³⁰

The distinction drawn between “national” and “party” independence draws attention not only to competition between the Communist and Nationalist organizations for dominance within the united front arrangement, but also a rebuttal to the Communists’ own Internationalist faction, which supported moving the center of anti-Japanese activity to the urban stronghold of Wuhan. According to David Holm, this “competition with Wuhan as a revolutionary center” forced the Yan’an-based Communist organization to adopt a propaganda strategy that would appeal to the widest possible audience and yet “preserve the operational independence of the CCP ... in special areas

¹²⁹ See, for example: Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Conference on Literature and Art”: A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980).

¹³⁰ “Propaganda Outline Issue by the CC [CCP] on the Seventeenth Anniversary of the CCP” (June 24, 1938), in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (New York: Atheneum [originally published by Harvard University Press], 1966), 258-260. As the editors observe, the language of this document “bears a close and hardly unintentional resemblance to Sun Yat-Sen’s Three People’s Principles i.e. Nationalism, Democracy (or People’s Rights), and People’s Livelihood.” See also: “Commentary L. Propaganda in the United Front Period.”

under separate CCP jurisdiction.”¹³¹ Propaganda, then, of which the “Propaganda Outline” itself serves as an example, was thus understood as a means toward two important ends—it attracted popular support by calling attention to the democratic aspects of an incipient Communist-led republic, and it worked toward maintaining an independent Yan’an government by solidifying the mutually-beneficial relationship between party and people in that region.

This latter point is developed at greater length in Mao’s 1940 “On the New Democracy,” a description of the past, present, and future of Chinese society that accorded considerable agency to the Communist Party as a catalyst of historical change. While the culture of the new democracy was, Mao wrote, “the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal culture of the masses . . . it can only be led by the cultural thought of the proletariat, i.e. Communist thought.”¹³² Reversing this dictum, culture becomes one of several areas of social life in which the Party sought to establish its legitimacy. What culture and propaganda share in common, then, is that they refer to areas of human activity—specifically, cultural or artistic production (propaganda) and thought—that are seen as crucial loci of democratic, or revolutionary, change. This conception coexisted with a clear bent, present in the writings of Mao and others, for framing change in terms of establishing and preserving the Communist Party’s role as a leading historical force.

Indeed, and as becomes evident both in “On the New Democracy” and other writings produced by Yan’an-based leaders during the wartime period, party goals included survival, a successful resolution to the War of Resistance, *and* the establishment

¹³¹ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 49-50.

¹³² Mao Zedong, “On the New Democracy” [extract] (January 19, 1940), in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (New York: Atheneum [originally published by Harvard University Press], 1966), 272.

of a broad coalition, or national “new democracy,” that would bring the Communists as close to as many other sectors of Chinese society as possible. While the rationale for this kind of rapprochement varied, policies related to culture highlighted the role that intellectuals would play in “spreading revolutionary thought,” as “culture ... paves the way for [revolution].”¹³³ Prior to Mao’s well-studied 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and the Arts,” whose main significance was to “provide intellectuals with an appropriate mentality for political and artistic engagement,” Party leaders such as Chen Yun identified intellectuals, and cultural work, as the “necessary bridge between the Party and the masses.”¹³⁴

Early Images of Yan’an

Despite Communist Party attempts to organize among Shanghai-based filmmakers, the earliest cinematic images of Yan’an were those produced for audiences outside of China. Acting on orders from Pan Hannian, underground agent Yu Ling contacted the cinematographer Zhou Daming during early 1937.¹³⁵ Would Zhou be interested in traveling to northern Shaanxi? Would he consider filming Eighth Route Army life, along with reenacted scenes from the Long March? Zhou was interested, but unwilling to accept the assignment until filming had been completed for *Wang Laowu*, a project directed by fellow “left-wing” filmmaker Cai Chusheng. War between China and Japan broke out in July. Zhou never reached Shaanxi.

¹³³ Mao Zedong, “On the New Democracy” [extract], 274.

¹³⁴ David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 107; Chen Yun, “How to be a Communist Party Member” (May 30, 1939), in Conrad Brandt, Benjamin Schwartz, and John K. Fairbank, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (New York: Atheneum [originally published by Harvard University Press], 1966), 325.

¹³⁵ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 55.

Such decisions were hardly exceptional. During the first year of the war Wuhan, not Yan'an, was clearly the most popular destination for filmmakers fleeing Japanese invasion along the coast.¹³⁶ Most joined the All-China Film Circles Wartime Resistance Association before relocating to either Chongqing or Hong Kong; some later returned to Shanghai. Accessibility also played a role in keeping filmmakers from the Communist-controlled territories, should they have desired to make the journey. Yan'an remained remote, often blockaded by combinations of Japanese and Nationalist forces. Moreover, the Communist Party initially did little recruiting beyond the united front offices and organizations that already existed in Wuhan by early 1938. Such activities were principally overseen by Zhou Enlai, who represented Communist forces as a member of the Nationalist-dominated Military Affairs Committee Political Department.¹³⁷ This department, in turn, oversaw united front propaganda work, and thus served as the principal node for contact between the Wuhan arts administrations—including those related to film—and high-ranking political representatives for the Nationalists and Communists alike.¹³⁸ Finally, it seems that Yan'an was a hardly a desirable or even practical destination for Shanghai refugees, and the vast majority of China's filmmakers were, until mid-1937, based in Shanghai. As Wuhan succumbed to Japanese military forces during late September 1938, most filmmakers followed the Nationalist government west.

¹³⁶ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 15; Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 21-23.

¹³⁷ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 17-19.

¹³⁸ As Stephen MacKinnon argues, such relative pluralism was made possible by the fact that Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist forces did not even control the city during this period. See: Stephen MacKinnon, "The Tragedy of Wuhan, 1938," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1996 Special Issue: War in Modern China), 934.

American journalist Edgar Snow, on the other hand, had already reached the Shaan-Gan-Ning Soviet region during July 1936, and thus shot some of the first footage of the Red Army ever shown to the world. These 16mm images—which included infantry and cavalry exercises, “worker and peasant” cultural performances, speeches by Mao Zedong and Zhu De, and Zhou Enlai on horseback—were first screened at Yanjing University on 5 February 1937, following Snow’s return to Beijing.¹³⁹ According to a university publication released shortly thereafter, the audience included members of the university’s Journalistic Study Association (*Xinwen xuehui*), students from nearby Qinghua University, and the Communist Party-affiliated Shanghai actress Chen Bo’er.

Snow was not alone in his efforts to document the Eighth Route Army and Soviet area life, although he was the first reporter to do so in moving pictures. Yet while a tendency to propagate the Party’s official history and hagiography was evident even in written works such as *Red Star over China*, his filmmaking efforts point toward a larger context of cinematic “leftism” which emerged during the late 1930s. According to Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, this cultural trend was defined by small-scale organizations such as the New York-based Film and Photo League (originally the Workers’ Film and Photo League), whose members often shared communist sympathies, enthusiasm for “alternative” cinema, a dislike of Hollywood, and a commitment to increasing public awareness of poverty and racism.¹⁴⁰ Among active filmmakers associated with these leftist circles, several also supported the Spanish Republican cause after 1936 by documenting the horrors of war in that country, later traveling to Wuhan in

¹³⁹ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (second edition) (New York: McGraw Hill, 2003), 304.

order to cover war between China and Japan.¹⁴¹ Of these, perhaps the most well-known was Joris Ivens, whose first documentary produced in the U.S. was *Spanish Earth*, written and narrated by Ernest Hemmingway. Although he never reached Yan'an, Ivens did travel to China to film a subsequent documentary, *The 400 Million* (1938), which “concentrated on the country’s struggle against the Japanese invasion and on its vast landscapes.”¹⁴² Hemmingway would soon begin gathering intelligence in Chongqing for the U.S. Treasury on behalf of Hans Morgenthau.¹⁴³

Soon after Snow’s screenings the filmmaker and former ballet dancer Harry Dunham also traveled to Yan’an, where he filmed additional materials as part of a documentary on Japan’s invasion of China, later released as *China Strikes Back* (1937). Like Snow, Dunham’s primary focus was the Red Army, as well as Communist Party leaders like Mao. Indeed, his film represented not only the first record of events in Yan’an released for global audiences, but also an introduction to the hitherto-unknown figure of Mao Zedong.¹⁴⁴ Dunham’s camera was primarily drawn to images that seemed representative of the close relationship between Red Army soldiers and Soviet area villagers, or which reflected the communal, disciplined nature of Yan’an life.¹⁴⁵ Dunham also highlighted Mao’s faith that peasants, rather than urban workers, provided the greatest hope for China’s future.¹⁴⁶ Once received in the United States, this footage was spliced together with other images of the Sino-Japanese war by a Frontier Films editorial

¹⁴¹ See: Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*, 97-110 (Chapter Seven, “Romantic Hankou: The International Dimension”).

¹⁴² Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (second edition), 308.

¹⁴³ See: Peter Moreira, *Hemmingway on the China Front: His WWII Spy Mission with Martha Gellhorn* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006).

¹⁴⁴ The film was shown over 400 times in London alone. See: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 100.

¹⁴⁵ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 56.

¹⁴⁶ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilu yingpian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 107.

“collective” which included Jay Leyda and Sidney Meyers, two leftist filmmakers with experience producing documentaries of their own; Frontier itself had been formed from the Film and Photo League’s ashes, and had already proclaimed its anti-Franco position by releasing *Heart of Spain* in 1937.¹⁴⁷ *China Strikes Back* served as a similar document of Japan’s “criminal” wartime behavior and China’s “heroic” resistance effort, with Dunham’s Red Army images presented as proof of the latter’s existence at a time when much about Yan’an was still obscured by the Nationalist media blockade.¹⁴⁸ The final release incorporated newsreel footage depicting the united front, and was sold abroad in several countries.

Such films can be understood as attempts both to frame the Communist base areas as one possible vision of “new China,” and to establish the possibility of China’s victory in the Sino-Japanese war for other wartime audiences abroad. Supposedly inspired by a viewing of *China Strikes Back* while in the Soviet Union, Russian filmmaker Roman Karmen seems to have focused on both themes, highlighting the damage done to Chinese society by Japan’s invasion, and aspects of life in Yan’an that seemed to represent some hope for China’s future.¹⁴⁹ Karmen also filmed a “typical” day for Mao Zedong—his images of Mao reading, greeting peasants, and giving lectures represented some of the first glimpses of the elusive leader ever shown to abroad. With footage of wartime conditions in eleven provinces, the two documentary projects completed following

¹⁴⁷ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 80. See also: Russell Campbell, *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States, 1930-1942* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁸ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 366. For a first-person account of the making of the film, see: Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 150-151.

¹⁴⁹ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 369; Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 80. Karmen had also documented the Spanish Civil War prior to turning his attention toward China’s war effort; his *Spain* was ultimately released in 1939.

Karmen's travels—*China at War* and *In China*, the latter released in 1941—were perhaps less explicitly pro-communist than they were pro-Chinese. Nonetheless, his diaries and footage added to a growing body of material representing the “red capital” of Yan’an in terms of a new way of life.

Such examples illustrate the relative ease with which United States “leftist” and even Soviet filmmakers tended to frame China in terms of concerns related to the expansion of German, Italian, and Japanese influence in nations throughout the world. Both Germany and Italy supported Franco's coup, while by the late 1930s Japan had clearly emerged as the dominant foreign force on the Chinese mainland. Yet early journalistic access to Yan’an was not only restricted to representatives of the Euro-American news media. Hong Kong's Young Photojournalists Group (*Qingnian sheying tuan*) established a working relationship with Eighth Route Army representatives, producing the first full-length documentary devoted exclusively to life in Yan’an—*On the Northwestern Front* (1938).¹⁵⁰ Similar to other titles produced by Western journalists, this film highlighted the new educational facilities, vivid cultural life, military discipline, and charismatic leaders that were becoming increasingly emblematic of the Chinese Communists and their hinterland headquarters. Described as having “sown the seeds of [anti-Japanese] struggle” and a “riddle,” the Yan’an of *On the Northwestern Front* represented one of the few images of the city available to Chinese-speaking audiences during the wartime period.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 370; Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 52. In 1941 the film was renamed *Inside Yan'an (Yan'an neimao)*; *On the Northwestern Front* became the title of a book containing stills and other photographs of Yan'an life.

¹⁵¹ “Dashiji,” Lingxing zazhi she, ed., *1938 zhi Zhongguo dianying: Minguo ershiqi nian dianying nianjian* (Hong Kong: Lingxing zazhi she, 1939), 17-18.

Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo'er, and the Yan'an Film Corps

Under such conditions, early Yan'an-based efforts to establish viable film production facilities must be seen as efforts to regain some measure of control over how, and in whose terms, the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese people would be defined in the wartime media. Evidence for this argument can be found in the history of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Resistance Film Agency (*Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu kangdi dianying she*), officially founded on April 1, 1938. With north Chinese students and intellectuals arriving in Yan'an from 1936 onward, the Party began to establish numerous educational institutions both to cope with the influx of urban youth, and to organize cultural activities that would contribute to the ongoing War of Resistance.¹⁵² The agency was thus one of several Yan'an-based cultural organizations to emerge from this period—its leadership included Yan'an mayor [?] Gao Langting, Soviet advisor “Shakov”, and political advisor Kang Sheng.¹⁵³ Although a government department, supported by the border areas' Committee Party committee, it was not formally a political entity.¹⁵⁴ As stated in an early announcement, issued on March 30, 1938, the society's objectives were to:

use vivid experiences gained in battle to educate our people throughout China, and lead them to take the road of [anti-Japanese] resistance with even greater resolve ... [and] tell people all over the world how the Chinese people (*Zhonghua minzu*) are bravely, and justly, waging this war. Moreover, to win their sympathy and aid through the use of persuasive evidence; at the same time, [we will] express our wish to gain

¹⁵² David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 45-47.

¹⁵³ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 96; Shan Wanli. *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 81.

¹⁵⁴ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 82.

closer contact with the world's film communities [by which we] hope to obtain comprehensive guidance, and assistance.¹⁵⁵

These goals were never realized. Although camera operator Xu Xiaobing—a former employee of the Tianyi and Northwest film studios—was instructed to purchase filmmaking equipment via Hong Kong channels, the mission ended in failure. Additional personnel selected to make the deal never arrived at their destination, and the Resistance Film Agency was dissolved shortly thereafter.

Consequently, the Yan'an Film Corps (*Yan'an dianying tuan*) is frequently cited as the Communist Party's first successful filmmaking enterprise.¹⁵⁶ Its titular leader was Yuan Muzhi, a versatile Shanghai film personality known as the “man with a thousand faces.”¹⁵⁷ According to biographers, Yuan had long nurtured plans of traveling to Yan'an as a filmmaker, but the real catalyst seems to have been the Japanese bombing of Shanghai on August 13, 1937, after which Yuan fled to Wuhan along with close confidantes and former Shanghai co-workers Chen Bo'er and Qian Xiaozhang.¹⁵⁸ Yuan and Chen subsequently starred together in *Eight-Hundred Heroic Soldiers* (*Babai zhanshi* 1938), a film depicting the exploits of a military regiment engaged in pitched battle

¹⁵⁵ “Shaan-Gan-Ning bian qu kangdi dianying she chengli qishi” [Announcement of the Establishment of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Resistance Film Society]. *Xin Zhonghua bao* (Yan'an). March 30, 1938. Quoted in Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 59. An oral history of the career of Xu and his wife, photographer Hou Bo, has recently been published. See: Hou Bo and Xu Xiaobing (Liu Mingyin, ed.), *Dai chibang de sheyingji: Hou Bo, Xu Xiaobing koushu huiyilu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999).

¹⁵⁶ Initially, the organization was known as the Eighth Route Army Political Department Film Corps, and later the United Government (*Lian zheng*) Film Corps. Yet because it was routinely referred to as the “Yan'an Film Corps” (*Yan'an dianying tuan*), the name stuck. See: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 81.

¹⁵⁷ Huo Fengren and Yan Jiushi, “Yuan Muzhi,” in *Zhongguo dianying jia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu*, ed., *Zhongguo dianying jia liezhuan, di yi ji* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1982), 279.

¹⁵⁸ Their passage to Wuhan, and subsequent employment, was apparently facilitated by the dramatist and wartime official Yang Hansheng, also a former “left-wing” cultural activist. See: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 28.

against Japanese forces; it was later dismissed by one critic as “thoroughly news-like,” “overly faithful to reality,” and ultimately uninspiring.¹⁵⁹ At roughly the same time, Yuan and Chen—who had entered the Communist Party in 1937—were contacted by Zhou Enlai, who invited Yuan to join a nascent Yan’an-based film production team.¹⁶⁰ According to Qian, who was working for the China Motion Picture Corporation and close to becoming a Communist Party member at the time, Zhou’s rationale was that “we [the Party] should have our own films.”¹⁶¹ Yuan accepted this proposition, and together with Chen began drawing up concrete plans for a Communist filmmaking organization.

During the summer of 1938 Yuan received additional orders, this time to purchase cameras, developing equipment, and projectors in Hong Kong.¹⁶² Upon his return to Wuhan, two new figures entered the picture. Wu Yinxian, a trusted cinematographer with whom Yuan had also worked in Shanghai, joined the incipient organization as a technical advisor. Second, the Dutch director Joris Ivens, frustrated by Nationalist Party attempts to prevent him from reaching Yan’an, donated his 35mm camera and film stock

¹⁵⁹ Bai Wei, “Jinbu de dianying—‘Ba bai zhuangshi’ yu ‘Gu dao tiantang’ de guangan” [Progressive Films—Impressions of ‘Eight-Hundred Heroic Soldiers’ and ‘Orphan Island Heaven’], reprinted in: Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying, 1937-1945* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 380-386. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 2, 1941).

¹⁶⁰ Accounts vary. At least one scholar maintains that the original idea for a Yan’an documentary project (which would become *Yan’an and the Eighth Route Army*) was first pitched by Yuan Muzhi to Zhou Enlai, who supported the proposal. See: Li Shaobai, *Ying shi que lue: dianying lishi ji lilun xu ji* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2003): 141. Others write that Yuan Muzhi’s proposal for a newsreel concerning Yan’an life resulted in Zhou’s decision to recruit Yuan as one of the principal advisors for a Yan’an-based film production team. See: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 29.

¹⁶¹ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yan’an dianying tuan de fendou licheng” [The Yan’an Film Corps’ Course of Struggle], in Yan’an wenyi congshu’ bian weihui, ed., *Yan’an wenyi congshu, di shisan juan: dianying, sheying juan* (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 3.

¹⁶² Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 341; Qian Xiaozhang, “Zui chu de ganku” [Our Earliest Hardships], in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 29. Ultimately, Yuan was only able to procure one camera, some film stock, and developer.

to the organization's cause via the Eighth Route Army's Hankou office.¹⁶³ Yuan and Wu traveled to Yan'an that fall. Thereafter, they joined the Yan'an Film Corps, established during September 1938 by the Eighth Route Army Political Department (*Ba lu jun zong zhengzhi bu*) in the days following their arrival.

Early Film Corps activities consisted not only of filming documentaries, but also of screening films for Communist Party leaders, other Yan'an residents, and inhabitants of the surrounding countryside. Technical personnel remained scarce. Of the seven original members, only three (Yuan Muzhi, Wu Yinxian, and Xu Xiaobing) had any prior filmmaking experience; they were joined by two high-ranking Eighth Route Army representatives and two students selected from the Resist Japan Military and Political University (*Kang-Ri junzheng daxue*).¹⁶⁴ The Film Corps was eventually merged with the hinterland Eighth Route Army's Film Projection Team (*Dianying fangying dui*) during 1940; both units were managed by the Propaganda Department (*Xuanchuan bu*) thereafter.¹⁶⁵

As testimony to both the difficulty and undesirability of filmmaking in the Shaanxi region, principal camera operator and director Wu Yinxian nearly abandoned the fledgling Film Corps almost immediately after arriving to Yan'an. Only while on the road back to Wuhan did he apparently "awaken" to the fact that the Eighth Route Army

¹⁶³ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 341.

¹⁶⁴ Yuan Muzhi, "Guanyu jiefang qu de dianying gongzuo" [Regarding Film Work in the Liberated Areas], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 1. Originally published in *Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui jinian wenji* (n.p.: Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui xuanchuan chu bianji, 1950); Wu Yinxian, "Qinqie de huiyi" [A Pleasant Recollection], in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 7. Originally published in *Dazhong dianying*, July 1958; Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 97. Conventional accounts, apparently excluding Tan Zheng, state that the Yan'an Film Corps included only six individuals.

¹⁶⁵ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 144.

and Communist Party needed him; he may well have been aided in this awakening by the fact that by this point Wuhan was clearly on the brink of being captured by Japanese military forces.¹⁶⁶ Xu Xiaobing joined the Eighth Route Army only after the Northwest Film Studio, where he was employed as an assistant cinematographer, relocated to Chengdu.¹⁶⁷ And Qian Xiaozhang, who had followed Yuan Muzhi and Chen Bo'er to Wuhan following the outbreak of war in Shanghai, worked in studios in Chongqing and Hong Kong before finally arriving in Yan'an during 1941.¹⁶⁸ Although a Communist Party member since 1938, Qian spent almost a year engaged in mandatory political study before finally being granted Film Corps membership; he would eventually become the organization's Party secretary.

Nonetheless, approximately ten new members had joined by 1940, while the establishment of regular training classes added twenty to thirty more recruits by 1944.¹⁶⁹ Students were trained using the same two cameras employed by Film Corps personnel, which they referred to (perhaps with a hint of sarcasm) as the “two great officials” (*liang da gongchen*), a testimony to the fastidious care with which this rare equipment was treated by its operators.¹⁷⁰ While specialization would become the norm in future years, those trained during this experimental period received instruction in subjects ranging from photography to production to film developing. Their experiences would later be distilled into several textbooks by Wu Yinxian, who oversaw the entirety of the training

¹⁶⁶ Wu Yinxian, “Qinqie de huiyi” [A Pleasant Recollection]. Quoted in Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 348.

¹⁶⁷ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 351.

¹⁶⁸ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 350.

¹⁶⁹ Wu Yinxian, “Qinqie de huiyi” [A Pleasant Recollection], 8.

¹⁷⁰ Lu Ming, “Yan'an shiqi de dianying jiaoyu” [Film Education during the Yan'an Period], cited in Fang Fang. *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 109. Originally appeared in Zhongyang xinwen jilu dianying zhipianchang, ed., *Women de zuji* (n.p., n.d.).

process.¹⁷¹ Many of the students themselves, whose numbers continued to increase until the Party's transfer of film and other personnel to Northeast China in mid-1946, would go on to occupy positions of authority in the Northeast, August Eighth, and Central News studios, which after 1949 composed the initial backbone of the Communist Party-dominated studio system.¹⁷²

Due to enemy troop movement and difficulties obtaining additional film stock, Film Corps productions shrank dramatically in number from 1943 until the gradual collapse of Japanese opposition to Allied forces beginning in 1945.¹⁷³ With the war declared over, and increasing amounts of territory, resources, and materiel falling into Communist hands, the Yan'an Film Corps was disbanded and more ambitious plans for a Yan'an Film Studio announced during August 1946.¹⁷⁴

Documentary Filmmaking and Wartime Mobilization

The first shot of *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* was taken from atop the Yellow Emperor Tombs (*Huang di ling*) region in Shaanxi province. During January 1939, following several months of filming in the border regions, the Film Corps dispatched two camera teams to Eighth Route Army-occupied regions near the front lines of north China.¹⁷⁵ Yuan Muzhi acted as director and principal liaison with the Party center, while Wu Yinxian, Xu Xiaobing, and latecomer Wu Benli divided camera

¹⁷¹ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 109-110.

¹⁷² Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 70.

¹⁷³ Qian Xiaozhang, "Zui chu de ganku" [Our Earliest Hardships], in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 31.

¹⁷⁴ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998), 139.

¹⁷⁵ Yuan Muzhi, "Guanyu jiefang qu de dianying gongzuo" [Regarding Film Work in the Liberated Areas], 1. Principal destinations included Pingxi [western region of *Pingyuan genju di*?] and mountainous Taihang.

duties.¹⁷⁶ In addition to working on this large-scale documentary project, the teams produced several short pieces to be used as archival materials for future documentaries and newsreels.¹⁷⁷ Shooting was essentially completed by early 1940, although some team members would return to Yan'an as late as 1941.

In general, the wartime period gave rise to an increased emphasis on producing newsreels and documentaries as a means of mobilizing popular energies and generating consent.¹⁷⁸ Yan'an was no different. During 1940 and 1941, Yuan Muzhi joined filmmakers like Zheng Junli and Xu Suling in arguing for documentary cinema as the most politically-effective form of cinema, one whose use of “truth and reality” (*zhenshi xianshi*) for political purposes would serve to encourage the war effort.¹⁷⁹ This could be accomplished, Yuan argued, by depicting “the greatness of the Chinese people amidst [wartime] hardships.” In general, film should serve as a “propaganda weapon,” one that “closely followed the political situation” by offering a “topical” distillation of events. In short, Yuan was proposing that documentary filmmakers offer a selective window on reality that supported a particular political climate or regime. “Politics,” then, referred to wartime government and its institutions and to prevailing or hegemonic social interests (e.g. the war effort) as whole. While such films might possess a minimum of “artistic”

¹⁷⁶ Xu Xiaobing, “‘Yan’an yu Ba lu jun’ ji qita” [‘Yan’an and the Eighth Route Army’ and Other Matters], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 9. Originally published in *Dazhong dianying*, July 1958.

¹⁷⁷ Shan Wanli. *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Li Shaobai, *Ying shi que lue: dianying lishi ji lilun xu ji*, 133-134.

¹⁷⁹ Yuan Muzhi, “Tan jilu dianying” [A Discussion of Documentary Film], reprinted in Chongqing shi wenhua ju dianying chu, ed., *Kang Ri zhanzheng shiqi de Chongqing dianying, 1937-1945* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1991), 130-131. Originally appeared in *Zhongguo dianying*, vol. 1 no. 2 (February 1, 1941). Yuan was particularly concerned with the evolution of the Soviet documentary as an outgrowth of “bourgeois” European newsreel and documentary filmmaking.

content, their value lay in the ability to depict a particular view of reality that served explicit political needs.

Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army was thus an unambiguously political film, and a propaganda film. According to Xu Xiaobing's recollection, the film was initially composed of two principal themes: students and intellectuals from Nationalist-controlled areas "returning to Yan'an" (*tianxia renxin gui Yan'an*) and learning revolutionary behavior, and scenes featuring the Eighth Route Army's "bravery" and "close relations" with local people.¹⁸⁰ Later footage shot behind enemy lines included images of battles between heroic "guerillas" (*youji dui*) and "Japanese invaders" (*Ri kou*), although much of it seems to have been staged in guerilla camps adjacent to the front.¹⁸¹ Camera operator Wu Yinxian also filmed several short news segments during this process, including images of the Jin-Cha-Ji military region, General Nie Rongzhen, the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, and life behind enemy lines.¹⁸²

Indeed, the filmmakers seem to have adhered to Zhou Enlai's dictum (also related by Xu) that wartime Yan'an film projects should "reflect construction in the liberated areas and conditions of the War of Resistance."¹⁸³ Yet their method of transforming this imperative into moving image required selecting particular images of Communist-controlled areas and Eighth Route Army heroics that would win support for both. Thus,

¹⁸⁰ Xu Xiaobing, "'Yan'an yu Ba lu jun' ji qita" ['Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army' and Other Matters], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 9. Originally appeared in *Dazhong dianying*, July 1958.

¹⁸¹ Xu Xiaobing, "'Yan'an yu Ba lu jun' ji qita" ['Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army' and Other Matters], 10-11; Wu Benli, "Sui Zhu zong siling hui Yan'an" [Following Commander Zhu Back to Yan'an], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 12. Originally appeared in *Dazhong dianying*, July 1961.

¹⁸² Li Shaobai, *Ying shi que lue: dianying lishi ji lilun xu ji*, 142.

¹⁸³ Hou Bo and Xu Xiaobing (Liu Mingyin, ed.), *Dai chibang de sheyingji: Hou Bo, Xu Xiaobing koushu huiyilu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999). Quoted in Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 96.

Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army gradually came to include images of Mao and other leaders of the Party center; Zhu De and other high-ranking generals of the Eighth Route Army; military campaigns carried out in Shanxi province between 1939 and 1940; wartime production drives and the provision of supplies to the front lines; rural militias and youth corps; rural politics and elections; student life in the liberated areas; the arrival of foreign officials and reporters to Yan'an; political, economic, and cultural construction projects in the border regions and base areas. In short, it represented a kind of compilation or record that represented Eighth Route Army activities as beneficial, and life in the Communist Party-controlled regions as desirable—a “model of democratic China.”¹⁸⁴

Such goals extended to depictions of political and military leaders themselves, sometimes with unintended results. According to Xu, repeated efforts to make Deng Xiaoping appear “natural” and approachable before the camera only succeeded in irritating Deng, who had to be pacified by Liu Bocheng before shooting could continue.¹⁸⁵ Mao Zedong was often shot from below, in order to make him appear more imposing. Zhou Enlai went to great lengths to blend into the crowd in group shots. Zhu De would willingly pose for the camera when asked; one frame depicting Zhu astride a horse captured from the Japanese in battle later appeared on a postage stamp. Filmmakers did debate whether documentary images should be “captured” (*zhuapai*) or “staged” (*baipai*), yet this debate did not seem to undermine the overall premise that

¹⁸⁴ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 87.

¹⁸⁵ “Koushu lishi: jilu Zhongguo geming—Xu Xiaobing fangtan lu” [Oral History: Documenting the Chinese Revolution—Transcript of an Interview with Xu Xiaobing], in Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 113.

staged images nonetheless served to effectively “document” or “record” (*jilu*) the realities of wartime life.¹⁸⁶

The final version of Yuan Muzhi’s outline for the film was thus divided into four sections concerning the wartime flight of students to Yan’an, various aspects of Yan’an society, the “fighting life” of the Eighth Route Army, and the experiences of students now enrolled in Yan’an’s numerous schools.¹⁸⁷ Numerous “subplots,” such as that concerning a young mother who had fled to Yan’an in search of her husband, furnished this structure with the details of individual experience. The four-part schema was perhaps derived in part from a similar technique employed by a “living news play” (*huobao ju*) in which Yuan regularly performed alongside Chen Bo’er, entitled *Yan’an Life in Three Acts* (*Yan’an shenghuo san bu qu*).¹⁸⁸ Like the play, Yuan hoped that *Yan’an and the Eighth Route Army* would include live sound—overdubbed during post-production—and Chinese, rather than Soviet, compositions as accompaniment.¹⁸⁹

As Yan’an itself still lacked film production facilities, Yuan Muzhi and composer Xian Xinghai traveled to the Soviet Union in 1940 to develop and edit the gathered footage.¹⁹⁰ Xian, a prolific composer, had written a score for the film.¹⁹¹ Chronically ill, his participation in the endeavor was partly an attempt to seek medical treatment.

Traveling with falsified identification papers to escape Nationalist scrutiny, Yuan and

¹⁸⁶ “Koushu lishi: jilu Zhongguo geming—Xu Xiaobing fangtan lu” [Oral History: Documenting the Chinese Revolution—Transcript of an Interview with Xu Xiaobing], 116.

¹⁸⁷ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 61.

¹⁸⁸ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 62.

¹⁸⁹ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 85.

¹⁹⁰ Zhong Dafeng, “Xin Zhongguo dianying gongye: chu chuang shexiang jiqi shishi” [New China’s Film Industry: Preliminary Plans and Their Implementation], in Lu Hongshi, ed., *Zhongguo dianying: miaoshu yu chanshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002), 272; Wu Benli, “Sui Zhu zong siling hui Yan’an” [Following Commander Zhu Back to Yan’an], 15.

¹⁹¹ Huo Fengren, “Xian Xinghai,” in Zhongguo dianying jia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu, ed., *Zhongguo dianying jia liezhuan, di er ji*, 210-211.

Xian arrived in Moscow during November 1940. They were greeted by representatives of the Third International, and placed in contact with the Moscow Film Studio.¹⁹²

However, the advance of German armies on Moscow resulted in the studio being abandoned sometime following June 22, 1941, and during the ensuing chaos Yuan's negatives were apparently lost, never to be recovered. While several stills apparently taken from the reels remain—an indication that at least some portion of these were processed in Moscow—*Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* was never completed.¹⁹³

According to several friends, Yuan's experiences abroad were a cause of considerable ambivalence for the actor-director. On one hand, he served as an assistant director and editor under Eisenstein while war between Germany and the Soviet Union erased any hope of returning to China during the early 1940s.¹⁹⁴ However, Yuan also confided that he was treated poorly while in Moscow, and conditions that would have enabled him to finish postproduction on *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* never materialized.¹⁹⁵ He returned to China in 1946, following Soviet Red Army forces; Xian Xinghai had died during the previous year. In lieu of a completed film, Yuan brought with him only a volume of the Soviet publication *The Party Discusses Cinema (Dang lun dianying)*.

¹⁹² Shan Wanli. *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 86.

¹⁹³ According to film scholar Li Shaobai, some parts of the film were nonetheless preserved, and appeared in post-1949 Sino-Soviet joint documentary productions such as *Victory of the Chinese People (Zhongguo renmin de shengli)* and *Liberated China (Jiefang le de Zhongguo)*. See: Li Shaobai. *Ying shi que lie: dianying lishi ji lilun xu ji*, 141. A recent exhibition at the 1997 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, entitled “Anti-Japan War of China” (part of the larger program section “Imperial Japan at the Movies”), has gathered much of the remaining 35mm footage shot by Wu Yinxian, as well as scenes of Yan'an shot in 1938 by the Young Photojournalists Group.

¹⁹⁴ During this period Yuan directed a commemorative documentary concerning the Kazakh (*Hasake*) poet 江布尔, which was apparently released in Moscow during his stay. See: Shan Wanli. *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 87-88.

¹⁹⁵ Zhong Dafeng, “Xin Zhongguo dianying gongye: chu chuang shexiang jiqi shishi” [New China's Film Industry: Preliminary Plans and Their Implementation], 273.

Yet if *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* remained unfinished, the process of its creation gave rise to a new, although barely perceptible, trend. Yuan Muzhi entered the Communist Party in 1940, and Wu Yinxian in 1942. The marshalling of cultural forces—in this case, filmmakers—for the purposes of wartime propaganda marked the beginning of increasingly close relations between communities of artistic professionals, and institutions of mass politics and the military.

The Yan'an Film Corps After 1940

Subsequent documentaries produced by the Film Corps were mostly short affairs depicting single events. Titles like *Second Plenum of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Representative Council (Shaan-Gan-Ning die r jie canyihui)*, *October Revolution Celebration (Shi yue geming jie)*, *Border Region Production Exhibition (Bianqu shengchan zhanlanhui)*, and *Uniting Production with Warfare (Shengchan zhandou jiehe qilai)*, few of which have survived to the present, give a sense of what issues and events seemed “film-worthy” from the perspective of Yan'an filmmakers and propaganda officials. Due to an almost total absence of new film during this period, many of these projects were shot on 16mm stock left over from *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army*. Moreover, they were entirely silent as any attempts to obtain sound recording technology were stymied by Nationalist and Japanese army blockades.¹⁹⁶

After 1940, while Yuan Muzhi was still abroad in the Soviet Union, some efforts were made to establish viable production facilities in the Yan'an base area. As

¹⁹⁶ Yuan Muzhi, “Guanyu jiefang qu de dianying gongzuo” [Concerning Film Work in the Liberated Areas], 1.

membership in the Film Corps increased, personnel began construction of a cave “studio” in the nearby mountains.¹⁹⁷ No automated facilities existed—all exposing and developing was done by hand. With film stock rapidly dwindling, this space was often used for turning film cuttings from other projects into badges (*zhengzhang*), or staging photographic and other visual exhibitions. Most frequently, however, Film Corps members spent their time laboring like everyone else—clearing wasteland, handling grain, chopping firewood, fixing the nearby landing strip, and weeding with local farmers.

Yet filmmaking did not cease altogether. *Uniting Production with Warfare*—or, as it was also known to audiences, *Nanniwan*—was the only “long” documentary ever completed by the Yan’an Film Corps, and the only Yan’an-produced film ever distributed throughout Shaan-Gan-Ning during the Sino-Japanese War.¹⁹⁸ Production appears to have begun during 1942, following Mao’s speeches on cultural policy (later edited and published as “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and the Arts”) and economic self-sufficiency of the same year. Thus, in the manner envisioned by Yuan Muzhi and other political documentary filmmakers years earlier, *Nanniwan* was intended to coincide with Yan’an government calls to increase enthusiasm for local production in the face of Japanese and Nationalist blockades.¹⁹⁹ Taking the waste-clearing activities of a military

¹⁹⁷ Wu Yinxian, “Qinqie de huiyi” [A Pleasant Recollection]. 8.

¹⁹⁸ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yi bu zai Yan’an yansheng de yingpian—yi ‘Nanniwan’ de shezhi” [A Film is Born in Yan’an—Remembering the Shooting and Production of ‘Nanniwan’], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 17. Originally published in *Dianying xin shidai*, no. 1(1983).

¹⁹⁹ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yi bu zai Yan’an yansheng de yingpian—yi ‘Nanniwan’ de shezhi” [A Film is Born in Yan’an—Remembering the Shooting and Production of ‘Nanniwan’], 19. Qian himself does not suggest any connection to previous views concerning political and documentary filmmaking, but there is little to suggest that *Nanniwan* represents a watershed in cinematic history. He does, however, indicate that the

brigade attached to the Eighth Route Army's 120th regiment as their subject matter, filmmakers like Wu Yinxian and Xu Xiaobing documented the conversion of the eponymous "southern flats" into arable farmland capable of sustaining human settlement.²⁰⁰ Color was faint, owing to the lack of appropriate film for making negative prints. The soundtrack was performed live at each screening—a hand-cranked motor, amplifier, and phonograph provided musical accompaniment, while a bullhorn was employed during the voiceover. Through these methods, audiences were encouraged to emulate military and labor heroes who scoffed at hardship, lived communally, and worked hard on behalf of the Yan'an government, now suffering economically from Nationalist blockades.²⁰¹

According to Qian Xiaozhang, who authored the film's voiced-over narrative, *Nanniwan* consisted of "terse" (*jinglian*) scenes of military advance, waste-clearing, herding, autumn harvest, and military drills.²⁰² However, such arduous conditions were intentionally given a "pastoral atmosphere" (*tianyuan qixi*), as the filmmakers endeavored to create a vision of rural and military life that was "pleasing to the mind and eye" (*shang xin yue mu*) and "intertwined image with emotions" (*jing qing jiaochu*). Forceful, melodious musical accompaniment was chosen to complement this flattering portrait of life within one of the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region's least hospitable environments. By linking images of feverish labor with those promising demonstrable

film's original title made direct reference to a document published in the Yan'an *Military and Government* (*Junzheng zazhi*), and was intended as a clear indication of its overall "gist" (*zhuzhi*).

²⁰⁰ See also: T'ien-wei Wu, "The Chinese Communist Movement," in James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine, eds., *China's Bitter Victory: The War With Japan, 1937-1945* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 95.

²⁰¹ Qian Xiaozhang, "Yi bu zai Yan'an yansheng de yingpian—yi 'Nanniwan' de shezhi" [A Film is Born in Yan'an—Remembering the Shooting and Production of 'Nanniwan'], 19.

²⁰² Qian Xiaozhang, "Yi bu zai Yan'an yansheng de yingpian—yi 'Nanniwan' de shezhi" [A Film is Born in Yan'an—Remembering the Shooting and Production of 'Nanniwan'], 20.

future rewards—as implied by the waste-clearers’ “model,” but presumably attainable, status—*Nanniwan* was likely intended to focus audience attention on a thematic cluster linking hard work as necessity with hard work as reward, thus extolling self-sufficiency. The potential benefits of such relationships were made even clearer by scenes depicting brigade members assisting peasants in sowing and harvesting work. In the process, it proposed that Communist Party policies were worth following, and Eighth Route Army personnel worth emulating.²⁰³

Shorter projects, of which the Corps produced several during the 1941-1943 period, also tended to portray Party leaders, Yan’an life, and the Soviet Union in a flattering light. These 16mm “records” (*jilu*) of conferences, meetings, speeches, memorial services, and celebrations were apparently intended as material for future newsreels, although their circulation seems to have been limited or nonexistent until at least 1945.²⁰⁴ In some cases—*Second Plenum of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region Representative Council*, for example—shorter productions served to document speeches and discussion concerning major policy issues, and were screened immediately thereafter for assembled participants as part of a larger program of cultural entertainment.²⁰⁵ According to documentary historian Fang Fang many of the films, particularly those concerning holidays and martial or cultural displays, were influenced by Leni Riefenstahl’s document of the 1936 Berlin-hosted Olympic festival, *Olympia Part One: Festival of the Nations* (1938), commissioned by the International Olympics

²⁰³ See also: Patricia Stranahan, “Labor Heroes of Yan’an,” *Modern China*, vol 9, no. 2 (April 1983), 228-252.

²⁰⁴ Cheng Jihua et al. *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 355.

²⁰⁵ Cheng Jihua et al. *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi (di er juan)*, 356.

Committee.²⁰⁶ Others, like *The Soviet Red Army is an Indomitable Force* (*Suliang Hong jun shi yi zhi bu ke zhansheng de liliang*), were composed of compiled and re-edited Soviet footage, and trumpeted the Soviet Red Army's successful counter-attack on Germany. The last documentary produced by the Yan'an Film Corps, *The Seventh Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* (*Zhongguo gongchan dang di qi ci quanguo daibiao dahui*), filmed during 1945, depicted the confirmation of Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, and most notably Mao Zedong as representing the pinnacle of the Party elite.

The Yan'an Film Corps thus serves to illustrate two of the principal features of Communist Party filmmaking during the War of Resistance period. First, activities recognized as “cultural production” (*wenyi chuangzao, yishu chuangzuo*, and permutations thereof) at the time were clearly subordinated to the larger goal of reinforcing or legitimating Communist Party and Eighth Route Army authority in the hinterland base areas of Shaan-Gan-Ning and north China (e.g. Jin-Cha-Ji, the Taihang Mountains, etc.). Second, this subordinate relationship—albeit justified in terms of wartime exigencies and the prospect of future democracy—certainly did not preclude the production of numerous images clearly differentiated by message or function. Documentaries, newsreels, and on-the-spot “records” of significant events taken for future or archival use transmitted numerous values that had more to do with the exigencies of the time than they did with the nature of “propaganda” film production *per se*. Yet whether depicting Yan'an as a model democracy or mobilizing for economic production and thrift, these documents (many of which were never circulated at the time of their production) nonetheless carried the message that what was being apprehended on

²⁰⁶ Fang Fang. *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 103.

the screen was nonetheless what was necessary for audiences to know about a particular time and place.

Such notions of were communicated using techniques of documentary realism, as indicated by the writings of Yuan Muzhi and other filmmakers and critics who published their ideas during the early 1940s. Yet as Yuan spelled out, what distinguished such images from those of the news (a claim that might strike some as antiquated or naïve) was their open dialogue with the political authorities and social exigencies of the wartime period. This relationship was reduplicated by the increasing controls imposed on film production by competing regimes (Chongqing, Yan'an, Shanghai, etc.), although the parameters of acceptability clearly varied depending on the priorities of each regime vis-à-vis the cinema, and cultural activity in general.

Two additional phenomena relating to “Yan'an cinema” bear mentioning. First, images of Yan'an were by no means produced solely by those filmmakers working closely with the Chinese Communist Party, resulting in images of the hinterland capital whose meaning clearly varied depending upon both filmmaker and audience—an issue discussed only briefly in this section. Such activity can be traced back to the growth of an international, politically-directed news media during the early twentieth century, and was clearly identified by Communist leaders such as Zhou Enlai as not belonging to “us,” by which he appears to have meant the Chinese Communist Party. Despite this fact, many of the norms of cinematic representation which informed Yan'an filmmaking clearly referred both to international “craft” traditions such as montage, newsreel editing, and production methods common to Chinese film studios of the pre-war period. As

whole, then, representations of Yan'an produced both before and during the Sino-Japanese War appear remarkably uniform.

Finally, it is clear that filmmaking in Yan'an met with numerous obstacles, not least of which included the lack of enthusiasm among filmmakers for relocation to one of China's most isolated and economically-deprived wartime capital. More commonly remarked-upon by the few filmmakers who did make the trip was an almost insurmountable lack of even the most basic equipment and production facilities. Following the dissolution of the Yan'an Film Corps in 1946, such difficulties would only haunt the Party's next effort to establish a wartime filmmaking base—the Yan'an Film Studio.

The Yan'an Film Studio

Within pre-1937 screen and dramatic circles, acting out socially critical scripts was seen as one way of participating in politics while enjoying the fruits of an artistic life. Chen Bo'er, a theater devotee-turned-theater actress, became increasingly prominent for her performances of confrontational material, eventually earning the attention and enmity of Nationalist Party authorities.²⁰⁷ After a brief flight to Hong Kong in 1931, where she engaged in student politics while evading professional harassment and possible arrest, Chen returned to Shanghai in 1934. Moving from stage to screen, she appeared in Yao Sufeng's *The Edge of Youth* (*Qingchun xian*, 1934). Thereafter, she became

²⁰⁷ Ding Guocheng, "Chen Bo'er," in *Zhongguo dianying jia xiehui dianying shi yanjiu bu*, *Zhongguo dianying jia lie zhuan, di yi ji*, 133.

professionally linked with Yuan Muzhi when the two starred together in the famous “left-wing” release *Plunder of Peach and Plum* (*Tao li jie* aka *The Graduates’ Fate*, 1934).

Chen Bo’er traveled China for two years as an organizer of anti-Japanese women’s groups and theatrical societies before arriving at Yan’an in 1940 [check against Cheng Jihua account]. As David Holm has documented, the 1940-1942 period was one of gloom, listlessness, and dissent for many Yan’an-based cultural workers, a condition which stemmed from ongoing crises in the Communist Party leadership and economic hardship in the base areas.²⁰⁸ Moreover, indecision concerning the appropriate cultural forms for mass mobilization work meant that opportunities for recent arrivals remained scarce. Chen thus remained largely inactive as an actor until 1942, when her co-writing credit for the Party-feted production of *Comrade, You’re On the Wrong Road!* (*Tongzhi, ni zoucuo le lu!*)—one of the first new dramas to appear following Mao’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on the Arts”—won her the distinction of “labor hero on the cultural and educational battlefield” (*wenjiao zhanxian shang de laodong yingxiong*).²⁰⁹

As documentaries like *Nanniwan* demonstrate, Yan’an tropes of heroism were closely associated with exhortations for audiences to emulate these “heroes” in both behavior and spirit. In this regard *A Border Region Labor Hero* (*Bianqu laodong yingxiong*), the second Yan’an feature film produced with Party approval after 1942, was no exception. Chen Bo’er and former Mingxing Film Studio co-worker Yi Ming developed the script, which described the new life and model behavior of Wu Manyou, a peasant refugee who, upon reaching the Shaanbei region, had become noted for his

²⁰⁸ David Holm. *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 87.

²⁰⁹ See: Wang Yongfang, *Chen Bo’er zhuanlue: mingxing/zhanshi/renmin yishu jia* (Beijing: Zhongguo huaqiao chubanshe, 1994), 179-185.

enthusiasm during the production drives of 1942.²¹⁰ Eventually, its plot would include depictions of land reform, the Red Army's rebirth as the Eighth Route Army, and a history of Yan'an production campaigns.²¹¹ Although produced exactly as any feature, it was described in the *Liberation Daily* as a “documentary film” (*jilu dianying*), attesting to the priority placed upon verifying the essential truth of its component elements.²¹²

With the War of Resistance drawing to a close, and filmmaking equipment more attainable than in the past, *A Border Region Labor Hero* appeared likely to become the first film successfully produced under Yan'an Party auspices. The Yan'an Film Corps having already been dissolved, and the majority of its members dispatched to northeast China, a Yan'an Film Studio was established during August 1946 to provide support for this new endeavor, under the auspices of the Northwest Central Party Bureau (*Zhong gong zhongyang xibei ju*).²¹³ Initially, the “studio” consisted of a handful of former Film Corps members who had not yet departed (e.g. camera operator Cheng Mo and film developer Zhou Congchu) and appointees from Party-affiliated cultural institutions (e.g. set designer Zhong Jingzhi and studio head Cheng Yongqing). These numbers were diminished further when Cheng, Yi Ming, and Chen Bo'er traveled to Shanghai via

²¹⁰ Wang Yongfang, *Chen Bo'er zhuanlue: mingxing/zhanshi/renmin yishu jia*, 185-186. Wu came to Chen's attention when he was honored at a 1944 “Border Region Labor Heroes and Model Workers Conference” (*Bianqu laodong yingxiong ji mofan gongzuozhe dahui*). Wu was selected as the “peasant” hero/model—two other individuals similarly honored included a “worker” model (Zhao Zhankui) and a “soldier” model (Huang Lide). See: Dan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 91.

²¹¹ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 73-74; Li Shaobai, *Ying shi que lue: dianying lishi yu lilun xue*, 211.

²¹² Zhong Jingzhi, “Cong Yan'an dianying zhipianchang dao Xibei dianying gong xue dui” [From the Yan'an Film Studio to the Northwest Work-Study Film Team], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 52. Originally appeared in *Dazhong dianying*, September 1959.

²¹³ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 92. Cheng Jihua and others have written that the official date of establishment was July 1946. See: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]), 375.

Chongqing for the purpose of purchasing additional filmmaking supplies, including a 35mm camera, film, and lighting equipment.²¹⁴

Chen never returned to Yan'an, but instead continued on to northeast China following Party orders. In her absence, the script for *A Border Region Labor Hero* was altered by a “revision committee” (*xiugai weiyuanhui*) which included original co-writer Yi Ming along with former Shanghai actress Jiang Qing, also a member of the newly-established studio’s board of directors (*dongshi hui*).²¹⁵ Following this new script’s approval, shooting commenced during September 1946, using both professional and amateur actors selected from local cultural and Party institutions, including the emerging stage star and future director Ling Zifeng. Owing to an ongoing lack of electricity, the lighting equipment proved useless and filming activity was restricted to days with adequate sun. Uncooperative camera equipment and Nationalist general Hu Zongnan’s military incursions into the Yan’an region—some of which were documented by the camera crew—further conspired to bring progress to a grinding halt by November.²¹⁶

The renewal of open hostilities between Nationalist and Communist forces soon put a halt to the production altogether, as cast and crew members returned to their original work units to prepare for the eventuality of civil war.²¹⁷ Two additional events

²¹⁴ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949*, 139; Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 92.

²¹⁵ Wang Yongfang, *Chen Bo'er zhuanlue: mingxing/zhanishi/renmin yishu jia*, 187; Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949*, 139. Wang does not include Jiang Qing as a member of the “revising committee.”

²¹⁶ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 92.

²¹⁷ Wang Yongfang, *Chen Bo'er zhuanlue: mingxing/zhanishi/renmin yishu jia*, 191. During this time the Yan’an studio personnel filmed another documentary in preparation for Nationalist military assault. Unlike *A Border Region Labor Hero*, *Protect Yan'an and Protect the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region* (*Baowei Yan'an he Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu*) was completed, but never saw release. The footage was later added to other documentary features such as *A Red Flag Flutters in the West Wind* (*Hongqi man juan xi feng*) and *Return (to) My Yan'an* (*Huan wo Yan'an*). See: Di si ci wen dai hui choubei zu qicao zu, Wenhua bu

contributed to *A Border Labor Hero*'s demise. First, Yan'an was evacuated during the spring of 1947, as the Party center fled impending Nationalist attack. Moreover, Wu Manyou—the individual on whose experiences the film was loosely based—was captured during the exodus, issued a public denouncement of the Communist Party thereafter.²¹⁸ The hero became a tragic figure, or traitor; the film was never completed. A telegram from the Northwest Party Bureau read tersely: “Wu Manyou has been taken prisoner. Appears to have lost all integrity (*bianxian haowu qijie*). Do not recommence shooting on the film concerning him.”²¹⁹

Table 3.4: Documentaries and newsreels produced by Yan'an-directed film organizations, 1939-1945 (Source: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945, 2000*).

	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Completed titles	1		4	4	2		1
Uncompleted titles (“stock footage”)	7			2			

Although short-lived, the Yan'an Film Studio represented the culmination of Communist plans to develop cultural institutions whose members were steeped in both Leninist political ideology and international propaganda techniques.²²⁰ Although ties with post-Shanghai filmmaking communities remained essentially severed during the war, those who did make the journey established new patterns of cinematic production

wenxue yishu yanjiu yuan lilun zhengce yanjiu shi, *Liushi nian wenyi dashi ji, 1919-1979 (wei ding gao)* (n.p., 1979), 114.

