Hong Kong Film Archive

Exploring Hong Kong Films of the 1930s and 1940s

Part 1: Era and Film History

Cover
Little Tiger (1941)
1. See Wai
2. Wong Man-lei
3. Tso Tat-wah
4. Fung Fung
5. Ng Wui

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Part 1: Era and Film History

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Foreword

Kwok Ching-ling and May Ng

Many Hongkongers who cared about and enjoyed watching local cinema grew up watching re-runs of 1950s and 1960s Hong Kong films on television. For this reason, these films 'entered our homes' and became a constant companion to film lovers who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, before the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) was established in 2001, the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF) had organised thematic film retrospectives on Hong Kong cinema and published retrospective catelogues annually since 1978, setting a crucial foundation for the study and research on Hong Kong cinema history. Despite these efforts, for many years, very few Hong Kong films from the pre-war era were available for viewing. In 1979, when the HKIFF held the retrospective 'Hong Kong Cinema Survey: 1946–1968', only two post-war films from the 1940s were shown: *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (1948) and *Latecomer in the Snow* (1949).

A few years ago, under extremely fortunate circumstances and with the tremendous help of some veterans, the HKFA acquired a batch of film negatives from the 1930s and 1940s with related print materials, opening up an invaluable opportunity to study pre-war Hong Kong cinema in greater depth. Films from the 1930s and 1940s are the 'prequels' to 1950s and 1960s cinema, from which we can investigate historical connections and cinematic evolution in direct, concrete ways. In fact, culture workers from the 1980s had already begun to explore early Chinese cinema, setting a firm foundation for us to study pre-war Hong Kong films. An excellent example is the 1984 ambitious endeavour, 'Early Chinese Cinema: the Era of Exploration' (co-presented by the Chinese Film Association and Hong Kong Arts Centre). Because early Hong Kong films were deeply influenced by the Shanghai film industry, as exemplified by the fact that Hong Kong pioneering film workers aspired to study and hone their craft in Shanghai, we can better understand the heritage and the beginnings of the Hong Kong film industry through comparing the Chinese and Hong Kong film industries at that time.

In early 2021, as part of the celebration of the HKFA's 20th anniversary, we held a symposium entitled 'From Silent to Sound—Hong Kong Films of the 1930s and 1940s'. This book is a collection of essays stemming from that symposium. Since many topics and themes were covered by the essays, the contents are split into two volumes. *Part 1: Era and Film History* includes studies from a historical point of view, elaborating on how the Mainland's film industry, political situation and the raging of war influenced Hong Kong's film industry. It is divided into three sections: 'Pre-War Film-Related Events in the 1930s', 'Film Stories During Wartime' and 'The 1940s and Post-War Demobilisation'. *Part 2: Genres · Regions · Culture* also features three sections: 'Genres and Art', 'Transcending Cultures' and 'Rethinking Research'.

Hong Kong film history in the 1930s and 1940s are full of adventurous happenings. Outstanding examples range from its 'pre-history'—such as its evolution from silent to sound films—to the story of Moon Kwan Man-ching bringing his Hollywood experience back to China and Hong Kong; from the successes and failures of Lo Ming-yau and The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua) in Hong Kong and Shanghai to instances such as southbound Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi)'s transformation into Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company), or Chuk Ching-yin (aka Zhu Qingxian)'s accomplishments in establishing Nanyue Film Company upon landing in Hong Kong from Shanghai. If we step back and take a more macro view, we can see that the entire structure of Hong Kong cinema had undergone a critical metamorphosis after the War of Resistance, making great concessions for the sake of survival, while at the same time turning crises into opportunities. Several interesting and unique factors contributed to this structural change in the Hong Kong cultural field, including the relocation of the epicentre of South China culture to Hong Kong due to the war in the Mainland. What cannot be overlooked were the contemporary documentary films which very closely followed the times, many of which were excellent pieces of the genre in the 1930s. The

situation of the Hong Kong film industry during the Japanese occupation was also a significant part in film history. In the 1920s, Hong Kong's film industry had been far behind that of the Mainland, but their relationship became increasingly close and intertwined until after the war, when Hong Kong could be said to have inherited the mantle and developed robustly on its own thereafter.

Thriving Growth

When we now reflect on Hong Kong films from as far back as the first half of the 20th century, we realise that they really were from generations ago; however, that was the era when Hong Kong films were green and immature, vivacious and new. Those determined to work in the field of film put their hearts and minds into studying it. In the 1920s, Hong Kong only produced very few films. It was not until the mid-1930s that the industry began to thrive. In that era, innovations and breakthroughs followed one after another: films went from silent to sound; Cantonese talkies gained tremendous popularity; Hong Kong later also began to make Mandarin films; technicians strove to improve technical quality; early, rudimentary special effects tested the limits of filmmakers' ingenuity; those studying colour film and cinematography were also rearing to give it a try.

At that time, the Mainland was embroiled in the War of Resistance against Japan. The war was a watershed moment that sharply divided the 'pre-war' and 'post-war' eras, and ideas of 'history and the times' branded themselves into the very fabric of the film industry. Different political camps and ideologies had definite influences on the industry as a whole. In the mid-1930s, Shanghai was the nation's film capital, and Hong Kong filmmakers who wanted to learn the craft, such as Mok Hong-si, Fung Chi-kong and Lo Duen, joined the film industry in Shanghai as apprentices. However, with the approaching war, the situation became unstable. The Shanghai film industry took a big hit and numerous filmmakers from Shanghai came to Hong Kong to ply their trade; at the same time, talent and funding came in from the US. As a result, the Hong Kong film industry began to flourish, improving in leaps and bounds both in quantity and quality.

A 1938 report indicated that the biggest players in the local film market were, in descending order, American films (48%), Cantonese films (30%), British films (10%), Mandarin films (8%, mostly Mainland films) and others (4%). Also, because a large number of Shanghai immigrants resided in Hong Kong at the time, the percentage of Mandarin films was expected to grow (see 'The Current Situation of the Hong Kong Film Market', *Screen Weekly*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 3, 21 September 1938). In fact, the local film industry had always been struggling to survive. When the nation faced a common enemy, patriotic anti-Japanese war films rose to prominence, but their standards were very uneven. Period costume film adaptations became a symbolic projection of the spirit of a people at war.

Since Hong Kong is located in South China, reminders of the similarities in Lingnan culture and identification with the region were often reflected in the films of that era. For example, characters in the films would often travel between Hong Kong and Guangzhou, or mention that they had family or a home in Guangzhou. Films of stories adapted from *muyu shu* (Chinese woodblock singing) always did good business due to the genre's innate popularity among the grassroots population, indicating that southern Chinese folktales had a broad appeal and were well-loved by audiences. Cantonese opera, also rooted in folk culture, was another source of creative inspiration for Cantonese films. In fact, all genres of films—including family melodrama, romance, fantasy, martial arts, detective films and comedies—were at the times steeped in folk traditions as well as Western elements. Hong Kong films absorbed influences from a great variety of sources as they explored and developed their own identity.

In addition, with more and more literati and culture workers joining the film industry, a new facet of the industry emerged. After the war, a great number of filmmakers from Shanghai came to Hong Kong, many of whom were active in both theatre and film, and in turn, they often invited scholars and intellectuals to join the film industry. Undoubtedly, these people brought a more literary tone to their film work, which ultimately helped to raise the standards of Hong Kong cinema.

In post-war Hong Kong, the economy was in tatters as business ground to a halt and the lives of the general population were not yet back on track. Film became an important form of entertainment for the people, constantly fluctuating between the two extremes of providing inexpensive, purely sensory entertainment and releasing long pent-up pressures and anxieties. With acrobatic stage actors from Shanghai's theatre and opera industries coming south, *wuxia* and martial arts films began to thrive. Mandarin and Cantonese sing-song films also became very popular. Occasionally, films would capitalise on the sex appeal of their female stars to attract more audiences. Such phenomena indicate the enthusiasm with which the audience embraced film as a form of instant entertainment. On the other hand, having experienced the horrors of warfare and full of anticipation for a better future, people were still putting up with the frustrations of reality, and were induced to seek a moment of solace in the interplay of light and shadows on the silver screen. This accounts for the emergence of romantic melodramas and realistic films as important film genres.

After the war, film studios that had ceased operations gradually resumed production. At that time, film funding and talent from the Mainland flowed southwards. Film businesses, led by Great China Film Development Co., Ltd. (aka Dazhonghua), targeted the film market in the Mainland and began to produce Mandarin films (with Cantonese-dubbed versions for different regions), turning Hong Kong into a base for producing Mandarin pictures. Meanwhile, since the Mainland government resumed its policy to ban Cantonese film production, even local filmmakers began to make Mandarin films at one point, an example being *Flames of Lust* (1946). However, such Mandarin films were mainly targeted

at the Mainland market, and were mostly set in pre-war or wartime Shanghai, full of nostalgia for the former prosperity of the city, especially those made in the early years after the war. Awkwardly stuck between two different eras and cities, these films understandably lacked appeal in the eyes of local audiences. On the other hand, several left-wing film companies in Hong Kong were established, determined to inject progressive ideologies into their films, creating and promoting a different aspect of Hong Kong's film industry.

Hong Kong films, with their various and diverse production targets, reacted on different levels in the face of war and troubled times. Influenced by left-wing sensibilities, some films such as Lo Duen's *Everlasting Regret* (1948) criticised contemporary social problems, such as people being unable to make ends meet and criminals engaging in corrupt practices. Cantonese films, rooted in local grassroots culture, also exposed social ills such as housing shortage, unemployment, forced prostitution and the concubine system. In addition, with post-war family and social values in crisis, images of women onscreen gradually and subtly began to change in a significant way. Thanks to global movements advocating for women's independence and autonomy, Hong Kong films began to depict in both costume and contemporary dramas '*nüxia*' (heroine) characters who sometimes subverted and challenged traditional female roles. At the same time, images of women being part of the family unit as 'good wives' were greatly strengthened after the war. Such images of the 'good wife/mother' were the polar opposite of the trope of the 'fallen woman'. This contrast was especially pronounced in films immediately after the war; yet in the end, the good always triumphed over the bad, which on some level reflected the pervading conservative ideals in society at the time.

Around that time, Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries Ltd and Great Wall Pictures Corporation were established in Hong Kong. In particular, Yung Hwa spared no expense to purchase technologically advanced camera equipment and built studios with better facilities. These two major companies assembled the best talents from Shanghai both in front of and behind the camera, and made many excellent period costume dramas as well as films set in the contemporary present, all of which helped to raise the standards and quality of Hong Kong films at the time. These efforts also laid a firm foundation for the prosperity of the Hong Kong film industry in the 1950s.

At the same time, many film studios were set up after the war, providing smaller film companies with shooting-for-hirer services. Thus, numerous films based on Cantonese operas and folktales, as well as mass-entertainment sing-song and martial arts films, were made to appeal to the sizeable market for Cantonese films in Southeast Asia and other overseas regions. Meanwhile, the film industry sought inspiration from other media, seeking to cater to general public tastes by adapting from popular serialised novels in newspapers, as well as serialised radio dramas known as 'airwave novels'.

Cross-Regional Ties

The development of Hong Kong's film industry has always been related to the ups and downs of its neighbouring regions. Guangzhou and Hong Kong are both in southern China, so they share the same cultural heritage. Because of the political instability in Guangzhou at the time, conditions were not conducive to the film industry. Only a few companies were set up there in the 1920s, and few films were produced. In the 1930s, the Nationalist government based in Nanjing enacted a policy to suppress the production of Cantonese films. Further, Guangzhou failed to take advantage of the business opportunity to sell their Cantonese films to the vibrant Southeast Asian market so as to become the base for producing Cantonese films, as Hong Kong did. In particular, after Shanghai's Unique Film Productions set up a branch studio in Hong Kong, the pace of Hong Kong's film industry development began to vastly exceed that of Guangzhou. However, Guangzhou can be said to be the cradle of Hong Kong's film and theatre culture. Not only is it home to Cantonese opera, which has always been very closely related to the Hong Kong film industry, but many of the major players of Hong Kong's film and opera industries had also honed their craft in Guangzhou in the 1920s and 1930s, and later proved crucial to Hong Kong's cultural development in the future.

On the other hand, since the beginning of the 20th century, Shanghai had been on the path to urbanisation, and its film industry developed rapidly. Even in the 1920s, in the silent film era, there was already a sizeable film industry where actors and production staff from all over China gathered, including numerous Cantonese filmmakers. In the early 1930s, with the advent of sound films, and the rise of the Southeast Asian market for Cantonese films, the roles of Guangzhou and Hong Kong filmmakers became increasingly important. But there were also a lot of directors from Shanghai who made Cantonese films. Exchange and collaboration between filmmakers from Shanghai and Hong Kong became frequent and continuous both before and after the war, greatly adding to the richness of Hong Kong film culture.

Hong Kong is where the East and the West converge; and has always been learning from Western culture. As early as the 1920s, Cantonese operas had been inspired by American silent films. With the rise of Cantonese films, filmmakers just as aggressively borrowed from Hollywood films—sometimes adopting their plotlines, sometimes imitating the onscreen images of Hollywood stars. Interestingly, some films adapted Cantonese operas that had originally been adapted from American films, injecting contemporary elements before putting them on the silver screen again. With Cantonese opera masters interpreting lead characters from Western stories, these films told stories that seemed old and yet new at the same time. In addition to motion pictures, Hong Kong films also drew inspiration from Western literature. Not only British and American works, but also French and Russian satires were often adapted into Hong Kong films. An example is Leo Tolstoy's

Resurrection, which was adapted in 1948 and 1949 into a Cantonese and a Mandarin film respectively, each displaying distinct cultural and artistic visions.

Hong Kong has always been a melting pot of different cultures. From Eastern and Western cultures to northern and southern accents, as well as the local customs of various Southeast Asian regions—all these were absorbed by Hong Kong filmmakers, who in turn drew nourishment and inspiration from such elements. In the first decade or so after sound films first appeared in Hong Kong, in spite of the horrors of war, the variety of Hong Kong film genres were evenly matched with foreign films. Under comparatively deficient filming conditions, they nevertheless managed to accomplish diverse developments. In addition to imitating the foreign genre films, pre- and post-war Hong Kong filmmakers were very skilled at combining the characteristics of different genres, mixing them up and adding their own touches. That was how pre-war period costume sing-song films adapted from folktales, or even horror and supernatural films, could carry elements that instilled patriotic awareness in audiences, encouraging them to fight the enemy and defend the nation. After the war, southern fists and northern kicks were thrown into the mix, adding a breath of fresh air to different genres, influencing films for years to come.

Film technology is constantly being reformed. It should be mentioned that before the widescreen format became prevalent, the universal standard aspect ratio in the 1930s and 1940s was 1.33: 1 (or 1.37: 1), regarded as the ideal ratio most appropriate for human sight. In the early years, film cameras were extraordinarily heavy. Adjusting the lens was a major operation, especially in resource-strapped productions, where only limited adjustments would be made. When we watch Hong Kong films of this era, most of them undoubtedly seem crudely made, and some of the more rudimentary techniques have fallen by the wayside. But through them, we can observe some very interesting experiments and characteristics. The depth of field created by film set design could of course be strengthened to show greater depth and more complex layering details. In this 4:3, almost square aspect ratio, we would sometimes still see filmmakers making use of the top part of the screen. For example, the almost ubiquitous staircase in any mansion is often very useful in this respect, allowing actors to move up or down. In *Portraits of Four Beauties* (1948), the theatre's backstage set has a staircase in the back. The troupe members running up and down the stairs create a point of interest in the background, despite the narrow space available in such a crowded frame. In *The Haunted House* (1949), when the female lead character opens the curtains in her room, she can, quite amazingly, take a step and climb onto an artificial mountain at the back of the house. As she moves from the top of the screen to the bottom, she lightly steps into the garden and leaves the premises. Wearing a cape and venturing out at night, the uncanny interiors of this strange, closed-off mansion is enhanced by the character's mysterious gestures.

Unearthing of the Past; Insights for the Future

At the start of the 20th century, as a mass medium with wide circulation means, film was highly influential in areas of society, politics, culture, art, and education, on top of its inherent entertainment and commercial value. It thus rose to prominence very quickly. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, China went through a period of national reconstruction. As the old was being replaced by the new, educating the population was also seen as a foremost priority. When the Japanese invaded China, it became an imminent task to advocate for a united front against the Japanese. It became clear that each theatrical performance could only reach a maximum of 1,000 or so audience members, and the number of theatrical performances was limited. On the other hand, many copies of the same film could be printed and projected at numerous locations at the same time. The number of audience members that could be reached thus increased exponentially. The film industry therefore became a sphere of influence for which every party fought. Apart from political players bidding for power, patriots too desperately wanted to use films to help revitalise the nation, granting cinema the timely mission of educating the general public. Cinema also offered audiences solace and comfort as they immersed themselves in various powerful, heart-warming works.

The development of Hong Kong's sound films in the 1930s and 1940s can be said to have inherited the essence of the pre-war Shanghai film industry in its heyday while absorbing elements from various regions and cultures. Although it gathered the best of different refined and popular cultures, its path of development was far from smooth. Irrespective of Cantonese or Mandarin films, each had to make some kind of compromise in order to cater to market demands and conform to the limitations of the times. Yet there were quite a few film industry entrepreneurs and creators who worked hard to find a balance between commercialism and didacticism. As they struggled forth, their efforts bore bounteous fruits for Hong Kong's film culture and laid a strong foundation for the prosperity of the industry in the 1950s. For example, studio productions experienced rapid development after the war. The industry made great strides forward in the 1950s and 1960s, pushing Hong Kong films to the forefront of Southeast Asia. Post-war left-wing films experimented with ways of using films to soothe the pains of history, which paved the way for more innovative and outstanding works in the 1950s. These realist pictures from the early post-war period also foreshadowed the humanism of the Union Film Enterprise Ltd (established in 1952) and would have a profound influence on Hong Kong cinema in the coming years. Other mainstream genres such as *wuxia*, martial arts and even sing-song films also began to take shape during the 1930s and 1940s.

Although archival material and documents on film titles from 1930s and 1940s are sorely lacking, research on this project was made possible thanks to the efforts of those before us who had collected and organised the data in the previous century. With the ease

and convenience of the internet and support from various official and academic institutions around the globe, many major online databases have been made accessible over the past decade. The availability of digital files of large amounts of old newspapers and periodicals has made research work much faster than before. Cross-regional film research is now much more convenient, which is good news. The recent rediscovery of copies of 1930s and 1940s film titles overseas was a great encouragement to us, and has provided immense practical convenience to our research on early Hong Kong films.

We are deeply grateful to all the scholars and researchers who have participated in this project from the symposium to the publication of this monograph. Their theses, rich in content, make up this collection of essays, which is the first on the subject of Hong Kong films of the 1930s and 1940s published by the HKFA, a significant milestone in this area of research. Certainly, many aspects of the era await further study. It is our hope that in the future, both seasoned scholars as well as young researchers, local and overseas, will continue to study the development of Hong Kong films, discover more angles of research and delve more deeply into a wider range of topics. [Translated by Roberta Chin]

Editor's note: English names mentioned in this book (both Part 1 and Part 2), including personalities, companies, organisations and publications, are translated/transliterated unless source materials with trustworthy translations are located, in which case the translated names or titles of the source materials will be used.

Pre-War Film-Related Events in the 1930s

‘Silent Films or Talkies?’

On the Importation, Production and Reception of Sound Films in China in the 1930s

Ching May-bo, Ye Ruihong

In the spring of 1931, Mr Yuen Jim-fan, who was in charge of Hong Kong’s Tai Ping Theatre at the time, made this entry in his diary as he looked towards the future of the theatre:

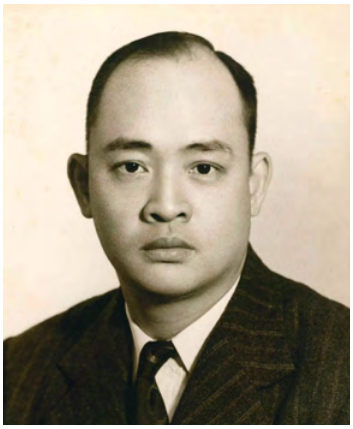
> I arrived at Tai Ping Theatre around 11 o’clock to talk about how new theatres would operate in the future and discuss about what type of films we were going to show: silent films or talkies? I am in full support of silent films. In time, this theatre may be the only place where silent films will be screened in all of Hong Kong. And for those savvy aficionados, they will have to come here in order to enjoy this form of entertainment.[1]

It seemed that Yuen was rather unimpressed with the prospects of ‘talkies’, or sound films, expressing his ‘full support of silent films’. He even imagined that Tai Ping Theatre might become the only cinema in Hong Kong to screen silent films in the future, where it would be the only place audiences could come to ‘enjoy this form of entertainment’. This passage is part of a private diary entry and was not intended for others’ consumption. As such, Yuen did not intend to make any enlightening remarks on the debate, but rather expressed a sincere belief that only silent films could bring viewing pleasure to the audience.

In fact, there were many people who held this view at the time. In the early days when sound films were still being developed and introduced into China, many were not optimistic about this nascent format. Some rejected the value of talkies based on what they perceived as the vital essence and aesthetics of cinema, but there were others who envisaged a bright future for sound films. Investors and producers based in Shanghai and Hong Kong also went back and forth on the subject for a while. Of course, history tells us that talkies did eventually win out over silent films, which have since faded into obscurity. The choice of ‘sound over silent’ had a profound impact on the development of films and actors, maybe even on the fate of Cantonese films as a whole. The definition of film as an art form also underwent an irreversible transformation.

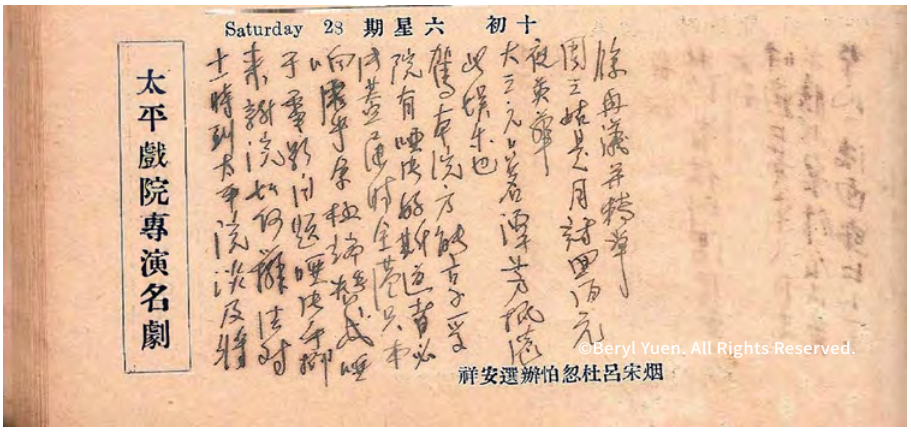
1. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 28 March 1931 (in Chinese). The author of this article, Ching May-bo, has been commissioned by Ms Beryl Yuen, Mr Yuen’s daughter, to compile a selection of Mr Yuen’s diary, which was published in 2022. The quotations in this article have been approved by Ms Yuen.

Diary of Mr Yuen Jim-fan



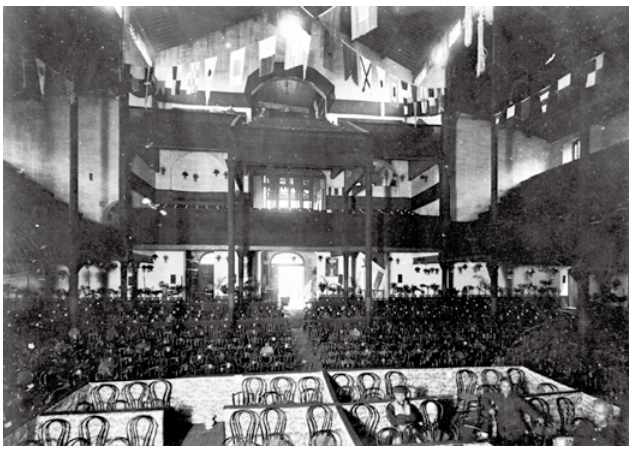
The second-generation owner of Tai Ping Theatre, Mr Yuen Jim-fan
From the collection of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum
Donated by Ms Beryl Yuen

Cover of Mr Yuen Jim-fan's diary



Entry in Mr Yuen Jim-fan's diary dated 28 March 1931

Tai Ping Theatre, before and after renovations



The interior of Tai Ping Theatre before renovations (1904–1931), a two-storey structure
Image courtesy of Public Records Office of Government Records Service

Tai Ping Theatre after renovations in 1932, a three-storey building (Photo taken in 1950)
From the collection of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum
Donated by Ms Beryl Yuen

This article uses Yuen's comment as a starting point, and then, through collating information from various sources, a picture begins to emerge of people's views on the appearance of sound films and their development in China between the 1920s and 1930s. It also briefly touches on reactions towards such developments from both Shanghai and Hong Kong film industries.

Visual Aesthetics of the Silent Film Era

Yuen's concerns were not entirely unfounded. First of all, sound films posed significant costs and technical considerations, but a more fundamental influence might be the aesthetical perception of the silent film era. Since Warner Bros. launched the sound film *Don Juan* in 1926, it had been a bumpy road for promoters and advocates of talking pictures around the world, including China.[2] In 1927, Warner Bros.' sound film *The Jazz Singer* was a smash hit with impressive box-office performance, which ignited other Hollywood giants' appetites for investing in talkies. With the improvement of synchronised sound technology, the production of sound films in the US increased steadily in 1929.[3] At that time, American films had a huge share of the box office in China,[4] and with sound films advancing by leaps and bounds in the US, its increasing influence was bound to extend to China. Despite most foreign sound films screened in China during 1929 being criticised for their lack of dialogue and high ticket prices,[5] the trend continued to gain momentum; by September that year, first-run theatres of Shanghai such as Grand Theatre, Capitol Theatre and Carlton Theatre all in turn began screening sound films. Odeon Theatre soon followed in December. Between 1929 and 1930, theatres in other major cities such as Beijing and Tianjin upgraded their facilities to screen sound films.[6] The theatres in Hong Kong and Guangzhou also began to show sound films around 1930.[7]

Since theatres across various Chinese cities from Shanghai to Guangzhou and Hong Kong had successively transitioned to screening sound films between 1929 and 1930, why then did Yuen still remain 'in full support of silent films' in early 1931 and why did he regard it as an enjoyable form of entertainment? In light of the discussions at the time, Yuen's considerations were likely

2. Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai & Xing Zuwen (eds), *Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi* (*A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*), Vol 1, Beijing: China Film Press, 1963, pp 156-157; Gu Jianchen, 'History of Chinese Film Development' in *The Cinema-tographic Year Book of China*, National Educational Cinematographic Society of China Yearbook Editorial Committee (ed), National Educational Cinematographic Society of China, 1934, p 248; *Shanghai Dianying Zhi* (*Shanghai Film Chronicle*), Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1999, p 649 (all in Chinese).
3. See Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926–1931*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997; Patrick Robertson, *Film Facts*, New York: Billboard Books, 2001; and other discussions.
4. According to surveys done at the time, 80% of the films released in China in 1929 were American films. See 'Current Situation of Film Industries Around the World: There are 200 Film Theatres in China, and Eight out of Ten Films Shown are American Productions', *Xinguang Xun Kan* (*New Light Journal*), Fujian, No 14, 11 May 1929, p 62 (in Chinese).
5. Zheng Yimei, 'Listening to Sound Films', *The Liengyi's Tri-Monthly*, Shanghai, No 114, 21 May 1929, p 2 (in Chinese).
6. Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai & Xing Zuwen (eds), note 2, pp 157-158.
7. 'Majestic Theatre Switches to Screen Sound Films', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*), 2 October 1930; P. Tao, 'Talkies in Canton', *Silverland*, Shanghai, Vol 4, No 31, April 1931, p 105 (both in Chinese).

not only about cost, technology or effects, but also how industry insiders and film lovers from the silent film era defined the art of cinema at the time.

In the early 1920s, the popular opinion was that sound had nothing to do with film as an art form. Film reviews focused mostly on visual elements, such as a director's camera movement and the facial expressions of the performers. One commentator argued:

> The principle of cinema is not based on sound. At any rate, it all comes from the performance. As long as the performance is superb, it suffices for the audience to understand the plot; whatever cannot be performed will be explained by inserted texts. Sound is not needed.[8]

Even with the advent of synchronised sound in films, people still believed that the essence of a film laid in its use of pictures and imagery, and the rest were but secondary elements. Another author stated:

> Because film is a silent performance, much like the performative nature of colours in paintings and illustrations, it is also a visual art…. The viewer's vision is focused on the performances of different characters. He/She should understand the plot, intrigues and emotions in the story through what is rendered directly onscreen.[9]

There were also those who thought that acting scenes with dialogues were worthless. Screenwriter and film theorist Huang Chia-mo wrote:

> With sound films, titles for the dialogue have been removed, so that during a dialogue exchange we are not only hearing the dialogue being said, but additionally, we are watching the scene in front of our eyes. I don't believe that such performances are worth watching. Normally during a conversation, the shot inevitably shifts to a close-up, but what is the sense of watching an actor's lips move? Wouldn't it then be shifting the audience's attention from seeing with their eyes to hearing with their ears?[10]

The arrival of sound films also accentuated the problem of language barriers. At the time, one of the main concerns from Chinese film critics and filmmakers about talking pictures was that it would be difficult for Chinese audiences to understand foreign language films:

> When watching foreign films, without Chinese translated titles on the screen already constitutes a problem for many. It would be hard enough to listen to the foreign words being spoken, let alone word recordings that are conveyed mechanically? The result would be utterly unfathomable. If we ask this question in China: 'Do you need sound in films?' I'm afraid 90% of audiences would object![11]

8. 'Entertainment Supplement: The Value of Sound Films', *Xi Zazhi*, Shanghai, Trial Issue, April 1922, p 63 (in Chinese).
9. Shang Yuan, 'Are Sound Films Artistically Valuable', *Shun Pao* (Local Supplement), Shanghai, 2 March 1927 (in Chinese).
10. Huang Chia-mo, 'On Sound Films', *Film Monthly*, Shanghai, No 9, February 1929, pp 1-2 (in Chinese). Separate page numbers are used for each article in this periodical.
11. Gu Yong, 'A Review of Sound Films (Cont'd)', *The Film Magazine*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 3, 15 September 1929, p 71 (in Chinese).

The Laconic Aesthetics of Film 'Titles' [12]

For supporters of silent films, the 'titles' for explaining story background and expressing the content of conversations also held artistic value intrinsically. One critic suggested:

> Film titles are to films what annotations are to books. Therefore, film titles that are not clear and easy to understand, or that fail to help the audience relate better to the story, should be omitted. Titles should be direct rather than obscure, simple rather than complex. Obscurity hampers accessibility, and excessiveness arouses annoyance. This much should be obvious.[13]

For people of that era, the writing of film titles was very challenging work. In her memoirs, Butterfly Wu mentioned the 'Best Writing (Title Writing)' award established at the first Oscars: 'It was still in the silent film era. And the quality of film titles directly affected the screening impact of a film.'[14] One of the main criticisms of domestic films at the time was in fact about their titles.[15] We might ask: since the quality of film title writing was unreliable, wouldn't sound films help solve the problem? However, from the perspective of those concerned, the problem should be solved with the writing itself. The introduction of sound was considered as nothing more than the reading out loud of the film titles and synopses, an act which was not seen as requiring much skill. This commentator argued:

> All of these issues are essentially the result of film as an immature art form. However, some might see the 'inability to maintain visual focus of its audience' as a failure of the medium itself. When viewers strain their eyes to read the details of film titles and synopses, they exhaust their mental faculties, thereby inducing the desire to use hearing as a sensory support for their eyes, so that the two senses together could better decipher the meaning of the film. Scientists naturally seized upon such a good opportunity to invent the 'sound film'.[16]

The paragraph above was obviously meant to satirise the role of sound in films.

The 'Tranquil Beauty' and 'Enjoyment of Sound' in Silent Films

Many researchers have pointed out that screenings during the silent film era were never silent. In most Chinese theatres, there were usually two kinds of sound, namely live music and narration. Shanghai's leading high-end first-run cinemas, such as Carlton Theatre and Odeon Theatre, would

12. In the 1920s, the term 'subtitles' referred mainly to film 'titles' in the context of a silent film, i.e. a shot presented in white lettering on a black background, as opposed to what we would call today 'subtitles', which are printed on the bottom of the screen. In fact, the English prefix *sub* itself means 'below or in a lower position'. By the 1930s, the Chinese word for 'subtitles' (*zimu*) was gradually used to refer to actual subtitles, and became commonplace in the 1940s.
13. Shuijing Erlang, 'Film Trivia', *Silver Light*, No 3, 1 February 1927, later reprinted in Jiang Yasha, Jing Li & Chen Zhanqi (eds), *Minguo Huabao Huibian: Gangyue Juan* (*Compilation of Republic of China Pictorial: Hong Kong and Guangdong Volumes*), Vol 1, Beijing: China National Microfilming Center For Library Resources, 2007, p 177 (in Chinese).
14. Butterfly Wu (dictated) & Liu Huiqin (collated), *Hu Die Huiyilu* (*Butterfly Wu: A Memoir*), Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1988, p 51 (in Chinese).
15. Jue Min, 'Light—Subtitles', *Silver Light*, No 1, 25 November 1926, same as note 13, p 14.
16. See note 9.

hire large ensembles to provide live orchestral music accompaniment for their films. Most of them were composed of Western musicians that were showcased in advertisements. In lower-end cinemas, 'except for third-class theatres that had no music, the rest of the first- and second-class theatres all had live music accompaniment.'[17] Live performance within theatres was an important draw card for attracting audiences. Some people would 'watch' a film for the sake of listening to the live music:

> I have a friend who doesn't know much English, but he likes watching foreign films. He said that it was not so much about watching a film as listening to the music. Because the music in foreign film theatres is just too beautiful and melodious.[18]

It was thought at the time that if properly matched, a silent film with the right live music performance could bring out the best in each other:

> The relationship between film and music appears to be closely intertwined. Every action crossing the screen, every sorrow and every joy has the ability to stir up something inside when set to a sweeping musical score, and the whole cinematic experience becomes more riveting and engaging. Even with a heart of iron, one would inevitably be moved by the scenes passing across the screen, rejoice with them, mourn with them, forget about one's own life struggles and be away from all the things that vex and exasperate us. This is the utmost enjoyment one can achieve through cinema.[19]

Thus, for some critics, the true crime that sound films were committing was destroying this beautiful synergy of music and imagery within the theatre:

> Films began as a silent art form, accompanied by melodic scores performed live (at the theatre), to thrill and delight its audience. It has become an extraordinary kind of experience, which has truly come into its own. To corrupt its silent form with all sorts of unnecessary sounds and effects, as well as the American language, which remains largely obscure and despised by many. I find it hard to believe that these ideas would have any kind of permanence.[20]

Huang Chia-mo also made this observation:

> From what I have observed personally, despite the meticulous research and development by scientists in technologies such as phonographs, telephones, radiotelephony and broadcasting, etc., what is transmitted often falls short of how the original sounds.
>
> The audio in sound films we have today is only audible when filmed close-up, but when the source is further away, the volume is reduced, or becomes completely silent…. Doesn't that just render the theatre lonely and vacuous? Isn't this inferior to playing beautiful music live within the theatre?

17. For more on this subject, see Zhang Wei & Yan Jieqiong, '"Dubbing" and "Scores" in Era of Silent Films', *New Films*, Shanghai, No 2, 2010, pp 35-43 (in Chinese).
18. Shen Zhesheng, 'Horse is Touched by Music', *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 15 April 1929 (in Chinese).
19. Xu Mingshi, 'Film Theatre and Music', *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 25 February 1929 (in Chinese).
20. Zhu Xin, 'Sound Films Will Eventually Fail', *The Pei-yang Pictorial News*, Tianjin, 20 November 1930, p 2, later reprinted in Zhang Yiwei, 'Sound and Modernity: The Issue of Chinese Theatre Sound History During the Period of Transition from Silent to Sound Films', *Wenyi Yanjiu* (*Literature and Art Studies*), Beijing, No 5, 2010, p 94 (in Chinese).

> We go to the cinema for pleasure, to enjoy the art, the tranquility and the exquisite music. Sound films as they are now have destroyed both the tranquility and the music, and have replaced them with all sorts of artificial mechanical sounds.[21]

From our perspective today, this pursuit of 'tranquil beauty' in silent films alongside the experience of 'live music' performance may appear a bit contradictory. And if the quality of narrators had been inferior in second-class theatres, it would have destroyed the inherent tranquil beauty of silent films. Nonetheless, up till 1934, there were those who still asserted that 'silent films hold a kind of tranquil beauty that cannot be found in sound films.'[22]

Silent Films: Implied Reality over Re-Enactment of Reality

In addition to valuing visual and 'auditory' sensory experiences, people at the time also evaluated silent films through an aesthetic or philosophical lens. Aficionados of the silent film era believed that the relationship between film and reality rested on its implied truth rather than a re-enactment of reality. In 1930, the Commercial Press published an abridged Chinese translation of *The Study about Movie Art* by Austin Celestin Lescarboura and Kawazoe Toshimoto, which had been edited and translated by C. W. Cheng. Cheng's translation resembled the translation works of Yan Fu and Lin Shu in the late Qing period and beginning of the Republic of China, in which personal opinions were added into the text.[23] A chapter in the book that dealt with the distinction between film and theatrical play, articulated the way films expressed implied reality in the eyes of some film critics:

> The essence of art is never about the literal recreations of real life, but rather about implied reality. Similarity to or grounding in truth is what lies at the heart of artistic expression. Whether in late impressionism or the Southern School, paintings are not objective reproductions of reality; rather they strive to hint at some universal truth filtered through the heart and soul of the artist. Could we not imagine within a monochrome Southern painting the emerald mountains, aquamarine waters and scarlet flowers? The cinematic experience is the same as a Southern painting in this respect. It is an art where all colours can be depicted in black and white…
>
> As for sound, our ability to fill that in with our imagination is far stronger than even colours, because all sounds are inextricably tied to their source, be it an action or movement: children crying, wheels of a vehicle passing or the explosive sound of artilleries firing—could we not already experience the plethora of sounds passing across the screen?[24]

21. See note 10, pp 3-4.
22. Yun Xue, 'From the Transformation of Reinhardt to the Development of Sound Films', *Dianying Shijie* (*The Moving Image World*), Shanghai, No 3, 1 November 1934, p 11 (in Chinese).
23. For related views, see Li Suyuan, *Zhongguo Xiandai Dianying Lilun Shi* (*A History of Modern Chinese Film Theory*), Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2005, pp 113-114 (in Chinese).
24. C. W. Cheng (trans), *The Study About Movie Art*, Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1930 (Preface in 1925), p 6 (in Chinese). In this context, '*nanhua*' refers to the literati paintings of the Southern School with a strong emphasis on free brush strokes, as opposed to the Northern School, which favoured more formal brushwork.

However, on the issue of 'realism', some commentators asserted that sound films were superior to silent films. As early as 1925, director Cheng Bugao commented:

> Current motion pictures have no sound, such that audiences are relegated to enjoy the experience only with their eyes. As films cannot produce the native sounds associated with what is on screen, the plot outline and dialogues must be translated into words (titles or synopses), sometimes even using graphics to signify themes and ideas, a kind of last resort to compensate. It is a pity that the inventor of film could not resolve this despite their best efforts. Films capture the zeitgeist of our times, as such should be an earnest and authentic reflection of society, and sound is also an integral element of that…[25]

As the technology of sound films was perfected and problems such as synchronisation and sound quality were improved, the pursuit of 'realism' in audiovisual experiences was gradually realised. In 1931, *Movie Weekly* published an article entitled '"Talking Pictures" as the Perfect Amalgamation of the Arts', in which the author asserted:

> Recently, the sound film has become very popular. It has assimilated different art forms and melded all the mediums together into a cohesive whole. It is superior to theatrical plays and musicals, in that it can be screened for audiences in different places simultaneously. This powerful ability to disseminate art is what live theatre and musical performances are incapable of. It is for this reason the author proclaims 'talking pictures' as the perfect amalgamation of the arts. What are your thoughts, dear readers?[26]

Whether they were against or in favour of talking pictures, it is worth noting that in the late 1920s, most people believed that silent films would not die out with the rise of sound films because they saw the two as distinctly different in nature. Zhou Jianyun, who looked askance at talking pictures, maintained:

> When the sound film was born, audiences were drawn to it by curiosity. Of course, this will prevail for a while. However, over time, that alone will not be enough to maintain strong interest, as it will fail to create an exceptional experience. Although sound films can lead the way in a different direction, the silent films will continue to forge ahead. The two shall part ways, but exist independently.[27]

Those who supported sound films also believed that the two could coexist. One supporter suggested:

> Sound films and silent films are fundamentally different from the standpoint of art. They each go their own way, and in fact does not contradict each other…. We cannot be sure that silent films would naturally be superseded by the current fad, nor can we say that talking pictures will fail to develop because of their narrow scope.[28]

25. Cheng Bugao, 'Latest Invention: The Way of Producing Talking Pictures', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Chunqiu*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 1, 1 March 1925, pp 10-11 (in Chinese).
26. Fu Yao, '"Talking Pictures" as the Perfect Amalgamation of the Arts', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 38, 1931, pp 26-27 (in Chinese).
27. Zhou Jianyun, 'My Views on Sound Films', *Film Monthly*, Shanghai, No 8, 5 December 1928, p 4 (in Chinese).
28. Cong Rui, 'The Future of Sound Films', *The Film Magazine*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 3, 15 September 1929, p 69 (in Chinese).

In 1931, Mr Yuen Jim-fan probably stood at the contentious crossroads between 'silent or sound films' and made a stand for his continued faith and belief in silent films by choosing one over the other. However, as we will see below, in the following year, Yuen would reverse his stance in support of sound films.

The 'Sound' of Chinese Sound Films: Mandarin and/or Cantonese?

On the one hand, the arrival of sound films made waves in the Chinese cinema industry; on the other hand, it also paved the way for the birth of a domestic market for sound films. It is precisely because of the alienating experience of foreign 'sounds' in imported films, that the desire arose for domestically produced sound films among local audiences. Film critic Wu Chengda said quoting the author's preface of the book titled *How to Understand Talkies*:

> Why do so many people prefer to watch Chinese films? In the past, films only had 'sights', but no 'sounds', so the audience could only 'watch' but not 'listen'. However, with the emergence of talking pictures, this is no longer the case. For local audiences, it is far more attractive to watch Chinese films for the ticket price: 25 cents for 'sights' and 25 cents for 'sounds'. So for a 50-cent ticket, you can both see and hear the full experience. Money is well-spent compared to the higher one-dollar ticket price to watch a foreign film, where you can see and listen but not understand much at all. For the average moviegoer, watching a foreign film feels as if they are throwing away half the ticket price into the Huangpu River for nothing.[29]

The advent of sound films in China coincided with the time when the Nationalist government and many educators advocated the full promotion of Mandarin and *baihuawen* (written vernacular Chinese). People thought film titles should be written in Mandarin. However, during the era of silent filmmaking, what the actors said was of little importance. On this subject, director Cheng Bugao observed: 'There's no sound anyway, so it doesn't matter which dialect is being spoken'. He also vividly described the process of filming dialogues without sound at the time:

> Speaking in dialects is not a problem, the main thing is the expression while speaking. One can speak in any dialect…. Whichever dialect one deems natural and fluent for the actor to emote for the camera is adopted. When Northerners are forced to speak Cantonese or vice versa, the speaking is often awkward and uneven. It actually hinders the performance and damages the overall quality of the film. As long as the performance is good, it doesn't matter which dialect is being spoken.[30]

At that time, filmmakers active in Shanghai came from all over China, many of whom were Cantonese from the Guangdong Province. With the advent of talking pictures, the ability to speak and understand Mandarin became a critical challenge. Amongst them, starlet Butterfly Wu's transition was probably one of the most favourable. She mentioned the experience in her memoirs:

29. Chengda, 'Commentary: *How to Understand Talkies*', *The Chin-Chin Screen*, Shanghai, 4th Year, No 16, 18 July 1939, p 3 (in Chinese).
30. Chen Bugao, *Yingtan Yijiu* (*Reminiscences of the Film Circles*), Beijing: China Film Press, 1983, pp 111-112 (in Chinese).

> Most film actors of that period were Cantonese, such as Zhang Zhiyun and Ruan Lingyu, so everyone had to study Mandarin diligently and hire experts to coach them. I was ahead in this aspect, because as a child I travelled a lot with my father on the Peking-Mukden Railway. Although I returned to and lived in Guangdong afterwards, I never forgot the northern dialects I learnt along the way when I was young. When I first moved back to Shanghai, apart from speaking Pekingese and Cantonese fluently, I was not yet great with any other languages. Moreover, the mother of my father's concubine, whom I called 'grandma', had been living with us for many years. She originated from a Manchurian bannerman family in Beijing, so our family spoke both dialects at the same time, much like English and French are both the official languages for Canada. Therefore, when silent films gave way to sound, my Mandarin offered a unique advantage, and I transitioned rather smoothly to the sound film era.
>
> The ups and downs of life could sometimes be very strange. I never expected my return to films in the 1940s to be in Hong Kong. At that time, only Cantonese films were shown throughout Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, where my native Cantonese would become handy again.[31]

Following on from the above biographical account, Wu then shared her memories of starring in *The Singing Peony*, one of China's earliest sound films recorded with a wax cylinder phonograph. The film was co-produced by Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing) and EMI Records and was released in Shanghai's Strand Theatre in March 1931 to a great deal of excitement everywhere. However, the film could only be defined as a 'semi-talking picture'. And the subpar Mandarin spoken by individual actors was also criticised by the public. Regarding the general standard of Mandarin spoken in sound films at the time, some viewers observed that 'the pronunciation itself was unclear, inconsistent or inaccurate, and some actors even mixed in local Shanghainese words unceremoniously'.[32] There were even those who suggested that 'due to the lack of great Mandarin-speaking talents, it might be better to shoot films in local dialects, whether in Cantonese or Shanghainese. Then at least the result would be fully understandable for local audiences.'[33]

The Singing Peony (1931), one of China's earliest sound films recorded with a wax cylinder phonograph, starring Butterfly Wu

31. See note 14, pp 53-54.
32. Huo Shan, 'The Flaws of Sound Films', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 51, 2 January 1932, p 5 (in Chinese).
33. 'Speak Out Your Thoughts: Sound Films and Dialects', *Dianying Shijie* (*The Moving Image World*), Shanghai, No 1, 1 September 1934, p 13 (in Chinese).

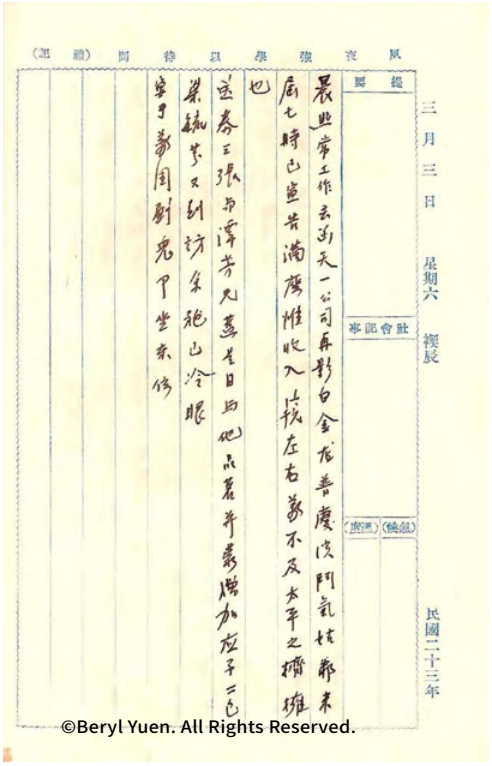
An advertisement for *Two Daughters of the Northeast*, dubbing the film as the 'first real Cantonese talky' (*The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 3 November 1932)

In fact, as early as 1932, Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi) had spotted the huge potential of the Cantonese film market across Guangdong Province, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia.[34] As a result, it produced the films *Two Daughters of the Northeast* (aka *Two Orphans*, 1932) and *A Younger Actress* (1932) with screenings in both Mandarin and Cantonese. They were colloquially called 'synchronised' films, because speaking-doubles performed dialogues in Cantonese in synch with the film in post-production. The production had originally casted Lee Lai-lin, who spoke Cantonese, as the heroine for the Cantonese version of *Two Daughters of the Northeast*. However, the film only contained dialogues in a small number of scenes and many silent clips had already been filmed with a different actress, Lu Lixia, who spoke only Mandarin for the Mandarin version. In order to cut costs, the solution was to use a speaking-double to create a 'synchronised' Cantonese version, which is equivalent to today's practice of 'dubbing'. Although there were eight or nine actors in the film's cast, its voice performances actually came from only four of the cast members who could speak Cantonese.[35] The production of *A Younger Actress* was done in a similar fashion.[36]

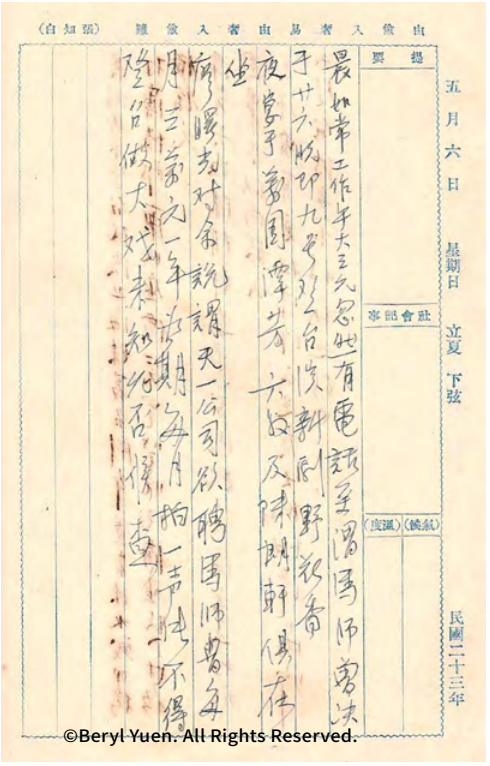
When *Two Daughters of the Northeast* was released in November 1932 in Hong Kong to an all Cantonese-speaking audience, it was advertised as follows:

> *Two Daughters of the Northeast* is a patriotic melodrama entirely in Cantonese and partial colour.... With many famous songs composed by distinguished artists including Li Jinhui, its music is sweeping and impassioned, such as 'Sorrow on the Frontier' and 'Frosty Sky at Daybreak' that will arouse your spirit and excite you. Every Cantonese person should watch this cinematic ode to the glory of our region. The film has arrived in Hong Kong and will be playing simulatneously at the Oriental and Tai Ping Theatres from the 3rd (Thursday). Ticket reservations are now open.[37]

34. There was also a Cantonese film market in the era of silent films. According to certain texts from 1936 reminiscing silent film screenings in Shanghai, 'New Helen Theatre had a special feature: there was someone explaining the story during screening, first in Cantonese, followed by Mandarin.' See Fan Jibing, 'Assorted Experiences of Film Viewing', *Modern Cinema*, Shanghai, No 12, 25 December 1936, p 1 (in Chinese).
35. Maige Erfeng, 'Guangdong Production *Two Daughters of the Northeast*—a Domestic Synchronised Film—Celebrates its Success!', *The Ladies' Life Pictorial*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 27, 4 September 1932, p 712 (in Chinese).
36. Maige Erfeng, 'Domestic Synchronised Films Coming One After Another', *The Ladies' Life Pictorial*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 30, 13 September 1932, pp 796-797 (in Chinese).
37. 'Film Updates of Oriental and Tai Ping Theatres', *Chinese Mail*, 1 November 1932 (in Chinese).



Entry in Mr Yuen Jim-fan's diary dated 3 March 1934



Entry in Mr Yuen Jim-fan's diary dated 6 May 1934

The Cantonese version of *Two Daughters of the Northeast* proved to be more lucrative for the studio than the Mandarin version. In 1932, after the boom for sound films had cooled off a little, the rights for an average Mandarin-language talky was $10,000 at the most,[38] but rights in Guangdong for the Cantonese version of *Two Daughters of the Northeast* apparently sold for $13,000.[39] It could be said that these two 'synchronised' productions were touchstones for the slate of Cantonese sound films soon to follow, amongst them *Blossom Time* (1933) and *The White Gold Dragon* (aka *The Platinum Dragon*, 1933).

The above advertisement that ran in the *Chinese Mail* for *Two Daughters of the Northeast* confirms that by the end of 1932, Tai Ping Theatre was already showing sound films. According to the cinema's own records, scholar Joey Wong verified that the theatre had been converted from two to three floors in August 1932, and the seating capacity was increased to 1,726 with the addition of a sound projector.[40] In other words, Mr Yuen Jim-fan was able to take stock of the situation and no longer struggled with the idea of whether silent films or talkies would prevail. From diary entries between 1933 and 1934, it was clear that Yuen had already tasted the success of talking pictures and was confident of his investment in their screenings. On 1 March 1934, Yuen noted in his diary:

38. Xingxiu, 'An Overview of Film Productions in China Tickets Sales of Fantasy, Martial Arts and Romance Films are Declining The Future of Sound Films is Worrying', *Camera News*, Shanghai, No 145, 1932 (in Chinese).
39. See note 36, p 796.
40. Joey Wong, 'Family Businesses and Theatres in Hong Kong: The Story of Yuen Hang-kiu and His Family (1930s to early 1950s)' in *A Study of the Tai Ping Theatre Collection*, Yung Sai-shing (ed), Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2015, p 250 (in Chinese).

> Today's screenings of *The White Gold Dragon* were jam-packed. We must continue to show this film, in order to make the most of its favourable box office for our theatre's revenue. The film's earnings over four sessions came to about $1,400, which is unprecedented.[41]

Two days later he wrote:

> Worked as usual in the morning, sent correspondence to Unique Film Productions, then screened *The White Gold Dragon* again. Astor Theatre was showing *The Witty Patriarch*, with sessions sold-out before 7 o'clock, but the box office was only around $1,600, quite a significant shortfall compared with Tai Ping's swarming crowds.[42]

Yuen Jim-fan (left) and Ma Si-tsang (right), the guiding master at the helm of the Tai Ping Opera Troupe

On 21 March, when *Blossom Time* was screened, Yuen wrote: 'Despite it being the last screening day it was still bustling, which goes to show the profound appeal of songs in sound films.'[43] According to newspaper sources, several production companies for sound films were established in Hong Kong and Shanghai in 1934.[44] Around the same time, Ma Si-tsang, guiding master at the helm of the Tai Ping Opera Troupe sponsored by the Tai Ping Theatre, was also actively seeking investment for producing and starring in sound films. Yuen was even told: 'It has been said that Unique Film Productions is seeking to hire Ma Si-tsang for $30,000 per month for a year, to produce one sound film every month, but he would not be permitted to perform opera on stage. Not sure if Ma has accepted the offer, pending confirmation.'[45] The development of Ma's career in film followed a similar trajectory to that of Sit Kok-sin, in that both were able to leverage their talent and status as renowned veterans of Cantonese opera, and let their star power shine on the silver screen.[46]

41. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 1 March 1934.
42. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 3 March 1934.
43. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 21 March 1934. *Blossom Time*, directed by Joseph Sunn Jue, was a Cantonese song-and-dance talky produced by the Grandview Film Company Limited in the US, and was distributed by The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua) in Hong Kong. The film starred Sun Liang Chau (aka Kwan Tak-hing) and Wu Tip-ying. The film was previewed at Queen's Theatre in Hong Kong on 31 December 1933 (see *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 30 December 1933). Central Theatre re-screened the film for two days in May 1934 (see *The Tien-Kwong Po*, 10 May 1934 and 20 May 1934); Tai Ping Theatre re-screened the film several times, and it was screened again on 23 and 24 July 1934. Because the film prints had to be sent to an exposition in a hurry, it was said that this would be 'the last time it met with the people of Hong Kong' (see *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 23 July 1934) (all in Chinese).
44. See 'UPS Is Going to Build a Studio in Kowloon to Make Sound Films', *The Tien-Kwong Po*, 13 March 1934; 'Overseas UPS is Busy Organising an Overseas Branch), *The Tien-Kwong Po*, 25 July 1934, and 'Joint Venture of Guangdong Businessman and Overseas Chinese to Found a Sound Film Production Company', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 25 March 1934 (all in Chinese).
45. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 6 May 1934.
46. For news clippings about Ma Si-tsang's early involvement in the film, see 'Ma Si-tsang Is Determined to Star in Films', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 15 August 1934 (in Chinese).

'Butterfly Wu's Cantonese Debut'

At this time, Yuen paid great attention to the aural experience of talking pictures, not only being discerning about the equipment used to play the films, but also the sound quality of the actors. On 20 June 1934, he went to Ko Shing Theatre to 'observe the audiovisual equipment' and found that 'there were too many echoes and distortions, the light projected was not very clear, and it was not up to standard.' Yuen felt that this was a wasted opportunity for Unique's premiere of *A Younger Actress*.[47] On 14 September that same year, he also noted in his diary:

> This evening, Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. sent *Mrs. Mai* [aka *Story in a Cantonese Opera Company*, 1934] over here for a preview screening. My wife and I, as well as Man-fong and Zyu-jyu went to Kam-Lung [Restaurant] for supper. After eating, we came back to view the film. It was very impressive: Butterfly Wu's performance was exceedingly memorable, her Cantonese was very fluent, and her voice very pleasing to the ear. [48]

Mrs. Mai adopted a common practice in producing Cantonese sound films at the time. By leveraging collaborations between film actors and Cantonese opera performers, the film thus possessed authentic elements of Cantonese opera without losing characteristics unique to cinema.[49] According to reports in Hong Kong newspapers at the time, Star 'rarely made Cantonese talking pictures, but when the Sun Moon Star Cantonese Opera Troupe arrived in Shanghai to perform a few months prior, Star's director Zhang Shichuan noted that although their studio's talent Butterfly Wu was a fluent Cantonese speaker, she had never performed in Cantonese on film. Zhang decided to cast Wu as the lead for a Cantonese production in development: *Mrs. Mai*. Zhang then hired principal performers from the Sun Moon Star Cantonese Opera Troupe to guest star in the film, as well as featuring Leung Choi-chun [aka Liang Saizhen] and her two sisters, who were famed southern performers both on the silver screen and the stage.'[50] The publicity at the time was centred on Wu, along with a lineup of notable opera singers such as Kwai Ming-yeung and Tse Sing-nung that were bound to entice Cantonese opera fans into the cinema, to enjoy the art through a different medium. On 4 October 1934, *The Industrial and Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*) promoted the film with the headline, 'Butterfly Wu Stars in Cantonese Talking Picture':

> Ms Butterfly Wu, the Queen of Chinese Cinema, recently starred in two productions from Shanghai, both of which have now arrived in Hong Kong. One is *The Lives of the Three* (1934), a follow-up to Wu's leading performance in *Twin Sisters* (1933), and the other is Star's first

47. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 20 June 1934.
48. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 14 September 1934.
49. *Conscience* (1933) was produced by Lai Buk-hoi (aka Lai Pak-hoi), co-directed by Mak Siu-ha and Chow Wing-loi, and starred Pak Yuk-tong. Its advertisement describes it as 'a ground-breaking Cantonese opera sound film, with a starry line-up of opera singers and film actors, depicting multiple love affairs and exposing the modern society like an X-ray machine'. The film also starred Wong Sau-nin, Lam Mui-mui, Mak Siu-ha, Tong Sing-to, Chan Siu-lam and Yip Fut-yeuk. See *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 23 October 1933 (in Chinese).
50. 'Sound Film *Mrs. Mai* Arrives Hong Kong', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 2 October 1934 (in Chinese).

> Cantonese sound film, *Mrs. Mai*. In addition to Wu, the film also features acclaimed southern performers Kwai Ming-yeung, Tse Sing-nung, Tsang Sam-to, Chan Kam-tong among others, who will perform excerpts from their best-known Cantonese operas *The Flame of Glacier Mountain*, *Marriage Deal for the Royal Lady*, *Romance on the Stage* and *Heavenly Maiden Delivers Her Son to the Mortal Father*. The entire Cantonese speaking populace is familiar with these four outstanding Cantonese operas. We've been told that screenings have already been scheduled and the film will be screened at the Central Theatre in the next few days.[51]

However, some people showed a sense of disregard for the introduction of Cantonese opera into Cantonese sound films. An author said:

> Cantonese sound films had been all the rage for a time in Southern China over the last few years. From the perspective of film as an art form, this has been a rather twisted development. However, for a specific type of cinema to be so overwhelmingly well-received with such a large audience, we should not underestimate its power; we need to see why and how it has become so popular. In all the Cantonese sound films produced, we observed that a few Cantonese opera numbers have invariably been included, and the acting in these films tended to be stage-oriented, which were not entirely on par with other kinds of talking pictures.

But in the case of *Mrs. Mai*, which starred Butterfly Wu as the protagonist, this seemed to be another story. The author continued:

> When Star started filming *Mrs. Mai*, they naturally had the same impetus to please their audience, but they did so with a determination to improve the Cantonese sound film by casting their main star, Butterfly Wu, in the lead role. And Wu's performance in this film was more sophisticated than any of the other films she had starred in before…. And of the musical numbers on which the professional opera singers collaborated, the scene from *Marriage Deal for the Royal Lady* co-starring Wu with Kwai Ming-yeung was the most outstanding…. As for the cinematography and sound, they were of a quality not often seen in Cantonese sound films. On the whole, the only thing that could be faulted about the film was the rambling and unfocused plot, but this is a common problem in all Cantonese sound films.[52]

Critics obviously held high expectations for the Cantonese talking picture, hoping that it would not become just a cut-rate version of Cantonese opera on the silver screen. At the same time, they also paid special attention to the quality of the sound recording. In a behind-the-scenes report published on the same day as the previous critique, the columnist specifically mentioned that 'of all the sound films produced by Star, the sound recording of this film bears a fine quality. And since I had an opportunity to meet up with Wu Ngai-sing and Tse Sing-nung in real life, I could validate that the voices of both actors in the film sounded exactly the same as they did in person.'[53]

51. 'Butterfly Wu Stars in Cantonese Talking Picture', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 4 October, 1934 (in Chinese).
52. 'A Few Words About *Mrs. Mai*', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 6 October 1934 (in Chinese).
53. Lue, 'Behind the Scenes of *Mrs. Mai*', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 6 October 1934 (in Chinese).

Butterfly Wu

Butterfly Wu highlighted in an advertisement for *Mrs. Mai* for her 'Cantonese debut' (*The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 12 October 1934)

Butterfly Wu's voice had also captured the audience's attention. As Yuen noted at the aforementioned test screening, Wu's 'Cantonese was very fluent, and her voice very pleasing to the ear'. When *Mrs. Mai* was released in Hong Kong on 10 October 1934, half-page advertisements were placed on the front pages of newspapers touting it as 'a full Cantonese speaking sound film with opera songs, a national masterpiece'; 'featuring top Cantonese opera singers' and 'Butterfly Wu's Cantonese debut!'[54] After the premiere, newspaper reviews confirmed 'Butterfly Wu's phenomenal Cantonese debut in a striking blockbuster presented by Star...as well as her delicate voice, sweet and clear like the nightingale; her singing and speaking in Cantonese that was the most pleasant to the ear.'[55] During the silent film era, the public saw Wu as the mute Queen of Chinese Cinema. In the age of sound films, her 'Cantonese debut' aroused the admiration and imagination of the Cantonese audience, as can be attested by the reception of *Mrs. Mai*.

54. See the promotion slogan in the half-page advertisement on the front page of *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 10 October 1934; a full-page version of the advertisement was published on the front page of the same newspaper on 9 October (both in Chinese).
55. *'Mrs. Mai* Makes a Comeback', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 1 December 1934 (in Chinese).

Afterword: Did the Cantonese Sound Film Dig Its Own Grave?

Trends and technology evolve very quickly. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* was released with synchronised sound and picture. By 1929, the production of sound films in the US had increased greatly; and in response to this new technology, many theatres in major cities across China had upgraded their equipment to play sound films in 1930. In 1931, the same year that Yuen questioned the superiority of talkies versus silent films in his diary, China had produced what was said to be the first 'semi-sound' Mandarin film *The Singing Peony*. In 1932, Unique Film Productions launched two 'synchronised' films in Mandarin and Cantonese; the Cantonese versions sold much better than the Mandarin versions. Like many theatres in Hong Kong at that time, Yuen's Tai Ping Theatre benefited from the showing of sound films. From 1933 to 1934, *The White Gold Dragon* made a killing at the box office, and in 1934, Cantonese speakers were finally able to 'hear' the Queen of Chinese Cinema, Butterfly Wu, in her 'Cantonese debut' on the big screen.

For both industry professionals and the public, the sensory experience of films had changed, in a few short years, from one of a purely visual medium (and still in black and white) to a 'mixed' medium encompassing both audio and visual elements. In fact, the scales had even tipped towards favouring the auditory experience, which solidified a sense of cultural identity for Cantonese speakers (in which Cantonese was codified as the 'local' or 'home town' dialect).[56] In addition to the Guangdong and Guangxi regions, a large number of Cantonese speaking population lived in Shanghai, Southeast Asia and even North America at the time, therefore 'Cantonese products' offered an advantage in both production and consumption.

However, when talkies became the norm, people within the film industry were no longer satisfied with only making films with sound, but began to demand more from its content. In 1935, *The Kung Sheung Evening Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Evening News*) published a piece of social commentary entitled 'Cantonese Sound Films Are Digging Their Own Graves'; the article argued that:

> The period from the 20th anniversary of the Republic to the present can be considered an era of renaissance. In this era, the interaction between the technology of sound recording in film and different local dialects, ushered in the emergence of two kinds of sound films in Chinese cinema: Mandarin and Cantonese sound films. Currently, Mandarin sound films are marching on the bright road of enlightenment, while Cantonese sound films are gradually moving down the dark path of depravity. These Cantonese sound films cater to low-brow tastes—as long as there is money to be made, they will not hesitate to corrupt cultural and social mores. Stories of no value, anti-social thinking, despicable actions and opinions that impact on the cultural dignity of the country are all fodder to be put on the screen together; this is a most heart-wrenching and tragic state of affairs.

56. The so-called 'local' in this case is in fact the '*Xiguan* dialect' (West End Speech), which has been recognised as the standard Cantonese language gradually since the 18th and 19th centuries. For further discussion, see Ching May-bo 'The West End Speech: The Sound of Urbanity of Canton and Hong Kong That Expended to Shanghai', *Current Research in Chinese Linguistics*, T. T. Ng Chinese Language Research Centre, the Institute of Chinese Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Vol 99, No 1, January 2020, pp 3-10 (in Chinese).

> We cherish the future of Cantonese sound films, and we also cherish the wellbeing of our national spirit, so we have to speak up: may the film companies in Southern China hear our plea to stop digging their own graves and ruining the future of Cantonese sound films.[57]

This may not be a case of just a small group virtue signalling within the industry; the low box office revenue numbers seemed to reflect a similar attitude among the audience as well. In the spring of 1936, Yuen wrote in his diary:

> The film *Under His Wife's Thumb* starring Se Cai Lei had extremely low attendance, seems like Cantonese sound films have fallen out of favour.[58]

The next big challenge faced by Cantonese sound films was the 1936 ban on dialect films by the Central Film Censorship Committee in Nanjing,[59] soon followed by the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan in 1937. After these two significant events came a period of history we are comparatively more familiar with: in the 1970s and 1980s, Cantonese films gradually reincarnated as 'Hong Kong films'. No matter whether today's Cantonese cinema produced in Hong Kong is 'digging their own graves' or not, we should not forget that what we now take for granted as 'Cantonese films' were once known as 'Cantonese sound films'. They are the product of synchronised sound recording in films having become a reality. The importance of 'sound'—especially Cantonese 'sound'—cannot be understated. It is a history worth opening our ears to listen to and studying more closely. [Translated by Hayli Chwang]

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57. 'Cantonese Sound Films Are Digging Their Own Graves', 'Commentaries', *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 31 October 1935 (in Chinese).
58. The diary of Yuen Jim-fan, 23 April 1936.
59. For more on this subject, see Lee Pui-tak, 'To Ban and Counter Ban: Cantonese Cinema Caught Between Shanghai and Hong Kong in the 1930s' in *The Hong Kong–Guangdong Film Connection*, Wong Ain-ling (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2005, pp 30-49.

From Silent Films to Talkies:
Rediscovering Moon Kwan Man-ching

Stephanie Chung Po-yin

Moon Kwan Man-ching (pen name Shan-yuet) was a pioneer of modern Chinese cinema as well as a trailblazer of his time. His remarkable life closely reflected the development of the Chinese and foreign film industries. Through his life story, we can catch a glimpse of the changing modes of operation in the film industries in China and overseas. In the 1930s, sound films (talkies) were a trend that took the world by storm. Within a few short years, rapid changes swept through the film industry in China. Moon Kwan kept his finger on the pulse of the times. He brought talkies into the film studios of Hong Kong, heralding the birth of Grandview Film Company Limited and the start of the Cantonese sound film era. The stories of Moon Kwan's travels across Shanghai, Guangdong, San Francisco and Hollywood are intimately related to the stories of the Taishan people's overseas diaspora in the early 20th century. His achievements in building up Grandview with Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) and pioneering Cantonese sound films were built upon his vast and deep overseas Chinese connection networks with Lew (Lau), Quan (Kwan), Jung (Cheung) and Chew (Chiu) clans of San Francisco's Loong Kong Tian Yee Association. Based on research from old books, journals and newspapers, this essay hopes to re-trace Moon Kwan's journeys around the world as well as his fascinating life story, thereby re-telling how he witnessed numerous ups, downs, twists and turns of world film history.

Taishan and San Francisco

Moon Kwan was born in 1894,[1] a native of Dawu Village, Chikan Town, Kaiping County, Guangdong Province.[2] His fateful ties to cinematic history had much to do with the historical and geographical context in which he lived. The Taishan region of Guangdong is mountainous. Farmland is scarce, unlike nearby Panyu and Shunde that are known as 'the land of fish and

1. Elsewhere, it has been claimed that Moon Kwan was born in 1896. This essay cites the words of Kwan's family, and therefore takes the year 1894 as his year of birth. See Law Kar, *Law Kar@Hong Kong Cinema.Line*, Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics (Hong Kong), 2006, p 52 (in Chinese).
2. 'Moon Kwan Man-ching', Personalities Database in the Jiangmen Library website at http://wyq.jmlib.com/jmhq/listhq.asp?id=234 (in Chinese). Accessed on 18 December 2020.

rice'. For generations, numerous Taishanese men have left their hometowns to make a living. In addition to Hong Kong and Macao, quite a few of them went to the West Coast of the US. In particular, the San Francisco area has been a popular place for many Taishanese to gather and live. Therefore, from Taishan, Hong Kong, Macao, San Francisco, then on to other major cities along the West Coast of North America, the Taishanese have established a very strong network, linking numerous overseas Taishan-dialect speaking Chinese communities.[3] Among them, the Loong Kong Tian Yee Association, comprising overseas Chinese with the family names of Lew, Quan, Jung and Chew, have the most widespread and influential network. On another note, by the time many of the Taishanese men who had gone overseas to work have established a more comfortable lifestyle, they would have past their prime years. Those men would then go back to their hometowns or to Hong Kong to find a wife. Such a phenomenon of older men taking younger wives was very prevalent in overseas Chinese communities. In Cantonese films of the 1950s and 1960s, there were numerous roles portraying this kind of 'Uncle from Gold Mountain' coming home to find a wife. For example, Lee Hoi-chuen, the father of Bruce Lee (born in San Francisco and thus named 'Jun-fan'), originated from Shunde, would often perform such roles in films. San Francisco was the primary gathering place for overseas Taishanese, and an important stop on the tours of Chinese performance troupes in the Cantonese opera and film circles. Moon Kwan's story starts within the networks of this community.

Moon Kwan

Good Family Training

Moon Kwan's father was a scholar in the late Qing period and a schoolteacher in his hometown. Although the family was not rich, Moon Kwan was well-trained from childhood. His education began at age of seven in a private school in his home village. From his youth, he had been a lover of poetry and essays, and formed ties with literature and the arts. Around 1910, like many boys from Taishanese families, he was sent to Hong Kong to be educated in English in order to help him in establishing a career overseas in the future. The following year, a Washington State University professor known as Miss Greenlee was appointed by the labour unions of the US to test and select 100 students from Hong Kong and the Mainland to study in the US. In the first year, 75 students were chosen, including Moon Kwan.[4] In 1911, he travelled by ship to the US to start a new adventure in his life.

3. Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.
4. See Moon Kwan Man-ching, *Zhongguo Yintan Waishi* (*An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*), Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press, 1976, pp 69 & 82; note 2; Moon Kwan, 'Remembering Sun Yat-sen', *Wen Wei Po*, 10 October 1981 (all in Chinese).

Choosing an Alternative Path

Moon Kwan arrived in the US at age 17 (another source said 15). He contacted his elder brother, who was already working in San Francisco, and started to work his way through school.[5] In 1914, Kwan's brother passed away in San Francisco. There was no money left for his education. At that time, the young Kwan had witnessed the hardships that the Chinese people had to bear while living in the US. They mostly worked as cooks or laundry workers, and had great difficulty in escaping poverty, much less becoming outstanding in their fields. He decided to choose another path, learning a newly popularised skill with the hopes of contributing to the industries of his own country, China. The film industry, one of the most in vogue of contemporary industries, naturally became his first choice. Later, Kwan would reminisce that his choice to commit to the film industry in his youth was not only a way of survival, but also because of his wish to revitalise China's industry. He also chose film because of its ability to subtly influence, making it a good tool to educate the people. Another reason was because he was very attracted to actress Mary Pickford, and had hoped for an opportunity to get close to her in the film studio.[6]

The Rise of Hollywood

In 1915, the young Moon Kwan left San Francisco to try his luck in Hollywood. Yet in actual fact, in those days, the centre of the American film industry was on the East Coast. In the past, most of the major film companies in the US established studios in New York, Chicago and other financial centres, while the studios in Hollywood operated on a smaller scale.[7] Between 1914 and 1920, during the outbreak of World War I, many Europeans in the arts circle escaped to the US, while film markets all over the world suffered from a shortage of European pictures. Entrepreneurial Americans invested in these people to make numerous films to meet the high demand from international markets. Thus, the film industry in Hollywood on the West Coast gradually took shape.

In order to avoid competition from the studio moguls of New York and Chicago, and to stay away from intellectual property lawsuits launched by inventors of film cameras and projectors such as Thomas Edison, these European filmmakers usually chose to stay on the West Coast, taking full advantage of the consistently sunny weather and varied natural scenery that Hollywood had to offer, and proceeded to produce films there. In the days before mercury vapour lamps (which were not invented until 1917), Hollywood's natural advantages were taken into serious consideration by filmmakers. These new companies were often organised according to the labour-management cooperation principle, which enabled them to make films at low cost to test the market. This agile and changeable style of working greatly quickened the rise of Hollywood, causing more and

5. Moon Kwan, 'My Boyhood in China', *The Washington Herald*, Washington, DC, 3 September 1919.
6. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 3.
7. Ibid, pp 8-9.

more filmmakers to gather there,[8] making the town a new filmmaking centre filled with energy, opportunity and unlimited potential.

Around 1914 to 1915, in order to learn filmmaking techniques, Moon Kwan, who had recently moved to Hollywood from San Francisco, spent days seeking work among the various studios. He did not have much money on him, so he couldn't survive very long without income. So, he went to the Los Angeles Chinatown to look for help from the overseas Chinese clan associations. He received room and board from the manager of the Guang Ju Lung grocery store. This gentleman, surnamed Kwan, came from the village next to Moon Kwan's and knew his father. In order to continue trying his luck at the film studios, Moon Kwan once worked as a dishwasher at a hotel up on a snowy mountain to earn living expenses.[9]

Baker Block: A Relay Station in Kwan's Journey

Residing at Baker Block enabled Moon Kwan to set foot into a film studio for the first time. It became a major turning point in his life. One day, while he was strolling on the streets of Chinatown, by chance he met a young man, Howard Willard, who was studying at an art institute. They felt that they shared the same dreams and became very good friends. He invited Kwan to stay with him at Baker Block. Kwan thought that if he got to know some artists with similar ambitions, he could use that connection to enter the film industry, and accepted Willard's proposal.[10]

The third floor of Baker Block was an art school, and artists from all over the country lived in this building. Because of that, Kwan made friends with a lot of Western artists.[11] Another resident of Baker Block, who worked as an extra on film sets, brought Kwan to the film studio and made introductions so that he got to work as an extra on major director Cecil DeMille's film. Through the observations Kwan made while working as an extra, he got to know the basics about the internal organisation of a studio and the process of film production.[12]

Later, to gain more film-related experience, Kwan enrolled in a film academy for two months to further learn about the process of filmmaking.[13] In order to make ends meet, he later worked at a minor film studio and participated in a film called *The Foolish Detective*. At the time, he and the studio's boss entered into a labour-management cooperation arrangement. The boss's friend had financed the film so that he could play the lead role. Because of the limited budget, Kwan had to work in many capacities, including assistant director, actor and cook. Regarding payment, after the film had been made, Kwan would be given 10% of the profits. Thus, if the film failed to make a profit, he would get nothing. After the film had been produced, Kwan went back to the studio

8. Ibid, pp 36-39.
9. Ibid, pp 12-15.
10. Ibid, pp 17-19.
11. Ibid, pp 19-25.
12. Ibid, pp 25-32.
13. Ibid, pp 32-33 & 37.

several more times, but the boss said there was no news about the distribution of the film. Later, the studio was even taken back by the landowner. Kwan did not earn any money from this film, but as assistant director, he was able to learn about different kinds of camerawork technique (such as slow crank and backward crank) from the cinematographer. In addition, he was permitted to help with film development and processing in the dark room and learn about editing, and through conversing with the cinematographer, he gained valuable experience. Kwan also experienced firsthand the labour-management cooperation mode that was so popular in Hollywood at the time.[14]

The Author Who Represents 'China': 'The Chinese O. Henry'

Although Moon Kwan later became a film director, he first became known in the Western world for his poems and essays. At the time he was living in the US, he had had his poems published in newspapers.[15] One day in 1919, he encountered an album of Chinese scenery photography taken by an American friend in Baker Block and suggested selling them to the newspaper. His friend thought that they might have a chance to meet the news editor if the photographs were delivered by a Chinese and so he took the photographs to a news publishing office. The editor Harry Carr received him and asked him to write articles based on his childhood in China. The newspaper gave him the nickname 'The Chinese O. Henry' and introduced this 'China Hand' as follows:

> Editor's Note—Moon Kwan is a Chinese youth who has set himself the life-task of interpreting China to Americans. The son of a teacher, reared in the quiet village of Chu-Yang-Li, near Canton, he came to America at 15 and in the past few years has mastered English. He has translated many old Chinese poems and stories, and plans to interpret China through the drama as well as literature.[16]

Kwan wrote articles about his childhood. They were very well-received by readers, and the news publishing office subsequently published Kwan's two novellas and an essay entitled 'The Beauty of Chinese Poetry'.[17] 'Chinese culture' seemed to become a distinctive feature of Kwan's image. The majority of his essays and translations were based on the theme of Chinese culture. For example, he once translated the story behind the phrase 'tyranny is worse than tigers' to explain the content of Chinese classical texts to Westerners.[18]

At that time, Harry Carr was also script and publicity consultant for director D W Griffith. He introduced Kwan to Griffith as an author who represented 'Chinese culture', and he was later hired as a technical consultant on Griffith's film *Broken Blossoms* (aka *The Yellow Man*

14. Ibid, pp 37-44.
15. 'L.A. Chinese Writes Poem on Photoplay', *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, 11 January 1919.
16. Moon Kwan, 'My Boyhood in China', *The Washington Herald*, Washington, DC, 10 September 1919.
17. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 46-52; 'Behind The Curtains of Dragon Land', *The Washington Herald*, Washington, DC, 31 August 1919; note 16.
18. 'Worse Than Tigers', *Lamer Register*, 9 June 1920.

and the Girl, 1919). He provided suggestions on the style and image of the male lead role, the parts of the story relating to Chinese culture, and the props and sets.[19] Becoming a consultant on *Broken Blossoms* further increased Kwan's reputation. Later, more films hired him to be technical consultant or assistant director, such as *The City of Dim Faces* (1918), where he was translator and assistant director. From being on that film, he got to know Anna May Wong, who would become internationally renowned in European and American film industries.[20]

In 1920, Kwan published a book of poetry and vignettes, *A Pagoda of Jewels*. In an article about the book, he was introduced as 'Chinese author and poet, and technical consultant on *Broken Blossoms*', showing that his image was synonymous with 'China' and '*Broken Blossoms*', and that his fame was built on his Chinese identity.[21] In the same year, Moon Kwan considered that with the discrimination he faced in the US, it would be difficult to further his studies and career there. Also, he believed that he had already mastered the organisational methods of the film business as well as production techniques. He therefore decided to return to China.[22]

Returning to China

Although he had achieved a certain degree of fame in the US, Moon Kwan's career when he returned to China was far from plain sailing. When he arrived in Shanghai, he did an interview with a reporter from *Shun Pao*. After the interview was published, he received a visit from Wang Changtai, an officer of the Jinan Youth Association. Wang wished to form a film company to produce educational and science-based films in order to promote social education. He invited Kwan to work with him. Kwan would be producer, screenwriter and director, while Wang would be manager and cinematographer.[23]

In order to form this company, they needed to produce samples for their initial public offering. So, they went to Nanjing to document Nanjing Normal University's summer workshop and to make a documentary on Nanjing scenery. But because it was too hot in Shanghai, the dark room overheated and the negatives could not be developed. The documentary film concept was aborted. Wang was then sent by the church to raise funds for drought victims in Shaanxi. The formation of their film company ended there.

To make a living, Kwan accepted an invitation from his American friend from Baker Block and worked as a book cashier for a book company for six months,[24] until through the introduction of Bao Qingjia, he was hired by Lu Shoulian as a script writer for Zhongguo Film Production Company Limited. Kwan wrote the script for *Mirror of Freedom*, based on the story of the

19. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 52-55.
20. Ibid, p 59.
21. 'Completes Book', *Los Angeles Herald*, 4 June 1920.
22. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 69.
23. Ibid, pp 88-89.
24. Ibid, pp 89-100.

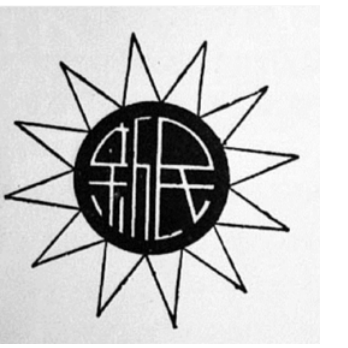
72 martyrs of the Second Guangzhou Uprising. However, due to issues with the company's finances, the film was never produced.

When he received news of the dissolution of Zhongguo Film Production, Kwan was in Guangzhou. Thus, he planned to try his luck in both Guangzhou and Hong Kong. But at the time there was only one 200-seat cinema in Hong Kong, while Guangzhou did not have any. Even if he successfully produced a film, he would fail to make his money back. So, he worked as a teacher to support himself instead.[25]

Meeting the Lai Brothers

While travelling in Hong Kong, Moon Kwan saw a newspaper advertisement from the China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd, who was hiring actors and actresses. He applied, and the brothers Lai Man-wai and Lai Buk-hoi (aka Lai Pak-hoi) were impressed by him. Kwan joined China Sun, participating in and witnessing the start of this Hong Kong film company.[26] At the time, China Sun was already quite well-established. Kwan stayed in the company's China Sun Building (located at what is now Ngan Mok Street, Causeway Bay). It was a three-storey building which also served as the company's office and the Lai brothers' residence. There was an empty lot next to the building, on which they had planned to build a film studio. According to Kwan, because Lai Man-wai refused to bribe local officers to speed up their permission to do so, he established their film studio at Tanhua Mansion (now Tai Wah House) in Xiguan, Guangzhou instead.[27]

China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd



Company logo of China Sun

25. Ibid, pp 100-109.
26. Ibid, pp 109-110; Duanmu Hui, 'Hong Kong's First Film', *Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartial*), 7 August 1955 (in Chinese).
27. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 110 & 113-114; Duanmu Hui, ibid.

In 1925, the Canton-Hong Kong Strike caused numerous factories and companies to collapse. Hong Kong's entertainment industry also ceased operations. Quite a few film companies folded or moved.[28] In 1926, Kwan established Nanyue Film Company in Guangzhou, and produced their first film, *Newfound Wealth from a Newborn*.[29] In the same year, he was hired as a consultant by wealthy San Francisco businessman Isaac O Upham for his travel film. So Kwan once again went to the US, returning to China only in 1927.[30] Unfortunately, Upham's film did not do too well at the box office, so he proposed to Kwan and the others to cancel their contracts and dissolve the Yuandong Film Company. At this time, through introductions made by Anna May Wong, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer hired Kwan as technical consultant on *Mr. Wu* (1927), a film about a conservative family that adhered to a traditional Chinese code of ethics.[31]

Moon Kwan (left) and Lai Man-wai (right)

From Silent Films to Talkies

In the 1930s, 'talky' was a trend from overseas that took the world by storm, leading the Chinese film industry to transition from silent films to talkies. In a few short years, sound films became the norm. The major film companies in Shanghai were first to take this opportunity to make sound films. Meanwhile, film companies saw business opportunities arising from Cantonese-speaking audiences with high spending power in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and North America. In order to accommodate this even bigger market, they put a lot of effort into developing Cantonese films.

Hong Kong's unique geographical and political environment made it a very suitable base for the production of Cantonese films. Some people at the time even hoped that Hong Kong would become 'Hollywood of the East',[32] and thus the Cantonese film industry in Hong Kong began to develop on a large scale. In such an environment, Kwan also latched onto the talky trend,

28. Sit Hau, 'The Whole Industry Folded', 'Milky Way', *Wen Wei Po*, 25 June 1990 (in Chinese).
29. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang Dianying Zhanggu 1: Mopian Shidai (1896–1934)* (*Anecdotes of Hong Kong Film History 1: The Era of Silent Films [1896–1934]*), Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press, 1985, pp 101 & 153 (in Chinese).
30. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 70-74.
31. Ibid, pp 77-80; 'Filmograms', *Evening Star* (*The Sunday Star*), Washington, DC, 5 June 1927; Ren Keyu, '*Mr. Wu*', 'Readers' Corner', *The Movie Guide*, Shanghai, No 12, 1 September 1927, pp 42-43 (in Chinese).
32. 'Economist Zhu Changdong Discusses Three Advantages of Filming in Hong Kong Not a Difficult Task to Turn Hong Kong into Hollywood of the East', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*), 15 November 1934 (in Chinese).

and helped to usher in the Cantonese sound film era.

In 1929, sound films were brought into Shanghai. At the time, the city had around 30 cinemas, and six of the major ones had already installed sound-projecting equipment. Watching sound films was therefore becoming a popular form of entertainment.[33]

Major film production companies in Shanghai jumped onto this trend and began to make sound films. Some Chinese people also began to analyse film sound techniques and manufacture the corresponding production equipment,[34] proving that sound films had become a formidable industry.[35] In contrast, however, Hong Kong was comparatively ill-equipped to play sound films at the time. Hong Kong historian and writer Ha Lik (aka Leung Tol) recalls that in the early 1930s, there were only a few theatres in Hong Kong that screened sound films, though quite a few were preparing or in the process of updating their equipment for the change.[36] The local sound film market had yet to enter its booming era.

At this time, Lo Ming-yau and Lai Man-wai, in the name of revitalising the Chinese film industry, formed and established The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua). The China Sun Motion Picture Company Limited located in Shanghai was also incorporated into UPS.[37] Lai Buk-hoi became the Head of the UPS 3rd Studio (i.e. UPS [Hong Kong Branch]) and hired Kwan and Leung Siu-bo as screenwriters and directors.[38] In 1931, Moon Kwan produced the debut film of the UPS 3rd Studio, *The Flame of Love* (aka *Iron Bone and Orchid Heart*).[39] Yu Mo-wan states that the film claimed three 'firsts' in the Hong Kong film history: it was the first film to advocate for free-love marriages and denounce the feudal system of transactional marriages; the first film to be shot on location overseas and the first film to be shot on a hand-held camera (which Kwan had brought back from the US).[40]

In 1932, improved American and German camera technology introduced film cameras with noise-reduction capabilities.[41] In the past, in order to avoid camera noise from being recorded, the camera and its operator had to be shut inside a wooden box fully lined with cotton batting. The window of the box had to be fitted with sound-proof glass. The director and cinematographer could not communicate during filming, and the cameras had very limited ranges of movement. Visual enjoyment was therefore very much compromised for the sake of better audio. Technological advancements sped up the development of sound films, and many companies thus planned to purchase American sound film equipment.

33. 'Shanghai's Grand Cinema to Screen Sound Films', *The Shanghai Pao*, 29 November 1929 (in Chinese).
34. 'The Difficulties in Making Domestic Sound Films', *The "Robinhood"*, Shanghai, 29 April 1930 (in Chinese).
35. Zuo Kang, 'The Boom of Chinese Sound Films', *The Screen Monthly*, Guangzhou, No 8, September 1930, pp 3-6 (in Chinese).
36. Ha Lik, 'Ngan Mok Street and Hong Kong Films', 'Hong Kong's Neighbourhoods', *Wen Wei Po*, 14 August 1980 (in Chinese).
37. Gongsun Lu, *Zhongguo Dianying Shihua* (*Anecdotes of Chinese Film History*), Vol 2, Hong Kong: South Sky Book Company, 1962, p 138 (in Chinese).
38. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 130.
39. *Movie Daily News* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 42, 31 October 1931 (in Chinese).
40. See note 29, p 125.
41. Shi Yu, 'New Invention from European and American Film Industries Noise-Free Sound Film Camera', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 23 December 1933 (in Chinese).

Cover of the brochure of *The Flame of Love* (1931) proclaiming the film as 'the first production of UPS (Hong Kong branch)'

Director Moon Kwan (right) and cinematographer Lo Wing-cheung (left) on the set of *The Flame of Love*

UPS must have been established in Shanghai because its founders had witnessed the success enjoyed by major Shanghai film companies in producing sound films at the time. In 1932, UPS hoped to purchase sound film recording equipment, but according to Kwan, the company lacked an effective internal management system, and its filmmakers often made big-budget films with long production time. Thus, UPS incurred huge expenses for very few film productions, thereby often leading to financial difficulties.[42] In order to raise capital, UPS accepted Kwan's proposal and had him bring films including *The 19th Route Army's Glorious Battle Against the Japanese Enemy* (1932) and *Humanity* (1932) to sell to the US, and to contact overseas Chinese to persuade them to invest in the company.[43]

The Loong Kong Tian Yee Association Network

Moon Kwan went back to San Francisco, and through the network of the San Francisco Loong Kong Tian Yee Association, successfully collected capital, talent and new equipment, and organised and conducted an experiment in making a sound film. The Loong Kong Tian Yee Association was formed in the 1890s. Its members consisted of overseas Chinese by the surnames of Lew, Quan,

42. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 130-131.
43. Ibid, p 133; *Chinese Commercial News Sunday Pictorial*, Tianjin, No 21, 21 August 1932 (in Chinese).


聯華

本文作者
關文清

MOON KWAN

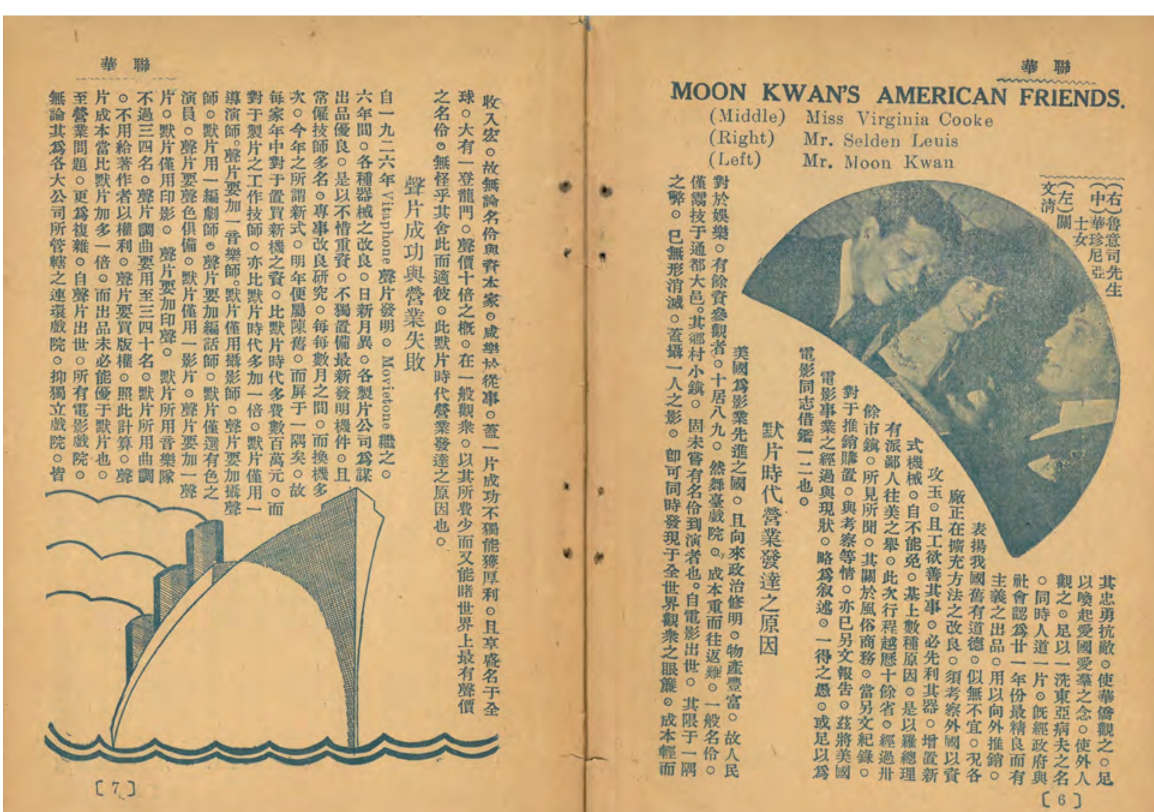
美國影業調查概略

關文清

遊美之任務

羅明佑君之組織聯華影業公司也。其宗旨不但對內振興國片。挽回外溢利權。抵抗文化侵略。而且對外欲負起表揚國光。謀爭國際電影地位。是以成立以來。力求向內外發展。去歲淞滬之役。曾派攝影員多名。隨營攝取十九路軍抗敵真景。事後編成九幕。

〔5〕


聯華

MOON KWAN'S AMERICAN FRIENDS.
(Middle) Miss Virginia Cooke
(Right) Mr. Selden Leuis
(Left) Mr. Moon Kwan

(右)魯意司先生 (中)華珍尼亞士女 (左)關文清

其忠勇抗敵。使華僑觀之。足以喚起愛國愛羣之念。使外人觀之。足以一洗東亞病夫之名。同時人道一片。既經政府與社會認為廿一年份最精良而有主義之出品。用以向外推銷。表揚我國舊有道德。似無不宜。況各廠正在擴充方法之改良。須考察外國以資攻玉。且工欲善其事。必先利其器。增置新式機械。自不能免。基上數種原因。是以羅總理有派鄙人往美之舉。此次行程越歷十餘省。經過卅餘市鎮。所見所聞。其關於風俗商務。當另文紀錄。對于推銷購置。與考察等情。亦已另文報告。玆將美國電影事業之經過與現狀。略為敘述。一得之愚。或足以為電影同志借鑑一二也。

默片時代營業發達之原因

美國為影業先進之國。且向來政治修明。物產豐富。故人民對於娛樂。有餘資參觀者。十居八九。然舞臺戲院。成本重而往返難。一般名伶。僅獨技于通都大邑。其鄉村小鎮。固未嘗有名伶到演者也。自電影出世。其限于一隅之弊。已無形消滅。蓋攝一人之影。即可同時發現于全世界觀衆之眼簾。成本輕而

〔6〕

聯華

收入宏。故無論名伶與資本家。咸樂於從事。蓋一片成功不獨能獲厚利。且享盛名于全球。大有一登龍門。聲價十倍之概。在一般觀衆。以其所費少而又能睹世界上最有聲價之名伶。無怪乎其舍此而適彼。此默片時代營業發達之原因也。

聲片成功與營業失敗

自一九二六年Vitaphone聲片發明。Movietone繼之。六年間。各種器械之改良。日新月異。各製片公司為謀出品優良。是以不惜重資。不獨置備最新發明機件。且常僱技師多名。專事改良研究。每每數月之間。而換機多次。今年之所謂新式。明年便屬陳舊。而屏于一隅矣。故每家年中對于置買新機之資。比默片時代多費數百萬元。而對于製片之工作技師。亦比默片時代多加一倍。默片僅用一導演師。聲片要加一音樂師。默片僅用攝影師。聲片要加攝聲師。默片用一編劇師。聲片要加編話師。默片僅選有色之演員。聲片要聲色俱備。默片僅用一影片。聲片要加一聲片。默片僅用印影。聲片要加印聲。默片所用音樂隊不過三四名。聲片調曲要用至三四十名。默片所用曲調。不用給著作者以權利。聲片要買版權。照此計算。聲片成本當比默片加多一倍。而出品未必能優于默片也。至營業問題。更為複雜。自聲片出世。所有電影戲院。無論其為各大公司所管轄之連環戲院。抑獨立戲院。皆

〔7〕

An article in Issue 4 of *UPS*, written by Moon Kwan about promoting films in the US and how he raised funds from the American Chinese there

Jung and Chew. It took its name from the 'Oath of Brotherhood at the Peach Garden' story in the classic Chinese legend *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, where Lew Bei (Liu Bei), Quan Yu (Guan Yu) and Jung Fei (Zhang Fei) took an oath of brotherhood (the surname Chew derived from the general, Chew Wen [Zhao Yun]). Among North American Chinese communities, this organisation had one of the strongest network of connections.