²¹⁸ Wang Yongfang, *Chen Bo'er zhuanlue: mingxing/zhanzhi/renmin yishu jia*, 191; Li Shaobai, *Ying shi que lie: dianying lishi yu lilun xuji*, 211.

²¹⁹ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949*, 140.

²²⁰ These were not only limited to what could be learned from the Soviet Union. As Gunther Stein noted in 1944, dissident Japanese propaganda troupes and anti-fascist rhetoric represented important elements of Yan'an culture during the war years. See: Gunther Stein, *The Challenge of Red China* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1945), 405-412.

which incorporated both typical wartime documentary patterns and the increasing Communist emphasis on revolutionary heroes as models for mass emulation. The link between leftism and critical realism—if it had ever existed—had been decoupled, and a new cultural elite, composed of individuals like Yuan Muzhi and Chen Bo'er, emerged as trusted loyalists of the party center. As in the Nationalist-controlled areas, these filmmakers were charged with mobilizing support for the Communist government by cloaking its leaders with the imagery of popular acceptance and victory in the war effort. Yet regional isolation, material shortages, and unexpected wartime disruptions (e.g. the loss of *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army*) largely circumscribed such efforts between the years of 1938 and 1944, when contact with international channels of communication remained minimal.

Japan's China: Manzhouguo and "State Policy" Cinema

The Japanese client state of Manchuria, established in 1932 and returned to China in 1945, possessed one of the largest and productive film industries in East Asia at the time. The Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation (*Zhushihui Manzhou yinghua xiehui*) controlled production, exhibition, and distribution in the name of the Manzhouguo nation-state; as such, it represented a powerful technology of state cultural expansion very much contemporaneous with wartime propaganda efforts throughout the industrialized world.²²¹ Debates concerning whether or not Manzhouguo-produced films

²²¹ On the relationship between Manzhouguo and Japan's larger imperial project, see: Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime*

should be considered “Chinese” cinema notwithstanding, both the corporation and other Japanese-sponsored efforts to create semi-autonomous cultural industries in the regions of north and central China bequeathed important institutional legacies to Chinese nation-building efforts after 1945.

Japanese Filmmaking in Manchuria

The earliest motion pictures produced in Manchuria, or Northeast China, coincided with the Russo-Japanese War. These were made by Russian, and U.S. filmmakers engaged in the circulation of wartime *actualités*, whose stock-and-trade was the legitimating imagery of empire (see Chapter One).²²² By 1906 the first film had been shown in Dairen (*Dalian*), and in 1909 the South Manchuria Railway Company designed a park, the Denki Yuen (*Dianqi yuan*), which included a movie hall.²²³ Permanent theaters were later established in Mukden (Shenyang) and Harbin (Ha’erbin); “the industry took root in Dairen, and grew along the railway lines.” The Southern Manchuria Railway Company gave promotional screenings to schools and communities on an *ad hoc* basis, and also established an irregular exhibition circuit. In 1923, a permanent Public Affairs Department (*Hongbao xi*) and Film Office (*Yinghua ban*) began the regular filming and distribution of short informational films extolling the benefits of Japan’s growing colonial regime:

Imperialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). On the etymology of “Manchukuo” as an alternate rendering used to highlight the non-Chinese nature of this “puppet,” or client, regime see: Joshua Fogel, “Translators Preface,” in Yamamuro Shin’ichi (Joshua Fogel, trans.), *Manchuria Under Japanese Domination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

²²² Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, 11-13.

²²³ Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 1.

About the 13th year of Taisho (1924) the Photographic Party of the S.M.R. began to “shoot” scenes in motion. In this party Mr. Kenkichi Narita was working under Mr. Shin Yoshida as a cameraman. The first “big” picture was taken by Mr. Narita in company with Mr. Usuki Tenki, a prominent figure in Manchuria politics, in 1 Showa (1926). Many spectacular scenes, such as a hunting expedition with a Mongolian prince, and a flock of thousands of cranes, were recorded.²²⁴

By contrast, the majority of scenes shot after 1931 celebrated the advance of the Guandong Army on northeastern urban centers, and the railway company’s role in repairing ensuing damage done to local settlements and infrastructure.²²⁵ During the years in between, propaganda for the Japanese military and Manchurian “self-government” movement became a dominant trope in motion pictures concerning the Northeast.²²⁶ Under the new head of the railway company’s Film Office, Akutagawa Mitsuzo, films depicting the “native” peoples of Manchuria—Manchus and Mongols—also flourished.

With the establishment of Manzhouguo in 1932, the national Autonomy Guidance Commission (*Zizhi zhidao bu*) and Southern Manchuria Railway Company Public Affairs Department quickly turned to legitimating the new government with titles like *The State Founding* (*Jianguo zhi chun*), which showed the restored Manchu emperor Puyi on an official tour of his domain:

After Japan began its colonization, the government started a campaign to encourage immigration to the new land. The Southern Manchurian Railway Company (Mantetsu), the initial epicenter of the Manchurian Incident [of September 9, 1931], began producing its own travelogues. It

²²⁴ Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” 2.

²²⁵ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 17.

²²⁶ Other early documentaries included: *The Grand Military Review of Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang*; *The Franco-Japanese Athletic Meet*; *Prince Chichibu’s Visit to Manchoukuo*; *The Granary*; *Autumn in the Highlands*.

produced many silent films with a common structure designed to “sell Manchuria” to prospective entrepreneurs. Beginning with the Manchurian Incident, they showed the founding of the new Manchurian state and enthronement of Pu Yi, followed by scenes of a peaceful land crisscrossed by luxurious trains and home to classy hotels, mining, shipping, and other attractive business opportunities—not to mention lots of open space, which [was] constantly emphasized through long shots of expansive plains. Other immigration films were aimed at farmers and focused on the broad continent’s possibilities for a new life.²²⁷

As institutions also proliferated, so did documentaries; the General Affairs Board Information Bureau, Department of Defense, Department of People’s Welfare, Department of Industry, and Concordia Association (*Xiehe hui*) all commissioned films highlighting the benefits and opportunities afforded by national development.²²⁸ Cinema became a harbinger of political novelty. At the same time, Manzhouguo’s Department of Police Affairs took on an expansive role in regulating cultural production. Together, such activities represented an important aspect of state efforts to both “produce” (in a subjective or normative sense) and control the identities of Manzhouguo’s multi-ethnic citizenry, while attracting financial and human capital from abroad.

The Manchuria Motion Pictures Corporation

Well before the Japanese government’s 1939 promulgation of the Film Law, which subjected studios and theaters to state control, the “All Japan Conference for Research into Questions Regarding the Promotion of Education by Means of Motion Pictures” was convened in Osaka in 1933. One result was the formation of a Manzhouguo Motion Picture Policy Research Society. Another was the proposal to

²²⁷ Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, 58.

²²⁸ Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” 3.

establish a state-run film institution to be run by the Guandong Army, which would assume a “leading” position in cultural and educational affairs.²²⁹ Manzhouguo state planners based their plans partly on international models of film-based education movements in Germany, Italy, the U.S., and Great Britain. Although tariffs on foreign imports were increased as part of an effort to increase Japanese market share, the society also promoted Chinese imports like *Filial Piety* (aka *Song of China*) in an effort to raise nationwide standards of “film appreciation.”²³⁰ In 1937, the Manzhouguo Motion Picture Law was promulgated by imperial order, along with detailed regulations concerning its enforcement.²³¹ The Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation (*Manzhou dianying gufen gongsi*), also established that year, became the executive organ of national film policy, taking control of all cultural institutions formerly belonging to the South Manchuria Railway Company, and controlling distribution on a national basis.

Formally incorporated on August 21, 1937, the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation (aka The Manchuria Motion Picture Production and Distribution Company) represented sizable investment on the part of the Manzhouguo government and Southern Manchuria Railway Company in securing the nation-state’s “custodial sovereignty” over cultural production.²³² The corporation’s film studio, completed in November 1939, encompassed six separate sound stages and was designed by German engineers according

²²⁹ Hu Chang, “Wei Man de guoce dianying” [The Illegitimate Manchurian Government’s National Policy Films], in Liu Yunzhao et al., eds., *Wei Man wenhua (Wei Man shiliao congshu)* (Changchun: Jilin chubanshe, n.d.), 148. The Manzhouguo conference focused on film as a matter of “national policy” (*guoce*), and attendees included representatives of the army and police.

²³⁰ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 25.

²³¹ This event coincided roughly with the establishment of the Greater Japan Film Association (*Da Riben dianying xiehui*). See: Hu Chang, “Wei Man de guoce dianying” [The Illegitimate Manchurian Government’s National Policy Films], 151-152.

²³² Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, 249.

to the same specifications employed at UFA.²³³ Documents outlining the studio's mission placed considerable emphasis on “spiritual state-building” (*jingshen jianguo*) via the medium of film.²³⁴ In the short-term, Manzhouguo-produced films were expected to propagate a spirit of citizenship, with a “state-building spirit” (*jianguo jingshen*) at its core; they would provide materials for raising the level of “ordinary culture” within Manzhouguo; they would foster a worldview according to which citizens would believe that they lived within a “paradise of benevolent rule” (*wang dao le tu*); they would smash persistent “bad habits” (*louxi*) while promoting a psychology (*xinli*) of “rising national construction” based on “harmony between the five [East Asian] races.”²³⁵ In the long-run, Manzhouguo's state film policy, which extended into trade as well as the production, bore two larger responsibilities. First, it was expected that lowered tariffs on Japanese films would contribute to the national policy of making Manzhouguo and Japan “an integral whole” (*Man-Ri yiti guoce*). Additionally, film was construed as a means through which the two governments might together wage a “thought and propaganda war” (*sixiang zhan, xuanchuan zhan*) against competing ideologies.

By 1939, the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation had produced eighteen features, fifty “cultural films” (i.e. educational and documentary titles), and numerous newsreels.²³⁶ The corporation's chief executive was Amakusa Masahiko, who as a police

²³³ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 90.

²³⁴ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 33.

²³⁵ Hu Chang, “Wei Man de guoce dianying” [The Illegitimate Manchurian Government's National Policy Films], 150-151.

²³⁶ “Cultural films” borrowed their title from a translation of the German “Kulturfilme.” Both UFA and the Japanese Toho Film Company managed special units for their production. See: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 43. Over time, “entertainment” (*yumin*) films would come to encompass a broad range of subgenres such as historical dramas (*guzhuang pian*), comedies (*xiju pian*), and spy thrillers (*zhentan pian*), yet also included “policy propaganda films” (*guoce xuanchuan pian*) based on fictionalized narratives rather than the realist conventions associated with cultural (*wenhua*) films,

officer who had strangled to death married anarchists Ōsugi Sakae and Itō Noe after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, and received a sentence (later halved) of ten years.²³⁷ Features regularly combined the talents of Japanese directors and Chinese actors, and included early titles such as *Our Village Heroes*, *Birth of Movie Stars*, *Travelling After Mother*, *Our Land of Fortune*, *True To You Forever*, *Honeymoon Express*, *Song of Genghis Khan*, *Spring Sunshine in the Country*, *Fair and Just is the National Law*, *Ghost Revenges*, and *Fighting Policemen*.²³⁸ Cultural films were explicitly distinguished from such amusements, and produced:

- (1) To play an important role in the enlightenment of masses in Manchoukuo through ‘wellmade’ [sic] educational films.
- (2) To encourage and promote harmony among the five races inhabiting the country through short feature films dealing with current topics.
- (3) To provide primary schools in the country with a series of so-called ‘school education’ pictures.
- (4) To inculcate on the masses in the country national policies of the Government ...
- (5) To bolster so-called [sic] spiritual mobilization campaign and other patriotic movements which have been launched by the Government and the Manchoukuo Concordia Association.
- (6) To take a lead in the nationwide anti-Comintern campaign.
- (7) To produce documentary films which deal with national affairs and bear upon national policies.
- (8) To send select films abroad in accordance with agreement relative to the exchange of cultural films between Manchoukuo and Italy and between Manchoukuo and Germany respectively.

“enlightenment” (*qimin*) films, or newsreels (*shishi pian* or *xinwen pian*). Proposals also existed for historical films based on recent findings concerning Manchurian antiquity. See: “Observations on Antiquarian Researches and Fine Art in Manchuria: Materials for the Production of Motion Pictures,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 17-20. German titles produced in China, of which there were several, depicted lands and peoples made accessible to cameramen by the Imperial Japanese Army’s advance into Manchuria, Peking, central China, and even the Himalayas. See: Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 137-138.

²³⁷ Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, 58.

²³⁸ Jih Kaosheng, “Photoplays in Manchoukuo,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 8-16.

- (9) To introduce abroad various phases of industrial and economic development in Manchoukuo now being conducted on a large scale according to the Government's revised five-year industrial program.
- (10) To distribute 'goodwill' pictures in the areas [of] China already occupied by the Japanese military. These pictures are to be shown among the Chinese masses, most likely free of charge, as part of [the] Japanese pacification program.
- (11) To show abroad real conditions in Manchoukuo. In this case, a great emphasis should be put on the fact how within such a short period of seven years the Empire of Manchoukuo, as an independent State in the Far East, has attained great progress in many ways.
- (12) To encourage tourist industry both at home [and] abroad.
- (13) To cooperate with the political and cultural bodies in the country.
- (14) To encourage the domestic use of cultural films with a view to holding in check the influx from Shanghai and other places of anti-Manchoukuo films.²³⁹

These titles, directed and photographed by Japanese employees of the corporation, included *Brighter North China* (3 reels, Guandong Army), *China Incident Series* (newsreel series), *Hsieh-Ho Young-jian's Association* (2 reels, Concordia Association), *Anshan* (2 reels, Andhan Showa Steel Works), *Manchoukuo* (2 reels, Capital Construction Bureau), *Agriculture in Manchoukuo* (4 reels, Bureau of Agricultural Affairs and Department of Industry), *Gold Mining in North Manchuria* (1 reel, Manchuria Gold Mining Company), *Rising Manchuria* (2 reels), *Mongolian National Mass Meeting* (1 reel), *Fighting Kwantung Army* (3 reels, Guandong Army), *Fertile Plains of Manchuria* (3 reels), *State Highways in North Manchuria* (2 reels, Bureau of Road Construction and Department of Communication), *Anti-Aircraft Maneuvers in Hsinking* (1 reel), *National Mass Meeting* (1 reel), *Capital Construction Festival* (1 reel, Bureau of Information and State Council), *Nippon and Manchoukuo* (2 reels, Bureau of

²³⁹ Noboru Hidaka, "Cultural Films in Manchoukuo," *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 ("Special Number," July 20, 1939), 22.

Information and State Council), *Forestry in Manchuria* (5 reels, Bureau of Forestry and Department of Industry), *Japanese Immigrants in Winter* (2 reels, Bureau of Information and State Council), *State Funeral of the Late Premier Cheng Hsiao-hsu* (3 reels, State Funeral Committee), *Springtime in China* (2 reels), *Cotton Cultivation in North China* (3 reels), *Yellow River* (5 reels), *Don't Forget the Tungchow Massacre* (2 reels), *Brighter Peking* (2 reels), *Immigrant Woodcutters* (3 reels, Bureau of Forestry and Department of Industry), *Seventh Anniversary of the Manchurian Incident* (4 reels, Guandong Army), *Express Delivery Mail* (2 reels, Bureau of Postal Administration and Department of Communications), *Match* (2 reels, Bureau of Monopoly and Department of Finance and Commerce), *Salt Industry in Manchoukuo* (2 reels, Bureau of Monopoly and Department of Finance and Commerce), *Natural Resources in Tungpientao* (2 reels, Tungjientao Development Company), *Insurance Business in Manchoukuo* (1 reel, Bureau of Postal Administration and Department of Communications), *Arbor Day* (1 reel, Bureau of Forestry and Department of Industry), *Fishing in the Icebound Water* (2 reels), *Menace of the Blazing Fire* (1 reel, Mukden Police Board), *Aeroplane Trip* (2 reels, Manchuria Air Transport Company), *Colonization in Manchuria and Mongolia* (2 reels, Manchurian Colonization Company), *Italo-Manchoukuo Friendship* (2 reels, Bureau of Information and State Council), *Coal and Iron* (2 reels, Bureau of Information and State Council), *Immigrant Woodcutters at Farming* (2 reels, Bureau of Forestry), *National Congress on the Manchoukuo Concordia Association* (2 reels, Manchoukuo Concordia Association), *Manchoukuo National Defence Ladies' Association* (1 reel, Guandong Army), *Return of the Hsingan Army* (1 reel, Bureau of Public Peace) and *Kirin Dam* (Bureau of Hydro-electric Construction).

Table 3.5: “Cultural” and “enlightenment” films produced by the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation, 1938-1945 (Source: Jilin sheng difang bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jilin sheng zhi, juan 39: wenhua yishu zhi, dianying*, 1996).

Year	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944-1945
Number of titles	7	22	31	30	45	35	15	4

Until its dissolution in 1945, the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation produced 108 features, 189 “cultural films,” 307 Japanese-language newsreels, 313 Chinese-language newsreels, and 55 newsreels for children.²⁴⁰ By 1943, the corporation had become a dominant investor in the region’s film and music industries, and an employer of locally-recruited filmmakers who handled an increasing share of day-to-day studio responsibilities. Studio leaders and producers, by contrast, were often experienced veterans of the Office of Public Information (*Hongbao chu*), the *Manzhouguo Daily*, or film companies in Japan.²⁴¹ One top official was longtime “Manchuria expert” (*Manzhou tong*) and member of the Manchu royal family, Jin Bidong.²⁴² Although Manzhouguo cultural officials expressed disdain for the “star system” familiar to Japanese filmdom, and all actors were required to enroll in the studio’s Training School for Movie Players (*Manzhou yanyuan yangcheng suo*), film sirens Li Xianglan (aka Ri Ko Ran, aka Shirley Yamaguchi) and Hasegawa Kazuo played important roles in developing the studio’s

²⁴⁰ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, [Introduction, 2].

²⁴¹ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 31.

²⁴² Zhang Yi, “Wo suo zhidao de ‘Manying’” [The ‘Manchuria Film Studio’ I Knew], in Changchun zhi zhengxie wenshi weiyuanhui, ed., *Changchun wen shi ziliao*, no. 1 (1986), 1. Jin was an older brother of the infamous “Han traitor” and “eastern Mata Hari” Jin Bihui (aka Kawashima Yoshiko). Two other prominent studio executives were a state propagandist, and a former manager of the Yalü Hydroelectric Corporation.

“brand” in several key markets.²⁴³ The Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation retained associated offices and staff in Tokyo, Beijing (as the “Hsinmin Films Association”), and Dairen.²⁴⁴

Table 3.6: Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation Personnel by place of origin, November 1944 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990).

Japan	China	Korea	Taiwan	TOTAL
1,075	711	51	20	1,857

At the outset, studio employees numbered approximately 690, and included 142 actors.²⁴⁵ Yet the poor track record of Manchurian films at the box office led to Amakusa Masahiko’s transfer to the studio in 1940 at the request of concerned state investors. A “mysterious personality” (*shenmi renwu*) in the eyes of the studio’s Chinese community, Amakusa ordered that both Chinese and Japanese workers be paid according to the same scale and that classes in directing and other technical work be opened to Chinese applicants.²⁴⁶ One objective was to increase positive reception of Manchurian films among Chinese audiences; the studio also hired scriptwriters to improve upon Japanese-penned scenarios by imbuing them dialogue and characters which reflected “local” tastes.²⁴⁷ By 1943, Chinese personnel played a notably active role in studio affairs, as

²⁴³ See: “Characteristic Features of Manchurian Films,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 21-22.

²⁴⁴ “The Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation: Its Structure and Work,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 5.

²⁴⁵ Hu Chang, Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1990): 43.

²⁴⁶ Ba Ren, “Dongdang suiye shiqi nian—zong sheying shi Wang Qimin he yanyuan Bai Mei” [Seventeen Years of Tumult—Director of Photography Wang Qimin and Actress Bai Mei], *Changchun wenshi ziliao*, no. 2 (1987), 16; Lü Ren, “Zhuming sheying shi jian daoyan Li Guanghui” [The Famous Cameraman and Director Li Guanghui]. *Changchun wenshi ziliao*, no. 2 (1987), 88.

²⁴⁷ Zhang Yi, “Wo suo zhidao de ‘Manying’” [The ‘Manchuria Film Studio’ I Knew], 9.

many of their Japanese counterparts were drafted into an increasingly desperate war effort.²⁴⁸

Table 3.7: Film titles inspected by the Manzhouguo Office of Public Information, 1934 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990).

Japan	China	United States	Soviet Union	Europe	Other	Total
123	308	825	14	92	2	1,364

Manchuria Film Studio recruiting efforts targeted numerous cities in North China, particularly Beiping. Its most popular stars traveled to Japan, Korea, and Shanghai.²⁴⁹ Culturally, Japan’s “mainland policy” (*dalü zhengce*) included support for these outward representations of Manzhouguo cultural authenticity as well as fostering exchange with allied nations. Hollywood films disappeared from Manzhouguo screens in 1939 as a result of regulations passed by the Hays Organization, which represented the eight largest U.S. studios.²⁵⁰ Instead, the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation signed a contract to import German films, for which it became the exclusive distributor in Manzhouguo, Japan, and China. Other formal agreements included a contract with Italy’s LUCE, and plans for joint newsreel production with Japan’s Domei News Agency, “not only for exhibition in Japan and Manchoukuo, but also in parts of the world, so as to give effect to

²⁴⁸ By 1944, the studio’s personnel included 1,075 Japanese, 731 Chinese, and 51 Korean employees. See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 147-148.

²⁴⁹ Ba Ren, “Dongdang sui yue shiqi nian—zong sheying shi Wang Qimin he yanyuan Bai Mei” [Seventeen Years of Tumult—Director of Photography Wang Qimin and Actress Bai Mei], 16, 24-25. It was often the studio’s practice to recruit actors with established performance careers, notable examples being the theater performer Bai Mei and recording artist Zhang Jing. See also: Guo Yanping, “Ji ‘Manying’ nü mingxing Zhang Jing” [Remembering the Manchuria Film Studio’s Female Star Zhang Jing], in Liu Yunzhao et al., eds., *Wei Man wenhua (Wei Man shi liao congshu)* (Changchun: Jilin chubanshe, n.d.), 186.

²⁵⁰ “The Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation: Its Structure and Work,” 6.

the importance [sic] of news reels.”²⁵¹ Yet according to an anonymous writer observing the corporation in 1939:

The films actually produced in Manchoukuo are almost limited to those intended for her own people, and as for the distribution of Japanese pictures, she has only a right to be supplied with them together with China. Seen from the viewpoint of the possibility of finding a way into the world market, however, it may safely be assumed that Manchurian pictures have a greater universality and adaptability than Japanese pictures. This is because life in Manchuria, being not only more cubic [sic] and expressive, but also containing more of Orientalism, is better able to satisfy the requirements of the Western filmdom.²⁵²

Manchurian films undeniably incorporated a variety of visual elements. At the same time, their uniform intent was to portray Manzhouguo as an authentic nation with close ties to Japan, and in this respect they served as propaganda for Japanese military and economic expansion into China.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Along with German, Italian, and Japanese films, Korean films were also screened in Manzhouguo theaters, although details concerning their exhibition remain vague.

²⁵² “Characteristic Features of Manchurian Films,” 21.

²⁵³ Indeed, Japan represented one of the most important markets for Manchurian films which purported to represent, among other things, Chinese support for Japan’s imperial project. See: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 202; Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 152.

Table 3.8: Films inspected for exhibition in Manzhouguo by country of origin, 1936-1942 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990). Numbers in parentheses indicate 16mm films. 1941 total reflects first-run titles only.

	Manzhouguo	Japan	China	United States	Europe	Other	Total
1936	159	154	134	618	103	3	1,171
1937	131	232	152	399	89		1,003
1938	227	1,352	249	94	92		2,014
1939	859	1,630	125	173	108		2,895
1940	n/a						
1941	315 (160)	631 (115)	63 (1)	37 (4)	56 (3)		1,112 (283)*
1942	3,144 (452)						

Exhibition and Censorship

By 1920, thirty-six venues existed for the regular exhibition of motion pictures in northeast China. Hollywood imports soon dominated the local film trade, which in Harbin also included European and Chinese films.²⁵⁴ Dalian, however, was undoubtedly the northeast's cinematic hub, and attracted considerable attention from the Southern Manchuria Railway Company and other Japanese investors. Manzhouguo possessed sixty-two Japanese-owned, sixty-four "Manchu"-owned, and eight foreign-owned theaters in 1939.²⁵⁵ In addition to production duties, the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation regulated distribution and exhibition. As in Japan after the promulgation of the Film Law, one consequence of regulations like the "Outline of Directives for Theaters" (*Dianying yuan zhidao gangyao*) was that state-made propaganda and

²⁵⁴ Thomas Lahusen, "Dr. Fu Manchu in Harbin: Cinema and Moviegoers of the 1930s," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 99, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 147.

²⁵⁵ Liu Wenghua, "Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria," 11. Statistics include "both permanent and temporary houses."

educational films seem to have gained a stronger foothold on Manzhouguo screens.²⁵⁶

Theater owners were expected to implement national policy,” and “work hard in carrying out citizens’ education.”²⁵⁷ This legislation coincided with the Manzhouguo Film Association’s efforts to expand distribution channels and screening venues, with the result that film-related activity in Manzhouguo greatly increased in cities and county seats.²⁵⁸

Table 3.9: Northeast theaters by province and territory, 1935 and 1940 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990).

	1935	1940		1935	1940
Fengtian 奉天	27	35	Heihe 黑河	1	1
Jilin 吉林	10	28	Dongan 东安		1
Longjiang 龙江	7	16	Bei'an 北安		7
Rehe 热河		1	Xing'andong 兴安东		2
Binjiang 滨江	20	23	Xing'anxi 兴安西		
Jinzhou 锦州	1	7	Xing'annan 兴安南		
Andong 安东	6	6	Xing'anbei 兴安北	3	3
Sanjiang 三江	1	4	Jiandao 间岛		
Tonghua 通化		2	Guandong zhou 关东州	10	12
Mudanjiang 牡丹江		4	TOTAL	86	156

Projection by route and line also represented an important area of film-related state activity. A “comfort train” operated by the Welfare Section of the General Directorate of Railways at Mukden embarked on seasonal tours for the workers and communities along the rails. In addition to performers and motion picture technicians, the thirteen-car train was also “equipped with various provisions as well as a full

²⁵⁶ On Japanese production and exhibition after the Film Law, see: Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima*, 61-66.

²⁵⁷ Jiang Donghao, ed., *Ha'erbin dianying zhi* (Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin chubanshe, 2003), 164.

²⁵⁸ Li Daoxin., *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 246-247.

complement of medical and surgical supplies.”²⁵⁹ Regular traveling film teams, sponsored by organizations such as the Concordia Association, Department of Defense, Information Bureau (i.e. the Office of Public Information), and Guandong Army, provided additional conduits by which viewership of entertainment and propaganda films was extended beyond regular theater patrons. As in Chongqing and Yan’an, 16mm film played an increasingly important role as a relatively economical technology of mass acculturation:

In a country like Manchoukuo, which embraces geographically so extensive an area, it is of paramount importance, from the viewpoint of national policy, to utilize the pervasive nature of moving pictures in spreading education, elevating the people’s national sentiment and providing means of healthy recreation. For this reason and also out of the considerations regarding expense and equipment, the Government of Manchoukuo has decided to encourage the popularization and spread of small-sized motion pictures.²⁶⁰

Schools, waste-clearing and agricultural brigades, and other state organizations served as the initial focal points for these activities. Later, with the outbreak of the Pacific War, mobile screening teams recorded over 4.5 million attendances in 1943, and over 5 million attendances in 1944; these rather astonishing numbers also include irregular screenings held for members of the military and of banner administrations (*qi gongshu*) along Manchuria’s borders.²⁶¹ By 1945, virtually every banner and province was assigned a

²⁵⁹ Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” 12.

²⁶⁰ Hidaka Noboru, “Motion Picture Industry in Manchoukuo,” *Manchuria*, vol. 4, no. 15 (“Special Number,” July 20, 1939), 1620.

²⁶¹ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 208-209.

projection team (*fanying ban*), administered either by the Manzhouguo Film Association or local “mobile projection committees” established for the purpose after 1939.²⁶²

Table 3.10: Ownership of theaters in Manzhouguo and the Guandong Leased Territories, 1937-1942 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990).

	Chinese	Japanese	Total (Manzhouguo)	Chinese	Japanese	Total (Guandong)	TOTAL
1937	30	43	73	3	10	13	86
1938	52	46	98	3	10	13	111
1939	56	52	108	3	10	13	121
1940	69	64	133	3	10	13	146
1941	74	76	150	3	12	15	165
1942	106	79	185	4	12	16	201

North and Central China

Japan’s state-led economic and military expansion into China transformed cultural production in areas beyond the northeast. Ownership of theaters in north and central China reflected this tendency, for which the establishment of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation acted as a catalyst. With increased Japanese ownership of theaters came deeper ties to Japan-based film companies Shochiku, Nikkatsu, Toho, Shinko, and Daito. By abolishing the vertical ties which linked theaters to specific studios by exclusive contract, the corporation attempted to increase the circulation of Japanese films throughout China as a whole.²⁶³

²⁶² Changchun shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Changchun shi zhi: dianying zhi* (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992), 179. This projection network was principally administered by the Central Mobile Projection Committee and the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation Mobile Projection Suboffice. A separate organization, the Manzhouguo General Film Office, existed for the management of state theaters not directly owned by the corporation or its affiliates.

²⁶³ Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” 13.

Table 3.11: Theaters owned by Japanese corporations before and after the establishment of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation (Source: Liu Wenghua, “Brief History of the Development of Motion Pictures in Manchuria,” 1939).

	Manzhouguo		North China		Central China	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Shochiku Co.	15	32	2	6	1	4
Nikkatsu Co.	12	31	2	4	1	1
Toho Co.	11	33	2	6	1	4
Shinko Co.	16	28	0	2	1	1
Daito Co.	6	8	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	60	132	6	19	4	10

October 1938 discussions of “policies and tendencies concerning Japanese film on the mainland,” sponsored by the Japan International Film and News Agency (*Riben guoji yinghua xinwen she*) pushed agendas firmly toward the establishment of film-producing institutions on Chinese soil—“using China to manufacture [for] China.”²⁶⁴ Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation offices were established in Beiping that same year, followed by the Xinmin (“New People”) Film Association, which served as a distributor for Japan- and Manzhouguo-based studios. Xinmin offices appeared in Tianjin, Qingdao, Ji’nan, Datong, Taiyuan, Shijiazhuang, Zhangjiakou, and other north China cities soon thereafter.²⁶⁵ Production began in 1939, when the North China Army (*Bei zhi jun*) began marshalling resources for the filming of propaganda reels through the Xingya (“Revive Asia”) Film Production Bureau.²⁶⁶ A regional studio under the control of the North China Provisional Government, and managed by the newly-capitalized North China Motion Picture Corporation (*Huabei dianying gufen youxian gongsi*) represented the

²⁶⁴ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 127-128.

²⁶⁵ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 144.

²⁶⁶ On propaganda under the Provisional Government of China, see: George Taylor, *The Struggle for North China* (New York: AMS Press, 1978 [1940]), 65-70, 210-211.

culmination of two years of intense effort spent making Beiping—which had never been a center of film production in the past—into an “industrial and artistic center for Chinese films.”²⁶⁷ Vertical distribution and exhibition chains were subsequently reestablished under Japanese ownership, with the corporation operating eighty-one theaters and numerous mobile film teams by 1941.²⁶⁸ As the war intensified, North China Film Corporation operations expanded under the guise of various campaigns to propagandize “Greater East Asian war news” and local “public order movements.”²⁶⁹

Table 3.12: China Motion Picture Corporation personnel by place of origin, 1939-1940 (Source: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 1990).

	1939	1940
China	82	264
Japan	72	142
Other	1	1
TOTAL	154	407

Central China, too, was transformed by efforts to create a client state-run “Mainland Cinema League” (*Dalu dianying lianmeng*) in support of the Japanese government’s overall “mainland policy” (*dalu zhengce*). In 1935, Nanjing had played host to a “Japan-China cinematographic education symposium” (*Ri-Hua dianying jiaoyu zuotanhui*), and Xu Gongmei had surveyed Japan’s film system on behalf of Chen Lifu’s

²⁶⁷ See: Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 136-137.

²⁶⁸ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 147-148.

²⁶⁹ North China studio feature releases between 1938 and 1945 numbered only six titles; the number of documentaries, newsreels, and other genres produced is unclear. See: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 261. Titles of “public order” films, for example, included *Eastern Hebei Public Order Meeting (Ji dong zhi’an huiyi)* and *United Effort, Common Purpose (Xie li tong xin)*. See: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 128.

National Educational Cinematographic Society.²⁷⁰ In 1939 Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation agents returned to the former Nationalist capital, this time establishing the China Motion Picture Corporation (*Zhong hua dianying gufen youxian gongsi*), later administered by the Reformed Government of the Republic of China and Wang Jingwei-led Nanjing Nationalist Government.²⁷¹ Like the North China Motion Picture Corporation, this institution managed regional distribution as well as serving as broker of “orphan island” Shanghai cinema produced in the remaining foreign concessions to Manzhouguo.

Table 3.13: Japanese studio-produced films shown in area of Shanghai concessions, 1937-1938 (Source: Qiu Shuting, *Gang-Ri dianying guanxi*, 2006).

Year	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Titles	1	2	6	3	10	28	24	3

Consolidation of allied Japanese-Chinese control over coastal China’s remaining film studios the “orphan island” (or “solitary island”) commercial enterprises of Shanghai—occurred in 1942. With the concessions occupied, former *New Earth* (*Atarashiki tsuchi*) producer Kawakita Nagamasa became head of China United Productions Corp. (*Zhongguo lianhe zhipian gufen gongsi*), a Sino-Japanese venture which included the former studios of Xinhua, Yihua, Guohua, and several smaller enterprises.²⁷² In 1943, China United was merged with the China Motion Picture Corporation, ostensibly by order of Wang Jingwei, and China Film United (*Zhonghua*

²⁷⁰ A brief reference to the symposium appears in: Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying—guoce dianying mianmian guan*, 139.

²⁷¹ Three former advocates of Nationalist “soft” cinema policies, Liu Na’ou, Mu Shiyong, and Huang Tianshi, became key figures in studio operations.

²⁷² See: Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*, 94-97; Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 93.

dianying lianhe gongsi) established as an umbrella organization which placed all of Shanghai's studios—including the China Motion Picture Corporation's state-of-the-art Cultural Film Studio—under direct Ministry of Propaganda management. Film production thereafter was thereafter divided between: 1) “cultural” films made under Japanese direction, 2) feature, or “entertainment” films produced by Chinese studios, and 3) co-productions between China Film United and Japanese studios, guided by the former's International Co-Production General Office (*Guoji hezuo zhipian shiwu chu*).²⁷³ Newsreels, of which an unclear number were produced in support of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, were released with both Mandarin and Cantonese soundtracks, and Hollywood films banned from Shanghai's screens entirely.

Table 3.14: Feature films (Shanghai) and documentaries (Hong Kong) produced by Chinese studios in cooperation with occupation authorities, 1942-1945
(Sources: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945, 2000*; Qiu Shuting, *Gang-Ri dianying guanxi, 2006*).

	1942	1943	1944	1945
Shanghai	24	41	31	7
Hong Kong	4			

Conclusions

Surrender came suddenly, leaving intact sprawling studios and exhibition chains along China's railways and coast. Japan's total war and colonizing initiative had aimed not only at reshaping the political and economic structures of regions over which

²⁷³ Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shi, 1937-1945*, 267; Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*, 94-97. In light of this division of labor, which Fu acknowledges and was a matter of official policy, it is difficult to understand how “entertainment” unambiguously constituted a mode of resistance in wartime cultural economies premised upon acceptance of the same.

resistance governments in Chongqing and Yan'an could claim only nominal sovereignty, but also at re-aculturating the inhabitants of these regions to accept the authority of their new governments through initiatives intended to produce effective propaganda while narrowing the alternatives. Occupation did not erase patterns of international exchange, or “pure” entertainment cinema, as characteristic features of the film industry. Rather, it submitted these activities both institutionally and conceptually to the unrelenting logic of wartime mobilization, in particular the need for systemic controls that would allow for coordination of all areas of cultural life with the larger effort to accrue territorial and human resources. In this sense, the “Yan'an way” was very similar to the “Chongqing way” and the “Manzhouguo way” (or, to use a phrase repeated by Manzhouguo’s rulers and cultural architects, the “kingly way” or “way of benevolent government”).

Throughout the early twentieth century, Japanese military and economic expansion had triggered waves of student protests and public movements for “national” salvation.” Public figures like Song Qingling and He Xiangning (widow of Liao Zhongkai), along with literary figures Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Ding Ling, lent their voices to pro-resistance calls for the Nationalist Party to take action against foreign imperialism in the northeast.²⁷⁴ In film world, as in other areas of society, “nationalization” began in 1937, through institutions which represented an emerging national consensus in favor of the war effort, as well as a renewal of cooperative efforts to join both Communists and Nationalists in a single united front. By this point, however, the Nationalist Party had already successfully established its own studios and cultural bureaucracy. Wartime film

²⁷⁴ See: Parks Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991), 289-290.

production was anticipated, and to a certain extent controlled, by individuals like Chen Lifu and Zheng Yongzhi—names which are almost entirely excluded from histories of culture and film through the 1930s and wartime period as a whole.

Filmmaking in Wuhan and Chongqing was characterized by an early period of intense production, as existing modes and genres—educational, commercial, newsreel, animated, etc.—were adapted to the dictates of populism and mobilization. Yet cultural officials also expressed concern with the obstacles to propaganda posed by retreat to the unfamiliar hinterland and China's division between competing zones of studio activity. Patriotic or not, Hong Kong and Shanghai studios remained largely beyond the institutional reach of hinterland “national” planners, who sought to delimit the boundaries of Chinese identity according to their own agendas.

From the Nationalist perspective, Communist activities in the cultural realm represented another concern, and Ministry of Information officials like Hollington Tong worked to enforce a media blockade on the northwestern “base areas” and Communist-organized guerilla actions in north China. Following the Wannan Incident, Chen Lifu moved decisively in 1942 to regain control over a film industry that was undeniably dominated by Communists and film circle “leftists” by establishing a separate facility—the China Educational Film Studio—under direct Ministry of Education supervision. These efforts were not entirely successful, but they do challenge the notion that breakthroughs in wartime cultural production can be solely credited to the energies of “progressive” (i.e. non-Nationalist) forces within the industry. Patterns of international cooperation established during the early 1930s continued to deepen as China joined a larger international war effort against “fascist” nations in Europe and Asia, and

experimentation with Soviet-style, state-directed system of film production, dissemination, and exhibition took shape under the China Educational Film Studio. Again, while obstacles to the national propaganda effort drew comment from filmmakers and cultural bureaucrats of all political stripes, film studios in Chongqing and Chengdu remained thoroughly enmeshed within a global culture of wartime cultural production which facilitated flows of technology and imagery across enormous spatial distances.

The establishment of a Yan'an base only indirectly touched by enemy encirclement campaigns allowed the Communist Party to make additional innovations in political propaganda and film production. Although severed from many former Shanghai contacts, filmmakers like Yuan Muzhi and Chen Bo'er proved instrumental in organizing a small, devoted cadre of professionals whose ties to the international cinematic communities proved instrumental to maintaining Yan'an's presence in the foreign media. In their assessment of documentary filmmaking during World War II, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson offer the following summary:

Leftist filmmakers who had criticized capitalist governments recognized the necessity for switching to a position supporting the battle against fascism. Military establishments within the warring countries called on professional filmmakers, and major directors previously associated primarily with fiction films switched to documentaries. Documentaries became far more popular.²⁷⁵

Here again, there exist numerous parallels with Communist Party filmmaking of the same period, and indeed with Chinese cinema throughout much of the late 1930s and 1940s. Documentary filmmaking and war reporting became a dominant mode of cinematic address. And political agendas, loosely subsumed under the term "nationalism,"

²⁷⁵ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell. *Film History: An Introduction* (second edition), 313.

demanded the cooperation of nearly every regional film industry, in some cases—most obviously those of Yan’an and north China—even bringing those industries into existence where none had previously existed.

As wartime filmmaking, much of this activity must also be considered “propaganda,” insofar as film was not only seen as a “crucial tool for increasing levels of [mass] political knowledge” (e.g. concerning Yan’an society, People’s Liberation Army victories, and so on), but also “part of a struggle for the hearts and minds” of audiences.²⁷⁶ The thinly-disguised hostilities between Communist and Nationalist political leaders made it impossible for policymakers of the Communist Party to remain satisfied with a status quo in which foreign reporters and news agencies, let alone the Nationalist Party’s Chongqing government, controlled the means of producing and distributing information concerning the war. Moreover, by 1937 it is undeniable that direct politicization and regulation of cultural industries were seen as necessary functions of the state. Total war demanded that both filmmakers and audiences were held responsible for supporting the state’s objectives.

Nonetheless, filmmaking under the central party governments of Chongqing and Yan’an proved difficult to sustain after 1942, when the war effort reached its nadir and prospects for survival seemed grimmest. Materially, neither side fully recovered until 1945. Yet when Chinese military forces finally returned east, they would discover elaborate Japanese-built studio facilities in Changchun, Beiping, and Nanjing to rival anything left behind in Shanghai. Manzhouguo’s “state policy” film system embodied

²⁷⁶ Julian Chang, “The Mechanics of State Propaganda: The People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s,” in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich, eds., *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 76; Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film Propaganda: Myth or Reality?* (London: Cassell, 1999), 6.

many of the goals of wartime Chinese cultural planners; its equipment and personnel would be put to further use after the war. Theaters had proliferated in the region from 1939 onward. To the south, years of institutional transformation linking film industries across Japan's wartime empire had created a similar outcome. Through patterns of interaction which included cooperation and grudging collaboration as well as covert resistance, China's pre-war film industry expanded into new regions and continued to profit under occupation-supported governments which supported domestic commercial cinema as a matter of policy.

Recently, a group of scholars concerned with the impact of warfare on twentieth-century China have demonstrated that periods of terrible destruction have also produced broad changes in patterns of nationalism and revolution.²⁷⁷ Rather than treating these patterns as explanatory concepts in their own right, they have demonstrated how—as in Europe after the “Great War” ended in 1919—the shock and destabilization which accompanied rising militarism led to a general displacement of older institutions and ideas by which “a whole set of previously marginal political approaches and vocabularies began to move toward the center.”²⁷⁸ Similarly, this chapter has argued that the crisis spawned by total war in East Asia had the effect of delegitimizing commercial and market-based approaches to cultural production in favor of systematic models dominated by state institutions. While the entertainment value of culture was never completely

²⁷⁷ This group includes Arthur Waldron, Edward McCord, Diana Lary, Chang-tai Hong, Chang Jui-de, Hans J. van de Ven, Johanna Waley-Cohen, and Stephen R. MacKinnon.

²⁷⁸ Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 245. Both Waldron and Hans J. van de Ven have argued persuasively that Nationalist plans for a militarized society supported by disciplined national bureaucracies as a solution to the persistent problem of civil war and imperialism in Chinese politics can be traced back to the 1920s or even earlier (van de Ven suggests 1917). See: Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925-1945*, 68. This centralizing sense of “revolution,” in addition to those connoting mass politics and popular sovereignty, suggests another pattern linking Communist and Nationalist politics in subsequent decades.

disavowed, and the surviving commercial studios of the coast would continue operation past 1945, both Nationalist and Communist parties alike demonstrated a clear preference for a Soviet-style “propaganda state”—as did many nations of the world from the 1930s onward.²⁷⁹ In short, international exchange and elite networks, as well as rising “national feeling,” produced much of the institutional and cultural homogeneity which characterized wartime media.

²⁷⁹ Some historians may protest that culture and politics have always overlapped in China, but this does not answer the question of why they have overlapped, or how, across divergent times and places.

CHAPTER 4. Propaganda, Disinformation, and Spectacle from the Civil War to
National Inauguration, 1945-1949

August 15, 1945 marked the end of Japan's dominance in East Asia, but not the end of warfare on the mainland. Soviet forces entered Manchuria and northern Korea several weeks prior to the arrival of U.S. troops, raising Washington's apprehensions about the spread of a Moscow-backed communist movement.¹ Yet despite significant U.S. support for Jiang Jieshi after 1945, the breakdown of negotiations between Nationalists and Communists did not result in victory for the incumbent government during the ensuing Civil War period (1946-1949). Soviet evacuation of Manchuria in March 1946, in coordination with Communist troop movements, allowed People's Liberation Army forces to occupy Mukden (Shenyang), Changchun, Jilin, Ha'erbin, and Qiqiha'er.² By June 1949, Nationalist forces had been driven irreversibly southward, and the victorious Communist Party had pledged to shore up ties with the Soviet Union. The result was "the most extensive peacetime mobilization of national resources in American history" in order to contain the emergence of additional regimes which might prove amenable to Soviet geopolitical ambitions.³ China was once again drawn into a pattern

¹ Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World* (New York: Columbia University, 2000), 370-371. See also: Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

² Lloyd E. Eastman, Jerome Ch'en, Suzanne Pepper, and Lyman P. Van Slyke, *The Nationalist Era in China, 1927-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 300. On the Civil War more generally, see: Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Stephen I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Joseph K.S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution in China: The CCP-GMD Struggle for Beijing-Tianjin* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995); Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

³ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 2. On the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations after 1945, see also: Sergei N. Goncheryov, John, W.

of globe-spanning great power rivalries, in preparation for which its own national mobilization, peacetime and otherwise, continued under the rubric of “continuous revolution.”

Throughout the Civil War, the Nationalist government worked to regain economic and social control of major cities while hunting down Communist forces in the north. Attentions shifted immediately toward the areas evacuated by surrendering Japanese forces. For the government’s cultural bureaucracy, the return from Chongqing included reclamation of former “enemy” filmmaking facilities in Shanghai, Nanjing, Beiping, and Guangzhou—a process largely managed by the Central Propaganda Department’s Central Film Studio administration.⁴ Japanese studios in Shanghai (China Film United/*Huaying*), Beiping (North China Motion Picture Corporation/*Huabei dianying gongsi*), and Changchun (Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation/*Manying*) were all targeted for takeover (*jieguan*) and re-opening under central party control, while other equipment and property was designated for transfer to the Ministry of Defense New Bureau-controlled China Motion Picture Corporation.⁵ Some of these facilities included former private studios (e.g. Lianhu, Yihua) which had been absorbed into the Japanese-run China Film United (*Zhonghua dianying lianhe gongsi*) after 1943. Hinterland government facilities like the China Educational Film Studio (*Zhongjiao*) and Rural Education Film Studio (*Nongjiao*) were relocated directly to Nanjing under the supervision of trusted Jiang

Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). On Sino-U.S. relations, see: John King Fairbank, *The United States and China* (fourth edition, enlarged) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Michael Schaller, *The United States and China in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Simei Qing, *From Friends to Allies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁴ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998), 9.

⁵ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 108.

Jieshi loyalists like Huang Renlin, leader of the “gangster-dominated” Lizhishe.⁶ By 1947, total confiscated film industry holdings were valued at 10 billion *yuan*.⁷

Another post-war priority of the Nationalist government was cultural control. The Central Film Services Bureau (*Zhongyang dianying fuwu chu*), originally established in 1943, took over Japanese distribution offices in Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Beijing, and Tianjin. This monopolistic stance drew cries of protest from domestic film companies and Hollywood “majors” alike, despite the fact that U.S. films continued to occupy the majority of market share in nearly every major city.⁸ Nationalist censorship institutions such as the Film Censorship Bureau (*Diaying jiancha chu*) and other offices belonging to the Central Film Studio and Chinese Motion Picture Corporation attempted to reign in representations deemed overly critical of the regime or its wartime policies. By 1948, nearly one-third of all domestic releases had been edited down from their original content in response to censors’ requirements.⁹ These regulations took on a new stringency after 1947, when domestic protest and subsequent crack-downs began to reach a crescendo.

In 1947 the government also moved to reorganize its studio holdings into a single incorporated body—the Central Film Enterprise Corporation (*Zhongyang dianying qiye*

⁶ Frederic Wakeman Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 517, n. 47. The Lizhishe, along with the Ministry of Education and Central Film Studio, was a co-founding institution of the Educational Film Pictorial Agency (*Jiaoyu dianying huapian she*) in 1942, and operated an independent “cartoon section” (*katong gu*) from its Nanjing offices from 1945 to 1947. See: Bao Qigui, “Zhongguo meishu dianying zhuizong,” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, no. 2/3 (May 1993), 238.

⁷ *Zhongyang dianying sheyingchang gaikuang* (1947), quoted in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 109.

⁸ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949*, 14, 16; Wang Zhaoguang, “Minguo nianjian Meiguo dianying zai Hua shichang yanjiu,” *Dianying yishu*, no. 1 (1998). Statistics cited in Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004), 99, tab. 3.3.

⁹ Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949*, 15.

gufen youxian gongsi). Principal stockholders and overseers included party stalwarts Chen Lifu, Zhang Daofan, Luo Xuelian, Li Weiguo, Fang Zhi, Pan Gongzhan, and Du Tong.¹⁰ By this point, Nationalist-controlled facilities had expanded considerably. Central Film Studio No. 1 released over seventy newsreels in the *China News* (*Zhongguo xinwen*) series, as well as several multi-reel documentaries celebrating democratic reform and promoting Jiang Jieshi as national leader; Central Film Studio No. 3 produced fifteen separate reels of *China News, North China Edition*; the China Educational Film Studio specialized in longer documentary titles devoted to propagandizing the achievements of the national government, and providing educational materials concerning China's traditional culture (e.g. *Ji Kong*); the China Motion Picture Corporation, under Ministry of Defense leadership, released military mobilization and anti-Communist propaganda shorts *Iron (Tie)*, *Communist Bandits Ruin the Nation (Gong fei huo guo ji)*, *Communist Bandit Atrocities (Gong fei baoxing shilu)*, and *Who Destroyed this Railroad? (Shi shei pohuai le tielu)* in addition to pro-Jiang materials.¹¹ Another common documentary theme was the trial, sentencing, and execution of collaborators. In feature filmmaking as well, state studios churned out titles at a rapid rate between 1946 and 1949, with thirty-eight titles for Studio No. 1, eighteen for Studio No 2, and fourteen for Studio No. 3 (China's four largest private studios, Guotai, Kunlun, Wenhua, and Datong, released a total of sixty-two features during the same period).¹² Compared with the pre-war film industry, post-1945 arrangements reveal a general shift toward state capital. This

¹⁰ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 170.

¹¹ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 170-171.

¹² Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 114-115; Cheng Jihua, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]) 467-476 (appendix, "Gushi pian, xiju pian, donghua pian").

growing gap was highlighted by the establishment of two separate distribution networks after 1947—the state-managed China Film Enterprise Corporation’s “Business Department” (*Yewu bu*) and the privately-managed “China Film Producers Joint Operations Office” (*Zhongguo dianying lianying chu*).¹³ Additionally, state distributors established large regional operations in Jiangnan and north China, and controlled the import-export trade dealing in film and film equipment.¹⁴

¹³ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 109. By this point two-thirds of all industry capital was already in state hands.

¹⁴ As Hu Jubin notes, citing Cheng Jihua, one significant consequence of this arrangement was that state studios were able to circumvent the foreign exchange controls which made importing film equipment a much more difficult proposition for private companies. See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 164.

Table 4.1: State-owned studios by institutional affiliation, location, and type of production, 1945-1949 (Source: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 2003).

	Facility	Location	Films produced
Central Film Studio/ China Film Enterprise Corporation			
	Studio Number One	Shanghai	Features, newsreels, documentaries, animated shorts
	Studio Number Two	Shanghai	Features
	Studio Number Three	Beiping	Features, newsreels, documentaries
	Shanghai Experimental Film Works	Shanghai	Features
	Changchun Film Studio	Changchun	Features
China Motion Picture Corporation			
	China Motion Picture Corporation	Nanjing	Features, anti-Communist propaganda, military education
Other			
	China Educational Film Studio	Nanjing	16mm educational films, newsreels, documentaries
	Rural Education Film Studio	Nanjing	16mm rural education

Experimentation with film as a medium of mass communication continued in both sectors. Jinling University filmmaker Sun Mingjing produced several films highlighting the internationalist spirit of post-war cultural and educational reconstruction—*Front Line of Democracy* (*Minzhu xianfeng*, 1946), which documented Sun's return to Nanjing, was distributed among Christian colleges throughout China; *Nanking* (*Nanjing*, 1948) recorded the performance of British, Hungarian, and Italian folk dances by female

university students during a “May Day” celebration.¹⁵ Delegates sent by the Nationalist government attended the inaugural Paris meeting of the International Scientific Film Association in 1947.¹⁶ Members of the Suzhou National Social Education Academy Audio-Visual Education Department (*Suzhou guoli shehui jiaoyu xueyuan dianhua jiaoyu xi*) produced an 8.75mm animated reel entitled *Tilling the Land (Gengtian)* in 1948 at the behest of UNESCO, the United Nations’ recently-established educational, scientific, and cultural organization.¹⁷ As during the war years, filmmaking occurred within a context shaped by domestic attempts to legitimate state reconstruction activities, and international missions aimed at securing aid for the Nationalist government and its anti-Communist war at home.¹⁸

* * *

State dimensions of Civil War cultural production are nonetheless absent from film scholarship, which has focused primarily on the thematic aspects of features produced by China’s better-known directors (e.g. Tang Xiaodan, Shi Dongshan, Cai Chusheng, Zheng Junli, Shen Fu, Sang Hu, Sun Yu, Fei Mu, and Chen Liting).¹⁹ More

¹⁵ Zhao Huikang and Jia Leilei, *Zhongguo kejiào diányǐng shǐ* (Beijing: Zhongguo diányǐng chubanshe, 2005), 31-32.