During this trip to San Francisco, Kwan was visited by Joseph Sunn Jue, son of the Association's Chew branch leader Jue Jun-yao (aka Jew Jun-you), and the young man asked Kwan for a chance to join the film industry.[44] Through Joseph Sunn Jue's connections, Kwan stayed at San Francisco's Grandview Hotel (owned by Lau Dai-wah), and he was also introduced to film sound recording engineer Clifton Skinner. Skinner was willing to rent or sell his equipment to Kwan, as well as provide technical support and assistance. Kwan took this opportunity to convince Sunn Jue to make a Cantonese film in San Francisco, which would be distributed by UPS. One reason for this arrangement was to learn production techniques for sound films. Another reason was to set the foundation for Sunn Jue to enter the film industry. With Kwan's encouragement and help, Sunn Jue set up Grandview Film Company Limited. The name 'Grandview' was taken from the hotel where Kwan was staying, since the idea to make a film started there, and also because the owner Lau Dai-wah granted them free usage of a room for the film's pre-production office. The name Grandview commemorated such events.[45]

The first Cantonese film Sunn Jue produced in the US was *Blossom Time* (1933). Although Kwan did not have an official role, he was the prime mover who facilitated the film's production. Because the film's original leading man Ma Si-tsang was heavily in debt and could not participate in the filming, Kwan encouraged Sunn Jue to cast a then-unknown actor, a member of the Quan branch, named Kwan Tak-hing (aka Sun Liang Chau). He also changed the genre of the film to a romantic drama, and mentored a young man named Kan Chi-hin to write the script for *Blossom Time*.[46]

Joseph Sunn Jue

In San Francisco, Moon Kwan met Joseph Sunn Jue, who introduced him to stay at the Grandview Hotel. Later, Sunn Jue adopted this name for his own film company.

44. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 134.
45. Ibid, pp 136-140.
46. Ibid.

Blossom Time (1933): Wu Tip-ying (left) and Kwan Tak-hing (right)

(From right) Joseph Sunn Jue, Wu Tip-ying, Kwan Tak-hing and Sun Yaoyuan on the set of *Blossom Time* (1933)

Upon completion, the film was released in San Francisco to critical acclaim. Kwan then recommended Sunn Jue to Lo Ming-yau. Lo invited Sunn Jue to bring the film to Hong Kong, and proposed that UPS and Grandview form a big company together to produce sound films.[47] Lo asked Sunn Jue to stay in Hong Kong to make films, and because Sunn Jue did not know the city well and had no friends there, Kwan often accompanied him on walks and to tea while discussing script issues.

In order to further develop the sound film industry in China, Lo received from the Nationalist government in Nanjing the title of Inspector of European, American and Japanese Film Industries, and brought Kwan with him to Europe and the US to observe their film industries,[48] and to take that opportunity to contact overseas Chinese to form the Overseas UPS.[49] In the US, after their observation tour and setting up a film distribution network, Lo, Kwan, Jue Jun-yao (Joseph Sunn Jue's father) and Lau Dai-wah began to raise capital for the Overseas UPS with the help of the Loong Kong Tian Yee Association.

The mission of the Overseas UPS was sound film production. Kwan, Jue Jun-yao and Cheung Tseuk-pui were elected by the shareholders to negotiate purchasing recording equipment from Clifton Skinner.[50] They also had Skinner train apprentices so that they could bring the equipment and experienced sound recording technicians back to China. Just as the preparations for the Overseas UPS were underway, Lo decided to restructure UPS and to concentrate the company's resources on Shanghai.[51] Kwan and Joseph Sunn Jue were unwilling to move to Shanghai. As a result, Sunn Jue asked Kwan to leave UPS and join him at Grandview.[52]

47. Ibid, p 145.
48. 'Weekly Information' & 'Bid Farewell to Mr Lo Ming-yau', *Lianhua Huabao* (*UPS Pictorial*), Vol 3, No 16, 22 April 1934; 'American Chinese Aviation Association Holds a Grand Meeting to Welcome Lo Ming-yau and Moon Kwan', *The Diamond*, Shanghai, 21 July 1934; 'Schedule Fixed for a Overseas Field Study by Inspector of Film Industries Lo Ming-yau To Be Accompanied by Moon Kwan', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 29 March 1934 (all in Chinese).
49. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, pp 153-154.
50. Ibid, pp 181-182.
51. Ibid, pp 182-186.
52. Ibid, pp 188-189.

The Grandview Days

Moon Kwan and Joseph Sunn Jue wished to leave UPS, but in order to pacify shareholders who might have been affected by the changes at the Overseas UPS, they decided to make a sound film, *Song of the Past* (aka *Yesterday's Song*, 1935).[53] Lee Yi-nin participated in the film's audition, and Kwan and Sunn Jue liked her performance so much they signed a three-year contract with her. In 1935, Kwan and Sunn Jue cast Lee against Ng Cho-fan for their new film *Life Lines* (aka *Lifeline*, 1935). They believed that if the film had good box-office results, this would indicate that Grandview had the ability to operate independently. That year, the studios used by Grandview were rented from the landlord by UPS. Thus, Kwan and Sunn Jue requested Jue Jun-yao to wire them funds, and at the same time began to negotiate with Lo Ming-yau. In the end, it was decided that the amenities and equipment inside the studio which belonged to UPS would be kept and managed by Grandview, while Grandview would clear the debts incurred by UPS. With that, Grandview became independent.[54]

The newly-independent Grandview developed rapidly. With numerous films in the pipeline, the studio was constantly overbooked. Thus, Grandview constructed new production studios in Kowloon, and equipped them with the latest, more mobile cameras.[55] Meanwhile, despite having left UPS, Kwan, impassioned with filmmaking for the country, wrote and directed numerous patriotic films. In particular, *Life Lines* ignited Ng Cho-fan's sound film career,[56] and was Hong Kong's first national defence sound film.[57] When *Life Lines* was released, it was at one point banned by the Hong Kong government (at the time it chose to adopt a 'kid-gloves handling policy' with regards to Japan).[58] But because the film never specifies who the invaders are, the courts finally accepted director Kwan's appeal and revoked the injunction.[59] The film received accolades from the Drama and Film Censorship Association and was later screened at the Chen Jitang Mansion and received a prize of $500. Later, Grandview

Life Lines (1935): Banned at one point due to the Hong Kong government's 'kid-gloves handling policy' towards Japan and earned Kwan the moniker of 'the fearless director'
(From left: Lo Tai-kim, Lo Sai-kim, Lee Yi-nin)

53. Ibid, pp 190-193.
54. Ibid, pp 195-201.
55. 'Grandview's New Development Setting Up a Studio in Kowloon', *Chinese Mail*, 1 February 1936 (in Chinese).
56. Ng Cho-fan, '11. My *Life Lines*', 'Ng Cho-fan: An Autobiography', *Wen Wei Pao*, 15 March 1956 (in Chinese).
57. See note 29, p 159.
58. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 201.
59. See item '*Life Lines*' under 'Hong Kong Film Search' at the Hong Kong Film Archive website.

wished to ship the film to Central and Northern China for screening, but the Central Film Censorship Committee did not allow the screening of dialect films, so they had to remove the Cantonese soundtrack and edit the subtitles before sending the film to the Censorship Committee in Nanjing.[60]

At the time, the Nanjing government was promoting Mandarin films, and issued orders to ban the production of Cantonese films. Filmmakers in Southern China formed the 'Save Cantonese Films Committee' and elected Kwan, Joseph Sunn Jue, So Yee, Chin Tai-soak and others as committee members.[61] Kwan was sent by the South China Film Federation to be their representative to go to Nanjing to appeal for the delay of the ban.[62] This was an indirect reflection of the industry's high regard for Kwan at the time.

Before and After the War

In 1937, Kwan and renowned opera actor Kwong Shan-siu formed Hillmoon Film Company,[63] and produced a series of films, including *For Duty's Sake* (aka *Blood and Tears at the Border*, 1937) and *The Golden-Leaf Chrysanthemum* (1938). Among them, *The Golden-Leaf Chrysanthemum* achieved considerable success overseas, causing a sensation in Singapore.[64] Kwan and Kwong's collaboration extended beyond films. After the war, they set up the Hillmoon Alumni Club, and through written and oral examinations, accepted about a dozen students. The name 'Hillmoon' was formed by taking the second word of Kwong Shan-siu's name (meaning 'hill') and Moon Kwan's English name.[65]

As the war spread through China, six production companies helped raise funds for the nation by making a non-profit film together. Eight directors—Moon Kwan, Joseph Sunn Jue, Tang Xiaodan, So Yee, Lee Fa, Lee Chi-ching, Chan Pei and Nam Hoi Sup-sam Long—co-directed the film entitled *The Last Stand* (aka *At this Crucial Juncture*, 1938), which featured almost every actor and actress in Hong Kong at the time.[66]

60. Yan You, 'Grandview Expands its Market Subtitles of *Life Lines* Sent to Nanjing for Review Director Moon Kwan Undertakes the Task Personally', *Movietone*, Shanghai, Vol 5, No 13, 3 April 1936, p 309 (in Chinese).
61. Ng Cho-fan, '26. The Delegation Goes to Beijing', same as note 56, 31 March 1956.
62. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*, note 4, p 214.
63. 'Research on Films Made in China for the Year (3)', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 37, 1938 (in Chinese).
64. In the article 'A Report on Popular Films that Came to Screen in Singapore in the Last Two Weeks' (*Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 37, 16 January 1938 [in Chinese]), writer Yin Hu wrote about *The Golden-Leaf Chrysanthemum, Part Two* and mentioned that 'the first *The Golden-Leaf Chrysanthemum* had caused a great sensation when it was screened in Singapore.'
65. Mu Tian, 'Serendipity', 'Anecdotes of Broadcasting', *Wen Wei Po*, 30 July 1986; 'The King of Broadcast Chung Wai-ming', *Wen Wei Po • Baihua Weekly*, 27 July 2003 (both in Chinese).
66. Ng Cho-fan, '19. *The Last Stand*', same as note 56, 23 March 1956. There are other sources saying that the directors of *The Last Stand* were Chan Pei, Lee Chi-ching, Nam Hoi Sup-sam Long, So Yee, Joseph Sunn Jue and Ko Lei-hen, see 'The Highly Valued Film *The Last Stand*', *Artland*, No 12, 15 August 1937 (in Chinese).

In 1937, Moon Kwan (right) and Kwong Shan-siu (left) formed Hillmoon, and produced masterpieces such as *For Duty's Sake* (1937) and *The Golden-Leaf Chrysanthemum* (1938).

The War Ended (1947), a post-war title directed and scripted by Moon Kwan (Left: Tso Tat-wah; right: Wong Man-lei)

In 1939, Kwan and Tso Yee-man toured the US, screening Hillmoon's films. They also planned to sell a script about the war in China to Hollywood.[67] Later, when Hong Kong fell, Kwan returned to the Mainland via a circuitous route, eventually settling in Enping and teaching at the province-established Yue Hua Middle School there.[68]

After the war, the Cantonese film market gradually revived. Distribution companies and agencies were happy to invest in Cantonese film productions, and so Kwan returned to his former career.[69] In 1947, he wrote and directed *The War Ended* (aka *Tears of the Returned One*), hoping to reflect the problems he saw in post-war society. It won great acclaim from his contemporaries, who praised it as a film which 'established a model for Cantonese films; directors who like Hollywood films, who portray vulgar interests and those who do slipshod work should watch *The War Ended* and feel ashamed of themselves.'[70] When the cinematic run of *The War Ended* was suddenly stopped in Guangzhou, Kwan wrote a letter to Song Ziwen (aka T V Soong) in fury.[71]

67. 'South China Film Partners Moon Kwan and Tso Yee-man Go to the US Kwan Plans to Sell a Script about War in China to Hollywood', *Screen Weekly*, Shanghai, No 62, 13 December 1939, p 7 (in Chinese).
68. Feng, 'Moon Kwan Returns to Hong Kong in a Rush to Cast Outstanding Actors', *Gong Ping Bao*, Guangzhou, 6 January 1947 ; Moon Kwan, *Zi Ming Ji* (*My Own Voice*), Hong Kong: Hillmoon Alumini Club, 1965, p 20 (both in Chinese).
69. San Min, 'Cantonese Films Resurrected Cantonese Actors Show Off as Shooting of *Life Lines* Sequel Begins Soon', *Gong Ping Bao*, Guangzhou, 5 May 1947; 'The Prospects of Hong Kong Cinema', *Gong Ping Bao*, 13 May 1947 (both in Chinese).
70. Lü Yang, 'On *The War Ended*', *Gong Ping Bao*, Guangzhou, 21 August 1947 (in Chinese).
71. 'Screening of *The War Ended* Is Forced to Stop Moon Kwan Writes to Song Ziwen', *The Petty News*, Shanghai, 6 July 1948 (in Chinese).

Co-directed and co-scripted by Joseph Sunn Jue and Moon Kwan, and starring Kwan Tak-hing, *Kwan-ti, God of War* (1956) was a meaningful reunion among the trio after their last cinematic collaboration in San Francisco. (Left: Tang Bik-wan; right: Kwan Tak-hing)

In 1947, he formed the South China Film Directors Association with many other directors.[72] Two years later, in response to a call by the 'Film and Drama Weekly' published by *Wen Wei Pao* (aka *Wen Wei Po*), he participated in a seminar to discuss in detail how Cantonese films might change for the better.[73] In the same year, he signed a joint declaration to support the Cantonese Film Clean-Up Movement.[74]

Meanwhile, Kwan was working with Joseph Sunn Jue once again. During the war, Sunn Jue had gone to the US to purchase new equipment. But when the war broke out, his return to Hong Kong was delayed. During this time, he established a branch studio for Grandview in the US.[75] After the war, Kwan took charge of casting in Hong Kong for the American branch.[76] He also produced several films with Sunn Jue, among which was *Kwan-ti, God of War* (1956), the first Cantonese film to be shot entirely in Eastman Color. The leading man was Kwan Tak-hing, whom he had known years ago in San Francisco. This film brought the three men full circle back together in the same picture, this time a legendary story from the Three Kingdoms era.[77] In 1995, Moon Kwan passed away from illness in the US. He was 101.

Conclusion: A Life in Cinematic Colours

Moon Kwan can be said to be somewhat of a legend in world film history. Hailing from Taishan, Guangdong, he went to school in the US in his teens, and was a key figure in bringing European and American film production experience, technology and equipment back to China. His life

72. Zhan Shu, 'Major Southern Chinese Film Directors Appear on Camera Together to Actively Prepare for a Directors' Association', *Gong Ping Bao*, Guangzhou, 3 November 1947; Ling Yun, 'Hong Kong Film Directors' Association Formed', *Gong Ping Bao*, 17 November 1947 (both in Chinese).
73. 'Workers Hold Seminar Changes Necessary to Avoid Decline', *Wen Wei Pao*, 27 February, 1949 (in Chinese).
74. 'Southern Chinese Film Workers Initiate "Clean-Up Movement" Joint Declaration of Ceasing Production of Bad Films', *Wen Wei Pao*, 10 April 1949 (in Chinese).
75. 'Joseph Sunn Jue Arrives in Hong Kong from the US', *The Kung Sheung Daily News*, 22 November 1948 (in Chinese).
76. Leng Xia, 'Wong Ang Plans to Go to Hong Kong for Making Films in the US', *Gong Ping Bao*, Guangzhou, 5 February 1947 (in Chinese).
77. Mo Chou, 'General Kwan's Face Turns Red in Colour Film', 'Drama Window', *Wen Wei Pao*, 17 March 1956 (in Chinese).

was the stuff of legend: he personally witnessed European filmmakers escaping to the US at the start of the WWI; the emergence of minor studios in Hollywood and the rise of the major film studios, the production of *Broken Blossoms*; as well as the birth of sound films. He also helped to introduce the latest production technology and equipment to Asia and assisted film pioneers like Lai Man-wai and Joseph Sunn Jue during the early parts of their careers. In the 1930s, an era of rapid development in the Chinese film industry, sound films flooded in from overseas, prompting Chinese films to transform from silent to sound. Film companies saw business opportunities in Cantonese-speaking audiences located in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and Northern US, and aggressively developed Cantonese films for this market. Hong Kong's geographical and political advantages made it an appropriate home base for Cantonese cinema.[78] Within this context, Kwan was one of the trailblazers who helped to create the first Cantonese sound films. His adventures across Shanghai, Guangdong, San Francisco and Hollywood were very closely related to the stories of the Taishanese people's overseas diaspora. History provided an excellent platform in a given time and space for Moon Kwan, where he lived out his exciting and ever-changing life in cinematic colours. [Translated by Roberta Chin]

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78. See note 32.

Lo Ming-yau and The United Photoplay Service Limited in the 1930s: Ideals and Setbacks of the Affiliate Management System

Lee Pui-tak

I. The Establishment of The United Photoplay Service's Hong Kong Headquarter

Lo Ming-yau

Before he founded The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua), Lo Ming-yau (1901–1967) had been managing theatres in Beijing. He was able to break the domination of foreign-owned theatres and establish his own cinema circuit due to three factors: firstly, affiliate management—he formed a network with different theatres, including those managed through foreign investments, to negotiate for more extensive exhibition rights and better profit-sharing deals; secondly, he lowered ticket prices to make cinema-going affordable to the general public, thus making film the main form of entertainment for the common people; and thirdly, he absorbed management talents from various backgrounds and capitalised on their various styles.

Between 1924 and 1925, Lo built Zhongyang Theatre in Beijing and founded Palace Theatre and Hebei Theatre in Tianjin. As the number of cinemas in his network increased, he was able to negotiate with foreign-owned cinemas like Ping'an Theatre. He successfully formed a cinema circuit consisting of six cinemas in Beijing and Tianjin and broke the long-time foreign domination of cinema business. In 1927, Lo founded North China Amusement Company and merged with or built over 20 cinemas in various cities such as Taiyuan, Jinan, Shijiazhuang, Harbin and Shenyang to control the film exhibition rights in northern and northeastern China.[1] Lo had his first taste of success in affiliate management, and the significance of this experience was two-fold:

1. Luo Zhengxin, 'How Lo Ming-yau Built His Career in the Film Industry,' in Cultural and Historical Research Committee of the Panyu County Political Consultative Conference (ed), *Panyu Wenshi Ziliao* (*Cultural and Historical Materials of Panyu*), No 9, November 1991, pp 53-54 (in Chinese).

firstly, affiliate management enabled him to compete against foreign-owned companies; and secondly, he saw endless possibilities in the film industry. After all, film exhibition was only part of the downstream operations of the industry while midstream and upstream operations, such as production and distribution, were enticing options for Lo to expand his business.

Lo Ming-yau's dream was to found his own film production company. After securing support from his father Lo Shut-po and uncle Luo Wen'gan, he enthusiastically planned for the establishment of UPS. According to Lo, the greatest goal in founding UPS was to join forces from various parties under the 'affiliate management' system to counter competition from Hollywood in the US. He explained,

> We know that among all foreign film companies, only the eight major studios from the US… have distribution facilities in China. All the major theatres in big cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Hong Kong are all directly controlled by these eight studios. Some of the theatres are even bound by contracts not to screen Chinese films. These four cities account for 80-90% of the Chinese market for American films. About 90% of the people in charge of these theatres, as mentioned before, are Cantonese. Why don't we Cantonese unite to form a company to handle the distribution of foreign films in China and to gain control of the situation? ….
>
> That is the fact, so the Cantonese who own the majority of these theatres should hasten to unite and form a strong line of combat by means of an affiliation.[2]

The 'Cantonese' mentioned in Lo's quote above are from all aspects of the film industry, including producers, directors, screenwriters, actors, cinematographers, sound recordists, projectionists, etc. It can be said that Cantonese were fully immersed in every facet of the Chinese film industry and playing key roles. Lo felt that if the Cantonese united, they had a fair chance of competing with the Americans. According to the surviving prospectus information of UPS, at the establishment of the company there had been eight directors, including Robert Ho Tung, Lo Ken (aka Lo Din-hok), Lo Shut-po, Lo Ming-yau, Chan Hau-po, Lai Pak-hoi (aka Lai Buk-Hoi), Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho and Lai Man-wai. Among them, only Lai Man-wai was not listed as a promoter.[3]

According to the *Memorandum and Articles of Association of The United Photoplay Service Limited*, the prospectus of the company contained several noteworthy points that would help us understand the development of the studio itself:

Firstly, the registered capital of the company was one million Chinese silver dollars (Shanghai currency at the time), divided into 100,000 shares of 10 silver dollars each. Additional shares could be issued as necessary. The currency used here is the Chinese silver dollar, indicating that the share allotment scheme was targeted at Mainland investors. The amount of paid-in capital was 250,000 silver dollars, amounting to 25% of the total number

2. Lo Ming-yau, 'Cantonese and Chinese Cinema', *Guangdong Wenwu* (*Guangdong Cultural Relics*), Vol 8, Hong Kong: Chinese Culture Association in Hong Kong, 1941, pp 196-200 (in Chinese).
3. Although Lai Man-wai was a board director of UPS, he was not listed as a promoter like Lai Pak-hoi. See *Memorandum and Articles of Association of The United Photoplay Service Limited*, 1930, p 27.

Significance of the UPS trade mark

UPS actors Florence Lim (left) and Henry Lai (right) holding the UPS trade mark

of shares. In other words, the company was under-subscribed.[4] Thus, it can be seen that under-subscription was a problem for UPS from the start. But since the target investors were from the Mainland, why was the company registered in Hong Kong, and why was its headquarter set up there? According to Lo Ming-yau himself, 'The reason that the company was first registered in Hong Kong was that the founders and the majority of the investors were Hong Kong businessmen. In addition, Hong Kong shares had a daily market price, making them easy to trade and mortgage, which was convenient for our shareholders to calculate the value of their shares.'[5] It is worth mentioning that in 1930, the value of the Chinese silver dollar was in decline. Another factor that was favourable to Hong Kong investors was the increase in exchange rate against Chinese sliver dollars.

Secondly, according to the regulations, the directors of UPS may not receive more than 500 silver dollars, or less than 250 silver dollars, in emoluments yearly. Executive directors or any three directors may call a board meeting, and any issues discussed at the meetings must be decided upon by the majority of directors present at the meeting. Each director must own either 500 company shares or 100 individual shares and offer 400 additional shares to external investors ('stock promoters'). There must not be more than 100 of these stock promoters. The company's directors must be responsible for at least 25% of all shares issued, i.e. 25,000 shares; and externally issued shares must exceed 5% of the total shares. Based on the above arrangements, the 250,000 silver dollars of actual paid-in capital was perfectly accounted for.

4. Kenzaburo Amagai (ed), *Chūka Minkoku Jitsugyō Meikan* (*The Directory of the Companies in the Republic of China*), Tokyo: Toa Dobunkai Kenkyu Hensanbu (Research and Publication Division of the East Asian Common Culture Association), 1934, pp 1267-1268 (in Japanese).
5. Lo Ming-yau, 'A Report on the Organisation of The United Photoplay Service Limited (The Second Report)', *The Film Magazine*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 10, 31 October 1930, p 45 (in Chinese).

Thirdly, the company's annual profits must be divided as follows: 10% to be given back to the shareholders as dividends; 25% must be split up into the following: 7.5% to the stock promoters, to be decided by the related directors, another 7.5% to the directors and 10% to the executive director, company secretary and company treasurer. Whatever remained would be put into the company's reserves.[6] In other words, being the executive director, Lo Ming-yau was UPS's largest stakeholder and thus entitled to over 17.5% of the company's profits. In addition, as the Company's permanent director and executive director, Lo very much assumed sole control over the company's management.

The founders of UPS included Robert Ho Tung, Lo Ken, Lo Shut-po, Lo Ming-yau, Chan Hau-po, Lai Pak-hoi, Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho and Lai Man-wai, all of whom had close ties to Hong Kong. Robert Ho Tung was a business tycoon in Hong Kong and a millionaire by 1900. In addition, many of his families were compradors for Hong Kong's key foreign firms. Their networks and relationships were definitely valuable to UPS; the interesting question here is why Robert Ho Tung was willing to be the chairman of a film company? Was it an interesting investment for him, or an opportunity to expand his social network? Lo Ken, known as 'King of Southern China Cinemas', had known Lo Ming-yau for many years; his own cinema circuit had also helped exhibit films produced by UPS.[7] Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho used to be Lo Ken's secretary. He ran Union Publicity Service in Hong Kong

Robert Ho Tung with UPS actors: (from left) Florence Lim, Ruan Lingyu, Robert Ho Tung, his personal secretary Wei Tat, his son Robert Ho Shai-lai

Lai Man-wai (left) and Lo Ming-yau (right)

6. See note 3, p 39.
7. Chen Gang, 'Lo Ken: The Cinematic Life of a Supporter of Commercial Integration (Trust)', *Film Art*, Beijing, No 4 (2009), p 132 (in Chinese).

and Shanghai, which specialised in translating subtitles for Western films and publishing *The Film Magazine*, which were very helpful for UPS's film production, marketing and promotion. Lo Shut-po was Lo Ming-yau's father. He had been the manager of the Hong Kong branch of the German firm Reuter, Brockelmann & Co., as well as the general manager of the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company Limited. He had also founded China Merchants Tobacco Company, Cheung Lee Grass Mat Factory and Shop, and Cheung Lung Grass Mat Factory and Shop. In addition, he had invested in the Kwong Chow Theatre and Great Eastern Tobacco Co., Ltd.[8] Although Lo Shut-po did not have much experience in film industry, he had been the vice-commander of the Canton Merchants' Corps and the first head of the Visa Department of the Nationalist government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be stationed in Hong Kong, so his political connections were considerable. Chan Hau-po was a manager in German company Siemssen & Co., and had been an active politician during the Beiyang government era (1912–1928). Among this group, the brothers Lai Pak-hoi and Lai Man-wai were the most experienced in film production. Lai Pak-hoi had co-founded numerous film companies, including The World Theatre (1921), China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd (1923), Hong Kong Film Company (1928), The United Photoplay Service Limited (1931) and China Sound and Silent Movies Production Company (1933). Apart from Lo Ming-yau, he had also worked with business tycoon Lee Hysan and film producer Tong Sing-to.

Without a doubt, Cantonese businessmen from Hong Kong were the main supporters of UPS when it was first founded. Company chairman Robert Ho Tung served two consecutive terms in that capacity. Among the new directors to join the board, many were prominent Hong Kong businessmen such as Chien Yu-chieh of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company Limited, Aw Boon Haw of Tiger Balm Eng Aun Tong, Shiu Wai-ming of Vitasoy and Western pharmaceutical entrepreneur Leung Wei-cho. From this we can see that Lo had always wanted to attract investment from the local business circle, but only a minority of the board of directors actually worked in the film industry. At the company's founding there were six of them; in the first term there were seven; and in the second term there were four. This sowed the seeds of later crisis caused by industry outsiders ruling over experienced film professionals.

As described before, Lo Ming-yau ran the company with experience from his management of theatres in northern and northeastern China, and he established a cartel-style organisation for that purpose. Ultimately, Lai Man-wai's China Sun Motion Picture Company Limited in Shanghai became the UPS 1st Studio, acquired at a discounted asset price of 40,000 silver dollars; Lu Jie's Great China Lilium Pictures Co., Ltd became the 2nd Studio, acquired at a discounted asset price of 100,000 silver dollars;[9] Lai Pak-hoi's Ming Yuen Studio became the 3rd Studio, acquired at a discounted asset price of 20,000

8. 'Mr Lo Shut-po', *Xianggang Huaqiao Tuanti Zonglan* (*An Overview of Overseas Chinese Groups in Hong Kong*), Ou Shaoxuan (ed), Hong Kong: International News Service, 1947 (in Chinese).
9. The total capital of 100,000 silver dollars included 45,000 of the discounted price of the factory and its equipment and facilities plus 55,000 in cash.

silver dollars; Dan Duyu's Shanghai Photoplay Company became the 4th Studio; the 5th Studio was to be constructed in Beijing and the 6th Studio was to be built in Chongqing. Lo believed that acquiring different studios with their equipment and facilities at a discount price was of great benefit to the parent firm UPS, as Lo recalled, 'Such equipment are profit-generating tools. They are all in excellent condition and suitable for use. Per market price and current exchange rates, they are worth over 300,000 silver dollars. Presently, our company has taken possession of them for only 105,000 silver dollars. Not only is this in line with our original budget, our company has already reaped great benefits from these deals.'[10]

Lo openly stated that he chose Hong Kong as his base for three main reasons: right timing, convenient location and human networks. In terms of weather, natural scenery and urban infrastructure, Hong Kong compared favourably to Los Angeles in the US where Hollywood films were made, and could be molded into the Hollywood of the Far East: 'The heart of this city's prosperity is Hollywood, at the cutting edge of the world's film industry. With Hollywood comes prosperity for Los Angeles. Prosperity in Los Angeles brings prosperity to the state of California. Therefore, isn't the film industry key to the prosperity of a city like Hong Kong?'[11]

An introduction on the UPS 1st, 2nd and 3rd Studios in Shanghai in *U.P.S. Year Book 1934–1935*

10. See note 5, p 46.
11. Lo Ming-yau, 'The Relationship Between the Film Industry and the Prosperity of Hong Kong', *The Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce Monthly Magazine*, Vol 1, No 1, 1 April 1934, p 50 (in Chinese).

Thanks to UPS's discounted acquisition of various film facilities and its affiliate management, even some films that had begun but not finished principal photography, such as China Sun's *Wild Flowers by the Road* (1930) and Great China Lilium's *Because I am Your Elder Brother* (aka *When A Brother Sacrifices*, 1930) could be counted among the company's early accomplishments.[12] With this method of gathering a collection of film companies already in existence within the shortest amount of time, and forming them into the largest film enterprise in modern China, it can be said that Lo had achieved something never seen before at that point in film history. According to research by Yu Mo-wan, the first year of UPS's establishment ended with about $32,000 in profit. Dividends of 5% were distributed. The following year yielded less profit, at about $21,400. Dividends of 5% were again distributed.[13] UPS made three films in 1930, nine films in 1931, and 17 films in 1932.[14] On average, in the first year each film made about $2,700 in profit; but much less in the second year at $1,260. It was definitely a challenge for UPS to try to maintain a profitable status.

II. UPS's Dilemma that Lo Ming-yau Has to Resolve

Under-subscription was apparently a scenario that Lo had not anticipated. Still, he faced the challenge head-on, even travelling abroad in 1932 and 1934 to Southeast Asia and North America respectively in order to get support from the overseas Chinese community. He had wished to inject new capital and at the same time open up new markets, but did not achieve these desired results. In July 1932, Lo arrived in Vietnam and was welcomed by the local Chinese merchant organisation. When he went to Singapore, he received support from the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The local newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* reported extensively on Lo's visit and UPS's films *Humanity* (1932) and *The 19th Route Army's Glorious Battle Against the Japanese Enemy* (1932), both of which received a lot of coverage. In fact, the name UPS became widely known in Singapore and Southeast Asia. In addition to creating a network of Chinese-owned cinemas in Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines, a production studio in Singapore was planned. In March 1933, besides the establishment of UPS's branch office in Singapore, a UPS Singapore Film Company was set up as well.[15]

12. Lo Ming-yau, 'A Report on the Formation Process of The United Photoplay Service Limited', *The Film Magazine*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 9, 31 August 1930, p 43 (in Chinese).
13. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang Dianying Shihua* (*Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*) *Vol 2 (1930–1939)*, Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Ltd, 1997, pp 27 & 47 (in Chinese).
14. *U.P.S. Year Book 1934–1935*, p 33 (in Chinese).
15. Pang Yanfang, 'The Lian Hua Film Studio in Nanyang', *Contemporary Cinema*, Beijing, No 10 (2020), pp 95-103 (in Chinese).

The UPS Theatre in Manila, the Philippines

Lo Ming-yau (back row centre) visiting Southeast Asia

Lo Ming-yau (3rd left) and Moon Kwan (2nd left) visiting the US to study the American film industry

In April 1934, Lo was commissioned by the Nationalist government to visit North America to conduct a survey of the American film industry as a model for China. Lo widely publicised this trip, including paying a pre-trip visit to the Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, where he was warmly welcomed by local business leaders such as Shouson Chow, Robert Kotewall and Huang Guangtian. The purpose of this trip for Lo was three-fold: to promote UPS; to look for potential investors; and to source equipment. Here, sourcing equipment means buying machinery to produce and project talkies for UPS, in order to catch up with the latest trends in cinema.[16] Unfortunately, the activity with the highest priority—finding investors—did not go as well as planned. Lo again had no choice but to return to China.

When UPS was first established, it made a small profit in the first two years and subsequently its business went downhill. The main reason for its failure was financial difficulty. First of all, it was the Mukden (Manchurian) Incident on 18 September 1931.

16. Wei Taifeng, 'The Three Missions of UPS General Manager Lo Ming-yau's Trip to the US: To Promote the Company, to Solicit the Company Stock, and to Acquire Equipment', *Cinema Weekly*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 8, 1 August 1934, p 196; 'Shouson Chow and Others Bid Lo Ming-yau Farewell For His Overseas Trip on Film Industry; Robert Kotewall Delivers Farewell Speech; Lo Ming-yau Criticised European Films Seriously', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*), 10 April 1934 (both in Chinese).

The main studio of UPS in Shanghai

Northeastern China fell. Many cinemas in Lo's network had to cease operations. Next came the 1932 Japanese invasion of Shanghai. The UPS 4th Studio was destroyed and the company began to have cash flow problems.[17] Through all this, Lo struggled hard and pushed through three rounds of crucial restructuring of the company.

The first round happened in 1932 when the 4th Studio was destroyed in battle and Dan Duyu backed out of UPS to join Yee Hwa Motion Picture Co. Lo was forced to take some decisive measures. He shut down the UPS 5th Studio in Beijing and the UPS Actor Training School, dissolved North China Amusement Company and stopped the construction plans of the 6th Studio in Chongqing. The business strategy of UPS rapidly changed from expansion to consolidation of its existing assets.[18]

During the second round of restructuring, due to two failed overseas attempts to raise capital, UPS changed from a system of 'separate studios' to 'joint studios'. As a result, the 2nd Studio remained unchanged, the 1st and 3rd Studios were combined, and the 3rd Studio in Hong Kong was shut down. The original plan to collaborate with Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) to set up an overseas UPS was cancelled.[19] The Hong Kong headquarters and the Shanghai branch management office were merged together. Meanwhile, a main production studio was set up to oversee the 1st, 2nd and 3nd Studios, which were managed respectively by Lai Man-wai, Lu Jie and Zhu Shilin. In addition, a new position of deputy manager was created under the general manager, and Lai Man-wai was appointed to hold the post concurrently with his existing responsibilities.[20] Thus, it can be seen that UPS continually engaged in 'trimming the fat,' saving expenses by combining and restructuring. The original concept of affiliate management, which had been effective up to this point, began to unravel.

17. Chen Ye, 'Comments on Lai Man-wai, Lai Pak-hoi, and Early Hong Kong Cinema—A Discussion on the Views of Li Yizhuang and Zhou Chengren', *Twenty-First Century*, Institute of Chinese Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Online Edition, No 42, 30 September 2005 (in Chinese).
18. Yuan Xiaoming, *Study on the Lianhua Company and its Film Creation*, Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing House, 2016, p 54 (in Chinese).
19. 'UPS: Lo Ming-yau Violated the Joint Production Contract', in Wei Junzi (ed), *Guangying Li De Langhua: Xianggang Dianying Mailuo Huiyi* (*The Waves in Lights and Shadows: The Memories of Hong Kong Cinema*), Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company (Hong Kong) Limited, 2019, pp 45-46 (in Chinese).
20. See note 18, pp 55-56.

The third round occurred in May 1935, when the 1st Studio ran into financial crisis, and UPS appealed to the Nationalist government for assistance, but was given the cold shoulder. Now desperate, Lo began to cut staff salaries. His workers protested: if he continued, they would go on strike. In December 1935, Lo announced that he would leave UPS. On 15 July 1936, Wu Sinze (aka Wu Xingzai) and Wu Bangfan took over UPS and changed its name to Hua'an. Thereafter, UPS was practically dissolved.

In fact, back on 27 December 1930, Lu Jie had gone to Hong Kong in his capacity as the representative of Great China Lilium to attend the establishment ceremony of UPS. The purpose of the trip was not only to attend the business meetings, but also to try to collect the money owed to Great China Lilium. Lu's diary also contains other examples of UPS's fragile financial foundation that would foreshadow its later economic crises:

> 11 February 1931: This time, a large group of us went from Shanghai to Guangzhou and Hong Kong, hoping to promote the stock offering. In the end, there were very few investors, well below Lo [Ming-yau]'s expectations.
>
> 30 July 1932: Due to the excessive amount in film fees owed to Heng Kee's, they refused to supply film stock to UPS.
>
> 3 August 1932: I visited Sin [Wu Sinze] and told him of our liquidity issues. If we were to stop shooting due to the lack of film stock, our losses would be even greater.
>
> 23 May 1933: Lo assembled everyone to another meeting, announced the failure of the stock offering and that we were in financial difficulty.
>
> 26 June 1933: Branch Management Committee Meeting. Out of funds. Difficult to do any businesses.
>
> 1 May 1934: The company is extremely impoverished. Discussed with Tan to cancel location shoot in Hangzhou.
>
> 1 August 1934: Begging for funds everywhere; Tao [Boxun], Zhu [Shilin] said no way out this time, this boat will surely run aground.
>
> 10 August 1934: Recently in discussions with Yukang about a loan and was close to success, but because Lo will not be returning to Shanghai, Yukang suddenly refused the loan.[21]

21. Wang Ran, *"'Lu Jie Riji Zhaicun" Zhong De Lu Jie Ji Qi Dianying Huodong Yanjiu (1920–1949)'* (*Research on Lu Jie in 'Extract of the Lu Jie Diary' and His Activities in the Film Industry, 1920–1949*), Master Thesis, Nanjing University of the Arts, 2015, p 13; Wu Jun, *The Early Filmmaking of Sun Yu in the Context of the Development of Lian Hua Film Company (1930–1937),* Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University Press, 2018, p 20 (both in Chinese).

By 1935, UPS was out of funds and in dire straits. The workers were about to go on strike. All the staff were having trouble making ends meet. The company was on the verge of dissolution. Lu Jie writes in his diary:

3 April 1935: Arrived at the new studio three days ago. Felt that everything has gone past the point of no return. Restructuring would be difficult. Went to the branch in the afternoon. Although the studio has been merged, the branch has no solution at all regarding finances.

5 April 1935: The branch requested funding, to no avail.

1 May 1935: Tao [Boxun] reported that due to difficulties in carrying out any businesses, he planned to give Lo his resignation as manager.

4 May 1935: Morning meeting. To adjust to the company's cash flow problem, the sets will be adjusted: fewer, smaller, and simpler.

15 May 1935: Sent letter to the branch office: due to failure to pay water and electricity bills, the studio's water and power supplies shall be cut.

17 May 1935: Due to extreme lack of funds, filming has been interrupted.

28 May 1935: Went to the branch in the morning. Tao reported that Lai [Man-wai] had just called to say the workers had met up yesterday and decided to stop work and demand back pay.

15 June 1935: The branch issued post-dated cheques, which often bounce back on the due date.

12 July 1935: Filming stopped due to lack of funds. Nothing to do.

1 August 1935: New arrangement begins today. Told Tao and Zhu [Shilin] that the back pay for May had been distributed yesterday, but because the amount did not suffice, there were immense complaints and they should think of a solution to try to diffuse the situation.

5 August 1935: Due to being owed wages, the workers refuse to obey orders. The mail room has refused to deliver any mail for the past 20 days.

5 December 1935: Food supplies have run out. There is only enough money to provide half of the lunch servings.[22]

22. Wang Ran, ibid, p 13.

III. The Great Transition in Lo Ming-yau's Life

Above is an account of Lo Ming-yau's experience in running UPS. From 1932 onwards, it was tough going every step of the way. He could not let down his guard for even a moment. Shockingly, the people who had cooperated with him all left one by one, including Zhang Yu Fengzhi. Zhang was the wife of General Zhang Xueliang. In the past, she had co-financed Shenyang Theatre with Lo, but her name never appeared on the first list of UPS's board members. Her presence was a flash in the pan, so to speak. It is worth noting that although Zhang Xueliang was then the revered commander of the Northeast Army (aka Northeast Peace Preservation Forces), he did not belong to any faction of the Kuomintang (KMT). In 1936, when the Xi'an Incident occurred, anyone who had a close relationship with Zhang could have been a target of the Nationalist government. Lo Ken was known as 'King of Southern China Cinemas.' According to some critics, although he was a shareholder of UPS, he was unwilling to show UPS's films exclusively in his cinemas, insisting on showing Western films that brought greater profits.[23] Like UPS, Lo Ken was a victim of the turbulent times in the 1930s. The cinemas in his circuit were either destroyed in battle or had to cease operations. In the end, his loans were greater than his assets, and he declared bankruptcy in 1935. After Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho left UPS, he joined Wen Tsung-yao's organisation, China Motion Pictures Holdings Company, as board director.[24] In fact, Lai Pak-hoi and Lo Ming-yau had various arguments while shooting *A Virtuous Woman*. Lai eventually left and was replaced by cinematographer Lo Wing-cheung.[25]

So far there has been no information indicating that Lo felt upset about losing any of the aforementioned business partners. Lo was the leader at the helm of UPS, and quite a few critics felt that the failure of the company had a lot to do with Lo's personality and his way of handling things. On 4 September 1936, *The Min Kao Daily News, Canton* ran an article discussing the reasons for the failure of UPS and summarised them into three main points: firstly, management of both the production and human resources departments was not scientific; secondly, opinions regarding production in all the studios under the UPS banner were not well coordinated; and thirdly, failure to make timely adjustments in line with the development of talkies.[26] Famous director Moon Kwan Man-ching, who had

23. Guo Haiyan, *Lianhua Yingye Gongsi Tanxi* (*An Exploration of UPS*), Shanghai: Oriental Publishing Center, 2017, pp 300-301 (in Chinese).
24. Mu Weitong considered Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho, who always betrays his friends, should regard as the 'Shi Yousan' of the film industry. As Lo Ken's secretary, Huang betrayed his boss and joined Lo Ming-yau's camp. Later, he turned his back on Lo Ming-yau and entered the film company run by Wen Tsung-yao. See Mu Weitong, 'The Shi Yousan of the Film Industry, Jeffrey Huang Yi-cho the General of Betrayal', *Camera News*, Shanghai, No 82, 1932 (in Chinese).
25. Huo Long, 'Before and After the Closure of UPS (Hong Kong)', *Movietone*, Shanghai, Vol 3, No 48, 14 December 1934, p 944 (in Chinese). See also note 23, p 302.
26. Ping Sheng, 'The Tears of the Cinema', *The Min Kao Daily News, Canton*, 4 September 1936 (in Chinese). Special thanks to Mr Wong Ha-pak of the Hong Kong Film Archive for the provision of this newspaper clipping.

worked with Lo before, felt that Lo's working style was too dictatorial. As Kwan observed:

> Since the films were making money, why were the company's finances in such a sorry state? The ultimate reason is bad management. Expenses were too great and there were too few film productions. The capital simply ran out…. Producers and directors adopted a 'quality over quantity' policy. 'Quality' meant higher cost and longer shooting time since the cost was borne by the company while the merit went to producers and directors. As a result, each director produced at most one to two films annually. It took one particular director two years to make a film. To support a huge organisation with 60 to 70 full-paid staff and actors with so many productions would inevitably 'exhaust' the studio.
>
> In this way, Lo cannot be excused. Being the one in total control of the company, he behaved like a 'king' or 'monarch', albeit perhaps sub-consciously. He had two characteristic traits: stern and undisciplined.[27]

Regarding the method with which Lo ran UPS, Lu Jie had also described Lo's personality and his working style in his diary. His descriptions completely match Moon Kwan's comments. Lo frequently quarrelled with the others:

> 8 May 1933: Zhu [Shilin] said Lo exaggerated like crazy, did not tell the truth and was difficult to work with.
>
> 29 June 1935: Lai [Man-wai] and Lo had a big quarrel in Lo's office. In the afternoon meeting, Lo mentioned that production will be completely split up into two units after 1 July. Lai and I will each manage one unit.
>
> 13 July 1935: Morning executives meeting. Lo announced nine methods to sustain the original organisational structure. Lai was furious. He said the organisational chart of the nine methods resembles a gun, symbolising the company's suicide. After the meeting, someone said Lai and Lo had been arguing for days. Lai demanded full control of his studio. Lo refused to give in, thus the arguments continued.
>
> 6 December 1935: Bang [Wu Bangfan] quoted Zhu in saying: Lo is befuddled but not mediocre; Lu [Jie] is mediocre but not befuddled; Lai is very befuddled and very mediocre; Chin [Ching-yu, aka Kam King-yu] is medium-level befuddled and medium-level mediocre; Gao is slightly befuddled and slightly mediocre.[28]

The decision to bring together film studios of different styles was criticised by director Sun Yu, who believed that it was an idea with many disadvantages. As he recalled, 'After I finished writing the script for *Wild Rose* at UPS's editorial department, I had a rather vicious argument with general manager Lo Ming-yau and the manager of the 1st Studio, Lai

27. Moon Kwan Man-ching, *Zhongguo Yintan Waishi* (*An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*), Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press, 1976, pp 130-132 (in Chinese).
28. See note 21, Wang Ran, pp 14-15 and Wu Jun, p 32.

Man-wai, regarding the plans for director distribution among the various studios at UPS as well as where I was based…. Also, because some of the 2nd Studio's films such as *Because I Am Your Elder Brother, Lust* (aka *A Slave of Passion*) and *Heartache* did not do so well at the box office, they made it a point to always praise the 1st Studio and look down on the 2nd Studio. I felt that was terribly unfair.' [29]

The setbacks experienced by Lo during his time in the film industry caused him to focus his energies elsewhere. There is evidence to show that on 17 September 1933, he was baptised at The Church of Christ in China Hop Yat Church in Hong Kong. From 1938 he ran Zhenguang Film Company (aka Chen Kwang Film Company), starting with a capital of $100,000.[30] This leads to speculation as to where the funds came from. How did Lo decide to put his resources and energy into religion rather than his film career, which he had been devoted to for years? I am also interested in the fact that, unlike other filmmakers, Lo did not take advantage of the protection offered by the concessions in Shanghai to continue his film activities. Quite the opposite, he intentionally avoided Shanghai, choosing to spend his reclusive retirement years in Hong Kong under the assumed name Law Lei-shun.

After World War II, Lo did try to revive his film business and manage cinemas in Guangzhou. Although that lasted only a short time, he did not plan to return to Shanghai.[31] I believe that Lo had doubts about the political power of the KMT, although his own uncle Luo Wen'gan had been Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Nationalist government. But apparently Luo Wen'gan did not belong to a major faction of the KMT; his political career had ended during the 1930s.[32] Although he had always been a board director of UPS, after his resignation in 1933, he did not have much influence to support UPS to regain its former glory. After 1949, Lo did not choose to settle down in Taiwan with the KMT, as did a lot of filmmakers. What reignited his passion turned out to be religious life. He dedicated the rest of his life and all his energy to the church. He combined Christian truth and traditional Chinese thinkings and created 'audio-visual sermons' to preach through films.[33] During the

29. Sun Yu, *Yinhai Fanzhou: Huiyi Wo De Yisheng* (*Sailing in the Silver Sea: Recalling My Life*), Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House, 1987, pp 87-88 (in Chinese).
30. Kinia Ng Choi-lin, 'Lo Ming-yau (1900–1967)', in Lee Kam-keung (ed), *Xianggang Jiaohui Renwu Zhuan (Xianggang Huaren Jidujiao Lianhui Baizhounian Zhiqing Xilie): Yijiuyiwu Zhi Erlingyiwu* (*Biographies of Church Leaders in Hong Kong [HKCCCU 100th Anniversary Series]: 1915 to 2015*), Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, 2014, pp 383-386 (in Chinese).
31. 'Mr Lo Ming-yau Talks About the Revival of Cinema', *Cinema of China (Hong Kong)*, No 1, September 1946, pp 4-5 (in Chinese).
32. Regarding the tumultuous political career of Luo Wen'gan, see Liu Yiqing, 'Luo Wen'gan in Both the Political and the Academic Scenes', *Tongzhou Gongjin* (*Go Forward in the Same Boat Together*), Guangdong, No 2 (2016), pp 69-74; Wong Chun-wai, *English Lessons and the Yellow Dragon: Chinese Elites of Queen's College of Hong Kong and Modern China*, Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company (Hong Kong) Limited, 2019, pp 456-492 (both in Chinese).
33. See Lo Ming-yau, 'Karma', *Special Bulletin of the Promotion of Morality Campaign*, Hong Kong: Wan Chai Kai-fong Welfare Association, 1963, p 25; Luo Zhengheng, 'Luo Mingyou's God, Country and Home', *Contemporary Cinema*, Bejing, No 1 (2008), p 49; Wang Wanyao, 'The Film Activities of Lo Ming-Yau in Hong Kong in His Later Years: A Study to *A New Life*,' *Film Art*, Beijing, No 1 (2018), pp 124-128 (all in Chinese).

war, Lo avoided Shanghai; after the war, he avoided Taiwan and lived in Hong Kong, once again showing his unique and self-assured personality and working style.

On 16 January 1950, Lai Man-wai, in his capacity as a shareholder of UPS, wrote a letter to the Hong Kong government to declare that all of the company's business activities had completely ceased and the company was no longer capable of fulfilling any legal obligations typically expected of ordinary companies.[34] On 21 April of the same year, Chin Ching-yu, who was living in Shanghai, in his capacity as UPS's representative in Shanghai, wrote a letter to China Film Corporation in Hong Kong to confirm that UPS's Shanghai operations had completely ceased.[35] The Hong Kong government announced the official dissolution of UPS on 17 February 1956. Thus ended the chapter on The United Photoplay Service Limited in Hong Kong film history.

IV. Conclusion

The 1920s and 1930s were the golden age of development of China's film industry. But because of the Sino-Japanese War and the oppressive rule of the Nationalist government, the first film trust in China, The United Photoplay Service Limited, rapidly went downhill. Lo Ming-yau, as the chief executive of UPS, had worked very hard to try to adapt the management style used by film companies in Hollywood in the US to China, attempting to develop the 'affiliate management' system and even to mould Hong Kong into the Hollywood of the Far East in order to break Hollywood's dominance over the Chinese market. It was most unfortunate that such ambitious system ultimately could not be sustained. Before the advantages of the system could materialise, its disadvantages had emerged all too clearly. Among the various studios at UPS, there were many conflicts of opinion. Lo's 'affiliate management' system, a model based on integration and cooperation, failed to withstand this test and finally fell apart. In the end, it became a meaningless lumping together.

What Lo lacked was more than simply capital. He was articulate and a convincing salesman but could not resolve the management and personnel issues at UPS. People who worked with him left one after another. In conclusion, the original intention of the founding of UPS was that the more companies signed on, the greater the capital and talent amassed. Unfortunately, Lo was unable to take full advantage of the situation or

34. *Documents of the Dissolution of The United Photoplay Service Limited* dated 17 February 1956 deposited in the Companies Registry of the Hong Kong government.

35. Letter of Chin Ching-yu addressing to China Film Corporation (Hong Kong), in which he disclosed the operation status of UPS, 21 April 1950. This letter is included in *Documents of the Dissolution of The United Photoplay Service Limited*, ibid.

prevent the downward slide of his company. Eventually, these advantages gradually became disadvantages and UPS could not escape the ill fate of dissolution. The United Photoplay Service Limited was officially wound up in 1956. [Translated by Roberta Chin]

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From Vertical Integration to Horizontal Alliances:

A Preliminary Discussion on the Business Strategies of Unique's Hong Kong Studio and Nanyang Film Company

May Ng

Foreword

Starting from the 1920s, the four Shaw brothers—Runje, Runde, Runme and Run Run—set up quite a number of film companies in cities such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore, including Unique, Nanyang, Shaw & Sons Ltd. and Shaw Brothers, successively becoming part of the most important and influential forces in the Chinese-language film industry. Shanghai's Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi), which they set up in Shanghai in 1925, was a crucial cornerstone to the Shaw brothers' film empire. Shanghai's Unique was established in the beginning of the silent film era in the 1920s with a 'low cost, fast production and big turnout' business strategy.[1] Later, the four brothers shared out their work across different regions: Runje and Runde stayed in Shanghai to manage Unique, while Runme and Run Run set up Hai Seng Co. and Shaw Brothers Company, opening up a distribution network throughout Southeast Asia. Operating under the 'vertical integration'[2] model, they controlled three major aspects of the film business: production, distribution and theatrical release, which allowed them to maximise their efficiency and profit.

The involvement of the Shaw brothers in the Hong Kong film industry began with one of the early Cantonese talkies, *The White Gold Dragon* (aka *The Platinum Dragon*, 1933). In 1933, Shanghai's Unique collaborated with Cantonese opera star Sit Kok-sin to adapt his signature play *The White Gold Dragon* for the silver screen. The result was a blockbuster success in Guangdong, Hong Kong and overseas markets. Unique thus decided to capitalise on the business opportunities offered by these Cantonese film markets. In 1934, they established a branch studio in Hong Kong and began to exclusively produce Cantonese films. In time they even moved their film production base from Shanghai to Hong Kong. However, the development of Unique's Hong Kong studio did not go as smoothly as planned. Second brother Runde and third brother Runme made its

1. Stephanie Chung Po-yin, 'The Industrial Evolution of a Fraternal Enterprise: The Shaw Brothers and the Shaw Organisation', in *The Shaw Screen: A Preliminary Study*, Wong Ain-ling (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003, p 3.
2. Ibid, p 1.

The four Shaw brothers

Runje Shaw

From left: Runde Shaw, Runme Shaw, Run Run Shaw

debut film *Unworthy of Love* (1935), but due to technical errors, the eldest brother Runje had to come from Shanghai to take up the directorial role to 'save the day'. The company survived for about two years until 1936, during which it caught fire twice. Runje stepped down the same year, and Unique changed its name to Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company), with Runde at its helm. In terms of output, Nanyang did not appear to have significantly increased its percentage of the annual Hong Kong film productions since Unique's Hong Kong studio era (see Table 1). However, through its studio rental discount mechanisms, Nanyang managed to build horizontal alliances with some of the smaller film companies and assist them to produce motion pictures, which in turn guaranteed a steady film supply for the Southeast Asian market. The goal of this essay is to rediscover through a close study of newspaper and journal records the development of Unique and Nanyang, both of which held places of great importance in the history of Hong Kong cinema, and to explore their evolution as they adjusted their management strategies in response to the times.

[Table 1] Statistics of Films Produced by Unique's Hong Kong Studio, Nanhua, Nanyang in the Pre-War Period and Their Percentage Share of the Hong Kong Film Market

Year	Total Number of Productions in Hong Kong	Unique	Nanhua (owned by Runme Shaw)	Nanyang	Total Number of Productions by Shaws' Studios (Percentage Share of the Hong Kong Film Market)
1934	14	1	–	–	1 (7%)
1935	31	9	–	–	9 (29%)
1936	48	7	2	–	9 (19%)
1937	86	1	–	18	19 (22%)
1938	86	3	–	16	19 (22%)
1939	127	1	–	12	13 (10%)
1940	90	–	–	13	13 (14%)
1941	80	–	–	15	15 (19%)
Total	562	22	2	74	98 (17%)

Tracing the Origins of the Establishment of Unique's Hong Kong Studio

As early as 1932, Runje Shaw had had an eye on the South China market, and had begun to dabble in producing Cantonese sound films.[3] In 1933, Shanghai's Unique produced *The Loving Pursuit* (1933), directed by Qiu Qixiang and starring Li Minghui, who had a Hong Kong background, and was 'filmed bilingually in both Mandarin and Cantonese dialogues'.[4] It was reported that *The Loving Pursuit* did very well at the box office in South China: 'As soon as it reached the Hong Kong and Guangdong regions, it was sold out everywhere, gauging $30,000 to $40,000's profit.'[5] The success of both *The Loving Pursuit* and *The White Gold Dragon* (a collaboration between Unique and Sit Kok-sin that broke all box-office records in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia) were testament to Runje's sharp eye for business.[6]

However, shooting Cantonese films in Shanghai was not a viable long-term strategy. Also, at the time the Central Film Censorship Committee had decreed a ban on making Cantonese films, so film companies in China could not openly do so.[7] Nonetheless, Cantonese films produced in a studio in Hong Kong could avoid Committee censorship, enabling them to enjoy the convenience of being able to be 'directly released in South China and Southeast Asia.'[8] Jackson Sum Kat-sing, who was a long-time employee of the four Shaw brothers, once wrote an essay under the pen name of Lo Kut explaining that Unique had set up studios in Hong Kong to streamline Cantonese film production: 'Runme and Run Run Shaw are so clever. They know that to make Cantonese films, one cannot rely on just Sit Kok-sin and Tong Suet-hing…. In particular, Cantonese opera stars and Cantonese film actors are plentiful in Hong Kong; in addition, Hong Kong is a duty-free port, which would greatly lower the cost of film production.'[9]

Besides these practical considerations, it was noted in some articles that the actual reason why Unique established a studio in Hong Kong was that the four brothers had a falling-out: third brother Runme, who 'held the all-powerful distribution rights to Southeast Asia', decided to start his own company because he was dissatisfied with the poor production quality of Unique under the control of eldest brother Runje. 'The audience had been suffering from economic stress and had developed more sophisticated tastes after many years of cinema-going experience. Thus, they began to reject bad films with distasteful subjects, seriously and adversely affecting Unique's business. Runje Shaw's third brother Runme was the manager of Unique in Singapore. His ways of thinking were more modern, and he saw that the demise of Unique's foreign markets was

3. See Ching May-bo & Ye Ruihong, '"Silent Films or Talkies?" On the Importation, Production and Reception of Sound Films in China in the 1930s' in Part 1 of this book, pp 14-31.
4. Zhou Qianwen, 'On the Operation Strategies of Unique Film Productions (1933–1937)', *New Films*, Shanghai, No 1, 2015, pp 61-66 (in Chinese).
5. '*The Loving Pursuit* Selling Well in South China', 'Titbids on Chinese Cinema', *Lin Loon Ladies Magazine*, Vol 3, No 14, 10 May 1933, p 628 (in Chinese).
6. 'Unique Planning to Build a Studio in Hong Kong', *Ling Sing*, Guangzhou, No 95, 8 June 1934, pp 23-24 (in Chinese).
7. Ibid, p 24.
8. Huang Wei, 'Hong Kong Film Industry is Active The United Photoplay Service Limited [UPS, aka Lianhua], Unique and Quanqiu Setting Up One After Another', *Cinema Weekly*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 6, 18 July 1934, pp 152-153 (in Chinese).
9. Lo Kut, 'Runje Shaw and Sit Kok-sin', *Panorama Magazine*, No 19, 1 June 1975, p 63 (in Chinese).

entirely due to its inferior products. He repeatedly wrote letters to advise his eldest brother to stop directing everything himself, and to cease promoting Chan Yoke-mui as film queen nor to allow her to perform in any more films…. But he never managed to convince his obstinate eldest brother…so the second and third brothers decided to start their own outfit in Hong Kong.'[10]

In the end, whether Unique's Hong Kong studio arose out of the mutual consensus among the four Shaw brothers, or out of their conflict, is not easy for outsiders to ascertain. One thing for sure, however, is that Hong Kong provided befitting conditions for the production and easy distribution of Cantonese films. It was definitely a good decision for Unique to set up their studio in Hong Kong.

Studio Set-Up, Equipment Transportation and Deployment Plans in Hong Kong

The first two commanders to lead the team to Hong Kong were Runme Shaw, who was responsible for setting up the studio, and Runde Shaw, chief accountant of Shanghai's Unique. According to newspaper reports, Runme arrived in Hong Kong on 5 May 1934. Joining him was 'a Westerner who used to work for Twentieth Century Fox'[11]; meanwhile, their Hong Kong representatives had already arrived in Shanghai to bring most of the production staff and film studio equipment to Hong Kong on 7 June. 'Director Tang Xiaodan, famous for his work on *The White Gold Dragon*, also came south.'[12]

By this time, construction work on the film studio had already begun. The Hong Kong studio's chosen site was at 42 Pak Tai Street in To Kwa Wan, Kowloon. Unique rented the site from the landlord at $800 per month. The film equipment was brought over from Singapore by Runme Shaw. Their goal was 'to mainly produce films for other companies, so only a partial technical crew is required, and there is no need to hire actors.'[13] The phrase 'mainly produce films for other companies' was the exact opposite approach of Runje Shaw's, who enjoyed full power in making production decisions as head of Shanghai's Unique. This was very likely the reason why Runde and Runme had decided to set up the Hong Kong studio. But later, as Runje came to Hong Kong to take over its operations, he reset the production strategy. The plan to 'mainly produce films for other companies' was thus put on hold, and would only become reality again two years later, after the establishment of Nanyang Film Company.

10. Tian Weng, 'Internal Conflicts Within Unique', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 3rd Year, No 32, 24 August 1934, p 625 (in Chinese); see also Kwan Wai-sum, 'Days of the Shaws' Films Before the War' in *Silverscreen Dreams: Recollection of Hong Kong Pre-War Cinema Tales*, Chan Tsang-ning (ed), Hong Kong: Let's Go Watch a Film, 2020, p 38 (in Chinese).
11. Lu Xun, 'Silver Screen News', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*), 20 June 1934 (in Chinese).
12. Ibid.
13. Ding Ding, 'Unique's New Development in Hong Kong', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 3rd Year, No 23, 22 June 1934, p 445 (in Chinese).

The Tumultuous Production History of Unique's Hong Kong Studio

The debut film of Unique's Hong Kong studio was to be *Unworthy of Love*, directed by Tang Xiaodan and starring Wu Tip-ying, who had also starred in another early Cantonese film *Blossom Time* (1933). At that time, sound film technology was still in its infancy, and sound recording tests and experiments were conducted for consecutive nights before the actual filming begins.[14] On 14 July 1934, when the cameras started rolling, the job of sound recordist fell to none other than the boss of the company, Runme Shaw.[15]

However, after its completion at the beginning of September,[16] *Unworthy of Love* was not immediately scheduled for release. Apparently, when Runme Shaw watched the film, he decided that it was substandard. He shelved the film and wrote a report to eldest brother Runje in Shanghai,[17] prompting Runje to relocate to Hong Kong to take over production matters, while Runde returned to Shanghai to focus on the distribution business.

After the completion of *Unworthy of Love* but before Runje's arrival in Hong Kong, Unique's Hong Kong studio started shooting its second film, *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower* (1934), adapted from Pak Kui-wing's signature play of the same title, in which Pak also starred. For this film, in addition to producing, Runde and Runme were also responsible for sound recording.[18]

Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower (1934) was the first film released by Unique's Hong Kong studio, though not its first production. (From left: Wu Tip-ying, Pak Kui-wing)

However, the quality of the film's sound recording were less than satisfactory. Thus, they had to step back from the frontlines and ask their eldest brother Runje, who was far more experienced in film production, to take over these two projects. According to the newspaper reports at the time, Runje arrived in Hong Kong with his wife Chan Yoke-mui on 24 October 1934. They brought with them 'a better sound-recording machine from Shanghai' for *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*. Runje also made changes

14. Lu Xun, 'Silver Screen News', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 30 June 1934 (in Chinese).
15. Kat Sing, 'A Visit to the Studio When Shooting of *Unworthy of Love* Kicks Off', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 18 July 1934 (in Chinese).
16. Jian Zhao, 'Return from an Interview with Unique's Hong Kong Studio, *Ling Sing*, Guangzhou, No 101, 10 September 1934, p 14 (in Chinese).
17. See note 9, p 64. According to the article, Runme Shaw told his brothers Runje Shaw and Runde Shaw about *Unworthy of Love* being below standard. But at that time, Runde Shaw was involved in the production, so he should presumably know more about the film's inside story than Runje Shaw.
18. Qiu Sheng, 'A Report on the First Shooting Day of *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 13 October 1934 (in Chinese).

to the studio. His son, Shao Weihe (aka Shaw Vee-ngok), would also arrive in Hong Kong on 2 November that year to serve as the sound recordist for *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*. Unique's Hong Kong studio was also planning to hire directors from Shanghai's Unique, such as Jiang Qifeng and Hung Chung-ho (aka Hung Chai), to make new films.[19]

Runje Shaw Travels South to Take Over Unique's Hong Kong Studio

As soon as he arrived in Hong Kong, Runje Shaw immersed himself in the production of *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*. After his reorganisation of the company, its bosses no longer had to perform double duty as sound recordists. Instead, he and Runme stayed on set to direct the actors.[20] The erstwhile director of *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*, Tang Xiaodan, had his name removed from the credits. The final version of film credits lists Runje Shaw and Runme Shaw as co-directors. The film was released on 28 December 1934. Although it was not the first to go into production, *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower* ended up being the debut film of Unique's Hong Kong studio. It was an auspicious start with good results, thanks to the film's star power.

The Deadly Rose (1937), starring the couple Sit Kok-sin (right) and Tong Suet-hing (left)

At the end of 1934, Unique's Hong Kong studio hired Cantonese opera star Sit Kok-sin and his wife Tong Suet-hing to star in *The Deadly Rose* (1937). The film was completed in under two weeks. It was planned for release on 4 February the following year, on the first day of the Lunar New Year, but because it got involved in a copyright infringement lawsuit, its Hong Kong release was postponed until the ban was lifted in December 1937 (the film changed its title to *The Red Rose* and was released in Guangzhou in 1935).[21]

After watching the shelved *Unworthy of Love*, Runje Shaw felt that the sound recording in one segment was not properly done, and planned a reshoot after the completion of *The Deadly Rose*. He wished to hire Wu Tip-ying, Yip Fut-yuek, Ho Seong-chi and Sun Ma Si-tsang to go to Shanghai together to do a reshoot at Unique's Shanghai studio, but Ho and Sun Ma did not

19. Wu Mei, 'Runje Shaw Reorganises Unique's Hong Kong Studio', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 3rd Year, No 44, 16 November 1934, p 871 (in Chinese).
20. 'On the Shooting of *Mourning of the Chaste Tree Flower*', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 10 November 1934 (in Chinese).
21. Lo Kut, 'Runde Shaw Arrives in Hong Kong', *Panorama Magazine*, No 22, 1 September 1975, pp 66-67 (in Chinese).

agree. So, Mak Siu-ha was hired to replace Ho Seong-chi and Lau Hark-suen was to replace Sun Ma Si-tsang. After various setbacks, *Unworthy of Love* finally completed its reshoot in the Hong Kong studio. The roles originally played by Ho Seong-chi and Sun Ma Si-tsang were performed respectively by Sing Tsak-ming and Lam Kwun-shan instead.[22] After much delay, *Unworthy of Love* was finally released on 14 February 1935, and the director credit was changed from Tang Xiaodan to Runje Shaw. It was the second released film of Unique's Hong Kong studio. Meanwhile, with clues of its plot details, director (Tang Xiaodan) and cast (Sun Ma Si-tsang, Wu Tip-ying, Yip Fut-yuek and Ho Seong-chi), *The Perfect Match*, a production by Unique's Hong Kong studio released on 12 March 1936, was very likely a film comprising the unused footage of Sun Ma Si-tsang, Ho Seong-chi, et al in *Unworthy of Love*, mingled with newly shot scenes.

With Runje Shaw's takeover, Unique's Hong Kong studio enjoyed a period of steady development. At the end of 1934, the studio expanded and rented the building block with two storeys next door for Studio Two.[23] Unique then proceeded to commence the shooting of its fourth film, comedy *The Country Bumpkin Tours the City* (aka *Villagers in Town*). When the film was released in 1935, it did good business in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Because its production cost was low, it brought very high profit to Unique.[24] Thus, the company immediately began work on the two sequels in the series that same year. Meanwhile, Unique's Hong Kong studio aggressively recruited new talent. In early March 1935, they ran a newspaper notice to audition actors and actresses.[25]

After Runje Shaw took control of Unique's Hong Kong studio, he began to produce many new films. In 1935, the company produced nine films, making up almost 30% of Hong Kong's total number of films produced that year. Among them, *Nocturnal Mourning* was directed by Wen Yimin, but the other eight were all directed by Runje. These included adaptations of the signature works of Cantonese opera stars, such as *Nocturnal Mourning* and *Behind the Great Wall* (aka *Burning of the Efang Palace*) starring Kwai Ming-yeung; three instalments of the comedy *Country Bumpkin Tours the City*; remakes of the Shanghai studio's old works based on folktales such as *The Butterfly Lovers*, *Parts One and Two* and the urban melodrama *Livelihood* (aka *Life*). These subjects reflected Runje's style of catering to the general public's tastes while remaining relatively conservative.

Beginning in 1936, a gradual change in subject could be observed in Unique's works. There was *Monster of the Secret Chamber*, influenced by foreign films; *A Lady of Canton* (aka *A Woman of Guangzhou*), which had a relatively progressive theme; as well as *A Fisherman's Girl*, which featured regional southern elements. That year, Runje Shaw only directed one film: *A*

22. '*Unworthy of Love*-Related Conflicts Arise Thrice', *Ling Sing*, Guangzhou, No 109, 14 January 1935 (in Chinese). It remains unclear if Sing Tsak-ming mentioned in the article was in fact Sing Chi-sing in the film cast.
23. 'Another Expansion of Unique's Hong Kong Studio', *Nam Keung Yat Po*, 13 November 1934 (in Chinese).
24. Lo Kut, 'A Battle of Wit Between Runje Shaw and Lam Kwun-shan', *Panorama Magazine*, No 20, 1 July 1975, p 61 (in Chinese).
25. Notice announcing 'Unique Recruits Actors and Actresses', *The Kung Sheung Evening Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Evening News*), 3 March 1935 (in Chinese).

Lady of Canton. Apart from *The Perfect Match*, which had Tang Xiaodan listed as director, the remaining Unique titles were all directed by Wen Yimin.

A Crushing Blow to Unique's Hong Kong Studio: Two Fires

However, things went well for Unique's Hong Kong studio for less than two years. On 29 June 1926, a fire destroyed the negatives of many films as well as some equipment in the studio.[26] Afterwards, Unique quickly arranged for work to resume, but only about a month afterwards, on 6 August, the studio caught fire again. The films that had just been reshot were destroyed again, as well as the negatives and other elements of over ten films that had been completed before.[27]

It was rumoured that before the second fire, Unique had planned to cease film production anyway due to political changes in Southwest China, which exacerbated 'Runje's deep-seated fears that when the power of the central government reached South China, there would be no more room for Cantonese sound films.' In any case, with the unexpected second fire, Unique hurriedly concluded its business at the Hong Kong studio. Runje and his wife Chan Yoke-mui returned to Shanghai in August 1936. As their contracts were all about to expire, Wen Yimin, Fan Xuepeng, Ngai Pang-fei (who was working as production manager), Ge Furong and others returned to Shanghai as well.[28] The era of Runje Shaw's reign over Unique's Hong Kong studio was over. Two of the films that had been destroyed, *The Light of Women* (1937) and *The White Gold*

Rebirth from the flames: *The Light of Women* (1937; left photo: Lee Yi-nin) and *The White Gold Dragon, Part Two* (1937; right photo from left: Wong Man-lei, Sit Kok-sin) were destroyed in two fire incidents at Unique's Hong Kong studio, later being re-shot and released by Nanyang.

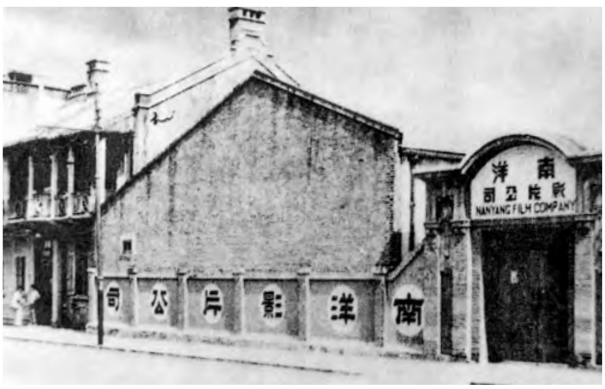
26. 'Unique Five Production Rooms on Fire Yesterday', *Chinese Mail*, 30 June 1936 (in Chinese).
27. 'Flames of *Behind the Great Wall* Were Reignited Fire Broke Out Again in Unique's Studio Yesterday Afternoon Behind Closed Doors', *The Kung Sheung Daily News*, 7 August 1936 (in Chinese).
28. 'No More Room for Cantonese Sound Films Unique's Hong Kong Studio Was Closed in Haste', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 5th Year, No 33, 21 August 1936, p 825 (in Chinese).

In 1937, Runje Shaw came to Hong Kong to revive Unique's Hong Kong studio, producing *Storm over Pacific* (1938) and other films. (From left: Lee Yi-nin, Chan Tin-tsung, Hou Yao)

Dragon, Part Two (aka *The Platinum Dragon, Part Two*, 1937) were later remade and released by Nanyang Film Company. In 1937, when the Battle of Shanghai broke out, Runje Shaw returned to Hong Kong again to revive Unique's Hong Kong studio,[29] and produced several films in 1938 and 1939, including *The Flying Ace* (aka *The Flying General*, 1938), *Storm over Pacific* (aka *Incident in the Pacific*, 1938), *Shaking Heaven and Earth* (1938) and *A Woman of Guangzhou, Part Two* (aka *Reunion*, 1939), but soon the company had to cease production completely.

The Production Strategy of Nanyang's Early Days

Two months after Unique's second fire, from October to November 1936, there were various rumours that the company would be reorganised as Nanyang Film Company, with Runme Shaw temporarily in charge. He would bring three directors with him to the South, including Wen Yimin, Ko Lei-hen and Hung Chung-ho.[30] Under Runme Shaw's reign, preparation work began in earnest, including 'spending $7,000 to buy a full set of camera and sound equipment.'[31] At first, Nanyang's productions focused on rather conservative subjects. Its first two films, *The Country Bumpkin Visits His In-laws* (1937) and *Mr. Wong of Guangdong* (1937), were both comedies. In addition, Nanyang began to produce more films



Nanyang Film Company

29. 'The Past and the Present of Hong Kong Film Companies', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 8th Year, No 7, 3 February 1939, p 358 (in Chinese).
30. 'Runme Shaw Flew Back to Singapore Yesterday', *Chinese Mail*, 24 October 1936; '*Mr. Wong of Guangdong* Will be Filmed at Unique's Hong Kong Studio', *Wu Ying*, Shanghai, 1st Year, No 3, 13 November 1936, p 18; 'Nanyang is the Substitute of Unique', *Xinghua*, Shanghai, 1st Year, No 25, 13 November 1936 (all in Chinese).
31. 'Unique's Hong Kong Studio Is Renamed Nanyang', *Tanxing Guniang* (*The Sentimental Woman*), Shanghai, 1st Year, No 16, 17 November 1936, p 16 (in Chinese).

based on folktales, as well as other entertainment films. These early films were mostly directed by Hung Chung-ho and Ko Lei-hen. Other directors included So Yee, Wong Fook-hing and Hou Yao, etc.

By the end of 1936, Runme Shaw reportedly had 46 cinemas in Singapore and Malaysia.[32] He participated actively in film sales matters with different film companies to secure film sources for his cinema chain. For example, by October 1936 he had secured the Southeast Asian exhibition rights for Grandview Film Company Limited's films.[33] At the time, Runme was based in Singapore, but often came to Hong Kong to ensure that the direction of his company's productions was correct. He also had to hold regular meetings with Nanyang's partners, such as Grandview, Nanyue Film Company and Dapeng Film Company, and discussions often involved the latest film trends.[34]

The Management Strategy of Mainly Shooting for Other Companies

Towards the end of 1937, like in the early days of Unique's Hong Kong studio, Nanyang experienced a change in leadership: Runde Shaw came to Hong Kong from Shanghai to take the reins of Nanyang,[35] and to put into practice new strategies. One of them was to build more studios. Nanyang successfully set up Studios Two and Three. On 24 April 1938, Unique and Nanyang issued a joint notice in the papers to introduce the facilities in the three studios: 'Our company is now well-facilitated with three complete sets of cameras and sound recording equipment, as well as over 100 floor-based and hanging lights. In addition to producing our own films, we also hire out our studios for shooting for all companies at a low price.'[36] The phrase 'hire out our studios for shooting for all companies' in the notice clearly was an indication that the company intended to put into practice the original ambitions of Unique's Hong Kong studio.

Numerous small film companies sprouted up at around 1938. It is said that during that year alone more than 20 of them were established.[37] Nanyang's studio expansion not only helped speed up its own productions, but also allowed it to grow the shooting-for-hirer business to cater to such small film companies, 'to provide extra conveniences to them according to their financial abilities'. Some of the companies Nanyang shot films for included Wenhua Production Company, Wode Film Company and Zhongnan Film Company.[38]

32. '*Mr. Wong of Guangdong* Will be Filmed at Unique's Hong Kong Studio', note 30.
33. Ying Zi, 'Runme Shaw Advises Joseph Sunn Jue Not to Use Tso Yee-man Again in New Films', *Youyou* (*Leisure Magazine*), Guangzhou, No 28, 15 October 1936, p 13 (in Chinese).
34. 'Three Groups Venturing in Nanyang', *Artland*, No 7, 1 June 1937 (in Chinese).
35. See note 21, p 65.
36. 'A Joint Notice of Unique's Hong Kong Studio and Nanyang', *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 24 April 1938 (in Chinese).
37. 'A Review of South China Film Industry in 1938', *Artland*, No 45, 1 January 1939 (in Chinese).
38. 'Nanyang Expands Its Studio', *Artland*, No 30, 15 May 1938 (in Chinese).

Advertisement for new films from Shaw Brothers (Singapore) (*Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 85, 16 January 1941)

At the time, Nanyang was not the only company that does shooting-for-hirer productions. Nanyue, Grandview and Chi Min Motion Picture Co., Ltd. were among the others that offered the same service. Nanyue reportedly charged at least $2,400 per film. Nanyang and Grandview charged about $2,000, while Chi Min charged around $1,400 to $1,500 per picture. Chi Min's services were the cheapest because they only had one set of camera and sound recording equipment, so they were less efficient.[39] Among these studios, Nanyang can be said to offer the most attractive terms to prospective clients, largely because of its distribution network in Southeast Asia. A newspaper article dated 16 August 1938 listed their terms and conditions for shooting-for-hirer productions: 'They charge their clients a deposit of under $2,000. The price includes the film shoot itself, developing and printing the film, sound recording and labour such as set-building. Film stock, props, actors and directors are not included. Notwithstanding the deposit, Nanyang would buy the screening rights in Southeast Asia's three colonial regions for every film shot in their studios for $4,000. Therefore, sometimes shootings can start without cash exchanging hands, as long as the deposit was paid.'[40] There was no doubt that the terms were very favourable.

A Brief Outline of Nanyang's Shooting-for-Hirer Business in 1939

By 1939, Nanyang's shooting-for-hirer business was becoming increasingly prosperous. This was due to the competitive conditions they offered: 'Each film's labour cost was only $2,000 to $3,000. An additional attraction was the offer to distribute the film throughout Southeast Asia. Therefore, smaller film companies from everywhere approached—one even say flocked to—Nanyang'. Because 'the business of shooting for other companies was more profitable, it was

39. See note 29.

40. Kang Le, 'Hong Kong Film Industry', *Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartial*), 16 August 1938 (in Chinese).

easier to sit back and enjoy the benefits; as a result, the company reduced the number of its own productions.'[41] In fact, the number of films produced by Nanyang dropped from 16 in the previous year to 12. Yet more than ten companies approached Nanyang to shoot films as hirers, and it can be said that Nanyang 'forged strong alliances' with these companies.[42]

In 1939, Nanyang only produced 12 films, less than 10% of the total 127 films produced in Hong Kong that year. This was not a remarkable number, in fact four less than that of the previous year. But if we include the number of films Nanyang shot for hirers, the total would almost be half the number of Hong Kong films. Table 2 summarises the information from an article in *Screen Voice* about the films shot in Nanyang's studios in the first nine months of 1939.[43] I also added their initial release dates and directors' names, as well as the founders or managers of their production companies.

[Table 2] Films Shot at Nanyang's Studios Between January and September 1939

No.	Film Title	Premiere Date	Director	Production Company	Company Founder/Manager
1	*Hopelessly Sentimental*	1939.1.22	Tong Tak-pui	Huayi	–
2	*The Seductive Empress Now and Then*	1939.1.26	Hung Chung-ho	Jincheng	Fung Kei-leung, Hung Chung-ho
3	*Suicide of an Empress*	1939.5.25	Hung Chung-ho, Wan Hoi-ling		
4	*Triple Stealing of the Nine-Dragon Cup*	1939.6.21	Hung Chung-ho, Fung Chi-kong		
5	*I am a Female Companion*	1939.9.1	Hung Chung-ho		
6	*Hubbub at Three Gate Street*	1939.10.7	Hung Chung-ho, Yeung Wang-kwun		
7	*The Home Revolution*	1939.4.14	Yeung Kung-leong	Zhongguo	Wong Pang-yik
8	*Untied the Knot*	1939.6.2	Yeung Kung-leong		
9	*Untied the Knot, Part Two*	1939.7.21	Yeung Kung-leong		
10	*For Love or Money*	1939.8.29	Moon Kwan Man-ching		
11	*Devil Love*	1939.9.13	Tang Xiaodan		
12	*Mystery of the Boiled Infant*	Unknown	–		
13	*The Step-Mother*	1939.3.21	Hung Chung-ho, Hung Suk-wan	Sanxing	Hung Chung-ho and others (related to Zhongnan, Guangrong)
14	*Lady in Red*	1939.7.9	Hung Chung-ho, Fung Chi-kong		
15	*The Bandit Queen Elopes*	1939.7.28	Hung Chung-ho		
16	*The White Daisy*	1939.9.21	Yeung Wang-kwun, Hung Chung-ho		
17	*Farewell to My Lady*	1939.11.15	Hung Chung-ho, Yeung Wang-kwun		

41. 'Unique in Hong Kong Producing for Others Enjoys Prosperous Business', *Screen Weekly*, Shanghai, No 32, 19 April 1939, p 1080 (in Chinese).
42. Ibid; 'Updates on Film Studios in Hong Kong', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 51, 16 August 1939 (in Chinese).
43. '51 Films Have Been Made This Year', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 56, 1 November 1939 (in Chinese); the article lists 51 films with one duplication, so the actual number should be 50.

No.	Film Title	Premiere Date	Director	Production Company	Company Founder/Manager
18	*Dreaming of the Butterfly*	1939.3.29	Wong Fook-hing	Xinya	Wong Fook-hing, Leong Sum
19	*The Golden Butterfly*	1939.4.19	Wong Fook-hing	Xingye	–
20	*Usurper*	1939.4.23	Hung Chung-ho, Wan Hoi-ling	Zhongda	–
21	*The Brick Stockade*	1939.10.28	Hung Chung-ho, Tong Tak-pui		
22	*Master Keung*	1939.4.25	Hou Yao, Wan Hoi-ling	Fuli	–
23	*The Henpeck*	1939.5.21	Wong Fa-chit	Guangrong	Wong Fa-chit
24	*The Cannibalic Woman*	1939.8.16	Wong Fa-chit		
25	*The Story of a Seductress*	1939.6.7	Wong Fook-hing	Xindalu	Wong Fook-hing, Kwong Shan-siu
26	*The Ghost Wife*	1939.10.5	Wong Fook-hing		
27	*Trial of the Vengeful Woman*	1939.5.16	Hung Chung-ho/ Co-director: Tong Tak-pui	Jinshan	Hung Chung-ho
28	*Swordswoman Red Butterfly*	1939.6.13	Hung Chung-ho		
29	*A Poor Man's Deliverance*	1939.7.8	Hung Chung-ho, Wan Hoi-ling		
30	*Twelve Widows*	1939.8.8	Hung Chung-ho, Fung Chi-kong		
31	*Spirit of the Coffin*	1939.6.17	Yeung Tin-lok	Xingguang	–
32	*The Ghost*	1940.3.15	Hung Chung-ho		
33	*The Half Beauty*	1939.6.25	Yeung Kung-leong	Dahua	–
34	*Twin Sisters of the South*	1939.6.29	Lai Ban, Leong Sum	Wu Tip-ying	Wu Tip-ying
35	*Incident in the Turtle Mountain*	1939.7.12	Hou Yao, Wan Hoi-ling	Nanyang	Runme Shaw, Runde Shaw
36	*The Filial Son and the Unworthy Mother*	1939.8.12	Hou Yao, Wan Hoi-ling		
37	*The Lady Ghost, Part Two*	1939.9.8	Wong Fook-hing		
38	*The Philanderer and His Mate*	1940.1.13	Ko Lei-hen, Yeung Tin-lok		
39	*Illusion of Happiness*	1945.3.16	Hung Suk-wan		
40	*Spirit of the Broom*	1939.7.16	Fung Chi-kong	Shanchuan	Kwong Shan-siu
41	*A Stone House on Fire*	1939.11.24	Yeung Kung-leong		
42	*I Married the Wrong Guy*	1939.9.5	Lo Si, Liu Mung-kok	Siyou	Liu Mung-kok, Wong Cho-shan and others
43	*The Monastery on Fire*	1939.9.17	Hung Chung-ho	Luen Yik	–
44	*Untamed Woman*	1939.9.27	Yau Kwun-yan, Tong Tak-pui	Yinxing	–
45	*Hope for Husband's Return*	1939.10.11	Lo Si	Guangsheng	–
46	*Pagoda of Haunted Souls*	1939.10.25	Hung Chung-ho, Hung Suk-wan	Dalu	–
47	*Romance of the Fading Pearl* (aka *Twin Flowers*)	1940.4.28	Hung Chung-ho		
48	*The Case of the Jealous Actor*	1939.11.19	Hung Chung-ho	Wode	Yee Chau-shui, Lo Si and others
49	*The Seven Fairies Marry the Eight Immortals*	1939.12.8	Fung Chi-kong	Hequn	–
50	*Trap of Fragrance*	Unknown	–	–	–

Table 2 above lists a total of 50 films. If we discount two titles with unknown release dates; five which were produced by Nanyang; and *The Ghost* (1940) and *Romance of the Fading Pearl* (aka *Twin Flowers*, 1940) which were not released in 1939, 41 titles remain. In addition, information gleaned from existing documents indicate that the following eight titles were also filmed at Nanyang's studios and released in 1939:

[Table 3] Films Shot at Nanyang's Studios and Released in 1939

No.	Film Title	Premiere Date	Director	Production Company	Company Founder/Manager
1	*Journey to Fantasy Land*	1939.2.11	Tung Chu-sek	Zhongda	–
2	*The Four Beauties of Sai Quon*	1939.3.7	Tang Xiaodan	Zhongguo	Wong Pang-yik
3	*The Lone Swan*	1939.4.21	Tong Tak-pui	Weiming	–
4	*The Overbearing Mother-In-Law, Part Two*	1939.5.6	Hung Chung-ho	Xindalu	Wong Fook-hing, Kwong Shan-siu
5	*The Heartless*	1939.9.17	Hung Chung-ho, Wan Hoi-ling	Jinxing	–
6	*Robbing the Dead*	1939.10.15	Fung Chi-kong	Xingye	–
7	*A Life of Romances*	1939.10.19	Wong Fook-hing	Xindongfang	–
8	*A Girl with a Miserable Life*	1939.12.20	Lo Si	Guangsheng	–

The two tables show that 49 films were shot by outside companies at Nanyang and released in 1939. Most of these film companies that hired Nanyang to shoot their films were founded by directors who had in fact worked for Nanyang before. Among the 49 films, 22 were directed or co-directed by Hung Chung-ho, who used to direct films for Nanyang, making him the director who worked most closely with Nanyang in 1939. There was also a news report the same year indicating that he and his Zhongnan Film Company had a contract with Nanyang: Hung would direct 20 films at Nanyang every year, and would sell all their screening rights to Nanyang; meanwhile, Nanyang must buy six Zhongnan-produced films per year.[44] In addition, Wong Fook-hing, a director at Shanghai's Unique since 1927, former Nanyang director Lo Si and screenwriter Tong Tak-pui each shot several films at Nanyang's studios. At the same time, Nanyang also selected and invited directors who had filmed at their studios to join the company. For example, Hung Chung-ho's younger brother Hung Suk-wan and Yeung Kung-leong were both recruited and subsequently made many films for Nanyang.

If we tally all the films in both tables, a total of 49 films produced by outside companies were shot in Nanyang's studios and released in 1939. Adding the 12 films produced by Nanyang, at least a total of 61 films were shot at the company's studios, amounting to almost half of the 127 films produced in Hong Kong that year.

44. Gao Ming, 'The Contract Between Hung Chung-ho and Nanyang', *Tsun Wan Yat Po* (*The Universal Circulating Herald*), 1 January 1939 (in Chinese).

Implementing the Cantonese Cinema Reform Movement

In 1938, the film industry started a trend of adapting folktales for the silver screen,[45] for which Nanyang seemed to serve as the base camp. The following year, the fad inspired and spawned another genre: supernatural films. The flood of folktale and supernatural films led to verbal and written condemnation by critics. For example, director Hou Yao, who had made many folktale adaptations for Nanyang, was criticised in an essay by a commentator.[46] Although in 1937, the Mainland had suspended its ban on Cantonese films for three years,[47] there were constant murmurs for the next few years about further restrictions on Cantonese films. For example, the Censorship Committee's Xu Hao urged the South China film industry: 'Do not make films with nonsensical scripts that encourage feudal ideals or lewd, shameless behaviour, or films that are lecherous, disgusting, weird, or about the supernatural. Rather, make films that promote the patriotic spirit during times of war.'[48] In the face of such challenges at the start of 1940, Runde Shaw made plans to take timely and appropriate action.

Runde proposed to reform the Cantonese film industry: 'To reform Cantonese cinema, the first and foremost issue is to improve their overall quality.' He suggested that filmmakers 'start from the scripts', and also advocated 'against poor, slipshod productions', emphasising the principle of 'quality, not quantity'.[49] Thereafter, Nanyang 'assertively sought to revitalise itself' and 'made meaningful films' by 'gathering talent from all areas of the industry to work together, in the hopes of contributing to the South China film industry, currently shrouded in a cloud of doom.'[50] Among the talents that Nanyang gathered together were 'famous Shanghai theatre screenwriter Xu Xingzhi' and 'Hong Kong novelist Lui Lun'.[51]

In addition, Nanyang also groomed quite a few young screenwriters, including Ku Lung-kang (at age 22), Fung Fung-kor and Kong Ho, etc. Ku Lung-kang was seen as the most promising member of this group. The company made over a dozen films under the banner of 'Cantonese Cinema Reform', and Ku wrote the scripts for five of them, including *When Will We Meet Again* (aka *When Will You Return?*, 1940), *The Smile* (aka *The Smile of a Woman*, 1940), *Seduction on the Plains* (aka *Hung Sing Chou*, 1940), *A Sick Girl* (aka *Boudoir Blues*, 1941) and *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* (1947).[52] Among them, *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* garnered the most attention. Set in a historical era when traitors betrayed the country and brought harm to the people, the themes of the film fulfilled the need to promote ideas about protecting the family and

45. 'Nanyang Churns Out *Snow in Summer* in a Rush', *Artland*, No 35, 1 August 1938 (in Chinese).
46. Pang Yin-nung, 'Don't Follow Hou Yao's Ardous Efforts in Directing Folktale Feature Films', *Artland*, No 53, 1 May 1939 (in Chinese). See Law Kar, 'Between Pre-war Cantonese Opera and Cinema: Their Mutual Transformation and Aesthetic Issues in the Hong Kong Context' in *Heritage and Integration—A Study of Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Films* (Electronic Publication), May Ng (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2019, p 19.
47. Chen Zongtong, 'The Ban on Cantonese Films Was Indeed Put to a Halt', *Artland*, No 9, 1 July 1937 (in Chinese).
48. 'Words of Xu Hao to Bid Goodbye', *Artland*, No 46, 15 January 1939 (in Chinese).
49. Feng, 'Nanyang in One Year', *Chinese Mail*, 24 December 1940 (in Chinese).
50. 'News Line on South China Film Scene', *The Chin-Chin Screen*, Shanghai, 5th Year, No 14, 9 April 1940, p 5 (in Chinese).
51. 'An Appealing Phenomenon in the Evolution of Cantonese Cinema', *Artland*, No 71, 1 April 1940 (in Chinese).
52. 'Nanyang Thriving Well', *Chinese Mail*, 11 May 1940; The advertisement of Nanyang Film Company, *Artland*, No 81, 1 September 1940 (both in Chinese).

defending the nation. The production itself featured higher quality sets and costumes, adhering to the goal of raising the standards of Cantonese films. As early as 1939, news of *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* going into production had been released. Then, after a prolonged pre-production period, the production process was slow and serious, with 'only 2,000 feet shot after three months of filming'.[53] When completed, the film had '895 shots, filmed in 59 different sets'. When Hong Kong fell to the Japanese, the film was allegedly seized and kept in Hong Kong's Japanese Film Association film vault, and only got to see the light of day after the war.[54]

The production of *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* (1947) featured higher-quality sets and costumes.