¹⁶ Liu Yong, “Kejiào diányǐng shìhuà zhāji,” *Shanghai diányǐng shìliào*, no. 2/3 (May 1993), 226.

¹⁷ Qian Jiajun, “Tantan dōnghuà zhuānke de qīngkuāng,” *Shanghai diányǐng shìliào*, no. 6 (June 1995), 264.

¹⁸ One example of the latter is Chen Lifu’s participation in the U.S. Congress-led Moral Rearmament Movement (MRA), an anti-communist organization with offices in Switzerland, London, and Los Angeles. See: Ch’ēn Lì-fu (Sidney H. Chang and Ramon H. Myers, eds.), *The Storm Clouds Clear Over China: The Memoir of Ch’ēn Lì-fu, 1900-1993* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1994), 203-209.

¹⁹ See, for example: Jay Leyda, *Diányǐng/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972); Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003); Lu Hongshi, *Zhongguo diányǐng shǐ, 1905-1949: zāoqǐ Zhōngguó diányǐng de qūshū yǔ jìyì* (Beijing: Wenhua yìshù chubanshe, 2005).

recently, there have been attempts to frame these works within a larger political and social context, with the dominant emphasis remaining on film as an expression of popular culture.²⁰ Yet lack of attention to settings beyond urban theaters—most notably Communist-controlled areas and the international arena—has tended to portray Civil War-era filmmaking as a return to the familiar patterns of pre-war entertainment, despite Paul G. Pickowicz’s intriguing observation that this was the first period in which the state had gone into the motion picture business.²¹ This chapter, by contrast, moves beyond considerations of film as variety of “experience” to focus on the largely unstudied application of cinematic technology to patterns of military occupation, governance, and political communication.

An examination of Communist filmmaking during the Civil War sheds light on the ubiquity of state-orchestrated cultural programs of mobilization, disinformation, and propaganda long after Japanese surrender in 1945. From this perspective, there was no post-war “return.” Political agents on both sides of the Communist-Nationalist divide continued their relentless efforts to purify cultural institutions of “enemy” influence, and a persistent drumbeat of national crisis accompanied the cooptation and confiscation of private enterprise. One important lesson drawn from the experiences of previous decades was that public opinion—domestic and global—could play a pivotal role in political contests. Hu Jubin’s assertion that “post-war cinema served politics, but it did not

²⁰ See: Ding Yaping, *Yingxiang Zhongguo: Zhongguo dianying yishu, 1945-1949* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1998); Paul G. Pickowicz, “Victory as Defeat: Postwar Visualizations of China’s War of Resistance,” in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).

²¹ Paul G. Pickowicz, “Victory as Defeat: Postwar Visualizations of China’s War of Resistance,” 366.

directly serve political *parties*,” cannot be sustained when considering the numerous mobile production units, studios, and international agencies through which Communists and Nationalists alike attempted to bolster their own leadership while subverting rivals’ capabilities in the cultural realm.²² While government-run studios in Shanghai may have permitted filmmakers of varying political stripes to simultaneously manufacture and package public dissent, in the Northeast a new emphasis on ideological uniformity and codified displays of “the people’s” everyday heroism was taking shape alongside a massive military campaign to rid China of its present rulers by force.

Guerilla Cinema: Film and the Military

In a manner strongly reminiscent of Nationalist filmmaking during the Northern Expedition and subsequent anti-Communist “encirclement” campaigns, one common use to which film was put during the Civil War was creating popular support for Communist military advance. During the mid-twentieth century, terms like “psychological warfare” (or *sixiang zhanzheng*) reflected the growing global awareness of communications as a supplement to armed combat. World War II had demonstrated that propaganda disseminated across international boundaries, and over enemy lines, could be deployed in novel combinations with existing technologies. Film, shortwave radio, and even printed fliers were studied for their effectiveness as tools of both mobilization (at home) and demoralization (when targeting enemy forces). After 1945, social scientists and state propagandists alike began applying their new insights to issues of domestic national

²² See: Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema Before 1949*, 160.

security; in China, this process occurred in the process of a bitter conflict between two opposing political claimants.²³ Media thus became one of the new techniques of waging “popular war” in China well before it was identified with Third World guerrilla movements by Western observers.

In film, as in other areas, Communist Party cultural officials sought to represent the People’s Liberation Army as the nation’s savior while denigrating the military and social mismanagement of Nationalist opponents. War of Resistance efforts had ended on an anticlimactic note, with shooting on *A Border Region Labor Hero* suddenly stopped as a result of its real-life protagonist’s defection. In their stead, a new emphasis was placed on propagandizing Communist militarization of the base areas in preparation for Nationalist general Hu Zongnan’s advance on Yan’an. A new team, established by the party’s Northwest Bureau and composed of filmmakers Yi Ming, Cheng Mo, Ling Zifeng, and Luo Mao, took up this task of documenting Communist resistance to the new enemy. Whereas past wartime documentaries had been accompanied by slogans such as “down with Japanese imperialism,” these early images of the Civil War spread calls to “protect the border regions, protect Yan’an, protect the Communist Party center, and

²³ In the U.S., terms like “political communication” and “international communication” gradually made headway among academic communities during the 1950s, even though many social scientists who had studied wartime propaganda and its effects continued to use the term “psychological warfare” in their research. See: Armand Mattelart (Susan Emanuel and James A. Cohen, trans.), *Mapping World Communication: War, Progress, Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 [1991], 85-91. During the war itself, “psychological warfare” had come to replace “propaganda” as the term most commonly deployed in describing operations of the U.S. military, where such distinctions were used to draw a clear line between Allied and Axis battlefield techniques. In July 1946, New Fourth Route Army filmmaker Xue Boqing presented his documentary *Military Life in the New Fourth Route Army* (*Xin si jun de budui shenghuo*) to the Nationalist-Communist joint Military Affairs Mediation Executive Small Group (*Junshi tiaochu zhixing xiaozu*) as evidence against Nationalist accusations of improper conduct during the war. See: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1997 [1963]), 371-375.

protect Mao Zedong.”²⁴ Local people were shown mobilizing for war and supporting the People’s Liberation Army, implying that all shared a common responsibility in their resistance to Nationalist advance.²⁵ In addition to images of self-defense—which ultimately include retreat from Yan’an itself—these films recorded defeated Nationalist soldiers and captured supplies as evidence that Communist forces were equal measures indomitable and humane. Other scenes highlighted instances of top leaders Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Ren Bishi, Peng Dehuai, and Xi Zhongxun “sharing a common fate” (*tong shengsi gong huannan*) with subordinates by working late hours or taking personal command of battlefield maneuvers. The significance of these moments for future propaganda efforts was stressed repeatedly by Zhou, who urged Cheng Mo and Ling Zifeng to persist in recording “source material” (*sucai*) concerning the war, despite adverse conditions.²⁶

The Northwest Trainee Film Team

By late 1947, the party center’s Propaganda Department had disbanded the Yan’an Film Studio. The Northwest Trainee Film Team (*Xibei dianying gongxue dui*) was established in its stead as a hinterland organization charged primarily with training new personnel, as well as processing and editing recently-shot footage of Yan’an’s capture for a documentary bearing the working title *Protect Yan’an and Protect the*

²⁴ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 92.

²⁵ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998 [1963]), 379.

²⁶ Cheng Mo, “Zai Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu gongzuo de shihou” [When (I) Worked in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 43. Originally appeared in Zhongyang xinwen jilu dianying zhipianchang, ed., *Women de zuji* (n.p., n.d.).

Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region (Baowei Yan'an he baowei Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu).

Two additional filmmakers, Zhong Jingzhi and Cheng Yin, joined the new organization after being recruited from within northwest cultural organizations. Yet as Nationalist forces encircled the Communist Party's hinterland base areas, the team was ordered to relocate to Beipo village in neighboring Shanxi province.

With approximately forty reels of footage but no permanent facilities for further post-production, Northwest Trainee Film Team members began their tenure by engaging in an intense period of political study during which initiates were educated in party doctrine and cultural policy. A series of basic principles (*jianze*) were drafted:

1) Responsibilities: work—to complete the development and reproduction of documentary footage taken from the Northwest battlefields; study—to travel as a group to the Northeast [for] study, and train film cadres who [will] place equal emphasis on ideology (*sixiang*) and technical knowledge (*jishu*); 2) Organization: the work-study team's leadership nucleus will be [comprised of] a “team affairs committee” (*duiwu weiyyuanhui*) made up of five committee members appointed from the [party's] Northwest Bureau ... 3) Team personnel: should generally be limited to literary and artistic youth, and cadres, from Shaanxi and Shanxi; [they] will be required to return to the Northwest and engage in film-related work [there] following completion of their training; 4) Educational responsibilities (*xuexi renwu*) of team personnel: to study each branch of technical knowledge (screenwriting, direction, cinematography, mise-en-scene, soundtrack, projection, etc.) and seriously, but not simply study technique; [personnel] should also raise their own ideological knowledge (*sixiang renshi*), [awareness of] political affairs, theory, culture and so on, in order that they become new film workers truly able to serve the people.²⁷

²⁷ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yan'an dianying tuan de fendou licheng,” in Yan'an wenyi congshu bianwei hui, eds., *Yan'an yishu congshu, di shisan juan: dianying, sheying juan* (Changsha: Hu'nan wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 25. Much of the footage in the team's possession at this time was presumably shot during the Battle of Shajiadian.

In practice, the team served as another extension of the party-military cultural apparatus. Northwest Bureau head Xi Zhongxun and regional armed forces commander He Long were nominally the principal decision-makers for the team itself.²⁸ Many team members had already joined the party—to become a trainee represented a prestigious and desirable assignment—and possessed significant experience as playwrights, directors, set designers, and actors within the loose system of drama societies (*jushe*) that crisscrossed the northwestern base areas. Several were either former instructors or students at the Lu Xun Academy of Art and Literature, while a smaller number were Yan'an Film Studio veterans. In total, the team consisted of approximately thirty individuals, all of whom had reached artistic maturity as participants in wartime mobilization efforts.

After Beipo, the Northwest Trainee Film Team joined Communist military forces on the long trek toward northeast China. While in central Hebei province, news of unexpected Nationalist troop movements delayed the team's further advance; the winter of 1947 was spent quartered with North China Film Team members (discussed below) in Shenze county.²⁹ During the ensuing “three inspections, three investigations” (*san cha san zheng*) campaign to improve party loyalty and weed out dissent, this expanded group of filmmakers participated in yet another training program intended as preparation for future responsibilities as technical and political advisors.³⁰ Two Japanese members of the North China Film Team—both former employees of the Manchuria Motion Picture

²⁸ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yan'an dianying tuan de fendou licheng,” 26.

²⁹ Qian Xiaozhang, “Yan'an dianying tuan de fendou licheng,” 26. The North China Film Team (*Huabei dianying dui*, or *Jin-Cha-Ji junqu zhengzhi bu dianying dui*) was a similar organization under the command of the Communist Party's North China military organization.

³⁰ Zhong Jingzhi, “Cong Yan'an dianying zhipianchang dao Xibei dianying gongxue dui” [From the Yan'an Film Studio to the Northwest Trainee Film Team], reprinted in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 56. Originally appeared in *Dazhong dianying*, September 1959. Training was conducted under the supervision of leading North China propaganda official Zhou Yang.

Corporation—lectured on cinematic theory and editing, while the Northwest Trainee Film Team’s technical director, Cheng Mo, discussed cinematography.

A speech given by North China cultural commissar Zhou Yang on May 10, 1947 provides some insight into the issues facing the party’s cultural workers as they adjusted to new civil war realities. Speaking for the Central Committee, Zhou urged his audience to overcome the atmosphere of “caution” (*shenzhong*) created by the Yan’an rectification (*zhengfeng*) campaigns that had followed Mao Zedong’s 1942 “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and the Arts.”³¹ Rather, he urged intellectuals to address with common people by creating a new culture that would “unobtrusively influence” (*qian yi mo hua*) mass sentiment. Zhou’s speech sanctioned realistic images of popular and party-led wartime resistance, “local” (*bendi*) individuals and events, and exemplary human models as the primary vehicles of this new endeavor; his emphasis on “influence” (*mohua*) and “reality” (*zhenshi*) highlighted the latter’s malleability in the eyes of wartime propagandists. Cultural work reflected concerns with how ordinary people might perceive Communist military action and policies as the war moved toward northeast China. By portraying both party and people as sharing similar goals, the former might more readily appear as a benefactor rather than another occupying force.

On March 3, 1948 both film teams departed Shenzhe for the Communist-controlled city of Shijiazhuang. Several former northwest personnel, including Cheng Mo, Ling Zifeng, Yang Qiong, and Shi Langxing, were subsequently transferred to new positions in the city’s cultural organizations or the North China Film Team, while the remaining

³¹ Zhou Yang, “Tan wenyi wenti” [On Literary and Artistic Problems], in *Zhou Yang wenji* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 499.

members made their way toward the Northeast, joining the flood of military personnel also being transferred to that region.³² Still carrying canisters of footage taken a year prior, they arrived at the Northeast Film Studio's Xing Mountain encampment (discussed below) in June 1948. This material—along with the never-completed *A Border Region Labor Hero*—was subsequently edited into several longer documentaries such as *Return My Yan'an* (*Huan wo Yan'an*) and *The Red Flag Flutters in the West Wind* (*Hong qi manjuan xi feng*).

The North China Film Team

By coordinating filmmaking with military advance and occupation, the Communist Party sought to introduce an element of mobility into cultural production that would allow its armed forces to counter Nationalist propaganda and build popular support. Another example of this tactical innovation was the Jin-Cha-Ji Military Region Political Department Film Team (*Jin-Cha-Ji junqu zhengzhi bu dianying dui*), also referred to as the North China Film Team (*Huabei dianying dui*), which remained active for almost four years between 1946 and 1949. More than their northwestern counterparts, North China Film Team members staged frequent exhibitions using projectors captured from Japanese and Nationalist forces; standard fare included old Soviet features, documentaries, and newsreels. Team members also screened more recent footage taken from People's Liberation Army victories, key moments of which might be

³² Qian Xiaozhang, "Yan'an dianying tuan de fendou licheng," 26.

re-staged for the benefit of the camera, and produced short propaganda reels concerning Communist policies.³³

Following the occupation of Zhangjiakou in late summer 1945, members of the Jin-Cha-Ji Political Department Pictorial Agency organized regular film screenings for army officers and regulars in the newly-christened Zhangjiakou People's Theater (*Zhangjiakou renmin juyuan*), offering Soviet war films first released during World War II.³⁴ Jin-Cha-Ji military commander Nie Rongzhen subsequently signed off on tentative plans to establish a regional film studio, for which theater manager Wang Yang and Soviet-trained filmmaker Su Heqing were selected as the principal organizers. In March 1946, following a meeting with Northeast Bureau superior Peng Zhen, Wang travelled to the Northeast on a mission to transport equipment from the former Manchuria Motion Picture Studio back to Hebei province. After reaching the Communist-operated Northeast Film Company's remote production facility in Heilongjiang province, Wang received cameras, sound equipment, lighting, chemicals, films, and twelve experienced technicians.³⁵ Although the return trip was plagued by several near-fatal accidents, including a train collision, overturned transport truck, and armed attacks by local "bandits" (*tufei*), the group returned to Zhangjiakou that August.³⁶ Plans for studio construction were further delayed by attacks made on Communist positions by forces

³³ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 76.

³⁴ "Jin-Cha-Ji junqu zhengzhi bu dianying dui lishi jiyao" [A Record of Important Historical Events Concerning the Jin-Cha-Ji Military Region Political Department Film Team], in Wang Yang and Ma Yuyin, eds., *Zhanhuo zhong chengzhang de Huabei dianying dui* (Beijing, 1997), 231.

³⁵ Su Shuyang and Shi Xia, eds., *Ranshao de Wang Yang* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1999), 158-161.

³⁶ Interview with LHY, May 2005.

under the command of Fu Zuoyi, during which the recovered equipment was hidden in local caves.

The North China Film Team was established on October 15, 1946. With film equipment and projectionists from the Jin-Cha-Ji Political Department Pictorial Agency, and additional personnel drawn from other cultural organizations active in the north China region, it numbered approximately thirty individuals, of whom only ten had any previous filmmaking experience.³⁷ Early team operations included conducting propaganda screenings (i.e. film exhibition accompanied by a politically-trained speaker/narrator) of Soviet features *A Female Village Schoolteacher* and *We From Kronstadt*, which were deemed “effective tools for encouraging the military.”³⁸ The team’s camera crew was “embedded” in the army; a third group, comprised solely of projectionists, provided regular “comfort” screenings for People’s Liberation Army staff and troops. Many former members of the Yan’an Film Corps received transfers to join the growing organization, which operated three mobile projection units (*xunhui fangying dui*) by the spring of 1947. Equipment captured from defeated enemy forces and cultural institutions was either put directly into operation or used to refurbish balky machinery.

In May, the North China Film Team completed construction of a temporary studio facility in the midst of an abandoned village threshing ground.³⁹ Protecting and developing valuable negatives was the team’s first priority; from these were compiled

³⁷ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 100.

³⁸ Wang Yang, “Zhuang zai yi liang dache shang de dianying zhipianchang—ji Jin-Cha-Ji junqu zhengzhi bu dianying dui” [A Cart-Borne Film Studio—Remembering the Jin-Cha-Ji Military Region Political Department Film Team], in Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985 [1962]), 59.

³⁹ Su Shuyang and Shi Xia, eds., *Ranshao de Wang Yang*, 185. Studio facilities were housed in former donkey pens, grain mills, and grass-roofed sheds. In some cases, shredded quilts and burlap were used to keep light, noise, and moisture at bay during the editing and recording process; electricity was provided by a flatbed truck that doubled as a mobile production unit.

The War of Self-Defense, First Report (*Ziwei zhangzhen xinwen di yi hao*, aka *North China News, No. 1/Huabei xinwen di yi hao*). This milestone in Communist Party postwar newsreel production depicted the capture of Ding County by People's Liberation Army forces, and ceremony honoring an "iron battalion" for combat valor. Such images sought to imbue the Communist-led war effort with a heroic veneer. One segment, "Press Forward to Victory" (*Xiang shengli tingjin*), contained an overdubbed speech given to soldiers immediately before battle. According to a July 8, 1947 article in the *Jin-Cha-Ji Daily*, premiere screenings of *First Report* took place during a military celebration on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party. North China Film Team members responsible for producing the film received individual awards, including induction into the party.⁴⁰ Thereafter, additional reels were immediately transported to the front.

Successful completion of *The War of Self-Defense, First Report* convinced North China reporters that a "modernized film industry" (*xiandaihua de dianying shiye*) had arisen amidst the region's rural environs. Essentially a four-part newsreel, segments such as "A Smashing Victory at Zhengding" (*Zhengding dajie*) not only established the superiority of the People's Liberation Army over National Revolutionary Army forces, but also depicted soldiers as heroes in the eyes of "the masses," who appeared as cheering

⁴⁰ Xiao Bai, "Jin-Cha-Ji dianying shiye xin jiyuan—zhanzheng xinwen jilu yingpian chuangzhi chenggong shou ci fangying" [A New Epoch for the Jin-Cha-Ji film Industry—The Successful Production and Premiere Exhibition of a Wartime News Documentary], reprinted in Wang Yang and Ma Yuyin, eds., *Zhanhuo zhong chengzhang de Huabei dianying dui* (Beijing, 1997), 213. Originally appeared in *Jin-Cha-Ji ribao*, July 8, 1947.

peasant throngs.⁴¹ Another objective of the films was to foster a sense of identity between Communist military objectives and popular desire for peace after years of wartime exigency—the voiceover accompanying *First Report* praised “our” victories in the War of Self-Defense, and urged audiences to “put forth our greatest resolve, be ever-victorious, and continue to eradicate enemies.” Other images depicted the post-liberation People’s Government of Ding Country delivering emergency grain rations to impoverished families, and the humane treatment extended by People’s Liberation Army forces to Nationalist prisoners of war.⁴²

By late 1947, North China Film Team activities were effectively suspended as the Communist Party prepared to intensify rural land reform and redistribution efforts. Camera crews appeared at the party’s Xibaipo headquarters to film the July 1947 National Land Reform Conference chaired by Liu Shaoqi, and during victory celebrations following of the Battle of Qingfengdian. Further newsreel production, however, was put on hold as team members again relocated to Shenze county, taking part in land reform and the Military Rectification Movement (*Zheng jun yundong*) later that winter.⁴³ Following a period of joint training with the Northwest Trainee Film Team, North China Film Team members relocated to Shijiazhuang.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Wang Yang, “Ziwei zhanzheng xinwen di yi hao’ jieshao” [An Introduction to *The War of Self-Defense: First Report*], reprinted in Wang Yang and Ma Yuyin, eds., *Zhanhuo zhong chengzhang de Huabei dianying dui* (Beijing, 1997), 216. Originally appeared in *Jin-Cha-Ji ribao*, July 14, 1947.

⁴² Literally, prisoners were shown being given the chance to “once again be human” (*chongxin zuo ren*).

⁴³ It appears that a planned second installment of *The War of Self-Defense*, which was to include footage taken during the evacuation of Yan’an shot by Cheng Mo and Ling Zifeng, was also scrapped. See: “Shaanbei shezhi ziwei zhanzheng yingpian” [Shaanbei Produces a War of Self-Defense Film], *Renmin ribao*, October 26, 1947, 4. These images would first appear in documentaries *Return My Yan’an* and *The Red Flag Flutters in the West Wind*.

⁴⁴ At this point, regional party-military administration of the remaining North China base areas underwent further consolidation, and the North China Film Team (*Jin-Cha-Ji junqu zhengzhi bu dianying dui*) was

Projection work expanded rapidly during 1948, as military gains in the region were consolidated under Communist Party administration. The North China Film Team now included two camera crews and six projection teams, including one all-female unit led by Na Lei; high-ranking party leaders arriving in Shijiazhuang were treated to frequent screenings.⁴⁵ In addition to constructing a new studio facility, the team managed a film distribution center (*yingye bu*), and restored war-damaged theaters in Handan, Xingtai, and Anyang. Additional equipment was purchased in Dalian, bought from soldiers in the Soviet Red Army known for selling miscellaneous looted machines and parts to Chinese buyers.⁴⁶ By year's end, North China Film Team crews were moving from front to front, shooting footage for *The War of Self-Defense, Third Report* (aka *North China News, No. 3*) and gathering material for the future. *Third Report* was released in March 1948, and featured extensive depictions of Nationalist surrender under heavy artillery bombardment and street-level combat during the capture of Qingfengdian and Shijiazhuang. Voiceovers blamed Jiang Jieshi for loss and destruction incurred by the war, urging audience members to “resolutely, effectively, thoroughly, and totally eradicate the enemy.” Other depictions included: U.S.-manufactured planes of “Bandit Jiang” allegedly in the act of bombing factories and homes; peasants treating People's Liberation Army soldiers like kin; another older woman washing a wounded man's

renamed the North China Military Region Political Department Film Corps (*Huabei zhengzhi bu dianying tuan*).

⁴⁵ Mao Zedong, for example, viewed several recent Soviet films, 1930s “left-wing” productions such as *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, 1937), and a Japanese [Manchurian?] production of *Journey to the West*. Interview with LHY, May 2005.

⁴⁶ Interview with LHY, May 2005. Much of this confiscated “enemy” property was relocated to the Soviet Union nonetheless.

uniform, “soaked with the fresh blood of honor” (*ranman guangrong xianxue*).⁴⁷ One montage included a sequence of scenes from post-liberation Shijiazhuang—restored factories, grateful peasants, bookstores, repaved roads, and holiday celebrations—to illustrate the fruits of “new democracy” for those who supported the new government.

As Communist control over North China deepened, many North China Film Team personnel were gradually transferred to the large cities of Beiping and Tianjin. By April 1949, most equipment in the Beiping-based Third Central Film Studio had been secured for use in the future Beijing Film Studio. Several North China Film Team members—most notably Wang Yang—would play vital roles in this facility after the founding of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Others joined the Southwest Field Army (*Xi’nan yezhan jun*), or the recently-established North China Base Military Region Political Department Film Education Unit (*Huabei junqu zhengzhi bu dianying jiaoyu bu*), while the team itself was formally disbanded.

The Northeast Nexus: State Cinema and Communist Rule

North China battlefields represented only one context of Communist efforts to report on the People’s Liberation Army “War of Self-Defense” in a positive way. After years of hinterland isolation, the party stepped forward with a calculated propaganda offensive based on territorial and technological gains acquired from the collapsed state of Manzhouguo, now once again China’s “Northeast.” Like Soviet Union *dezinformatsia*

⁴⁷ “Ziwei zhanzheng xinwen di san hao” [The War of Self-Defense: Third Report], in Wang Yang, Ma Yuyin, eds., *Zhanhuo zhong chengzhang de Hua bei dianying dui* (Beijing, 1997), 223-224.

(disinformation) activities, these informational strategies also aimed at discrediting an enemy government by exposing its malicious intent—in this case, by blaming the Nationalists for the wartime destruction, collapsed economy, and social inequality which appeared rampant during the late 1940s.⁴⁸ Unlike the Soviet Union, however, China's cultural markets were not yet completely nationalized, thus reintroducing a commercial calculus to Communist filmmaking efforts during the Civil War.

The Soviet invasion of Manchuria in 1945 presented former Yan'an filmmaker Yuan Muzhi with an opportunity to return to China and reassume a leading role as architect of Communist Party cinematic planning. According to one biographer, Yuan's experiences in the Soviet Union had been ambivalent; working alongside Sergei Eisenstein in the Moscow Film Studio had provided him with valuable experience in film production and studio management, while abandoning *Yan'an and the Eighth Route Army* during the wartime evacuation of Moscow left Yuan bitter and despondent.⁴⁹ Upon Yuan's arrival to the Northeast, the party's regional bureau appointed him advisor (*guwen*) to the Northeast Film Company—a Communist-controlled front organization involved in the stockpiling and protection of Manchuria Motion Picture Company studio equipment. When the company was relocated in April 1946 following the recapture of Changchun by Nationalist forces, Yuan became head of Northeast Film Studio, founded in Heilongjiang province on a site chosen for its proximity to the Sino-Soviet border.

⁴⁸ Soviet disinformation tactics, some spearheaded by the KGB, also included reconstitution of the Comintern as the Cominform in 1947, through which was organized a world-wide anti-U.S. campaign drawn up by the Administration of Agitation and Propaganda of the Communist Party Central Committee (AGITPROP). See: Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs, and the Media Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), 32-33.

⁴⁹ See: Zhong Dafeng, "Xin Zhongguo dianying gongye: chuchuang shexiang ji qi shishi," in Lu Hongshi, ed., *Zhongguo dianying: miaoshu yu chanshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002), 272-292.

Northeast personnel included both Chinese and Japanese veterans of the Manzhouguo studio system. Many had made the northern trek rather than face future dangers as Communist and Nationalist armies jockeyed for regional control. Recruited by underground Communist agents, they constructed what was soon known as the “cradle of New China’s cinema” (*Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*). In reality, however, Northeast film production during the Civil War incorporated many tried-and-true patterns of political propaganda from the past several decades.

The Northeast Film Company

The end of World War II triggered a massive influx of intellectuals and artists to China’s coastal cities. State and private investment in the cultural sector created a cinematic resurgence, and studio doors reopened to accept returnees from the hinterland in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Beijing. In the Northeast, however, competition between Nationalist and Communist forces for control of resources belonging to the collapsed Manzhouguo state was complicated by the presence of the Soviet Red Army, which maintained nominal control over the former capital of Xinjing (now Changchun) during operations to relocate industrial equipment from the Northeast to Russia as payment toward wartime reparations demanded from Japan.⁵⁰

Communist Party operatives played a negligible role in the handover of the Manchuria Motion Picture Company studio to Changchun’s new authorities following Japanese surrender. Chinese advisors who had worked closely with Amakusa

⁵⁰ Yu-Kwei Cheng, *Foreign Trade and Industrial Development of China: A Historical and Integrated Analysis through 1948* (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of Washington, D.C., 1956), 58.

Masahiko's Japanese staff controlled the studio's day-to-day operations, while other personnel abandoned the site for their native villages, turned to petty commerce, or drank and gambled while awaiting further news of the changing political situation.⁵¹ For many Japanese workers, concern for the safety of themselves and their families added to the uncertainty.⁵²

Some time later, underground Communist operatives Liu Jianmin and Zhao Dongli, then working as field agents of the Soviet Red Army, arranged a meeting with five Chinese studio technicians.⁵³ Through this relationship, the party was able to secure wider support through the establishment of "workers leagues" charged with protecting studio equipment and pressuring management for payment of back wages. Party-worker liaisons Ma Shouqing and Jiang Hao, along with screenwriter Zhang Xinshi, were subsequently recognized by Soviet military government authorities as legitimate studio representatives, and appeared at several "victory rallies" (*shengli dahui*) marking the establishment of a transitional coalition government composed of Communist, Nationalist, and Soviet administrators.⁵⁴ With the studio continuing to earn meager profits by distributing archived films, the League of Northeast Filmworkers (*Dongbei*

⁵¹ Ma Shouqing, "Dongbei dianying gongsi chengli qianhou" [Before and After the Establishment of the Northeast Film Company], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 28.

⁵² 大家有章 (Ming Wei, trans.), "Wo tong Dongbei dianying gongsi" [My Role in the Northeast Film Company], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 80-81.

⁵³ Ma Shouqing, "Dongbei dianying gongsi chengli qianhou" [Before and After the Establishment of the Northeast Film Company], 29.

⁵⁴ Zhao Dongli, "'8.15' hou de Changchun xingshi he dui yuan 'Manying' de gongzuo" [Changchun and Work Concerning the Original "Manchuria Film Studio" After Japanese Surrender], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 1. At least one "victory rally" was filmed by studio personnel, and the resulting footage shipped to the Soviet Union where it was reputedly viewed by Joseph Stalin. See: Zhang Xinshi, "Dongdang niandai de huiyi" [Memories of a Turbulent Decade], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 17.

dianying gongzuozhe lianmeng) adjudicated between competing factions, some of whom sought to sell the remaining equipment for profit.⁵⁵

Although ultimately short-lived, the league represented an important organization “fulcrum” for widening the organizational space available to Liu, Zhao, and their studio proxies. Although the Soviet Red Army explicitly prohibited the existence of Japanese-run organizations after surrender, many Japanese workers also joined the league rather than negotiate directly with Soviet authorities for their repatriation.⁵⁶ Japanese and Chinese administrators, by contrast, expressed open hostility toward the new organization. After weeks of negotiations, administration of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation main studio was transferred to the League of Northeast Filmworkers, and members of its Communist Party leadership given official papers verifying their ties to Soviet military offices.⁵⁷

By September 1945, the league’s principal organizers had successfully rebuffed several threats to their leadership, including one made by a pro-Nationalist faction which subsequently disbanded.⁵⁸ Planning began for the establishment of a league-managed enterprise, the Northeast Film Company (*Dongbei dianying gongsi*), to manage the former studio’s distribution business and maintain its filmmaking equipment.⁵⁹ Former screenwriter Zhang Xinshi became the company’s chief executive, supervising the

⁵⁵ Zhang Xinshi, “Dongdang niandai de huiyi” [Memories of a Turbulent Decade], 15.

⁵⁶ Zhang Xinshi, “Dongdang niandai de huiyi” [Memories of a Turbulent Decade], 14; Zhao Dongli, “‘8.15’ hou de Changchun xingshi he dui yuan ‘Manying’ de gongzuo” [Changchun and Work Concerning the Original “Manchuria Film Studio” After Japanese Surrender], 5-6.

⁵⁷ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshi, 1986), 7. Indeed, Soviet patronage proved essential to maintaining the safety of the studio community as former Manchurian cultural institutions—with their long history of ties to “enemy” counter-intelligence and propaganda activity—were regarded with suspicion by Communist and Nationalist officials alike.

⁵⁸ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 10-11.

⁵⁹ Ma Shouqing, “Dongbei dianying gongsi chengli qianhou” [Before and After the Establishment of the Northeast Film Company], 33.

production of several stage performances—including Lu Xun’s *The True Story of Ah Q* and Ba Jin’s *Family*—and subtitling of films obtained from the Soviet Union into Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-language releases.⁶⁰ Nearly half of the company’s personnel were either of Japanese or Korean nationality. Ma Shouqing later recalled:

When we established the Northeast Film Company we used the following criteria ... Those who had oppressed and maltreated the Chinese people during the Japanese occupation were not allowed to continue to work with us. We also sought those who were most competent.”⁶¹

Based on its reputation as a reliable employer, company operations began to expand beyond Changchun, and soon encompassed the Russian-built city of Ha’erbin.

Nationalist pressure on the company intensified in November 1945, after which operations were maintained primarily through contacts with the Soviet Film Trading Company (SOVEXPORTFILM, or *Sulian dianying shuchu shuru gongsi*) and military government.⁶² At the same time, former Yan’an filmmakers Yuan Muzhi and Qian Xiaozhang arrived in the Northeast and began working with the party’s regional bureau to begin securing Changchun and its enterprises by force; when the Soviet Red Army withdrew on April 14, 1946 Communist forces successfully drove the Nationalists from their positions. The event also marked a change in leadership for the Northeast Film

⁶⁰ Patricia Wilson, “The Founding of the Northeast Film Studio, 1946-1949,” in George Stephen Semsel, ed., *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People’s Republic* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 18; ⁶⁰ Zhao Dongli, “‘8.15’ hou de Changchun xingshi he dui yuan ‘Manying’ de gongzuo” [Changchun and Work Concerning the Original “Manchuria Film Studio” After Japanese Surrender], 6.

⁶¹ Patricia Wilson, “The Founding of the Northeast Film Studio, 1946-1949,” 18; Ma Shouqing, “Dongbei dianying gongsi chengli qianhou” [Before and After the Establishment of the Northeast Film Company], 37.

⁶² Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 18-19.

Company as Yuan, Qian, Shu Qun, and Tian Fang assumed control of daily operations.⁶³

When Changchun fell again to Nationalist armies in May, Yuan and others led the evacuation of company personnel and equipment north, to Ha'erbin.⁶⁴

The Northeast Film Studio

Under Shu Qun's direction, members of the Northeast Film Company moved first toward Ha'erbin, then further north to the city of Xingshan. Party members worked desperately to maintain morale among the company's Japanese technicians, whose skills were deemed essential to future filmmaking efforts.⁶⁵ Yet the decision to establish a new studio on the site of an abandoned mining facility (*Hegang kuangqu*) triggered a new round of desertions among Chinese and Japanese personnel alike.⁶⁶ The studio community had dwindled to two hundred and forty-six individuals by late 1946, to whose numbers were added additional Yan'an filmmakers Chen Bo'er and Wu Yinxian.

The Northeast Film Studio (*Dongbei dianying zhipianchang*), established on October 1, 1946, was operated almost exclusively by former Communist base area cadres. Wu, Yuan Muzhi, and Tian Fang occupied the highest positions, while

⁶³ Qian Xiaozhang, "Zuichu de licheng—yi jiezhou 'Manying' he chengli 'Dongying'" [The Earliest Course—Remembering the Takeover of the "Manchuria Film Studio" and the Founding of the "Northeast Film Studio"], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 55-56. Among the four, Shu was most closely connected to individuals within both the company and the party's Northeast Bureau, and was largely successful in quieting mistrust of the new leadership. See: Shu Qun, "Wo zai Dongying de jingli" [My Northeast Film Studio Experiences], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 71.

⁶⁴ The number of individuals evacuated totaled approximately four hundred company employees, family members, and dependents.

⁶⁵ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 28.

⁶⁶ Qian Xiaozhang, "Zuichu de licheng—yi jiezhou 'Manying' he chengli 'Dongying'" [The Earliest Course—Remembering the Takeover of the "Manchuria Film Studio" and the Founding of the "Northeast Film Studio"], 64.

Northeastern personnel filled the lower administrative and technical ranks.⁶⁷ Yan'an artist-intellectuals Chen and Yan Wenjing supervised creative work; two former north China propagandists, Yu Lan and Yuan Naichen, managed the studio's agitprop acting corps (*wengong tuan*). During the following two years, Communist Party-directed cultural units from across China would converge upon the Northeast as People's Liberation Army power in the region solidified, and mobilization began for a decisive confrontation with Nationalist forces.

In an effort to expand their operations, Northeast Film Studio representatives recruited among students at the Communist-sponsored Norman Bethune Medical College (aka Xingshan Medical College) and Northeast Political and Military University.⁶⁸ Like their counterparts in the North China and Northwest film teams, studio members entered an intense period of political study and participation in social reform efforts (e.g. land redistribution) in 1947.⁶⁹ At the height of this radical moment—later criticized as an “infantile disorder”—Japanese personnel were expelled from the studio and relocated to either Pyongyang, in neighboring Korea, or the Dalian River Coal Mine (*Dalian he meikuang*), near Shenyang.⁷⁰ While as much as a year would pass before this period of exile was brought to a close, the incident dramatically decreased the number of Japanese filmworkers within the Northeast Film Studio community. Instead, a constant stream of Yan'an and North China cadres arrived to assist in film production under the supervision

⁶⁷ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 40-41.

⁶⁸ Zhang Xinshi, “Dongdang niandai huiyi—cong ‘Manying’ dao ‘Changying’” [Memories of a Turbulent Decade—From the “Manchuria Film Studio” to the “Changchun Film Studio”], *Changchun wenshi ziliao*, no. 1 (1986), 67.

⁶⁹ Zhang Xinshi, “Dongdang niandai huiyi—cong ‘Manying’ dao ‘Changying’” [Memories of a Turbulent Decade—From the “Manchuria Film Studio” to the “Changchun Film Studio”], 68.

⁷⁰ 民野吉太郎 et al. (Gu Quan, trans.), “Women de huiyi” [Our Recollections], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 95-99.

of new Film Bureau (*Dianying ju*) chief Yuan Muzhi.⁷¹ By late 1949, the Northeast Film Studio employed 1,193 individuals, including 340 creative cadres (e.g. directors, screenwriters, and designers), 215 technicians, 179 administrators, and 459 workers and odd-job (*qinza*) personnel, and the expanding operation was again transferred to the former Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation studio under People's Liberation Army protection.⁷²

The Democratic Northeast

Northeast Film Studio productions reflected the mixed cultural economy of the late 1930s and 1940s. Although filmmakers became better-versed in canonical Communist texts like Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts" and the Soviet compilation *Party Theories of the Cinema* (*Dang lun dianying*)—the latter carried back to China by Yuan Muzhi—production remained divided between for-profit features and shorter newsreels, documentaries, and educational films.⁷³ Like Chongqing advocates of national policy cinema before them, cadres repeatedly emphasized the role of politics as in providing "direction" or "guidance" (*zhidao*) to art. This time, however, the new setting of national salvation was the Communist-controlled "democratic Northeast" (*minzhu Dongbei*).

⁷¹ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 41-42, 57-58. The studio was also visited by Hungarian and Korean delegations, but the purpose of these visits is unclear.

⁷² Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 42.

⁷³ On the Chinese-language translation of *Party Theories of the Cinema*, see: Meng Guangjun, "Yi Dongying, zui yi shi Xingshan" [When Recalling the Northeast Film Studio, (I) Most Remember Xingshan], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 181-183.

The destructive aftermath of the Allied war against Japan—compounded by a bitter military struggle between Nationalist and Communist forces—meant that wartime themes and anti-Nationalist disinformation tactics were profoundly intertwined with Communist propaganda from 1945 onward. Early agitprop activities in the Northeast focused on promoting the promises of Mao’s “new democracy” and stirring up bitterness against Japanese “invaders.”⁷⁴ Criticism of the Nationalist Party focused on the idea of a Jiang Jieshi-led plot to steal the “fruits” of victory from the Chinese people.⁷⁵ As U.S. Foreign Service Officer John F. Melby noted, most Communist “propaganda education” consisted of “anti-American content” and “abuse of the Generalissimo.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the earliest Northeast Film Studio productions used animation and traditional Chinese puppets (*mu’ou*) to satirize the Jiang-Truman alliance. *The Emperor’s Dream* (*Huangdi meng*), a four-act puppet “opera” directed by Chen Bo’er and Japanese filmmaker 持永只仁, depicted Jiang as a vague and pretentious leader. Another type of release intended to captivate semi-literate audiences was the animated *Catching a Turtle in a Jar* (*Weng zhong zhuo bie*), in which the cowering Generalissimo, trapped in his own fortified bunkers, is crushed by a gigantic People’s Liberation Army soldier.

As suggested by films like *The Emperor’s Dream*, the principal difference between post-1945 Communist filmmaking and earlier wartime efforts lay in the degree to which filmmakers would go to accommodate non-urban cultural tastes. In the eyes of

⁷⁴ Yu Lan, *Kule wubian du rensheng* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), 137-138; Interview with YL, March 2005.

⁷⁵ He Jinwen, “Yi Dongbei wengong yi tuan hebing Dongying” [Merging the Northeast First Cultural Work Corps with the Northeast Film Studio], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 121-123.

⁷⁶ John F. Melby, *The Mandate of Heaven: Record of a Civil War, China 1945-1949* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 243, 262.

Yan'an-trained cadres, creating “close relationships” (*miqie de guanxi*) between artists and common people meant privileging cultural tropes believed to carry the broadest possible appeal.⁷⁷ So much depended on judgment, however, that Northeast filmmakers pondered even the smallest details when depicting factories and rural areas. In later years, Chen Bo'er would complain that the anxieties felt by indecisive personnel had become serious impediments to studio production.⁷⁸ Even among cadres with Yan'an experience, few had applied Mao's “Yan'an Talks” to film production; some had yet to see a film.⁷⁹

Yet production ground on. Two features—*Light Shines Everywhere* (*Guang mang wan zhang*, 1949) and *The Bridge* (*Qiao*, 1949)—depicted workers foiling Nationalist saboteurs or reconstructing post-war China. Both films urged audiences to show their own support for Communist armies at the front. Another pair of “short features,” *Leave Him to Fight Old Jiang* (*Liuxia ta da Lao Jiang*, 1948) and *Back Into the Fold* (*Huidao ziji de budui lai*, 1949), blamed the civil war on the Nationalists and encouraged community self-defense. *Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua nü'er*, 1949) praised female supporters of the Communist Party by portraying them as anti-Japanese guerrillas.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Interview with YM, April 2005.

⁷⁸ See: Chen Bo'er, “Gushipian cong wu dao you de biandao gongzuo” [Making Feature Films from Scratch] (January 1950), reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 59.

⁷⁹ Zhong Jingzhi, “Wo zai Dongying shi ge yue” [My Ten Months at the Northeast Film Studio], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 118-119; Interview with YM, April 2005.

⁸⁰ According to scenarist Yan Yiyan, the plot for *Daughters of China* was based loosely on the exploits of eight female resistance fighters. See: Yan Yiyan, “Huiyi ‘Zhonghua nü'er’ de chuanguo” [Remembering the Creation of *Daughters of China*], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 187-196.

Compared with the products of Nationalist-controlled studios or Shanghai's non-state sector, Communist features were fewer and, from the perspective of audiences, rarer. This imbalance was partially addressed by the effort which Northeast filmmakers poured into newsreel and documentary production—between 1946 and 1949, three cameramen died on the battlefield while one succumbed to disease. Away from the southern front, film crews recorded a mixture of post-war retribution and social reform. Former Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation projectionist Li Guanghui was on hand to record the sentencing and execution by firing squad of several alleged war criminals, including a former provincial governor (*shengzhang*).⁸¹ Other early newsreel segments included the capture of wanted “bandit gang” (*feibang*) leader Xie Wendong by People's Liberation Army forces, and a 1946 memorial service for assassinated resistance hero Li Zhaolin.⁸²

This footage became the basis for *The Democratic Northeast (Minzhu Dongbei)*, a series of newsreels which, taken as a whole, represented a painstaking attempt to document beneficial aspects of life under Communist authority. In general, *The Democratic Northeast* series associated post-liberation rule with national renewal. The party's ideology appears as a series of subtle touches—*yangge* dancing, the study of Maoist texts, valorization of the army's rural origins. Otherwise, Northeast Film Studio filmmakers took care in choosing clear, moving language and recognizably “Chinese”

⁸¹ Li Guanghui, “Wo pai ‘Minzhu Dongbei’ de jingli” [My Experiences Filming *The Democratic Northeast*], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 146.

⁸² Discussion of *The Democratic Northeast* newsreel series based on viewings conducted at the China Film Archive (*Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan*), Summer 2006. The Li Zhaolin memorial service was held in Ha'erbin.

musical accompaniment.⁸³ In the context of Communist political culture, the newsreels also registered a shift from Yan’an to the Northeast in depictions of utopian reform. Yet images of Yan’an persisted, most notably in terms of their association with a particular political elect represented by Mao, Zhu, and Lenin—the past and present architects of postwar society. Likewise, artistic communities within the Northeast Film Studio were divided between Yan’an veterans and new recruits, party members and non-members. Those outside the consecrated inner circle might hope to advance by mastering technical skills instead. Although films like *Light Spreads Everywhere* and *The Bridge* were later deemed successful in terms of their political content, reproducing the complex cinematography which characterized Soviet films of the same period—models on which Northeast filmmaking was at least partially based—required more than just “immersion” in the lives of industrial proletarians. In this sense too, familiar modes of wartime propaganda were altered according to the particularity of Communist mobilization strategies, only to be further transformed by material and technical limitations imposed by the party’s tenuous geopolitical position throughout much of the war.

Table 4.2: Individual titles released by the Northeast Film Studio, 1946-1949 (excluding subtitled or overdubbed films) (Source: Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan*, 1997 [1963]).

	1946	1947	1948	1949
Features			1	3 (4)
“Artistic” films (animation, other visual arts)		1	1	
Newsreels	4	3	5	4
Documentaries, educational films			1	

⁸³ Lü Xiaoqi, “Dongying yinyue zu yue dui—Chang ying yue tuan” [From the Northeast Film Studio Orchestra to the Changchun Film Studio Music Corps], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 237; Li Ning, “Xingshan Dongying huiyi” [Recollections of the Northeast Film Studio at Xingshan], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 265.

Distribution and Exhibition

During much of the Civil War, Northeast Film Studio productions were screened only in areas directly controlled by People's Liberation Army or Soviet Red Army forces. Key studio-owned distribution offices were located in Jiamusi and Ha'erbin; *The Democratic Northeast* titles circulated more widely than any other Northeast production.⁸⁴ While these operations were run for profit, they distributed only Northeast and Soviet titles—the latter overdubbed or subtitled—rival distributors with ties to Hollywood and Shanghai threatened to crowd Communist films from the market entirely. Nor was the profit-minded theater industry interested in an unfamiliar and potentially unpopular product. Faced with managers already connected to local Nationalist authorities or the local police, Northeast Film Studio middlemen found little exhibition space until the armies arrived months, even years, later.⁸⁵ Until 1948, the majority of urban screenings for Northeast titles took place in northern Heilongjiang province. Even this represented a significant improvement over the previous year, when the studio's public screenings were limited to the immediate vicinity of the local party university.⁸⁶ Once established, the Northeast Film Distribution Company (*Dongbei yingpian jingli gongsi*) arranged for the export of several titles overseas.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Bai Xi, "Guanyu Dongbei yingpian jingli gongsi de huiyi" [Remembrances Concerning the Northeast Film Distribution Company], in Su Yun and Hu Chang, eds., *Yi Dongying* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 213.

⁸⁵ Bai Xi, "Guanyu Dongbei yingpian jingli gongsi de huiyi" [Remembrances Concerning the Northeast Film Distribution Company], 214.

⁸⁶ *Renmin ribao*, June 26, 1946, 4.

⁸⁷ Bai Xi, "Guanyu Dongbei yingpian jingli gongsi de huiyi" [Remembrances Concerning the Northeast Film Distribution Company], 215. Destinations included northern Korean and other Soviet allies.

The obstacle posed to political propaganda schemes by an obstinately commercial theater sector would have been familiar to any Chongqing filmmaker. As in the wartime hinterland, Communist cultural planners could only respond by stepping up free screenings. From 1947 onward, the studio managed five mobile projection teams, which had reached most cities in northeast China by the end of the following year.⁸⁸ Yet despite their reputation for filth and uncomfortable seating, theaters remained the most common means of exhibition for Northeast Film Studio productions.⁸⁹ Between May 1947 and May 1949, distributors recorded 9,189 screenings and 3.63 million viewers (395 per screening); film teams, by comparison, organized 2,893 screenings and attracted over 4 million attendees (at least 1,382 per screening).⁹⁰

The spread of film beyond Northeast theaters was touted by Communist propagandists as signaling the technological transformation of everyday life, and an end to cultural divisions between haves and have-nots. The medium also served as an important public record of past events—rituals and celebrations welcoming liberation were often accompanied by massive outdoor screenings offering free attendance. During these exhibitions, documentary images of Yan’an and north China depicting Communist

⁸⁸ Zhang Lianjun, Guan Daxin and Wang Shuyan, eds., *Dongbei san sheng geming wenhua shi, 1919.5.4-1949.10.1* (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), 313.

⁸⁹ One pair of couplets supposedly scrawled on a Shenyang theater wall read: Frigid central heating, no light anywhere/A restroom spattered with excrement/This worn-out film hasn't ended yet/But the seat is tearing at my clothes (暖气冰凉灯不亮 / 厕所屎尿遍地滴 / 破烂电影没看完 / 椅子撕破我衣裳). See: Bai Xi, “Guanyu Dongbei yingpian jingli gongsi de huiyi” [Remembrances Concerning the Northeast Film Distribution Company], 214.

⁹⁰ Zhang Lianjun, Guan Daxin, and Wang Shuyan, eds., *Dongbei san sheng geming wenhua shi, 1919.5.4-1949.10.1*, 313. If these numbers are accurate, they suggest that Manzhouguo state and private investment created an exceptional cultural infrastructure indeed.

achievements in those areas were used to promote ongoing transformations in Northeast society.⁹¹

Soviet films were also promoted by the Northeast Film Studio as important elements of the “new” Northeast culture.⁹² Despite the fact that the studio itself was unable to keep up with subtitling and overdubbing on the range of new titles released in China’s markets, Communist news organs like the *People’s Daily* praised Soviet cinema in general for its inherent cultural and educational value—praise that not only masked the shortage of domestically-produced socialist films available, but linked Soviet culture and technology to a “new life” for the Chinese nation.⁹³ Tina Chen’s argument that Chinese and Soviet cultures were purposefully juxtaposed to create a larger socialist imaginary—one which represented the Soviet present as China’s future—is supported by evidence suggesting that even during the 1940s, film teams used Soviet films to illustrate the effectiveness of Chinese Communist Party policies.⁹⁴ In other cases, lantern slides of People’s Liberation Army victories and model soldiers preceded screenings of Soviet war films, inviting audiences to suture these “local” images to the spectacular pageantry unfolding after.⁹⁵ To overcome problems of interpretation posed by Soviet cinematic conventions, newspapers offered film criticism decoding each new feature’s plotline and overarching message.⁹⁶

⁹¹ *Renmin ribao*, June 25, 1949, 4.

⁹² On Chinese screenings of Soviet films after Liberation, see: Tina Mai Chen, “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s,” *Cultural Critique* 58 (2004), 82-114.

⁹³ See: *Renmin ribao*, May 28, 1946, 1; *Renmin ribao*, June 10, 1946, 2.

⁹⁴ Tina Mai Chen, “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s,” 84-114, passim.

⁹⁵ *Renmin ribao*, June 13, 1947, 1.

⁹⁶ *Renmin ribao*, March 25, 1947, 4; *Renmin ribao*, January 1, 1947, 3.