Besides raising the standards of its own productions, Nanyang also claimed that 'it would only agree to shoot for hirers if the project had a good script and the correct themes, in total adherence to the spirit of reform.'[55] The most prominent example was *The Empress Dowager* (1940)[56], directed by Hung Chung-ho and produced by his Zhongnan Film Company. The shooting of the film began in December 1939 at Nanyang. It was reported that the sets were grand and costly, and over a thousand actors were hired. In the film, the Emperor and Empress's lifestyles and ceremonies were based on historic Qing-dynasty palatial traditions. Authentic antiques were sought for every costume and prop, sparing no expense to 'sweep away Cantonese cinema's unprofessional, slipshod reputation'.[57] Filmmakers also took care to elevate the film's ideological awareness. In addition to doing meticulous research in official and unofficial historical accounts, they 'deepened the film's themes by doing everything in their power to expose the incompetent befuddlement of the Qing dynasty rulers, as well as the corruption and lecherousness within their inner courts.'[58] These historical details no doubt created a contemporary resonance against the backdrop of the Japanese invasion of China at that time.

The actions undertaken by Nanyang in its efforts to raise the standards of Cantonese films were very quickly acknowledged by critics. Some reviewers even pointed out that 'films with budgets of over $10,000, well-funded capital and month-long production schedules' such as *Seduction on the Plains*, *A Sick Girl* and *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* were praised

53. 'News about Filmmaking', *Artland*, No 73, 1 May 1940 (in Chinese).
54. '*Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* Has Arrived in Singapore', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 108, 15 April 1946 (in Chinese).
55. See note 52.
56. 'Hung Chung-ho Is Devoted to Making *The Empress Dowager*', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 61, 16 January 1940 (in Chinese).
57. Yan, 'Hung Chung-ho and *The Empress Dowager*', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 64, 1 March 1940 (in Chinese).
58. Cheung Tat-kuen, 'A Rare Gem of the Film Industry *The Empress Dowager*', *Tsun Wan Yat Po*, 31 March 1940 (in Chinese).

The Empress Dowager (1940): An extravagant production with grand sets and authentic costumes and props

for showing improvement and progressiveness,[59] and some critics even believed that at that time, Cantonese films made by Nanyang and the other major companies were 'better than their Mandarin counterparts from Shanghai.'[60] Although Nanyang experienced a definite degree of success in reforming their Cantonese films in 1940, its film production business had to cease operations by the end of 1941, due to the spread of war and the fall of Hong Kong. After the war, a new chapter opened in the film careers of the Shaw brothers.

Conclusion

Looking back at the operation models of Unique's Hong Kong studio and Nanyang, it can be observed that, during the infancy of Hong Kong's film industry, the Shaw brothers actively learned from their experiences at different stages, all the while adjusting the directions of their companies and refining their strategies according to changes in market demand and turbulence of the times. In the early days of Unique's Hong Kong studio, the brothers were very ambitious. Their goal was to launch a shooting-for-hirer business to provide sufficient supply for their distribution business in the Singapore/Malaysia region. However, due to technical errors in the sound recording of their debut production *Unworthy of Love*, the original studio heads Runde and Runme Shaw were forced to step back from the frontlines and allow Runje to come south to lead the company. Unique's Hong Kong studio was hence run like Shanghai's Unique, with Runje alone in charge of all production decisions. Thus, the brothers' original plan of stepping up production to supply more films for Southeast Asia did not work out.

This situation continued until 1936, when the studio caught fire twice. Runje stepped down, and Runde and Runme formed Nanyang, expanding the studio and finally implementing their

59. Pang Yin-nung, 'A Reply to Friends from Afar', *Artland*, No 84, 16 October 1940 (in Chinese).
60. Wu Ming, 'Shoddy Films Are Not Wanted', *Artland*, No 83, 1 October 1940 (in Chinese).

grand plan for the shooting-for-hirer business. With its extensive distribution network in Southeast Asia, Nanyang aggressively expanded their studio space and recruited smaller companies to shoot their films at its studios, at the same time acquiring their Southeast Asian screening rights. In order to guarantee the quality of the films shot for hirers, and to ensure they appealed to Southeast Asian markets, Nanyang consciously 'groomed' companies that were set up by screenwriters and directors who had previously worked with the Shaw brothers and who had come south with them. The key to this 'horizontal alliance' tactic was that Nanyang did not have to pay full price to finance the production of these films, but was still able to acquire their Southeast Asian screening rights, thereby guaranteeing that the company would have the greatest return on their investment and the highest profit margins. This tactic also ensured the company's studios would be operating on a steady basis, maximising Nanyang's cost benefits for its own in-house productions. In addition, after Nanyang and the smaller companies had formed their alliances, their marketing efforts would be much more cohesive and effective, which was beneficial to establishing the Nanyang brand in the long term.

Due to a lack of research materials, it is difficult to reconstruct a full picture of Nanyang's shooting-for-hirer business in Southeast Asia. However, looking at data from 1939 alone, the total number of Nanyang productions and the number of films shot for hirers amounted to almost half of the number of films produced in Hong Kong. Nanyang dominated nearly half of the Hong Kong film industry, signifying the peak of the Shaw brothers' pre-war film career achievements in Hong Kong. In the face of tumultuous times, such as the public opinion crisis of Cantonese cinema in early 1940, Nanyang still had ample time and funding to adjust the direction of their own productions because they were armed with the advantage of a steady film supply. The steps they took to counter criticism helped to hasten the Cantonese Cinema Reform Movement, as the brothers moved beyond their production philosophy of 'low cost, fast production and big turnout' from the the era of Shanghai's Unique, and instead sought to raise the professional production standards of their Hong Kong pictures. On the whole, the full extent of Nanyang's influence on the development of Hong Kong's film industry in the few short years before the war bears further study; and how the Shaw brothers borrowed from their Southeast Asian operations strategy to plan their post-war film careers is a subject that deserves even more attention and exploration. [Translated by Roberta Chin]

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Responding to Challenges:
The Production Strategy of Nanyue Film Company

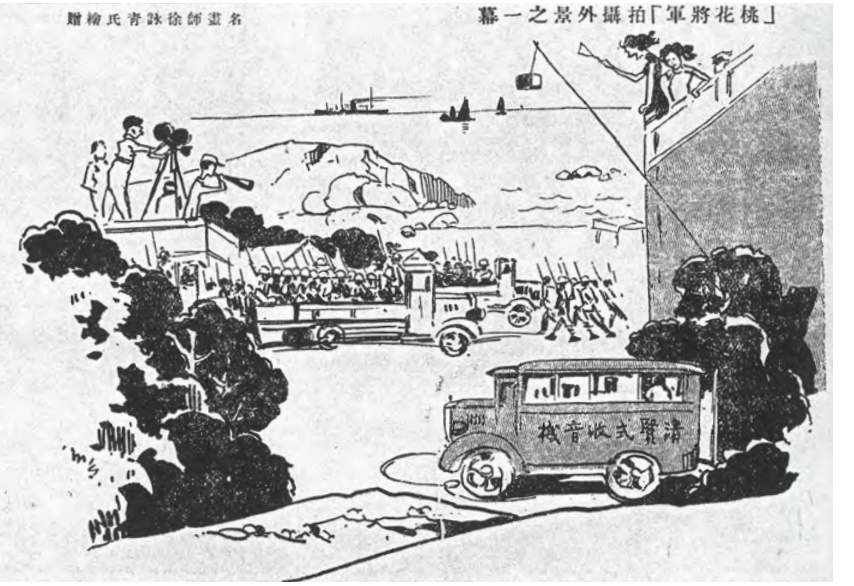
Stephanie Ng Yuet-wah

Chuk Ching-yin (aka Zhu Qingxian, 1900–1981) was an inventor and developer of cinematographic technology in early Chinese cinema, starting from the early 1930s in Shanghai. After spending time in Hong Kong, he decided to set up the Nanyue Film Company, and began making Cantonese films using his 'Ching Yin Sound Recording System'. Chuk was devoted to his research and also remarkably open-minded towards the creative and production work at his company. He made Nanyue a home for different talents and allowed them to experiment with different film genres. At one point, the company's Cantonese productions fetched the highest prices in the Southeast Asian market.[1] Yet as the war raged on, Nanyue was forced to continually adapt and capitalise on its superior technology to collaborate with different filmmakers in various regions, venturing out of its comfort zone to make Vietnamese and Mandarin films, and even tried to raise funds for English version of its works and to shoot in colour. These developments are representative of the early Hong Kong film industry's efforts to break free of its technical, language, and geographical limits. Yet any account of Nanyue's strategy of diversification should begin with the story of a man: its founder Chuk Ching-yin.

Chuk Ching-yin: From Silent Films to Talkies

A photography enthusiast from a young age, Chuk Ching-yin was born in Ningbo and studied at Jiao Tong University.[2] As early as 1924, he founded Chenzhong Company in Shanghai together with Lin Mengming etc. and became cinematographer for *Regrets* (1925), a silent film produced by the company. He was highly praised for his camerawork.[3] Afterwards, he worked as cinematographer's assistant at Xinren Film Company. Shortly after, Chuk was able to purchase

1. 'Nanyue Restructured', *Artland*, No 38, 15 September 1938 (in Chinese).
2. 'About Film Technique', *South China*, No 1, 25 July 1938, p 6; 'Leader of Nanyue Comes to Shanghai to Form a Team', *Movie Life*, Shanghai, Inaugural Issue, 1 January 1940, p 7 (both in Chinese).
3. See 'Chenzhong Film Company' in *China Cinema Encyclopaedia*, Zhang Junxiang & Cheng Jihua (eds), Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 1995, p 106; 'Cinematographer of *Regrets*, Mr Chuk Ching-yin', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Chunqiu*), Shanghai, No 9, 26 April 1925, p 5; Xin Leng, 'New Review of Chinese Films', *Kuowen Weekly*, Shanghai, Vol 2, No 13, 12 April 1925, p 26 (all in Chinese).



The 'Ching Yin Sound Recording System' was used by Nanyue in location shooting.

Chuk Ching-yin

one of its cameras after the company's closure, and he began to work for smaller film companies, eventually establishing Hehe Film Company, which produced the silent picture *A Difficult Couple* (1928).[4] In 1928, foreign talkies were imported to China and became immensely popular in Shanghai. Two years later, Chinese filmmakers began making their own talkies with foreign cameramen and equipment. However, the prohibitively high costs of such equipment motivated Chinese professionals to develop their own sound technology. By the early 1930s, there were three kinds of Chinese-invented film recording machines that could capture sound: Shi Shipan's 'Aisitong'; the 'Hemiantong', invented by Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing)'s cinematographer Yan Hemian; and Chuk's 'Ching Yin Sound Recording System'. Out of the three, Chuk's invention was the very first. Unfortunately, major film studios such as Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi) and Star preferred to continue using foreign technology over Chinese-made products, so Chuk's career as inventor was far from smooth.[5]

Chuk had taken out a significant loan and also spent three years before he was successful in developing his sound film technology.[6] He filmed the sound picture *Fallen Angel* (aka *Spring Wind and Willow*) for Dadong Jinshi Film Company, which was finally released in 1932. According to contemporary anecdotes, the sound quality of the film was decent, but due to multiple technical problems during the course of filming, parts of the picture had to be reshot. Eventually, the

4. Hu Tu, 'A Brief Account of the South China Filmmaker Chuk Ching-yin', *Happa Life* (A Feature of the 1940 Film), 29 November 1940, p 4; 'Hehe Film Company Would Make Its Debut with *A Difficult Couple*' is mentioned in *The "Robinhood"*, Shanghai, 9 November 1927, p 2; 'Film News', *The Sin Wan Pao* (Local Suppplement), Shanghai, 11 January 1928 (all in Chinese).
5. Jing Ying, 'Chuk Ching-yin Yan Hemian The Struggling Business of the Chinese-Invented Sound Recording System', *Movie Daily News* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, 8 March 1933; 'Chinese Sound Films Seek Foreign Assistance Yan Hemian, Chuk Ching-yin and Shi Shipan Determined to Make a Vigorous Start', *Camera News*, Shanghai, No 32, 8 June 1932; Little Director, 'Chuk Ching-yin Signs Contract at Chai Loh Hotel', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 12 September 1932 (all in Chinese).
6. Hu Tu, note 4.

production went over budget, which the investors were unhappy about.[7] In between the delays of the *Fallen Angel* shoot, Chuk also helped to film Jinan Film Company's *Glories for Motherland* (1933), also a sound picture. He drove his red sound-recording vehicle, with 'Ching Yin Sound Recording System' painted on the door, all the way to Hangzhou to film on location, but the location shoot was extremely challenging, coupled with technical problems during the audio recording. He eventually completed the shoot, but the film company failed to pay the production costs in full in the first place, and later even attempted to hijack the picture for themselves, leading to a dispute at court.[8]

Although Chuk's first two sound films were not necessarily smooth experiences, the transition from silent to sound was already inevitable for Shanghai cinema. Therefore, after these two pictures, Chuk still had job offers from small film companies that could not afford foreign technology, as well as artists from other disciplines. One of his collaborators was The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua), one of the three major film studios in Shanghai at the time. When Richard Poh (aka Bu Wancang), director of the UPS 1st Studio, started working on *The Sunshine of Mother* (aka *Mother Love*, 1933), Chuk helped the studio shoot the final song sequence in the film, 'The Sunshine of Mother', at a discount rate. Later, when the studio was planning a sound picture on Peking opera master Mei Lanfang, they also discussed collaboration with Chuk.[9] Other performing artists, such as famed stage actress Wang Meiyu, Peking opera star Gai Jiaotian, sought Chuk's services. Even businessmen turned filmmakers Wang Wenyuan and Yu Keng consulted Chuk on *Roar*, a picture intending to reflect on the 'changing times'. Unfortunately, these projects in development did not come into fruition and there have been no reports on their general release.[10]

7. It was alleged in some newspaper reports of the time that Chuk Ching-yin's work on Dadong Jinshi Film Company's *Fallen Angel* had been sub-par (see *The Social Daily News*, Shanghai, 15 January 1933 [in Chinese]); but most news articles commented that the film's sound quality was satisfactory. For more about *Fallen Angel*'s reshoots, see Focus, 'The Second Marriage of Yang Naimei and Wong Fook-hing Chuk Ching-yin Too Late for Regrets Likely to Bargain with Agfa Loses Over $1,500', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 31 October 1932; 'Wong Fook-hing Hired Several People to Help with *Fallen Angel* Yang Naimei · Chuk Ching-yin · Xia Peizhen Turned Out They Made Things Worse', *The Screen & Drama Weekly*, Shanghai, 1st Year, No 10, 11 February 1937, p 152 (both in Chinese).
8. For more about the challenges of outdoor shooting, see Fan Di Yin, 'Production of *Glories for Motherland* Starts After *Fallen Angel* is Done On-Location Shoot Shared with Dadong Chuk Ching-yin Responsible for Cinematography and Sound', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 1 November 1932; Supporting Role, 'Issues at Jinan Shoot Yesterday Afternoon All Because of Chuk Ching-yin's Sound-Recording Vehicle', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 21 December 1932 (both in Chinese). For more about the legal conflicts between Chuk Ching-yin and Jinan Film Company, see Fu Xi, 'Going to the Court Before Earning Glories for the Motherland', *The Social Daily News*, Shanghai, 18 December 1933 (in Chinese).
9. For more about the filming of *The Sunshine of Mother*, see Old Performer, 'Richard Poh Secures Chuk Ching-yin's Participation Consensus Reached at the UPS 1st Studio Yesterday', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 10 February 1933 (in Chinese). For details on the preparation for the Mei Lanfang stage documentary, see Kai Mo La, 'UPS Planning for a Sound Film Contract Signed with Mei Lanfang Chuk Ching-yin Responsible for Sound', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 13 March 1933 (in Chinese).
10. For more about the failed collaboration between Wang Meiyu and Chuk Ching-yin, see Kai Mai La, 'An Empty Dream: Sound Films Make Wang Meiyu Numb Chuk Ching-yin's Bad Luck Refunds $500', *Camera News*, Shanghai, No 47, 1932 (in Chinese). For more about Gai Jiaotian's plans to invite Chuk Ching-yin to make a documentary, see Kai Mo La, 'Gai Jiaotian Founds Film Company to Make Peking Opera Films Lu Fuyao Appointed as Director and Screenwriter Chuk Ching-yin as Cinematographer and Sound Recorder', *Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 24 February 1933 (in Chinese). For more about Wang Wenyuan and Yu Keng's plans to make *Roar*, see Tan Jun, 'Wang Wenyuan and Yu Keng Leave Business For Film Set to Cooperate with Chuk Ching-yin', *Radio Movie Daily News*, Shanghai, 19 February 1933; Mu Weitong, '*Roar* Abandoned! Chuk Ching-yin Faces Problems Borrowing Directors from UPS', *Dongfang Ribao*, Shanghai, 16 March 1933 (both in Chinese).

Chuk was an open-minded collaborator who was willing to work with different approaches to filmmaking. However, he was seldom properly rewarded for his efforts financially and he found it difficult to sustain his business. At the time, fantasy pictures were doing very well in the Southeast Asian markets, but in China, the Nationalist government's Central Film Censorship Committee (hereafter 'the Censorship Committee') had given strict orders to replace them with other film genres. Nonetheless, Chuk still participated in a number of Cantonese fantasy films, including *Journey to the West* (year unknown), *Lu Dongbin Tricked the White Peony Thrice* (year unknown), *Memorial at the Pagoda* (aka *The White Female Snake*, 1934), all of which starred amateur Cantonese actors from Shanghai, such as Ng Yat-bing, Lau Ying-chi, Lau Hei-man and Yeung Yat-ping.[11] On top of fantastical special effects and fight scenes, such films also featured singing sequences. Thus, the advertisements for *Memorial at the Pagoda* boasted of the film's special effects and singing, even specifying that it was 'filmed using the "Ching Yin Sound Recording System"'.[12] Upon completion of these fantasy films, Chuk handed them over to Wha Wei Trading

An advertisement for *Memorial at the Pagoda* (1934) promoting its special effects and music, and stressing that the film was made with the 'Ching Yin Sound Recording System' (*The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 20 December 1934)

11. For details on the Censorship Committee's ban on fantasy films and the fad for this genre, see Kai Mo La, 'Wha Wei Trading Company Limited Talks with Film Companies to Find Solutions for Fantasy Film Ban', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 31, 15 August 1931, pp 1-2; 'Wave of Martial Arts, Fantasy Films and Others Produced By Small Companies', *Modern Daily News* (A Special Feature on the Double Tenth Day), Shanghai, 10 October 1934 (both in Chinese). For more about Chuk ching-yin's work on *Journey to the West*, *Lu Dongbin Tricked the White Peony Thrice* and *Memorial at the Pagoda*, see Chu Kea, 'Chuk Ching-yin Invents the "Ching Yin Sound Recording System" Marks the Beginning of Sound Films', *HK TV News*, No 384, 3 June 1981, p 27 (in Chinese). However, scholar Dr Linda Lai Chiu-han wrote an article noting that Nanyue once produced a film named *Lu Chunyang Tricked the White Peony Thrice*, and that *Lu Dongbin Tricked the White Peony Thrice* was filmed by a Shanghai company called Jinan (for more on this, see Linda Lai Chiu-han, '"Made in Hong Kong", How to be Human, How to be Good, How to be Civilized, and Everyday Modernity in the Crevices' in *Producing Heterotopia: Traces of the Cinema in the Thick Space of Governmentality, Localism and Citizenship in 1934 Hong Kong*, New York: New York University, 2006, pp 353-465; advertisement of *Lu Dongbin Tricked the White Peony Thrice*, *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 21 September 1934 [in Chinese]). The film starred actors from Shanghai including Lau Ying-chi and Yeung Yat-ping (see film advertisement in *The Chinese World,* San Francisco, 9 December 1943). Also, the advertisement of *Lu Chunyang Tricked the White Peony Thrice* (*The Kung Sheung Evening Press*, 21 September 1934 [in Chinese]) specified the film was 'the first Cantonese opera fantastical fight film in Cantonese' without listing the company that produced the film.

12. According to the advertisement of *Tragedy of Stone Castle*, before the production began, Nanyue did make several Cantonese sound films, including *Thrice Infuriating White Peony* and *Memorial at the Pagoda*, see *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press* (aka *The Kung Sheung Daily News*), 8 August 1935 (in Chinese). I could not locate any advertisement or newspaper coverage about *Thrice Infuriating White Peony*; for *Memorial at the Pagoda*, see its advertisement in *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 20 December 1934. The two titles are not included in the list of films produced by Nanyue, see 'An Overview of Nanyue's Production', *South China*, No 5, 1 February 1938 (in Chinese). Therefore, it can be surmised that the two films were shot in Shanghai. See also Stephanie Ng, 'Nanyue Film Company at the Forefront' in *Silverscreen Dreams: Recollection of Hong Kong Pre-War Cinema Tales*, Chan Tsang-ning (ed), Hong Kong: Let's Go Watch a Film, 2020, p 50 figure 2 and p 58 note 5 (in Chinese).

Company Limited, which had distribution networks all over the country. They had considerable box-office success in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Before its ban, *Lu Dongbin Tricked the White Peony Thrice* did excellent business in Guangzhou. The success of such films foreshadowed Chuk's later decision to move to Hong Kong to further his career and company.[13]

Nanyue Enters the Market with Cantonese Folktales

After the Shanghai bombing incident of 1932, Chuk travelled to Hong Kong and found its local film industry promising, prompting his eventual decision to relocate there some years later. He brought over not only his sound-recording vehicle and other camera equipment, but also his Hehe partner Wong Pang-yik; boom operators Miu Hong-yan and his brother Miu Hong-nee; cinematographer Wong Kat-sing (aka Wong Kat-sang); former executive director, Shanghai-born Cantonese Yeung Kung-leong; and a few Cantonese actors.[14] In the early years of Nanyue, Wong Pang-yik was production manager, while Fung Kei-leung, former Hong Kong manager at Shanghai's Wha Wei, was responsible for sales and distribution. Fung introduced Chuk to Chan Pei, a director who was very well-connected among Guangzhou and Hong Kong film, Cantonese opera, and music circles. Later, Chuk invited Chan to serve as unit production manager at Nanyue. The company rented the studio space of Huaxia Production Company at Lee Gardens Hill to shoot their films.[15] Before coming to Hong Kong, Yeung Kung-leong had asked his mother who originated from Guangdong for advice, who told him that the locals loved the stories of Leung Tin-loi and Third Master Sha. Yeung therefore pitched these to the Nanyue team to appeal to the tastes of Cantonese-speaking audiencs.[16] Apart from adapting Cantonese folk tales, Nanyue pictures continued to bank on selling points such as music and special effects, hiring singer-actress Ng Yat-bing from *Memorial at the Pagoda* to play the dual key roles of the mother of protagonist Leung Tin-loi and the character Ling Gwei-sin in *Tragedy of Stone Castle* (aka *The Imperial Appeal*, 1935). The film was a box-office success, a highly encouraging result for the Nanyue team.[17]

13. For more about Chuk Ching-yin's participation in fantasy film productions, see Chu Kea, note 11. For more about Wha Wei's distribution work, see 'Wha Wei and the Chinese Film Industry', *Movie Weekly* (*Yingxi Shenghuo*), Shanghai, Vol 1, No 10, 20 March 1931, pp 15-16; 'Wha Wei Suffers Huge Losses After the War', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 11, 6 May 1938, p 207 (both in Chinese).
14. Chu Kea, note 11.
15. 'Planning a Collaboration with Sit Kok-sin Chuk Ching-yin Making Films in Hong Kong in Secret', *Movietone*, 4th Year, No 35, 30 August 1935, p 722; Lei, 'Chuk Ching-yin Sets Up Company in Hong Kong Cantonese Films Deemed Profitable', *Variety Weekly*, Shanghai, Vol 1, Inaugural Issue, 7 July 1935, p 27 (both in Chinese). For more about the background of Chan Pei, see Stephanie Ng, 'Interactivity Between Film and Cantonese Opera: The Aesthetics of Linearity in Chan Pei's Movies Featuring Tang Bik-wan' in *Heritage and Integration—A Study of Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Films* (Electronic Publication), May Ng (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2019, pp 38-40.
16. *A Life Film: Yeung Kung-leong* (Radio Programme hosted by Cheang Mang-ha), Hong Kong: Radio Rediffusion, 1964.
17. The majority of newspaper articles and interviews indicated that *Tragedy of Stone Castle* was a popular hit. See '*Tragedy of Stone Castle* Screened at Central Theatre Yesterday', *The Industrial & Commercial Daily Press*, 11 August 1935; Chu Kea, 'Nanyue's Debut Film A Triumph Sit Kok-sin Declined to Star in *Penalty* to Protect Public Image', *HK TV News*, No 385, 10 June 1981, p 112 (both in Chinese). There were also reports that claimed that the box office of *Tragedy of Stone Castle* was unsatisfactory, so Sit Kok-sin was invited to film *Penalty*, see Wu Shang, 'Sit Kok-sin and Tong Suet-hing', *South China*, No 8, February 1939 (in Chinese).

At the time, Cantonese opera superstar Sit Kok-sin was in a feud with Runje Shaw (aka Shao Zuiweng) of Unique Film Productions' Hong Kong studio. Sit's wife, Tong Suet-hing, was on good terms with Chuk and she successfully persuaded her husband to join Nanyue and work on *Penalty* (aka *The Fop*, 1935). Still fresh from his negative experience of playing a delinquent in *Livelihood* (aka *Life*, Unique's Hong Kong studio, 1935), which was a box-office flop, Sit refused to play the title role of the wealthy playboy turned murderer. Instead, he took on the roles of director and screenwriter, and invited his brother Sit Kok-ming to play Third Master Sha. The film was a great hit, and successfully cemented Nanyue's status as a major player in Hong Kong cinema.[18] To capitalise on such success, Nanyue invited Tong Suet-hing and Sit Kok-sin to star in *Loverboy* (1935) and *Loverboy, Part Two* (1936). Sit especially asked Tang Xiaodan, director of his first Cantonese picture in Shanghai, *The White Gold Dragon* (aka *The Platinum Dragon*, 1933), to co-direct. In *Loverboy*, Sit plays two separate characters who share fight scenes and dialogues together onscreen at the same time, and of course, Sit's singing is heavily showcased as well. Unfortunately, after completing *Loverboy*, Sit formed his own studio, Kok Sin Film Company, to make *The Rose Girl* (aka *Bitter Sweet*, 1936), also engaging Chuk to do the sound recording. Later, Sit restructured his Kok Sin Sing Opera Troupe and left for Singapore, and thus he was not able to make another picture for Nanyue again.

Loverboy (1935), starring Sit Kok-sin (left) and Tong Suet-hing (right), co-scripted and co-directed by Sit and Tang Xiaodan

Broadening Market Appeal with Diverse Cantonese Pictures

Having established itself in the Cantonese film market, Nanyue began to expand its business. It revamped its operations at the Lee Gardens Hill studio, purchasing additional filming equipment and hiring more talents in front of and behind the camera. The company successfully signed long-term contracts with Cantonese opera artists such as Wu Tip-ying, Lai Siu-shan, Tam Yuk-lan, Chao Fei-fei, Chu Po-chuen, Ho Tai-so, Ho Siu-hung, Lau Hark-suen, etc.[19] Although these opera artists had considerable influence, established stars were expensive and non-exclusive to Nanyue. The company therefore had to focus its long-term strategy on training a new generation of talents. Its two young directors, Yeung Kung-leong and Chan Pei, made use of their own respective strengths,

18. Chu Kea, ibid.
19. 'Nanyue's New Production: *Leaves of Late Autumn*', *Tsun Wan Yat Po* (*The Universal Circulating Herald*), 17 May 1936; 'Updates of Nanyue's Films', *Chinese Mail*, 12 May 1936; Theatre Fan, 'Stars of Nanyue to Form Cantonese Opera Troupe', *Youyou* (*Leisure Magazine*), Guangzhou, No 25, 3 September 1936, p 4 (all in Chinese)

The 'maverick director' Yeung Kung-leong took inspiration from Western vampire films' cinematography and lighting techniques to create a horrifying atmosphere in *An Evil Thought* (1936, left photo) and made heavy use of special effects like its Western counterpart in horror film *The Evil Scientist* (1936, right photo).

as well as the superior technological capabilities at Nanyue that outstripped other Cantonese studios, to execute their unique visions and successfully helped Nanyue further broaden its market appeal.[20]

Yeung was proficient in English and possessed a certain amount of knowledge of foreign culture. He had made *Journey to the West* and other fantasy films with Chuk in Shanghai, so extraordinary pictures with heavy special effects became his first port of call when he came to Hong Kong to direct. In the early 1930s, Hollywood film *Dracula* (1931) had inspired a wave of vampire films in the West, and Yeung took inspiration from the cinematography and lighting techniques used in the West to create an atmosphere of horror. He transferred these elements to a moral tale typical of local cinema, and in doing so, he made the first vampire film in Hong Kong cinema, *An Evil Thought* (aka *Midnight Vampire*, 1936), while also kickstarting the local horror genre. Later, Yeung was influenced by *Frankenstein* (1931) to make *The Evil Scientist* (aka *The Scientific Murderer*, 1936), a special effects-heavy story about a crazed researcher who conducts experiments on human-to-beast transformation. Due to the ban on fantasy and Cantonese films on the Mainland, Yeung's two dark creations did not exactly popularise the horror genre. Nonetheless, he was well-received for his efforts and talent, and earned the title of 'maverick director'. *An Evil Thought* and *The Evil Scientist* are now recognised as pioneering works that prefigured the wave of Hong Kong horror cinema in 1939.[21]

Born to a family of Cantonese opera artists, Chan Pei was a humorous man who was active in the film and music circles of both Hong Kong and Guangdong. He knew many Cantonese opera artists, and given that Nanyue was a film company known for its sound film technology, Chan

20. Xiao Tan, 'New Work of Nanyue's Two Directors', *Youyou*, Guangzhou, No 26, 15 September 1936, p 12 (in Chinese).
21. 'Wu Tip-ying Joins Nanyue', *Chinese Mail*, 24 May 1936 (in Chinese). For more about *An Evil Thought* and the birth of Hong Kong horror films, see Winnie So Tsz-yan, Yip Ying-ying, Chloe Yang Lok-sum et al, 'Fear in a Tumultuous Age: The Ups and Downs of Horror Films' in *Silverscreen Dreams: Recollection of Hong Kong Pre-War Cinema Tales*, same as note 12, pp 96-97.

naturally gravitated towards sing-song films and comedies when he first began working in the film industry. As part of the Arrayed Fantasia (Linlang Huanjing), Chan had played Third Master Sha on stage, but he took on the role of Tam Ah-yan instead in *Penalty*, Nanyue's film adaptation of the play. At the same time, he assisted Sit Kok-sin in his directorial work, and his talent was so apparent that he was further promoted to director. He first invited Pak Kui-wing, one of the five most popular leading singers in Cantonese opera at the time, to star in *The Pain of Separation* (Yingwu Production Company, 1936), a film that shared the same title as his famous tune. The film was a box-office success. Chan followed it up with *Leaves of Late Autumn* (aka *An Abandoned Woman*, Nanyue 1936), starring Kwai Ming-yeung, also one of the top five male Cantonese opera stars. This picture, together with *The Miserable Rich* (aka *The Miserly Old Man*, 1936), a sharply observed comedy about human nature, did great business at the box office. From then on, musicals and comedies became staple parts of Chan and Nanyue's filmographies. On top of his screenwriting and directorial talents, Chan was also an actor who could sing and perform. He was sensitive to the preferences of Cantonese audiences, and was also adept at playing to the strengths of his performers. Therefore, he was popular with actors, opera artists, as well as audiences. His great market value was one of the key reasons why he remained one of the most important and long-standing directors at Nanyue.

Cantonese films were in high demand in Southeast Asia, but Hong Kong, being the main location for filming Cantonese productions, was short of film studio space. The Nanyue studio was well-equipped with advanced technology, and was therefore the first choice for outsourced film shoots for many smaller-scale film companies. At one point, Nanyue considered opening an additional film studio in Kowloon exclusively for the purpose of undertaking outsourced works from external companies.[22] Within this line of business, Nanyue worked most frequently with Wha Wei Film Company. All of their collaborations were directed by Chan and most were produced by Chuk. Most of them were either headlined by Cantonese opera stars or were large-scale productions that featured an ensemble cast. An example of a film that belonged to the former category was *The Witty Patriarch* (recording by Chuk, distributed by Nanyue, 1937), starring Ma Si-tsang and Tam Lan-hing. The film was an adaptation of an opera piece of the same title from Ma's Tai Ping Opera Troupe. Similarly, *A Man's Wife* (aka *Wife, Emperor!*, produced by Chuk, 1937) featured 'Whimsical Diva' Yuet Yee (aka Cheung Yuet-yee) and comedian Yee Chau-shui. Among Wha Wei's big, star-studded productions were *One Wife is Best* (aka *The Polygamist*, produced by Chuk, 1936) and *The Polygamist, Part Two* (aka *Nine Sons*, 1937), which starred Lam Kwun-shan, comedian-superstar and the headliner of the Arrayed Fantasia, along with nine other actresses. The Wha Wei production that caused the greatest stir was *A Mysterious Night* (aka *Conditions for Improvement*, produced by Chuk, 1937), which boasted a robust cast of over 50 film stars and was also the first picture to relate its story entirely through songs.

22. Ying Tan, 'Nanyue Sets Up Studio in Kowloon Taking Jobs from New Companies', *Youyou*, Guangzhou, No 29, 30 October 1936, p 14 (in Chinese).

Tam Ah-yan (right, played by Chan Pei) and Chan Ah-ngan (left, played by Qu Aizhen) in *Penalty* (1935)

Nanyue filmed *A Man's Wife* (1937) for Wha Wei. (Left: Yee Chau-shui; right: Yuet Yee)

A Mysterious Night (1937) was a big-budget production promoted as a star-studded grandiose endeavor with over 50 film stars, which became a sensation at the time. (*Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 9 May 1937)

Hard Times on the Road

In mid-1936, film production companies in the south formed the South China Film Federation, in response to the Censorship Committee's decision that 60 per cent of film screenings in Mainland cinemas had to be Chinese films. The Federation was formed to discuss arrangements pertaining to shipping Cantonese pictures for screening in Northern China.[23] Yet unfortunately, just as all these film companies were getting ready to expand, the Nationalist government implemented a single-language policy, and there were rumours that dialect films would be banned completely. Chuk was therefore appointed representative of the Hong Kong film industry, and he made several trips to Nanjing to lobby on its behalf. Eventually, the Censorship Committee decided in June 1937 that film companies had to undergo registration, and the ban on dialect films would be postponed and gradually executed over the course of three phases in three years. However, some

23. 'Hong Kong Film Production Companies Organise Film Association', *Chinese Mail*, 18 May 1936; 'Nanyue, Unique, Grandview Spearhead Efforts to Form South China Film Federation with Other Hong Kong and Guangdong Film Production Companies', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 5th Year, No 21, 29 May 1936, p 507 (both in Chinese).

news reports at the time accused Chuk of not being dedicated enough in lobbying against the ban, the first of which can be traced to a report dated 11 June, on Chuk's trip to Shanghai to open a subsidiary studio locally.[24]

1. Collaboration with Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company

Chuk rented a space that was originally Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd.'s Studio Two to establish a subsidiary studio for Nanyue, in preparation for shooting Mandarin films. Yet unfortunately, war broke out in Shanghai shortly after. During the war, many film studios were destroyed and the number of Mandarin productions dropped sharply. Zhang Shankun from Hsin Hwa Motion Picture Company was keen to fill the void in the market, and therefore rented Chuk's inactive space as Hsin Hwa's Studio Two.[25] At the same time, Zhang proposed co-filming Mandarin production *My Son is a Woman* (1938) at Nanyue's Hong Kong studio, where Nanyue had to provide the studio space and technical support as investment, and Hsin Hwa only needed to pay for the fees to fly director Griffin Yue Feng and the cast, including Yuan Meiyun and Wang Yin, into town. Upon completion of the picture, Zhang was very pleased with Nanyue's state-of-the-art technical capabilities, and so he arranged for the yet-to-be-completed parts of *Sable Cicada* (1938), a Mandarin production that was suffering from shooting delays, to be filmed in Nanyue. *Sable Cicada* became the first Mandarin picture to be completed and released in Hong Kong.[26]

Around this time, acclaimed actress Butterfly Wu, also from Guangdong, was forced to move south to escape from war. Hsin Hwa had wanted to work with her, but Wu was reluctant to leave Hong Kong for Shanghai. Thus, Hsin Hwa partnered up with Nanyue once again to do the remake of *The Goddess* (1934), reusing the same sets and props to make both the Mandarin and Cantonese versions of *Rouge Tears* (1938). In this collaboration, Hsin Hwa provided the funds and the cast for the Mandarin version, and also hired *The Goddess*'s director Wu Yonggang to helm the Mandarin production. Nanyue was responsible for the sets, filming equipment, the Cantonese-version cast, and also appointed Chan Pei as director for the Cantonese production. The rights of the Mandarin film belonged to Hsin Hwa, and was marketed chiefly in the eastern and northern regions of China, while its Cantonese counterpart was owned by Nanyue, which sold

24. For more about Chuk Ching-yin's lobbying work in Nanjing on behalf of the South China Film Federation, see 'Two South China Film Federation Representatives Chuk Ching-yin and Lee Fa Travel to Shanghai from the South, On Their Way to Petition Nanjing', *Dongfang Ribao*, Shanghai, 23 December 1936; 'Five South China Film Industry Representatives Arrive in Nanjing to Lobby Cause', *Artland*, No 8, 15 June 1937; Chen Zongtong, 'Ban on Cantonese Films On Halt', *Artland*, No 9, 1 July 1937 (all in Chinese). For more about Chuk Ching-yin's lacklustre lobbying efforts, see Nini, 'Shanghai Representative Runje Shaw Indecisive Hong Kong Representative Chuk Ching-yin Lacklustre', *China Screen Pictorial*, Shanghai, 1st Year, No 1, 15 June 1937 (in Chinese). For more about Chuk Ching-yin's establishment of a new studio in Shanghai, see 'Chuk Ching-yin Bound For Shanghai to Open Another Studio', *South China*, No 4, 1 June 1937, p 2 (in Chinese).
25. 'Chuk Ching-yin Rents Star's Studio Two', *Movietone*, Shanghai, Vol 6, No 17, 30 April 1937, p 763; 'Branch of Hsin Hwa Finds Site for Its Subsidiary Studio Rents Star's Studio Two from Chuk Ching-yin', *The Screen & Drama Weekly*, Shanghai, 1st Year, No 26, 3 June 1937, p 7 (both in Chinese).
26. 'Filming of *Sable Cicada* in Hong Kong Complete', *Artland*, No 23, 1 February 1938 (in Chinese).

My Son is a Woman (1938), co-produced by Shanghai's Hsin Hwa and Hong Kong's Nanyue, starring Yuan Meiyun (left) and Wang Yin (right)

Both Mandarin and Cantonese versions of *Rouge Tears* (1938) were co-produced by Hsin Hwa and Nanyue. (Top: Butterfly Wu; bottom: Henry Lai)

it to Southern China and Southeast Asian markets. This method of collaboration allowed the two companies to share production costs, as well as the expensive salaries of the star-studded cast.[27]

Nanyue shouldered the production fees in all three instances mentioned above, and thus their profit margins were narrow. Yet Chuk was still willing to collaborate with Hsin Hwa as he believed that the Shanghai film company's prestige would help promote Nanyue's standing. Meanwhile, Hsin Hwa's marketing campaigns made no mention of Nanyue, and Zhang's representative at Nanyue did not get along with Chuk. Any further collaboration between the two companies were thus impeded.[28] Nonetheless, Chuk was convinced that Mandarin films would be the future of Chinese cinema, so when the political situation in Hong Kong seemed tense in 1940, he rented the Datong Film Studio to try his hand at making a Mandarin film in Shanghai once again. However, the company's move to Shanghai was once again unsuccessful. It had to content itself with partnering again with Hsin Hwa to co-invest in Nanhua Film Company in Hong Kong, which further produced four Mandarin pictures: *The Perfect Beauty*, *The Love of a Woman*, *Revolt of the Fishing Folks*, and *The Gardener and a Lady* (all 1940).[29]

27. Huang Hai, 'Hsin Hwa and Nanyue Collaborate on *Rouge Tears*', *Li Bao*, Shanghai, 15 April 1938; '*The Goddess* Switcheroo: Hsin Hwa Invests and Nanyue Provides Technology for Remake Starring Butterfly Wu Instead of Ruan Lingyu', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 6, 1 April 1938, p 108 (both in Chinese).
28. Man Zi, 'Collaboration Between Hsin Hwa and Nanyue Difficult From Now On', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 10, 29 April 1938, p 184 (in Chinese).
29. 'Hong Kong Film Companies Begin to Move to Shanghai Director Sun Jing Joins Nanhua by Invitation', *Movie Daily News* (*Dianying Ribao*, another newspaper with same English title as *Yingxi Shenghuo* in previous notes), Shanghai, 30 September 1940; 'Zhang Shankun Collaborates with Chuk Ching-yin Nanhua Film Company in Hong Kong Established', *Movie Life*, Shanghai, Inaugural Issue, 1 January 1940, p 3 (both in Chinese).

2. Opportunities in Vietnam

After the fall of Shanghai, Japanese troops moved southwards and started to launch attacks against the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. Yet British Hong Kong was largely unaffected at the time. During this time, the greatest overseas market for Mandarin films was Southeast Asia, which included Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, etc.[30] In early 1938, Vietnam had yet to enter the fray of war, and its film industry was largely underdeveloped. There were a few sound pictures for local Chinese audiences and a handful of Vietnamese films that were produced by French film companies and directed by French directors. There was insufficient technical capability to shoot local Vietnamese film productions.[31] Vietnamese film distributors were impressed by the quality of Nanyue's sound pictures, and so they proposed to collaborate with Nanyue to make Vietnamese films together. Results of the collaboration included *Realm of Ghosts* (directed by Chan Pei, produced by Nanyue) and *A Stormy Night* (directed by Kwun Siu, produced by United Company in Vietnam and filmed by Nanyue).[32] *Realm of Ghosts* was a horror film. Its script was provided by United Company and Nanyue invested significant amounts of money to hire French-Vietnamese actors for it. Chan, who didn't speak any Vietnamese, communicated with his cast via a Cantonese-Vietnamese interpreter. United Company was satisfied with the end product, and even invited Nanyue to establish a film studio in Vietnam.[33] Nanyue sent Wong Pang-yik to investigate and review the opportunity, but the plan was abandoned due to internal restructuring within the company.[34]

3. Restructuring of Nanyue

While recruiting for the new head of the production studio, Chuk found himself in frequent disagreement with Wong Pang-yik, his partner of many years. Fung Kei-leung, another long-time colleague who had been helping Chuk with the company's finances, also had disputes with Chuk. After completing the shoot for *Femme Fatale* (1938), Nanyue paused all of its other productions to prepare for internal restructuring. Staff members with long-term

Femme Fatale (1938), produced before the restructuring of Nanyue (Left: Lai Cheuk-cheuk; right: Chao Fei-fei)

30. Xin Sheng, 'The Future of Nanyue', *South China*, No 5, 1 February 1938 (in Chinese).
31. 'Chan Pei Directs Vietnamese Film', *Artland*, No 22, 5 January 1938 (in Chinese).
32. The two films *Realm of* Ghosts and *A Stormy Night* had never been released in Hong Kong; their release in Vietnam was unclear.
33. 'Nanyue Establishes Studio in Vietnam', *Artland*, No 27, 1 April 1938; Xue Li, 'Nanyue Makes Vietnamese Films Chinese Films to Expand Abroad?', *Film & Stage*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 9, 7 April 1938, p 1; Ying Tan, 'Nanyue Makes Vietnamese Films Triggers International Conflict', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 3, 4 March 1938, p 50 (all in Chinese).
34. 'Head of Production Wong Pang-yik Returns from Vietnam Work Trip', *South China*, No 6, May 1938, p 18 (in Chinese).

contracts were put on furlough, and the company's expenses relied solely on taking on outsourced work from other studios. Wong officially announced his resignation from Nanyue on 1 September 1938 to form his own company, Zhongguo Production Company.[35] After around three months, Chuk successfully persuaded his ex-classmate in Shanghai, Tang Liusan, to invest in shares of the company. He also invited Sit Kok-sin, who had just split amicably with Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company), to join Nanyue as head of production. The company was then renamed as Nanyue Film Production Company.[36] The first film Nanyue produced after its restructure was *Eighth Heaven* (1939), a big-budget song-and-dance comedy directed by Chan Pei and featuring Sit and Tong Suet-hing, as well as numerous stars from the Cantonese opera scene. Over 100 actresses auditioned, of which 40 were selected to participate in the epic and glamorous dance sequences.[37] Subsequently, Sit co-scripted and co-directed *Love Duel* (1939) with Chan and Yan Meng, a film about free love starring Pak Yin and Tsi Lo-lan (aka Violet Wong). On the other hand, Tong starred in *Mahjong Bible* (1939) with Ng Cho-fan, a contract actor with Nanyue. The film, produced by Sit and directed by Chan, elaborated on mahjong gambling's adverse effects on families.