In time, Northeast cultural authorities adopted patterns of control which replicated—if only unconsciously—earlier Manchurian experiments with an integrated filmmaking system linking production, distribution, and exhibition to state acculturation projects. Films opposing the “interests of the people” were banned and withdrawn from circulation, as were those deemed anti-democratic, anti-nationalistic, pornographic, satirical, or fascist.⁹⁷ Internal directives mandated inspection and censorship (*shencha*) of all circulating titles at the provincial level, while exhibitor compliance was enforced by the local police.⁹⁸ Several permits were required for any screening, and theaters lacking them risked immediate closure. Soviet films were shown uncensored, as were “democratic” Shanghai releases. Backed by these new policies, the Northeast Film Distribution Company by 1949 managed one hundred seventy-nine theaters and forty-nine work unit “clubs” (*julebu*), with operations reaching nearly every county in Heilongjiang, Liaodong, and Jilin provinces.⁹⁹

Northeast Filmmakers and the Central Committee

Ties between regional and central Communist administrations were rebuilt and strengthened during 1948, with the result that Northeast Film Studio administrators played an increasingly influential role in nation-wide cultural affairs. In the central Propaganda Department’s November 16, 1948 “Directive Concerning Cinema Given to the Northeast Bureau Propaganda Department” (*Guanyu dianying gei Dongbei ju*

⁹⁷ *Renmin ribao*, December 24, 1948, 4. The “fascist” designation most likely referred to Japanese, Manchurian, Korean, German, or Italian films produced prior to 1945, many of which were still in circulation even after war’s end.

⁹⁸ Zhang Lianjun, Guan Daxin, and Wang Shuyan, eds., *Dongbei san sheng geming wenhua shi, 1919.5.4-1949.10.1*, 313.

⁹⁹ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 113.

xuanchuan bu de zhishi), cultural authorities expressed concern over the relative lack of politically-acceptable films in comparison with “old and pernicious” titles.¹⁰⁰ Instead, they authorized increased production of approved scripts concerning a range of political and non-political topics, provided that these had been previously cleared with a “supreme” censorate (*shencha dianying juben de zui gao jiguan*) charged with coordinating all film production and personnel.

The directive was written in response to a September report written by Yuan Muzhi on current conditions of Northeast filmmaking, in which Yuan advocated using the region as positive propaganda for the liberated areas.¹⁰¹ Cultural cadres from north and northeast China, once transferred to studios in Changchun, Shijiazhuang, and Beiping, would be enlisted in producing films of both “local” and “national” character, and communicating news of China’s revolution to the outside world. On October 9, 1948 Yuan followed his report by cabling for the transfer of thirty-five additional creative personnel (*chuangzou renyuan*) and administrative cadres (*guanli ganbu*) to the Northeast Film Studio; of these, he stipulated that twenty should be drawn from studios in Shanghai and Hong Kong.¹⁰² After receiving the Propaganda Department’s response, along with news that Nanjing would soon fall to People’s Liberation Army forces, he advised that Nationalist facilities be immediately reopened under the guidance of other experienced filmmakers drawn from Shanghai’s “progressive” circles.

Yuan Muzhi was made head of the newly-established central Film Bureau in April 1949 (see Chapter Five). By this point, his recommendation that Northeast

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 68-69.

¹⁰¹ Zhong Dafeng, “Xin Zhongguo dianying gongye: chuchuang shexiang ji qi shishi,” 279-280.

¹⁰² Zhong Dafeng, “Xin Zhongguo dianying gongye: chuchuang shexiang ji qi shishi,” 282.

filmmakers and cultural cadres be made leading propagandists for the post-liberation government had become a matter of policy. Although the center of the Communist-controlled studio system had shifted toward Beijing, Northeast personnel occupied top administrative and creative positions. Yuan's own responsibilities as studio coordinator were supplemented, if not overshadowed, by the central Propaganda Department's role as inspector and censor of the entire system.¹⁰³ Extension of the party-military executive "arm" into national cultural affairs was ubiquitous. When former leftist filmmakers and members of the Communist Party's Shanghai Film Group (*Dianying xiaozu*) returned from Hong Kong later that year, their superiors were high-ranking People's Liberation Army commanders Rao Shushi, Tan Zhenlin, and Chen Yi.¹⁰⁴

Sovereign Rites and National Spectacle

The propaganda apparatus inherited from wartime Manchuria, and further refined under Communist rule in Northeastern China, played a vital role in legitimizing the rulers of the People's Republic of China when Mao Zedong and other members of the party Central Committee came to power in 1949. As a member state of the socialist "Second World," much of China's media now aimed at mobilizing international support to rid East Asia of U.S. influence; at home, the task was building a political culture that shaped and

¹⁰³ See "中共中央对电影工作的指示" (December 1948), quoted in Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 121-122.

¹⁰⁴ See: Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng lu* (zengbu ben) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000), 389-431 ("Yingjie Xin Zhongguo de dansheng").

mobilized public opinion in favor of the new People's Central Government.¹⁰⁵ Emphasis on “continuous revolution” perpetuated wartime calls to enhance national security, silencing state critics and justifying party-fication of cultural production in the broadest possible terms.¹⁰⁶ Although October 1, 1949 marked the establishment of a “New China” atop the crumbling Nationalist regime, the techniques applied to defining this nation's place amidst an evolving Cold War order relied in part on mechanisms of media spectacle and control envisioned during earlier decades.

Filming Liberation

As in North China, the first filmmakers to arrive in Beijing played an important role as media witnesses to carefully-orchestrated rituals in which Communist control was visually legitimated by the juxtaposition of marching soldiers and cheering masses. After a lengthy period of negotiation between Communist and Nationalist forces, People's Liberation Army regulars entered the city on January 31, 1949. As U.S. historian Derek Bodde observed:

At [the soldiers'] head moved a sound truck (apparently supplied by the municipality), from which blared the continuous refrain, “Welcome to the People's Liberation Army on its arrival in Peiping! Welcome to the People's Army on its arrival in Peiping! Congratulations to the people of Peiping on their liberation! ...” Beside and behind it, six abreast, marched some two or three hundred Communist soldiers in full battle equipment.

...

Behind the soldiers marched students carrying two large portraits: one of Mao Tse-tung, the other presumably of Chu Teh, commander in chief of

¹⁰⁵ On the socialist “Second World,” see: Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004).

¹⁰⁶ On “continuous revolution” as an explanatory category linking China's international and domestic politics after 1949, see: Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p. 12 and passim.

the People's Army. A military band came next, and finally a long line of trucks carrying more soldiers, students, and civilian employees of the telephone company railroad administration, and other semi-official organizations. In about ten minutes, the parade was over.¹⁰⁷

Three days later, a formal “city entrance ceremony” (*rucheng shi*) was held on the morning of February 3. At ten o'clock, a ceremonial procession entered Beiping through the Xizhimen and Yongdingmen gates before winding its way to the Qianmen “watchtower” (*jianlou*) complex immediately south of Tiananmen.¹⁰⁸ University and municipal organization representatives turned out in the thousands, some bearing banners and portraits of Mao. Marching, *yangge* dancing, and cavorting stilt walkers—Bodde noted popular enthusiasm for Communist “folk art”—accompanied cadres chanting Mao's “eight points” in unison.¹⁰⁹ Once again, the shouting was followed by columns of infantry and armored divisions, including captured trucks, armored cars, and tanks of U.S. manufacture. Crowds appeared “quite favorably disposed and obviously deeply impressed by the display of power.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution* (New York: Henry Schumann, Inc., 1950), 101.

¹⁰⁸ “Gudu Beiping chenjin zai kuanghuan li! Women zhuangyan juxing rucheng shi. Beiping junguan hui yu Renmin shi zhengfu rucheng bangong” [The Ancient Capital of Beiping is Immersed in Revelry! We Solemnly Hold a City Entrance Ceremony. The Beiping Military Control Committee and People's Government Enter the City and Go to Work] *Renmin ribao*, February 5, 1949, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 103.

¹¹⁰ Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 104. See also: *Renmin ribao*, February 5, 1949, 1.

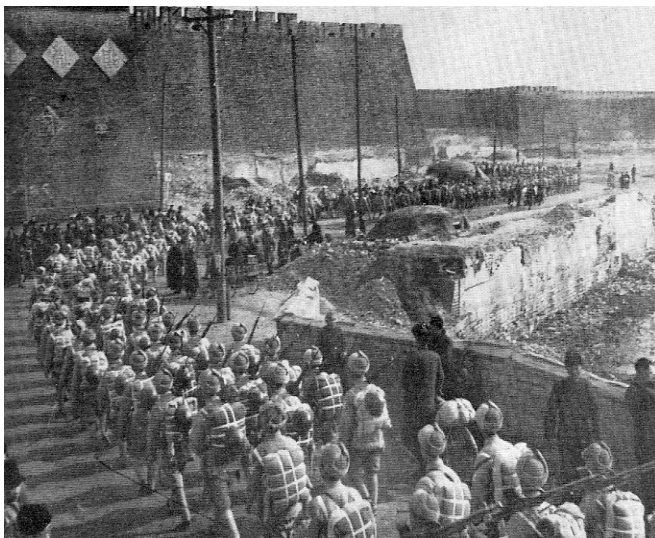


Figure 4.1: City entrance ceremony, Beiping, February 3, 1949 (Source: Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 1950).



Figure 4.2: City entrance ceremony, Beiping, February 3, 1949 (2) (Source: Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 1950).

Much of the event was recorded by cameramen Zhang Zhaobin, Liu Deyuan, along with several uncredited others. The fifth segment in *The Democratic Northeast*, No. 10, “City Entrance Ceremony” appeared alongside “Liberating Tianjin” (*Jiefang Tianjin*)

as one of the first images of liberation filmed outside of the Northeast. Not all political rituals were so well-covered in the media, perhaps due to the aggressively anti-Nationalist and anti-U.S. tenor of the proceedings. Observing a particularly raucous Fifteenth Night (*Yuan xiao*) celebration arranged by the Communist Party, Bodde noted that:

Biggest of all was yesterday's super mass meeting in the big square before the T'ien-an Men (the imposing front gate to the Forbidden City), followed by a parade lasting many hours. Over 200,000 persons are said to have listened to the speeches delivered from the top of the gate, which was draped with red flags and surmounted by giant portraits of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh. Though the crush was too great to let me near the gate itself, the cavorting paraders I saw later on seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. One of the most arresting displays, according to the papers (I did not see it myself), was that prepared by students from the Mukden Medical College. It consisted of a turtle labeled Chiang Kai-shek ... On him rode a "big-nosed" foreigner in formal attire and stovepipe hat, obviously Uncle Sam.¹¹¹

This event likely marked the party's first use of Tiananmen as a backdrop for mass spectacle.¹¹² Mao's portrait was hung alongside those of Zhu De, Lin Biao, Nie Rongzhen, and Ye Jianying above the gate.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 108.

¹¹² Nor was the Communist Party the first to use the gate in this way. See: Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments," *Representations*, no. 35, Special Issue: Monumental Histories (Summer, 1991), 84.

¹¹³ Tan Deshan, "Kaiguo dadian zhenwen" [National Inauguration Ceremony News Tidbits], *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 11 (1999), 46.



Figure 4.3: Poster depicting Fifteenth Night festivities, February 12, 1949. The caption reads: “Red flags wave and songs ring out, oceans of people celebrate liberation. The masses of people become masters, the ancient palace has been changed into a new red square.” (Source: Derek Bodde, *Peking Diary: A Year of Revolution*, 1950).

Other events receiving cinematic treatment occurred in less historically-resonant surroundings. *Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Zhu Arrive in Beiping for a Military Review* (*Mao zhuxi Zhu zong siling li Ping yue bing*, 1949), the first release of the Beiping Film Studio (see Chapter Five), was shot near the Xiyuan Airport on March 25, 1949. Distributed domestically and overseas, the short newsreel captured several images—including Mao waving from atop a jeep—which later became iconic images of

the Chairman's popularity.¹¹⁴ Mao was also shown greeting “democratic personages” (*minzhu renshi*) specially flown in for the occasion, as the party lobbied to garner support in Hong Kong and south China (see Figure 4.4).



1949年3月25日，毛泽东等率中共中央机关和人民解放军总部进驻北平。这是在南苑机场同前来欢迎的民主党派负责人和其他民主人士在一起。

Figure 4.4: Mao and assembled “democratic personages” (Source: *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 1, 1999).

While filmmakers were illustrating Communist claims to a new political consensus, Beiping's military rulers were disarming Nationalist troops, registering urban inhabitants, and confiscating two-way radios in an effort to secure the new

¹¹⁴ Zhou Xiaobang, ed., *Beiyong sishi nian [Forty Years of the Beijing Film Studio]* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 10. See also: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 161-162.

government.¹¹⁵ Street patrols and covert operations increased as the Communist Party Central Committee prepared for its move from Xibaipo to the future capital.¹¹⁶ Consolidating its control over the city's material and administrative infrastructure, the Beiping Military Control Commission created another important “backdrop” against which public displays of popular support for Communist rule took place—suppression and intimidation of disruptive elements within the spectacle of orderly regime change.

National Inauguration

With a mainland victory over the Nationalists virtually assured by early 1949, Communist leaders set about coordinating the construction of a new national capital—Beijing—amidst Beiping's former imperial grandeur. Transforming the city into a model of urban governance meant cracking down on gambling, “superstitious” activity, and drug trafficking as well as cleaning up public streets, parks, and squares.¹¹⁷ North China party secretary Peng Zhen, who headed the Capital Construction Planning Committee (*Shoudou jianshe jihua weiyuanhui*) addressed these requirements adeptly, overseeing preservation of the “old city” (*jiucheng*) and coordinating anti-espionage efforts throughout Beiping and its surrounding environs. Peng was not only charged with establishing social order, but also transforming the city into an appropriate setting for a series of highly-charged political events the common purpose of depicting Communist

¹¹⁵ Zhou Yixing, ed., *Dangdai Beijing jianshi* [A Concise History of Beijing] (Beijing: Zhongguo dangdai chubanshe, 1999), 16-18.

¹¹⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 270.

¹¹⁷ Gao Shizhen, “Kaiguo dadian miwen jishi” [Secret News of the National Inauguration Ceremony], *Dangshi zongheng*, no. 10 (1999), 4.

victory as a “people’s victory,” and propagandizing this event to audiences around the world.

When the People’s Political Consultative Conference first convened on September 21, 1949, this date also marked a shift in party ritual from local ceremonies of liberation to national affairs of state. Reporters, photographers, and filmmakers played a vital role in recording and disseminating news of each choreographed moment.¹¹⁸

Footage shot by Beiping Film Studio cameramen Wu Benli, Xu Xiaobing, and Su Heqing was edited by film editor Gao Weijin—one of the studio’s few female filmmakers—into newsreels for immediate release to theaters in Beiping, Shanghai, and Tianjin.¹¹⁹ Unlike the numerous images sent back from the front, these films highlighted consensual and, to a certain degree, non-military aspects of Communist governance:

The New Political Consultative Conference Planning Committee is Established (Xin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi choubei hui chengli, 1949)

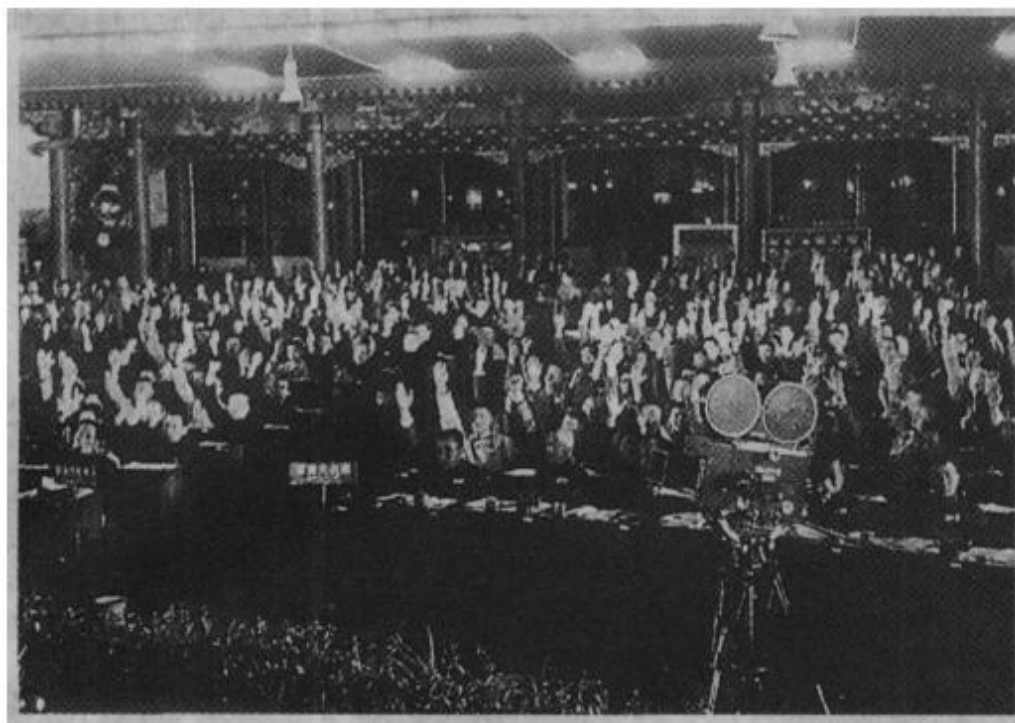
“International Labor Day” in Beiping (‘Qi yi’ zai Beiping, 1949)
News Bulletins, No. 1 (Jianbao yi hao, 1949); includes “May First Train” (Wuyi jiche), “Tianjin Steelworks” (Tianjin liangangchang), “Number Seventy Arsenal” (Qiling bingggongchang)

News Bulletins, No. 2 (Jianbao er hao, 1949); includes “Conference of Women’s Representatives” (Funü daibiao dahui), “Conference of Youth Representatives” (Qingnian daibiao dahui), “Welcoming the Return of the Peace Delegation” (Huanying heping daibiaotuan fanguo)

News Bulletins, No. 3 (Jianbao san hao, 1949); includes “The Sino-Soviet Friendship Association Planning Committee is Established” (Zhong-Su youhao xiehui chouweihui chengli), “Song Qingling Visits Beiping” (Song Qingling di Ping)

¹¹⁸ See: Tan Deshan, “Kaguo dadian zhenwen,” *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 1 (2000), 44-45.

¹¹⁹ Cheng Jihua et al., *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi, di er juan*, 404.



1949年9月27日，出席政协第一届全体会议的代
表举手通过国都、纪年、国旗、国歌四项议案

Figure 4.5: The movie camera as ritual observer (Source: *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 10, 1999). In this image, conference delegates are shown unanimously ratifying the new symbols of China’s sovereignty—national capital, chronology, flag, and anthem.

Viewed from the perspective of these state rituals rather than national chronology, the National Inauguration ceremony (*Kaiguo dadian*, or *Kaiguo shengdian*) of October 1, 1949 (hereafter “October First”) was not a unique event, but represented the culmination of months of political reorganization and media activity intended to convincingly confer an aura of popular mandate.¹²⁰ One defining feature of the inauguration was that it

¹²⁰ See: Wang Juying, *Xin Zhongguo shoudou Beijing jishi* [*Beijing, Capital of New China*], (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2000); Wen Fu, *Tiananmen jianzheng lu* (vol. 2) [*Tiananmen Testimonials*] (Beijing: Zhongguo yanshi chubanshe, 1998).

combined street-level celebrations of Yan'an-formulated folk culture (e.g. *yangge*, woodcuts, storytelling) with globally generic rituals of state (e.g. formal preamble, raising of the national flag, military review), all centered around a singular political space—Tiananmen Square—constructed in the mode of Leninist “monumental propaganda.”¹²¹ According to Wu Hung, the square’s design enshrined “political expression, collective memory, identity, and history,” functioning to “address the public and actually to constitute the public itself.”¹²² Already consecrated by a July 7, 1949 ceremony commemorating the deaths of Chinese “martyred” by Japanese forces during the War of Resistance, Tiananmen articulated an official ideology of gratitude to the Communist Party for its role in delivering “the people” from a traumatic past. The National Inauguration, however, conveyed a slightly different meaning—namely, that people’s willingness to become subjects of a new nation-state.

October First was date chosen for its associations with both the Chinese and Russian revolutions.¹²³ On the day itself, several hundred thousand people gathered in the newly-paved square facing Tiananmen Gate. Included in this massive audience were organizational representatives, assorted local residents, city defense forces, and security details charged with maintaining public order.¹²⁴ According to a circulated pamphlet “Notice on Entering the Square” (*ruchang xuzhi*), participants were prohibited from carrying drums, wearing make-up, bringing bicycles, forming impromptu *yangge* performances, carrying unauthorized weapons, or failing to process through the square in

¹²¹ See: Chang-tai Hung, “Revolutionary History in Stone: The Making of a Chinese National Monument,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 166 (June 2001), 457–473.

¹²² Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments,” 85.

¹²³ Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950*, 270.

¹²⁴ Zhou Yixing, ed., *Dangdai Beijing jianshi*, 25.

a vigorous and organized manner when called.¹²⁵ Parade marshals (*zhihui yuan*) and pickets (*jiucha yuan*) provided direction. Work units were required to provide food and water to their representatives at the day-long event. Upon arrival, those standing in the square were met with the sight of state officials gathered on either side of the ceremonial rostrum to the north; others had lined up around the central flagpole.¹²⁶ All invitees, including members of the audience, stood in predetermined places, forming orderly units within a massive human display.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Wang Juying, *Xin Zhongguo shoudou Beijing jishi*, 373.

¹²⁶ Lu Yuan, “Cong Huabei Beigeda dao Kaiguo dadian—fuqin de huiyi” [From North China Revolutionary University to the National Inauguration Ceremony—My Father’s Recollections], *Beijing dang’an shiliao* [*Beijing Archival Materials*], no. 3 (2004), 173.

¹²⁷ Zhang Shuhua, “Kaiguo dadian nei yi tian” [The Day of the National Inauguration Ceremony], *Beijing dang’an* [*Beijing Archives*], no. 9 (1999), 14.



Figure 4.6: Viewing Tiananmen Square (*Tiananmen guangchang*) from the rostrum atop Tiananmen Gate (*Tiananmen*), October 1, 1949 (Source: Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space*, 2005).

Official symbols chosen for the ceremony highlighted a preoccupation with history and popular ritual. Red lanterns and banners—traditional markers of celebration—festooned Tiananmen Gate and rostrum.¹²⁸ Architects had restored the imperial columns and edifice which marked the area as a former site of dynastic power. Even Mao’s Zhongshan-style suit was worn in emulation of the “father of the nation,”

¹²⁸ Tan Deshan, “Kaiguo dadian zhenwen,” *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 12 (1999), 47. The rostrum design team, comprised mainly of set designers and other political artists from the North China military region, also included two Japanese nationals.

Sun Yat-sen. Throughout the ceremony, state planners had consciously employed trappings of past authority in fabricating a legitimizing pageantry for the present.

Following the inaugural meeting of the Central People's Government Committee (*Zhongyang renmin zhengfu weiyuanhui*), higher-ranking state representatives proceeded from Qinzheng Hall in Zhongnanhai to vicinity of Tiananmen Gate.¹²⁹ At two fifty-five in the afternoon, another group ascended the tower to the rostrum; at three o'clock, committee secretary Lin Boqu announced the opening of the ceremonial proceedings:

The Establishment. Mao Zedong proclaims, "The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China has on this day been established."¹³⁰ The new national anthem, "March of the Volunteers," is played by a military band position just below the gate. Mao presses a button, and the new national flag rises to the top of a 22.5 meter flagpole, recently constructed along the square's north-south axis. Fifty-four cannons fire twenty-eight shots in unison—one cannon for each government branch established during the first plenary meeting of the People's Political Consultative Conference, and one shot for each year of the Chinese Communist Party's existence.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Tan Deshan, "Kaiguo dadian zhenwen," *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 2 (2000), 45.

¹³⁰ Zhang Shuhua, "Kaiguo dadian nei yi tian" [The Day of the National Inauguration Ceremony], 14.

¹³¹ Zhang Shuhua, "Kaiguo dadian nei yi tian" [The Day of the National Inauguration Ceremony], 14.



Figure 4.7: Pronouncing the Central People’s Government established (Source: *Beijing dang’an*, no. 9, 1999).

The Proclamation. Mao reads the First Proclamation (*Di yi hao gonggao*) of the Central People’s Government:

“From the time of the homeland’s (*zuguo*) betrayal by the government of Chiang Kai-shek’s reactionary Nationalist Party clique, [their] collusion with imperialism, and [their] initiation of a counterrevolutionary war, the entire nation (*quanguo renmin*) has been plunged into the depths of a dreadful abyss. Yet having the good fortune to rely on the People’s Liberation Army with the support of the people, and for the sake of protecting the homeland’s territorial sovereignty, protecting the livelihoods and property of the people, and relieving the people’s suffering while striving for victory in their name, [we] have courageously risen up and heroically battled so that the reactionary army may be eliminated, and the reactionary rule of [this] Nationalist government may be overturned. At present, [we] have already gained a fundamental victory in this liberating war, and [thus] the large majority of our nation’s people have already won liberation. Upon this foundation, the first plenary meeting of the Chinese People’s Political

Consultative Conference to be composed of representatives of every democratic party, every popular association, the People's Liberation Army, every region, every ethnicity (*minzu*), [and] overseas Chinese compatriots as well as other patriotic advocates of democracy (*aiguo minzhu fenzi*) has already been convened; representing the will of the nation, [this body] has formulated the Organizational Law (*Zuzhi fa*) of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, and has elected Mao Zedong as Chairman of the Central People's Government; Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Song Qingling, Li Jishen, Zhang Lan, and Gao Gang as Vice-Chairs; ... [these individuals] form the Committee of the Central People's Government; [they] proclaim the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and moreover designate Beijing as its capital. On this day the Committee of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China does, in [this] capital, assume office, and unanimously resolves: to proclaim the establishment of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China; to accept the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference as this government's administrative policy (*shizheng fangzhen*) ... At the same time, [the Committee] resolves: to declare to the government of every country that this government is the only legal government to represent the nation of the People's Republic of China, [and] that this government wishes, without exception, to establish diplomatic relations with any foreign government that fully intends to abide by principles of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty (*lingtu zhuquan*). [All of] this is hereby proclaimed."¹³²

The Military Review. People's Liberation Army Commander-in-Chief Zhu De descends from the gate, takes his place in a waiting jeep, crosses Jinshui Bridge toward the square, and receives a report from general Nie Rongzhen.¹³³ Three review detachments representing naval, land, and air forces perform a precision march in front of the gate, moving from east to west. Tanks, cannons, and mechanized infantry are on full display. Seventeen airplanes—nine P-51 fighters, two “mosquito” bombers, three C-46

¹³² Mao Zedong, “中华人民共和国中央人民政府公告” [Proclamation of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China] (October 1, 1949), reprinted in Zhong Gong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di yi ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 20-21. Originally appeared in *Renmin ribao*, October 2, 1949.

¹³³ Tian Shen, “Yongsheng nanwang de Kaiguo dadian” [The Unforgettable National Inauguration Ceremony], *Beijing dang'an*, no. 10 (1999), 10.

transport planes, and three trainers—pass overhead in formation.¹³⁴ The military band plays “The Army and the People” (*Budui yu laobaixing*) and “Protect the Fruits of Victory” (*Baowei shengli guoshi*). Zhu returns to the rostrum atop the gate, and reads “Order of the Headquarters of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army” (*Zhongguo renmin jiefang jun zongbu mingling*):

“To all fellow soldiers, commanders, political workers, and logistical personnel: The armed forces of the People’s Republic of China, together today with the entire people (*quantu renmin*), have come to jointly celebrate the establishment of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China. We, the armed forces of the People’s Republic of China, in the midst of a revolutionary war against the United States imperialism-aided reactionary Chiang Kai-shek government, have already obtained a great victory. The majority of the enemy has been destroyed, [and] the majority of the nation’s territory already liberated. This is the result of uniform effort and bravery in struggle by the whole of our soldiers, commanders, political workers, and logistical personnel. I express my warmest congratulations and thanks to you. However, right now the final duty in our struggle has yet to be completely fulfilled. A remnant of the enemy still colludes with foreign invaders, and carries out counterrevolutionary activities [in] revolt against the [government of the] People’s Republic of China. We must continue to put forth effort, and realize the final goal in [our] war for the people’s liberation. [Thus], I order all officers, soldiers, and personnel of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: to resolutely carry out all orders of the Central People’s Government and the great leader of the people, Chairman Mao [Zedong]; to swiftly eliminate all remnants of the reactionary forces of the Nationalist Party; to liberate all non-liberated national territory (*guotu*), and at the same time to eliminate all counterrevolutionary brigand forces and their followers, and; to suppress all manifestations of their resistant and troublemaking behavior. May those people’s heroes sacrificed amidst the war of people’s liberation remain immortal! Long live the great unity of the Chinese people!

¹³⁴Li Ge, “Youguan Kaiguo dadian ji tiao shishi” [Several Historical Facts Concerning the National Inauguration Ceremony], *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu* [Research on Contemporary Chinese History], no. 4 (2005), 100.

Long live the Chinese People's Republic! Long live the Central People's Government! Long live Mao Zedong!"¹³⁵

Mao waves to assembled military formations while they perform a second "march-past" (*fenlie shi*), finally exiting the square via Chang'an Gate. By this point, the military review has lasted for over two hours. Dusk falls as the last cavalry detachment parades west.¹³⁶ Distribution of lanterns and fireworks signals the closing of the ceremony and beginning of the celebratory parade.

The Mass Parade. Workers, peasants, students, officials, and soldiers form a mass parade (*qunzhong youxing*) in celebration of the people's "great unity" (*da tuanjie*).¹³⁷ Participants execute military march steps and hoist aloft massive replicas of the national emblem, portraits of the new leadership, banners, lanterns, and ceremonial weapons. Music, singing, and fireworks displays continue throughout; informal greetings are exchanged between Mao and paraders. A throng gathers on Jinshui Bridge beneath the rostrum. "Parade detachments" (*youxing duiwu*), wearing brightly-colored uniforms and carrying flags, banners, and lanterns, fan out into the city.

¹³⁵ Zhu De, "中国人民解放军总部命令" [Order of the Headquarters of the Chinese People's Liberation Army], reprinted in Zhong Gong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di yi ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 22.

¹³⁶ Lu Yuan, "Cong Huabei Beigeda dao Kaiguo dadian—fuqin de huiyi" [From North China Revolutionary University to the National Inauguration Ceremony—My Father's Recollections], 175.

¹³⁷ Tan Deshan, "Kaiguo dadian zhenwen," *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 3 (2000), 46.

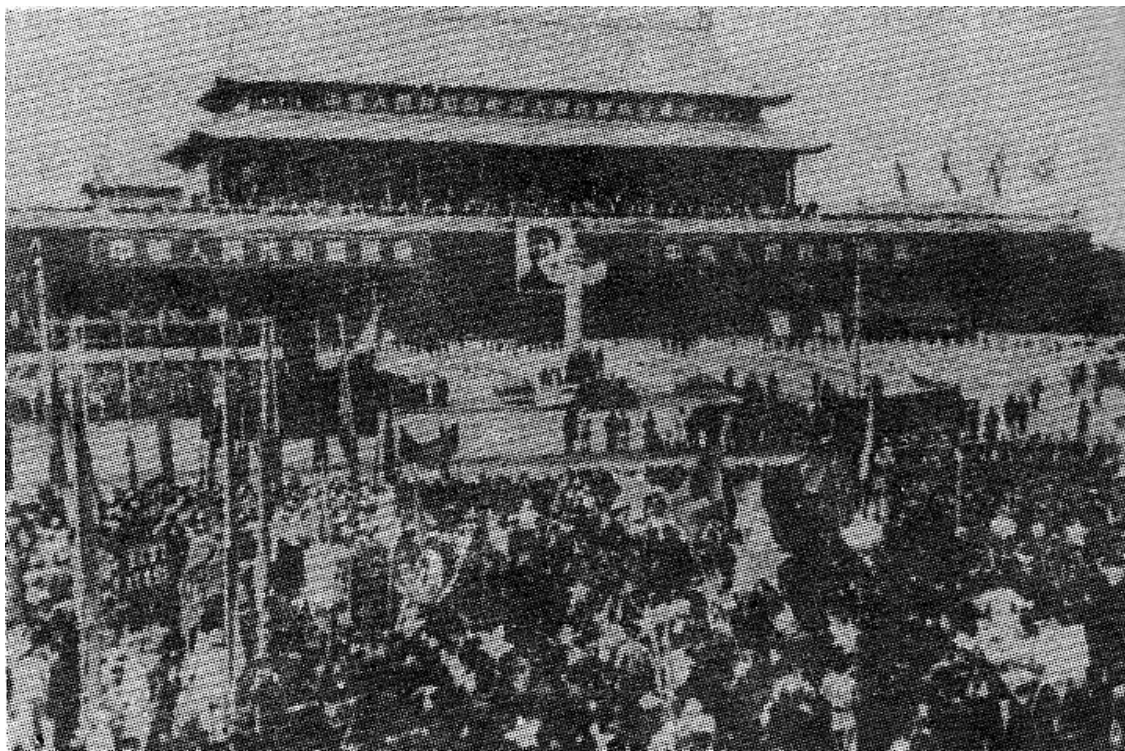


Figure 4.8: Crowds bearing ceremonial banners, flags, and state symbols (Source: Wang Juying, *Xin Zhongguo shoudou Beijing jishi*, 2000).

Media coverage and filming of the National Inauguration allowed non-participants to experience the event either “live,” as broadcast, or through subsequent viewings. Simultaneous transmission via radio and amplifier columns (lit. “nine-headed birds,” or *jiutou niao*, a divine creature) erected throughout the square itself disseminated audio captured from rostrum microphones.¹³⁸ On-the-spot announcers from the Xinhua News Agency provided additional description and commentary to listeners.

In his memoirs, cameraman Xu Xiaobing describes how Beiping Film Studio filmmakers sought to capture the ceremony. Camera crews focused on two fields of vision—a view of the rostrum that would foreground Mao Zedong against a backdrop of

¹³⁸ Tan Deshan, “Kaiguo dadian zhenwen,” *Gongchandang yuan*, no. 3 (2000), 48.

other assembled leaders (looking toward the gate), and a view of the audience and parade route (looking toward the square).¹³⁹ Films of the National Inauguration attempted to convey its spatial hierarchy as well as its sequence, intercutting between leaders, paraders, and audience. Soviet director Leonid Varlamov assisted Xu's teams by placing cameras and outlining shot angles in a manner intended to reproduce the visual character of Stalinist spectacles.¹⁴⁰ Many of the foreign faces appearing on the Tiananmen rostrum on October First belonged to Soviet cinematographers; by contrast, members of the U.S. observation mission allowed to attend the event were relegated to a distant position at the square's edge, away from the main rally.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Hou Bo and Xu Xiaobing (Liu Mingyin, ed.), *Dai chibang de sheyingji—Hou Bo, Xu Xiaobing koushu huiyi lu* [*The Winged Camera—Collected Oral Reminiscences of Hou Bo and Xu Xiaobing*] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 161.

¹⁴⁰ Hou Bo and Xu Xiaobing (Liu Mingyin, ed.), *Dai chibang de sheyingji—Hou Bo, Xu Xiaobing koushu huiyi lu*, 160-163.

¹⁴¹ “Kaiguo dadian weihe mei jilupian [Why There Is No Documentary of the National Inauguration Ceremony],” *Dang'an* [Archives], no. 2 (2004), 33; Shu Yun, “Kaiguo dadian de sheyingshimen” [Photographers of the National Inauguration Ceremony], *Dang shi tiandi* [Party History Cosmos], no. 7 (1999), 12. Film negatives from the Soviet footage were unexpectedly destroyed in a room fire at the Xinhua hotel during the early morning of October 2, 1949. The erroneous impression that Mao's first words to the masses gathered at Tiananmen were “The Chinese people have stood up!” (*Zhongguo renmin zhanqilaile!*) is largely a result of efforts to combine the remaining footage of Mao speaking on October First with an audio recording from his earlier speeches to the People's Political Consultative Conference.

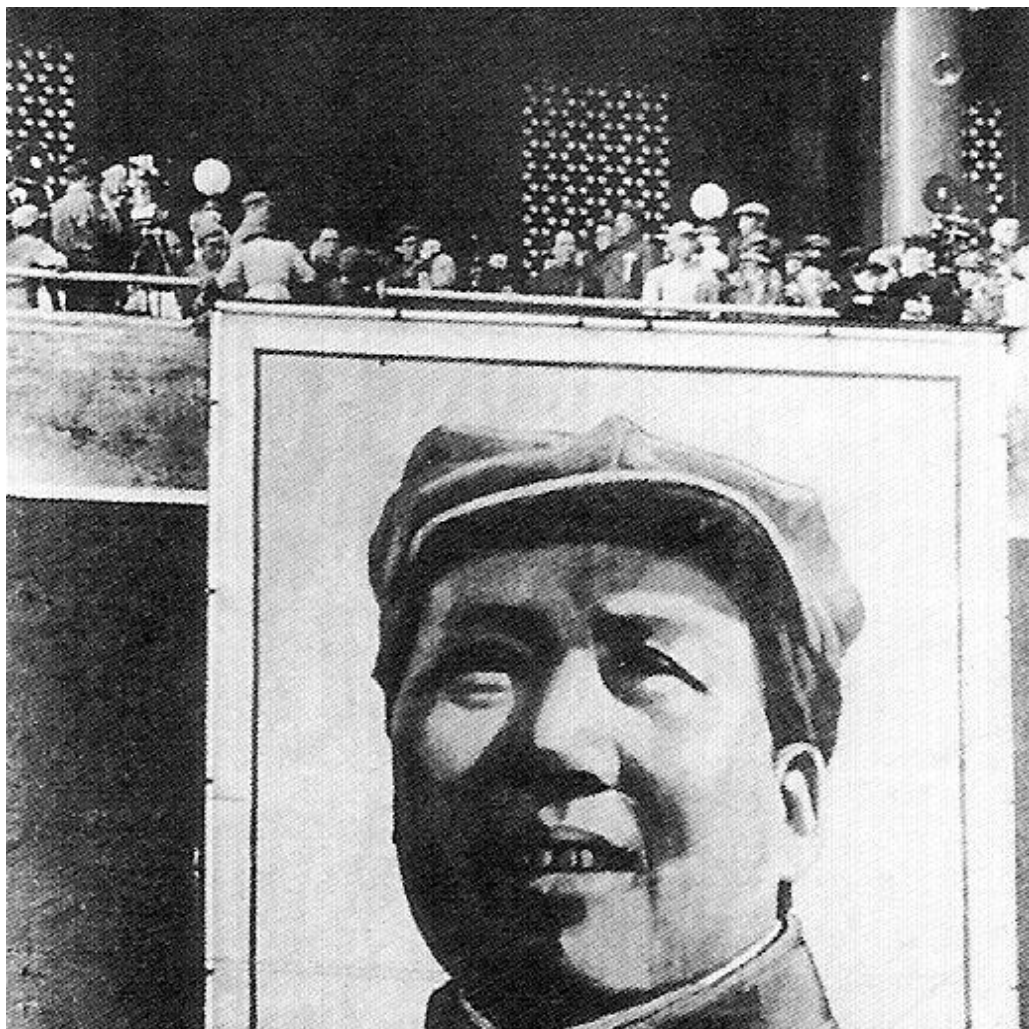


Figure 4.9: Rostrum on Tiananmen Gate with cameras and other recording equipment visible, October 1, 1949 (Source: Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of a Political Space*, 2005).

Securing Recognition

As political spectacle, the National Inauguration marked a definitive break with the old order while incorporating a historically eclectic iconography which communicated both the “timelessness” of the nation and (more subtly) its debt to the state monumentalism of Germany’s Nuremberg and Moscow’s Red Square. As political ritual,

the inauguration legitimated party-state authority through displays of celebration and consensus, many in the guise of popular festivities, such as holidays. Both modes pointed toward a single concept—the sovereignty of the People’s Central Government.

Within this symbolic context, the mass media functioned to promote recognition of the new government’s sovereign claims among distant communities, including those of other nations. Among filmmakers, approaches varied. Two feature-length documentaries—*China Liberated* (*Jiefangde de Zhongguo*, 1950) and *Victory of the Chinese People* (*Zhongguo renmin de shengli*, 1950)—placed October First within a broader tableau of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist liberation. Both were Sino-Soviet co-productions, and distributed widely throughout the world as introductions to official views on China’s history, contemporary society, and the Sino-Soviet Friendship Agreement; also included was critical “disinformation” concerning the Nationalist-U.S. alliance. Another film, *Birth of New China* (*Xin Zhongguo de dansheng*, aka *National Inauguration/Kaiguo dadian jishi*, 1949), focused specifically on the People’s Political Consultative Conference, National Inauguration, and post-inaugural celebrations in cities throughout China, and was shown mainly to Chinese-speaking audiences. According to editor Gao Weijin, *Birth of New China* was intended to serve as “historical evidence” of New China’s founding ceremonies, and the positive reception that these received.¹⁴²

Party leaders were quick to praise the new titles. Beijing (formerly Beiping) Film Studio personnel noted in a 1950 meeting that *China Liberated* had received an approving comment from state premier Zhou Enlai, who praised the film as “vividly

¹⁴² Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* [A History of Chinese Newsreels and Documentaries] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 113.

depicting the past sufferings of our people, their present joys, and their future hopes.”¹⁴³ *Victory of the Chinese People*—also described as “welcomed” and “cherished” by audiences worldwide—earned kudos from Nie Rongzhen as “showing a beautiful and attractive China.” Speaking during a high-level preview and discussion of the film, Nie also lauded *Victory* for clearly depicting popular support for the party and army, promoting a “new understanding” of China abroad, and refuting imperialist-produced propaganda highlighting China’s past “backwardness” and “humiliation” at the hands of foreign powers.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Beijing dianying zhipian chang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yijiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu* [1950 Work Summary and 1951 Policies and Assignments] (May 1951), 19.

¹⁴⁴ Beijing dianying zhipian chang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yijiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu* [1950 Work Summary and 1951 Guiding Principles and Assignments], 17.



Figure 4.10: Sichuan advertisement for *China Liberated*, 1950 (Source: China Film Distribution & Exhibition Corporation, China Film Import & Export Corporation, *On the 35th Anniversary of China Film Distribution and Exhibition Corporation, 1951-1986*, n.d.).

International circulation brought *China Liberated* and *Victory of the Chinese People* to Moscow, India, Mongolia, Great Britain, Indonesia, and Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁵ Following October First, *People's Daily* coverage had been quick to note “welcoming” foreign and overseas Chinese reactions to news of the inauguration. This tone extended to coverage of the films as they were screened abroad, particularly with respect to the

¹⁴⁵ On Indonesia, see “Wenyi dianying jianxun” [Film and Culture News in Brief], *Renmin ribao*, December 9, 1950, 6.

Soviet Union and socialist bloc democracies of the anti-U.S. “peace camp.” Of great concern to critics was China’s national prestige. Zhong Dianfei, a leading voice in Party film circles, wrote that *Victory of the Chinese People* depicted China’s quest for equality with other peoples (*minzu*).¹⁴⁶ And prospects for the future—Zhong wrote that *Victory* would eliminate foreign perceptions of China as an “old” and “backward” civilization by depicting recent strides toward popular emancipation under the leadership of Mao Zedong, Zhu De, and Zhou Enlai. Echoing this perspective, well-known author Mao Dun praised *China Liberated* and *Victory of the Chinese People* for “telling the whole world of China’s experiences,” and realistically representing the people’s depth of knowledge and positive character.¹⁴⁷

Zhong’s points concerning equality hinted at a little-observed aspect of China’s post-liberation foreign policy—the attempt to establish formal state-to-state relations with non-socialist nations. A pro-Soviet stance was clearly outlined in the Common Program, which stated that “the People’s Republic of China will ally with all peace-loving, free nations and peoples of the world, allying first with the Soviet Union.”¹⁴⁸ Yet the document also contained provisions for diplomatic relations with any nation willing to sever its ties to the Nationalist Party (Article Fifty-six), and international trade relations with any nation willing to engage New China on a basis of equality and mutual benefit (Article Fifty-seven). Thus, while establishing a new, pro-Communist basis for China’s

¹⁴⁶ Zhong Dianfei, “Tan ‘Zhongguo renmin de shengli’ de sixiang xing” [On the Ideological Qualities of *Victory of the Chinese People*], *Renmin ribao*, September 24, 1950, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing), “Juda jiaoyu yiyi,” [(Two Films of) Tremendous Educational Significance], *Renmin ribao*, December 25, 1950, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Xie Yixian, ed., *Zhongguo waijiao shi: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shiqi, 1949-1979* [A Diplomatic History of China: The People’s Republic of China, 1949-1979] (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 11.

international recognition, policies of “leaning to one side” and anti-imperialist “housecleaning” did not foreclose the possibility of seeking broader ties with non-allied nations.

These points were reiterated by Zhou Enlai in a September 22, 1949 speech to the First Plenary Assembly of the People’s Political Consultative Conference, in which Zhou reiterated that the Common Program safeguarded the “completeness” (*wanzheng*) of China’s independence, freedom, and territorial sovereignty while also embodying “clear acceptance” of Mao’s plan to “stand together” with the Soviet Union and “new democracies” of Eastern Europe.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, relations between the People’s Republic of China and smaller European countries of both ideological camps were restored “in fairly short order.”¹⁵⁰ Following another period of negotiation, Britain established a chargé d’affaires in Beijing to replace the former ambassador. Alliances with the socialist bloc countries deepened over time, as Sino-Soviet political and economic ties intensified. Yet formal diplomatic recognition from national governments in Southeast Asia (Federation of Malaya, Indonesia), South Asia and the Middle East (India, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Israel), Northern Europe (Norway, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland), and Western Europe (Britain, Holland) also defined the foreign policy and security environment of the “Mao years.”¹⁵¹ China’s rocky relations with the U.S.—most notably the Korean War (1950-1953)—may have played a greater role than ideological affinities in shaping the internationalist elements of its political culture (see Chapter Six).

¹⁴⁹ Zhou Enlai, “人民政协共同纲领草案的特点” [Characteristics of the Draft Common Program of the People’s Political Consultative Conference], reprinted in Zhong Gong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di yi ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 19.

¹⁵⁰ A. M. Halpern, “China in the Postwar World,” in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *China Under Mao: Politics Takes Command* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966), 487.

¹⁵¹ Xie Yixian, ed., *A Diplomatic History of China*, pp. 18-34.



ILLUS 9.1. 'Great Calamity Yangge', cartoon by KMT artist Lan Gebi, 1949. A worker and peasant hold up a banner reading 'Inauguration Ceremony of the Yangge Dynasty', as yangge dancers dance, dragon dancers wield a dragon (labelled 'Democratic Dictatorship'), and a big-nosed foreigner (the Soviet Union) presides over a scene of desolation, seated on a 'chair reserved for foreign guests'.
Source: Lan Gebi, *Yangge wangchao*, Taipei 1950.

Figure 4.10: Nationalist Party images of the October First National Inauguration ceremony (Source: David Holm, *Art and Ideology in Revolutionary China*, 1991). The “peasant” described in the caption is a People’s Liberation Army soldier.

Conclusions

Filmmaking during the Civil War was shaped by the implementation of earlier wartime structures to enhance the effectiveness of “politics” in both Communist and Nationalist areas. Yet whereas the Nationalist Party appeared willing to encourage the growth of the commercial sector in tandem with propaganda and educational cinema production, Communist forces in the Northeast exhibited a tendency to turn available

resources toward more immediate military and state-building agendas.¹⁵² Cold War politics in East Asia undeniably reinforced the geopolitical schism between “Reds” and “Whites” on the mainland. However, while recent treatments of state-led cultural change during this period have principally focused on U.S. occupation policies in Japan and Korea, this chapter has shown that techniques of mobilization developed during World War II served as influential models for China’s political parties even after 1945.¹⁵³

Admittedly, focusing on Communist Party activities during this period may overemphasize the degree to which military agendas dominated cultural production in China as a whole. Filmmakers in the Northwest and North China film teams devoted their energies solely to propagandizing party and People’s Liberation Army achievements in the provinces, or representing Nationalist forces as the principal cause of wartime destruction. The majority of state filmmakers, by contrast, had returned to commercial film production in Shanghai and Hong Kong, or the Nationalist government studios then spread throughout China’s coastal cities. Nonetheless, hinterland-based cadres ultimately occupied top positions in the Communist film system after 1947, particularly in the Northeast and Beiping (Beijing) film studios—a fact which suggests that cultural production in general was increasingly determined by agendas which prioritized the overturning of “imperialist” (e.g. Nationalist, U.S.) influences. The resulting space was filled with Yan’an and Soviet images of a populist, revolutionary, heroic imaginary

¹⁵² Odd Arne Westad suggests that the overall Chinese Communist Party policy focus in north and northeast China was “overturning power” at the village level and laying the foundation for an “alternative Chinese state” through the control of strategic industries. See: Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950*, 107-143 (Chapter Four, “Adjusting Heaven: Communist Rule in the Provinces”), *passim*.

¹⁵³ See, for example: Charles K. Armstrong, “The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 62, no. 1 (February 2003), 71-99.

which demanded that audiences actively support the war front. Yet in achieving these ends, the Northeast government continued to rely on many of the broad censorship powers, mobile film teams, and distribution controls which had accompanied the growth of a Manchurian “state policy” film industry after 1932; a fact which gave it much in common with the Nationalist government to the south, despite post-1949 claims to the contrary.

As this chapter’s analysis of political ritual and filmmaking surrounding the October 1, 1949 National Inauguration of the People’s Republic of China demonstrates, Communist objectives cannot solely be reduced to establishing a monolithic state-controlled media or imposing a Yan’an-Soviet cultural hybrid on urban spectators. While these were undoubtedly important issues (see Chapter Five), it was also a priority that the new government represent itself using the visual language of popular sovereignty—not only for the sake of domestic legitimization, but also as part of a wider diplomatic policy of securing friendly relations with other nations beyond the socialist bloc. Prasenjit Duara has argued that following World War I, anti-imperialist ideologies were accompanied by “the simultaneous emergence of the idea of the nation-state as a universal political form and of nationalism as a natural condition of humanity.”¹⁵⁴ By the same token, films like *China Liberated* and *Victory of the Chinese People* supplemented narratives of China’s socialist revolution with descriptions of national “people’s” struggle and civilizational authenticity.

¹⁵⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004 [2003]), 10.

The overseas use of cultural, educational, and information programs by Cold War national security states on both sides of the ideological divide has recently begun to attract attention among international historians.¹⁵⁵ And while topics of media and empire have long been familiar to scholars of modern communications, most studies of Chinese culture industries have focused solely on Maoism as a domestic phenomenon.¹⁵⁶ By tracing the circulation of films produced by the post-1949 Communist national security state, it is possible to approach Maoist political culture as an international phenomenon. One important consequence of this perspective—which is now beginning to inform studies of foreign cinemas within China—is that it opens the door to studies of China’s

¹⁵⁵ See, for example: Victor Peppard and James Riordan, *Playing Politics: Soviet Sport Diplomacy to 1992* (Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, 1993); Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Reinhold Wagnleiter, “American Cultural Diplomacy, the Cinema, and the Cold War in Central Europe,” Center for Austrian Studies Working Paper 92-4 (1997); Seth Fein, “Everyday Forms of Transnational Collaboration: U.S. Film Propaganda in Cold War Mexico,” in Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Frank Schumacher, eds., *Culture and International History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004 [2003]); Kenneth A. Osgood, “Words, and Deeds: Race, Colonialism, and Eisenhower’s Propaganda War in the Third World,” in Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds., *The Eisenhower Administration, The Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 23-26;

¹⁵⁶ On media and empire, see: Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950); Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1980); Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs, and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1997); Oliver Boyd-Barrett, ed., *Communications Media, Globalization, and Empire* (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006); Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007). On China’s culture industries, with particular emphasis on communications and filmmaking during the Maoist period, see: Alan P. Liu, *Communications and National Integration in Communist China* (new enlarged edition) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Godwin C. Chu, *Radical Change Through Communications in Mao’s China* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawai’i, 1977); John A. Lent, ed., *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). For a notable survey on Maoism as an international phenomenon, see: Robert J. Alexander, *International Maoism in the Developing World* (Westport, CT: Praeger 1999). Other exceptions are Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking’s Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), Jay Taylor, *China and Southeast Asia: Peking’s Relations with Revolutionary Movements* (expanded and updated edition) (New York: Praeger, 1976), and J. D. Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

state-to-state relations which go beyond the “hard” diplomacy of bipolarity and the Sino-Soviet alliance.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ See, for example: Tina Mai Chen, “Textual Communities and Localized Practices of Film in Maoist China,” in Tina Mai Chen and David S. Churchill, eds., *Film, History, and Cultural Citizenship: Sites of Production* (London: Routledge, 2007), 61-80.

CHAPTER 5. State Cinema in New China, 1949-1955

The 1949 victory of the Communist Party over its Nationalist enemies marked the end to more than twenty years of civil and total war within the former territories of the Republic of China. Communist governments also arose in North Korea and Vietnam, while U.S. forces held sway over Japan and South Korea. The Soviet Union, whose “satellites” and zones of strategic influence included Outer Mongolia and portions of northwest and northeast China by special treaty, was not easily contained in eastern Eurasia; conflict came quickly to Korea in 1950.

The Mao-led government of “New China” participated directly in these events. Allied with the Soviets, the Communist Party’s alienation from the United States-dominated “imperialist” camp intensified when involvement in the Korean War resulted in condemnation and sanctions from members United Nations General Assembly. The success of the revolution seemingly depended on Soviet aid, which would secure “Communist control of China’s state and society as well as promote the international prestige of the People’s Republic.”¹ Moreover, war itself provided the new government with justification for imposing an authoritarian system with unchallenged power in nearly every area of social activity. Successive mass movements were, somewhat paradoxically, launched in the name of restoring social stability and purging New China’s territory of dangers associated with the Nationalist and U.S. threat beyond.

While the individual consequences of “liberation” have been recounted with exacting detail, there has been somewhat less emphasis on the emergence of colossal,

¹ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China & The Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 59.

centralizing bureaucracies as a major feature of the post-1949 order. Moreover, the totalizing aspects of these organizations suggest that they have much in common with pre-1949 wartime modes of social management—continuities which are often overlooked by scholars focusing on the apparent novelty of Communist political culture or the sudden expansion of Soviet influence throughout East Asia. As argued throughout this dissertation, such continuities are evident in state approaches to mass culture throughout the twentieth century. The post-1949 film industry in the People’s Republic was no exception.

* * *

As noted by Jay Leyda, from October 1949 onward “those who were directly responsible for what appeared on the cinema screens were the Ministry of Culture and the special Department of Propaganda,” with Yuan Muzhi and Chen Bo’er as leading officials in the new Film Bureau.² Leyda also astutely observed that film, as a type of propaganda, was primarily directed “outside the ministries” by Yan’an cultural officials Lu Dingyi and Zhou Yang. During the early 1950s, the aim undertaken by these individuals appeared a relatively “simple” one—to build and maintain support for the revolution and Communist power. Still, Leyda noted differences in the levels of “trust” accorded New China’s various studios, with the Northeast Film Studio receiving the

² Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 181. Leyda may have been one of the first Anglophone scholars of Chinese cinema to attempt to theorize its aesthetics in terms of his understanding of “Peking opera” and Chinese theater, particularly in instances where he observed a “visual simplicity” or “opposition” to realist ambiguity.

government's full political confidence while the studios of Shanghai incurred "constant political anxiety."³ With the Korean War, propaganda entered a re-intensified phase. Yet in Leyda's view, it was the campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun zhuan*, 1950) which signaled the party center's bid for "control of Shanghai's cultural institutions."⁴ His analysis introduced the notion of conflict within China's nominally unified political system; a theme explored four years earlier in the work of Ezra Vogel.⁵ Propaganda institutions redefined the meaning of cultural production in the People's Republic, while certain studios and artists benefited more than others under the new regime.

Leyda's view was later recast by Paul Clark, who examined the use of film for creating a "new, mass, nationwide culture" after 1949.⁶ Clark summarized the tensions identified by Leyda in a starker manner, arguing that:

In creating this new culture, the national leadership and the artists on whom they depended could draw upon two different revolutionary, cultural, and political heritages. One was a more autochthonous heritage associated with the wartime [Communist] Party headquarters in the interior town of Yan'an. It drew heavily on folk traditions severely modified to conform with Party ideology. In contrast, the alternative cultural tradition grew out of the Westernized, cosmopolitan coastal cities, notably Shanghai. Its cultural inspiration was to a large extent foreign and its political stance reformist or revolutionary, but not necessarily Marxist ... May Fourth literature was one of the distinctive components of this modern, Shanghai-centered, cultural heritage. Before 1949 most Chinese filmmakers were part of this cultural strain. They had had little

³ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China*, 187.

⁴ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China*, 198.

⁵ See: Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). More discussion of the historiography of tensions within Communist networks of authority appears in: Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4-5.

⁶ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.

exposure to the more remote, though in many ways more Chinese, Yan'an alternative.⁷

In hindsight, Clark's account clearly underestimated the role that "foreign" models and Shanghai experience played in the development of Yan'an filmmaking practices, which likewise received little coverage due to his focus on prominent—and, at the time of Clark's research, only recently-available—feature films exclusively. Nor does his distinction between Party/autochthonous/folk "traditions" and non-Marxist/Westernized/cosmopolitan "modern" heritage adequately capture the experience (discussed in earlier chapters) of theorists and producers who attempted to actively create and employ both "alternatives" in the service of state-led cultural projects. Still, Clark's attempt to think of post-1949 cultural change in terms of tensions between "Yan'an" leaders and "Shanghai" artists employed new research to reiterate Leyda's earlier insight that Shanghai studios and their employees at the time of takeover often failed to earn the political "trust" of the Communist Party leadership.

More recently, publications by mainland Chinese film scholars have likewise moved away from the stance, prevalent during the 1980s, that Cultural Revolution excesses bore sole responsibility for the consequences of competitive politicization within the post-1949 film system. Hu Jubin's *A History of Film and Ideology in New China* (*Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*), who finds that China's post-1949 communications networks closely resembled the "ideological state apparatus" theorized by Louis Althusser, has criticized the extent to which political institutions have interfered

⁷ Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*, 2.

in the “artistic” realm throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁸ Meng Liye ascribes changes in Chinese cinematography (*dianying yishu*) of this period to broader shifts in “historical context” (*lishi yujing*).⁹ Li Daoxin, by contrast, has attempted to “reconstruct” Chinese film history through micro-studies of post-1949 film genres, and larger synthetic works which provide comparative perspectives on “Chinese cinema” as a phenomenon unfolding simultaneously in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.¹⁰ In each of these studies, the emphasis on “context”—political, historical, socio-cultural and otherwise—has been invoked to shed new light on a film history which has been written primarily from the perspective of individual films, directors, and institutions.

This chapter focuses primarily on the creation of a state-managed, and state-owned, film industry by the Communist Party during the early 1950s. The argument advanced is that this process was consistent with pre-1949 party attempts to create a state film industry that would successfully compete against both private and Nationalist-owned studios in Shanghai and Nanjing in winning over public opinion to the Communist cause. The tenuous nature of Communist authority following the “takeover” (*jieguan*) period, however, appears to have foreclosed any argument in favor of leaving even private enterprise intact. While Soviet advising (discussed in the next chapter) certainly played a role in promoting “socialization” on a national scale even before the inauguration of the 1953 First Five Year Plan, the impetus toward centralized cultural management—epitomized by the post-1949 Film Bureau and Film Guidance Committee—emerged from

⁸ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi: 1949-1976* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1995).

⁹ Meng Liye, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishu shigao* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2002).

¹⁰ See, respectively: Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying shixue jiangou* (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2004) and Li Daoxin, *Zhongguo dianying wenhua shi (1905-2004)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005).

the party's more consistent emphasis on ideological uniformity as a precondition of political strength. While some may have experienced the early 1950s as a "honeymoon," the Communist military-political bureaucracy seems to have viewed unsupervised cultural plurality as a luxury which it could ill-afford while in the midst of a struggle to rebuild sovereignty within China's borders and combat the spread of American hegemony in Northeast Asia.

Communist Party policies remained essentially consistent with those established in Yan'an and the Northeast. In some cases, the new authorities were indeed "new" by the standards of Shanghai's veteran directors; some had little experience with film at all, but rather had served as political functionaries within military cultural organizations, or as "mobilizers" (*dongyuan*) skilled in other performance arts. Yet the highest levels of the new cinematic institutions were staffed by individuals who, prior to arriving in Yan'an or the Northeast, had gained formative experience as filmmakers or cultural producers in Shanghai. They supported Mao in criticizing films of their non-party contemporaries, and were themselves eager to transform existing cultural institutions and artists' communities for the benefit of the state. Many filmmakers also subscribed to this logic, which undeniably had negative repercussions for those who lacked connections to the emerging central hierarchy. Moreover, the diversity of cinematic modes—features, newsreels, documentaries, theatrical performance films, scientific education films, and animated short features—complicates the notion that the early 1950s was one of either development or decline. Rather, it is a period within which China's new government linked existing social populations and institutions to the dictates of "politics" (*zhengzhi*)

or “policy” (*zhengce*), defined and implemented by the Communist Party center and its allies within the state.

Film and Culture on the Eve of “Liberation”

During the early years of New China, state filmmaking became concentrated in three studio facilities—the Northeast Film Studio (renamed the Changchun Film Studio in 1955), the Beijing Film Studio, and the Shanghai Film Studio. This process represented the fulfillment of plans outlined in 1945 by the Yan’an Film Group to “establish a central film base for the Party under the direct leadership of the Party center.”¹¹

In April 1949, following the takeover of Beijing by People’s Liberation Army forces, the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party Central Committee established a Central Film Bureau (*Zhongyang dianying ju*). This organization was one of the first central cultural institutions to take shape under the growing Communist-led government, and was intended to consolidate control of the existing film industry under the mantle of the state. A Propaganda Department resolution (*jueding*) issued on August 14, 1949 for the “strengthening” of the film industry required that “drama troupes and cultural work troupes above the first provincial committee and military grade must select and depute between two and four cadres of various types ... mentally and physically sound, and of relatively high professional ability” for assignment to the Central Film

¹¹ “接收东北敌伪电影事业建设我们我党宣传机构” (1945). Quoted in Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 117.

Management Bureau.¹² Department officials further required that of those selected, at least one individual from each regional division or field army political department should be a writer-director (*biandao*); other “important” personnel included male actors and “female cultural cadres (literally, “our sister comrades”) who had worked hard for many years in accordance with Chairman Mao’s cultural orientation.” Beginning on October 1, 1949 the Ministry of Culture of the newly-formed Central People’s Government officially oversaw all Film Bureau matters. Those staffing it, however, had all received the highest-level clearance from the Central Committee’s Propaganda Department.

Former Yan’an Film Group and Northeast Film Studio leader Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978) gained a new position as Film Bureau chief from April 1949 onward. Under his leadership, the Bureau assumed responsibility for all film production and distribution in New China.¹³ In an early report to the Propaganda Department, Yuan recommended that state film production be divided between the two studios currently under Party control. The Northeast Film Studio would produce features and newsreels, while the Beiping Film Studio would produce newsreels exclusively. The Film Bureau Censorship Committee (*Shencha weiyuanhui*) planned to review all films circulated by the new government’s main distribution offices, while artistic policy and technical matters would be handled by

¹² “关于加强电影事业的决定” (April 14, 1949). Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi: 1949-1976*, 4. Based on Yuan Muzhi’s report to the Propaganda Department (described below), many of the transferred personnel from the “eight big” drama troupes based in North and Northeast China would subsequently staff the Beiping Film Studio, while personnel from other organizations took up posts in distribution offices and theaters formerly controlled by the Nationalist government. See: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 135. A directive, “中共中央宣传部为发展电影事业向各野战军政治部抽调干部的指示” and issued on August 4, 1949 uses strikingly similar language. See: Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan* (Changchun: Jilin 1986), 119.

¹³ See: Yang Haizhou et al., eds., *Zhongguo dianying wuzi chanye xitong lishi biannianji (yijiu'erba nian zhi yijiujusi nian)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe 1998), 34.

separate committees also within the bureau. Several smaller offices existed for financial administration, research, translation, and the staff secretary.

On the eve of Beiping's fall, the Communist Party Central Committee had ordered cadres transferred from the Northeast Film Studio to assist in military "takeover" (*jieguan*) operations. The overall goal of operatives like Yuan Muzhi and Tian Fang (1911-1974), who had travelled from Changchun to Beiping several months before Yuan, was initially to consolidate and reform the existing film industry under Communist leadership.¹⁴ Additional construction, and the "coordination" of state- and privately-owned institutions with central government policies, would come later. With Beiping already selected to displace Changchun as the key node within New China's state film industry by December 1948, numerous filmmakers under the leadership of their Northeast Film Studio superiors began traversing the Shanhai Pass westward that following year.

On May 5, 1949 a different group of Communist Party members also made their way toward North China. High-ranking intelligence operative Pan Hannian (1906-1977), social scientist Xu Dixin (1906-1988), and writer Xia Yan (1900-1995) boarded a boat flying Panamanian colors from Hong Kong to the port of Tanggu, in Tianjin.¹⁵ Six days later, at the Communist Party's North China Bureau in Beiping, Xia was informed by Zhou Enlai that he would soon be assigned duties as an upper-level official overseeing Shanghai's cultural and educational institutions during the People's Liberation Army takeover of East China. Like Pan Hannian and Xu Dixin, Xia possessed intimate

¹⁴ Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1988), 40-41.

¹⁵ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji (zengbu ben)* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000), 389. Shen Ning, Xia Yan's daughter, also accompanied the group.

knowledge of Shanghai, having served for years as an underground cultural operative during the 1930s. Together with other Communist-affiliated critics, screenwriters, and filmmakers he had acted as a liaison between the Shanghai-based party's Cultural Committee (*Wenhua weiyuanhui*) and the non-party League of Left-Wing Writers.¹⁶ Meeting again with Zhou Enlai on the evening of May 12, Pan, Xu, and Xia joined a larger group of high-ranking Communist cadres to discuss plans for an upcoming national conference of important cultural figures, and policies toward the popular press in newly-liberated areas.¹⁷ According to Xia Yan's memoir, Zhou Enlai emphasized the importance of "unity" (*tuanjie*) to decisions affecting non-party individuals and institutions.¹⁸ In the case of national organization, this meant allowing for considerable "breadth" in the backgrounds of artists and other cultural figures with whom the Communist Party aimed to publicly unite; as long as these individuals were not anti-Communist or anti-Soviet, they were to be encouraged to work in national programs.¹⁹ The rationale, which reflected a recent Central Committee policy decision, was that "old" artists were not only more numerous than their "new" counterparts from Communist-controlled organizations, but also that they possessed broader and closer ties to the populace as a whole.

¹⁶ See: Laikwan Pang, *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 40.

¹⁷ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 393. Among those present were Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), Sa Kongliao, Hu Yuzhi, Zhou Yang, Yuan Muzhi, A Ying (Qian Xingcun), and Sha Kefu (Chen Weiming).

¹⁸ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 394, 396.

¹⁹ The policy of unity and concern for maintaining a hospitable social order seemingly extended to Shanghai's underworld. En route from Beiping, Pan Hannian received instructions from Liu Shaoqi—to be conveyed to People's Liberation Army generals Chen Yi and Rao Shushi—that notorious "Green Gang" figures Du Yuesheng and Huang Jinrong were to be left undisturbed provided they did not resist during the takeover process. See: Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 397.

During the first half of 1949, film institutions established by the Communist Party Central Committee, and staffed primarily by those with experience in the cultural organizations of North and Northeast China, appeared poised to carry out the nationalization of China's existing film industry. This program was the precondition of a larger aim—the creation of a productive “base” that would ultimately serve policies generated at the highest level of the party's leadership. Yet as planning for takeover progressed, its political and social base became increasingly diverse. Pan Hannian, Xu Dixin, and Xia Yan traveled south to Shanghai on May 14, 1949. All three were well-versed in Shanghai's cultural institutions, and the importance of these to the Communist Party's national programs. As such, the three figures represented an important human conduit through which the Central Committee hoped to complement its southern military campaigns, directed by generals Chen Yi and Rao Shushi, with a centralized cultural and educational network built upon the crumbling landscape of the Republic of China.

Takeover

Communist Party plans for the takeover of China's existing film industries had been formulated as early as December 1948, when the Central Committee Propaganda Department issued a directive to the Northeast Bureau requesting cadres from the Northeast Film Studio to assist in the “expropriation” (*jieshou*) of Beiping's Central Film Studio No. 3 (*Zhongdian san chang*).²⁰ With the formation of a “unified leading organization”—the Film Management Bureau—still pending, Propaganda Department

²⁰ “中共中央对电影工作的指示” (1948). Quoted in Ji Hong, *Xin Zhongguo dianying shiye jianshe sishi nian (1949-1989)* (Beijing: 1995), 7-8.

planners continued to issue orders for the confiscation of additional Nationalist Party studios in Nanjing and Shanghai throughout January 1949.²¹ Filmmakers of the liberated areas behind People's Liberation Army lines had yet to be thrust into power by the military push that would carry them toward Beijing.

At this time, Yuan Muzhi and other former leaders of the Communist Party wartime film teams, such as Chen Bo'er (1907-1951) and Zhao Wei (1917-), remained sequestered in the Northeast Film Studio's Xing Mountain facility. In a September 1948 report to his superiors, Yuan Muzhi had written that the film industry should "take the [Northeast Film Studio] as a model and 'temporary focal point' for the development of new studios, so as to provide a reference for future state-run studios throughout the nation."²² By 1949, it had already become a gathering site for cultural workers from various organizations within the military-based propaganda system. Zhong Jingzhi (1910-) and the Northwest Film Work-Study Team arrived in May 1948.²³ Both front-line and rear-area brigades from the Northeast Cultural Work No. 1 Regiment reached Xing Mountain during subsequent months. Graduates from the studio's training classes (*xunlian ban*) also created a swell in the number of personnel with political and professional credentials suitable for employment in Yuan Muzhi's reorganized administration.²⁴ The vast majority of these students were recruited from counties

²¹ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 135.

²² "关于电影事业报告 (一)" (1948). Quoted in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 137.

²³ See: Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 33-39.

²⁴ The Northeast Film Studio underwent a major organizational change in September 1948. The resulting divisions—artistic, production, management (including distribution and projection), and personnel (or secretarial)—anticipated those of the Central Film Management Bureau before and after the official establishment of the Central People's Government on October 1, 1949. For charts detailing the pre- and post-September 1949 divisions, see: Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 40-41.

adjacent to Ha'erbin and, later, major cities on the Liaodong peninsula.²⁵ One young man responded to an advertisement run in a Ha'erbin newspaper.²⁶ When interviewed for admission, he admitted that while he was not actually from Ha'erbin, he had come in hopes of "participating in the revolution." Following six months of study at the nearby Northeast Military and Political University, he was assigned a position as assistant to one of the studio's directors

By June 1949, over 530 students would graduate from Northeast Film Studio-run training classes and join the "revolutionary" filmmaking ranks. Many of them were subsequently transferred to Beijing thereafter. Takeover began in early February, when a group of ten studio cadres led by studio secretary (*mishu*) Tian Fang followed People's Liberation Army forces into the city. Areas "within the wall" (*cheng nei*) were deemed secure enough by February 5 that Tian and his group were able inspect the Central Film Company Third Studio grounds, and report the next day that "all branches of the Beijing film [system], materials and equipment, and personnel remain in place, and all have been closely safeguarded by our friends and the workers' association (*zhigong hui*); there are neither losses nor disorder, and conditions are truly excellent."²⁷ Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo'er, and Zhao Wei departed from the Northeast Film Studio on February 14. The Beijing Film Studio was officially established on April 20, and Tian Fang named studio head; on this same date management of the studio passed from the city's Military Control Commission (*Jun guan hui*) to the North China People's Government.

²⁵ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 120.

²⁶ Interview with LWH, January 2005.

²⁷ Quoted in Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (shang ce)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tielu chubanshe, 1990), 189. A slightly expanded version of this section of Tian's report appears in Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 123.

Military seizure of Beiping enriched the Communist Party's state-run film industry by placing top Northeast administrators in the preeminent filmmaking center of North China. The Central Film Company Third Studio was the post-1945 name of the North China Film Company—a Japanese-built facility prized as one of the most modern studios in China after 1945.²⁸ Nationalist Party Propaganda Department officials had placed the studio under management of the Central Film Enterprise Company (also known as the Central Film Studio) during October 1945. Its three sound stages constituted half of those owned by the company between 1945 and 1949, although due to economic constraints only one stage was in operation by late 1948, when the studio was closed in preparation for its equipment and personnel to be evacuated to Nanjing following Communist victories in the northeastern Shen-Liao military campaign.²⁹ Underground Communist activists, with orders to preserve the facility intact, successfully delayed this action by fomenting a dispute with studio head Xu Angqian over back wages and the payment of a “dispersal fee” (*san fei*). With his authority quickly diminishing—and after a brief period locked in an assembly hall on the studio grounds—Xu ceded decision-making to labor activists on the pre-evacuation Contingency Committee (*Yingbian weiyuanhui*). Amidst economic uncertainty, workers rallied around the prospect of future wages and against removal of the studio's contents to Nanjing (subsequent orders from Nationalist Party Propaganda Department representatives would insist that the transfers be made to Shanghai, in preparation for removal of studio

²⁸ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 112.

²⁹ Interview with CYX, February 2005.

equipment to Taiwan).³⁰ While no communication existed between the studio's underground Communist Party branches and encircling army during late January 1949, a "smooth" (*shunli*) takeover of the studio by the Military Control Committee was effected soon thereafter.

Resuming effective studio organization based on a new structure of authority nonetheless created new tensions. Two "front" organizations for separate Communist Party cells within the studio came to blows during the takeover process, as competing individuals vied for dominance.³¹ Many former Central Film Company Third Studio employees scattered after the surrender of Nationalist general Fu Zuoyi's Beiping forces on January 30, 1949. Their return was met by the clusters of Northeast cadres and filmmakers, whose arrival signaled a significant change in the previous hierarchy. Qian Xiaozhang (1919-1991), former head of the Northeast Film Studio newsreel group (*xinwenpian zu*), entered Beiping in April with a group of forty individuals.³² Wang Yang (1916-) and the North China Film Brigade, departing from Shijiazhuang the previous month, represented another thirty film workers with ties to the military occupation. While Wang, together with Tian Fang, played an important role in smoothing tensions between these groups, Third Studio employees generally found themselves at a disadvantage during the reorganization process.³³ Communist Party cadres found the backgrounds of those who had recently worked under the Nationalists

³⁰ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (shang ce)*, 185-186; Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyang sishi nian* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 5.

³¹ Interview with CYX, February 2005.

³² Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyang sishi nian*, 6.

³³ Interview with CYX, February 2005 (concerning the role of Wang Yang and Tian Fang as mediators).

politically “complicated,” concluding that “nothing could be done” with certain cases.³⁴

In some cases, personal connections could mitigate a lack of established political credentials—several filmmakers who had traveled to Beiping in 1947 with actor, director, and former Changchun Film Studio head Jin Shan (1911-1982) remained in the new studio’s employ.³⁵ At this time Jin himself was, under the cover of establishing the Qinghua Film Company in Shanghai, acting as a liaison during ongoing negotiations between the Communist Party and several prominent Shanghai capitalists.³⁶

While studio organization centered on the Northeast Film Studio’s party structure solidified in Beijing, other representatives moved southward during the People’s Liberation Army campaign to cross the Yangzi (Chang) River. Zhong Jingzhi arrived in Nanjing during May 1949. Here, he met up with the agitprop playwright and Shanghai screenwriter Yu Ling (1907-), one of the Communist Party’s top film operatives in the East China region. Reports from Zhong Jingzhi’s south-bound (*nan xia*) Northeast Film Studio group described the relative speed of the takeover process, and the thoroughness with which former Nationalist state film institutions were included within the emerging People’s Liberation Army “military control” (*jun guan*) system:

Our south-bound group of comrades arrived in Beiping ... On April 22, at nightfall, newspaper extras (*waihao*) spread rapidly to every corner of the city: Nanjing has been liberated!

...

Everyone roused themselves with enthusiasm. The next day, we boarded an express train bound for Nanjing.

³⁴ Interview with CZ, December 2004.

³⁵ Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyang sishi nian*, 2.

³⁶ Xu Guorong, *Jin Shan zhuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1989), 254-260. Jin’s ability to move easily among Shanghai’s financial elite was supposedly due to a relationship with “Green Gang” figurehead Du Yuesheng dating back to early contact between the two during World War Two, when Jin made Du’s acquaintance in Chongqing.

...

The train reached Xuzhou, and right away we heard that our army was pressing toward Shanghai. Originally, we had planned to first take hold of [film institutions in] Nanjing, and then move on to expropriate [those in] Shanghai. But because of the speed with which the situation has developed, we must move quickly to take over [management] of both locations, and have no alternative but to dispatch a group of people to begin the Shanghai takeover.³⁷

Nanjing yielded the Communist Party several secondary film studios previously operated by the Nationalist military—the China Education Film Studio and Central Rural Education Film Studio. The China Film Studio, designed by an American advisor after 1945, had already been successfully transferred to Taiwan.³⁸ Yet more important seizures of institutions, equipment, and other film-related investments from the Republic were soon to come. On July 2, 1949 the Shanghai-bound group led by Zhong Jingzhi and Yu Ling reported the following:

On May 26, on a night ringing with the sound of cannon fire along the Huangpu River coast, we reached Shanghai. Stationed in Jiaotong University, on June 2 [we] began takeover and management work, while adding to our ranks comrades from the East China film brigades.

...

In Shanghai we expropriated five film studios: the “Central Film Company First Studio” and “Central Film Company Second Studio” of the illegitimate [Nationalist] Propaganda Department; the “China Film Studio” of the illegitimate Ministry of Defense; the Shanghai Experimental Film Works and China Film Industry Corporation (*Zhonghua dianying gongye gongsi*); additionally, the Central Film Enterprises General Management Office and Film Censorship Committee office; [and] four theaters.³⁹

³⁷ Reports from the south-bound group to the Northeast Film Studio. Quoted in Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 124-125.

³⁸ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 115.

³⁹ Reports from the south-bound group to the Northeast Film Studio. Quoted in Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 125. While the Central Film Company and China Film Studio were associated with the Nationalist Party’s propaganda and military institutions respectively, the Shanghai Experimental Film

By the end of August, takeover operations would extend to over forty theaters, Central Film Company management offices, the Nationalist film system's Rural Education Office, and the Shanghai offices of the Xinjiang provincial government's Northwest Film Company.

According to one of Zhong Jingzhi's published recollections, another factor in determining the decision to move swiftly onward toward Shanghai was the chaotic and "unrecognizable" (*buxiang yang*) state of many of the Nanjing facilities. The China Film Studio appeared to be in the midst of repairs, and the contents and personnel of the Central Agricultural Education Film Studio already transferred to Taiwan.⁴⁰ While waiting to enter Shanghai, the combined Northeast and East China forces—the latter also including cultural workers who, like Yu Ling, had recently returned from Hong Kong to assist with the Communist takeover—were placed under the leadership of the Shanghai Military Control Commission Cultural and Educational Management Committee. While People's Liberation Army general served as the titular head of this organization, its everyday operations were mainly coordinated by Communist Party Central Committee-appointed representatives Xia Yan, Qian Junrui, Fan Changjiang, and Dai Baitao.⁴¹ With military control over Shanghai established on May 27, the committee's film-related responsibilities fell largely to Yu Ling and Zhong Jingzhi, following extensive briefing

Works (*Shanghai shiyan dianying gongchang*) was an institutional unit within the Three People's Principles Youth Corps (*San qing tuan*).

⁴⁰ Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 51.

⁴¹ In his autobiography Xia Yan notes that because journalist Fang Changjiang and social scientist Qian Junrui remained in Beijing at the time of the Shanghai takeover, he was involved in nearly the entire range of Cultural and Educational Management Committee operations. See: Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 399.

concerning the Communist Party's occupational regulations (*rucheng jilü*).⁴² The committee expropriated only those film institutions which represented “bureaucratic capital” belonging to the Nationalist state. Contact with studio workers was arranged primarily through the assistance of underground operatives familiar with Shanghai workers' organizations; within each work unit, a committee-designated liaison (*lianluoyuan*) served as intermediary between the occupational administration and “provisional supervisory committees” (*linshi guanli weiyuanhui*) from which workers received political instruction. These provisional supervisory committees also coordinated the massive inventorying, individual registration, equipment preservation, and record-keeping efforts needed to resume studio operation under Shanghai's new cultural bureaucracy.

As in Beiping, Shanghai's post-takeover studio system brought together individuals from a variety of professional backgrounds. Veterans of the 1930s commercial heyday mingled with “new talents” who had emerged in the hinterland or post-war Shanghai system during the 1940s. Both groups were soon joined by performers and other cadres recruited from within the East China military region, many of them “old liberated area” (*lao jiefang qu*) personnel transferred by Central Committee order.⁴³ A Cultural and Educational Management Committee decision issued on June 27, 1949 and signed by the committee's internal Communist Party members requested three hundred additional cadres to assist with political education and management of skilled labor in Shanghai's schools, cultural institutions, and presses. As emphasized by the

⁴² Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 52.

⁴³ Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 53-54. This was the same August 14 order issued by the Central Committee Propaganda Department, requesting the transfer of experienced personnel to Beiping to fill the ranks of the Beiping Film Studio and Film Bureau.

committee, one of the most important tasks facing these new arrivals would be “education” and the inculcation of proper ideology—portraying the Communist Party as “liberators from the Nationalist Party, not as individualists (*geren zhuyi*).”⁴⁴ Committee members also stressed the need for current Shanghai operatives to share power with those transferred from outside, rather than viewing them as rivals. Only by broadening the party’s inner ranks, they concluded, would mobilization for the Communist cause spread effectively throughout Shanghai society “from within the party to without.”

As the occupiers’ numbers within Shanghai film circles continued to grow, they remained under the authority of Military Control Commission cultural officials who, like former Shanghai party member Xia Yan, remained responsible for conducting takeover in accordance with directives transmitted by the northern-based Central Committee. Yet even Xia, who had spent the past three years in Hong Kong, remained dependent on current underground agents for information concerning the location and ownership of Shanghai’s studios.⁴⁵ Properties belonging to Nationalist Party’s Military Affairs Commission and other central institutions were confiscated outright. Kunlun and Wenhua film studios, both large-scale enterprises, remained in operation due both to their status as private investments as well as their contacts with underground Communist Party organizations.⁴⁶ Cultural and Educational Committee members remained under strict orders not to hastily implement programs of political thought reform (*gaizao*) among filmmakers during the takeover process, as the party remained wary of backlash within

⁴⁴ SHMA B34/1/203: “关于抽调三百干部的决定” (June 6, 1949). From Shanghai shi junshi guanzhi weiyuanhui, Wenhua jiaoyu guanli weiyuanhui, Wenguanhui dangweihui. Files of Shanghai shi wenhua jiaoyu weiyuanhui. One intriguing note in this resolution concerns the committee’s wish to accept as many cadres as possible from Southwest China.

⁴⁵ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 399-400, 408.

⁴⁶ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 408.

Shanghai's intellectual circles.⁴⁷ Only those who, under Japanese occupation, had actively aided enemy forces in “persecuting” (*pohai*) others within the film industry were subject to immediate punishment and removal.

Joining the numerous “liberation welcome groups” (*yingjie jiefang xiaozu*) and “factory protection groups” (*bao chang xiaozu*) which emerged openly during Nationalist evacuation proved one of the surest ways to demonstrate loyalty and support for the incipient new regime. One of the most common arguments employed by Communist Party operatives within Nationalist-controlled studios, which apparently proved instrumental in delaying the removal of equipment and destruction of property, was that a “labor reward system” (*chou lao*) should be instituted prior to participation in any evacuation measures; another was that for filmmaking, “Shanghai was better than other locations, and [film workers] should not go elsewhere.”⁴⁸ Equipment was hidden and, as Nationalist frustration and the resulting “white terror” reached its peak, so were potentially vulnerable Communist agents.

For Shanghai filmmakers working in smaller studios such as Guotai and Datong, however, financial crises, labor disputes, and lack of steady wages rendered the future increasingly uncertain.⁴⁹ The Cultural and Educational Committee's response, sanctioned by its nominal senior officer and new Shanghai mayor Chen Yi, was to submit all studio administration to committee approval in order to “prop up [New China's] national cinema” (*fuzhi minzu dianying*). In the midst of meetings with former Central

⁴⁷ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 409, 413.

⁴⁸ Zhu Jiang, “‘Tian liang’ qian de douzheng [The Struggle before the Dawn],” *Shanghai dianying shiliao* No. 2/3 (May 1993), 9.

⁴⁹ Jiang Haitian, “Nanwang de licheng—Shang ying chang jianchang de huigu,” *Shanghai dianying shiliao* No. 2/3 (May 1993), 2-3.

Film Company studio management, Yu Ling's inspection of the company offices also yielded a considerable amount of costumes, props, films, and documents held over from the main studio of the Japanese occupation.⁵⁰ Takeover operations unearthed years of wealth invested into successive political and cultural regimes, making it the property of the Communist Party's "military control" administration and, ultimately, the state. One early experiment with state-private mixed management—the process by which Shanghai's entire film system would be absorbed into the state system during the early 1950s—began with Cultural and Educational Committee expropriation of the China Film Industrial Studio (*Zhonghua dianying gongye zhipianchang*), a former remnant of the Japanese system bought for private use by Nationalist Party film officials Luo Xianlian and Wu Xuxun.⁵¹ With central Film Bureau approval, Yu Ling became head of studio's board of directors in 1950, until a merger with the Shanghai municipal Film Bureau the next year.

In 1949, however, Shanghai's Communist Party cultural administrators were focusing their attention primarily on the conversion of expropriated Nationalist studio properties into a new unified film production system—the Shanghai Film Studio. Formally established on November 16, 1949 this sprawling complex included five sound stages. Yu Ling and Zhong Jingzhi were named studio heads. With the exception of the addition new artistic (*yishu*) personnel such as directors, screenwriters, and performers virtually the entire Nationalist studio system remained intact.⁵² Workers' ranks would

⁵⁰ Zhang Jiahao, "Jieguan 'Zhong dian' jiyao," *Shanghai dianying shiliao* No. 2/3 (May 1993), 35.

⁵¹ Cao Maotang, "Changjiang yingye gongsi de qianqian houhou," *Shanghai dianying shiliao* No. 2/3 (May 1993), 37.

⁵² Interview with WX, July 2006.

not be thoroughly processed and “reformed” (*gaizao*) until well over a year later.⁵³ By the end of 1949, institutions administered by the central Film Bureau included the Northeast, Beijing (former Beiping), and Shanghai film studios, fifty-eight news teams, and distribution stations in each of six military regions (*qu*)—a total of over 3000 individuals in all.⁵⁴ According to statistics gathered one year later, personnel employed by the Northeast Film Studio totaled 1015 individuals, while Beijing employed 610 and Shanghai 750.⁵⁵ Yet the Northeast’s influence was felt not solely by dint of numbers. Of 708 administrative, artistic, and technical cadres originally belonging to the studio in 1949, 285—approximately 40 percent—received transfers to other studios and film institutions.⁵⁶

Often overlooked in histories of the mainland film industry, Hong Kong also represented an important location for Communist networking and cultural organization prior to takeover, as well as an important conduit through which artistic talent was recruited back to Shanghai after 1949. Some of the most prominent Communist-affiliated writers and filmmakers—including future central leaders Guo Moruo, Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing), Yang Hansheng, Xia Yan, Yu Ling, and Ouyang Yuqian—had gathered there in mid-1948 to escape Nationalist capture.⁵⁷ While awaiting the outcome of the

⁵³ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 142.

⁵⁴ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 143.

⁵⁵ Ji Hong, *Xin Zhongguo dianying shiye jianshe sishi nian (1949-1989)*, 14.

⁵⁶ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 126.

⁵⁷ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 148. A partial list of film workers from the “northern” areas would also include Fei Mu, Zhou Xuan, Li Lihua, Hu Die, Cai Chusheng, Shi Dongshan, Zhang Junxiang, Bai Yang, Ke Ling, and Zhang Ruifang. Almost all who returned would resume their careers in Shanghai, with some—most notably Cai Chusheng and Shi Dongshan—rose to the ranks of the new central government. See also: Zhang Litao, *Zhong Gong dianying shi gailun* (Hong Kong: Tomokazu Production House/Shuei Books/Juying guan, 1990), 30-31. Other notable returnees included Wang Weiyi, Wu Zuguang, Gu Eryi, Liu Qiong, Bai Chen, and Shu Shi,

Communist-Nationalist war on the mainland, several of these figures worked as writers for Hong Kong's largest studios, infiltrated literary and press circles, and organized among local film workers. While the emerging "leftist" film culture may have failed to significantly impact patterns of production in Hong Kong after its dissolution, in the face of anti-Communist police pressure, during the 1950s, the networks created within this largely ex-Shanghai community largely survived following its members' return to the mainland.

Hong Kong émigrés also provided policy advice to the nascent Communist Party film bureaucracy during the takeover process, as evidenced by a document entitled "Film Policy Recommendations" (*dianying zhengce xianyi*) distributed during January 1949. In language whose economic concerns in many ways accorded with Yuan Muzhi's notion of the film industry as both a cultural and economic "front" (*zhanxian*), its authors wrote:

Film is a type of cultural and educational tool which possess comparatively superior qualities—its expressive force is formidable, and its communicative reach is vast. Because of the strength of these qualities, it is able to serve the people even more effectively (*bian youxiao de fuwuyu renmin*). The socialist Soviet Union long ago made film one of the most important nationalized industries. The new democratic nations of Eastern Europe such as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and so on have also gradually taken this correct path. Yet film is also a business (*qiye*). In capitalist nations, this kind of business is regarded as being as important an [economic] sector as steel and oil. Taking the United States as an example, the enormous profits siphoned out of colonized, semi-colonized, and other under-producing nations are made possible by the commodity that is film.⁵⁸

as well as several film critics (e.g. Qu Baiyin) associated with Xia Yan and the *Huashang bao*. See: Ke Ke, *Zhongguo Lingnan yingshi yishu shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1999), 31, 38.

⁵⁸ Ouyang Yuqian et al., "电影政策献议" (January 1949). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 3-5. The full list of signatories included Ouyang Yuqian, Cai Chusheng, Shi Dongshan, Yang Hansheng, Wu Zuguang, Sima Wensen, Qu Baiyin, Su Yi, Hong Qiu, Mei Duo, Zhang Min, Gu Zhongyi, Xia Yan, Wang Weiye, Zhang Junxiang, and Ke Ling.

Creating an economically-viable national film industry, and severing China's semi-colonial ties with the capitalist world, required disrupting market relationships which facilitated the transfer of raw materials and manufactured goods to foreign countries. The sixteen signatories also argued that the Nationalist Party had further weakened China's domestic film industry to the point that immediate steps would need to be taken in order to excise the "reactionary" Nationalist presence. In this latter respect the policies outlined by these filmmakers of the former Nationalist-controlled "white" areas—Chongqing and Shanghai—were strikingly similar to those associated with artistic rectification campaigns of "red" areas such as Yan'an. The twenty articles of their proposal included suggestions for: "purging the ranks of those in the film industry" (article three); punishing corrupt personnel (article four); creating cooperative-style film institutions (article eight); establishing mass organizations for self-criticism within both state and private enterprises in order to "safeguard the political authority of New Democratic [institutions] and guard against [any] remaining backward, degenerate, and reactionary ideologies" (article eighteen), and; proscribing the projection of films "harmful to the people's interests" (article nineteen).

Preparations to convene China's diverse "cultural circles" (*wen yi jie*) under the banner of state authority began in June 1949, when the well-known Communist Party propagandist Zhou Yang announced that a major conference would be held in Beijing the following month. Lists of potential participants were expected to include an appropriate balance of individuals from former Communist-controlled base areas and Nationalist-controlled "white" areas, in addition to both "new" and "old" cultural

figures.⁵⁹ In reality, the majority possessed some form of base area experience, while it seems that those without explicitly revolutionary pedigrees were selected primarily on the basis of their national reputations—Mei Lanfang, the famous Peking opera star, represented a notable example of the non-revolutionary minority.

Speeches and reports given to the assembled delegates during this early August conference emphasized the degree to which takeover did not simply exchange Nationalist Party cultural administrators for Communist replacements, but also required that a diverse group of cultural figures take on the structure of a national community devoted to producing “works” according to the tenets of Maoist cultural policies. Writer Mao Dun’s conference report, delivered on July 4, 1949, included a somewhat defensive explanation for the “shortcomings” (*quedian*) of cultural production in the pre-1949 “white” areas:

During the early period of the War of Resistance, cultural production (*wenyi chuangzuo*) was suitably vigorous, but before long, reactionaries of the Nationalist Party became increasingly reactionary, and the situation of writers increasingly dire. Consequently, cultural production soon became subject to all manner of unimaginable restrictions.⁶⁰

Mao Dun’s point was not that “revolutionary” artists had failed to engage in “struggle” with the Nationalist Party through critical depictions of the regime, or that they had not served the war effort by attempting to mobilize China’s populace on the nation’s behalf. Rather, his address attempted to identify those points at which “complicated” (*fuza*) circumstances—blamed primarily on restrictions placed on artistic expression by Nationalist “reactionaries”—had inhibited the creation of a cultural orthodoxy compatible

⁵⁹ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 412.

⁶⁰ Mao Dun, “在反动派压迫下斗争和发展的革命文艺—十年来国统区革命文艺运动报告提纲(节录)” (July 4, 1949), Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 15.

with that outlined in Mao's 1942 "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and the Arts." Not only was this the one cultural policy which Mao Dun mentioned by name, but it clearly served as the criterion according to which all cultural production—and by extension, cultural producers—situated within Nationalist-secured areas became known as evolutionarily flawed.

The implications of this position for the film world were spelled out in Yang Hansheng's subsequent August 7 address, which castigated Nationalist oppression for filmmakers' collective inability to gain deeper contact with the urban industrial proletariat, or access to a mass audience beyond "petit bourgeois" types already found frequenting city theaters.⁶¹ Unlike Mao Dun, however, Yang also argued for the ongoing existence of a cohesive "dramatic cinema movement" (*xiju dianying yundong*) in Shanghai dating back to the 1940s and, by extension, for Shanghai filmmakers' claim to revolutionary legitimacy. Praising the "free space" (*ziyou de tiandi*) of the north, and promising to further "research" Maoist ideology, Yang seemed to treat as inevitable the impending unification (*tuanjie*) of cultural producers from both "white" and "liberated" regions. This vision was troubled, however, by a starker human reality of mistrust and discord:

After passing through eight years of warfare during the War of Resistance and [War of] Liberation, even though [China's cultural circles] co-existed within the nationalistic, democratic camps (*zhenying*), there still existed many ideological and emotional knots (*geda*) between individuals which could not be easily unraveled.⁶²

⁶¹ Yang Hansheng, "国统区进步的戏剧电影运动" (July 7, 1949), Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 24-25.

⁶² Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 412.

Campaigns

Not all unease within the post-1949 film world resulted from competition between cadres of different regions. And not all aspects of the post-takeover film industry were shaped by underlying discord. Yet unmistakably, a new administrative system and logic based upon the authority of Northeast personnel had emerged within the midst of China's newly "national" film community. As Mao Dun and Yang Hansheng apologized for the Nationalist-created limitations imposed on their work and the work of other urban cultural figures during the 1940s, Yuan Muzhi delivered to the All-China Literary and Artistic Workers Conference (*Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui*) a report entitled simply "Concerning Film Work in the Liberated Areas," which concluded:

In the past twelve years, the development of a film industry (*shiyè*) in the liberated areas can only be said to have begun with the 10,000 *li* Long March, and remains in an immature state. In the wake of victory in the people's War of Liberation and the expansion of the liberated areas, the film industry of the liberated areas has also kept pace with this victory and expanded to become national in scope; moreover [this industry] has become the state-operated enterprise (*qiye*) of the people's nation. Additionally, this single state-run enterprise will soon occupy the leading place within the film industry of the entire nation.⁶³

Although Yuan was ultimately selected as vice-chairman of the newly-constituted All-China Cinematic Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo dianying yishu gongzuozhe xiehui*) which emerged from the August 1949 cultural workers conference proceedings—

⁶³ Yuan Muzhi, "关于解放区电影工作" (August 1949), Yuan Muzhi et al., *Jiefang qu de dianying* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985), 6. This, along with other reports delivered at the 1949 cultural workers' conference, was originally reprinted in *Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui xuanchuan chu*, ed., *Zhonghua quanguo wenxue yishu gongzuozhe daibiao dahui jinian wenji* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1950).

Yang Hansheng served as chairman—his position as leader of the central Film Bureau confirmed the prestige of Northeast filmmakers in the state and Communist Party cultural system. Furthermore, Yuan carried with him the additional prestige of having studied extensively with Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein during the latter’s filming of *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (*Ivan Grozny I*, 1944) at Alma Ata during the evacuation of Moscow.

Emphasis on the Northeast “model” and significance of Soviet theory for future Chinese film production was conveyed by numerous reports delivered at Film Bureau meetings during late 1949 and early 1950.⁶⁴ An administrative conference (*xingzheng huiyi*) convened on November 29, chaired by Yuan Muzhi, state studio heads received instructions to begin producing films which reflected “the people’s War of Liberation and building of [new] lives for workers and peasants.”⁶⁵ At the same time, they issued a resolution condemning the present trend of “naturalism” (*ziran zhuyi*) in film production and ratified the establishment of a new script and film censorship institution to institute “new realism” (*xin xieshi zhuyi*) as the industry’s dominant aesthetic. From 1950 onward, all films produced by studios in the People’s Republic of China were required to receive Ministry of Culture approval before distribution. Just prior to the Film Bureau conference, the Shanghai Military Control Commission had issued the following ambiguous policy statement to private studio owners: “The censorship system is not compulsory, but criticism may be comparatively stricter (*yan ’ge*). This [process] should be of a constructive nature, and it will occasionally be necessary to examine (*shencha*)

⁶⁴ See, for example: Cai Chusheng, “在文化部电影局艺术委员会扩大座谈会的发言” (October 31, 1949) and Chen Bo’er, “故事片从无到有的编导工作” (January 1950), Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan*, 45-51, 58-66.

⁶⁵ Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 42.

[your studios'] finished products."⁶⁶ As would become increasingly obvious during the early 1950s, "censorship" favored a particular approach to filmmaking—the use of images and themes sanctioned in advance by the Film Bureau and Central Committee Propaganda Department.

The campaign against the film *The Life of Wu Xun* (*Wu Xun zhuan*, 1950) has acquired the reputation of a major tipping point in the "transition from Shanghai to Yan'an," or from Nationalist to Communist cultural policy.⁶⁷ This feature, produced in Kunlun Film Studio and directed by veteran Shanghai director Sun Yu, depicted an impoverished rural reformer (played by Zhao Dan) in his attempts to bring education to illiterate members of Qing society. Wu Xun (1839-1896) had been an actual figure; the story of his undertaking had received interest from educational reformers during the 1940s.⁶⁸ Several attempts to produce a film script based on Wu Xun's biography had also been initiated during this period. The film was already in production with Sun Yu at the helm in January 1949. Despite the director's apparent misgivings that the plot might be incompatible with the political program of the Communist Party, script shortages and poor revenues provided sufficient impetus for Kunlun Film Studio to bring *The Life of Wu Xun* to Shanghai and Nanjing theaters in February 1951.

⁶⁶ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 41-42.

⁶⁷ See: Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Cultural and Politics since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 45.

⁶⁸ A useful discussion of *The Life of Wu Xun* can be found in Paul Clark, *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949*, 45-52. Other important collections of materials include Yuan Xi, *Wu Xun zhuan pipan jishi* (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 2000) and documents contained in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006). Xia Yan's recollection of the event, "武训传事件始末" (1991), has most recently been reprinted in Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji (zengbu ben)* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000). A separate, "official" volume of research materials concerning the event has also appeared.

While initial audience and press reactions to the film were overwhelmingly positive, Sun Yu brought a copy of the film to Beijing, where it was screened for over one hundred party and military officials in the Zhongnanhai compound on February 21. Zhu De apparently praised the film, declaring that it possessed “educational significance.”⁶⁹ Several days later, Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing viewed the film in a private session. According to a projectionist from the North China Film Team, Mao hated the film at first sight.⁷⁰ Criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun* began in April, with Mao’s own written remarks appearing in *The People’s Daily* on May 20, 1951. The gist of the attacks was that Wu Xun, a pathetic figure from China’s feudal society, was an unworthy subject of “art” according to dicta laid down in Mao’s 1942 *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature*. By July the self-criticism of those associated with the film—a group which included Shanghai cultural officials Xia Yan and Yu Ling—appeared publicly in newspapers as well.

According to many, this mounting campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun* represented a portentous attack by the Communist Party on non-party artists, and non-state studios. More than over 2000 articles, and twenty volumes, were published denouncing the film.⁷¹ Jiang Qing personally led a “Wu Xun historical investigation group” (*Wu Xun lishi diaocha tuan*) to several counties in Shandong province associated with the activities of the historical Wu Xun. The group’s findings that Wu Xun had been a “big landlord, big loanshark, and big hoodlum” were published serially in *The People’s*

⁶⁹ Zhu Yuhe, Zhang Yong, and Gao Dunfu, eds., *Dangdai Zhongguo yishixingtai qingtai lu* (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 1997), 104.

⁷⁰ Interview with LHY, May 2005.

⁷¹ Zhu Yuhe, Zhang Yong, and Gao Dunfu, eds., *Dangdai Zhongguo yishixingtai qingtai lu*, 108. See, for example: Zhongyang dianying ju yishu weiyuanhui, *Guanyu yingpian ‘Wu Xun zhuan’ de pipan (xia ce)* (Beijing, 1951).

Daily between July 23 and July 28, 1951. The fact that the movement touched on numerous individuals within China's cultural circles had a chilling effect on film production thereafter.⁷² Critics and journalists who had praised the film received public condemnation, and the campaign also ignited a search for living “big Wu Xuns” and “little Wu Xuns” within China's educational system.⁷³ Nor were most urban intellectuals accompanied to the dynamics of the campaign, in which those labeled often became targets for mass criticism and derision.

Yet *The Life of Wu Xun* was not the first film to receive Communist Party censure after 1949. The lesser-known *Inner Mongolian Spring* (*Nei Menggu chunguang*, 1950), the seventh feature produced by the Northeast Film Studio, had already been withdrawn from circulation after party leaders discovered that its content violated “ethnic policy” by failing to adequately emphasize unity between Hans and Mongols.⁷⁴ Banned from further screening after May 1950, *Inner Mongolian Spring* became an important touchstone for a series of high-level meetings within the Ministry of Culture, and provided impetus for the formation of a “film guidance committee” (*dianying zhidao weiyuanhui*) within the ministry at the suggestion of Zhou Enlai, whose purpose was to ensure that domestic films received adequate central scrutiny prior to large-scale national release.⁷⁵ Nor were *The Life of Wu Xun* campaign's public polemics over which kinds of

⁷² Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005.

⁷³ Tang Minghong, “Dui dianying *Wu Xun zhuan* he ‘Wu Xun jingshen’ de pipan,” *Zhong Gong Shanghai shi weiyuanhui dangshi yanjiu shi*, ed., *Lishi jubian: 1949-1956* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), 356-357.

⁷⁴ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 106-107.

⁷⁵ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 42. The Film Guidance Committee, chaired by Shen Yanbing, was officially established on July 11, 1951. Jiang Qing, then head of the Propaganda Department Film Office (*dianying chu*), was one of the organization's most active members, and served on the ten-person standing committee. See: Tang Minghong, “Dui dianying *Wu Xun zhuan* he ‘Wu Xun jingshen’ de pipan,” 366. Other sources date the committee to July 1950, when following the *Inner Mongolian Spring*

subjects deserved valorization in the new society unprecedented. An essay by Shi Dongshan entitled “Methods of Present Cinematography” and published in the August 7, 1949 issue of *The People’s Daily* triggered a discussion among Shanghai film circles of whether individuals of the “petit-bourgeois class” were worthy of cinematic depiction alongside the party-approved “revolutionary” classes—workers, peasants, and soldiers.⁷⁶ By 1951, however, such debates had been rendered largely irrelevant in terms of their power to shape the filmmaking process, as evidenced by Ministry of Culture committees and demands that all private studios submit their finished products to a “unified” (*tongyi*) censorship apparatus.⁷⁷ Perhaps surprisingly, it was state-sponsored films like *Inner Mongolian Spring* and *To Whom Honor?* (*Rongyu shuyu shei*, 1950), another Northeast Film Studio production, which seem to have attracted central party suspicion concerning filmmakers’ powers of political judgment.⁷⁸

Moreover, the wide institutional terrain over which *The Life of Wu Xun* campaign was carried out is reminiscent of a broader trend affecting intellectuals and cultural production during 1951—thought reform. With China poised to enter the Korean War, party leaders became concerned about the effect of pro-American sentiment on support

incident Zhou Enlai supposedly ordered the creation of an institution within the Film Bureau whose responsibilities would include “providing suggestions concerning: the advancement of the film industry; film scripts narrative outlines, production, and dissemination plans of the state-managed studios; [and] films of the privately-managed studios. [And] will additionally provide censorship and appraisal jointly with the Film Bureau.” See: Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 5; Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyong sishi nian*, 8.