While Sit and his wife focused their time and energy on film production, Chuk continued his efforts into research and development of filming technology. He made improvements in the motor of his sound film recording camera, reducing the noise level that it made while running, thereby enhancing the quality of the sound recorded during shooting. Furthermore, Chuk successfully came up with his own RGB colour filmstock, which he hoped could be used to film period dramas in technicolor. At the same time, he was preparing for Nanyue's next big project.[38]

In 1934, S. I. Hsiung (aka Hsiung Shih-I), a Chinese playwright residing in England, adapted the story of *Wang Baochuan* into *Lady Precious Stream*, an English stage play. The English play was a hit in Europe, the US and Hong Kong. Nanyue attempted to raise funds to adapt it on screen, but was ultimately unsuccessful.[39] Four years later, in 1938, Hsiung translated and adapted *Romance of the Western Chamber*, which was equally popular among Western and Hong Kong audiences. Nanyue began raising the money for the Mandarin, Cantonese and English film versions of the story in mid-1939, in the hopes of promoting to an international audience the Eastern culture, moral ideology and peace across nations. Sit Kok-sin, Tse Yik-chi and Cheung Ying were to play Cheung Kwan-shui, General on White Horse and another key character respectively, for

35. 'Ambitious Nanyang Distributes Grandview and Nanyue Films', *Screen Weekly*, Shanghai, No 6, 10 October 1938, p 104 (in Chinese); note 1.
36. 'Chuk Ching-yin's Schoolmate Tang Liusan Is Not "Tang Lushan"', *South China*, No 3, 15 January 1939, p 8; 'The Reasons and Consequences of Nanyue's Revival', *Artland*, No 40, 15 October 1938; 'The Insider Story of How Nanyue Resumed Business', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 36, 28 October 1938, p 715; 'Nanyue Film Company Renamed as Nanyue Film Production Company The Insider Story of the Collaboration between Chuk Ching-yin and Sit Kok-sin', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 8th Year, No 7, 3 February 1939, p 356 (all in Chinese).
37. Chan Pei, 'After Directing *Eighth Heaven*', *South China*, No 3, 15 January 1939, p 9 (in Chinese).
38. 'Chuk Ching-yin Creates Two New Inventions: Sound Film Camera and RGB Colour Film', *South China*, 4th Year, No 3, July 1939 (printed as June on cover) (in Chinese).
39. Er Lang, '*Lady Precious Stream* Rights Go to Nanyue', *Youyou*, Guangzhou, No 14, 18 March 1936, p 17; Dian Ren, 'Location Shooting in Beijing Nanyue Crew Sets Off', *Youyou*, No 15, 8 April 1936, p 12; 'Nanyue Actively Preparing for *Lady Precious Stream* Filming Group of Tailors Hired to Make Period Costumes in a Rush', *Youyou*, No 19, 10 June 1936, p 11; 'Nanyue Prepares for New Film', *Chinese Mail*, 28 May 1936 (all in Chinese).

Nanyue productions after company restructure

Eighth Heaven (1939) is a big-budget song-and-dance comedy directed by Chan Pei and featuring Sit Kok-sin and Tong Suet-hing

Love Duel (1939): (from left) Pak Yin, Sit Kok-sin, Tsi Lo-lan

Mahjong Bible (1939), starring Tong Suet-hing

both the Cantonese and English versions of the film. Sit and Chan Pei were set to direct, with a script by Law Lai-ming. The Mandarin version was to be directed by Wang Cilong, with his brother Wang Yuen-lung cast as Cheung Kwan-shui.[40] Unfortunately, in September that year, the UK declared war, and together with the Nationalist government's desire to strengthen film propaganda efforts, the market for Cantonese films shrank drastically. At the end of the year, Nanyue was forced to let go of many of its employees, including Chan Pei. *Romance of the Western Chamber* never made it to production stage, and Nanyue was almost in a state of standstill.[41]

4. A Studio in the Philippines

While Nanyue was restructuring, it was commissioned by Cathay Theatre in Manila to make pictures for them. The cast would be hired by the theatre, while the film stock, cinematographers and other technical staff would be provided by Nanyue. After Nanyue's restructure, Chuk moved all the equipment originally intended for his Shanghai studio to the Philippines. The film shoots were supervised by cinematographer Wong Kat-sing and set designer and actor Yeung Yat-ping.[42] The first film Nanyue made for Cathay was a Hokkien film named *Film Bible*, directed by and starring Hokkien Chinese from the Philippines.[43] However, Cathay was eventually dissatisfied with the quality, and refused to renew their contract with Nanyue after it expired in August 1940.[44]

The End of Nanyue

After suffering multiple setbacks internationally, Chuk travelled to Java (now Indonesia) at the end of 1940, in the hopes of building a new studio there. He sold the old Nanyue studio in Hong Kong to Wong Pang-yik. After arriving in Java, Hong Kong fell under the control of Japanese troops, and Chuk was forced to remain where he was.[45] After World War II, when the Indonesian National Revolution broke out in 1947, news came by regarding Chuk's death. But according to an article by filmmaker Chu Kea, Chuk passed away in the spring of 1981 in Indonesia.[46]

40. 'Nanyue To Make English Film', *Artland*, No 51, 1 April 1939; 'Discussion on *Romance of the Western Chamber*', *Artland*, No 54, 15 May 1939; Sit Kok-sin, 'A Few Words on *Romance of the Western Chamber*', *South China*, 4th Year, No 3, July 1939 (printed as June on cover) (all in Chinese).
41. 'Huge Changes at Nanyue Director Chan Pei Also Fired', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 58, 1 December 1939 (in Chinese).
42. 'Nanyue Sets Up Studio in the Philippines Yeung Yat-ping and Wong Kat-sing Sets Off to Oversee', *Artland*, No 42, 15 November 1938; 'Nanyue Films in the Philippines', *South China*, No 8, February 1939 (both in Chinese).
43. 'Nanyue's Studio at the Philippines *Film Bible* Is Filmed in Hokkien', *Artland*, No 60, 15 August 1939 (in Chinese).
44. 'The Insider Story of Wang Yin's Sudden Return to Shanghai Chuk Ching-yin Rushes to Shanghai to Talk to Hsin Hwa', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 9th Year, No 13, 24 May 1940, p 254 (in Chinese).
45. 'Chuk Ching-yin Sells Nanyue to Wong Pang-yik', *Dianying Xinwen* (*Film News*), Shanghai, No 168, 2 September 1941, p 671; Mang, 'Famous Film Producer Chuk Ching-yin Opens Toothbrush Factory in Java', *The "Robinhood"*, Shanghai, 13 August 1946 (both in Chinese).
46. Jing Ren, 'Chuk Ching-yin Dies in a Foreign Land', *Guang Bao*, Shanghai, 26 August 1947 (in Chinese); Chu Kea, note 11.

Unlike Shaw Brothers, Nanyue did not have any established markets in Southeast Asia. Also unlike Grandview, it did not gain a foothold in the North American markets. Instead, Nanyue's strength laid in its sound film technology. Although Chuk never stopped seeking investment partners to form film production companies, maintaining a professional and serious attitude towards his productions, and also strategically manoeuvering his company around many challenging situations, he was nonetheless overwhelmed by extenuating circumstances. Under the impact of the war, and without tremendous financial backing or a distribution platform to fall back on, the company was hard hit by external factors such as market influences and government policies. Although Nanyue came to a quiet demise during the war, it remains today as one of the key early pioneers of cinema technology in Hong Kong film history. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

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Dilemma and Metamorphosis in Hong Kong Film After the Outbreak of the War of Resistance (1937–1941)

Law Kar

Birth of Cantonese Talkies Draws Talent from All Over

1933 was a special year for Hong Kong cinema. It was the year Cantonese sound films became a trend that was well-received by Chinese audiences from Hong Kong, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Southeast Asia, and drew filmmakers from all over to Hong Kong. They included the business-savvy Shaw brothers, Runje Shaw (aka Shao Zuiweng) and Runde Shaw (aka Shao Cunren), who, following the success of *The White Gold Dragon* (aka *The Platinum Dragon*, 1933), founded Unique Film Productions' Hong Kong studio to shoot Cantonese films. Chuk Ching-yin (aka Zhu Qingxian), who had succeeded in developing his own sound-recording system for talkies in Shanghai, and Wong Pang-yik also came south to establish the Nanyue Film Company. Meanwhile, Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) and Moon Kwan Man-ching came to Hong Kong and founded Grandview Film Company Limited, which focused entirely on Cantonese talkies, after having successfully distributed and screened the film *Blossom Time* (1933) that they had shot in San Francisco. Hou Yao, who wrote and directed for The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua) in Beijing and Tianjin in the early 1930s, was also a keen supporter of the Northeastern Volunteer Righteous and Brave Fighters (against the Japanese). Hou fled to Hong Kong in 1933 and resumed filmmaking in 1937, becoming a key figure in the 'national defence' genre. Other screenwriters and directors who came to the British colony between 1934 and 1937 included: Tang Xiaodan, Wen Yimin, Yeung Kung-leong, Mok Hong-si, Lau Yim-kung and Ko Lei-hen from Shanghai; Keung Pak-kuk, Hu Chunbing, Kwong Shan-siu and Yam Wu-fa from Guangzhou; and Lee Fa, Lee Sun-fung, Lo Duen, Ng Wui and Kwun Siu, who were active in both Hong Kong and Guangzhou; as well as flocks of technical talent from Shanghai who came to shoot Cantonese films with local professionals. Leftist film creatives arriving in Hong Kong in late 1937, such as Xia Yan, Situ Huimin, Cai Chusheng and Tan Youliu, managed to persuade local patriotic tycoon Lee Hysan to invest in 'national defence' titles. They subsequently worked with state-owned studios in Chongqing to produce 'genuine' national defence films.

Expertise and equipment arriving from Shanghai and the US, along with concerted efforts from film and theatrical talent from Guangzhou and Hong Kong, quickly bolstered the South

China film industry. Thus, films made in Hong Kong were inter-regional and intercultural, from choice of themes to the technologies employed. The market for Hong Kong films—all talkies by now—swiftly expanded to Guangdong, Guangxi, and Southeast Asia. In 1937, after the War of Resistance against Japan broke out in full scale, Shanghai's film sector began a two-year hiatus. Its Hong Kong counterpart seized this opportunity to expand its market to Southeast Asia, where the demand for Cantonese films surged. Between 1937 and 1938, the annual production volume of Cantonese films exceeded 86 titles, climbing to 127 in 1939, but dipping in 1940 and 1941 to between 80 and 90. On the surface, the industry seemed to be thriving, but in reality, it was eking out an existence in the crevices between various political forces—Japan, the UK, as well as leftist and rightist forces in China. This, compounded by low production costs and tight schedules, meant filmmakers laboured under enormous political, emotional and financial pressure; not to mention frequent political interference from all sides.

Mere years after their emergence, Cantonese talkies successfully transformed Hong Kong into a film production and distribution hub comparable to Shanghai. This was hastened by the outbreak of war. Hence, Hong Kong's previously unassuming film industry was able to exercise unforeseen political and cultural influence at this time of national crisis.

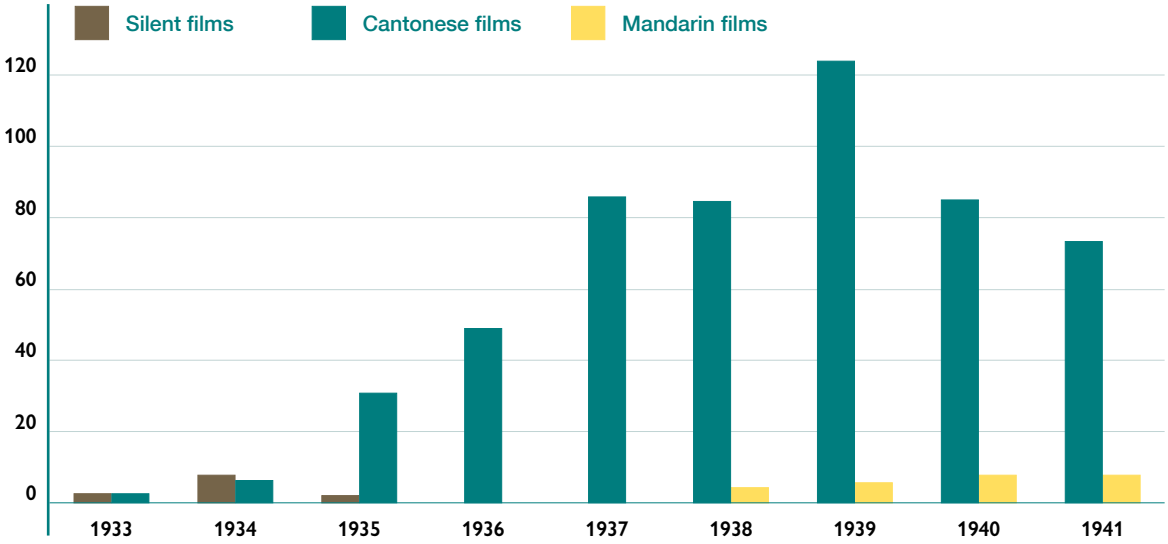
War Leads to Market Expansion and Further Pressure

The production of Hong Kong films rocketed between 1938 and 1939. Many were hot-blooded works depicting resistance against and the defeat of enemy forces; plus a number of entertainment pictures that were tinged with patriotic ideas. The production scales and cast sizes of both types of film were unprecedented. A rapidly expanding market meant more films were made and of better quality. Of course, there were sub-par works too. When World War II broke out in September 1939, the price of film stock soared. The two years prior had seen immigrants and refugees flocking to Hong Kong, which put strain on local housing supply. Life in the city was hard and was further exacerbated by an epidemic outbreak in 1938. In mid-1939, the UK declared war on Germany. Trepidation and dread seized the British colony while investors backed off. The production of Hong Kong films dropped, but still managed to maintain an average release of 90 films per year. However, with shrivelling budgets and tightening shooting schedules, overworked filmmakers fell sick or suffered work injuries, as reported in *Artland*.[1] Small studios went out of business, while big ones such as Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi), Nanyue and Quanqiu ceased operations or changed hands. Only Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company) and Grandview continued to grow steadily.

1. For example, Keung Pak-kuk's career in Hong Kong was bumpy; he suffered from chronic fatigue and eventually died at a young age in 1939. There were reports that Lau Yim-kung coughed up blood due to exhaustion and had to rest in confinement. Esther Eng from San Francisco, who had caught malaria, recuperated at home for several months between 1938 and 1939. Cai Chusheng wrote that he had been plagued by poverty and ill health while penning the script for *Glorious Parade* (1941). Shooting the film was an uphill battle for the whole crew, especially due to the extremely tight budget.

From 1937 to 1941, Hong Kong produced (by release figures) 465 titles. Only 19 were in Mandarin; the other 446 titles were in Cantonese. On average, a total of 93 films were made each year.

[Figure 1] Sound Film Production in Hong Kong Before the War



From Chan Tsang-ning (ed), *Silverscreen Dreams: Recollection of Hong Kong Pre-War Cinema Tales*, Hong Kong: Let's Go Watch a Film, 2020 (in Chinese).

In the seven years straddling the war, despite impressive developments in output numbers, as well as artistic and technical progress, Hong Kong's Cantonese cinema was still regarded as low-class and vulgar by the Nationalist government, the Shanghai film circle and many literati. They were discriminated against as crudely slapped-together entertainment for the uneducated, regressive works that shamelessly indulged in mindless romanticism in face of a national crisis. They were labelled as 'films with no ideological awareness'.

Since the success of the Northern Expedition and the declaration of Nanjing as the national capital, the Nationalist government had been troubled by factionalism in Guangdong and Guangxi. To weaken regional loyalties, it redoubled its efforts at linguistic and cultural control of the two regions. Ever since sound film appeared in the early 1930s, the authorities had meant to replace dialect films, requesting Cantonese films made in Guangzhou and Hong Kong to be 'reformed and transformed' into standardised Mandarin films. Thereafter, tools of censorship, such as re-editing and bans, were used to force the South China film industry into submission. The Shanghai film circle offered its full support to the screening ban on Cantonese films, as the latter's popularity in the Southeast Asian market was seen as a threat to Mandarin films. In November 1936, the Nationalist government announced an official ban on the production and release of dialect films. Soon after, however, with an eye on Cantonese films' potential as a propaganda tool against Japan, what with its huge Southeast Asian market, and Hong Kong's rising strategic importance, the ban was suspended for three years. Meanwhile, Japan exerted diplomatic pressure on the British colonial government to tighten film and news censorship, such as blacklisting words like 'anti-

It was common for even slightly impassioned articles to be entirely removed from newspapers and magazines, leaving a blank column with the words 'Censored Article', ridiculed as 'open window'. (*Artland*, No 26, 15 March 1938)

Japanese' and 'national resistance', and images showing these words. Blatantly anti-Japanese films were banned.[2] At the same time, the Japanese adopted a carrot-and-stick approach to bribing and manipulating news agencies and film studios. Southeast Asian governments were also pressured into imposing restrictive measures against the distribution of Hong Kong films, so it can be said that the industry faced pressure from all sides.

Patriotic Entertainment Popular but Criticised

As early as 1935, South China filmmakers had included patriotic ideas in their works and promoted solidarity against the enemy in defence of their homeland. To slip past the censors, they replaced

2. It was common for even slightly impassioned articles to be removed from newspapers and magazines, leaving a blank column with the words 'Censored Article', ridiculed as 'open window'. Combat scenes between Nationalist soldiers and the Japanese army were banned from films. The words 'patriotic' and 'national defence' were allowed to appear in dialogues and advertisements, but not 'anti-Japanese'. These were concessions made by the British colonial government under pressure from Japan. But after the UK declared war on Germany in 1939, the colonial government stopped giving in, as Japan was considered an enemy. More extreme and combative words were used in advertisements, and certain banned films were allowed to screen after an additional round of review.

keywords such as 'anti-Japanese' with 'confronting hostile invaders and villains', made oblique references to fighting external enemies, or simply portrayed their protagonists tackling evil forces like warlords and traitors. They also made sure that Japanese soldiers and the Japanese flag were absent from battle scenes. After 1937, this type of Hong Kong-style national defence film grew in number. Patriotic elements were also inserted into family melodrama, comedies, thrillers and song-and-dance films to remind viewers of their duty to the country, even as they amused themselves at the cinema. Of course, there were films that were eager to jump on the patriotic bandwagon, that awkwardly added nationalist twists to a family-and-romance plot or simply arranged for the main character to join the army in the finale. It was through the process of adaptation to a testing political ecology that Hong Kong's patriotic entertainment films were born. Yet the problem was that the Nationalists, Communists and Shanghai filmmakers had always been contemptuous of Cantonese films. Both leftist and rightist intellectuals did not accept patriotic entertainment, as they believed that cinema's primary duty during a time of national crisis was to promote love of country and not to provide entertainment. From their moral and nationalist high horse, cultural critics expected filmmakers to be 'fully committed—emotionally and morally—to enduring hardship and constructing films that comply with the resistance effort of the motherland in crisis, amid this sacred fight for the nation's liberation'.[3]

Cantonese talkies did not appear until around 1933 to 1934. Creatively, they combined the intermezzi and song performances of Cantonese opera with the plots and formulas of Hollywood's romantic melodramas and comedies. The filmmakers, hailing from Shanghai, the US, and Southeast Asia, had yet to synchronise their working styles—the early films were therefore aesthetically confusing, stylistically undeveloped and generally incohesive. Their audience were the less culturally sophisticated who were used to watching Cantonese operas with their metaphoric visual style and formulaic narratives that were sung and acted at the same time. The cultured classes did not watch Cantonese films and the literati rarely worked in the industry. Cantonese productions in the years from 1933 to 1936 demonstrated very limited diversity in terms of genre and artistry. Most featured singing by well-known Cantonese opera artists; growth in production was also slow. All this began to change from the first half of 1937. Perhaps the filmmakers from different places were getting used to each other's working styles; or political tensions were transforming audience tastes, leading to quick genre changes. *Pei-wah's Wives* (aka *Twelve Wives*), which premiered at the beginning of 1937, was a hit with critics and viewers. It was followed by a series of dramas and satires about women gaining awareness and solidarity, and campaigning in unison for rights and status. Even patriotic entertainment diversified with an assortment of genres and styles reflected in titles such as *The Modern Seductress* (aka *Modern Tui San*), *On the Eve of the Great Battle*, *The Grateful Angel* (aka *The Sentimental Angel*), *The Heroine* (aka *National Heroine*), *She Goes to War* (aka *The Country Woman Joins the Army*), *The Motherland* (aka *The Magnificent Country*), *The Patriot* (aka *The Great Commonwealth*), *The Desert Flower* (aka *Chu*

3. See 'Thinking of South China Filmmakers as I Read About Kunming's Censorship of Romance Films', *Artland*, No 63, 1 December 1939 (in Chinese). The article adopts the tone of a social commentary, and discusses the Kunming authority's ban on romance films from theatres and their decree that only titles promoting patriotism and the resistance effort could be shown. These developments served as a warning to South China filmmakers.

Gon in Mongolia), *The Last of Tyrants* (aka *The Forces Within*), and *The Rebel* (aka *The Bomber Wen Shengcai*) (all 1937). Released before the outbreak of war, such films formed a trend which would dominate the market during the second half of 1937 and the first half of 1938. After that, trends evolved again. As the patriotic film market cooled down, compounded by strict censorship and a screening ban in Southeast Asia, production numbers plunged. Eventually, folktale films took their place.

The war forced Cantonese cinema to take a broader view of nationhood; it also hastened the integration of the North and the South, as well as Eastern and Western cultures. Solidarity against the enemy in defence of the homeland became the main theme, but it was given a decidedly entertaining spin. With no subsidy nor support from the government and public organisations, Hong Kong's film industry was left to its own devices. It had no choice but to let viewer tastes—that is, the market—dictate demand and supply. In other words, it followed the rules of market economy. Yet the ruling powers demanded that even in the absence of incentive, filmmakers should transcend market and censorship restrictions to shoot films that promoted the resistance effort.

Twice the Nationalist government sent representatives to Hong Kong to meet with the film industry in May 1937 and September 1938. On the latter trip, the government's film censorship official in Guangzhou, Xu Hao, met in person with producers, distributors, screenwriters and directors in Hong Kong. Xu urged the filmmakers to put war resistance promotion first and foremost at this time of national crisis, rather than making films 'without ideological awareness'. On the other hand, the filmmakers decried the constraints of censorship and market, stating that while they loved their country, they could not subsist on serious national defence films due to staggering internal and external challenges. They asked for the government's understanding and assistance in facilitating film production and release. Hou Yao pointed out that both the US and the USSR had film policies in place and the Nationalist government should devise a feasible policy; alternatively, they could study the US's liberal system or the USSR's state-financed approach, to find a way for the industry to move forward. In other words, he implied it was unfair to make demands without offering support. He was immediately refuted. Drawing attention to the censorship suffered by Hong Kong films in Southeast Asia, another member of the industry requested that the Nationalist government use diplomacy to negotiate less heavy-handed restrictions on Cantonese films in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. This request failed to elicit any direct response or feedback.[4]

Genre Films Dominating over National Defence Films

The second half of 1938 saw the rise of folktale films based on historical legends and *muyu shu* (Chinese woodblock storytelling and singing), as well as period palace epics and martial arts films. In September, the industry met with Nationalist government representatives to discuss

4. 'Completely In Synch with the Film Clean-Up Movement A Valuable Tea Gathering', *Artland*, No 39, 1 October 1938 (in Chinese).

Lady in Red (1939): Inspired by Hollywood action films, the title features knife throwing and trick riding, as well as foreign actors.

Spirit of the Ancient Grave (1939): A satire of modern absurdity that involves ghost-like humans

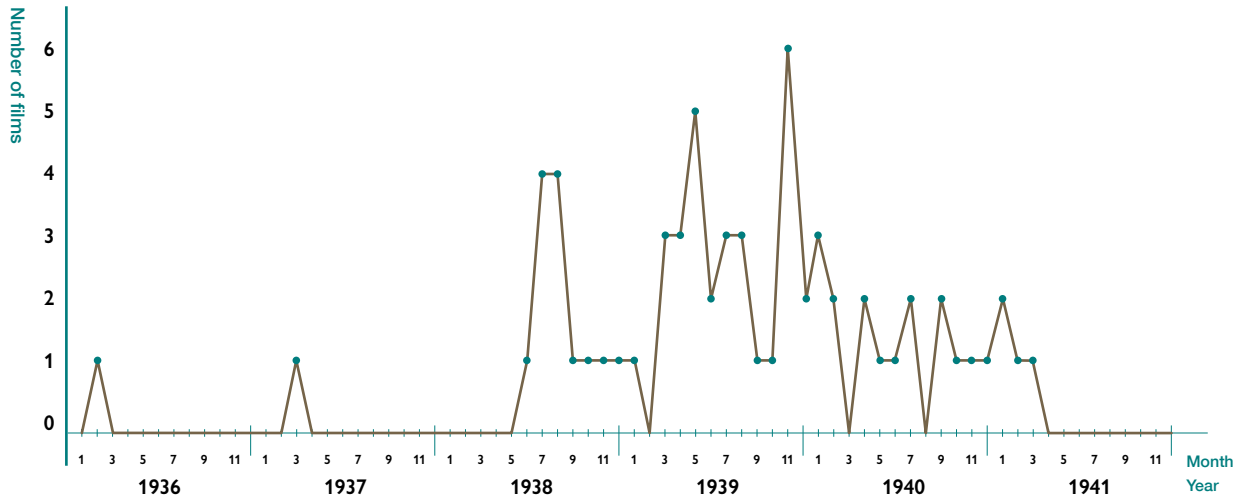
the situation. Folktale films were starting to catch on. Critics found them feudalistic, backward and vulgar. Hou Yao, who had consistently taken on an anti-Japanese stance in his life and work, had shot two folktale titles adapted from *muyu shu*. At the meeting, he stated that it was difficult to find investors for national defence titles and that folktale themes could also express positive ideology. He was quickly refuted by the leftist filmmakers present, then pounced upon by rightist news and cultural elites who branded him feudalistic, backward and useless for a country and nation in danger.[5]

1939 also saw the emergence of fantasy films about gods and demons, horror and murder mysteries, all described by critics and intellectuals as 'vulgar and low-class', preaching 'feudalistic superstition', even 'guilty of luring others to rape and rob'. Figures 2 to 4 and the following analyses show the popularity of such genre films and attempt to decipher the underlying meaning of such trends.

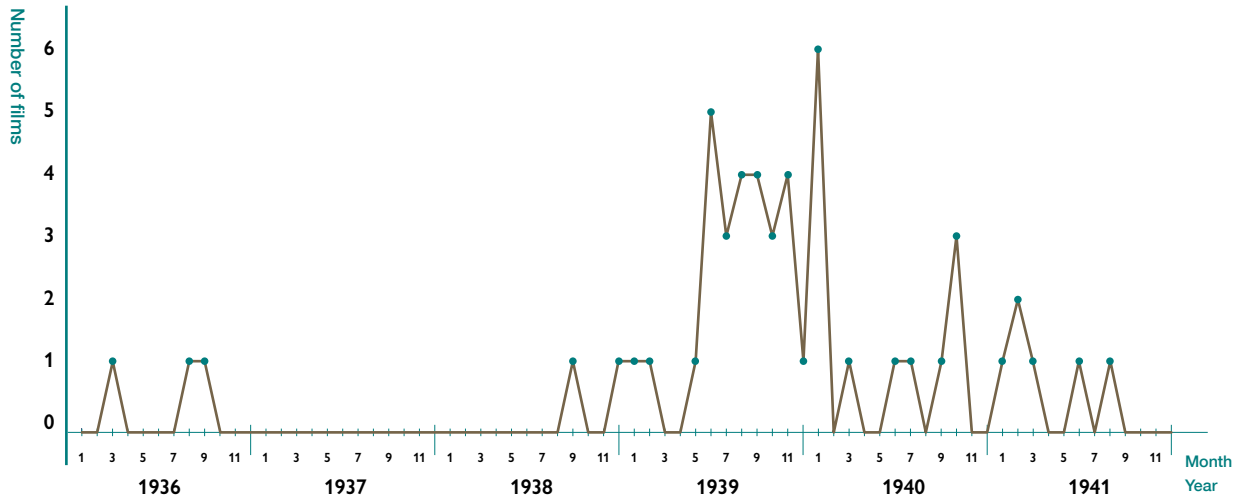
Folktale films were often attacked for being ideologically backward and feudalistic. But as the synopses and reviews in *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1914–1941)* (Revised Edition) show,[6] most were stories about family and social ethics, and love's trials, underscored by a belief in karma and punishment for villains; in other words, these works made an effort to offer guidance for behaviour. The original films are no longer available, so it is difficult to determine how they express these concepts. However, two of the earliest folktale film creatives were Hou Yao and Moon Kwan, pioneers of anti-Japanese patriotic films, which they continued to shoot alongside folktale projects. I am inclined to believe the latter was part of their attempt to find solutions to their plight.

5. For Cai Chusheng's refutation of Hou Yao's comments, see note 4. The tea gathering made the headline of *Tai Chung Yat Po* (*Public Herald*) on 24 September 1938: 'Hong Kong's Cultural Circle Denounces Toxic Film Production Companies' was followed by the subheading 'Hou Yao Attacked by All Present for Foolish Defence of Toxic Films' (in Chinese). The pro-establishment *Artland* published on its front page Pang Yin-nung's commentary 'Please Don't Emulate Mr Hou Yao's Keenness to Direct Folktale Films', see *Artland*, No 53, 1 May 1939 (in Chinese).
6. Kwok Ching-ling (ed), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1914–1941)* (Revised Edition), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2020, pp 85-147 (in Chinese). The book contains information about and synopses of a great number of folktale films inspired by *muyu shu*, folktales, and Cantonese opera film clips.

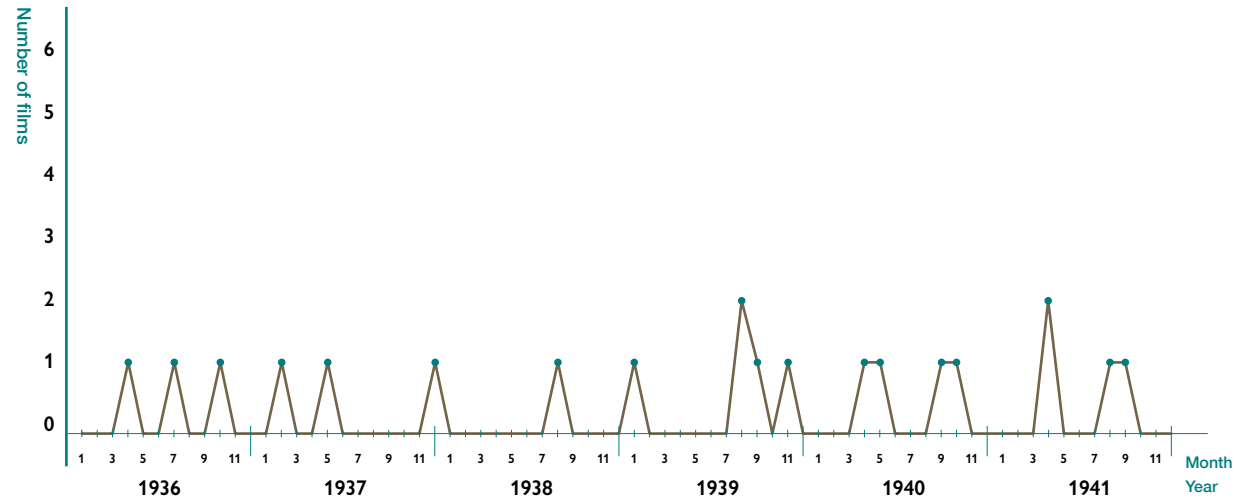
[Figure 2] Production Trends of Folktale Films (1936–1941)



[Figure 3] Production Trends of Martial Arts, Fantasy and Horror Films (1936–1941)



[Figure 4] Production Trends of Murder and Detective Mysteries (1936–1941)



An advertisement for *The Modern Seductress* (1937) advocates nationhood and rebellion against tyranny on the one hand and displays illustration of a naked woman on the other. (*Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 5 January 1937)

The folktale fad began in mid-1938 and persisted through 1939 with an average of three releases per month. It subsided in 1940, probably due to the political turbulences of 1938 and 1939. The resistance suffered huge blows—Wuhan and Guangzhou fell, the Nationalist government moved to Chongqing, the Japanese conducted massive air raids; life in Hong Kong, already difficult, was exacerbated by an epidemic; the UK declared war on Germany, WWII began; Japan signed a pact with Germany; Hong Kong was in a precarious situation under the covetous eye of the Japanese army. Physically and mentally drained, Hong Kong civilians sought refuge in the cinema. War films triggered panic; what audiences needed instead was the comfort of folkish faith and traditional values. It is worth noting that quite a number of folktale films had been adapted for the new era or had characters in modern costumes enacting ancient stories. Were these modern renditions attempts by the filmmakers to downplay the conservative, feudalistic features of the original works?

From mid-1938, the release of patriotic entertainment/Hong Kong-style national defence films slowed down, then for four months in 1939, none was screened. The fad revived after 1940 and stabilised with one or two releases per month. Large-scale song-and-dance films/Cantonese opera films were tinged with nationalistic sentiments, such as *The White Gold Dragon, Part Two* (aka *The Platinum Dragon, Part Two*, 1937), *Stage Romance* (aka *Stage Lights*), *Beautiful Star with Sad Songs* (aka *Tragic of Song of Opera Stars*) (both 1938); *Grand View Garden* (aka *The 1939 Grand Park*, 1939), and *Song of The Vagabonds* (aka *Song of Exile*, 1941). There were also well-made productions that enjoyed critical and/or popular acclaim, including *Flower of the Great Earth*, *The Tolling Bell*, *The Light of Overseas Chinese*, *The General, Small Canton* (aka *Little Guangdong*), *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan* (aka *The Blood's All Over The Fan*), *Refugees in the City* (aka *Poor Souls*), *Fatherland Calls* (aka *My Motherland*), *Everlasting Love* (all 1940); *Glorious Parade* (aka *Ten Thousand Li Ahead*), *Little Tiger, Song of Retribution* (aka *March of the Guerrillas*), *Roar of the Nation* (aka *Roar of the People*), *Fiery Village*, and *Follow*

Your Dream (all 1941). Surviving titles still available for viewing include *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan*, *Glorious Parade*, *Song of Retribution*, *Roar of the Nation*, and *Follow Your Dream*; they show how the productions of 1940 and 1941 were more sophisticated than their predecessors of the previous two years in terms of narrative rhythm, control of atmosphere, mise-en-scène and acting; their overriding values were patriotism and concern for people's suffering.

The Ghost Catchers (1939) is a 'conscious' attempt to reinforce a positive message by capturing, mocking and denouncing 'demons' of all kinds. (Back: Lau Kwai-hong)

The primary target of the British colonial government's strict censorship was political ideology; it was relatively lenient towards eroticism. Hence, studios often used semi-nudity and 'sexiness' as a selling point. *The Modern Seductress* is a film that alludes to tyranny and revolution by means of an ancient story. Its advertisements highlighted nationhood and rebellion against tyranny while showing the illustration of a naked woman. *Mary Lan* (aka *Fallen Angel*, 1938) centres around themes of debauchery and the figurative rebirth of women, but its promotional stills showed Lee Yi-nin getting out of the bath. *Stage Romance* had patriotic songs inserted throughout but these were edited out; the promotional materials simply focused on its erotic elements.

Martial arts, fantasy and horror films offered war- and politics-weary viewers solace and escape through sensory stimulation. Their period of popularity overlapped with folktale films—from the second half of 1938 through to 1939—when politics in China and the world underwent a sea change and Hong Kong people lived with their hearts in their mouths. These genres, however, faded faster than folktale films, and by 1940 to 1941, they had completely fizzled out.

While it lasted, however, there were filmmakers who made 'ideologically conscious' films that belonged to these genres. *Slaying Dragon by Supernatural Power* (aka *Encounter with Gods*, 1940) by Lo Duen, Lee Sun-fung and others alludes to the war against Japan by means of a legend about slaughtering a dragon. In a similar vein to Western *Tarzan* films, Hou Yao's *The Chinese Tarzan* (1940) mocks the destruction of nature and primordial society by modern civilisation. Wan Hoi-ling's *The Goddess* (1940) is a supernatural tale that celebrates the unwavering strength and kindness of womanhood and promotes a message of love and compassion. Wong Toi's *The Ghost Catchers* (1939) also attempts to reinforce a positive mindset by portraying the capture, mockery and denouncement of its demon characters.

Between 1936 and 1941, a limited number of murder and detective mysteries were produced: they appeared occasionally, never amounting to a proper trend per se but also never completely disappearing. Nonetheless, these films deserve a mention because they represent the genre most influenced by Western cinema. Key features of the local Cantonese version included: connections to true crime, an emphasis on morality, depictions of human evil that were always accompanied by

a lesson on karma. *Bitter Phoenix, Sorrowful Oriole* (shot in 1941, released in 1947), directed by Yeung Kung-leong and starring Ma Si-tsang, Yuet Yee (aka Cheung Yuet-yee) and Lau Hark-suen, belongs to the detective genre. Watching the film, one notices the amalgamation of Cantonese opera narrative formulas, Hollywood romantic comedy and detective mystery conventions, as well as clear-cut but innocuous contrasts between the upper and lower classes. The film's development is theme-driven, and the atmosphere is light and romantic at first, turning heavy and tragic in the latter half. Transitions in tone and manner feel abrupt and point to the artistic mayhem and half-baked aesthetics of wartime Cantonese films. But the features are also part of what makes the film interesting.

Women Take Centre Stage

Another phenomenon between 1937 and 1941 was the stark increase in female-driven films. Titles portraying empowered women include *The Light of Women*, *The Heroine* (aka *Heroism*, directed by Hung Chung-ho) (both 1937); *Seven Roses* (aka *Seven Fresh Roses*, 1938), *The Women's World* (aka *It's a Woman's World*), and *The Four Beauties of Sai Quon* (aka *Four Beauties*) (both 1939). Other works presented women who, like men, made sacrifices for their country, such as *The Desert Flower*, *The Heroine* (aka *National Heroine*, directed by Esther Eng [aka Ng Kam-ha]) (both 1937); *The Woman General* (1939) and *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan* (1940). These works underscored the collective power of women and their fight for autonomy. Directed by Tang Xiaodan, *Pei-wah's Wives* started a trend that featured groups of proactive women. The film was followed by *Women of Independent Means*, *Seven Sisters* (aka *Seven Ladies*) (both 1937); *Pei-wah's Twelve Wives* (aka *The Twelve Wives, Part Two*, 1938), *Black Jacket* (aka *The Domestic Brigade*, 1939) and *Eight Heroines* (1941). Even farcical comedies featured groups of women playing pranks on, defying and taking revenge on men. These years also saw the rise of female film crew. Among them were Tong Sing-to, producer, screenwriter and actress; Tong Suet-hing, Cantonese opera troupe manager, script assistant to Sit Kok-sin, and actress; Esther Eng, executive

Black Jacket (1939): A story about two sisters supporting each other to survive a plight

The Light of Women (1937) : A unique and realistic portrayal of the awakening of self-comb women

producer and director who shuttled between Hong Kong and the US; Wan Hoi-ling, who scripted 11 screenplays, co-directed eight titles and directed one solo; as well as screenwriter Mok Ming-ha and director-to-be Cheang Mang-ha.

Ko Lei-hen, who came to Hong Kong in 1937, was one of Nanyang Film Company's key directors and a prolific one at that, with 20 Cantonese films under his belt in five years.[7] Examining their synopses, one detects an affinity for female themes and refreshing angles. The female images in his films were diverse and unconventional. Examples include *The Mad Woman* (1937), based on a real-life crime of passion and the Wan Hoi-ling-scripted *The Woman Warrior* (1938), which highlighted the trials and tribulations women suffered both in love and in war. There were also films starring Yuet Yee about women rebelling against the suppression of traditional codes of behaviour—workers, maidens in love, naive country girls and spunky servants—they showed the many facets of women and womanhood. Fortunately, today we are able to watch three of his remaining works. *The Light of Women* tackles the unique and realistic theme of self-comb women who vow to remain single all their lives; the film depicts their awakening and how a teacher played by Lee Yi-nin organises these self-sufficient Chinese women into a commune that support each other. In the fun and ingenious *The White Gold Dragon, Part Two*, quick-witted Wong Man-lei uses her guile and beauty to save her cousin Tong Suet-hing's marriage. Pak Yin's free and independent image in the post-war production, *A Poor Lover's Tears* (1948), is also refreshing and gratifying to watch. No doubt, Ko Lei-hen was highly adept at sculpting images of women.

Skilled Creators Who Braved Hardship

The bustling wartime film market enabled many filmmakers to distinguish themselves from their peers. A clear standout was Tang Xiaodan. Tang came to Hong Kong in 1934 and worked so hard that by 1941, he had made 21 titles.[8] His works covered a range of genres, all of which sold well. *The White Gold Dragon*, one of the earliest Cantonese films in history, caused a sensation when it was released; *Loverboy, Parts One and Two* (1935–1936) was co-directed with Sit Kok-sin; *Pei-wah's Wives*, starring 12 actresses, was a big hit that spawned a sequel. Tang was not only an expert at entertainment—he proved equally in his element making national defence films. *Fire Over Shanghai* (aka *Shanghai Under Fire*, 1938), *Small Canton* and *Roar of the Nation* all went down well with the critics. Watching *Roar of the Nation*, his final work in Hong Kong, we observe the fitting subject matter and his consummate skill in wrapping grand ideas of nationhood and social commentary in a suspenseful, tightly knit mystery. The film is vivid and absorbing, alternating between joy and misery. Tang also tried his hand at other genres, such as song-and-dance film (*Stage Romance*), folktale (*Love in Another Life*, 1941), romantic drama (*A Sick Girl*, aka *Boudoir Blues*, 1941), and horror (*The Dead Body Disappears at Night* [aka *Destroy the Corpses!*] and *Devil*

7. The 20 films include seven co-directed works, as well as *Gone With the Song*, which was released in 1943.
8. The 21 films include five co-directed works. Furthermore, *Sheung Ngo Dashing to the Moon* had reportedly completed shooting by the end of 1940; the film was released in 1947, after the war but before the revival of Cantonese cinema.

Stage Romance (1938): A bold and refreshing production featuring jazzified Cantonese music, visuals of rhythmic beauty and popular dances from all over the world.

Love [aka *A Man and a She-Ghost*], both 1939). *Stage Romance* features jazzified Cantonese music, which is combined with scenes of beautiful visual rhythm to showcase popular dances from all over the world. The song-and-dance scenes were shot with three or four cameras. Critics applauded the film, not least for its bold and innovative visuals. After building his foundation in Hong Kong, Tang returned to the Mainland, where after 1949 he was able to further his career, becoming a master director of military and historical films.

Other versatile and prolific filmmakers during this time were Moon Kwan and Joseph Sunn Jue, who flexed their creative and business muscles from their base at Grandview Film Company Limited, after returning from the US. There were also Runje Shaw, Wen Yimin, Yeung Kung-leong, Hung Chung-ho, Wong Fook-hing, Lau Yim-kung and So Yee from Shanghai; as well as Hong Kong's own Chan Pei and Fung Chi-kong, both prolific filmmakers who were skilled at filming various genres quickly and effectively. Last but not least, there were creatives who underwent artistic maturation in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, and made their name in the latter city, such as Mak Siu-ha, Lee Tit, Lee Sun-fung, Lee Fa, Ng Wui, Kwun Siu, Lo Duen, Yan Meng, Wong Toi, Yam Wu-fa and Lee Ying-yuen. All these filmmakers experienced and surmounted a myriad of challenges during the war and became masters of the craft in their own right when peace resumed.

Filmmakers' survival tactics during the war fell mainly into two categories: stoop to compromise, as exemplified by Hou Yao/Wan Hoi-ling; or struggle against the odds, as demonstrated by Cai Chusheng/Situ Huimin. At a time when investors for patriotic films were hard to come by, the former pair shot many genre titles into which they injected positive, morale-boosting elements. By contrast, Cai and Situ insisted on making the most ideologically 'proper' patriotic films and thus encountered enormous hardship trying to stay afloat. The following table compares the two categories:

Director-and-Screenwriter Team Led by Hou Yao and Wan Hoi-ling Between 1937 and 1940	Director-and-Screenwriter Team Led by Cai Chusheng and Situ Huimin Between 1937 and 1940
Had no official connections and worked for commercial studios of all sizes	Supported by patriotic investors or state-operated studios
Made four national defence/patriotic films in four years: *The Desert Flower* (1937), *Storm over Pacific* (aka *Incident in the Pacific*, 1938), *Fortress of Flesh and Blood* (aka *Provoking Father*, 1938), *Shaking Heaven and Earth* (1938)	Made only national defence/patriotic films, amounting to five titles in four years: *A War at Bow Shan* (aka *The Blood-Stained Baoshan Fortress*, 1938), *The Devils' Paradise* (aka *Orphan Island Paradise*, 1939), *Fatherland Calls* (1940), *Glorious Parade* (1941), *Song of Retribution* (1941)
Fortress of Flesh and Blood and *Shaking Heaven and Earth* were riddled with market challenges. Together with *Storm over Pacific*, they were banned from release in Southeast Asia. The duo did not make national defence films anymore thereafter, but switched to making folktale/family melodrama/martial arts/adventure titles instead: six in 1938, six in 1939, two in 1940.	*Song of Retribution* was edited by Hong Kong censors. *The Devils' Paradise* was well-made with impressive battle scenes, but its production was shortened from six-to-eight months to three due to the lack of funding, and the crew fell sick from overwork.
They demonstrated efficient production: made five titles for Nanyang in 1939 (one of them was released on 1 January 1940) and three for other studios.	*Fatherland Calls* was shot in Hong Kong and Chongqing, and completed amid bombing raids. Cai scripted *Glorious Parade* while 'plagued by poverty and ill health'. With the evacuation of state-owned studios, shooting was an 'uphill battle'.
Re-cast folktale stories in contemporary settings to minimise feudalistic associations	Realist aesthetic, occasionally marked by an expressionistic touch
With limited sets, money and time, the duo created an aesthetic that coupled the spontaneity of the theatrical stage with minimalist images.	Their works demonstrated a concern for lower classes, a close-to-life aesthetic, as well as vivid and straightforward images.

Realist Patriotic Films in the Limelight from 1940 to 1941

The war brought large numbers of immigrants and refugees to Hong Kong, and with them, massive social and livelihood problems—housing, public health and medicine, education and employment provisions were seriously lacking. In 1938, some 30,000 were homeless; death from illness or starvation was a common sight on streets, as were lives given to hedonism and intoxication. The Chongqing government did not have an effective strategy against the Japanese; it was also administratively incompetent. Despite the destruction wreaked by the Japanese, the Nationalists and the Communists engaged in infighting. The future looked bleak for the nation. This was well-documented and reflected by the literary works at the time. In comparison, honest portrayals were rare in films due to strict political censorship and a shortage of courageous

investors. Films with relatively decent allusions and depictions include *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan*, *Glorious Parade*, *Follow Your Dream*, and *Roar of the Nation*. That said, looking through the synopses, advertisements and critiques of films made in 1940 and 1941, there was a noticeable upward trend in social commentary films, realist dramas and patriotic titles, not only in quantity, but in quality as well. Films such as *Small Canton*, *Fatherland Calls*, *Flower of the Great Earth* (all 1940); *Lover of the World* (aka *400,000,000 Lovers*), *Little Tiger*, *Song of The Vagabonds*, *Shadow Over Shanghai*, and *Fiery Village* (all 1941) featured more anti-Japanese content and promotional slogans indicative of relaxed censorship. During this time, the UK bolstered defence in East Asia; and accompanying its preparation for war in Singapore and Hong Kong was a more lenient policy towards anti-Japanese propaganda. Tormented by life and the threat of war, the people of Hong Kong were left to their own devices—some moved to Southeast Asia, some returned to non-embattled regions in the Mainland, some joined the army. All these were portrayed in Hong Kong films at the time. Unfortunately, this wave of realist patriotic films lasted only until the end of 1941 when Hong Kong fell.

Conclusion

1. Early in the war, large numbers of Mainland filmmakers fled to Hong Kong where they had to integrate into the local Cantonese film industry to make a living. This resulted in more and better-quality Cantonese films. The years 1937 and 1938 saw a surge in Hong Kong-style national defence titles. Not wanting to offend Japan, however, the British colonial government and countries in Southeast Asia tightened censorship of Hong Kong productions, thereby slowing the trend. To survive in the market, filmmakers sugar-coated patriotic ingredients with entertaining elements. After mid-1939, however, the UK regarded Japan as an enemy and the colonial authorities relaxed its stance on anti-Japanese content. Patriotic films made a comeback in 1940 to 1941, alongside realist films and social commentary titles. There was also marked improvement in their artistry.
2. The Nationalist government had long been disdainful of Cantonese films. During the war, censorship intensified, as Cantonese films were instructed to relinquish their entertainment function and focus solely on promoting nationalistic and anti-Japanese sentiments. Non-national defence films were branded 'films with no ideological awareness'. Yet the truth was that Cantonese films had always contained patriotic ideas, albeit sugarcoated in entertainment. Profit-driven and appealing to vulgar sensibilities, their production and marketing strategies tended to be crude and were thus not favoured by the literati.
3. Cantonese cinema's inferior image, high production volume and low respectability stemmed from structural problems that could not be solved quickly. Demand for them soared during the war, as did opportunists who churned out films to meet it. Investors shifted the costs onto the filmmakers, who bore the brunt of the pressure.

4. The Nationalist government did not concern themselves beyond instructing filmmakers of Cantonese titles to promote nationhood and resistance against invasion. Content was banned and removed, but there was no policy to help the industry out of its predicament. Left to their own devices, filmmakers survived by catering to the market. In 1938 and 1939, pure entertainment films replaced the patriotic entertainment genre.
5. As the war raged on in the Mainland and the global situation deteriorated, life in Hong Kong became even more difficult. Anxious and on edge, ordinary folk sought solace in the cinema. Hence, the solemn national defence genre was gradually replaced by reassuring folktales and thrilling martial arts, as well as fantasy and horror films.
6. The Hong Kong film industry was a melting pot of local and overseas creative and technical expertise. When full-scale war broke out, creative fervor reached a boiling point. Despite political suppression from multiple sides and market constraints, filmmakers' zeal continued unabated. To stay afloat, they shot entertainment films laced with patriotic ideas and positive thinking. They also created an aesthetic that tailored the past for modern purposes and fused together elements from the East and the West. Their achievements were limited as conditions were not favourable, but compared to Shanghai the Gudao (Island in Solitude) and Chongqing of the same era, Hong Kong's film industry was the most prolific and demonstrated unprecedented diversification in genre development. [Translated by Piera Chen]

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The Dialectics of 'Region' and 'Country':
Hong Kong National Defence Films and the Formation of a Cultural Community

Chiu Kit-fung

Introduction: 'Guangdong People Will Never Be Slaves!'

At 12:30pm on 8 June 1940, Central Theatre on Queen's Road Central was crowded with people. This day was the premiere of the national defence film *Small Canton* (aka *Little Guangdong*), co-directed by Tang Xiaodan and Law Chi-hung. The premiere aroused an unprecedented spectacle, with people talking about this national defence film from Central all the way to Lee Theatre in Causeway Bay. The hype even surpassed Disney's animated feature and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's Western film which were showing over the same period. People flooded in from all over just to see how Cantonese film stars the likes of comedians Yee Chau-shui and Ko Lo-chuen, the songstress Tsi Lo-lan (aka Violet Wong), and Wong Man-lei, who often portrayed the 'virtuous wife', joined forces to fight against the Japanese. To the Hong Kong audience of that time, this was an interesting sight. The characters who often appeared in humorous comedies and dramas about family values suddenly became members of an anti-Japanese guerrilla troop to defend their country. With widespread promotion, *Small Canton* became the top-grossing film at the Hong Kong box office in 1940.[1]

I begin this essay by talking about this motion picture to bring out the controversy surrounding the presence of national defence films in Hong Kong. It is a cinematic category that is difficult to define. Simply put, it originated in Shanghai. Initially a 'slogan' of political literature and art, national defence films garnered popularity in Hong Kong in the late 1930s and generally referred to propaganda films associated with the War of Resistance. However, since their introduction to Hong Kong in 1937, they had been criticised by many parties, including northern filmmakers and audiences. One of the reasons is that Hong Kong filmmakers had no experience in making such films.[2] On the other hand, the then-Hong Kong audience, who had long been

1. 'Hong Kong Filmography (1914–2010)', a pdf file downloaded from Hong Kong Film Archive's website on 8 Oct 2017 (in Chinese).
2. Poshek Fu, *Between Shanghai and Hong Kong: The Politics of Chinese Cinemas*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003, p 78.

under the influence of Cantonese opera and welcomed anything that featured singing, were not that interested in such a serious subject matter.[3] When they were first introduced to Hong Kong, national defence films hit a losing streak. No matter what angle one looked at them from, it seemed that these films were doomed to fail in Hong Kong. Therefore, the success of *Small Canton* was an 'anomaly', as well as a turning point. In his recommendation article, renowned director Cai Chusheng writes: '*Small Canton* emerged in the South China film scene with a pioneering attitude, invigorating the entire industry…. It is a chapter in the year 1940 worthy of going down in history. It is a powerful rebuttal against the fallacy that Cantonese cinema cannot produce high-calibre works, and that making national defence films is bound to lead to business failure.'[4] Cai's words form the basis of the question investigated in this essay: With national defence films originally being undervalued and even deemed 'business failure[s]', what led to this particular feature's sudden rise to the top of the box office? In addition, although hardly any reviews and related literature dating back to that time remain, from the popularity of the film, we can roughly observe the change in the Hong Kong audience's perception of protecting the 'home' and 'nation' through the perspective of cinema as a cultural medium. 'Guangdong People Will Never Be Slaves!': this slogan emphasised at the bottom of the advertisement for the film is an interesting entry point.

An advertisement for *Small Canton* (1940) features the intriguing slogan 'Guangdong People Will Never Be Slaves!', which demonstrates the audience's changing perceptions of protecting their 'home' and 'nation'. (*Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 8 June 1940)

From Cai Chusheng's recommendation article, we can observe that *Small Canton* was 'endorsed' as a national defence film by northern filmmakers. However, what exactly constitutes 'national defence films'? Many researchers, such as See-kam Tan, define them as a subgenre of social realism.[5] Meanwhile, critics like Yu Mo-wan hold the view that they are synonymous with 'patriotic films'.[6] However, in this essay, 'national defence films' are not categorised as patriotic films solely according to ideological perspective, nor do they belong to a genre. Instead, they are a 'phenomenon' which arose within certain fields of power. On the one hand, 'nation' in 'national

3. Kwok Ching-ling (collated), 'Lo Dun: The Films of My Era' in *Monographs of Hong Kong Film Veterans (1): Hong Kong Here I Come*, Kwok Ching-ling (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2000, p 136.
4. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang Dianying Shihua* (*Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*) *Vol 3 (1940–1949)*, Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Ltd, 1998, p 9 (in Chinese).
5. See-Kam Tan, 'Chinese Diasporic Imaginations in Hong Kong Films: Sinicist Belligerence and Melancholia' in *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema*, Esther M. K. Cheung & Chu Yiu-wai (eds), Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2004, p 159.
6. Yu Mo-wan, 'The Patriotic Tradition in Hong Kong Cinema: A Preliminary Study of Pre-War Patriotic Films' in *Early Images of Hong Kong and China* (The 19th Hong Kong International Film Festival), Law Kar (ed), Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1995, p 60.

defence' obviously refers to 'China', but to a certain extent, 'national defence' is also a symbol representing the exercise of power of a 'nation'. In the context of the United Front, this term thus implied a certain degree of institutional power. Therefore, when national defence films made their way to Hong Kong, they highlighted how the Hong Kong film industry dealt with the issue of state power. This provides a logical explanation as to why northern and local filmmakers had been arguing about national defence films since 1937. The problem did not lie in the binary opposition of being 'patriotic' or 'unpatriotic', but in how patriotism should be expressed, which involves the broader issue of power. Thus, the reason the term 'national defence films' is used in this essay instead of 'patriotic films' is that its focus is on structural problems within a certain cultural field.

The debate on national defence films started in 1938, with both sides refusing to give in. While local filmmakers termed these motion pictures as 'failures', their northern counterparts accused them of being 'traitors'.[7] As a matter of fact, the development of national defence films in Hong Kong and Shanghai began at almost the same time. Soon after the first 'national defence films' emerged in Shanghai, they also came into existence in Hong Kong and took on a unique form. To a large extent, Hong Kong cinema developed in parallel with Cantonese opera, with each having a profound influence on the other. Meanwhile, the parallel development of Hong Kong's 'national defence films' and 'war resistance Cantonese operas' gave rise to cultural media rich in local characteristics. The Hong Kong national defence films that would follow also inherited this quality of mass appeal deeply rooted in the culture of South China, and went on to evolve into diverse and exceptionally vibrant forms. However, they ran counter to the Northerners' patriotic discourse, leading to a series of conflicts about cultural form concerning 'region' and 'country'.

At the time, the relationship between 'region' and 'country' was an extremely complex issue in Hong Kong. The city was a British colony inhabited by Chinese people. In the eyes of left-wing intellectuals, it was an 'imperialist' place. The Nationalist government was also in the habit of referring to the Chinese people living in Hong Kong as 'overseas Chinese', implying that they were foreigners or non-nationals. Hong Kong was essentially orphaned back then. During the United Front period, although the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) put the notion of 'national entity' at the centre of their propaganda, their respective interpretations of the term 'national' were different. In order to keep the point of contention focused on Hong Kong, this essay will slightly simplify the above differences and concentrate on examining the market and institutional pressures put on the Hong Kong film industry.

This essay will focus on how the 'locality' of Hong Kong national defence films paradoxically took shape under pressure from various parties. The debates about national defence films in Hong Kong were a series of adjustment processes between 'local culture' and nationalist discourse from the 'country' after the two crossed paths. Hong Kong national defence films were not only faced with a single 'nationalist' discourse, but political pressure from both the KMT-led Nationalist government and the CCP. First, the Nationalist government promoted the New Life Movement on the grounds of saving the 'nation' and strengthening the anti-Japanese resistance effort. Many

7. 'Completely In Synch with the Film Clean-Up Movement A Valuable Tea Gathering', *Artland*, No 39, 1 October 1938 (in Chinese).

things that hindered the development of the 'national entity' were marginalised, and dialect films that impeded the unification of the 'national language' were one of the targets of the ban. Hong Kong's Cantonese films were the first to clash directly with the 'country' in this 'nation-centric' discourse predicated on language. Secondly, a group of CCP and left-wing intellectuals aspired to turn Hong Kong into a new base for churning out war resistance propaganda via art and literature.[8] They hoped to use the United Front as an opportunity to build a party-led front for distributing propaganda with various cultural means, so as to promote left-wing realist cinema aesthetics in the name of the coalition government. In addition to resisting the Japanese invasion, they also took this chance to strengthen the CCP's power. Therefore, all elements that did not conform to the established political policy or aesthetics were cast aside. Cantonese films subsequently became the target of criticism for being a popular form of local culture.

However, with the Hong Kong film industry being market-driven, local filmmakers were mostly concerned about the Mainland market. They were not interested in elucidating the complicated definition or political meaning of the word 'country'. When Cantonese films first came into being in South China in the mid-1930s, they faced the aforementioned pressures from the 'country' and were even shunned by the grand discourses on nationalism, causing them to run the risk of losing the Mainland market.[9] Consequently, from the mid-1930s onwards, the Hong Kong film industry began to add 'pro-nationalist' elements to its productions. At the time, words such as 'nation' and 'greatness' often appeared in film advertisements. Lacking a corresponding political background, Hong Kong filmmakers could only shoot national defence films in their own way according to existing models.

By 1939, the threat of war was on the horizon. The film industry realised that the top priority was to join hands with its South China counterpart and make good use of the propagandistic function of Cantonese national defence films. At the time, filmmakers from different parts of the political spectrum and geographical locations set up various associations and organisations. Regardless of their political tendencies, they did indeed establish a rather structured environment for literature and the arts in Hong Kong. Through competition and collaboration in this ecosystem, they then enabled national defence films to take root in Hong Kong. If we were to say that Cantonese films, as an embodiment of local culture, faced various pressures from the state in the mid-1930s, then by 1939, the relationship between 'region' and 'country' had shifted from oppositional to a new dialectical relationship. This gave rise to a new kind of 'local' national defence film model which proved to be successful.

In early 1940, Hong Kong national defence films combined mass appeal and leftist aesthetics, illustrating real life in Hong Kong, but slowly losing the inherent folktale quality that local films possessed. Driven by a group of local directors, national defence films gradually

8. Liao Liao (aka Sa Kong Liao), 'Build a New Cultural Centre', 'Dianxin', *Hong Kong Lih Pao*, 2 April 1938 (in Chinese).
9. Apart from 'China', the terms 'nation' and 'country' in this essay also refer to a form of power—a pressure exerted on the South China film industry through the government's enactment of certain laws and policies (market intervention) and the immense cultural capital that intellectuals held (industrial influence). This is a crucial point, as 'South China cinema' is not merely a regional culture, but it also exists at the periphery of various 'Greater China' discourses at a historically critical moment.

shifted from satirising the present through the past to portraying the real world. They depicted the contradictions of Hong Kong as a living space and seemed to resonate with left-wing realist literature and art to some extent; they vividly represented daily life in Hong Kong during the War of Resistance instead of illustrating a specific image of the 'country'. What caused this change? How did it happen? If we were to regard this as a 'phenomenon' which transpired at a critical moment in history, it would be hard to imagine that the local film industry induced the change simply because they had been 'inspired' by northern filmmakers. So, with Hong Kong being far removed from the frontlines at the time, what was it that prompted this transformation in its national defence films?

I. A Structural Transformation of Hong Kong's 'Literary and Artistic Field'

1939 was a crucial year. The power structure of Hong Kong's film industry underwent substantial changes: a brand-new 'literary and artistic field' formed by various 'associations' emerged. The changes in Hong Kong film production occurred within a field of power ruled by associations, which were in turn composed of commercial entites and semi-official organisations. With the fall of Guangzhou in late 1938, South China's cultural hub was relocated to Hong Kong. In 1939, two important associations were established. The first was the Hong Kong branch of the All-China Literary and Art Association Against the Enemy (hereinafter referred to as the 'All-China Literary and Art Association'), founded in March under the advocacy of Xu Dishan, a professor of the School of Chinese Studies at the University of Hong Kong. The All-China Literary and Art Association comprised a group of influential CCP literati and writers such as Mao Dun, Guo Moruo, Zhou Enlai, Sun Shiyi, Hong Shen (aka Hung Sum) and Feng Naichao. With the aim of calling on cultural workers from all over the country to participate in the resistance, it used literature and the arts to serve the resistance effort.[10] At the same time, the KMT reorganised its Hong Kong and Macao branches and appointed Jian Youwen as a committee member. It also launched the magazine *Da Feng* (*Great Wind*) in Hong Kong, with Lu Danlin as its editor-in-chief.[11] In September of the same year, Jian Youwen established the Chinese Culture Association in Hong Kong with the endorsement of the Nationalist government.[12] A group of Guangdong intellectuals served as the backbone of this body, among whom were a host of renowned filmmakers, artists and Cantonese opera actors. Apart from Lu Danlin and Yang Shanshen, the likes of Lo Ming-yau, Ma Si-tsang, Sit Kok-sin and Mak Siu-ha were also in the mix.

10. Liu Denghan (ed), *Xianggang Wenxue Shi* (*The History of Hong Kong Literature*), Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1999, pp 96-98 (in Chinese).
11. Lu Danlin was a former member of the Tongmenghui (Chinese Revolutionary Alliance) and a very influential figure in the KMT. He was also a member of Southern Society (Nan She) and had a hand in editing various publications.
12. Zhao Xifang, *Baokan Xianggang: Lishi Yujing Yu Wenxue Changyu* (*Newspaper and Magazines in Hong Kong: Historical Context and Literary Realm*), Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Company Limited, 2019, p 132 (in Chinese).

The Chinese Culture Association in Hong Kong was formed by a group of renowned intellectuals who were influential figures in South China.
Image courtesy of Dr Chiu Kit-fung

The political orientation of the two associations were not completely identical. The CCP-led All-China Literary and Art Association was generally regarded as 'leftist', while the Chinese Culture Association, whose establishment was supported by the KMT, was considered 'rightist'. Consequently, the two factions seemed to be in binary opposition and were antagonistic towards each other.[13] If one were to look closely, one would find that the functions and roles of these two groups were also different. The All-China Literary and Art Association was a national organisation. In addition to the Wuhan headquarters and the Hong Kong branch, it had subdivisions in other major cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai, Chengdu, and Kunming. Although it had extensive coverage, it lacked the ability to deal with regional differences effectively. Meanwhile, the key members of the Chinese Culture Association had close ties with the Nationalist government as well as Guangdong's cultural sector. Almost all the members in the group were well-known cultural figures in South China, so the group had greater appeal and were more tight-knit in the region compared to its counterpart. Its main purpose was to rally cultural workers in Hong Kong. Taking into account the members' backgrounds, it held sway over South China cultural circles. However, it cannot be denied that both groups unanimously agreed that there was an urgent need to establish a cultural discourse for the Chinese people in Hong Kong, so that there would be reasonable grounds for justifying the resistance.

'Resistance' requires a united 'national community', that is, the sense of a single 'national' identity, or at least a common 'enemy' to resist against, otherwise the key concept of patriotism would not be able to take shape. Nonetheless, how to go about the resistance had been a major issue in the Mainland from the very beginning. Due to political factors, very few people talked

13. See note 10, pp 98-99.

about 'patriotism' at the time. This was because the meaning of 'country' had diverged amid the conflicts between the CCP and KMT. However, under the United Front, the two parties cooperated once again. On this new political path, they had to compromise and use 'national defence' as the slogan to strike a balance. In other words, although the United Front emphasised the general idea of 'Chinese national entity' as a call to arms in an attempt to accommodate different ethnic groups, classes, and factions, there were diverging views on the meaning of 'country' in the Mainland. Unity had to be realised by 'resisting' against an external force—that is to say, the key concept of 'country' could only be established with the existence of an 'antagonistic Other'.

With Hong Kong being a British colony whose political, social, and economic conditions were completely different, it was very difficult for local filmmakers to realise the concept of 'resistance'. First of all, as early as September 1938, the Hong Kong government had invoked the Emergency Regulations Ordinance to show its neutral stance.[14] This was followed by regulations such as the Prohibition of Assembly and Incendiary Rhetoric During Extraordinary Times introduced in October, which stipulated that the identity of the enemy could not be explicitly stated in films, nor should they incite hostility between China and Japan.[15] In other words, the production of national defence films in Hong Kong faced a fundamental difficulty: it was not possible to illustrate 'anti-Japanese resistance' overtly, as the British Hong Kong government had the power to cut or re-edit the relevant content by force, and also to arrest and deport the individuals concerned. In 1938, Cai Chusheng's *March of the Guerrillas* was ordered to be re-edited and was not screened until 1941 after being renamed *Song of Retribution*. This is just one of many examples.

Another problem for Hong Kong filmmakers was the structural changes taking place in the local film industry. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. This prompted the UK and France to declare war on Germany, leading to the outbreak of war in Europe. In response to the looming crisis, in December, Lo Ming-yau was commissioned by the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China, a semi-official organisation of the KMT, to establish a branch in Hong Kong and serve as its director general.[16] When this body was founded, it took in a host of influential individuals from the Hong Kong film industry. In addition to Lo, members of the Chinese Culture Association such as Xu Dishan, Joseph Sunn Jue, Sit Kok-sin, So Yee, Zheng Hongnian, Butterfly Wu and Mak Siu-ha were also on its roster.[17]

The establishment of the Hong Kong branch of the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China can be regarded as a grand alliance of the Hong Kong film industry, the purpose

14. John Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007, p 242.
15. Cai Chusheng, *Cai Chusheng Wenji* (*Collected Works of Cai Chusheng*), Beijing: China Radio & TV Press, 2006, p 57 (in Chinese).
16. Cao Jing, 'Research on the Uses and Impact of the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China on Digital Education', Inner Mongolia Normal University PhD Dissertation, 2013, pp 13-14 (in Chinese). The International Educational Cinematographic Institute was set up in Rome, Italy on 5 November 1928 with the support of Mussolini's government; and the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China was the Institute's branch in China founded in Nanjing in 1932 with the support of the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist government. Later, the Institute set up branches in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Chengdu and Hong Kong, etc.
17. Ibid, pp 48-49.

of which was to reorganise the South China film industry[18] and justify the use of film as an educational tool. In April 1940, Lo represented the Hong Kong branch at the National Film Industry Conference held in Chongqing, and requested Chinese officials to resume the monitoring of Hong Kong film production and also to provide enhanced guidance on matters including talent training, overseas promotion and financial assistance.[19] The establishment of the Zhongguo Yingye Associate Company was thus important. With its head office located in Hong Kong, the company was responsible for the production of films by major studios across the country.

The emergence of the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China, followed by the Zhongguo Yingye Associate Company, signified that the film industry had been organised into a unified propaganda front after 1939. Moreover, some members of the Hong Kong branch of the National Educational Cinematographic Society of China, such as Joseph Sunn Jue, Sit Kok-sin, Mak Siu-ha and Xu Dishan, were originally key figures of the local labour union, South China Film Federation.[20] In other words, in early 1940, a strong network comprising various associations, major studios and influential filmmakers took form in the Hong Kong film industry.

To the film industry, this authoritative network made up of different cultural workers, associations and film distribution companies had even greater influence than the British Hong Kong government. This network emphasised politically correct ideology, but the question of what constituted as 'correct' left Hong Kong filmmakers helpless for a time, causing the production of Hong Kong national defence films to be mired in dilemma: on the one hand, under the censorship regulations of the British Hong Kong government, films could not contain explicit incendiary elements. This rendered the usual model of equating 'resistance against Japanese' with 'patriotism' redundant, hindering the original plan of using films as 'war resistance' propaganda. Meanwhile, the authoritative network formed by various associations also required motion pictures to incorporate elements that were conducive to the resistance.

Sandwiched between 'resistance' and 'non-resistance', Hong Kong national defence films had to adjust accordingly. The 'resistance' against 'external forces' expressed in national defence films at the time turned inward. What replaced external resistance was a Hong Kong society built by refugees and one that emphasised personal survival and livelihood. The next section will explain how this was the outcome of the interlocking between 'region', 'country', and 'associations'. What also cannot be ignored was how the Guangdong culture craze which arose at the time influenced cinema.

18. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang Dianying Shihua* (*Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*) *Vol 2 (1930–1939)*, Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Ltd, pp 213-214 (in Chinese).
19. 'A Centralised Joint Film Company Is Set up', *Chinese Mail*, 7 May 1940 (in Chinese).
20. 'Hong Kong Film Production Companies Organise a Film Association', *Chinese Mail*, 18 May 1936; 'South China Film Federation Has Its Second Meeting Today', *Chinese Mail*, 25 May 1936 (both in Chinese).

II. The 'Country Bumpkin' Is Also Patriotic: From Geographical Dislocation to Imaginings of Nationalism

It was not until after the northern filmmakers had arrived in Hong Kong that they realised what urgently needed to be resolved was not the issue of national identity, but the level of media literacy of the local audience. If the Mainland's national defence films were a slogan created for the United Front and were tasked with the political mission of rallying film industry workers to participate in the patriotic movement, then the first problem that the northern filmmakers had to solve was the local audience's disconnection with the 'country', which made it impossible for imaginings of patriotism to take shape.

Chinese people in Hong Kong were a long way from the frontlines and had never experienced actual warfare. At best, they only came across the topic occasionally through newspapers or rumours. Many people did not have a true grasp of the notion of 'country'. Therefore, for the Chinese people in Hong Kong, the concept of 'country' could only be constructed (or imagined) from traditional culture and folktales, and then gradually developed into a cultural model in order to take root in their hearts. Thus, 'Guangdong culture' was very important in Hong Kong, because the influx of refugees and the sense of calamity triggered by the fall of Guangzhou actualised the 'national crisis' experience and brought it to Hong Kong through cultural similarities between the province and the colony, such as language and life customs. In early 1940, a Guangdong culture craze took Hong Kong by storm.

On 22 February 1940, with Xu Dishan's coordination, the Chinese Culture Association and the Fung Ping Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong co-organised a 'Guangdong Artefacts' exhibition. The unprecedentedly grand occasion attracted tens of thousands of visitors in just a few days.[21] According to the records, in addition to evoking the 'national spirit' by recounting the heroic deeds of the 'Loyal Trio of Lingnan',[22] the organisers also hung a portrait of the founding father of modern China, Sun Yat-sen, in the middle of the venue. To its left and right were the portraits of renowned Guangdong figures and intellectuals from different dynasties. A comment made at the time said, 'Everyone paid homage to the deceased with reverence. It evoked a spontaneous sense of patriotism.'[23] The 'patriotism' in this passage of course referred to, for one, the Republic of China established by Sun Yat-sen. On the other hand, it also referred to the community within Guangdong culture and history sustained by the great intellectuals of the past, which transcended national boundaries. As a result, the abstract idea of 'country' was given form through regional culture.

21. Ching May-bo, *Regional Culture and National Identity: The Formation of the Notion of 'Guangdong Culture' Since the Late Qing*, Hong Kong: Joint Publishing (Hong Kong) Company Limited, 2018, p 2 (in Chinese).
22. Yung Sai-shing, 'Cantonese Opera Writing and Nationalism: Reinterpreting the *Everlasting Zhang Yuqiao, the Most Respectable Courtesan*', *From Opera Boat to Silver Screen: Visual and Sonic Culture of Cantonese Opera*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp 162-164 (in Chinese).
23. See note 21, p 3.

Very few studies in the past have regarded the encounter between southbound elite culture and Cantonese cinema in Hong Kong as a contest for 'cultural legitimacy'. Judging from the situation in 1940, we can reasonably infer that, in the face of pressure from the 'country', a large number of Hong Kong filmmakers refused to accept the official discourse that Guangdong culture was vulgar and detrimental. Instead, they strove to prove that Guangdong culture did not conflict with national discourse on historical and ethnic issues. Consequently, the establishment of the two associations in Hong Kong in 1940 was not simply the outcome of political opposition between the left and the right, but that of a local culture crossing paths with the country. It can be observed that the Chinese Culture Association, to a certain extent, hoped to achieve balance and consensus with the All-China Literary and Art Association on 'war resistance' propaganda on a 'cultural' level. This is evident from the membership of the two associations. Xu Dishan, the head of the All-China Literary and Art Association, was also a standing committee member of the Chinese Culture Association. Similarly, Jian Youwen served as the leader of the Chinese Culture Association while also being an alternate director of the All-China Literary and Art Association. Other members, such as Yang Gang and Dai Wangshu, were board members of both bodies as well. In the actual collaboration of these two factions in this literary and artistic movement, the contradictions and compromises between 'region' and 'country' cannot be overlooked.

This can explain why the group of South China filmmakers and artists who led the Chinese Culture Association at the time devoted themselves to the promotion of 'Guangdong culture' in Hong Kong. The critical period was between the fall of Guangzhou at the end of 1938 and the establishment of several associations headed by Guangdong intellectuals in 1939. During this time, the Chinese Culture Association contributed significantly to advocating and encouraging the production of Cantonese national defence films. Guangzhou had always been an important base for South China's entire cultural sector, and had far more prominence than Hong Kong before its fall. At the time, Hong Kong did not yet possess the so-called 'local' consciousness that it does today. Instead, it was connected with South China through familiar elements of 'Guangdong' culture—a language-based culture—such as Cantonese opera and Cantonese films. It then further connected with the 'country' through this link to 'Guangdong'. Here, 'rurality' and 'refugees' also played a key role.

Yung Sai-shing points out that as it transitioned from rural to urban spaces, 'cross-regional' themes became popular in Cantonese opera. In 1922, the ditty 'The Country Bumpkin Buys an Opera Show', which was published by a Cantonese opera magazine in Hong Kong, reflected the gap between 'old' and 'new', as well as 'backward' and 'modern', through the creation of a 'country bumpkin' character.[24] He went on to highlight that this also symbolised the transformation of Cantonese opera from a rural collective worship ritual to an urban form of entertainment catered to individuals.[25] In Cantonese, 'heong haa lou' (country bumpkin) is a negative term used to mock those who come from the 'backward' rural villages to the 'modern' city—they are the subject of ridicule. The 'country bumpkin' was created by urban audiences through their imagination of the 'rural' (be it good or bad) during a period when entertainment was undergoing a structural

24. Yung Sai-shing, 'Resplendent in Its Urbanised Form: A Study of Cantonese Opera in the 1920s', same as note 22, pp 63-64.
25. Ibid, pp 64-69.

transition. In other words, imaginings of regional differences have long existed in popular entertainment in Hong Kong,[26] and are deeply rooted in the industry. The 'country bumpkin' later became a symbol of regional-cultural differences and a notable presence in Hong Kong comedies, remaining popular until the 1990s. Following the success of Cantonese opera film *The White Gold Dragon* (aka *The Platinum Dragon*, 1933), an adaptation of American film *The Grand Duchess and the Waiter* (1926), which was a huge hit in Southeast Asia, Shanghai's Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi) believed that Cantonese films had development potential. In 1934, the Shaw brothers established Unique's Hong Kong studio to fully expand the Cantonese film market, mainly by producing Cantonese opera films. The first batch of Cantonese films produced by Unique's Hong Kong studio to garner popularity was precisely the *Country Bumpkin* series.

At the time, audiences of Cantonese films were mostly working class, or in Lo Duen's words, 'flip-floppers'[27]—that is, filmgoers who wore flip-flops to the cinema. Cantonese films therefore could not be too profound. The plebeian nature of the *Country Bumpkin* series catered perfectly to this crowd, and also inherited the traits of Cantonese opera to a certain extent. In May 1935, Unique's *The Country Bumpkin Tours the City* (aka *Villagers in Town*, 1935) was shown at The World Theatre. At the time, it created new records in Hong Kong cinema history in terms of both theatrical run and box-office sales, and was also a hit in Singapore and Malaysia.[28] Because of the plot's simple structure and mass appeal, the film catered to the tastes of local audiences and achieved unprecedented success in Hong Kong. Lam Kwun-shan, who portrayed the country bumpkin, also became popular in Southern China and Southeast Asia as a consequence.[29] In the years that followed, the Hong Kong film industry released numerous films about this stock character, including *The Country Bumpkin Tours the City, Part Two* (1935), *The Country Bumpkin Tours the City, Part Three* (1935), *The Farmer's Son* (aka *The Country Bumpkin Searches for His Son*, 1936), *The Country Bumpkin Visits His In-Laws* (1937), and *A Stroke of Luck* (aka *The Country Bumpkin's Stroke of Luck*, 1937). There were also works such as *She Goes to War* (aka *The Country Woman Joins the Army*, 1937), *Romance of the Country Girl* (1937), and *Country Girl* (aka *What Price Romance?*, 1941). The trend set by Unique's *Country Bumpkin* series also led to the emergence of films with related themes in the market, including *The Fool Goes to the City* (aka *Tai Shaw Goes to Town,* 1935) and *The Dim Pig-Seller* (aka *He Sells Her Pig*, 1935). Many Western films also adopted the words 'country bumpkin' in their Chinese titles. For example, *Mr. Dodd Takes The Air* (1937), *The Kid from Kokomo* (1939) and *Kentucky Moonshine* (1938) were translated as T*he Country Bumpkin Takes the Air* (1937), *The Country Bumpkin Searches for His Mother* (1939) and *The Crafty Country Bumpkin* (1939) respectively.[30] Similar translations had been virtually non-existent prior to Unique's *Country Bumpkin* series, which clearly demonstrates the trend it set.

26. Ibid, pp 66-68.
27. Lo Duen, *Fengzi Shengya Ban Shiji* (*Half a Century as a Lunatic*), Hong Kong: Xiang Jiang Press Co., Limited, 1992, p 144 (in Chinese).
28. Yu Mo-wan, note 18, p 92; ibid, p 150.
29. See note 27, p 153.
30. The brackets that come after the English titles mark the year of initial release; while those following the translated title in Chinese indicate the year of release in Hong Kong. The translated titles are compiled by the author with reference to Hong Kong newspapers and magazines. There might be more Western films with the word 'country' in their Chinese titles.

Small Canton (1940): Protagonist Little Guangdong (3rd left, played by See Wai) organises a guerrilla troop to fight against the enemy after the fall of Guangdong.

Little Tiger (1941): A story of a Cantonese martial artist and the guerrilla troop he forms, which topped the box office in 1941

The 'country bumpkin' signified geographical migration. In addition to population movement, it also involved the Hong Kong film industry's crafting of the image of 'the Other' from the Mainland—especially that of Cantonese-speaking immigrants from Guangdong. Subsequently, this led to the unintentional creation of a Hong Kong rooted in 'cultural differences'. The boundary between the so-called 'us' and 'the Other' back then was mainly drawn based on geographical migration, as opposed to the issue of national identity itself. Then in 1940, after the fall of Guangzhou, the hub of South China culture was relocated to Hong Kong. Faced with a more complicated political and economic environment, this group of Guangdong cultural workers had to contemplate how to find replacements for the folktale and supernatural films which had been eradicated. The country bumpkin films did not only provide a foundation for the creation of 'realistic' national defence films, but its implications of regionality and dissimilarity were also appropriated as the essence of such films: in these works, 'Guangdong' is described as an entity that is both 'domestic' and 'foreign'. These Guangdong refugees seem like 'us' as well as 'them'. Hailing from the Mainland, they generate a broader imagining of nationalism in Hong Kong. In the Chinese community of Hong Kong, people from such 'rural villages' were 'familiar Others' who shared a common language and culture, as well as distantly connected 'compatriots'. The great migration of South China culture after the fall of Guangzhou inadvertently facilitated the success of Hong Kong national defence films.

In 1940, the Hong Kong film industry entered another period of transition and the national defence films that followed underwent rather noticeable changes. Although a few works such as Yan Meng's *The General* (1940) and Lo Duen's *Slaying Dragon by Supernatural Power* (aka *Encounter with the Gods*, 1940) continued to use the past to satirise the present, the popular national defence films were those centred on Guangdong. In June 1940, *Small Canton*, directed by Tang Xiaodan and written by Law Chi-hung, was released in Hong Kong. The film has been lost, but from the most basic synopsis, one can discern that it is a straightforward story about Guangdong villagers resisting against the enemy. More importantly, the film achieved major success and became the overall box-office champion in Hong Kong in 1940. This was a crucial victory for national defence films. It was precisely because of the accomplishments of *Small Canton* that Grandview Film Company Limited released the sequels *Little Tiger* (1941) and *Roar*

of the Nation (aka *Roar of the People*, 1941). The former, directed by Law Chi-hung, topped the box office in 1941. This film has also been lost due to the war. Similar to *Small Canton*, the plot of *Little Tiger* also revolves around a Guangdong martial artist and the guerrilla troop he forms. Apart from *Little Tiger*, another popular feature was Tang Xiaodan's *Roar of the Nation*. Other critically acclaimed films that emerged over the same period include *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan* (aka *The Blood's All Over The Fan*, 1940), *Follow Your Dream* (1941), *Glorious Parade* (aka *Ten Thousand Li Ahead*, 1941), and *Song of The Vagabonds* (aka *Song of Exile*, 1941), all of which were centred on Guangdong or Cantonese-speaking refugees. Only a few of the works directed by Tang Xiaodan, Mak Siu-ha and Lo Duen have survived. Among them, Tang was one of the most important directors of that era.[31]

III. The Manifestation of the 'Guangdong Craze' in National Defence Films

Tang Xiaodan was an important director in pre-war Hong Kong. Without his remarkable work, *The White Gold Dragon*, Hong Kong Cantonese films probably would not have seen such rapid development. His national defence films, such as *Small Canton* and *Roar of the Nation*, also achieved major success. Tang's first work in this category was *Fire Over Shanghai* (aka *Shanghai Under Fire*, 1938). According to the screenplay, which is all that remains of the film, *Fire Over Shanghai* seems to be similar to the other national defence films on the market at the time. It tells of how a group of youths from Shanghai secretly plot a resistance attempt after the fall of their city. They find the extravagance of the dazzling city unbearable, and ultimately decide to return to their hometown to join the guerrilla troops.[32] There were not many advertisements and reviews related to this film in the Chinese newspapers of Hong Kong at the time. Compared with Hou Yao's two national defence films, *Fire Over Shanghai* seems to be unknown, which is expected. In Hong Kong, a paradise still untouched by war at the time, it was very difficult to elicit resonance from the audience using subject matter based on faraway Shanghai.

After completing work on *Fire Over Shanghai*, Tang Xiaodan did not make any more national defence films for over a year between late 1938 and 1939. Instead, he accepted the invitation from Zhongguo Production Company to shoot a number of mass-market comedies. This reflected the situation of the Hong Kong film market: 1939 was a year of controversy for the film industry, which directly led to the decline of the national defence film boom. The more renowned directors, such as Tang, also made films of other genres in response to market demand. It was not until after the onset of the Guangdong culture craze in 1940 that he made *Small Canton*, the sensational

31. In addition to Tang Xiaodan, Mak Siu-ha and Lo Duen were also prolific local filmmakers. Mak's *The Blood-Stained Peach Blossom Fan* is one of the most significant national defence films, in which similar regional characteristics are featured. Mak even applied the 'country bumpkin' genre framework to the film. *Follow Your Dream* by Lo also shows a deep concern for regional issues. Further elaboration is not provided here due to space limitations.
32. For more, see the screenplay of *Fire over Shanghai* in Hong Kong Film Archive's collection.

success of which also symbolised the revival of Hong Kong national defence films. In other words, from a macro-historical perspective, national defence films saw a resurgence in popularity in Hong Kong largely because of 'Guangdong'.

Small Canton is almost a sequel to *Fire Over Shanghai*, except that its setting has been moved to Hong Kong's neighbouring province of Guangdong. The protagonist, Little Guangdong, organises a guerrilla troop in the countryside at his mother's behest to resist against the enemy after the fall of Guangdong. However, due to limited combat experience, he suffers a devastating defeat, and his mother is captured. Little Guangdong proceeds to put together another guerrilla troop in the countryside and claims the final victory. The film has been lost, but what I would like to emphasise is that the biggest difference between *Small Canton* and *Fire Over Shanghai* is that the former has clearly removed the geographical barrier. To Hong Kong audiences, setting the story in Guangdong instead of Shanghai makes it much more familiar and 'realistic'. The rural Guangdong depicted in the film and the villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong share the same cultural roots, so there are virtually no differences.[33] As for the guerrilla troop from the Dongjiang area of Guangdong portrayed in the film, an anti-Japanese guerrilla called the Dongjiang Column actually existed in reality. By having an army composed of civilians, it also meant that the War of Resistance was no longer irrelevant to ordinary people. 'Guangdong' is personified as the film's protagonist. He is not a well-educated individual, but just an average villager who is ordered by his mother to fight against the enemy. Later, when his mother is captured, 'Guangdong' leads a guerrilla troop to rescue her. Why is the protagonist named 'Little Guangdong'? Who is the 'mother' instructing him behind the scenes to resist against the enemy? This is an obvious metaphor: Little Guangdong's captured mother represents China. The film attempts to eliminate 'regional' differences through a 'familial' relationship. 'Guangdong' and his 'mother' are flesh and blood. When the mother is in trouble, the son is obliged to save her. With the portrayal of a familiar 'rural' milieu through his lens, Tang Xiaodan wrote the beginning of a glorious chapter in national defence films with this feature about Guangdong, which went on to become the Hong Kong box-office champion in its year of release.

In the Hong Kong film market where commerce comes first, if *The White Gold Dragon* was the catalyst for the development of Cantonese cinema, then *Small Canton* would be the benchmark for national defence films. Its triumph directly led to the birth of *Roar of the Nation*, Tang's next national defence film. Financed by Grandview, it uses a more 'realistic' narrative approach compared with *Small Canton*. The plot still revolves around 'country bumpkins', but the setting has moved to Hong Kong. *Roar of the Nation* tells of the hard life of four refugees in Hong Kong. They try to make a living in the city but are oppressed by a merchant. All the while, they worry about the war in their hometown despite being unable to return. In the ending, the quartet joins the Dongjiang People's Guerrilla Troop and exposes that the merchant has been colluding with traitors in the Mainland to smuggle raw materials for forging arms, after which they decide to return to the Mainland to participate in the War of Resistance. The Dongjiang People's Guerrilla Troop depicted in this scene is somewhat reminiscent of *Small Canton*.

33. David Faure, 'Emperor in the Village: Representing the State in South China' in *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol 35, 1995, pp 75-112.

Roar of the Nation (1941): Exploited by a merchant while worried about war in hometown, refugees in Hong Kong eventually join the Dongjiang People's Guerrilla Troop, expose the merchants' betrayal act of smuggling raw materials with Mainland traitors, and finally return to the Mainland to join the War of Resistance.

As mentioned in the first part of this essay, with the formation of the Hong Kong film industry's authoritative network before and after 1940, a host of filmmakers from the North were able to join the major studios in Hong Kong and participate in the production of national defence films. *Roar of the Nation*, produced by Grandview, was made precisely with the help of a group of leftist filmmakers, especially Cai Chusheng.[34] At first glance, it has the exact same plot structure as Cai's earlier work, *Glorious Parade*. After its release, Cai even wrote an article which highly recommended the film.[35] From this, it can be seen that *Roar of the Nation* met the 'criteria' of certain northern left-wing industry members: the tendency to highlight the vices of society, as well as the illustration of the conflicts between classes resulting from wealth and gender inequality. Judging from the social issues such as 'class', 'traitors', 'nationalism', and 'women workers' raised in the story, the feature seems to be an out-and-out 'leftist' national defence film. However, if one were to compare the two films thoroughly, one would see obvious differences. Although both works are about refugees who return to China from the South and their protagonists decide to go home to serve the country in the end, the 'Hong Kong' depicted in *Roar of the Nation* is clearly not as dark and detestable as that in *Glorious Parade*.

Despite being a story about refugees in Hong Kong, the plot of *Roar of the Nation* unfolds almost entirely within the same community. All the main characters, be it the merchant, the traitors, or the four ordinary heroes, come from the Mainland—there is virtually no binary opposition in terms of geographical identity. Although the relationships between the merchant, the three protagonists and the maid are evidently antagonistic, there is not an intense malice. Everyone plays tricks on the merchant in the ending, and while this villain is despicable, the scene does make the audience feel pity for him. The malevolence towards the fat cat as seen in *Glorious Parade* is absent, let alone the murderous intent towards the traitors in *The Devils' Paradise* (aka *Orphan Island Paradise*, 1939). Rather, it is steeped in the ambience of Hong Kong's existing dramas about family values. On the surface, the film does not depict any local characteristics of Hong Kong. The city instead takes shape through a group of Guangdong immigrants—a South China cultural community. By using this cultural community to blur the boundaries between regions, the distinction between good and evil in the film is no longer reflected through differences in

34. See note 27, p 270.

35. Tang Xiaodan, *Reminiscences of Tang Xiaodan*, Taiyuan: Shanxi Education Press, 1993, p 71 (in Chinese). An article by Cai Chusheng titled 'Great Film About Democratic Movement' was first published in *Hwa Shiang Pao* (in Chinese).

geography, identity or culture, but through social class. This is also why the Hong Kong through Tang Xiaodan's lens does not evoke the sense of difference and opposition observed in Cai Chusheng's works. By contrast, it has become a space where the protagonists strive for survival.

Although *Roar of the Nation* mainly portrays the conflicts between social classes, from Tang's filming approach, one can see that he was not as fervent a leftist as Cai. As he stated in his memoir, he made films in Hong Kong to earn a living, so, in addition to national defence films, he was not disinclined to shooting other motion pictures for entertainment purposes. As a matter of fact, his 'national defence films' were not purely 'war resistance' propaganda. *Small Canton* and *Roar of the Nation* were created amid the Guangdong culture craze in Hong Kong, and are therefore principally categorised as 'popular cinema'. In early 1941, before Tang was about to begin filming *Roar of the Nation*, two blockbusters were being shown in Hong Kong, namely Cai Chusheng's *Glorious Parade* and Mok Hong-si's *Another Spring* (aka *Spring Returns to the Good Earth*, 1940). Tang watched both films.[36] From the similarities in plot structure, it can be seen that Tang was heavily influenced by these two films while shooting *Roar of the Nation*. Apart from creating propaganda, Tang also had to take into account the reactions of the local market and audience in Hong Kong. Consequently, the film also integrated and to some extent downplayed the class consciousness of leftist films. For Tang, obtaining the market's recognition mattered to him more than the artistic value of film or its ability to 'enlighten' people. This can explain why *Small Canton* and *Roar of the Nation* were so popular in a Hong Kong that was virtually oblivious to the anti-Japanese resistance. Without the Guangdong culture craze in early 1940 and the influx of immigrants after the fall of Guangzhou, this would probably have been difficult to accomplish.

To a certain extent, the success of *Roar of the Nation* could be attributed to the wave of southern migration caused by the fall of two cultural powerhouses, namely Shanghai and Guangzhou. The 'country bumpkins' in the film continue to make a laughing stock of themselves, but this time, they are portrayed as a class of industrious and tenacious individuals who, having been displaced after the fall of their hometowns, ultimately become the catalyst in encouraging the Chinese people living in Hong Kong to 'return to their rural hometowns'. The refugees in *Roar of the Nation* are not out of their element in Hong Kong. The three protagonists eventually overcome a life of despair as the story progresses: they find stable jobs and gain a foothold in Hong Kong. The 'country bumpkins' make their way from the 'periphery' to the 'centre', integrating into Hong Kong society and becoming role models of survival for the hard-working, underprivileged class. This ending is obviously modelled after Cai Chusheng's *Glorious Parade*, but the difference is that Tang depicted the refugees as 'outsiders on the inside' in Hong Kong (as opposed to the ostracised) who have stable jobs at a hotel. In addition to highlighting the complex social reality of Hong Kong, it also shifts focus from the criticism of Hong Kong as an irredeemable and debauched place in *Glorious Parade* to illustrating Hong Kong as a space for life and endeavour. The integration of refugees from Guangdong into Hong Kong society signifies the vanishing of the boundary between the province and Hong Kong. In the final scene, everyone returns to the Mainland to join the resistance, implying that 'South China' has once again returned

36. 'A Flutter of Silver Doves', *Chinese Mail*, 26 December 1940 (in Chinese).

to the 'country'. This is clearly different from the opposition created in Cai's film. Taking into account the overall context of the Hong Kong film industry at the time, perhaps Tang had hoped to mediate the conflict between South China cinema and the country through this work.

Conclusion: The Dialectics of 'Region' and 'Country'

Before the late 1930s, national defence films—as 'film propaganda'—had not been able to achieve success in Hong Kong, a British colony, due to various cultural and institutional limitations between 'region' and 'country'. This caused national defence films to simultaneously lose both the subject of 'country' and the object of 'enemy', making it impossible for their 'resistance' to be carried out smoothly. With the unexpected fall of Guangzhou, the hub of Guangdong culture moved to Hong Kong. The cultural closeness between the two places inadvertently turned national defence films into a bridge between 'region' and 'country'. In many national defence films released after 1939, immigrants from Guangdong gave form to a diverse, disparate and rootless 'Hong Kong'. The identity of the 'country bumpkin' as an outsider and Hong Kong's nature as a temporary residence brought about an unforeseen chemistry, evoking the desire to seek one's roots or feelings of homesickness, as well as conjuring up imaginings of a northern ancestral home, all of which culminated in a channel for Chinese people living in Hong Kong to 'return home'. In addition, under the drive of the Chinese Culture Association, a Guangdong culture craze emerged in Hong Kong, causing the plebeian Guangdong culture to pose a challenge to the 'orthodox' status of Shanghai culture and also become a catalyst for the establishment of national identity. This is the main reason why 'Guangdong' became an important subject matter of national defence films.