⁷⁶ See: Shi Dongshan, “Muqian dianying yishu de zuofa,” *Renmin ribao* (August 7, 1949); Xian Qun “Guanyu ‘keyi bu keyi xie xiao zichan jieji’ wenti,” *Wenhui bao* (August 27, 1949). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006).

⁷⁷ “中央人民政府文化部电影局工作报告” (1950). Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 41.

⁷⁸ Indeed, Chen Bo’er herself gave self-criticism an early 1951 Film Bureau meeting. See: “陈波儿同志在1950年故事片总结会上关于‘荣誉属于谁’错误检讨的发言,” *Yishu weiyuanhui ziliao gongzuo zongjie* (May 4, 1951). Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 16. Both films were later revised and re-released under different titles.

for the Communist cause, particularly among the educated classes. By December 1950, campaigns to “resist America and aid Korea” in cultural life, symbolized by the expulsion of American films from Chinese theaters, were joined by efforts to reform thought and purify educational institutions, as evidenced by central directives of the period.⁷⁹ The specter of domestic enemies, referred to in imperatives delivered by Mao and the Communist Party center to “suppress counterrevolutionaries,” also diverted considerable social energies toward campaigns which were still ongoing by mid-1951, when *The Life of Wu Xun* became an object of public criticism. One June 6, 1951 circular issued by the Shanghai party committee’s Propaganda Office noted that “among many comrades there still exists insufficient attention” regarding discussion and criticism of the film, and cited the suppression of counterrevolutionaries as an important factor.⁸⁰ Overall, film-related campaigns—of which the campaign against *The Life of Wu Xun* was surely the first—represented one of many means by which the party moved to consolidate power in a variety of areas. Even within cultural institutions, criticism of these specific targets served to advance a larger agenda of mobilizing artists and intellectuals to support larger aims. By late November 1951, denunciations of *The Life of Wu Xun* had become subsumed within a process of ideological “rectification” among cultural workers.⁸¹ This movement was itself followed by the criticism and purging of specific individuals from

⁷⁹ “关于在学校中进行思想改造和组织清理工作的指示” (December 1950). Referred to in Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng ji*, 422.

⁸⁰ SHMA A22/1/26: Shanghai Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Office, “关于执行市委指示—开展对‘武训传’的讨论的通知” (June 6, 1951).

⁸¹ See: Central Ministry of Propaganda, “关于文艺干部整风学习的报告” (November 1951) and Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, “关于在文学艺术界开展整风学习运动的指示” (November 26, 1951).

cultural, propaganda, hygiene, and educational institutions between January and December 1952 as part of the nationwide Three Antis Movement.

Even from the perspective of those most closely tied to the film and its reputation, the early 1950s period was shaped by continuous adjustment to the Communist Party-led government and its “new style” (*xin feng*), rather than a series of discontinuous political events. According to Xia Yan, the period of takeover in Shanghai’s cultural institutions was followed immediately by an announcement, delivered by new mayor Chen Yi, that “ideological work” (*sixiang gongzuo*) would commence among all municipal workers “held over” from the Nationalist regime.⁸² He also notes that during the launching of the Resist American Aid Korea Movement during June and July 1951, “a number of grass-roots units had already begun fomenting and experimenting” with thought reform movements of their own, resulting in “harm to the feelings of some intellectuals” and diminished enthusiasm for the new government.⁸³ In short, what was different about *The Life of Wu Xun* campaign was that it was the first instance of criticizing specific artists, and public figures, for their involvement in controversial works before a national audience.

Centralization: Confronting Shanghai

Released by the privately-managed Kunlun Film Studio, *The Life of Wu Xun* brought intense central party scrutiny down upon Shanghai’s remaining private film enterprises. Between 1949 and 1950 the state-owned studios—Northeast, Beijing, and Shanghai—produced thirty-five feature films, 280 newsreels and documentaries, six “fine

⁸² Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng lu*, 418.

⁸³ Xia Yan, *Lan xun jiu meng lu*, 422.

arts” films, and forty-three dubbed or subtitled foreign films combined; during those same years, Shanghai’s non-state studios produced an additional sixty-one features.⁸⁴ The establishment of central Film Bureau institutions for guidance and censorship in 1951, however, created a comparatively inhospitable environment for filmmakers working in the private sector. The thirty-two member Film Guidance Committee rejected over forty scripts that year, and only sixteen of a planned sixty-seven privately-made features ever reached completion. By 1952, articles critical of the “mistake-prone,” “problematic,” and “harmful” influence of “bourgeois and petit-bourgeois ... ideological influence” began appearing in newspapers.⁸⁵ Films such as *A Married Couple* (*Women fufu zhi jian*), *Company Commander Guan* (*Guan lianzhang*), *Biography of a Film Fan* (*Ying mi zhuan*), and *A Married Couple’s March* (*Fufu jinxing qu*) were specifically denounced as evidence of this damaging trend. That same year, the private industry collapsed, its studios shut down or absorbed into existing state institutions.

Much like *The Life of Wu Xun* campaign itself, these sudden events resulted from deeper changes in the relationship between state and society during the late 1940s and early 1950s. In this case, the principal dynamic was a weakening of Shanghai’s private film enterprises which spanned the periods of Nationalist and Communist rule. From 1947 onward, inflation had made film production increasingly expensive, while lack of consumer purchasing power made it increasingly unprofitable.⁸⁶ Studios withheld wages while employees clamored for them. The Nationalist censorship system, much like its

⁸⁴ Tang Minghong, “Dui dianying *Wu Xun zhuan* he ‘Wu Xun jingshen’ de pipan,” 366.

⁸⁵ Yao Fangzao, “Shi cong tou zuoqi de shihou le,” *Wenhui bao* (January 27, 1952). Quoted in Tang Minghong, “Dui dianying *Wu Xun zhuan* he ‘Wu Xun jingshen’ de pipan,” 367.

⁸⁶ Shi Ben, “Zhipian ren zenyang yingjie xin shiming—kan Shanghai de dianying ye,” *Wenhui bao* (June 25 and June 26, 1949). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 9-12.

Communist successor, further exacerbated this situation by refusing to pass numerous film scripts on ideological grounds. In 1949, however, the advent of Communist rule created a celebratory mood in national film circles: “many believed that the Nationalists had done far too little to protect the postwar film industry from the aggressive marketing strategies of the American movie industry.”⁸⁷ The Communist Party actively courted film people and private studio heads as participants in, and public supporters of, the post-revolutionary art world.

Yet as early as 1948, the notion that a state-run film industry would possess numerous comparative advantages over a private sector in need of organization and ideological reform had already taken root in central party circles. In a report written to the Central Committee Propaganda Department, Yuan Muzhi argued that:

Although nation-wide, the expropriated [state] film studios are proportionally weaker than the total sum of privately-managed film studios, if they were to be unified they would form a powerful “big fish” (*da yu*), whereas separately the privately-managed studios remain “small fish” (*xiao yu*) set against one another ... Supposing that of all cinemas nation-wide, one-third were unified and administered by a state-managed enterprise; this would be exactly [like] controlling one third of the national film market. It would also be like controlling one third of possible sales (*tuixiao de shengming*) of products produced by each privately-managed studio. Moreover, conflicts between privately-managed studios would appear in droves as they vied for market [share]. Objectively, this would benefit state-managed film enterprises.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Paul G. Pickowicz, “Acting Like Revolutionaries: Shi Hui, the Wenhua Studio, and Private-Sector Filmmaking, 1949-1952,” Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 260.

⁸⁸ Yuan Muzhi, “关于电影事业报告（一）” (September 1948), *Renmin dianying de dianjizhe—Ningbo ji dianying jia Yuan Muzhi jinian wenji* (Ningbo chubanshe, 2004). Quoted in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 143-144.

A subsequent report by Yuan also predicted that following ideological “reform” (*gaizao*) within private studios, filmmakers within these enterprises would become “closer to” their state counterparts in terms of worldview, while remaining a “periphery” (*waiwei*) over which the state-managed center would maintain an absolute economic advantage.⁸⁹ In fact, from 1949 onward, Communist Party administrators within the North China and Beiping military governments had experimented with the operation of centralized film enterprises uniting production with distribution as described in Yuan Muzhi’s reports. The overwhelming logic of film industry reform dictated that films produced by the recently-established studios in Changchun, Beijing, and Shanghai be given preferential access to existing film markets.

Between 1949 and 1952, the numbers of private studios gradually diminished. Wenhua, Kunlun, Guotai and Datong remained active; Da Guangming returned to Shanghai from Hong Kong in 1951, and closed almost immediately thereafter; Huaguang released no films after 1949; the Shanghai studio of Hong Kong-based Da Zhonghua, established in 1949, closed in 1952; Changjiang, a prototype state-private “joint management” studio, was merged with Kunlun in 1951 as the Changjiang-Kunlun United Film Studio.⁹⁰ While numerous other studios existed in name during this same period, almost all were fleeting enterprises whose capital was consumed in the production of single picture, or which produced no films at all. A June 30, 1951 census of Shanghai studios, taken when criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun* was just reaching its crescendo, showed only nine total studios in operation throughout the city, including the state-run

⁸⁹ Yuan Muzhi, “关于电影事业报告（二）”（1948）, *Renmin dianying de dianjizhe—Ningbo ji dianying jia Yuan Muzhi jinian wenji* (Ningbo chubanshe, 2004). Quoted in Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 144.

⁹⁰ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 144-145.

Shanghai Film Studio.⁹¹ Of these, two private studios—Da Zhonghua and Huaguang—had produced no films since July 1950.

As private industry withered, state regulation and efforts to transform national film markets proliferated. Campaigns against “negative” (*xiaoji*) films began with the removal of Hollywood and British films from Chinese theaters at the outset of the Korean War, following which cultural officials turned their attention to those features produced in private studios which lacked politically-approved content. Not all of these were selected as targets of public criticism. Some, including several Cantonese films, were simply restricted to limited engagements at a handful of theaters, essentially creating massive financial losses for their producers.⁹² A series of five “provisional measures” issued by the Ministry of Culture on October 24, 1950 gave the state far-reaching powers over registration of film enterprises, licenses for public screenings, the removal of “old films” (*jiu pian*) from circulation, the export of domestic features, and import of films from abroad.⁹³ Studios with direct connections to party leadership, such as Kunlun and Wenhua, received financial assistance and bank loans organized by state cultural administrators, and access to film stock purchased from foreign sources.⁹⁴ These measures exacerbated the already difficult financial situation encountered by most studios both before and after Communist takeover.

⁹¹ SHMA B172/1/35: “华东区公营公私合营及私营电影制片厂公司统计表” (June 30, 1951).

⁹² This strategy of “differential treatment” for progressive and negative features is described in SHMA B172/1/87: “上海市人民政府文化局电影事业管理处三年工作总结” (September-October 1952).

⁹³ “文化局关于电影业五个暂行办法” (October 24, 1950). Reprinted in Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 67-71.

⁹⁴ SHMA B172/1/87: “上海市人民政府文化局电影事业管理处三年工作总结” (September-October 1952); Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 146-148. Similarly, only approved studios were allowed export privileges that would allow them to tap markets for Chinese-language films in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. See also: Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), “中央文化部关于电影工作的报告（节录）” (December 8, 1950). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 76-78.

Likewise, films like *The Life of Wu Xun* did not single-handedly destroy private industry by incurring the wrath of the state; they did, however, solidify cultural officials' mistrust of the private sector and provide a pretext for its absorption into the state-managed enterprise system. In June 1951, following a central Film Bureau directive, the Shanghai Cultural Bureau embarked on a registration program of Shanghai's remaining film studios which resulted in the immediate closure of five "single-film companies."⁹⁵ A survey of the remaining eight private studios determined that these possessed, in total, fourteen small sound stages, fifteen motion picture cameras, and twelve sound recorders. Total employment amounted to 831 individuals. Following the trial merger of Changjiang and Kunlun, in January 1952 all remaining private companies were merged into a massive "united studio" (*lianhe chang*) headed by Yu Ling, their equipment and facilities transferred to state ownership. The resulting Shanghai United Film Studio was subsequently placed under Shanghai Film Studio management in February 1953.

Stepping back from this narrative of the demise of Shanghai's private sector, however, reveals that centralizing agendas had already made considerable headway following the period of takeover and transition which consumed much of 1949. A "script creation office" (*juben chuangzuo suo*) was established in November 1950; the Film Bureau itself directly employed fifteen screenwriters and twenty-one directors.⁹⁶ Bureau responsibilities additionally included setting individual studio production targets, inspecting scripts and films, and functioning as an institutional nexus for leaders in various central state and party offices who comprised the nation's censorate.

⁹⁵ SHMA B172/1/87: "上海市人民政府文化局电影事业管理处三年工作总结" (September-October 1952).

⁹⁶ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 4.

Additionally, from the center's perspective, the most trusted cohort of directors and film workers consisted of relatively "new" recruits trained in the Northeast or other former Communist base areas.⁹⁷ Former Shanghai and Hong Kong filmmakers, even those with party connections such as the signatories of the multi-point "Film Policy Recommendations" submitted (most likely) to the central Propaganda Department in January 1949, often found themselves excluded from these emerging institutions of cultural power. As Hu Jubin has shown, the Shanghai Screenplay Research Institute (*Shanghai dianying wenxue yanjiu suo*), established by Xia Yan during the spring of 1950 as means of cultivating the talent of experienced directors for use in reviving the remaining private-sector film industry, represents one example of the former cinematic establishment to reassert its presence in the post-1949 cultural hierarchy.⁹⁸ Yet two years later, films based on scripts penned by institute members—including *A Married Couple* and *Company Commander Guan*—would be labeled as egregious examples of bourgeois filmmaking, and the institute itself forced to close at the same time as private-sector filmmaking in Shanghai was brought to a close.

Increasingly, access to scripts endowed with the political authority of the party center and its Film Bureau became crucial to studios hoping to evade the criticism of having failed to properly adhere to Maoist cultural policy, as articulated by the 1942 *Yan'an Talks*. Privately-managed studios lacked this access, which deprived them of legitimacy as cultural producers under Communist Party rule. With Yuan Muzhi as its nominal figurehead, the state-managed film industry dominated China's film markets

⁹⁷ See: Chen Bo'er, "故事片从无到有的编导工作" (January 1950). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 58-66.

⁹⁸ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 9-10. Prominent institute members included Zheng Junli, Chen Liting, and Chen Baichen.

under a slogan of “revolutionary realism,” while driving out or absorbing the competition. Such practices were not solely limited to Shanghai. During the summer of 1950, author Sima Wensen (??-??), film critic Hong Qiu (1913-1994), and South China Federation of Literary and Art Circles chairman Ouyang Shan (??-??) began soliciting support from local military authorities and the Communist Party’s Hong Kong branch for a new film studio to be built in Guangzhou. Their proposal received support from the “left-leaning” Nan Kwok Film Company (*Nanguo yingye gongsi*); by the spring of 1951, a studio planning committee had been formed in Guangzhou with Hong Kong party approval.⁹⁹ Construction on the new “Pearl River” Film Studio (*Zhu ying dianying zhipianchang*) began that following year. A request for approval from central Film Bureau authorities, however, prompted a visit to Guangzhou from bureau official Chen Bo’er, who ordered the construction stopped on the principal that it failed to conform to principles of “centralized resource distribution and planning.”¹⁰⁰ Wang Weiyi (1912-), an experienced director chosen as studio head for the new venture, was transferred to the Shanghai Film Studio soon thereafter.

Centralization: Planning and Uniformity

Creating a unified system of film production, dissemination, and exhibition was not an objective particular to a unique, Communist vision of post-war social planning. It was, nonetheless, an area in which Communist Party operatives had experimented even prior to the 1946 establishment of the Northeast Film Studio. Yang Shaoren, Zhuang

⁹⁹ Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, 151; Yu Deshui, *Zhu ying ren yu Zhu ying de lu* (Guangzhou: Guangdong lüyou chubanshe), 23.

¹⁰⁰ Yu Deshui, *Zhu ying ren yu Zhu ying de lu* (Guangzhou: Guangdong lüyou chubanshe), 24.

Shiping, and Qiu Bingjing were three distributors of Soviet films who had worked with the party's Southern Bureau (*Nanfang ju*) during the 1940s to create a distribution network spanning Chongqing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia; in a January 1949 letter written to Zhou Enlai, Northeast filmmaker Jin Shan had advocated the establishment of a unified distribution institution that would provide for the entire nation's cinematic needs.¹⁰¹ By March 1949 the lineaments of such a system were just beginning to emerge with the establishment of Northeast Film Management Company offices in the cities of Shenyang, Ha'erbin, Changchun, Qiqiha'er, and Mudanjiang, and "stations" in Jinzhou, Jiamusi, Andong, and Jilin.

Producing films to distribute, however, was a more pressing matter. A series of articles published by the Shanghai-based *Wenhui bao* noted that studios outside of the Northeast were already in the midst of a severe script shortage by mid-1949, which the authors (including veteran writer-director Wu Zuguang) blamed on a repressive Nationalist censorship system and lack of capital available to Shanghai's studios.¹⁰² During that same year, the central Propaganda Department approved only twelve features and documentaries produced by the Northeast Film Studio for widespread release. In order to hasten the production of scripts, department officials had earlier notified the Northeast Bureau via directive to authorize not only topics dealing with the "liberated areas" or which were "modern and Chinese," but also those which touched upon the

¹⁰¹ Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*, 150-151.

¹⁰² See: Wu Zuguang, "为审查制度送终" [Paying One's Last Respects to the Censorship System], *Wen hui bao* (*yingju zhoukan*), No. 9 (January 24, 1949); Shi Ben, "制片人怎样迎接新使命—看上海的电影业" [How Are Film Producers Welcoming their New Mission?—A View from Shanghai's Film Industry], *Wen hui bao*, June 25-26, 1949; Wang Lian, "从演员们的希望看上海的电影业" [Viewing Shanghai's Film Industry from the Perspective of Actors' Hopes], *Wen hui bao*, June 29, 1949. All reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 5-14.

“Nationalist-controlled areas” or “foreign and ancient” themes.¹⁰³ In 1950, however, members of the new central Film Bureau made a concerted effort to formulate a nationwide plan for studio production. Shen Yanbing’s December 8 report to the National Council described plans for the completion of twenty-six features, seventeen documentaries, one fine arts (*meishu*) film, four dubbed or subtitled foreign features, forty-eight newsreels, and thirty-six dubbed or subtitled foreign educational films by year’s end, noting that prospects for the fulfillment of these production targets seemed “hopeful.”¹⁰⁴ By contrast, during this same time period Shanghai’s state and private studios had produced twenty-two features thanks to loans of 5.6 billion *yuan* and considerable amounts of film stock. Among these, he noted, only one title—*Ideological Problems* (*Sixiang wenti*, 1950)—possessed “educational significance” while the rest appeared motivated purely by concerns for “profit.” In addition to material aid, Shen emphasized the need for fitting studio production to the aims of state policy, as well as increasing the dominance of state-produced films within both domestic and overseas Chinese markets.

Campaigns against *The Life of Wu Xun* and the simultaneous cessation of private studio operation rendered such questions largely moot, at least where domestic markets were concerned. In 1950, the Film Bureau tightened control over state film production by requiring that new films fall into sanctioned genres such as “war,” “production and construction,” “land reform,” “creation and invention,” “opposition to American

¹⁰³ “中宣部关于电影工作给东北局宣传部的指示” (1948). Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), “中央文化部关于电影工作的报告 (节录)” (December 8, 1950). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 76-78.

imperialism,” “internationalism,” “ethnic issues,” “cultural construction,” “children’s issues,” “history,” and “others, such as ‘cadre work styles’.”¹⁰⁵ The bureau also attempted to standardize film production at the level of script production and direction. Writers were allotted eight months within which to gather materials, develop a scenario, gain Ministry of Culture approval, and complete the appropriate revisions (these last two steps repeated twice, if necessary).¹⁰⁶ Directors were given ten months within which to adapt the scenario to a working dialogue, rehearse with actors, develop a shooting script, shoot, complete post-production, and shepherd the resulting work past ministry censors. Following its establishment in 1951, the Film Guidance Committee added additional stipulations to this process by requiring that the filmmaking process be entirely devoted to “major topics” (*zhongda tical*) rather than “minor” (*xiao*) topics, with a particular emphasis on the revolutionary classes (workers, peasants, and soldiers), Communist party history, and wars of the 1940s and 1950s (the War of Resistance, War of Liberation, and War of Resisting America and Aiding Korea). While filmmakers and cultural cadres based in studios throughout China accommodated themselves to Film Bureau authority, no full-length feature films were produced by state studios in 1951 or the first half of 1952.

In addition to criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun* and the ongoing state transformation of Shanghai’s film industry as a whole, another possible factor behind diminished film production in 1951 may have been the considerable state efforts devoted to direct wartime propaganda and mobilization during this period. On October 26, 1950

¹⁰⁵ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Chen Bo’er, “关于 1951 年故事片创作计划草案及有关编导工作的意见” (August 15, 1950). Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 34.

the Central Committee issued a directive ordering that “timely propaganda” activities directed toward the ongoing war effort in Korea be increased. Face-to-face meetings and mass rallies, rather than screenings, were designated to serve as the dominant method employed to “resolutely eradicate reactionary pro-American ideology, and the erroneous psychology of fearing America, by propagating and cultivating an attitude of hate, disdain, and scorn toward American imperialism.”¹⁰⁷ A subsequent series of Communist Party resolutions issued during 1951 also indicates that during this period, central leaders also attempted to institute a more permanent “propaganda network” (*xuanchuan wang*) based on permanent personnel and subject to the systematic oversight of party committees.¹⁰⁸ Such measures were accompanied by the strengthening of party efforts in propaganda and education more generally, employing the “tools” (*gongju*) or “weapons” (*wuqi*) of print media, broadcasting, and cinema.¹⁰⁹ Throughout, central leaders identified the “strengthening of party propaganda work” with national interests—defeating imperialist interests abroad, while transforming China into a powerful, productive, and centralized nation. According to this calculus, film took on the properties of both “propaganda” and cultural “planning” controlled by central leadership.

Chen Bo'er died suddenly in 1951; Yuan Muzhi resigned from his duties as head of the Film Bureau soon thereafter, although for reasons which may not have been

¹⁰⁷ “中共中央关于在全国进行时事宣传的指示” (October 26, 1950), Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di yi ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 436.

¹⁰⁸ “中共中央关于在党建立对人民群众的宣传网的决定” (January 1, 1951), Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di er ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 1-5. This resolution subsequently circulated in the *Renmin ribao*, January 3, 1951.

¹⁰⁹ “中共中央关于健全各级宣传机构和加强党的宣传教育工作的指示” (February 25, 1951), Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di er ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 75-79; Liu Shaoqi, “党在宣传战线上的任务” (May 23, 1951), Zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, ed., *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian (di er ce)* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992), 288-302.

directly linked to Chen's passing. During the following years, officials in the Ministry of Culture attempted to advance China's film industry through administrative reform—"reorganizing and consolidating, developing focal points, raising quality, and steadily advancing" was the slogan chosen—and resumption of full studio production. Twelve new feature films, ten "long" documentaries, sixteen "short" documentaries, ten scientific education films, fifty-two "weekly edition" newsreels, fifteen "special edition" newsreels, and twenty-four "international" newsreels saw release in 1953.¹¹⁰ To these were added dubbed or subtitled foreign films (forty features, thirty scientific education films) and thirty-seven titles made available in "minority languages" or Cantonese. As noted in a Ministry of Culture report first issued on December 24, 1953 the most pressing "problem" faced by China's film industry as a whole remained the short supply of politically acceptable scripts, in response to which ministry officials had already directed that all screenwriters, directors, and actors be given additional training in "socialist realism"—the party's shorthand for sanctioned representational techniques and ideological viewpoints. Studios and other film-related institutions were also encouraged to solicit scripts from outside the industry altogether, adding other artistic organizations to the list of potential creative "forces" at their disposal. Despite the overarching emphasis on administrative centralization, ministry officials rejected the notion that China should establish a Hollywood-type (*da dianying cun*) "center" of film production, which they dismissed as "unrealistic" or unable to meet the diverse needs of the nation as a whole.

¹¹⁰ BJMA 2/6/253: "中央人民政府文化部一九五三年工作报告" (1953.12.24). This Ministry of Culture work report was reprinted and circulated as part of *Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jue ding* (Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju: January 1954).

State management of cultural production, rather than homogeneity *per se*, remained the ultimate objective.

The often overlooked sensitivity of post-1949 film production to economic considerations—in particular, doing more with less—was demonstrated by a series of directives and regulations concerning “film enterprise and financial management” (*dianying qiye, caiwu guanli*) issued by the Film Bureau on December 1, 1953. Such measures sought not only to maximize production, but also income.¹¹¹ Yet undeniably, the dominant state impetus ran toward creating centralized “systems” (*zhidu*) which divided the film production process according to a rationale which treated “objectives,” “planning,” “inspection” (or censorship), technical aspects of “production,” and the overall “training” of personnel as discrete and manageable areas of state intervention and control.¹¹² Moreover, this process remained subject to scrutiny from a host of non-cultural institutions. Enfranchised within the “consultation” process which generated state-approved scripts, for example, were representatives of various central departments and ministries, the People’s Liberation Army Political Department, national labor unions, the Youth League, and “other relevant popular organizations.”¹¹³

The notion that cultural production touched on considerations relevant to social planning and national defense was not a new one. In the context of artists’ meetings convened by the Ministry of Culture, however, this view was articulated using the

¹¹¹ See: *Guanyu dianying qiye, caiwu guanli de zhishi yu guiding* (Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju: December 1, 1953).

¹¹² See: “中央人民政府政务院关于加强电影制片工作的决定” in *Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jue ding* (Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju: January 1954).

¹¹³ Similarly, the Film Guidance Committee, first convened on May 24, 1950 as the Film Work Committee (*Dianying gongzuo weiyuanhui*) by the State Administrative Council Culture and Education Committee, was itself comprised of thirty-five members chosen from a wide range of cultural, military, and mass organizations. See: Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyang sishi nian*, 8.

language of “struggle” (*douzheng*), and artists who did not sufficiently endorse state-mandated critiques of “imperialism” and “feudalism” in their work were routinely censured for possessing a “backward ideology” (*luohou sixiang*) concerning cultural practice.¹¹⁴ Emphasis on the importance of Communist Party leadership in filmmaking stemmed from assertions that “film was the most powerful and most far-reaching tool of propaganda.”¹¹⁵ Within this context, party leaders sought to insert themselves into the production process at the point of “script creation” (*juben chuangzuo*) were correct ideology might be efficaciously assured by the central Propaganda Department. Establishing a permanent stable of trusted writers in Beijing (fifteen persons) and Shanghai (twelve to fourteen persons), or establishing a permanent censorship (*shencha zhidu*) system for reviewing scripts and completed films, comprised part of the proposed solution which emerged in early 1951. Party authorities commenced artistic “rectification” (*zhengfeng*) during the same year; compulsory political study classes for filmmakers followed.¹¹⁶ Propaganda Department leaders Hu Qiaomu and Zhou Yang delivered extensive lectures on the state aesthetic of “socialist realism” to newly-assembled filmmakers’ organizations, formed in the wake of *The Life of Wu Xun*

¹¹⁴ BJMA 11/2/205: “中央人民政府文化部关于第四次文化工作会议的报告” (May 26, 1954). The consequences of ideological incorrectness could extend well beyond public censure; in 1954, all personnel working in state-supported “culture enterprise units” (*wenhua shiye danwei*) were reviewed in order to create greater consistency in salary and position grade nationwide. See: BJMA 11/2/205: “文化人民政府文化部通知—(54) 文人四字第四号 (关于颁发一九五四年全国文化事业单位工作人员工资, 包干费标准及有关事项的通知)” (November 6, 1954).

¹¹⁵ “加强党对于电影创作领导的决定” (March 1951). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 81-83.

¹¹⁶ Wenhua bu dianying ju, “1952年电影制片工作计划 (草案)” (January 1952). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 231-235.

“incident” and subsequent attempts to restore cinematic productivity in conjunction with centrally-approved themes.¹¹⁷

Table 5.1: Beijing-produced films (as numbers of reels), 1949-1955 (Source: *Beijing shi wenhua shiye tongji ziliao, 1949-1955*).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Documentaries	42	157	82	152	130	156	191
News serials	6	50	83	89	102	111	96
Scientific education			3	17	7	4	4
Foreign language to <i>Putonghua</i>		38	18		11	4	11
<i>Putonghua</i> to minority languages				51	101	54	35
<i>Putonghua</i> to local dialects				38	46	8	
Released in foreign languages				67	34	27	27
TOTAL	48	245	186	414	431	364	364

Film historian Jay Leyda has described the 1949-1951 period as one in which Chinese filmmakers experimented with the creation of a yet-unrealized “art” based on propagandistic aims and—at least partly—Soviet models.¹¹⁸ The years 1952-1955 were apparently more difficult to generalize about for Leyda, although he observed a growing tendency toward “warlike” themes by 1955.¹¹⁹ Less remarked-on during this period were simultaneous shifts toward Beijing as a film production center, and non-feature forms as an important sector of national film production overall (Table 6.1). Principal documentary themes included People’s Liberation Army operations in Tibet and southwest China; state attempts to revive China’s national economy; campaigns

¹¹⁷ See, for example: Zhou Yang, “在全国第一届电影剧作会议关于学习社会主义县社会主义问题的报告（节录）” (March 11, 1953). Originally appears in *Zhou Yang wenji, di er juan* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 329-344.

¹¹⁸ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 181-198.

¹¹⁹ Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China*, 213.

associated with land reform, democratic reform, and the War to Resist America and Aid Korea; the Three Antis and Five Antis movements; conditions in minority regions; international exchange between the People's Republic and other sovereign states.¹²⁰ Beginning in 1950, the Beijing Film Studio took over responsibilities as China's primary producer of documentaries and newsreels; studios in Changchun and Shanghai produced newsreels on a more limited basis, but focused primarily on features. The People's Liberation Army Film Studio, established on August 1, 1952—later renamed the August First Film Studio in 1956—produced materials for military indoctrination and inclusion in more widely-distributed newsreels under the direction of the army's Political Department. In general, such efforts aimed to promote a positive view of Communist Party policies, while the filmmakers involved were typically long-serving members of the Northeast Film Studio who, like director Qian Xiaozhang, were transferred to Beijing or elevated to positions in central filmmaking circles after 1949.¹²¹

Another policy undertaken by the party, and formalized during the 199th session of the State Administrative Council (*Zhengwu yuan*) on December 24, 1953 was to produce a series of films representing China as an “ancestral homeland” (*zuguo*) through the depiction of “beautiful rivers and mountains, famous sites, historical relics, and important products and individuals.”¹²² In the larger effort to expand filmmaking ranks nation-wide, while simultaneously drawing minority regions into the orbit of state cultural production's aestheticizing effects, post-1949 filmmaking training programs began increasing their acceptances of female and minority students—the latter often

¹²⁰ See: Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 107-127.

¹²¹ Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 138-140.

¹²² Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 200-201.

assigned to state-operated “photojournalist stations” (*sheying jizhe zhan*) in provinces or autonomous regions with sizable numbers of minority inhabitants following graduation.¹²³ As in matters of production, party management of filmmakers reflected efforts to enhance centralized control and uniformity as well as raise numerical indices of growth.¹²⁴

Within this atmosphere of increased ideological and administrative homogeneity, public arguments for greater topical latitude came most frequently from Propaganda Department representatives, rather than filmmakers or critics. Zhou Yang, leading official of the department’s literary and artistic offices, addressed a meeting of studio heads in July 1952 by urging that:

Our topical requests should be broad, because the demands of film audiences should [also] be broad, and multi-faceted; furthermore, the aspects [of reality] with which our authors are familiar are not identical. Therefore topics should be broad. If it becomes necessary that every work must serve as a monument or memorial, there will be no works produced. In the past it seemed that there was a shortcoming—the tendency to write “big” topics.¹²⁵

Several months after Zhou’s address, the central Film Bureau issued a document entitled *1954-1957 Guide for Themes and Subject Matter of Feature Films (1954-1957 nian dianying gushipian zhuti, tical de tishi)*, which articulated this vision of broader content

¹²³ Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 2003), 199.

¹²⁴ See, for example, the following central transmission and report: Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, “中共中央批转中宣部‘关于改组文艺团体和加强对文艺创作领导的报告’” (March 13, 1953); Central Committee Propaganda Department, “中共中央宣传部关于改组文艺团体和加强对文艺创作领导的报告” (February 27, 1953).

¹²⁵ Quoted in Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 35. Zhou’s further remarks on the importance of overcoming bureaucratic obstacles to script production are included in his closing speech to a conference of artistic cadres within the central Film Bureau. See: Zhou Yang, “当前电影艺术领导中的官僚主义必须改变（节录）” (May 22, 1953). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 344-348. These originally appeared in Zhongyang dianying ju juban chuanguo suo, *Dianying juban tongxun*, No. 2.

more thoroughly. Divided roughly, the major categories of proposed themes and subject matter included: 1) the Communist Party's revolutionary struggle, 2) industrial construction and the lives of laborers, 3) rural production, construction, and peasant life, 4) various aspects of armed struggle in the War to Resist America and Aid Korea, and to safeguard peace, 5) various aspects of People's Liberation Army efforts to secure and aid in reconstruction of the homeland, 6) history and the lives of important historical personages, and 7) adaptations of famous works of literature, myth, and folk traditions.¹²⁶ In practice, however, film production organized under the overarching aesthetic of "socialist realism" was defined primarily by the war film in the eyes of several contemporary critics, including respected theorist Zhong Dianfei.¹²⁷

The Studio System

The impact of central institutions such as the Propaganda Department, Ministry of Culture, and Film Bureau on post-1949 studio organization was considerable. Directors with connections to the Communist Party enjoyed considerably greater prestige as exemplars of socialist art than did those associated with the pre-1949 system. Cultural administrators remained at the apex of the studio system, whether within the studios themselves or in the capacity of censors operating within the party's propaganda network. Yet studios were not uniform, nor were the center's objectives always fulfilled. While expanding the system's production powers, moreover, state cultural initiatives often drew

¹²⁶ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 36. For the full document, see: "1954-1957 年电影故事片主题, 题材提示草案 (节录)" (October 1, 1953). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 348-361. Originally appeared in Zhongyang dianying ju juban chuanguo suo, *Dianying juban tongxun*, No. 9.

¹²⁷ See: Zhong Dianfei, "电影 '南征北战' 所达到和没有达到的方面," *Wenyi bao*, No. 3 (1953).

on a preexisting range of human talent, technology, and capital capable necessary for the creation of multiple cinematic modes—e.g. feature, documentary, newsreel, educational film—and which reflected the multi-faceted nature of “propaganda” as a tool of statecraft during the Cold War era.

From 1949 onward, former Yan’an filmmakers such as Wu Yinxian, Zhang Xingshi, and Zhou Congchu wielded administrative power within the Northeast Film Studio. Similarly, the directorial ranks remained confined mainly to those with connections to either Yan’an or other Communist base areas in the North and Northeast. The studio also served as an important innovator and producer of projectors, light bulbs, developing equipment, sound mixers, and other film-related equipment into the early 1950s.¹²⁸ Although numerous Northeast personnel went on to Beijing following 1949, still others—including several of the studio’s Japanese technicians—were transferred to the Nanjing Film Machinery Works (*Nanjing dianying jixie chang*) in 1951. Another group, also including several former Japanese employees of the Manchuria Film Studio, remained in Changchun to work on the development of photosensitive film. High-ranking Northeast cadres consistently received appointments in central institutions such as the Film Bureau (Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo’er), China Film Management Company (Luo Guangda), Beijing Film Studio, and Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio, a pattern which would subsequently earn the Northeast the appellation of “cradle of New China’s cinema” (*Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*).

¹²⁸ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 110.

Table 5.2: Feature and theatrical performance films (titles and total reels) produced by the Northeast Film Studio, 1949-1955 (years refer to production start date, not year of release) (Source: Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Features (completed)	6	13	1	2	3	4	8
Features (never completed)						2	
Theatrical performance films						3	2
Total reels	57	128	3	20	28	80	97

Consequently, the history of the Northeast Film Studio as related by its former creative personnel gained considerable credence as representing the key developmental link between Yan'an cultural policies and post-1949 state cinema institution-building. Chen Bo'er's account, delivered to the Ministry of Culture sometime during January 1950, emphasized the notion of "planned production" (*you jihua shengchan*) as the most crucial aspect of Northeast filmmaking and its ideological and artistic "development" from 1946 onward.¹²⁹ Accounts of the Northeast which glorified the region as New China's industrial heartland modeled its studio's production style for filmmakers and audiences, in an effort to promote the validity of "liberated area" experience for other parts of the nation.¹³⁰ Between 1951 and 1953, Northeast Film Studio productions were expected to account for approximately half of all full-length features annually, with Shanghai slowly relegated to a less dominant place in the socialist cultural economy.

¹²⁹ See: Chen Bo'er, "故事片从无到有的编导工作" (January 1950). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 58-66.

¹³⁰ Yang Jing, *Dongbei fangwen lu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1950), 263-267. The author thanks Christian Hess for providing a copy of this source and its relevant passages.

Table 5.3: Comparison of planned Northeast Film Studio full-length feature production with national targets overall. 1949-1955 (Source: Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Planned features (national total)			14	8-10	10		
Planned features (Northeast)			6-8	4-5	4-5		

Like the Northeast Film Studio, the first Beijing Film Studio consisted of a facility built under Japanese occupation and subsequently inherited by the Nationalist government. Officially established on April 21, 1949—yet expropriated from the previous municipal administration months earlier—this institution was largely dominated by Northeast transfers and cultural personnel from North China Film Projection Brigade (*Huabei junqu zhengzhi bu dianying fangying dui*), as well as other Communist military and provincial administrations. Other new arrivals included locally-recruited student trainees, and filmmakers—principally actors and actresses—with significant experience in the Shanghai studio system.¹³¹ While the studio soon accounted for ninety-five percent of total newsreel production nationwide, it also released several early features. Perhaps owing to a close institutional and administrative relationship with central organizations—particularly the Ministry of Culture, Film Guidance Committee, and All-China Cinematic Workers Association—the Beijing Film Studio remained largely immune to disruptions in normal operation stemming from *The Life of Wu Xun* incident and its immediate aftermath. Artistic rectification came to Beijing, yet production continued.¹³² From 1949 onward, scripts filmed in the Beijing Film Studio were carefully vetted by central

¹³¹ Interview with CZ, December 2004. Notable examples of the latter group included former Shanghai starlet Wang Renmei (1914-1987) and actor Sun Daolin,

¹³² Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005. One example of a Beijing Film Studio filmmaker forced into public criticism was the director Lü Ban, whose *Heroes of Lü Liang* (1950) received condemnation in late 1951 for placing the film's "enemies"—particularly Japanese soldiers—in an unintentionally humorous (and humanizing) light.

authorities, and the finished products distributed via centrally-managed institutions.¹³³

The Communist Party’s evident determination to gradually transform Shanghai’s private film sector into a unified state enterprise did not diminish support for existing state studios. On December 31, 1950 veteran Yan’an filmmakers Xu Xiaobing and Wu Benli—both Beijing Film Studio members—received individual commendations from the Film Bureau, naming them “vanguards of the people’s cinema” in gold lettering.¹³⁴

Table 5.4: Features (full-length and “shorts”), theatrical and chorale performance films produced by the Beijing Film Studio (by year of release), 1949-1955
(Source: Zhou Xiaobang, ed., *Beiyong sishi nian*).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Features		5	3	2	2	2	
Theatrical and chorale performance films							2

By contrast, studio personnel with earlier ties to the Changchun Film Studio or Central Film Company Third Studio were often most vulnerable during the periodic and often overlapping “campaigns” which touched upon areas beyond the cultural. Under the post-1949 state system, studio personnel were under constant pressure to reduce their dependence on central subsidies while delivering a politically and economically successful product—a dual process of combining state planning with financial self-sufficiency known as “enterprise-ation” (*qiyehua*). Within this context, former Third Studio personnel were routinely blamed for waste and corruption, a phenomenon which became particularly intense during moments—such as the late 1951 Three Antis Campaign—during which central officials called upon Beijing Film Studio leaders to

¹³³ Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyong sishi nian*, 20.

¹³⁴ Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyong sishi nian*, 19.

produce individuals suspected of financial malfeasance for public criticism.¹³⁵

Ideological campaigns left former filmmakers of the Nationalist-occupied areas frequent targets of suspicions concerning the content of their “past thought” prior to contact with the Communist Party.

Such instances were undeniably detrimental to individual fortunes. In the eyes of state planners, however, they were part of a larger program—however fitful and occasionally incoherent—of creating an ideologically unified, economically efficient, and multi-functional industry. A Beijing-based film processing facility was established in 1950.¹³⁶ By 1953, a separate newsreel and documentary studio had been established on the Beijing Film Studio grounds. Cultural officials Zhou Yang and Chen Huangmei promoted a view of news as “political commentary given form” (*xingxianghua de zhenglun*).¹³⁷ The State Administrative Council’s December 24, 1953 “Resolution to Strengthen Film Production Work” directed that “newsreels and documentaries should report, with added timeliness, the achievements of our nation’s people amidst the undertakings of socialist industrialization and socialist reform, [as well as] their contributions to the undertaking of safeguarding world peace.” In comparison with feature films, the value attributed to newsreels lay in their perceived ability to present representations of contemporary “reality” (*xianshi*) that foregrounded the

¹³⁵ Zhou Xiaobang, *Beiyong sishi nian*, 41.

¹³⁶ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying shiye shi ji (1949-1990)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1999), 50-51.

¹³⁷ Gao Weijin, *Zhongguo xinwen jilu dianying shi*, 138. The phrase is based on a translated formulation put forth by Lenin. Plans for the studio were first articulated in a Ministry of Culture document entitled “Plan for 1952 Film Production Work” (*1952 nian dianying zhipian gongzuo jihua*). See also: Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 147. Another early reference is attributed to the 131st meeting of the State Administrative Council on April 4, 1952. See: Fang Fang, *Zhongguo jilupian fazhan shi*, 196.

accomplishments of “advanced individuals” (*xianjin renwu*) amidst ongoing campaigns, presumably serving as guides to specific modes of present-oriented action.¹³⁸

Production of non-feature films was not simply limited to studios in Changchun or Beijing. Shanghai’s private studios may have withered under the political scrutiny of central censors, but Propaganda Department officials coveted the productive potential of the old Nationalist system, which stretched inland as far as Nanjing. Complaints against “counterrevolutionaries” hidden within the state-owned Shanghai Film Studio, and whose presence was blamed on the incompleteness or ineffectiveness of post-*Wu Xun* cultural rectification, persisted until 1955.¹³⁹ Yet beginning in 1953, the consolidation of state ownership ushered in a renewed period of investment and experimentation with numerous cinematic modes in service of central aims. Establishment of the Shanghai Science Education Studio was followed by an engineering effort, begun in 1954, to erect the nation’s largest enclosed sound stage.¹⁴⁰ In addition to politically-suspect personnel, Shanghai’s filmmaking units also included a “fine arts” (*meishu*) group specializing in animation, and a “translation” (*fanyi*) group which produced Chinese-language versions of imported titles.

¹³⁸ *The People’s Daily*, January 12, 1954. Quoted in Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi*, 149.

¹³⁹ SHMA A22/1/997: Communist Party Shanghai Municipal Committee, Literary and Artistic Work Committee, “关于文化艺术部门的情况和全面规划的意见” (1955.11.12). An extensive summary of artistic rectification in the Shanghai United Film Studio first appeared in 1952. See: “上海联合电影制片厂文艺整风学习总结报告” (1952). Reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 306-325.

¹⁴⁰ Fu Qijiang and Zhang Jiahao (Yuan Guoqiang, ed.), “上海电影设施发展概况 (1949-1985),” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, No. 4 (October 1994), 266-267.

Figure 5.5: State and private studio releases (including full-length and “short” features, theatrical and chorale performance films) compared with total domestic output, 1949-1955 (Source: Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi*).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Total films		60	23	8	10		
State studio releases		26	10	5	7		
Private studio releases		34	13	3	3		

The state merger of Kunlun, Changjiang, Wenhua, Guotai, Datong, Da Zhonghua, Da Guangming, and Huaguang studios into Shanghai United Film Studio in 1952 brought an end to privately owned and managed film production in Shanghai, although features produced by these studios apparently continued to see release well into 1953. As in Beijing, nearly all subsequent film production, regardless of mode, began with scripts created and approved by the Film Bureau’s Screenwriting Research Institute (*Juben chuangzuo yanjiusuo*).¹⁴¹ Although the state industry employed numerous directors associated with the old order, including several filmmakers recently returned from Hong Kong, its expansion was also accompanied by the inclusion of numerous Shandong University graduates.¹⁴² Friction between the groups—most notably between “old” and “new” filmmakers—was both constant and inevitable.¹⁴³ Other production units within the studio, such as the Fine Arts Group, primarily consisted of former Northeast Film Studio personnel whose previous experience with non-feature production techniques allowed them to make novel use of Shanghai’s expropriated equipment and facilities.¹⁴⁴ Both the Northeast and Shanghai studios subtitled, or overdubbed, nearly all of China’s

¹⁴¹ Scientific education films, for example, were produced according to scripts developed in the Screenwriting Research Institute’s Education Film Group (*Jiaoyupian zu*). See: Niu Jin “教育片组纪事,” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, No. 2/3 (May 1993), 112.

¹⁴² Jiang Haitian, “难忘的历程—上海厂初建的回顾,” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, No. 2/3 (May 1993), 7.

¹⁴³ Zhong Jingzhi, *Renmin dianying chu cheng ji ji*, 56.

¹⁴⁴ Bao Jigui and Liang Ping, “中国美术电影 69 周年,” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, No. 6 (June 1995), 23.

feature imports, which often exceeded the number of state-produced titles in circulation throughout the early 1950s.

The post-1949 studio system was a complex institutional network shaped by material considerations as well as tensions between evolving studio communities and central leadership. Here too, capital and infrastructure created by previous wartime regimes, or private investors, dictated the options available to Communist Party industry planners. Until 1955, almost no significant shift occurred in the dispersion of studios and other film-related facilities nationwide. Machinery-producing facilities in Changchun, Ha'erbin, Beijing, or Nanjing were rarely created *de novo*.¹⁴⁵ Subsequent state investment built upon existing patterns of concentration, reinforcing the dominance of existing production sites within the industry as a whole. In unifying and augmenting the existing landscape of cinematic production, however, something of a new whole did emerge—an ideologically centralized, nation-building project with considerably fewer limitations to its territorial scope than any immediate predecessor.

Conclusions

The consequences of Communist Party victory for China's post-1949 film industry were numerous. Scholars have long dwelled on the implications of the hinterland leadership and Maoist doctrine for Shanghai's studio system. Establishing the central Film Bureau linked film production nationwide with networks of political and military cultural cadres whose primary experiences came from wartime mobilization and efforts to expand the party's social base. The practices of Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo'er, and

¹⁴⁵ See: Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1990)*, 49-60.

others clearly referred their work as artists and administrators to Maoist precepts, and involved routine dialogue with the Propaganda Department and other institutions of formal cultural authority.

At the same time, “takeover” (*jieguan*) and “expropriation” (*jieshou*) made use of numerous personal and organizational networks which helped to consolidate—within the larger context of military conquest and regime change—the Communist Party’s power within existing cultural institutions, such as film studios. Yet the studios represented far more than private enterprise to be expropriated by the expanding and acquisitive new regime. Personnel came from a variety of political “backgrounds”, and many facilities had already been built and used by a succession of non-Communist governments. One response was to staff the newly-acquired studios with politically- and technically-trained filmmakers from the Northeast. Another, employed in Shanghai to considerable effect, was to consolidate existing public and private institutions under larger cultural bureaucracies dominated by officials with deep ties to the party center.

Nonetheless, with the exception of certain intellectual and cultural figures who, like Xia Yan and Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), clearly served as effective “united front” organizers, central organizations were undeniably controlled by a hinterland party elite which viewed ideological uniformity as an essential precondition of cultural practice. The achievements of the Northeast Film Studio between 1947 and 1949 confirmed that filmmakers could be trained, and films of an acceptable political and artistic quality produced, independently of Shanghai’s well-capitalized studios to the south. Securing a bigger market share for such films and their producers thus became one of the post-1949 cultural bureaucracy’s top priorities. Against this backdrop—and at a time when the

outbreak of war in Korea brought renewed scrutiny down upon those whose goals seemed to diverge from those of the Communist government—Mao’s negative reaction to *The Life of Wu Xun* accelerated an already ongoing project of institutional and cultural change within the filmmaking community. Throughout the twentieth century, film had already served to articulate the policies and ambitions of various political orders based in eastern Eurasia and beyond. Yet as films like *Springtime in Inner Mongolia*, *To Whom Glory?*, and *The Life of Wu Xun* demonstrated, ideological “correctness” had come to depend completely on the judgments passed down by party center whose own will initially seemed to be in a state of flux. This state of indeterminacy clearly owed much to China’s changing international and domestic environment. For filmmakers already outside of the emerging state cultural hierarchy, however, failure to anticipate shifts in the political climate could carry serious consequences.

Yet Shanghai was not of paramount importance to the new cultural bureaucracy, as the rising prominence of the Northeast and Beijing film studios attests. Clearly, *The Life of Wu Xun* triggered a renewed emphasis on centrally-approved script production as the foundation of all subsequent feature filmmaking during the early 1950s. The resulting system, however, relied on input from a variety of individuals and institution, which seems to have exacerbated an ongoing script “drought” (*juben huang*) within the state film industry as a whole. At the same time, newsreel and documentary filmmaking maintained a more consistent level of production, while expropriated facilities allowed for a more diversified division of labor through simultaneous efforts in multiple cinematic modes, including the scientific education film, theatrical performance film, and animated short feature. Scholarly obsession with Shanghai’s marginalization also

overshadows the considerable amount of activity devoted to translating and either overdubbing or subtitling foreign imports. The expansion of a film industry based on Communist Party patterns of political and cultural authority accompanied internationalization of the resulting cinematic establishment—a theme taken up in the following chapter.

Overall, the threat of war created new norms of ideological and institutional stricture which rendered Shanghai's public/private "mixed" film economy obsolete, if not dangerous. Those at the center of the new government preferred a strategy of totalization—total appropriation of private and capture state resources, emphasis on total commitment to the aims of the center, and so on—which had emerged during early decades as various parties and regimes competed for political survival. Deference to Maoism, and acquiescence to the *arriviste* cultural hierarchy which had taken shape within a hinterland military-governmental nexus, became a common pattern during the early 1950s. At the same time, state authorities also emphasized multiplicity, economism, and audience comprehension as important priorities within the resulting order, revealing the affinities of their vision with earlier attempts to forge a successful national cinema that would be recognized as such according to international standards.

CHAPTER 6. Cold War Culture Industry: National and International Contexts,
1949-1955

The Sino-Soviet alliance was not solidified until December 1949. Despite this fact, policymakers like Dean Acheson continued to hold out hope that a “working relationship” between China and the U.S. might be established on the basis of resistance to Soviet imperialism.¹ As subsequent accounts by Chen Jian have shown, this plan was misguided. Neither Stalin nor Mao welcomed the U.S. presence in Korea.² In “leaning to one side”—that is, toward the Soviet Union—Communist Party leaders hoped to rid East Asia of what they considered to be a vulnerable adversary.³ When Stalin and Kim Il-Sung’s gambit to push U.S. forces from the Korean peninsula failed, however, China was suddenly confronted with the choice of fighting on foreign soil or allowing a U.S.-backed United Nations coalition to push all the way to Manchuria.⁴ The resulting Korean War (1950-1953) conflict marked a nadir in Sino-U.S. relations, and solidified Communist Party commitment to seeking other means of asserting China’s national interests against the rising tide of U.S. “containment.”

¹ Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000), 381-382.

² See: Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001) (see especially Chapter Two, “The Myth of America’s Lost Chance in China”).

³ Recent scholarship by Simei Qing has attempted to revise the thesis of an “inevitable” war between China and the U.S. during the early 1950s. See: Simei Qing, *From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity, and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 164-168. On the Sino-U.S. relationship in general, see also: John King Fairbank, *The United States and China* (fourth edition, enlarged) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Michael Schaller, *The United States and China in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁴ Warren I. Cohen, *East Asia at the Center: Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World*, 385-387.

During the period of the Korean War itself, China's material exchanges with non-socialist countries exhibited a precipitous decline as the result of "free world" embargoes imposed by U.S. allies. Shortly after the 1953 armistice, trade with these countries gradually resumed, while exports to Hong Kong, Malaya-Singapore, and Japan took off rapidly a year earlier.⁵ Imports of capital goods, raw materials, and arms formed the basis of trade with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which whom China maintained a trade deficit until the mid-1950s. Also in 1953, China began a foreign aid program to North Korea; by 1955 the list of countries receiving Chinese aid had expanded to include Albania and North Vietnam.⁶ While Soviet commodities, capital, and technical assistance undoubtedly contributed to China's industrialization program, exchanges with Western Europe, Hong Kong, and Malaya-Singapore never fully disappeared, and in 1955 direct trade (rather than trade via Hong Kong) resumed between China and Western Europe.⁷

These examples serve to indicate that despite the considerable importance of relations between the U.S., Soviet Union, and China in shaping twentieth-century international affairs, patterns of exchange between China and other nations also represented a distinct component of the Communist Party's attempt to establish and expand its foreign influence (see Chapter Four). Unifying the country and protecting its borders following a long civil war required significant assistance—assistance which first

⁵ Alexander Eckstein, *Communist China's Economic Growth and Foreign Trade: Implications for U.S. Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 97-101. Exports mainly consisted of soybeans, oil cake, other oil seeds, livestock products, silk, tea, tobacco, non-ferrous metals, pig iron, and coal.

⁶ Alexander Eckstein, *Communist China's Economic Growth and Foreign Trade: Implications for U.S. Policy*, 161-162.

⁷ In general, China's principal non-socialist trading partners during the 1950s were Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Malaya, Singapore, the United Kingdom, West Germany, and France.

came from the Soviet Union and other “socialist bloc” countries. In 1950 alone, Chinese military forces marched into Tibet, entered the Korean War, and prepared (fruitlessly) to invade Taiwan. Following armistice a policy of “peaceful coexistence” accompanied overtures to recently decolonized countries of Asia and Africa, as trading ties between Beijing and Moscow deepened.⁸ China’s renewed orientation toward nations who were not former “great powers” was symbolized by Premier Zhou Enlai’s highly-visible involvement in the April 1955 Bandung Conference (formally known as the Asian-African Conference), at which delegates pledged their support for world peace, international cooperation, and non-alignment.⁹ Mao had publicly courted Indian support since 1951, following the Tibetan invasion.¹⁰ In the context of “struggle” against the U.S., Asian and Pacific countries—including those within the U.S. alliance system, such as the Philippines and Thailand—all represented desirable allies as supporters of China’s bid for sustainable statehood.¹¹ By 1954, only New Guinea, Borneo, Timor, and Hong Kong remained under colonial rule; within a year, nearly a third of Asia was ruled by nominally communist governments.¹²

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⁸ Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking’s Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 13.

⁹ On details concerning Zhou’s participation in the conference, see: Zhong Gong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, ed., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949-1976 (shang juan)* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 464-472.

¹⁰ J. D. Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 70-71.

¹¹ In particular, supporting Ho Chi Minh against France and the U.S. was of key strategic importance to Chinese strategic planners, as was disrupting growing ties between the U.S. and Taiwan’s Nationalist Party government.

¹² François Godement (Elisabeth J. Parcell, trans.), *The New Asian Renaissance: From Colonialism to the Post-Cold War* (London: Routledge, 1997 [1993]), 86.

During the 1950s, “cold war”—a term which referred to aggressive U.S. containment of the Soviet Union without a declaration of war by either of the superpowers—dominated international affairs. The impact of this global competition on member nations of the Third World, many of whom had been represented at the 1955 Bandung Conference, was tremendous. Cold War expansionism appeared under many guises, including modernization and development.¹³ The notion of the Third World, by contrast, came to signify a “third way” to national independence which lay between capitalism and communism. Similarly, this chapter argues that while China’s post-1949 film industry was profoundly transformed by the Sino-Soviet alliance, filmmaking and exhibition as a whole reflected broader patterns of international involvement which did not simply mirror the ideological construction of a bipolar world order.¹⁴ By the end of the Korean War, attempts to define a national culture and film style had resulted in the tentative production of works intended to soften China’s image for a world audience. Overlapping with this consciously-constructed national identity was an emerging notion of China as an “ancient” and “Asian” culture, which reinforced the shifting dynamics of a fluid national policy focusing principally on borders shared with India, Korea, Vietnam,

¹³ See: Mark T. Berger, *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonization to Globalization* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ See: Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. While Westad rightly identifies the 1960s as a crucial period in the genesis of a “new, Maoist conception of an alternative socialist modernity” (163), he seems to overlook the significance of other identities coexisting with that socialism—in the Soviet Union as well as China—during earlier decades. As noted above, this tends to obscure the fact that Cold War bipolarity itself may have been more of an ideological construction than “realist” fact, as evidenced by China’s split with the Soviet Union in 1960. See also: Robert J. Alexander, *International Maoism in the Developing World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

and Southeast Asia (e.g. Malaya-Singapore, Indonesia).¹⁵ While the majority of Chinese film exports were sent to the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc countries, targeted audiences also included those in Western Europe. In short, cinematic forms of cultural production and exchange tended to reproduce the importance of the Sino-Soviet alliance to China's leaders while also serving to establish bilateral ties with other regional allies and non-socialist nations alike.

To view film in this way draws attention to broader patterns of influence and exchange which may help explain why Soviet leaders like Khrushchev continued to view Chinese Communist Party leaders with wariness even after Stalin's death in 1953. China had played a "tutelary" role with respect to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) since 1948, a year in which Tito was also expelled from the international Communist movement for challenging Moscow.¹⁶ Odd Arne Westad argues that upon coming to power, Khrushchev worried that China's relations with India and Indonesia already posed a threat to Soviet interests, which also included Egypt.¹⁷ In this sense, competition for the Third World began well before the mid-1950s. The cultural and communications aspects of rising tensions in Asia also drew in the U.S., which from the Korean War onward had been engaged in promoting the "Campaign for Truth" through the expansion of radio propaganda networks and psychological warfare.¹⁸ One U.S. observer, noting

¹⁵ For example, Zhou Enlai apparently proposed the notion of a common "Afro-Asian" (*Fei-Ya*) identity during an April 19, 1955 speech given at Bandung, Indonesia, remarking that "In the past, the peoples of Africa and Asia created brilliant, magnificent ancient cultures, and made enormous contributions to humanity." See: Zhong Gong zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi, ed., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1949-1976 (shang juan)*, 465.

¹⁶ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 66.

¹⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, 67-70.

¹⁸ Philip M. Taylor, *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 1997), 34-35. See also: W. Phillips Davison, *International Political Communication* (New

the rising importance of communications “channels” through which nations advanced their interests, commented that both the Soviets and Chinese “have both participated vigorously in international film festivals, and have made efforts to stimulate the circulation of their films abroad.”¹⁹ Between 1949 and 1959, an estimated 75,000 to 100,000 foreigners came to China on cultural visits, during which time more than four hundred Chinese delegations went abroad to participate in international sports, cultural, and other events.²⁰ Film was thus included in broader strategies of “cultural exchange” (*wenhua jiaoliu*) intended to enhance awareness of China’s own objectives within the international system, as the same time as it aestheticized these under rubrics of civilizational splendor or membership in an Afro-Asian constellation of “anti-colonial” nations.

Among historians of Chinese cinema, there have been numerous attempts to theorize the various representational categories (e.g. history, culture, modernity, gender, ethnicity) through which national identity has been constructed during the twentieth century.²¹ More recent scholarship by Tina Chen has demonstrated that not only did Soviet films also play an important role in disseminating post-1949 understandings of China’s own socialist development, but that screenings also aided in the inculcation of an

York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965). For an account of the 1948 Smith -Mundt Act, which called for an information and cultural program to “promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries, and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people in other countries,” see also: Charles A. H. Thompson, *Overseas Information Service of the United States Government* (Brookings, 1948). One consequence of the act was that the radio-based Voice of America became the international information program of the U.S. State Department.

¹⁹ W. Phillips Davison, *International Political Communication*, 200.

²⁰ W. Phillips Davison, *International Political Communication*, 201. See also: Wenhua bu dangshi ziliao zhengji gongzuo weiyuanhui, Duiwai bu wenhua lianluo ju dangshi ziliao zhengji gongzuo lingdao xiaozu, eds., *Dangdai Zhong-Wai wenhua jiaoliu shiliao, di yi ji* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1990).

²¹Two of the most recent are: Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).

“internationalist” imagination among audience members.²² Within this context, “film projection workers took up the historical project of delimiting the boundaries of the nation through the areas they reached, while in a dialectical relationship filmmakers captured images of the historical struggles of the newly imagined Chinese people and landscape and prepared them for dissemination nationally and internationally.”²³ This chapter describes the impact of international exchange on China’s film system from a somewhat different perspective, focusing instead on a precise outline of the actual policies and networks through which post-1949 state studios became focal points for developmental initiatives—both in terms of technical transfer, and in terms of producing films which promoted a favorable image of the party-state. Another important area of inquiry is filmmaking pedagogy, training, and education. In these areas as well, although Soviet “influence” was undoubtedly strong during the early 1950s, historical legacies of the pre-1949 film system included a persistent emphasis on the value of either domestic or other national experiences (e.g. Hollywood) as models of effective entertainment and/or propaganda.

Indeed, emphasis on the political function of filmmaking did not only result in the state transformation of China’s private studios (see Chapter Five), but also provided justification for the continuous expansion of state cultural networks as part of a larger “nationalizing” process. Past scholarship has attributed these patterns to China’s relationship with the Soviet Union. As Julian Chang argued, “in the construction of both the Soviet and Chinese party-states, a high level of mass political consciousness was an

²² See: Tina Mai Chen, “Textual Communities and Localized Practices of Film in Maoist China,” in Tina Mai Chen and David Churchill, eds., *Film, History, and Cultural Citizenship: Sites of Production* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²³ Tina Mai Chen, “Textual Communities and Localized Practices of Film in Maoist China,” 65.

explicit prerequisite for national development and propaganda was seen as a crucial tool for increasing those levels of political knowledge.”²⁴ The use of mass media “channels” for communicating state-sanctioned messages to recipients, moreover, was coupled with various low-level propaganda departments, small groups (*xiaozu*), and mass organizations into which the new cultural forms were “poured” as content. Within such contexts, trained propaganda personnel acted as interlocutors; public space, by the same token, became saturated with semi-permanent displays such as wall newspapers (*bibao*), loudspeakers, window displays, and monumental architecture.²⁵ While the effectiveness of these methods cannot be assumed, as massive investments of material and human resources they attested to the party-state’s intention to maximize propaganda reception and acceptance, emphasizing in particular the “objective” character—and thus inevitability—of state-society relations as constituted under socialism.²⁶

Within this context, film exhibition represented an important “battlefield” for propagandists.²⁷ Yet as in so many other areas of China’s post-1949 film industry, connections to the Soviet Union can be overdrawn. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, Chinese state planners and policymakers had experimented with education and propaganda networks based on numerous foreign models (see Chapters Two, Three, and Four). That post-1949 efforts have appeared more “successful” is not so much a

²⁴ Julian Chang, “The Mechanics of State Propaganda: The People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union in the 1950s,” in Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich, eds., *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 76.

²⁵ On loudspeakers, Soviet-style “radio-diffusion exchange systems,” and broadcasting networks in China after 1949, see: John A Lent, ed., *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 12-41.

²⁶ Julian Chang, “The Mechanics of State Propaganda,” 109.

²⁷ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishi xingtai shi* [*Film and Ideology in New China*] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1995), 4-5. My thanks to Zhiwei Xiao for calling attention to this important source.

consequence of Soviet models as of Soviet technical aid and assistance applied to the perennial wartime dilemma of how to create more effective forms of social mobilization. While it is true in theory that the Soviet Union served as a kind of archetype for the idea of an organizationally-centralized and state-directed society, in practice the institutional and experiential legacies of pre-Cold War propaganda lasted well into the Cold War itself. By committing to what were perceived as international standards of cultural achievement and spectacle, rather than Soviet-defined norms *per se*, Chinese cultural planners laid the institutional and artistic foundations for a remarkably flexible, and hegemonic, cinematic apparatus which shared much in common with national culture industries throughout the world.²⁸

Nationalizing Culture

Even prior to controversies surrounding *The Life of Wu Xun* (see Chapter Five), central Film Bureau officials had been unfailingly consistent in referring to Maoist notions that all art should “serve the people.” Yet this was not the only principle that guided post-Liberation cultural policy. Writing in August 1949, director Shi Dongshan described film as a tool of national unification, whose mass-produced form was capable of uniting China’s disparate regions where “local” cultural forms, such as theater, could not.²⁹ Citing the high-ranking Communist Party propagandist Chen Boda, Shi portrayed filmmakers as “architects of the human spirit” (*renlei xinling de gongchengshi*) who used

²⁸ By this I mean that one goal of cultural planners was to eliminate competing industries (see Chapter Five), keeping in mind that the anti-trust “Paramount Decree” was issued in 1949 as a means of mitigating the worst effects of Hollywood studio monopolies on theater ownership.

²⁹ Shi Dongshan, “Muqian dianying yishu de zuofa” [Present Methods of Film Art], reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 35. Originally appeared in *Renmin ribao*, August 7, 1949.

“representational form” (*biaoxian xingshi*) to educate, mobilize, and communicate with vast audiences. How to communicate remained an open-ended question. Film Bureau vice-chairman Cai Chusheng noted in an October 1949 address to other members of the bureau’s Artistic Committee (*Yishu weiyuanhui*) that many hinterland-trained cultural officials were not entirely trained in cinematic “technique.” In his view, adapting cultural policy from the countryside to the cities, and from China to the rest of the world, remained a challenge.³⁰

Like many in the party’s upper ranks, Cai looked to the Soviet Union as an important source of guidance. This was not equivalent, however, to insisting on a state aesthetic of modeled solely on Soviet precedent.³¹ During an April 21, 1951 meeting of the Ministry of Culture Film Guidance Committee (*Dianying zhidao weiyuanhui*), Jiang Qing proposed that filmmakers develop a “national style” (*guojia qipai*) based on epics and “major” (*zhongda*) themes.³² Moreover, cultural officials realized that films would be incapable of serving their political function unless propagandistic message were paired with entertaining content.³³ The China Film Management Company (*Zhongguo dianying jingli gongsi*), which controlled distribution on a national level after 1951, ranked

³⁰ Cai Chusheng (recorded by Yan Yiyang), “Zai Wenhua bu dianying ju yishu weiyuanhui kuoda zuotanhui shang de fayan” [Address at an Expanded Forum of the Ministry of Culture Film Bureau Artistic Committee] (October 31, 1949), reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 45. Document from the Ministry of Culture archives.

³¹ As claimed by Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar. See: Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 78. Another problem with this account concerns the unity ascribed to “socialist realism” in both its Chinese and Soviet variants.

³² Shen Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 155. Other Film Guidance Committee members included Zhou Yang, Ding Xilin, Shen Yanbing, Xiao Hua, Yuan Muzhi, Chen Bo’er, Cai Chusheng, Shi Dongshan, and Yang Hansheng. A separate Shanghai sub-committee was also established, and included Xia Yan, Liu Xiao, Shu Tong, Pan Hannian, and Yu Ling.

³³ See, for example: Jia Ji, “Tan dianying gongzuozhe de sixiang gaizao” [A Discussion of Thought Reform Among Filmworkers], reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 293-301. Originally appeared in *Wenyi bao*, no. 14 (1952). Jia Ji was a Ministry of Culture film critic and screenwriter who had written one of the first articles attacking *The Life of Wu Xun*.

domestic films according to the size of their ticket sales.³⁴ Directors took pride not only in the political quality of their work, but also its commercial success.³⁵ Film Bureau officials, in turn, used economic returns and recorded attendances in order to determine which films were popular, and reported these findings to studios; in addition to journalistic and party criticism, these represented some of the only quantitative measures of effectiveness.³⁶ While the market for state films was non-competitive in the sense that investment, purchase, and the cost of rental was set (and heavily subsidized) by the central government, filmmakers were evaluated at least in part according to their films' economic potential.

In short, communication with national audiences was not assumed, but was evaluated and controlled by state institutions according to a semi-commercial logic. These same institutions—in particular the Film Bureau and Propaganda Department—may have privileged political content, but differing levels of audience taste and comprehension remained important constraints on the effectiveness of cinema as “national” culture. Another strategy for promoting the medium was expansion of the film industry itself. Ministry of Culture directives on strengthening distribution and exhibition work were circulated in July 1952 and December 1953.³⁷ These were supplemented by

³⁴ Interview with former members of the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Company, April 2005. During the early 1950s, film distribution was managed primarily at the regional (*qu*) level. The China Film Management Company was originally the Film Distribution Office (*Dianying faxing chu*) of the Ministry of Culture Film Enterprise Management Bureau (*Wenhua bu dianying shiye jingli ju*), and became the China Film Distribution Company (*Zhongguo dianying faxing gongsi*) in October 1952. In 1958 the company was merged with the Film Bureau Exhibition Network Supervisory Office (*Fangying wang guanli chu*) to become the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Company (*Zhongguo dianying faxing fangying gongsi*).

³⁵ Interview with GW, February 2005.

³⁶ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 123.

³⁷ Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 55.

the December 24, 1953 State Council “Resolution Concerning the Strengthening of Film Work,” which laid out plans for rapid expansion of studios and personnel.³⁸

Reaching the countryside and other relatively “remote” regions (e.g. mines) was an important priority of the new planning initiatives. While China possessed an estimated 2,285 mobile projection units by 1952, cultural officials hoped to make peasants and other relatively untapped social sectors a larger part of the national audience.³⁹ Yet projection teams were also expensive to maintain, resulting in further state resolutions ordering their “enterprise-ation” (*qiyehua*).⁴⁰ This meant placing the responsibility for recouping equipment and film rentals on local governments, and units themselves; only in poorer provinces and non-Han regions where establishing national identity was considered to be of pressing urgency were state subsidies to remain at high levels.⁴¹ Yet overall, Ministry of Culture investment in the administrative regions of Northeast, North, and East China far overshadowed that in Inner Mongolia and Northwest, South, and Southwest China, which already included some of the most infrastructure-poor regions in the nation.⁴² One concession made to non-urban audiences

³⁸ See: Zhongguo renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, *Guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jue ding* (Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju, 1954).

³⁹ The first push for increased mobile projection occurred in 1950, when over 1,800 new projectionists were trained in Nanjing. See: Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui dianying shi wenhua bu, ed., *Zhongguo renmin gongheguo dianying shiye sanshiwu nian, 1949-1984* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1985), 336. Statistics from: Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 59.

⁴⁰ Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, “关于建立电影放映网与电影工业的决定” [Resolution on Establishing a Film Projection Network and Film Industry] (December 24, 1953), reprinted in Zhongguo renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, *Guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jue ding*,

⁴¹ Interview with former members of the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Company, April 2005; Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, “关于建立电影放映网与电影工业的决定,” 9.

⁴² “1954年文教卫生工作的报告(草案),” [1955?] (BJMA 11/2/50).

was that the state placed increasing emphasis on the importance of producing domestic films that would be “colloquial and easy to comprehend.”⁴³

Overall, the nationalization process of the early 1950s appeared more institutional than aesthetic. Beginning in July 1949, filmmakers were made members of the All-China Cinematic Workers Association (*Zhonghua quanguo dianying yishu gongzuozhe xiehui*). State directives stipulated that the power of central cultural institutions would be increased, exhibition practices standardized, and all film dissemination coordinated by the government.⁴⁴ Yet while high-ranking propagandists like Zhou Yang promoted socialist realism as the Communist Party’s official cultural policy, the collapse of private filmmaking did not simply result in the flourishing of a nationally-unified film culture.⁴⁵ In 1953, film critic Zhong Dianfei expressed dissatisfaction with what he saw as an excessive emphasis on the “military strategy film,” which Film Bureau officials clearly considered to be a relatively safe (and profitable) genre following Mao’s criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun*.⁴⁶ Subsequent conferences devoted to screenwriting and film production

⁴³ Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, “关于建立电影放映网与电影工业的决定,” 9.

⁴⁴ See: Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhua bu, “关于加强电影放映和发行工作的指示” [Directive Concerning the Strengthening of Film Projection and Dissemination Work], December 12, 1953 (BJMA 2/5/157). Revised and retransmitted December 23, 1953.

⁴⁵ See: Zhou Yang, “在全国第一届电影剧作会议上的关于学习社会主义现实主义问题的报告 (节录)” (March 11, 1953), reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 329-344. Originally published in *Zhou Yang wenji, di er juan* (Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984); Zhou Yang, “目前电影艺术领导中的官僚主义必须改变 (节录)” (May 22, 1953), reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 344-348. Originally published in Zhongyang dianying juben chuanguo suo bianji bu, ed., *Dianying juzuo tongxun*, no. 2. See also Zhou’s November 13, 1954 speech to an assembly of state studio heads, reprinted as “周杨副部长在电影局厂长会议上的讲话.”

⁴⁶ Zhong Dianfei, “Dianying ‘Nan zheng bei zhan’ suo dadao he meiyou dadao de fangmian,” *Wenyi bao*, no. 3 (1953). See: Hu Jubin, *Xin Zhongguo dianying yishixingtai shi*, 35. Already in the midst of the Korean War, China also established the August First (*Ba yi*) Film Studio on August 1, 1952. During its early years, however, the studio mainly produced military education films and documentaries. Originally named the People’s Liberation Army Film Studio, it was officially christened the Chinese People’s Liberation Army General Political Department (*Zhongguo renmin jiefang jun zong zhengzhi bu*) August

indicated a preoccupation with revising the basic tenets of post-1949 socialist art. Even state directives articulated a sense of dissatisfaction, noting that China's state industry had failed to produce enough films, or films of sufficiently high quality, to satisfy popular demands—a situation blamed not only on the lack of scripts and trained screenwriters, but also the absence of a “clear” (*mingque*) production plan capable of attracting and utilizing artistic talent.⁴⁷

The International Studio

State studios in Changchun, Beijing, and Shanghai stood at the intersection of numerous national and international networks which linked filmmaking professionals across locales.⁴⁸ Early documentaries like *Victory of the Chinese People (Zhongguo renmin de shengli, 1950)* and *China Liberated (Jiefang le de Zhongguo, 1950)* required the coordination of filmmakers spread throughout the growing territories controlled by People's Liberation Army forces. In light of their unprecedented scale, they also required foreign technical assistance. A directive issued on December 24, 1949 by the central Propaganda Department referenced two “color documentaries” (a reference to *Victory* and *China*, see Chapter Four) that would be produced with Soviet aid, and distributed as

First Film Studio in 1956. See: Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui dianying shi wenhua bu, ed., *Zhongguo renmin gongheguo dianying shiye sanshiwu nian, 1949-1984*, 121.

⁴⁷ Zhongguo renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, “关于加强电影制片工作的决定” (December 24, 1953), reprinted in Zhongguo renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, *Guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jueding*, 1.

⁴⁸ Concerning the post-1949 workplace in general, see: Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Lü Xiaobo and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Danwei: The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997); Mark W. Frazier, *The Making of the Chinese Industrial Workplace: State, Revolution, and Labor Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

domestic and overseas propaganda (*xuanxhuan*).⁴⁹ Local party members were asked to telegram Xinhua news offices with any promising leads concerning restoration of factory production, rebuilding of railroads and old bridges, land reform, minority areas, establishment of monuments to revolutionary martyrs, and trials of “imperialist” elements that might serve as examples for the “whole country.”

Soviet co-productions did not simply allow Chinese filmmakers to make technically superior films; growing contact with the “Eastern bloc” international film community also resulted in festival participation at the Karlov Vary International Film Festival, held in Czechoslovakia, and wider exposure for domestically-produced documentaries of the revolution (e.g. *Baiwan xiongshi xia Jiangnan*, *Da Xinan kaige*, *Hongqi manjuan xifeng*, *Tashang shenglu*). Both *Victory of the Chinese People* and *China Liberated* won the coveted “Stalin Prize” in 1950, the first time that the award had been received by non-Soviet filmmakers.⁵⁰ Beijing Film Studio filmmakers credited the experience with raising production standards throughout the studio as a whole.⁵¹

Domestic press coverage of the films’ international success seems to have represented one of the most important early means by which state studios were promoted as viable alternatives to private enterprise. Both *Victory* and *China* contained scenes depicting China’s “lengthy history” (*youjiu de lishi*) as well as more recent People’s

⁴⁹ Huadong ju xuanzhan bu, “中共中央宣传部关于协助拍摄中国解放战争影片等问题的指示,” December 24, 1949 (SHMA A22/2/18).

⁵⁰ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu* (Beijing, 1951), 3.

⁵¹ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu*, 27; Beijing dianying zhipianchang xinwen chu, ed., *Xinwen dianying gongzuo zongjie hui huikan* (Beijing, 1950), 95.

Liberation Army triumphs.⁵² Emphasis was not only placed on China's place within a hierarchy of technologically-advanced socialist nations, but also on unique national, or civilizational, achievements belonging to the "Chinese people." By contemporary standards, openings in Beijing, Tianjin, Zhangjiakou, Ji'nan, Shenyang, Dalian, Ha'erbin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Hankou, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Chongqing, and Dihua represented a major media and cultural event.⁵³ Color versions of *China Liberated* were touted as the first time that a full-length "color documentary" had been shown in China.⁵⁴ Indeed, the intentionally epic sweep of the film itself, which joined ancient past to the present day, marked this as a new, spectacular genre in which state studios were taking the lead.

Cooperative film ventures did not only extend to the Soviet Union, or to films for which Chinese filmmakers required technical assistance. By 1951, representatives of the Beijing Film Studio had signed contracts for the exchange of newsreel footage between China, the Soviet Union, and other Eastern European countries.⁵⁵ Studio personnel assisted in shooting several scenes for a Soviet film concerning the nineteenth-century explorer Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalsky (1839-1888), who had traveled to Tibet.⁵⁶ In October 1949, Shanghai filmmakers and studios provided additional support for the

⁵² See articles in *Yingxi xindi* (Shanghai), no. 2, no. 3, no. 7 (1950).

⁵³ See: Chen Zuxun, "'Zhongguo renmin de shengli'—yingyuan buzhi shi zenyang sheji de?" *Yingxi xindi*, no. 3 (1950), 3.

⁵⁴ Xu Xiaobing, "Ji 'Jiefang le de Zhongguo' wucai jilupian de sshezhi," *Yingxi xindi*, no. 7 (1950), 2.

⁵⁵ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu*, 8, 16.

⁵⁶ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu*, 32-33. Leyda notes that the film, directed by Sergei Yutkevich, "when ... finished in 1951, was not distributed in China. No official reason was offered, but it was clear that the discovery by a European of China's art and antiquity was not a fit subject for China's modern audience and national feelings." See, Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972), 189-190.

shooting of *A Day in Shanghai* (*Shanghai de yi ri*), another Soviet production.⁵⁷ North Korean filmmakers from the Korea State Film Studio (*Chaoxian guoli yinghua zhizuosuo*) also traveled to Beijing during the early 1950s, in part to make use of the studio's available sound recording technology.⁵⁸ In general, one important objective of co-production was the exchange of raw footage which made possible new documentary initiatives, such as the production of a series of educational films introducing Chinese audiences to Soviet and North Korean military history, and highlighting the contributions of these new allies to "world peace."⁵⁹

The inheritance of a massive, Japanese-built production facility, as well as access to Soviet technology and expertise, allowed Beijing-based filmmakers to play an increasingly central role in national film production. The Beijing Film Studio News Department, for example, operated regional units in Northeast, North, and South China; after 1949, the vast majority of newsreel and documentary film production also fell to Beijing, which was the only studio directly controlled by the central Film Bureau.⁶⁰ Yet the Northeast (Changchun) Film Studio also maintained a high profile as the "cradle of New Chinese cinema" (*Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*) in international eyes.⁶¹

Features *Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua nü'er*), *Zhao Yiman*, *The White-Haired Girl* (*Baimao nü*), and *Light Spreads Everywhere* (*Guang mang wanzhang*) were exported to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Malaya, and Indonesia on

⁵⁷ Yang Senyao, "Shanghai de wenhua yishu jiaoliu," in Zhong Gong Shanghai shiwei dangshi yanjiu shi, ed., *Fengyu licheng, 1949-1978* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2005), 285.

⁵⁸ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu*, 7, 32, 34.

⁵⁹ Beijing dianying zhipianchang xingzheng chu, ed., *Yjiuwuling nian gongzuo zongjie ji yijiuwuyi nian gongzuo fangzhen yu renwu*, 19.

⁶⁰ See: Beijing dianying zhipianchang xinwen chu, ed., *Xinwen dianying gongzuo zongjie hui huikan*, 3-43.

⁶¹ This is also the title of a silent documentary concerning the establishment of the studio's Xing Mountain facility, produced during the late 1940s by Northeast Film Studio personnel.

twenty-four separate occasions in 1950; *Daughters of China* and *Zhao Yiman* both received Karlovy Vary prizes, *Daughters* for its depiction of “struggle for freedom” (*ziyou douzheng*) and *Zhao Yiman* for its female lead, Shi Lianxing.⁶² During the early 1950s, the Northeast Film Studio itself was promoted as an example of Communist Party modernizing efforts in region.⁶³ Within studio walls, however, employees and filmmakers of multiple nationalities bespoke the facility’s connection to a far larger “Northeast nexus.” Former Japanese technicians of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation staffed the editing room; an associated institution, the Northeast Film Management Company (*Dongbei dianying jingli gongsi*), oversaw export of domestic features and acted as local agent for the distribution of Soviet imports.⁶⁴ Contacts with Korean studios facilitated the exchange of both state and private (e.g. Kunlun, Wenhua, Guotai, Datong) studio titles.⁶⁵

As the Korean War intensified, so too did Chinese filmmakers’ attention to promoting news of People’s Volunteer Army victories along the front. Directors and camera operators from state studios traveled to North Korea, filming footage for future newsreels. Despite the fact that few were experienced as battle-tested war photographers, many experienced actual combat in the form of bombing by U.S. aircraft.⁶⁶ Use of studio space was yet another form of aid provided by China to North Korean allies. With their own facilities reduced to rubble by the war, Korean filmmakers traveled to the Northeast

⁶² Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui dianying shi wenhua bu, ed., *Zhongguo renmin gongheguo dianying shiye sanshiwu nian, 1949-1984*, 350.

⁶³ See: Yang Jing, *Dongbei fangwen lu* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1950), 263-266. Source provided by Christian Hess.

⁶⁴ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan* (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1986), 41, 113.

⁶⁵ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 113.

⁶⁶ Interview with LWH, January 2005; Interview with GW, February 2005.

Film Studio and produced seven feature films, twelve documentaries, and forty-eight newsreels.⁶⁷ In Beijing, both sides also collaborated on *Oppose Germ Warfare (Fandui xijun zhan*, 1952), a documentary exposing allegations and scientific testimony concerning U.S. use of biological weapons.⁶⁸ During this same period, Chinese filmmakers and workers traveled to Korea to begin construction of a new studio, completed in November 1953. Thereafter, co-production activities shifted toward Vietnam, where filmmakers assisted with titles such as *Liberated Hanoi (Jiefang le de Henei)* which—much like *Liberated China*—depicted positive aspects of contemporary social conditions under Ho Chi Minh’s government.⁶⁹ Filmmakers also recorded meetings between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders, for the purpose of promoting Sino-Vietnamese relations at home.

Directors were not the only filmmakers involved in cementing cooperative ties between China and other nations. Actress Bai Yang’s October 1950 trip to the Soviet Union was breathlessly covered in the domestic press as evidence of Soviet esteem for China’s culture and people.⁷⁰ Regular Service Corps (*Weiwen tuan*) visits to soldiers on the Korean front, coordinated by the Chinese People’s Protect World Peace and Oppose American Invasion Committee (*Zhongguo renmin baowei shijie heping fandui Meiguo*

⁶⁷ Hu Chang, *Xin Zhongguo dianying de yaolan*, 140.

⁶⁸ See: Zhongyang dianying ju Beijing dianying zhipianchang, ed., *Fandui xijun zhan* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1953); Shan Wanli, *Zhongguo jilu dianying shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 128. See also: Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 285-299 (Chapter Ten, “Germ Warfare and Patriotic *Weisheng*”).

⁶⁹ Interview with LWH, January 2005.

⁷⁰ See: Tao Muzhou, “Fang Sulian guilai de Bai Yang—Sulian ren yao yan Zhongguo de xiju wudao, wo daibiao bang tamen sheji bujing yinyue,” *Yingxi tiandi*, no. 10 (1950), 8.

qinlüe weiyuanhui), included Shi Dongshan and actress Yu Lan among the luminaries.⁷¹

Entertainment typically consisted of film screenings and live performances. As Jay Leyda notes, some of these were viewed by U.S. prisoners, who did not entirely reject the “Chinese-produced movies.”⁷²

Nor did Chinese filmmakers ever completely reject Hollywood film culture during the 1950s. A low-level secret (*pumi*) request sent by the Film Bureau to the Beijing Municipal News and Publishing Department indicates that *Motion Picture Journal*, *Hollywood Reporter*, *Film Daily*, *Cinema*, and the British *Film Review* were surreptitiously obtained, via Hong Kong channels, for internal reference.⁷³ The China Film Archive, established in 1958, contained (and contains to this day) a sizeable collection of French- and English-language titles.⁷⁴ Some were captured during the Korean War; nearly all were restricted to high-level and “creative” cadres with connections to the propaganda system (*xuanchuan xitong*).⁷⁵ Trusted party filmmakers were instructed to mine Hollywood films for insights into the technical aspects of production, while studio accountants also attended reference screenings to better calculate their per-feature budgets according to international production standards.⁷⁶

Cinematic pedagogy represented another crucial means by which state studios were reconfigured to incorporate Soviet techniques while disseminating “local”

⁷¹ See; Di si ci wendai hui choubei zu qicao zu, Wenhua bu wenxue yishu yanjiu yuan lilun zhengce yanjiu ce, eds., *Liushi nian wenyi dashiji, 1919-1979* (n.p., 1979), 131, 148; Yu Lan, *Kule wubian du rensheng* (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001).

⁷² Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Film and the Film Audience in China*, 202.

⁷³ Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhua bu dianying ju to Beijing shi renmin zhengfu xinwen chubanshe, July 28, 1951 (BJMA 8/2/589).

⁷⁴ See: Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan and Beijing dianying ziliaoguan catalogs of films available for “emulative” (*guanmo*) screening in file SHMA B177/1/260.

⁷⁵ Interview with DZ, December 2004.

⁷⁶ One film frequently screened during such technical consultations was *The Sound of Music* (*Yinyue zhi sheng*).

experience accumulated by former base area cadres. State-run “performance arts institutes,” established in 1950, recruited actors in Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai under direct supervision of the Film Bureau’s party branch.⁷⁷ In May 1951 the Beijing institute became the Central Ministry of Culture Film Bureau Film School (*Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju dianying xuexiao*), a shift which reflected the beginning of “advanced study” (*jinxiu*) for experienced cultural cadres.⁷⁸ While the school retained its original focus on acting, faculty ranks expanded to include instructors from the former base areas, Civil War-era cultural troupes (*wengong tuan*), and Nationalist studio system.⁷⁹ By 1952, several leading figures of the pre-1949 audiovisual education movement (e.g. Sun Mingjing, Chen Tingsheng) had joined the school’s expanded facility near Xijiekou. In 1953 the Film Bureau Film School was renamed the Beijing Film School, indicating yet another shift toward “comprehensive” education in all aspects of film production.

State Council resolutions to strengthen China’s cinematic institutions coincided with a massive influx of Soviet aid and technical assistance known as the First Five-Year Plan. In preparation for the planned arrival of foreign experts the following year, a “fieldwork team” (*shixi tuan*) composed of seasoned party cadres (*gugan fenzi*) and technical personnel was sent to the Soviet Union in 1954 to learn “systematic” methods

⁷⁷ Yuanzhi bianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Beijing dianying xueyuan zhi, 1950-1995* (Beijing: Beijing dianying xueyuan chubanshe, 2000), 4. Chen Bo’er headed the Beijing institute; future director Xie Tieli served as secretary of the party branch.

⁷⁸ Yuanzhi bianji weiyuanhui, ed., *Beijing dianying xueyuan zhi, 1950-1995*, 4; Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005 (1).

⁷⁹ One former studio head described—accurately—the early “foundation” of China’s post-1949 studio system as consisting of “Shanghai directors who ‘knew’ Western films, Northeast Film Studio cadres, old Shanghai workers (*Shanghai gongren*), Japanese technicians, and former members of the ‘Nationalist Party Central Propaganda Section’ (*Guomindang zhongyang xuanchuan gu*).” Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005 (1).

of film production and studio management.⁸⁰ Former participants were almost unanimous in expressing admiration for what they saw there.⁸¹ The Moscow Film Studio represented a distinct improvement over China's current "state-of-the-art"; Soviet instructors were patient and thorough with their fifteen new students. Ultimately, the team stayed abroad until 1956, by which point a major, Soviet-directed overhaul of the Beijing Film Studio and Beijing Film School was well underway.

Despite the fact that Beijing became the unmistakable center of national film production after 1956, when the new studio entered regular production duties, assessing Soviet "influence" on Chinese filmmakers remains a difficult, and perhaps futile, endeavor. Many participants in the fieldwork team were technical workers, suggesting that the clearest path of connection lay through a shared store of knowledge concerning lighting, special effects, *mise-en-scène*, and sound design.⁸² Administrators, who comprised another significant subgroup, played a direct role in reshaping the Film Bureau's approach to creative oversight along Soviet lines. Whereas the previous post-1949 model emphasized centralizing the screenwriting process within the bureau itself—an arrangement later blamed, along with Mao's criticism of *The Life of Wu Xun*, for the sudden drop in state feature production after 1950—the Soviet model stressed dispersing multiple creative "teams" throughout each studio.⁸³ Another shift attributed to the return

⁸⁰ Interview with ZY, February 2005.

⁸¹ Interview with ZY, February 2005; Interview with ZEZ, May 2005.

⁸² On the notion of cinematic "problem-solving" and cinematographic "style" as transnational craft tradition, see: David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁸³ Zhou Xiaobang, ed., *Beiyong sishi nian* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1997), 47-50; Interview with GZH, November 2004. When the Film Bureau Screenwriting Institute was broken up in 1956, more than thirty members were transferred to the Beijing Film Studio in a move which effectively signaled the end of Northeast (Changchun) Film Studio dominance in the feature field. The system exhibited little change from 1956 onward (Interview with CZ, November 2004).

of the Moscow group was official approval for the institution of a star- and director-centered system, which was seen as a solution to the diminishing commercial effectiveness of war films.⁸⁴

The published memoir of former Film Bureau advisor V. Zhuravlyov confirms assertions by Chinese filmmakers that the point of “learning from the Soviet Union” (*xiang Sulian xuexi*) was not merely to “ape” Soviet features.⁸⁵ Technological and economic aspects of studio organization represented the core of Soviet knowledge disseminated via the Ministry of Culture Film Bureau after Zhuravlyov’s arrival on December 4, 1954.⁸⁶ The director registered both pride in previous domestic accomplishment and dissatisfaction with politicized “oversimplification” of the filmmaking process immediately following his arrival—the latter point made during Zhou Yang’s “scathing” critique at the 1955 National Conference of Script Writers, Directors, and Actors according to Zhuravlyov’s account.⁸⁷ Chinese filmmakers, he noted, not only sought to develop their industry for propaganda reasons but also sought to enter “the world market.”⁸⁸ Organization, as well as ideology, was seen as the key to attaining this goal.⁸⁹ As a former studio head who worked closely with another Soviet advisor put it, “the attitude was to take the best from all over the world.”⁹⁰ For many high-level Film Bureau officials this meant Hollywood, although political constraints

⁸⁴ Interview with GZH, November 2004; Interview with ZY, February 2005.

⁸⁵ V. Zhuravlyov, “Mission in China (Memoirs of a Movie Director),” *Far Eastern Affairs* (Moscow), no. 2 (1987), 79. Provided by Paul G. Pickowicz.

⁸⁶ V. Zhuravlyov, “Mission in China (Memoirs of a Movie Director),” 77.

⁸⁷ V. Zhuravlyov, “Mission in China (Memoirs of a Movie Director),” 81.

⁸⁸ V. Zhuravlyov, “Mission in China (Memoirs of a Movie Director),” 79.

⁸⁹ V. Zhuravlyov, “Mission in China (Memoirs of a Movie Director),” 87-88. As described by a former Beijing Film Studio technician, emphasis was placed on studying and mastering the Soviet production process, with particular emphasis on color film and mechanized developing. Interview with WX, July 2006 (1).

⁹⁰ Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005 (2).

forbad them from saying so.⁹¹ Within the context of the Cold War, this suggests an oft-overlooked truth—that Hollywood films were not only seen as models of commercial success, but as effective bearers of ideological values as well.⁹²

Technology Transfer

In 1949, Chinese studios depended almost exclusively on foreign imports for film stock and equipment. Limited production of projectors had been ongoing since at least the Civil War, but cameras and replacement parts were almost exclusively of Soviet, U.S., Japanese, or German manufacture.⁹³ Centralized management of film equipment-related enterprise was conducted through the China Film Equipment Company (*Zhongguo dianying qicai gongsi*), established in July 1951 under the direction of the Ministry of Culture Film Enterprise Supervisory Bureau (*Dianying shiye guanli ju*).⁹⁴ The company was headed by Luo Jingyu, a veteran studio head and technical advisor known for his work on behalf of the Nationalist government, who after 1949 was made a Film Bureau official.⁹⁵ In 1950 Luo traveled abroad to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland on an inspection tour; in China, experimentation with film stock production techniques

⁹¹ Interview with YM, April 2005; Interview with GH and WQ, May 2005 (2).

⁹² That Hollywood films were seen as effective forms of propaganda, and tools of foreign policy, because they promoted the United States as a nation of high consumer standards has been observed by Reinhold Wagnleitner. See: Reinhold Wagnleitner, "American Cultural Diplomacy, the Cinema, and the Cold War in Central Europe," *Worker Paper* 92-4, Center for Austrian Studies (1992).

⁹³ Interview with CZ, December 2004; Beijing dianying zhipianchang xinwen chu, ed., *Xinwen dianying gongzuo zongjie hui huikan*, 193.

⁹⁴ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1900)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1999), 32

⁹⁵ See: Gou Yusheng, "Luo Jingyu," in Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui, dianying shi yanjiu bu, ed., *Zhongguo dianyingjia liezhuan, di er ji* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1982), 216-222. In 1956, Luo became chief engineer (*zong gongchengshi*) of the Beijing Film Studio.

continued in the Northeast Film Studio, under the direction of Japanese technicians 仁保芳男 and 秋山喜世志.⁹⁶

Throughout the early 1950s, what equipment manufacturing and film processing facilities did exist remained concentrated in cities like Changchun, Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing—all former centers of pre-1949 government. Ha'erbin also possessed a modest 35mm projector plant, originally founded by a Russian émigré “Weisimengte” and later claimed by SOVEXPORTFILM, which transferred it to municipal Chinese authorities in 1950.⁹⁷ In addition to outfitting these sites with updated machinery and production methods, Luo oversaw the expansion of spare parts provision stations into each of China's six military administrative regions (*qu*), which remained the most basic administrative level of distribution management until provincial and municipal units were established in beginning in 1952.⁹⁸

Import dependency in China's film industry followed patterns common to the economy as a whole. Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union remained primary suppliers of capital goods (e.g. studio equipment), while Chinese output was mainly confined to lighter manufactured items, such as light bulb and parts for projectors.⁹⁹ Western Europe provided another important source of 16mm photographic equipment, imported via Hong Kong under separate manifests. After 1949, the manufacture of projectors was made a priority; regular production of 16mm and 35mm models resumed almost immediately

⁹⁶ Yang Haizhou and Feng Shulan et al., eds, *Zhongguo dianying wuzi chanye xitong lishi biannian ji (1928-1994)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1998), 41-42.

⁹⁷ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1900)*, 53.

⁹⁸ See: Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1900)*, 60-70.

⁹⁹ Yang Haizhou and Feng Shulan et al., *Zhongguo dianying wuzi chanye xitong lishi biannian ji (1928-1994)*, 44; Xu Qianlin, *Zhongguo dianying jishu fazhan jianshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2005), 56-58.

thereafter, although supply rarely met demand.¹⁰⁰ Nor was the Soviet Union ever able to provide for China's entire range of studio needs; surreptitious import of U.S., British, Japanese, and West German equipment continued into 1955, some of it obtained via Soviet channels.¹⁰¹

Despite the fact that state studios had inherited a sizable stock of confiscated hardware during the handover (*jieguan*) process, keeping up with international standards required a constant stream of state investment to replace old facilities with new.¹⁰² Sound recording, color film production, and projection methods all continued to evolve during the Cold War, yet prices of new equipment remained high relative to the value of China's currency. Manual development of film remained the norm until 1952.¹⁰³ According to one former technician, even mechanization remained painfully slow by international standards.¹⁰⁴ A series of major technical breakthroughs, however, came in 1953 and 1954, when Soviet advisors arrived *en masse* as part of build-up for the First Five-Year Plan.¹⁰⁵ The most rapid changes occurred in film processing and machine production; automation of the color film production process and domestic manufacture of projectors were considered essential ingredients of a spectacular, far-reaching projection network

¹⁰⁰ Yang Haizhou and Feng Shulan et al., *Zhongguo dianying wuzi chanye xitong lishi biannian ji (1928-1994)*, 40.

¹⁰¹ Indeed, one retired studio technician claimed that by this time the Soviets themselves were using a production system of "German" origin. Interview with WX, July 2006 (2).

¹⁰² By 1958, for example, more than 85% of Shanghai's post-1949 film facilities and equipment had been replaced or overhauled. See: Shanghai shi dianying ju bangong shi, "上海电影技术和机械工业的发展情况" (from draft version of pamphlet prepared for foreign visitors), September 28, 1959 (SHMA B177/1/324). Copy originally provided by Zhiwei Xiao.

¹⁰³ Shanghai shi dianying ju bangong shi, "十年来上海电影事业的巨大发展和变化 (初步资料)," September 25, 1959 (SHMA B177/1/220), 12. Copy provided by Zhiwei Xiao.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with WX, July 2006 (1).

¹⁰⁵ "1954年文教卫生工作的报告 (草案)," [1955?] (BJMA 11/2/50). Throughout this period China remained a net importer of film-related equipment, although imports to other countries, such as Vietnam, began in 1952. See: Yang Haizhou and Feng Shulan et al., *Zhongguo dianying wuzi chanye xitong lishi biannian ji (1928-1994)*, 56.

(*fangying wang*).¹⁰⁶ It appears that 1952 plans for a massive “film village” (*dianying cun*) including twenty-four independent sound stages, and based on consultation with Czech advisors, were scrapped when a more pro-Soviet clique led by Wang Lanxi emerged in the Film Bureau following Chen Bo'er's death and Yuan Muzhi's subsequent resignation (or dismissal). Other accounts indicate that Zhou Enlai dismissed the scheme as over-centralized.¹⁰⁷ Instead, the end result was a new Beijing Film Studio based primarily on Moscow Film Studio specifications, while the former facility became the Central News and Documentary Film Studio in 1953.

Technology transfer not only served to disperse film production further throughout China, simultaneously nationalizing and localizing the industry in the process, but also enhanced China's status as a source of aid to its regional allies; North Korea and Vietnam both received technical missions of Chinese filmmakers during the early 1950s. Moreover, as co-productions between the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and China attest, transfers provided the technological ground for the integration of industries across national borders. In 1955, Soviet advisors assisted in planning and preparatory work for the construction of a new, “key” (*zhongdian*) facility—the Xi'an Film Studio.¹⁰⁸ Personnel were drawn from all of China's major coastal filmmaking centers, as the Ministry of Culture expanded its operations horizontally to encompass a new regional territory. In its conception, this localizing shift preceded the Great Leap Forward by several years. The central government, in short, stood at the center of a nascent

¹⁰⁶ Xu Qianlin, *Zhongguo dianying jishu fazhan jianshi*, 56-57.

¹⁰⁷ Xu Qianlin, *Zhongguo dianying jishu fazhan jianshi*, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with GZH and ZT, August 2005; “西安电影制片厂厂史初稿 1956-1959 (献给伟大祖国建国十周年纪念),” September/October 1959 (SXMA 232/263).

communications empire which included China's hinterland regions as well as Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Sino-Soviet Culture during the Early 1950s

Soviet film imports became an indelible part of China's cultural landscape after 1949. Political and economic ties between the two communist parties essentially opened Chinese markets to Soviet goods during the 1950s, and closure of Shanghai's private studios exacerbated the trend by creating shortages of new titles. In the eyes of cultural planners, state enterprises remained woefully unable to fulfill mass demand, making imports all the more necessary. This did not necessarily mean that Soviet films drastically overshadowed their domestic counterparts in terms of exhibition. Rather, as Tina Chen has shown, Soviet films provided a vision of socialist historical development that reflected positively on China's own state programs:

The interpolation of Soviet film into Chinese socialist experience linked aesthetics, politics, emotion, and modernity. The "everyday internationalism" produced and mediated by Soviet film and film projection units in 1950s China was a combination of several elements: shared ideological commitment to socialist values expressed via individual perseverance, belief in the prosperity and happy future promised by socialism, conceptualization of geopolitics in Cold War terms that saw socialist countries united against the bourgeois capitalist bloc, valorization of mass culture, availability and mastery of modern technology, diachronic and synchronic understandings of China's national struggle as global struggle, and emotional and potentially occidentalist attachment to Soviet film stars. Together, these elements merged in various patterns with different emphases to create a political culture in which internationalism assumed meaning through Soviet films and the propaganda apparatus that supported them. This internationalism was shaped not only by geopolitical relations and state ideology, but also through the lived experiences and

multiple concepts through which Soviet film assumed and retained relevance for Chinese people.¹⁰⁹

Cinema from the Soviet Union represented much more than a series of models for China's future. Taken from the perspective of what Chen calls the “consumptive subject,” or viewer, they invited modes of self-identification which positioned that viewer within a global hierarchy divided between “socialist” and “capitalist,” or “democratic” and “imperialist,” nations.

Table 6.1: Total Beijing film screenings by studio, country of origin, 1949-1955
(Source: *Beijing shi wenhua shiye tongji ziliao, 1949-1958, n.d.*)

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Domestic	13,134	16,801	25,862	19,657	18,974	24,134	31,273
From private studios	11,217	11,721	10,770	3,111	3,012	1,884	1,708
Soviet films	5,056	12,319	11,830	17,536	19,910	19,901	22,598
From “people’s democracies”		123	112	3,189	8,166	10,338	9,574
From “other” countries	7,752	61				1,116	3,905

In the context of the Korean War, positive propaganda for socialism's future had another important function—stemming fears of nuclear destruction. A recent article by Steve Smith demonstrates that rumors of China's immanent invasion circulated like wildfire during between 1950 and 1953, and that authorities believed such rumors to be endemic.¹¹⁰ Yu Minling's research on archival and internal reference materials reveals several common obstacles to Soviet propaganda: misunderstanding, pro-U.S. sentiment, nationalistic opposition to the Soviet Union and Sino-Soviet relationship, and feelings

¹⁰⁹ Tina Mai Chen, “Internationalism and Cultural Experience: Soviet Films and Popular Chinese Understandings of the Future in the 1950s,” *Cultural Critique* 58 (2004), 108-109. See also: Nicolai Volland, “Translating the Socialist State: Cultural Exchange, National Identity, and the Socialist World in the Early PRC,” *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 33, no. 2 (2007), 51-72.

¹¹⁰ See: Steve Smith, “Fear and Rumour in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s,” *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2008), 271.

that Soviet wartime support for China was inadequate.¹¹¹ Interviews with former projectionists also indicate that the new films were not received uncritically. Features “most welcomed by the masses” (*zui shoudao guanzhong huanying de pianzi*) included *Private Alexander Matrosov*, *Baltic Sailors*, and *Lenin in October*, three films which audiences found to be relatively comprehensible compared with titles whose plotlines were complicated by unfamiliar historical background and dialogue.¹¹² Nor was socialist internationalism always foremost on spectator’s minds—as a former distributor noted, audiences also enjoyed Soviet films for the humor and romance which they often found lacking in domestic fare.¹¹³

Regardless of whether audiences accepted all of the messages encoded by socialist (e.g. Soviet, state-produced) films, an undeniable consequence of the effort to make mass media serve national agendas was the growth of a tremendous propaganda bureaucracy, whose primary role was to intensify the communication of official messages. Printed plot summaries, “film introductions” (*dianying jieshao*), and amplified voiceovers during screenings represented just some of the methods employed by projectionists.¹¹⁴ Studio production duties also included provision of overdubs and subtitles for the foreign imports. Although China’s large illiterate and semi-literate audiences made dubbing the preferred method, production was slow. *Private Alexander Matrosov* (*Ryadovoi Alexander Matrosov*, 1948), released in China as *An Ordinary*

¹¹¹ Yu Minling, “Learning from the Soviet Union: CPC Propaganda and Its Effects—A Study Centered on the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association,” *The Cold War History of Sino-Soviet Relations* (Zurich: Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, 2005), 4-5. Accessed August 12, 2008, at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/pubs/ph/details.cfm?v21=107808&lng=en&id=10829>

¹¹² Interview with ZTS, May 2005.

¹¹³ Interview with former members of the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Company, April 2005.

¹¹⁴ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1990)*, 81-82; various projectionist materials (*fangying ziliao*) published by the China Film Distribution Company (author’s collection).

Soldier (*Putong yi bing*, 1949) was the first Soviet feature recorded in Mandarin by a domestic studio. Thereafter, films imported from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria East Germany (GDR), North Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Italy, and India were released with locally-recorded dialogue as well. By the end of 1952, state studios (e.g. Northeast, Beijing, Shanghai) had overdubbed 127 features, ten documentaries, and forty-one shorts on a range of subjects.¹¹⁵ Two technological factors played an important role in speeding up the dubbing process: the division of films into smaller segments which could be recorded simultaneously and reassembled, and the transition from optical to magnetic sound recording.¹¹⁶ By the mid-1950s, average dubbing time for a single feature film had been reduced from thirty to twenty days.

Table 6.2: Total Beijing film screenings by genre, 1949-1955 (Source: *Beijing shi wenhua shiye tongji ziliao, 1949-1958*, n.d.).

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955
Features	23,805	25,456	33,728	32,793	41,130	48,742	60,804
Documentaries	2,137	3,848	4,076	7,510	5,813	6,073	6,159
Scientific education				79	107	674	387

The centrality of Soviet-produced images to early 1950s “socialist imaginaries” was also a result of direct Soviet support for the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association (SSFA), and highlights the use of cultural programs to strengthen cooperative security alliances during the Cold War. By November 1952, the association was the largest mass organization in China:

¹¹⁵ Xu Chongyi, “十年来中国人民电影的发行放映工作” (n.d.), *Dianying faxing fangying gongzuo shi nian zongjie, 1949-1959* (author’s collection).

¹¹⁶ Gu Jiaquan, “Shanghai shizhipian sishi nian” [Forty Years of Dubbed Film in Shanghai],” *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, no. 7 (1995), 7.

Methods of propaganda came in all shapes and sizes, ranging from the traditional—*dagu* (story in verse sung to the accompaniment of a small drum and other instruments), *yangpian* (magic lantern shows with a chanted explanation), variety shows, *yang ge* (a kind of popular rural dance), waist drum dance, etc.—to the modern, such as slides or film shows. Regular activities sponsored by SSFA branches in different parts of the country included exhibitions, lectures, seminars, get-togethers, study groups, mobile libraries, wall-newspapers, blackboard newspapers, street corner propaganda stations, fancy dress performances, classes in Russian songs and dances [sic] teaching sessions, etc. The SSFA promoted also the Russian language throughout the country, so that it had become, by 1952, the most widely taught foreign language in China. All SSFA branches in major cities had their own publications ... Furthermore, the SSFA and Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries sent delegations for mutual visits and organized penfriend exchanges ... To extend the propaganda front, the SSFA also expanded its “hardware” infrastructure by setting up Friendship Halls or Cultural Palaces in the major cities to serve as centers for promoting the Soviet Union and other friendship activities ... From the CPC’s assumption of power to the Sino-Soviet split, two grand festivals were inevitably celebrated year after year; the one to mark the October Revolution, the other the signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance.¹¹⁷

In Beijing, for example, the association operated its own mobile film teams, showing features such as Mikhail Romm’s *The Russian Question* (1948) along with propaganda concerning the Sino-Soviet relationship. All materials were provided by SOVEXPORTFILM (*Sulian dianying shuchu gongsi*), including the mobile projectors and generators.¹¹⁸ During “Sino-Soviet Friendship Month” (*Zhong-Su youhao yue*), this national network was mobilized to promote “study[ing] from the Soviets and walk[ing]

¹¹⁷ Yu Minling, “Learning from the Soviet Union: CPC Propaganda and Its Effects—A Study Centered on the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association,” 2-3.

¹¹⁸ Tian Jingqing, *Beijing dianying ye shiji (1949-1990)*, 19-20. Other targets for association teams included laborers and engineers for the Huai River reconstruction project, and non-Han minorities in Inner Mongolia.

the Russian path.”¹¹⁹ One immediate objective during the Korean War was raising factory output and efficiency; in one Beijing report, propagandists celebrated the salutary effect of Soviet films on worker morale by noting that Fridrick Ermler’s *She Defends Her Motherland* (1943) had inspired local tile manufacturers to exceed their daily production quotas.¹²⁰

Critics and actors were also enlisted in the campaign to eulogize Soviet cinematic achievement. Publishers brought out comprehensive guides to the Soviet film industry, and translated speeches by Soviet directors.¹²¹ Endorsed by high officials in the Department of Propaganda, these printed works encouraged audiences to see the superiority of socialist culture in terms of material standards depicted on the screen, pointing out the coexistence of “happy labor” and “pleasant life” with communist ideals.¹²² Soviet newsreels such as *The Soviet Union Today* (*Jinri de Sulian*) drove home the point that Soviet collectivization and industrialization methods worked for the betterment of the social whole.¹²³ Film industry representatives, recently returned from abroad, described Moscow as a city of sumptuous hotels and elaborate evening banquets.¹²⁴

The cultural shift from capitalist- to socialist-oriented representation was accomplished in two ways. The first, as Zhiwei Xiao has shown, was embargoes and

¹¹⁹ Zhong Gong Beijing shiwei xuanchuan bu, “北京市‘中苏友好月’工作报告” [Work Report on ‘Sino-Soviet Friendship Month’, Beijing Municipality], January 10, 1953 (BJMA 1/12/99).

¹²⁰ Zhong Gong Beijing shiwei xuanchuan bu, “北京市‘中苏友好月’工作报告.”

¹²¹ See: Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhua bu dianying ju xuanchuan ke, ed., *Sulian dianying sanshi nian* (Beijing: Dazhong shudian, 1950); Chen Long and Ling Yan, *Sulian dianying jieshao* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1951); Bo Fen, *Sulian dianying 500 ge wenda* (Shanghai: Chaofeng chubanshe, 1952).

¹²² Bo Fen, *Sulian dianying 500 ge wenda*, 3.

¹²³ Zhongguo yingpian jingli gongsi Huadong qu gongsi to Zhongyang maoyi bu Shanghai duiwai maoyi guanli ju, October 16, 1950 (SHMA B83/2/854).

¹²⁴ Tao Muzhou, “Fang Sulian guilai de Bai Yang—Sulian ren yao yan Zhongguo de xiju wudao, wo daibiao bang tamen sheji bujing yinyue,” 8-9.

censorship. Beginning in 1950, restrictions on total screen time allowed to U.S. and British films led to a decline in theater attendances for feature films produced by capitalist nations.¹²⁵ As China's international alliances shifted, even projectors and film stock became subject to new restrictions.¹²⁶ Entry into the Korean War intensified popular resistance to Hollywood titles; theaters in Shanghai began advertising their "refusal to screen U.S. films" (*juying Meipian*) on November 10, 1950. By November 14, all screenings of U.S. imports had ceased, and the boycott ratified nationwide.¹²⁷

Table 6.3: Comparison of screenings and total attendance, Chinese-language and English-language films, Shanghai, 1949-1950 (Source: Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu wenhua ju, SHMA B172/1/35) (note: does not include January-March 1949, December 1950).

	Screenings	Total attendance
State and private studios	43,424	18,597,670
U.S. and British studios	33,681	14,505,773

In fact, a flurry of regulations issued by the Film Bureau in October 1950 had already extended state control down to the level of individual screenings. Old films, unregistered films, and any title with content "sufficient to obstruct the new social order" were subject to immediate seizure and review. The bureau's Film Censorship and Review Committee (*Yingpian shencha weiyuanhui*) played a principle role in this

¹²⁵ Zhiwei Xiao, "The Expulsion of American Films from China, 1949-1950," *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 30, no. 1 (November 2004), 66.

¹²⁶ See Shanghai duiwai maoyi guanli ju files in folio SHMA B83/2/854.

¹²⁷ Qian Bin, "'拒映美片'—五十年代上海电影发行放映业的一页光辉斗争史" [Against the United States—A Moment of Glorious Struggle in the History of Shanghai's Film Distribution and Exhibition Industries during the 1950s], *Shanghai dianying shiliao*, no. 5 (1994), 76. See also: Shanghai renmin zhengfu wenhua ju dianying shiye guanli chu circular dated November 29, 1950 (SHMA B172/1/33); Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhua bu, Zhongyang renmin zhengfu caizheng bu, "关于电影片统一审查减微特种消费行为税的规定," May 20, 1952 (SHMA 148/1/146).

process, overseeing both domestic and international distribution.¹²⁸ As Xiao also notes, the fact that such regulations ultimately resulted in a virtual ban on U.S. films after 1950 did not only reflect anti-imperialist sentiment during the Korean War, but also represented a concession to Chinese film producers who hoped to rid domestic markets of their chief competitor.¹²⁹ Orchestrated campaigns to denounce Hollywood features as products of U.S. imperialism nonetheless followed. Mass discussions of held in Shanghai alerted cultural workers to the importance of “introducing and propagandizing progressive [Soviet, state-produced] films, and working to educate the masses.”¹³⁰ Such discussions were specifically intended to combat the notion, prevalent among audiences and filmmakers alike, that Hollywood films possessed specifically “artistic” or “entertaining” traits worthy of admiration.

Away from mainstream cultural venues, anti-imperialism proved somewhat more difficult to enforce. Small-format films (*xiao dianying*) of French and U.S. origin circulated in and around the outlying districts of coastal cities. Often shown using hand-cranked projectors, they provided income for itinerant projectionists whose primary audiences were comprised of children and the poor.¹³¹ In Guangxi province, “petty merchants, drifters, and former Nationalist officers (*wei junguan*)” were discovered

¹²⁸ “文化部关于电影业五个暂行办法” [Five Provisional Measures Concerning the Film Industry from the Ministry of Culture] (October 24, 1950), reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 67-71. From Ministry of Culture files. See also: Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhua bu to Shanghai shi wenhua ju, “电影业登记暂行办法 (草案),” 1951 (SHMA S319/4/3).

¹²⁹ Zhiwei Xiao, “The Expulsion of American Films from China, 1949-1950,” 80.

¹³⁰ Wu Qian, “谈谈美帝电影的‘艺术性’—上海通讯” [Discussing the ‘Artistry’ of U.S. Imperialist Films—Shanghai Bulletin], reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 72-75. Originally published in *Wenyi bao*, vol. 3, no. 3 (November 1950).

¹³¹ Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu wenhua ju to Shanghai shi wenjiao weiyuanhui, “拟具处理法制小电影办法请核示 [Request for Approval and Instructions Concerning Planned Measures for the Handling of French-Produced Small-Format Films],” April 7, 1951 (SHMA B34/2/122). Informal interviews conducted in Tianjin confirmed that such forbidden amusements survived into the 1960s.

trafficking in “licentious, sexual, and politically inappropriate” small-format films as late as 1955.¹³² Nor were local officials always aware of the latest regulations; when films originating from a U.S.-based travel agency arrived in Shanghai in 1952, local officials made a complaint to the central government to the effect that Shenzhen customs agents were acting in violation of national policy.¹³³

The second set of methods which transformed China into a space of “socialist experience” was the saturation of public space with propaganda forms of every kind. Restrictions on Hollywood films were accompanied by the withdrawal of advertising, print media, and a host of other methods through which “*kan dianying*”—“seeing films”—was constructed as a leisurely viewing practice.¹³⁴ With U.S. and British imports “eliminated” (*suqing*) from Chinese markets, cultural officials set about acquiring investment positions in theaters nationwide. By late 1950, 342 of an estimated 674 theaters nationwide belonged to the state.¹³⁵ The result, as reported by the Ministry of Culture to the State Council, was an increasingly “unified” (*tongyi*) system of theater management, one which combined screening of state-endorsed features with the incorporation of propaganda personnel into the filmgoing experience itself.

¹³² Wenhua bu directive dated June 11, 1955 (SXMA 232/4). The same file contains a report from the Shaanxi sheng wenhua ju describing a group of 50-60 projectionists who traveled between Xi’an and other northwestern cities until 1951, when they were discovered, “reformed,” and given new employment as slide projectionists for schools and youth organizations.

¹³³ Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu wenhua ju to Huadong wenhua ju, Zhongyang wenhua bu, “为请将中央文化部查禁美制小电影指示导知广东文化机关及其他有关机关, 以便一律执行由,” ... 1952 (SHMA B34/1/122)

¹³⁴ Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu wenhua ju dianying shiye guanli chu, “三年工作总结” [Three-Year Work Summary], September/October 1952 (SHMA B172/1/87).

¹³⁵ “Wenhua bu 1950 nian quanguo wenhua yishu gongzuo baogao yu 1951 nian jihua yaodian (jielu)” [Ministry of Culture Report on National Cultural and Artistic Work and 1951 Essential Plan (extracts)], reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 85.

In some cases, this process extended out to the streetcorners. In Xi'an, workers employed by the municipal Culture and Education Bureau staged nightly outdoor activities for introducing images and personalities from China's "new films" (*xin pian*) to onlookers.¹³⁶ Displays featuring film stills, images of Mao Zedong, and the new national flag were placed conspicuously near intersections and other well-traveled urban areas, creating considerable public "excitement."¹³⁷ State-produced and Soviet films themselves, however, did not always generate the same response. In some cases, distributors resorted to canvassing office buildings, work units, and even the streets with announcements and discounted tickets.¹³⁸ Within rural or non-Han environs, propagandists were forced to learn local idioms or entire languages in order to effectively communicate the political messages which constituted official "meanings" (*yiyi*) associated with each new feature.¹³⁹

At the heart of such efforts was a model—attributed to the Soviet Union but undeniably linked to wartime and even Hollywood precedents—which held that that film itself constituted an inadequate means of communication, thus requiring an additional apparatus through which audience attention could be attracted, sharpened, and redirected toward specific features of the cinematic event. While luxurious Moscow theaters were portrayed in state film publications as representing China's future, propagandists of the present inserted themselves directly into the nation's postwar theaters and became, in a

¹³⁶ "Xi'an xin pian zhanlan yue lingxun" [News Bits from the New Film Exhibition Month in Xi'an], *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 23.

¹³⁷ Images of outdoor film displays appear in *Xibei yingxun*, July 13, 1951.

¹³⁸ Hu Baoyu, "Women ruhe fdong he zuzhi qundong" [How We Mobilize and Organize Audiences], *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 38.

¹³⁹ *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 22, 31.

sense, part of the spectacle itself.¹⁴⁰ Prior to each screening, state-employed propaganda personnel (*xuanchuanyuan*) relayed official news (by blackboard or announcement); addressed pre-designated plot points and themes; led audience members in call-and-response chanting of slogans, rhythmic ditties (*kuaiban*), and songs (e.g. “The Internationale” or “Oppose Armed Japan”).¹⁴¹ During outdoor rural exhibitions—huge affairs which often included thousands of audience members—propagandists might employ an amplified public address system to ensure that peasants “correctly” understood the film and its overarching message.¹⁴² Such overt interpellation was not simply restricted to the countryside. In theaters which lacked sufficient electricity or equipment for sound accompaniment, or regions where the majority of audience members were unable to understand standard Mandarin, propagandists provided simultaneous translations and explication of on-screen events.¹⁴³

By 1954, typical “pre-screening propaganda” (*yingqian xuanchuan*) often included slides, songs, announcements, posters, banners, blackboards, radio broadcasts, and handbills.¹⁴⁴ Soviet and other foreign films were understood to represent significant challenges to audience comprehension, often requiring short historical lessons or introduction to new customs depicted on the screen.¹⁴⁵ Yet the model was not without its pitfalls. Pre-screening activities ran the risk of “disrupting” audience attention to a film’s

¹⁴⁰ A description of Soviet theaters intended for Chinese service personnel (*fuwuyuan*) appears in: “A. Wa’ertannuofu,” “Women dianying yuan de guanzhong fuwu gongzuo” [Our Theater’s Audience Services], *Dianying fangying ziliao*, no. 7 (November 1, 1954), 1-5.

¹⁴¹ *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 19.

¹⁴² *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 24.

¹⁴³ *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 28.

¹⁴⁴ “Shandong sheng dianying fangying dui de xuanchuan gongzuo” [Shandong Provincial Film Team Projection Work], *Dianying fangying ziliao*, no. 7 (November 1, 1954), 57. The Shandong teams were featured as “emulative models” during a 1954 conference for film projectionists.

¹⁴⁵ “Shandong sheng dianying fangying dui de xuanchuan gongzuo,” 58.

central message.¹⁴⁶ Propagandists with “low” cultural levels were deemed prone to relying on “vulgarized” (*tongsuhua*) language and personal interpretation when relating key political concepts. Projectionists who wasted time changing reels, or failed to keep their audiences engaged during these “gaps” (*kongxi*) in the exhibition, ran the risk of unsettling or annoying spectators.

In general, film policy during the early 1950s was shaped by an imperative to match cultural products to audiences’ “everyday conditions.” Professional journals and catalogs informed theater managers that a “base audience” (*jiben guanzhong*) existed for each film: *Victory of the Inner Mongolian People* (*Neimeng renmin de shengli*, 1950), which depicted the popular overthrow of feudalistic “ethnic” leaders, was recommended for northwestern Hui and Uighur minorities; *The White-Haired Girl* (*Baimao nü*, 1951), a portrayal of old society evils in the countryside, provided important messages for rural areas still undergoing land reform; *Sisters Stand Up!* (*Jiejie meimei zhanqilai*, 1950), which depicted Communist Party liberation and re-education of prostitutes, represented compelling viewing for women.¹⁴⁷ In the countryside, rural film teams were often instructed to show “rural films” which outlined, with plain language and simplified visual schemes, the positive economic effects promised by the party’s General Line.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 20.

¹⁴⁷ *Xibei yingxun*, August 1, 1951, 18-21.

¹⁴⁸ “Dui wo qu/sheng/shi suoshu dianying dui zai nongcun xuanchuan zong luxian de tongbao” [Bulletin Concerning the Propagandizing of the General Line in Rural Areas by Northwest Regional, Provincial, and Municipal Film Teams], *Dianying dui chungjie xuanchuan cailiao*, January 1954, 1-2. Examples of “rural films” include *Harvest* (*Fengshou*) and *Xinghuo Collective Farmstead* (*Xinghuo jiti nongzhuang*); projectionists also showed the “mainstream” state feature *When the Grapes Have Ripened* (*Putao shule de shihou*). See also: Wang Rulin, “Women de yingpian xuanchuan gongzuo—Shandong sheng Huimin zhuan qu dianying fangying dui” [Our Film Propaganda Work—The Film Projection Team of Shandong Province Special Administrative Region for Hui People Projection Team], *Dianying fangying ziliao*, no. 7 (November 1, 1954), 63.

Rural screenings, typically held during holidays (e.g. Spring Festival) or the “slack” season, illustrate a tendency common to all propaganda work during the 1950s—namely, the encroachment of political communication on existing forms of what were, from the state’s perspective, “empty” forms of recreation, leisure, and celebration. Moreover, the very audience categories invented by state cultural planners (e.g. “minority,” “woman,” “peasant”) were imbued with norms concerning the modes of address appropriate to each. What film could not do, of course, was describe its own effects, and for this reason state personnel expended considerable energy attempting to calculate the degree to which audiences had understood and internalized the approved messages associated with each cinematic event. Written surveys or the observation of positive behaviors outlined in propagandistic messages were important means by which exhibitors gathered “feedback” concerning political efficiency.¹⁴⁹

Yet as indicated by misgivings concerning ineffective projectionists, confidence in the state film system itself was far from absolute. During a June 1955 national conference on projection management, participants voiced the audience complaint that too many recent features were “alike in almost every way” (*datong xiaoyi*).¹⁵⁰ Peasants found films on rural production “dry” (*kuzao*), and clamored for repeat screenings of *Liu Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (1955) instead; others shunned the film teams entirely, resulting in financial losses for local cultural institutions who had rented the films. Zhejiang provincial officials reported that rural people found Northeast accents incomprehensible, and endless depictions of “meetings, speeches, production, and rushing about”

¹⁴⁹ *Xibei yingxun*, April 1, 1951, 32.

¹⁵⁰ “第二次电影放映管理会议座谈观众对影片的反应(节录)” (June 1955), reprinted in Wu Di, ed., *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 450. Originally appeared in *Yewu tongbao*, no. 9 (publication of the Wenhua bu dianying shiye guanli ju bangong shi).

fatiguing.¹⁵¹ Guangdong audiences remembered Hong Kong and Cantonese films with fondness; a general complaint was that state features were “quite politicized” (*hen zhengzhihua*) but the characters “lifeless” (*quefa shenghuo qixi*). Beijing officials, by contrast, argued that what audiences really wanted from films was “suspense” rather than “exemplary characters.” Most dispiriting was the news that while audiences had preferred domestic films prior to 1953, in subsequent years their tastes had begun to favor Soviet features.

Similar criticisms arose in assessments of film exhibition and the cultural “reach of the state.” China’s theaters remained exclusively concentrated within urban environments; moreover, “reforming” (*gaizao*) city venues and replace reactionary elements with reliable personnel remained an unfinished process. Although the number of mobile projection teams had been raised significantly since 1950 (from an estimated 100 to 700 or more), State Administrative Council (*Zhengwu yuan*) documents indicated an overall sense of dissatisfaction concerning non-theatrical projection. Common complaints concerned the poor distribution and irregular nature of mobile screenings, and the inadequate training of projectionists.¹⁵²

Taken together, these statements reflect an overall perception that films were insufficiently suited to their audiences, the projection network materially inadequate, and political messages ineffectively communicated. Proposed State Council solutions included: producing more films; producing more films for peasants; rationalizing and politicizing local exhibition; raising audience educational levels; providing closer

¹⁵¹ “第二次电影放映管理会议座谈观众对影片的反应(节录),” 451.

¹⁵² Zhongyang renmin zhengfu zhengwu yuan, “关于建立电影放映网与电影工业的决定,” December 20, 1953 (SHMA B234/2/203), 1.

supervision for screening activities; further expanding the industry.¹⁵³ In short, emphasis was placed on human political awareness, central coordination, and local control. Yet displacing other, apolitical cultural forms placed a tremendous economic burden on the state. Other documents, prepared on the eve of China's First Five-Year Plan, attempted to resolve this dilemma—of education versus profitability—by outlining plans for economic cost accounting and “enterprise-ation” (*qiyehua*) at the local level while maintaining a heavily subsidized, planned economy at the level of production and distribution.¹⁵⁴ In one instance, an October 1953 Film Bureau directive urged representatives of the China Film Distribution Company and its regional offices to “accelerate film turnover and expand film propaganda” while simultaneously “increasing the wealth of the nation.”¹⁵⁵ Another described how, in the context of ongoing anti-corruption movements, cultural planners also hoped to reduce financial outlays by uncovering hoarded financial resources, film stock, and other equipment.¹⁵⁶

The difficulty of managing a highly complex economy after completion of the post-1949 “rehabilitation” period (1949-1952) has formed an enduring theme in economic histories of the Peoples Republic of China.¹⁵⁷ In the end, decentralizing state institutions while retaining political control was the strategy chosen by Mao and other Great Leap Forward-era advocates of the commune movement. For early 1950s culture

¹⁵³ Zhongyang renmin zhengfu guowu yuan, *Guanyu jiaqiang dianying gongzuo de jue ding* (passim).

¹⁵⁴ On these aspects of the Soviet experience, see: Vance Kepley, Jr., “The First ‘Perestroika’: Soviet Cinema Under the First Five-Year Plan,” *Cinema Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 31-53.

¹⁵⁵ Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju, “关于在电影事业中厉行增产节约的指示,” in *Guanyu dianying qiye, caiwu guanli de zhishi yu guiding* (Beijing, 1953), 2.

¹⁵⁶ Zhongyang wenhua bu dianying ju, “关于彻底消灭积压现象与切实处理积压物资的指示,” in *Guanyu dianying qiye, caiwu guanli de zhishi yu guiding* (Beijing, 1953), 7.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example: Carl Riskin, *China's Political Economy: The Quest for Development Since 1949* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

industries as well, cracks in the façade of central management had already begun to emerge at the economic level, following an initial rush toward the political saturation of public and commercial spaces. And begun to emerge at the level of mass attitudes as well. By 1955, the tendency toward decentralization—whether in film production or approaches to local propaganda and exhibition—had already gained momentum as a cultural, or representational, phenomenon. One constant, however, was the inevitable attitude that “culture” itself remained a matter of political importance to the state.

Exhibiting China in the World

Another arena in which state-produced mass culture was used to spread political values was the international film festival. As Mao wrote in 1949:

Following the arrival of a high tide in economic reconstruction, it is inevitable that there will be a need to produce a high tide in cultural construction. The era in which Chinese people are taken to be uncivilized has already passed. We will, from this point on, arise in the world as a nation (*minzu*) possessing culture to a high degree.¹⁵⁸

To “appear in the world” meant presenting China not only as a socialist country, but also as a sovereign nation (see Chapter Four). In the context of the Cold War, this also meant choosing a flexible approach to self-representation which anticipated common points of identity, or even quasi-Orientalist expectations, which were believed to exist among other national audiences.¹⁵⁹ In many cases these forms of self-representation overlapped.

Moreover, as Joshua Goldstein has suggested, overseas “soft” diplomacy was important

¹⁵⁸ Mao Zedong, excerpt from *Zhongguo renmin zhanqilai* (September, 1949), reprinted in Wenhua bu zhengce yanjiu shi, ed., *Mao Zedong lun wenhua yishu (zhengqiu yijian ben)* (1978) (author’s collection).

¹⁵⁹ On “middlebrow” U.S. perceptions of Asia during the Cold War period, for example, see: Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

to the construction of a fixed, national identity among domestic audiences as well.¹⁶⁰ Newspapers like the *People's Daily* not only reported the fact of overseas exhibition, but also the manner in which overseas films were received. That there were various “Chinas” presented through film in this way indicates that Communist cultural policy was, to a certain degree, flexible at home as well. Overall, internationalist ideals on which film festivals were based clearly included room for national, traditional, and civilizational identities as well. Yet perhaps more importantly, cultural exchange created patterns of international interaction that were not, in the case of China, defined solely by bloc-based power politics.

This is not to downplay the importance of alliances with the Soviet Union and Eastern European “people’s democracies” (*renmin minzhuzhuyi guojia*) to China’s national recognition after 1949. Although trade was never completely severed between China and Western European members of NATO, hostilities surrounding the Korean War essentially foreclosed the option of pursuing normal diplomatic recognition beyond the Warsaw Pact. Cultural activities, however, represented another means of establishing ties to a wide variety of other nations. In October 1952, Beijing hosted the “Asia and Pacific Region Peace Conference” (*Yazhou ji Taipingyang quyu heping huiyi*), attended by representatives of thirty-seven independent countries and territories, which established an eleven-point resolution for continued “cultural exchange” (*wenhua jiaoliu*).¹⁶¹ Chinese delegates attended a cultural conference held in Santiago, Chile in April 1953; that same month, Beijing also played host to official groups from Finland and Sweden. Following

¹⁶⁰ See: Joshua Goldstein, “Mei Lanfang and the Nationalization of Peking Opera, 1912-1930,” *positions: east asia cultures critique*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1999), 377-420.

¹⁶¹ Di si ci wendai hui choubei zu qicao zu, *Wenhua bu wenxue yishujanjiu yuan lilun zhengce yanjiu shi, Liushi nian wenyi dashiji*, 141, 145-146.

the armistice, China staged a two-hundred year anniversary commemoration of the death of English novelist and dramatist Henry Fielding.¹⁶² Significant cultural events in 1955 included a festival for famous cultural figures of the world, and the performance by a Yue opera troupe at the Paris Second International Theater Festival.

Coverage of international film festivals in the *People's Daily* tended to emphasize the importance of common values, such as the “creation of human happiness,” which united participants in these events.¹⁶³ Propagandists appeared eager to demonstrate that Soviet culture was met with broad approval from filmmakers representing not only Eastern Europe, but also the U.S., England, Italy, and France, as was the case at a 1949 event held in Marienbad, Czechoslovakia. Illusions of a shared humanistic culture uniting countries on both sides of the U.S.-Soviet divide, however, were shattered by the tenor of much early Cold War cultural production. Thus, in 1951 the Sino-Soviet documentary *China Liberated* was excluded from the Festival de Cannes, where it appeared as a Soviet entry. Initial U.S. reporting suggested that the festival committee had been behind the decision.¹⁶⁴ Later, *New York Times* writers claimed the French Foreign Ministry had discovered that the film “cast a slur on a friendly government—Nationalist China.”¹⁶⁵ *Pravda*, by contrast, published an accusation by Vice-Minister of Cinema Nikolai Semenov stating that Washington had ordered the ban directly.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Di si ci wendai hui choubei zu qicao zu, Wenhua bu wenxue yishujanjiu yuan lilun zhengce yanjiu shi, *Liushi nian wenyi dashiji*, 152, 156-157.

¹⁶³ “二十国进步电影工作者, 号召影界争取和平, 苏联影片荣获头二等奖” [The Progressive Filmmakers of Twenty Nations Call for Film Circles to Strive for Peace, Soviet Films are Honored with First- and Second-Place Awards], *Renmin ribao*, August 12, 1949, 3.

¹⁶⁴ “Russia Asked to Withdraw Film,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1951, 49.

¹⁶⁵ “Soviet Film is Barred: Cannes Festival Objects to the Showing of ‘Liberated China’,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1951, 24.

¹⁶⁶ “Russia Protests Fete Film Ban,” *The New York Times*, April, 22, 1954, 74.

For Chinese filmmakers, the represented a crucial moment of international recognition, even if plaudits came mainly from within the socialist bloc. Held near Prague, the festival provided a showcase for cinematic works by Warsaw Pact nations and their allies; coverage in the *People's Daily* also noted that filmmakers from “capitalist” Europe and North America were also in attendance.¹⁶⁷ *Daughters of China* (*Zhonghua nü'er*, 1950)—one of fifteen Chinese features and documentaries to appear on the program—took home a major prize, while four other documentaries were granted “honorary awards” (*rongyu jiang*). The next year, filmmakers for new state releases *Steel Soldiers*, *The White-Haired Girl*, *New Sons and Daughters of China*, and *Red Flag on a Green Hill* all received individual prizes. At home, the films themselves were exhibited as part of a “new domestic features exhibition” showcasing state industry titles; upon receipt of their awards, these were re-screened as “prize-winning domestic films” seven months later.¹⁶⁸

Until 1958, the festival was a leading showcase for potential exports to other bloc members. Yet cultural recognition took a far wider range of forms than film awards indicated. At the Sixth Karlovy Vary International Film Festival opening ceremonies, Chinese and Korean representatives were congratulated by the Czech Minister of Propaganda for the “lengthy histories of advanced culture” possessed by the two “ancient states (*guguo*) of the Far East.”¹⁶⁹ Another attendee, Liu Deyuan, had captured three U.S. soldiers while filming on the Korean front, and received honors for his “contributions to

¹⁶⁷ “国际电影节在捷开幕, 中朝代表受到热烈欢迎, 苏中电影开始陆续放映” [The International Film Festival Opens in Czechoslovakia, Chinese and Korean Representatives Receive a Warm Welcome, Soviet and Chinese Films Shown in Succession], *Renmin ribao*, July 19, 1950, 4.

¹⁶⁸ *Beijing shi wenhua shiye tongji ziliao, 1949-1958*, 90.

¹⁶⁹ See: Zhongguo dianying daibiao tuan zai dahui fabiao de shumian baogao,”in Zhongguo dianying daibiao tuan, *Guanyu Di liu jie guoji dianying jie de baogao* (Beijing: Xin dianying zazhi she, 1951), 59.

world peace.” China’s official speaker at the event responded to the awards won by his industry by thanking the Soviet Union for providing aid to Chinese studios. Like actress Bai Yang’s trip to the Soviet Union one year earlier, festivals and festival coverage represented other ways in film industries contributed to cultural exchange, and thus to the affective dimensions of Cold War alliances between sovereign nations.¹⁷⁰ In particular, repeated emphasis on distinguishing national markers such as China’s “ancient” culture, or the Soviet Union’s technological superiority, was often put forward by parties on both sides of the exchange in order to further redefine international relationships (e.g. China as a grateful dependent of the Soviet Union).¹⁷¹

Despite overseas accusations that Chinese films represented “propaganda for the Chinese Communist government,” as claimed by Cannes representatives during the 1951 imbroglio, other governments and venues proved more receptive to socialist filmmaking. The Bombay-hosted India International Film Festival, held in January 1952, showcased films from both China and the Soviet Union among other entries from its twenty-three attending countries. In short, China’s international relations continued to evolve even during the Korean War. The economic component of these relationships must not be overlooked; while films played in Bombay, U.S. observers noticed that Chinese products displayed at the concurrent International Industries Fair attracted “continuing crowds of admiring Indians.”¹⁷² Further abroad, film and commerce combined during the staging of

¹⁷⁰ See: Tao Muzhou, “Fang Sulian guilai de Bai Yang—Sulian ren yao yan Zhongguo de xiju wudao, wo daibiao bang tamen sheji bujing yinyue,” 8-9.

¹⁷¹ This topic deserves further explanation. For an early attempt to theorize the role of “signals” in international relations more generally, see: Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

¹⁷² “Bombay is Center for Red Activity: Exhibits of Communist Lands at Industry Fair and Other Efforts Impress Indians,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 1952, 7.

elaborate “Chinese Film Weeks” held simultaneously in the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Romania on the national inauguration anniversary of October First. In July 1952, a ten-day festival devoted to “Sino-Mongolian Friendship” was accompanied by screenings of Chinese films throughout major cities in the Mongolian People’s Republic.¹⁷³

The international reception of “New China” in cinema thus coincided with trade and exchange agreements signed with other Eastern European and Asian countries. In 1950, China exported a total of ten feature films abroad; from that point onward, a corresponding expansion in domestic film culture included multi-week film exhibitions featuring titles from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, North Korea, East Germany, Romania, and India.¹⁷⁴ Individual titles from Italy, France, and other “capitalist” nations began to appear on a more limited basis from 1953 onward, as did expressions of concern from cultural officials over the potential that such films might inculcate unacceptably “romantic” behavior in Chinese youth.¹⁷⁵ Here as well, the opening of Chinese markets to Western European motion pictures indicated a gradual warming of exchange abroad. State-produced features played to festivals or private theaters in England (1952), France (1954), Scotland (1955), and Switzerland (1955).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Xu Chongyi, “十年来中国人民电影的发行放映工作,” *Dianying faxing fangying gongzuo shi nian zongjie, 1949-1959* (author’s collection).

¹⁷⁴ *Beijing shi wenhua shiye tongji ziliao, 1949-1958*, 90;

¹⁷⁵ Xu Chongyi, “十年来中国人民电影的发行放映工作,” *Dianying faxing fangying gongzuo shi nian zongjie, 1949-1959* (author’s collection). Italian imports tended to include acknowledged classics of realist filmmaking such *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) and *Rome 11:00* (1952). Other concerns focused on whether it was appropriate for “commercial” Italian studios to profit from import arrangements of otherwise progressive films.

¹⁷⁶ Wenhua bu dangshi ziliao zhengji gongzuo weiyuanhui, Duiwai bu wenhua lianluo ju dangshi ziliao zhengji gongzuo lingdao xiaozu, eds., *Dangdai Zhong-Wai wenhua jiaoliu shiliao, di yi ji*, 469-516 (passim). By the early 1950s, cultural exchange of films between China and other socialist nations was no longer conducted “in-kind,” but involved financial transactions in order to more precisely balance budgets on both sides. Capitalist countries proved less amenable to this approach, and so the export of Chinese films in such situations was mainly conducted through overseas agents or at a considerable discount. See:

During the run-up to the Bandung Conference, distribution expanded to Southeast Asia, the Near East and North Africa.

Despite the fact that overseas Chinese communities represented a highly desirable audience for state exporters, U.S. and Taiwanese shipping blockades in the region kept prospects for the cultivation of diasporic audiences uncertain. Nonetheless, the Southern Film Corporation of Hong Kong played a key role in handling distribution chains which stretched from Beijing to Hong Kong, Macao, and Southeast Asia.¹⁷⁷ One of the state's biggest overseas "hits" in both Asia and Europe was *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (1954), a screen adaptation of the well-known folktale concerning two star-crossed lovers. This film marked a remarkable departure from the state's putative socialist realist aesthetic, and signaled the rapid proliferation of opera film (*xiqu pian*) productions, including 1956 Beijing Film studio production *The Stage Artistry of Mei Lanfang* (*Mei Lanfang de wutai yishu*).¹⁷⁸ Why the state suddenly turned to these films is a question deserving of further research. At a minimum, their export seems to have coincided with the post-Korean War effort to "soften" China's image, and deliberately cultivate a film aesthetic that would appeal simultaneously to audiences in Chinese-speaking communities, other Asia nations, and non-socialist Europe.¹⁷⁹

In other words, international markets represented yet another targeted outlet for politically-controlled but commercially-packaged art. What united these two impulses,

Xu Chongyi, "十年来中国人民电影的发行放映工作," *Dianying faxing fangying gongzuo shi nian zongjie, 1949-1959* (author's collection).

¹⁷⁷ China Film Distribution and Exhibition Corporation, China Film Export and Import Corporation, ...

¹⁷⁸ See: Gao Xiaojian, *Zhongguo xiqu dianying shi* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2005), 116-117.

¹⁷⁹ See: "中华人民共和国电影事业概况," script of speech given by industry representatives during visits to India (1955) and Malaya (1956), in *Dianying faxing fangying gongzuo shi nian zongjie, 1949-1959* (author's collection).

again, was an overriding concern that the new government be seen, and be seen in ways which would elevate China's overall status within a competitive international hierarchy. In a 1955 report to the Ministry of Culture, director Zhang Junxiang—recently returned from trips to Poland and the Soviet Union—expressed feeling “embarrassed” that Chinese films exhibited in Moscow seemed neglected compared to Indian films.¹⁸⁰ Zhang also related several additional objections to recent Chinese films voiced to him by Soviet and Polish filmmakers: political ideology was abundant, but realistic depictions few; there was too much dialogue; scripts were poor and actors undertrained; there were not enough expressions of China's own artistic “characteristics”; there were not enough representations of contemporary life; there were too many scenes of war and suffering; China had produced few films to equal the achievements of *The White-Haired Girl* or *Steel Soldiers*.

Conclusions

In 1957, as talks held between the U.S. and People's Republic of China concerning the “Taiwan issue” ground to a halt, the Ministry of Culture reported that several films had recently been denied entry to the Festival de Cannes.¹⁸¹ The report blamed “anti-Communist sentiment” for the decision, noting that Taiwanese films had been selected as the official Chinese entries instead.

¹⁸⁰ Zhang Junxiang, “国外对我国影片的意见,” reprinted in Wu Di, ed. *Zhongguo dianying yanjiu ziliao, shang juan* (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2006), 444-446. Originally appeared in *Yewu tongxun*, no. 6 (publication of the Wenhua bu dianying shiye guanli ju bangong shi).

¹⁸¹ “文化部报送电影方面外事工作 1957 年小结,” 1958 (SHMA B177/1/319). Files of Shanghai shi renmin zhengfu dianying ju.

Judging from this official, internally-circulated reaction, it can be surmised that the decision was seen as a reversal of several years' work spent rebuilding China's international image following the Korean War armistice. Yet as events like the 1955 Bandung Asian-African Conference showed, these diplomatic maneuvers did not only extend to the NATO-dominated "First World." A close examination of China's cultural and technical exchanges during the first half of the 1950s reveals that policymakers and filmmakers alike were engaged in building up multiple points of international contact on both a bilateral and multilateral basis. This chapter has explored both international and national forums of film exhibition in order to track these points of contact from a cultural perspective.

The surprising picture which emerges is of a film industry whose organization and representational content alike were profoundly shaped by "First World" standards and audience expectations. Propagandizing the Chinese Communist Party's internationalist achievements first required developing the technical and artistic basis for entering the international market, and eliciting positive overseas reactions that could then be relayed to audiences at home. Here, the implications of internationalist practice for domestic legitimacy provide a novel twist on Akira Iriye's notion of international organizations (in this case film festivals and cultural exchange networks) as agents in the creation of global consciousness.¹⁸² As this chapter has shown, emphasis was also placed on how international representation reflected on the status of one's national culture and position within a global hierarchy of nation-states.

¹⁸² See: Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

Another, more familiar means of building domestic support for the post-1949 Communist government was to saturate state-defined categories of “culture” with innumerable political messages. Yet as in the international case, an examination of internal documents reveals deep concerns over how these messages were interpreted, as well as over the ability of propaganda itself to hold audience attentions. While state acquisition of private studios and theaters proceeded rapidly, backed by a combination of persuasion (investment) and coercion (campaigns), expanding cultural networks into areas which lacked, comparatively, the requisite infrastructure and personnel proved a more daunting challenge. Local logistics and unpredictable audience preferences represented persistent “problems” (*wenti*) for which problem-solving resources remained scant. Again, this is not to deny that the Communist revolution signaled a profound change in the modes and experience of cultural production after 1949. Rather, the emphasis here is on obstacles which state officials themselves perceived, and how debates concerning the appropriate remedies—many of which remained couched in an economic or market logic—reveal the shortcomings of understanding the propaganda state and its activities in purely representational terms.

CONCLUSION: Mass Media and War

In his famous prologue to *Call to Arms* (Nahan, 1923), Lu Xun described how a single lantern slide set him on the path to literature:

... I was a student at a medical school in rural Japan. My dreams were fulfilled. After graduation, I planned to return [to China], and alleviate the illness and suffering of those sick people who had been misdiagnosed like my father. During wartime I would be a medical doctor, which would also advance the faith of my countrymen in national reform. I do not know if the methods of teaching microbiology have progressed since then, but in those days they used projectors to display the appearance of the microbes. Because of this there were times when the lecture had ended early and the instructor would show the students slides of landscapes or current events, to fill up the remaining time. That was right at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, so there were naturally many slides concerning wartime events, and in that classroom I was often compelled to join in the clapping and shouting of my classmates. One time, I suddenly laid eyes upon those many Chinese I had long ago disregarded—a single figure occupied the center, bound, while many stood to either side. Each was robust in stature while appearing numbed in spirit. According to the explanation, the one who was bound was a military spy for Russia, and about to be decapitated by the Japanese army to set an example for the crowd, while those surrounding [him] were people who had come to admire the event.

Before the school year had ended, I had already gone to Tokyo, because after that incident I felt that medicine was no longer an urgent matter. [For] each [of these] ignorant citizens, no matter how physically healthy, or strong, was capable of nothing more than serving as the raw materials for a public display or as observers [to that display]. Therefore our most important task was to transform their spirits, and that which was best suited to transforming their spirits, I thought, was to promote culture, and advocate a cultural movement. Among the overseas students in Tokyo there were many studying law, government, physics, and chemistry—not to mention policing and industry—but there were few interested in literature or aesthetics. Nonetheless, despite this uninspiring atmosphere, I had the fortune of finding several comrades, in addition to which we invited

several necessary others. After some deliberation, [we decided] that the first step would be to publish a magazine. The title was based on the notion of “new life”, but because at that time we still held onto our antiquarian tendencies, we expressed [this meaning] using an obscure mode of expression.¹

This account has a definitive statement concerning the intellectual origins of twentieth-century cultural reform. Yet as others have later observed, it also contains the seeds for rethinking a profound transformation in the modern world—namely, the invention of mass media technologies and their effects on human self-representation.²

Several details in Lu Xun’s narrative point to the specific historical conditions of this process. First, he encounters the lantern slide as an overseas student, already enrolled in a course of study whose subject—medicine—he intends to use as a means of transforming his place of origin. Lu Xun believes that the efficacy of medical techniques will enhance his countrymen’s faith in other new practices associated with the non-Chinese world. His choice of words in referring to national reform—*weixin*, or “maintaining the new”—refers to the attempts of nineteenth-century Qing dynasty statesmen to bolster their empire’s authority through the use of Western technologies. By blaming his father’s death and the sufferings of others on “misdiagnosis”, he implies that existing forms of medical knowledge in China are both harmful and powerless. Like the Qing elites he refers to, Lu Xun’s search for new wisdom in Japan takes as its goal the rejuvenation of an entire society, one marked as distinct or separate by its comparatively ill health.

¹ Lu Xun, “*Nahan zixu (zhailu)*,” reprinted in Liu Siping and Xing Zuwen, eds., *Lu Xun yu dianying (ziliao huibian)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), 5-6. Author’s translation.

² See: Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Eric Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

Compared with what? As Lu Xun's allusions to medical medicine and the Russo-Japanese War indicate, the eastern Eurasian continent had been scarred by endemic warfare throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But this was not all. The combatants were principally powers like Russia and Japan, both militarily powerful states whose dominion in East Asia was seemingly bolstered by mastering of new sources of strength—Japan's microbiology, for instance. As a foreigner whose countrymen remain susceptible to painful and protracted illnesses, Lu Xun is alienated by this strength in its concrete manifestation even as he is attracted to it in the abstract. The Russo-Japanese War was but one manifestation of the Qing dynasty's weakening in relationship to surrounding and seemingly hostile powers.

This passage also reveals several things about the nature of media technology during the years of 1904-1905. First, his classroom's electrical projector serves a variety of uses. It educates, informs, and entertains. It reveals new forms, and conjures images of spatio-temporally distant landscapes and events. This versatility is exactly what allows the projector to be used as an accompaniment to the instructor's lecture and, later, as a means of wiling away the remaining minutes of class time after the lecture has ended. Yet the instructor's control over the machine in both contexts remains natural and accepted. This does not change when the instructor has concluded the period of instruction. The novelty of landscapes and current events are appreciated by the students, but selected seemingly at the instructor's whim.

The key moment in Lu Xun's narrative arrives when he is unexpectedly confronted with an image of what it means to be "Chinese" from a Japanese perspective. His classmates may have cheered for this slide as well—Lu Xun does not say. What he

does state is that those fellow Chinese he had “long ago disregarded” suddenly appear before him in a scene which he is told represents an actual event. A Chinese is being beheaded while others stand around him, powerless to intervene. The executed has been a military spy for Russia; during the execution he is made into mere “material” for a fatal object lesson given by the Japanese army. The audience can only participate as observers. The power which this execution makes manifest—that acquiescence to a Japanese-made order will determine whether they live or die—has been reinforced by the disturbing numbness which Lu Xun, the medical student, has diagnosed from the observers’ mute aspect.

Lu Xun’s attention to the healthy and robust bodies of these onlookers suggests that it is not only Russian intrigues or Japanese punishments which create their passivity. Under other conditions, he seems to say, they might well resist. But what are those conditions? The helplessness of the Chinese present in the lantern slide is produced where several historical patterns coincide: Russian and Japanese power over Chinese territory and subjects; practices of photography and means of producing a reproducible image being present when this power is exercised; the dissemination of these images into new spatio-temporal contexts; the display of these images to a mass audience; the reading of such displays in terms of a realist logic, according to which they are also “true” representations of a deeper reality.

Physical strength alone cannot overcome the circumstances which have created such an image, Lu Xun reasons. Nor can the techniques which have produced Japan’s power be introduced to China independently of the will to use them. The Chinese who Lu Xun beholds demonstrate no such will. He must, he realizes, “transform their spirit.”

Yet to reverse the events that so readily transmute a soon-to-be executed countryman's final moments into a Japanese lantern slide, he must also mobilize them to exercise power over their own sensory faculties—the same faculties as those through which Lu Xun experiences the execution tableau with sympathy and horror. And so, the preface goes, as a younger man he turned to literature.

* * *

A less well-regarded essay by Lu Xun appears as the “translator’s addendum” (*yizhe fuji*) to a chapter of Iwasaki Akira’s *Film and Capitalism* reprinted in a 1930 edition of literary journal *The Sprout (Mengya)*, notes that “so-called propaganda and agitation” refer to one aspect of the dominant class, but are “unrelated to so-called rebellion.”³ The following paragraphs, which include a long discussion of public reaction to racist portrayals of Chinese characters in Douglas Fairbanks’ film *The Thief of Baghdad*, make it clear that, from a cultural perspective, Lu Xun considers the dominant class in China’s treaty ports to be U.S. capitalists.⁴ Thus, he argues, Hollywood films are like the “rifles and cannons of old” which were used for colonial gain. The white Americans depicted in the film are racially other, yet Chinese audiences are eager to accept their pleasures as vicarious amusement, while “entrusting others to go out and

³ Lu Xun, ““Xiandai dianying yu youchanjieji’ yizhe fuji,” reprinted in Liu Siping and Xing Zuwen, eds., *Lu Xun yu dianying (ziliao huibian)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), 159-164. Iwasaki’s completed work was published in 1931; Lu Xun’s translation was based on an uncompleted manuscript.

⁴ This assertion is somewhat ironic—or perhaps made more convincing—given the fact that Lu Xun himself was a habitual consumer of Hollywood films. See: “Lu Xun linian suokan dianying tongji biao,” in Liu Siping and Xing Zuwen, eds., *Lu Xun yu dianying (ziliao huibian)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1981), 221-238.

propagandize to the world” (*tuoren xiang shijie qu xuanchuan*). Delivered in a typically sardonic tone, it is difficult to tell whether Lu Xun accuses Hollywood filmmakers or the cinema itself of waging war on China’s spiritual condition. As in so many other essays, he blames his countrymen for a self-deluding retreat into past glories—“four thousand years of cultural refinement”—as much as he castigates the “foreign masters” (*yang daren*) for their avaricious behavior.

These two passages, written by one of the twentieth-century’s finest writers in any language, illustrate the two historical uses of cinema which establish its relevance for any discussion of mass-mediated political communication as a function of statecraft.

Colonialism and war created the conditions under which images of China as inferior to the great powers (*lieqiang*) began to circulate on a global scale. But as documented by numerous scholars of modern Chinese history, the appropriation of new technologies created possibilities not only for resisting full-scale foreign invasion, but also for reunifying the former Qing empire under a new central government. Reformers already knew that this massive effort would require the inculcation of a shared identity as well, one that would give the enterprise meaning in the eyes of its participants.⁵ Yet as this dissertation has illustrated, nationalist mobilization used mass media both to communicate new imperatives and to reshape the institutional reach of the state. First, during the War of Resistance (1937-1947) and Civil War (1945-1949), political parties appropriated commercial capital and modes of production for their own uses. Later, during the first five years of Communist rule, political organizations found a foothold in

⁵ Two very different, but complementary, perspectives on the consequences of this realization are: Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

existing spaces of public culture—movie houses, street corners, and rural threshing grounds—and used newfound leverage to intensify the politicization of everyday life. While this process undoubtedly has its supporters, it also ran the risk of inciting mass resistance or, at a minimum, profound skepticism. A deeper structural problem lay in the economics of funding a massive “identity project” at a time when levels of consumption, though undoubtedly improved since the Civil War, were kept artificially low in order to accelerate an overarching industrialization effort.

What complicates any notion of this “nationalizing” use as a domestic, China-specific, socialist, or even fascist phenomenon is the rich history—for which this dissertation has established a preliminary, but nonetheless much-needed, outline—of intellectual and technology exchange between elites of varying, and even competing, national loyalties. China’s history reveals much about twentieth-century political culture because the means of creating that culture were actively shared via international organizations and technical missions. Yet from a visual perspective, the “international” use of cinema, which Lu Xun named correctly as propaganda, was as a state tool for displaying material and cultural markers of sovereignty to an even wider global audience. Even during the Cold War political elites of both blocs, as well as those of postcolonial nations, legitimized their strategic and developmental commitments in terms of human peace and prosperity. Film festivals, as international spectacles of solidarity, softened the images of revolutionary leaders and security states alike by offering visual proof of commitments to humanistic ideals, even when these were represented as timeless love stories (*Liu Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*) or pristine natural landscapes (*Scenery of Kueilin*, shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1956). Whether such representations were

“ultimately” commercial, ideological, or even self-Orientalizing is difficult to say at a time when economics, politics, and cross-cultural legibility were all considerations which shaped China’s post-1949 film production. Rather, the institutional issue which this dissertation has addressed is how aspirations to create an internationally-viable culture industry necessitated participation in numerous forms of cultural exchange between China and other nations which, in turn, reinforced an awareness of China’s position within a global hierarchy based on technological achievement and cultivation of national artistic forms.

According to Lu Xun, the mass-produced slide or motion picture brings with it an inevitable violence if the producer does not share a sense of identity with the represented subject. From the perspective of the propaganda state and its planners, however, identity was a thing to be made actual before it could be asserted or reclaimed. This process of realization, in turn, has generated massive bureaucracies devoted to the management of human opinion through the production and interpellation of commodities—culture industries. To celebrate the “emergence” of new industries, as many now do, is to simply assert that the world economy is becoming increasingly multi-polar. Which may indeed be cause for celebration; as the history of the twentieth century demonstrates, it may just as easily be cause for concern.

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