The structural transformation of the film industry involved another issue: When a grand, national-level discourse on patriotism landed on Hong Kong, how did the local film industry adjust and respond? This matter is quite complicated and is related to the conflicts between different 'patriotic' discourses. The so-called 'grand discourse on patriotism' did not simply refer to a set of 'patriotic theories' from the North, nor did it have to do with their correctness and political orientation. It existed in a field of power and influenced cultural production by intervening with sources of power, such as the economy and institutional bodies. The Hong Kong film industry underwent a major structural change in 1939. The changes in the rules of the game resulted in corresponding changes in national defence films, causing them to take on a completely new form in Hong Kong. The uniqueness of Hong Kong's national defence films lies in its use of Hong Kong as a 'place of origin'. They are set in Hong Kong as well as being Hong Kong-centric (be it in terms of production or screening), but they are not entirely 'local'. Indeed, the evolution of Hong Kong's national defence films in 1940 was a response to the 'grand discourse on patriotism'. However, at the time, it was not an antagonistic 'confrontation', but more of a form of 'negotiation' and 'protection'. A group of filmmakers used Hong Kong as their base to try and erase the stigma of South China cinema through national defence films. They did not fully

agree with the grand discourse from the North, and wanted to adapt their own culture to develop another discourse on community that was their own.

The tug-of-war between the Hong Kong government and industry organisations in the literary and artistic field changed the rules of the game in the Hong Kong film industry. National defence films could neither be overtly 'anti-Japanese', nor could they be complete flights of fancy. Hong Kong filmmakers had to strike a balance between reality and ideology. They deemed folktales redundant and did not fully accept the dogmatism from the North. What followed was a brief period of diversified development. National defence films gradually developed a unique 'mode of patriotism' within the authoritative network that took shape due to historical consequences. Behind 'patriotism' was a series of power struggles which cannot be explained by a single ethnic discourse. To go a step further, as Poshek Fu argues, sandwiched between pressure from the Mainland and the British Hong Kong government, the Hong Kong film industry was in a state of 'double marginality', which gave birth to the 'Hong Kong identity'.[37] During the War of Resistance, faced with different political, institutional, and market pressures, the Hong Kong film industry, which had always been politically indifferent, realised that it had been tasked with a 'national' mission. However, under its unique political and economic circumstances, as well as cinematic traditions, Hong Kong films were not completely biased towards the Chinese nor the British. Instead, they created their own sense of soildarity on the fringes—one built on images and life experience—through the medium of national defence films. I do not completely agree that this was a Hong Kong identity. Although everything happened in Hong Kong, none of the filmmakers would likely have defined their works as 'Hong Kong films' at the time—they considered themselves more as members of 'South China cinema'. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that several historical events enabled the remnants of pre-war national defence films to be integrated into post-war Hong Kong films throughout the 1950s. In particular, film professionals the likes of Cheung Ying, Lo Duen and Ng Cho-fan founded The Union Film Enterprises Ltd and Sun Luen Film Company after the war. The Cantonese social realist films produced by these companies not only created a common bond through the ideas of 'shared fate during times of turmoil' and 'one for all, all for one', but also established a creative model that linked 'home' (a 'community' rooted in local grassroots life) to 'country' (imaginings of a 'national community'). From various social contexts and historical information, one can observe that long before the war, national defence films had already shaped the beginnings of an identity which was rooted in real life and positioned between 'region' and 'country'. [Translated by Johnny Ko]

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37. See note 2, pp 76-87.

A Preliminary Study on 'Documentary' Films Made in Hong Kong in the 1930s[1]

Lee Daw-Ming

This essay is an attempt to study non-fiction filmmaking in Hong Kong in the 1930s. However, the period will be extended to late 1941 to explore more fully the extent of development of 'documentary' films before Hong Kong was occupied by Japan in December 1941. The foundation of this essay is the list of 'documentary' films made between 1914 and 1941 found in *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1914–1941)* (Revised Edition) (hereafter *Filmography Vol I* (Revised)).[2] I went through old newspaper reports and cinema advertisements from the period between 1930 to 1941 in order to verify the existence of such films, and to explore the circumstances surrounding the screening of these titles. A lot of details concerning the films and their makers, as well as the context of their making, were revealed in the process. Some titles not included in *Filmography Vol I* (Revised) were also uncovered.

Before getting into details of the findings of this study, one thing needs to be clarified. I use the term 'documentary' in this essay rather loosely. The more common definitions of documentary, such as John Grierson's often quoted 'creative treatment of actuality', could not be applied to most of the films discussed in this article. Many, if not all, of the films discussed are in effect travelogues, newsreels, educational films, promotional/industrial films, propaganda films, or home films. Produced between 1930 and 1941 in Hong Kong, very few of these films were made to express the makers' personal views of the world at large. Therefore, 'documentary' (in quotation marks) is used in this essay to mean 'films of documentary-style', and is used interchangeable with the term 'non-fiction'.

1. I would like to thank the Research & Editorial Unit of the Hong Kong Film Archive for their kind assistance and advice during my writing of this article. I also greatly appreciate Mr Po Fung and Professor Han Yanli of The University of Tokyo for providing valuable insight and information after reading the first draft of this essay.

2. Kwok Ching-ling (ed), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1914–1941)* (Revised Edition), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2020 (in Chinese).

The Development of 'Documentary' Films in Hong Kong Between 1930 and 1941

According to *Filmography Vol I* (Revised), 67 'documentary' films were being made between 1930 and 1941.[3] On average, five non-fiction films were screened each year. However, more than 60% of the 67 films were made in the years 1936 (13 films), 1937 (19 films), and 1938 (10 films).

After an in-depth review of literature and thoroughly checking old Chinese newspapers published in Hong Kong in the period under study,[4] I have, for the purpose of this study, removed some films in the 'documentary' list in *Filmography Vol I* (Revised), and added some other films discovered. A new list of 70 'documentary' films made between 1930 and 1941 has been compiled and is analysed. It is by no means a complete list since it is always possible that some locally produced non-fiction films have never been reported or publicised in articles and newspapers, even if they were screened in theatres or elsewhere during that period.

An obstacle one may encounter while exploring non-fiction films screened in Hong Kong during this period is the variations in film titles. This is not only due to the errors caused by contemporary and modern-day writers in Hong Kong and the Mainland, but also because of the strict censorship implemented in the 1930s and early 1940s by the Nationalist government, the Shanghai Concession, and Hong Kong colonial government. For a certain period of time before the outburst of the War of Resistance [Ed note: Sino-Japanese War in 1937], 'Japan' could not be directly mentioned in the titles of films, resulting in the inconsistency of some titles used in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the Mainland. However, despite all kinds of obstacles, this essay tries to analyse and discuss these films currently available from primary and/or secondary sources.

The following are results I have drawn after analysing the information:

1. Among the 70 'documentary' films, 17 fall under the category of 'Chinese politics' and other related activities. These include two feature documentaries screened in 1941: *Scenes of Yan'an* (aka *On the Northwest Front Line*) and *A Page of History* (aka *A Page in the History of the Republic of China*). All the rest in the 'Chinese politics' category are presumed to be short current affairs films/newsreels.
2. There are eight films related to the activities of the Hong Kong colonial government (categorised as 'Hong Kong government' films), including two promotional films made for the Safety First Campaign. Four films document celebration activities either commemorating the silver jubilee of the enthronement of King George V of the UK in 1935 or the coronation of King George VI in 1937.
3. 11 newsreels are on 'current affairs', such as train crashes, calamities caused by typhoons, disaster relief, the commencement of international aviation, an exhibition of Chinese products, a girl scouts' training camp, or promoting donations or buying of Nationalist

3. Ibid. Several items listed in *Filmography Vol I* (Revised) are collections of short films. I count the newsreels within an edited whole as separate films to arrive at the total of 67.
4. References have been primarily taken from two electronic databases: 'The Old Hong Kong Newspapers Collection' under the Multimedia Information System of Hong Kong Public Libraries and the 'Film-related Materials in Early Chinese Newspapers' collection at Hong Kong Baptist University.

government bonds held in Hong Kong, and the patriotic activities of overseas Chinese in the US after the War of Resistance broke out.

4. Two 'celebrity news' films—on the marriage ceremony of a rich family, and the private lives of film stars—were made during this period.
5. There are three films on 'culture/arts', topics of which include a cooking competition held in a high school, martial arts demonstrations, and hula dancing.
6. In the category of 'sports/recreation', there are eight films: five related to football games (two held for charity), two on athletic meets, and a final one on dog-racing in Macao.
7. Eight travelogues were made between 1930 and 1941. Among them, three are of scenery in Hong Kong, five are of landscapes of Macao, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Suzhou, and San Francisco.
8. Of the four 'promotional/industrial' films, two are related to canning factories, and the other two are for the Government House's Safety First Campaign.
9. Before 1937, only one film on 'war in China' was made by Hong Kong film companies. The film about the Shanghai bombing incident of 1932 follows battles between Chinese armed forces and the invading Japanese forces. After the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, at least ten more such 'documentaries' on the war were made by Hong Kong companies, among which was *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton* (aka *The War Effort in Guangzhou*, 1937), a feature-length film with 8,000 feet worth of footage. *Glorious History of the Eight-Hundred Heroes* (1937) may also be feature-length. *The War in Xiamen* (aka *Xiamen During the War*, 1938) is around 48 minutes (4,300 feet). Others are presumed to be films with less than 60 minutes of running time.

The following table has been compiled to categorise 'documentary' films made in Hong Kong between 1930 and 1941 (the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of 'documentary' films produced by Grandview Film Company Limited):

[Table 1] The Number of 'Documentary' Films Made in Hong Kong, 1930–1941

	Chinese Politics	HK Government	Current Affairs	Celebrity News	Culture/ Arts	Sports/ Recreation	Travelogues	Promotional/ Industrial	War in China	Total
1930										0
1931			1							1
1932			1	1		1			1	4
1933										0
1934										0
1935	1	3				2		1		7
1936	4 (3)		3 (3)				5 (3)	2 (1)		14 (10)
1st Half of 1937	8 (5)	1 (1)		1 (1)		1 (1)				11 (8)
2nd Half of 1937	2 (2)	1 (0)	1 (1)		1 (1)		2 (2)	1 (1)	3 (1)	11 (8)
1938			3 (3)			1 (0)	1 (1)		5 (0)	10 (4)
1939					1 (1)	2 (1)			1 (0)	4 (2)
1940		1 (0)				1 (0)				2 (0)
1941	2 (0)		2 (1)		1 (1)				1 (0)	6 (2)
Total	17 (10)	6 (1)	11 (8)	2 (1)	3 (3)	8 (2)	8 (6)	4 (2)	11 (1)	70 (34)

Based on Table 1 and information from secondary sources, the following has been noted:

The Lai brothers Lai Buk-hoi (right) and Lai Man-wai (left) formed China Sun, producing more than ten documentaries in Hong Kong in 1924.

1. Of the 70 'documentary' films made in Hong Kong between 1930 and 1941, almost half of them were produced by Grandview Film Company Limited. Before 1936, when Grandview started its 'documentary' productions, the highest number of 'documentary' films in Hong Kong had been 18, in the year of 1924. Almost all of them were produced by China Sun Motion Picture Co Ltd under the auspices of Lai Man-wai and his brother Lai Buk-hoi (aka Lai Pak-hoi). After China Sun relocated its operations to Shanghai, 'documentary' production in Hong Kong started to dwindle. The most prolific year in the period between 1925 and 1934 was 1932, with four productions.[5] In some years there were no 'documentary' films made at all. In 1935, the number rose to seven, which was still small by comparison with 14 in 1936, of which ten were produced by Grandview. Such a phenomenon reveals that 'documentary' films in Hong Kong were highly related to the interest taken by an individual company or filmmaker, rather than being a mainstream film genre.
2. Most of the 'documentary' films made in Hong Kong in the 1930s were made in the years 1936, 1937, and 1938, with 14, 22, and 10 such films respectively. The number of 'documentary' productions in other years were in single digits. In 1930, 1933 and 1934, there wasn't any output of 'documentary' films at all! Such a phenomenon may reflect the transition of the Hong Kong film industry, as well as a decision by Grandview to produce less (or no) 'documentary' films. Reasons for such a major change in Grandview's policy will be explained in the latter part of this essay.
3. There were 17 'documentary' films related to politics in China, amounting to a quarter of the total number, with the majority made in 1936 or the first half of 1937. Among these 17 films,

5. A film titled *Documentary of Current Affairs*, produced by Mantianhong Silver Screen Company in 1926, comprises 30 shorts. From the titles of these shorts, I would say that many feature the same incident without being edited into one complete film.

more than half were produced by Grandview. Topics of most of these films involve either activities in Guangdong Province or the political exchange between the colonial government and the Nationalist government. The choice of topics might have been reflecting the concerns of local audiences at the time, or at least those on the minds of production company executives.

4. The distribution of films is rather uneven in different categories of non-fiction films made in Hong Kong during the years between 1930 and 1941. The number of productions in the categories 'Hong Kong government' and 'travelogues' are six and eight respectively. The number of films in the 'celebrity news', 'culture/arts', and 'promotional/industrial' categories are much fewer. Grandview's productions account for 50 percent or more in 'Chinese politics', 'current affairs', 'celebrity news', 'culture/arts', 'travelogues', and 'promotional/industrial' categories. However, the percentage of Grandview is rather low in the 'Hong Kong government', 'sports/recreation' and 'war in China' categories. The pattern reflects a tendency in the non-fiction filmmaking policy of Grandview to document non-governmental local activities of Hong Kong, or to produce promotional or industrial films that matched the company's business directions.[6]

5. There were 37 'documentary' films made in Hong Kong between 1930 and 1937 before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Among them, the number of films in the 'Chinese politics' category is the highest, accounting for around one-third of the total. There is only one film on 'war in China', and two other films on 'celebrity news'. There is no production in the 'culture/arts' category. The number of films in the other categories apart from the aforementioned three are distributed rather evenly, ranging from three to five. The justifications for the rather large number of 'Chinese politics' non-fiction films may be attributed to the unique position of Guangzhou in the politics of the Republic of China. The Nationalist government was founded in Guangzhou in 1925 and became the base for the Northern Expedition of the National Revolutionary Army. After the Northern Expedition successfully wiped out the warlords in China, Guangzhou remained a centre in the power struggle among the Nationalists, such as the 1936 Guangdong-Guangxi Incident.[7] Thus, it is understandable that Chinese residents in Hong Kong would take a strong interest in watching newsreels on Chinese politics at the time.

6. Most of the Hong Kong-made newsreels or 'documentary' films on the War of Resistance appeared after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. Between the second half of 1937 and 1941, a total of ten such films were made. Among other categories, only 'current affairs', with

6. Promotional films made in conjunction with Grandview operations include promotional/industrial films made for the Amoy Canning Corporation Limited in Xiamen, as well as travelogues in Suzhou and Hangzhou, which were made while the company was shooting its own feature films on location in Suzhou.

7. In June 1936, leaders of the two southern provinces opposed the policies of the central government led by Chiang Kai-shek, and requested to maintain their quasi-independence from the Nanjing central government. The incident almost escalated into a civil war, which was averted after a political compromise between the two sides. The incident ended in September 1936.

its six films on the patriotic activities of civil society in Hong Kong and overseas Chinese society, comes close to the number of films in the 'war in China' category. There was only one 'promotional/industrial' film made during this period. No 'celebrity news' films can be found. The number of films in all other categories falls between two and four.

7. It can therefore be concluded that the primary focus of Hong Kong 'documentary' films between 1930 and 1941 was 'Chinese politics'. Before the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War, the theme was politics in China; after the war broke out, the theme was war in China. 'Chinese politics' is the champion, accounting for around a quarter of all the productions from 1930 to 1941. 'War in China' and 'current affairs' rank second, each accounting for 15.7%. 'Sports/recreation' and 'travelogues' rank third with 11.4% respectively. The rest of the categories account for less than 10% (2.9%, 4.3%, 5.7% and 8.6% respectively). It is worth mentioning that there are only three films in the 'culture/arts' category, all made by Grandview. One can surmise the general cultural or artistic tastes of 1930s' audiences that Grandview catered to.
8. Although Grandview made only one film on the Sino-Japanese conflict, *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton* (co-produced with Wenhua Production Company) is feature-length. Films in this category were made by several different film companies, of which Wenhua Production Company was the most prolific, producing three films: the abovementioned *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton* (co-produced with Grandview), *Protect Southern China and Guangdong: Special Edition* (1938, co-produced with Great China Photography Group), and *Legendary Fighters at Battles of Conghua* (1939), which was solely produced by the studio.
9. Many names of the production companies of 'documentary' films on the War of Resistance screened in Hong Kong theatres between 1937 and 1941 are very similar. Many of these companies or institutions seemed to be ad hoc organisations, established specifically to produce 'documentary' films with specific subject matters based on specific locations. The funding sources or operation locations of many of them cannot be traced. Thus, many of these 'documentary' films cannot be identified as Hong Kong productions or be analysed in this essay.

'Documentary' Films Produced by Grandview

Grandview Film Company Limited was founded by filmmaker Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) in Hong Kong in 1935. Grandview produced not only fiction films, but also 'documentary' films on current affairs, as well as short fictions and slapsticks through its Short Film Department. These shorts were shown in theatres in conjunction with feature films produced by Grandview.[8] However, not every Grandview feature film was screened with a short. There were also occasions

8. Chan Tsang-ning (ed), *Silverscreen Dreams: Recollection of Hong Kong Pre-War Cinema Tales*, Hong Kong: Let's Go Watch a Film, 2020, pp 61-67 (in Chinese).

Joseph Sunn Jue founded Grandview in Hong Kong, which produced documentaries in addition to feature films.

when a short newsreel was paired with a Grandview feature several days after the premiere. Sometimes the same feature would be paired with different newsreels throughout its run.

For example, Grandview's feature *Charge* (aka *Close Combat*) premiered with a newsreel, *The Film Industry of Southern China is Making a Film for Disaster Relief*, as a double-bill on 13 October 1937. However, three days later, the original newsreel was replaced with a hastily produced Grandview title, *The Arrival of Dr. H.H. Kung, Minister of Finance, in Hong Kong on October 14*. It is understandable that the newsworthiness of the latter was much higher.

Thus, Grandview in the mid-1930s, under the leadership of Joseph Sunn Jue, seemed very commited to making films that document important current affairs in Hong Kong. Such commitment can be seen from the fact that Grandview had developed a news magazine format, *The Grandview Revue* (1936). The first episode consisted of five news items and two short fictions. However, it appears that no further episodes of *The Grandview Revue* had been produced or released. This may be a sign indicating the inhospitality of Hong Kong film culture towards non-fiction films prior to the Sino-Japanese War, especially the concept of bundling 'documentary' films together with other shorts as a film programme.

The Grandview Revue includes a 30-minute long period short film titled *Immortal Music*, and a one-reel *wuxia* film *The Villains* (both written and directed by Joseph Sunn Jue), together with three newsreels related to 'Chinese politics', namely *The Birthday Celebration of President Chiang* (by film stars who answered the call to contribute funds for purchasing fighter aircraft), *The Funeral of Chairman Hu* (of the Kuomintang), and *Appointments to the Hong Kong Government* (which documents the official visits of Chairman Huang Mu-sung of Guangdong provincial government and Guangzhou Mayor Tseng Yang-fu to the Hong Kong government). A travelogue called *Scenery of Guangzhou* and a current affairs newsreel entitled *The Navigation Commencement Ceremony* (which documents the arrival of a China National Aviation Corporation's aircraft from Shanghai) are also included. These newsreels reflect some 'normal' activities of the Nationalist government and the rather frequent economic, social, and political engagement between the Hong Kong government and politicians of South China (especially from Guangdong Province).

In 1936, Grandview produced three travelogues (*Parade Through Macao and its Scenic Landscapes*, *Scenery of Hong Kong*, and *Scenery of Guangzhou*), two newsreels on the current affairs of Hong Kong (*Aftermath of Typhoon in Hong Kong* and *The Clipper's Arrival at Hong Kong*), as well as a promotional/industrial film (*Factory Scenes at Amoy Food Cannery*). The cinematographic style and content of *Scenery of Hong Kong* are similar to the Hong Kong section of *A Trip Through China* (1917), a travelogue made some 20 years earlier by Benjamin

Brodsky.[9] It was reported that *Scenery of Hong Kong* had been screened with a feature in 1936.[10] However, we are pending further evidence on it. In the second half of 1937, Grandview would produce two more travelogues: *Scenery of Hangzhou* and *Scenery of Suzhou*.

In the first half of 1937 Grandview screened five news films related to 'Chinese politics', including *Commander-in-Chief Yu Hanmou Visits Hong Kong*, *Provincial Government Chairman Wu Tiecheng on Transit via Hong Kong*, *Tour of Nationalist Government Chairman Lin Sen to Guangdong*, *Tribute to the Revolutionary Martyrs*, and *The Naming Ceremony of Military Aircrafts in Guangdong* (aka *The Naming Ceremony of Eighteen Military Aircrafts*). Ian Aitken and Michael Ingham consider these films to be related to the imminent war between China and Japan,[11] but my research concludes that only the last film is related to the then-upcoming Sino-Japanese War. Since the beginning of the Japanese invasion of China in mid-September 1931, the number and quality of Chinese Air Force planes were much inferior to those of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy Air Forces. This prompted the movements in China and overseas (including Hong Kong) to raise funds for purchasing fighter aircraft to achieve the goal of 'save China with aviation', in the name of celebrating President Chiang Kai-shek's birthday. The other four films are actually related to the aftermath of the 1936 Guangdong-Guangxi Incident.[12]

The King's Coronation Parade (aka *The Hong Kong Parade*), also made in the first half of 1937, documents one of the major events held by the Hong Kong government in early 20th century.[13] According to news reports, many Hong Kong film companies, Grandview included, had planned to shoot the parade.[14] However, I could not find any other films about the parade besides Grandview's.

Opening of the 14th Guangdong State Sports Championship, made around the same time, documents the athletic event held in Guangdong that opened on 5 May. At the time, the event was highly valued by local people, attested by the fact that Hong Kong newspapers published daily 'Special Editions' on the event to attract the attention of their readers.

The Private Lives of Movie People (1937) can be seen as Grandview's promotional effort to entice or satisfy audience's curiosity about film stars' private lives. The other short film—*Factory Scenes at Datong Cannery in Jiangxi Province*, *Hula*, *Scenery of Hangzhou*, and *The First Regiment at Whampoa Military Academy*—were shown in conjunction with some screenings of the aforementioned *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton* in October 1937.

9. The footage of *Scenery of Hong Kong* in the Hong Kong Film Archive collection is an unedited version with neither soundtrack nor intertitles. The images show various views of Victoria Harbour, all kinds of vessels, street scenery and hawkers, life on the floating houses, botanical gardens, views from the Peak Tram, farmlands in the New Territories, beaches, and, surprisingly, hordes of coolies, street people, and child beggars on the streets.
10. Nüren, 'Short Films Produced', *Youyou* (*Leisure Magazine*), Guangzhou, No 22, 28 July 1936, p 13 (in Chinese).
11. Ian Aitken & Michael Ingham, *Hong Kong Documentary Film*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p 21.
12. See note 7.
13. The Hong Kong government considered the parade celebrating the coronation of George VI a significant event. The Hong Kong Police Force introduced a special regulation to manage traffic during the parade. Additional express trains between Hong Kong and Guangdong were operated by the Kowloon-Canton Railway. There was a special steamboat scheduled to sail between Hong Kong, Macao and Guangdong arranged by the Hongkong, Canton & Macao Steamboat Co., Ltd. See *The Tien Kwong Morning News*, 12 May 1937 and *The Kung Sheung Daily News*, 9 May 1937 (both in Chinese).
14. See *The Tien Kwong Morning News*, 12 May 1937 (in Chinese).

There were two newsreels made in the second half of 1937. *The Film Industry of Southern China Is Making a Film for Disaster Relief* documents the launching of a film project, *The Last Stand* (aka *At this Crucial Juncture*), by an organisation called Southern China Film Industry Association for the Relief. The organisation was initiated by Joseph Sunn Jue, founder of Grandview, with some other Hong Kong filmmakers. *The Last Stand* was co-produced by Grandview and five other Hong Kong production companies. Box-office earnings were to be used for either the relief of war refugees from Northern China or the purchase of government bonds issued by the Nationalist government. The title of another newsreel, *The Arrival of Dr. H.H. Kung, Minister of Finance, in Hong Kong on October 14*, indicates exactly what it is about. Dr H H Kung (aka Kung Hsiang-hsi), Minister of Finance and one of the most influential members of the Nationalist government at the time, arrived in Hong Kong after a long trip, during which he first attended the coronation of King George VI, followed by visits to several European countries and the Philippines. His stay in Hong Kong was welcomed by both the Hong Kong government and the Chinese elites of the British colony.

From 1938 onwards, Grandview did not make any 'documentary' films on the war in China. Two films on the patriotic activities of the Chinese population in Hong Kong were made in 1938, namely *Commemorating The Battle of Shanghai: Fundraising Campaign for Resistance Efforts* and *Sales of Government Bonds to Curb National Debt*. The former documents how Hong Kong people answered the call of the fundraising campaign for resistance efforts to donate funds or participate in charity bazaars. The latter reveals how the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce encouraged the general public to purchase government bonds. Grandview had been persistent in documenting the activities of Chinese people, both in Hong Kong and the US, in support of resistance efforts during the Sino-Japanese War. Another such effort can be seen in a film it produced in 1941, *'A Bowl of Rice' Movement in America*, which documents a patriotic movement initiated by overseas Chinese in San Francisco to prevent American companies from selling scrap iron to Japan.

Other non-fiction films made in and after 1938 include *Scenery of San Francisco's Chinatown* (1938), *Chinese Girl Scouts' Training Camp in Hong Kong* (1938), *Soccer Match Between Opera and Movie Stars* (1939), *Cooking Competition at the Meifang School* (1939), and *Martial Art Master Lau Gam-dong Demonstrates Consummate Skills* (1941). From the film titles one can easily comprehend that these are rather straight-forward newsreels with subject matters catering for 'soft news'. However, from 1938 to 1941 (before Hong Kong was taken over by the Imperial Japanese Army), war in China was escalating and stretching out, while war in Europe finally broke out in 1939. It therefore cast doubts on whether Grandview would prefer to make newsreels on 'soft' subject matters, rather than tackling the situation in China during such turbulent times.

To answer the question, one needs to find solid evidence. However, before such an endeavour is attempted, let's try first to find out why Grandview started making a lot of 'documentary' films in 1936 and then decreased the production of them sharply after 1938. The following graph is based on data about the annual number of Grandview's 'documentary' films.

From Figure 1 (see next page), we cannot find any correlation between the annual production of Grandview's fiction films and 'documentary' films in the 1936–1938 period. However, there is an obvious parallel development between them in the subsequent years, between 1938 and 1941. On the one hand, there is almost no discernible interrelation between total fiction film production (including in-house and shooting-for-hirer productions)[15] and 'documentary' production, but on the other hand there is positive interrelation between Grandview's total film production (including in-house and shooting-for-hirer fiction as well as 'documentary' production) and its 'documentary' production.

Figure 2 (see next page) is a comparison between Grandview's annual film production (including in-house fiction, shooting-for-hirer production, documentary, and total production) and annual Hong Kong 'documentary' film production.

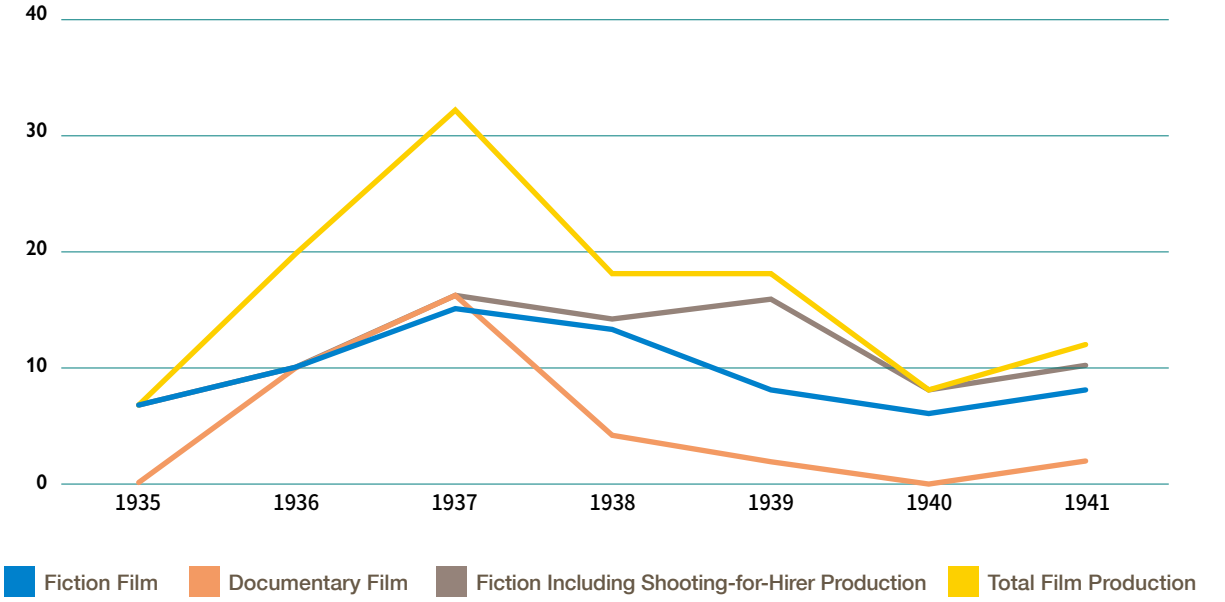
It is obvious that the variation in Grandview's annual production of 'documentary' films correlates to the number of annual 'documentary' films in Hong Kong. This is reasonable and understandable, since Grandview's 'documentary' production accounts for around half of Hong Kong 'documentary' production in the period between 1936 and 1941. One can also notice that, except for 1939, the development curve of Hong Kong's 'documentary' production is similar to that of Grandview's total production. 1937 is also the peak production year for Grandview's fiction films and 'documentary' films, and Hong Kong's 'documentary' films from 1935 to 1941. Grandview produced 15 fiction films and 16 'documentaries' in-house in 1937, the highest in both genres during this period. This might have been related to the aggressive expansion strategy of Grandview to celebrate its fourth anniversary.[16]

We may therefore conclude that Grandview's decrease of 'documentary' production in the 1939–1941 period was related to its place in the film industry in Hong Kong. Competition became fierce. Grandview was facing huge difficulties financially after the box-office failures of several films. To cope with the situation, Grandview decided on a strategy to produce fiction films for Hong Kong film companies that did not possess their own studios. Grandview produced eight fiction films for outside companies in 1939, and one to two films in other years during the 1937–1941 period.

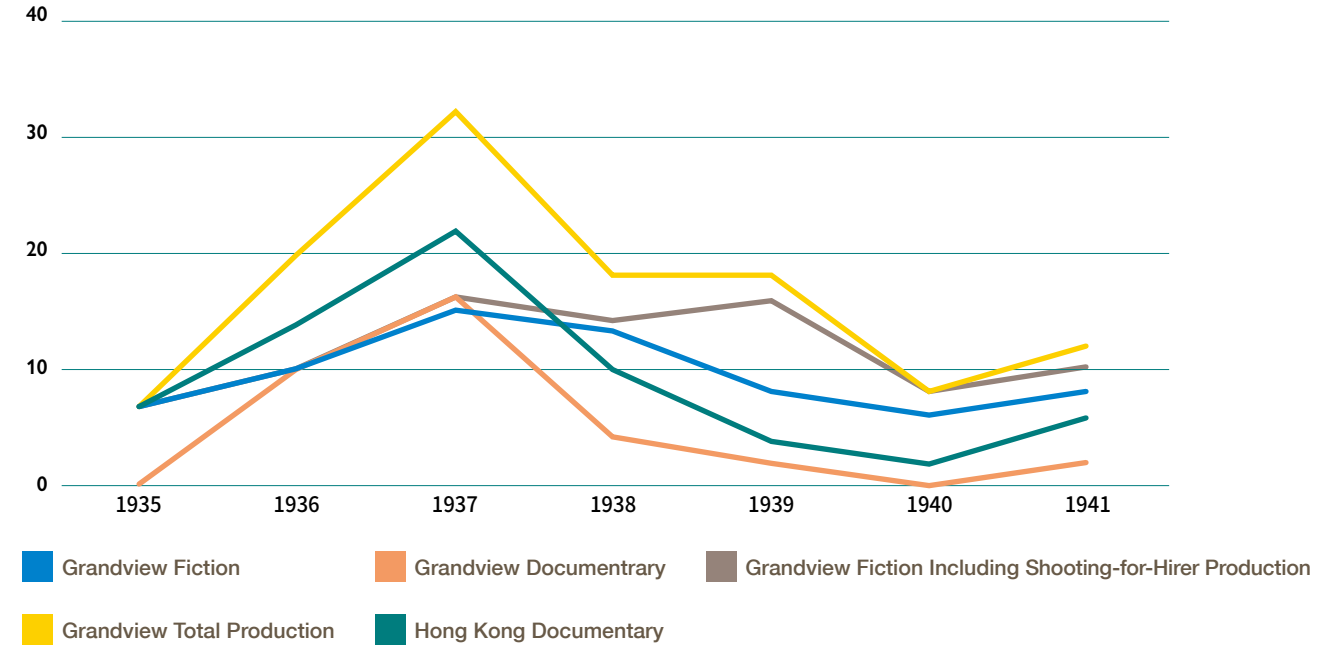
Another important reason for Grandview's approach was perhaps the departure of Joseph Sunn Jue from Hong Kong to the US in 1939 in search of more capital investment for Grandview. A US branch was established in San Francisco.[17] He did not come back to Hong Kong until years later, after the end of World War II in 1948. Meanwhile, the Hong Kong studio of Grandview was being managed by Jue's family members. The absence of Jue may explain why the making of 'documentary' films dwindled after 1938.

15. Grandview produced 14 feature films for other film companies between 1937 and 1941, including one fiction film each in 1937 and 1938, eight in 1939, and two each in 1940 and 1941.
16. In March 1937, Grandview launched a campaign to celebrate its fourth anniversary, giving out cash or gifts to participants. In May, screenings of more than ten films were arranged by Grandview in no less than ten local theatres. See the advertisement on the front page of *The Kung Sheung Daily News* on 8 May 1937 (in Chinese).
17. Grandview's San Francisco studio produced about 20 feature films from 1939 to 1945. See Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View*, Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2004, pp 82-83.

[Figure 1] Comparison Between Grandview's Annual Fiction and 'Documentary' Film Production



[Figure 2] Comparison Between the Annual Production of Hong Kong 'Documentary' Films and Grandview's Fiction and/or 'Documentary' Film Production



The production of in-house fiction features in Grandview between 1935 and 1941 grew, then decreased. From 1935 to 1937, annual production grew from seven to 16, maintaining steadily at 14 to 16 titles annually from 1937 to 1939, then dropped to eight and ten respectively in 1940 and 1941. It shows that the production strategy of Grandview shifted in 1939. In that year, Grandview produced eight fiction films in-house and eight for other Hong Kong film companies. In the next two years, Grandview cut down its shooting-for-hirer production operations.

It can be associated with the development of the Cantonese film industry in Hong Kong during 1939–1941. After the UK declared war against Germany and WWII officially erupted, materials gradually became scarce, causing the price of film negatives to soar. To cope with the situation, film companies in Hong Kong either cut down their production or tried to produce low-budget 'quickies'. Annual production in Hong Kong decreased from 125 in 1939 to 89 in 1940, and 80 in 1941.[18] Therefore, one thing for certain is that the growth/decline curve of Grandview's 'documentary' films during the 1939–1941 period is in synch with its fiction film production, and Hong Kong 'documentary' film production in the same period.

Travelogues Produced by Film Companies in Hong Kong and Internationally

At least five travelogues were produced in 1936, three of them from Grandview, as mentioned earlier. The other two commissioned by Hong Kong Travel Association, a semi-governmental organisation established in July 1935 by the Hong Kong government and tourism-related entities such as the Kowloon-Canton Railway, major steamboat companies, leading hotels, and shops that relied on tourism. The major functions of the Association were to promote local tourism, identify and develop tourist attractions, and create the image of Hong Kong as a resort suitable for vacation and sightseeing. Its targets were tourists from the US and Europe.[19] That explains why the Association commissioned Twentieth Century Fox to make its first promotional film.[20]

The 10-minute film, *Hong Kong Highlights* (aka *Views of Hong Kong*, 1936), was included in the 'Magic Carpet of Movietone' series of *Fox Movietone Newsreel*. It premiered in Hong Kong theatres on 11 April, and was screened throughout the US, Europe and Asia. The travelogue consists mainly of wide shots and panoramic views of bustling cityscapes, historical sites and scenery.[21] In view of the Western target audience, the choices of shots and 'viewpoints' adopted are unsurprisingly 'Orientalist' and colonialistic.

18. Ibid, pp 138-139. However, according to the chronology in *Filmography Vol I* (Revised), there were 127 Hong Kong features produced in 1939, with four of them in Mandarin; 90 made in 1940, with six of them in Mandarin; and 80 made in 1941, with six of them in Mandarin and one being a Cantonese film made in the US.
19. Pedith Pui Chan, 'Hong Kong Impressions: Modern Tourism and the Visual Representations of the Hong Kong Landscape' in *Hong Kong Impressions*, Hong Kong: Art Museum of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2020, p 26. https://www.academia.edu/44165783/Hong_Kong_Impressions_Modern_Tourism_and_the_Visual_Representations_of_the_Hong_Kong_Landscape.
20. See '*Hong Kong Highlights* To Be Released Soon', *The Kung Sheung Daily News*, 26 March 1936 (in Chinese).
21. See note 2, p 214.

Hong Kong Highlights (1936): Hong Kong Travel Association commissioned Twentieth Century Fox to make this title featuring incredible cityscapes of infrastructure, main streets, historical sites and scenery.

Perhaps due to Chinese committee members' dissatisfaction with *Hong Kong Highlights*, as well as their particular interest in catering to the tastes and needs of Chinese tourists from abroad, a few months later the Association commissioned a local commercial film company, Yuen Sing Gam Production Company, to make another promotional film, *Sceneries of Hong Kong and Kowloon*, which would include heritage sites of interest to Chinese tourists. This film is said to have been primarily screened at the Association's Information Office. Copies of the film were also sold throughout the world.[22] No evidence indicates that the film was theatrically released in Hong Kong.

In the 1930–1941 period, many more travelogues of Hong Kong were produced by foreign film companies, such as Metro-Goldwyn Mayer's *Hong Kong: The Hub of the Orient* (1937)[23] and Columbia Pictures' *From Singapore to Hong Kong* (1940). Both films were made by James FitzPatrick and screened theatrically in Hong Kong.[24] I can only locate *Hong Kong: The Hub of the Orient*, which is in FitzPatrick's 'Traveltalk' series. These films' target audiences are Americans or Europeans, and their rhetoric is unavoidably Orientalist. Aitken and Ingham characterise FitzPatrick's films as 'feel-good, undemanding, scenic travel documentaries.'[25] Audience in the West might have felt good watching these films, however, to Chinese audience (in Hong Kong and otherwise), the Orientalist and colonialist attitudes revealed in the film must have been distasteful.

On the contrary, *Hong Kong: Gateway to China* (1938), the 11-minute travelogue found on YouTube,[26] directed by André de la Varre, former cinematographer who worked with renowned traveller/photographer/filmmaker Burton Holmes, is a rather balanced film report on the land and people of Hong Kong. It even mocked its own filming by saying that 'natural glimpses of everyday life fall close until a camera, the evil eye, is noticed.' The excellent cinematography has been praised by British film critic Thirza Wakefield.[27]

22. Ibid.
23. According to IMDb, *Hong Kong: The Hub of the Orient* (1937) is eight minutes long. See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0239046/?ref_=nm_flmg_prd_173. Accessed on 28 December 2020.
24. See note 11.
25. Ibid.
26. See travelfilmarchive, 'Hong Kong, Gateway To China, 1938', 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIHTrmz4hTI. Accessed on 8 December 2020.
27. See Thirza Wakefield, 'Archives online: Travel Film Archive's *Hong Kong–Gateway to China* (1938)', *Sight & Sound*, 13 November 2014. https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/bytes/archives-online-hong-kong-gateway.

Hong Kong Audiences' Reception of 'Documentary' Films on the War in China

Several air battles between the Chinese Air Force and Japanese fighter planes took place in the Guangzhou area right after the eruption of all-out war against the Japanese in China in July 1937. Grandview promptly sent a filming team led by its head of production, Lee Fa, to Guangzhou to record the actual air battles and raids by Japanese aircraft, the aftermath of the bombardment, and air defense drills by civilians and the military in the Guangzhou area. The resultant film, *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton*, which premiered on 10 October 1937, should be the first Hong Kong 'documentary' film on the war in China.

However, in the second half of 1937 before 10 October, all the 'documentaries' that local audiences saw in Hong Kong cinemas had been newsreels made by production companies in China. There were at least 13 such films shown on local screens, almost one new film on the War of Resistance per week. These films targeted not only the Chinese, but also the non-Chinese audience. For example, *China of To-Day*, produced by the Cinema Department of the Central Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist government, was shown in Central Theatre consecutively for 12 days from 18 September, focusing on a Chinese audience. However, one special screening for non-Chinese audiences was arranged on 27 September.[28]

A total of 32 or more 'documentaries' on War of Resistance were shown in the second-half of 1937, of which three were made in Hong Kong.[29] Therefore, every two weeks local audiences were able to watch three Mainland- or Hong Kong-produced anti-Japanese newsreels on the war. Some of these films were shown collectively in a specific film programme, instead of being paired with a fiction feature. Meanwhile, around 35 locally made feature fictions, and roughly the same number of foreign features, were also shown in Hong Kong cinemas in the same period. This phenomenon validates the claim that Chinese audiences in Hong Kong, after the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War, were enthusiastic about watching news concerning the war. The programme consists of China-made *Bloody Ground and Air Battles Against the Enemy*, *Painful History of the Nation*, and *Central Army Sets Off on the Battleground after Taking Oath*, as well as Paramount Pictures' *Special Edition of the Sino-Japanese War*. It was reported to have attracted 20,000 viewers in three days.[30] Again, this attests to how newsreels on the 'war in China' became what Peter High termed as 'media events' in Hong Kong at the time, very similar to the mass consumption of news documentaries about the war front by enthusiastic audiences in major Japanese cities after the breakout of the Sino-Japanese War.[31]

By 1938, more locally produced 'documentary' films on the War of Resistance were shown in Hong Kong theatres, including two films that documents civilians participating in defending

28. See *Hong Kong Sunday Herald*, 27 September 1937.
29. Besides *Drastic Scenes of the Air Raids in Canton*, three other Hong Kong-made films on 'war in China' are *Glorious History of the Eight-Hundred Heroes*, *Massacre in Shanghai*, and *Achievements of Anti-Japanese War*.
30. See *The Kung Sheung Evening News*, 5 November 1937 (in Chinese).
31. Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931–1945*, Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003, p 93.

their homeland against invading Japanese forces: *Protect Guangdong!* and *Protect Southern China and Guangdong: Special Edition*. Two other films, *Xiamen on Alert* and *The War in Xiamen*, document how the military and civilians fought with and lost to the invading enemy. *The Bombing of Sanzao Island* depicts fighter planes of China's Air Force bombing the airfield and naval base on Sanzao Island in Zhuhai, which were then occupied by Japanese military forces.

The enthusiasm of Chinese audiences in Hong Kong toward newsreels about the 'war in China', which were shown right after the battles, can be further ascertained via a 'hot war' in advertising campaigns—various companies fought to attract audiences to watch newsreels on the victory of the Battle of Tai'erzhuang (Taierchwang) in 1938. Central Theatre's newspaper advertisement on 30 April declared the premiere of Central Motion Picture Company (aka Zhongdian)'s *Documentary Extra on War of Resistance Against Japan: Recapture of Taierchwang*, prompting China Motion Picture Studio ('Zhongzhi' in short), under the Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist government, to put a newspaper advertisement the next day to announce that its film, *Fourth Edition of the Special Newsreel Subjects of China To-Day* (aka *Battle of Taierchwang*), would incorporate rare footage of captured prisoners of war from the battle, and would be coming to Hong Kong theatres very soon.[32]

Claims in both advertisements of the two Nationalist government competitors that only cameramen from the central government's film units were allowed to take pictures on the battlefield, and only their footage of the Battle of Tai'erzhuang were 'authentic',[33] had been challenged by the advertisement of yet another film about the battle, made by a film company that was not part of the Nationalist government. The advertisement for *The Bloody Battle of Tai'erzhuang*, produced by privately-owned China Newsreel Company, came out on 5 May, the same day as Zhongzhi's *Fourth Edition of the Special Newsreel Subjects of China To-Day*. It appealed to the wisdom of the audience to check the facts, stating that 'good wine needs no bush, our audience are not blind' and 'thunderous applause was heard in the theatre during the six day-and-night screenings yesterday.' It also claimed that two cameramen sent by the central government had been assisted by an American cameraman named Steven, who was injured during filming. The fierce war of words competing for audience's attention shows

Protect Southern China and Guangdong: Special Edition (1938), co-produced by Wenhua Production Company and Great China Photography Group

32. See *The Tien Kwong Morning News*, 30 April 1938 and 1 May 1938 (both in Chinese).
33. See *The Tien Kwong Morning News*, 1 May 1938; *The Kung Sheung Evening News*, 5 May 1938 (both in Chinese).

that the Chinese population of Hong Kong were indeed concerned about the war situation in the Mainland. However, despite such enthusiasm, no theatre in Hong Kong was specialised in screening newsreels in the late 1930s. By comparison, there were several newsreel theatres specialising in showing newsreels (especially those on the war in China) in 1930s Tokyo or Taipei.

Scenes of Yan'an (1941) features the daily lives and living conditions of people in Yan'an, as well as the speeches of CCP leaders Mao Zedong and Lin Biao.

By 1939, local audiences' passion for news concerning the 'war in China' seemed to subside, as suggested by a reduction in the number of local or Mainland anti-Japanese war productions screened in Hong Kong cinemas. *Legendary Fighters at Battles of Conghua* (1939) and *The Guangdong Front* (1941) are probably two of such rarely made films in Hong Kong from 1939 to 1941. Both follow resistance battles against Japanese military forces in the Guangdong Province.

Scenes of Yan'an, made by the group of filmmakers who produced *The Guangdong Front*, documents the daily lives, as well as political and military training in the Chinese Communist base in Yan'an in 1938. When the beautifully shot documentary film was shown in Hong Kong theatres in 1941, it was promoted in a newspaper advertisement as 'an objective exposé of Communist secrets.'[34] However, after the founding of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, another advertisement promoting a re-screening of the film described it as 'a documentary of total truth, and a valuable document about the revolution.'[35] Such a revision of the rhetoric in advertisements for the same film reflects the flexibility of the Hong Kong distributor/exhibitor in their political stance, which can be observed time and again in the following decades.

Other 'Documentary' Films Made in Hong Kong Between 1939 and 1941

Three weeks before the Japanese attacked Hong Kong, schools founded by overseas Chinese organisations had held various ceremonies on 12 November 1941 to celebrate the birthday of Dr Sun Yat-sen, national father of the Republic of China. Among them, the New Life Movement's Association for Women in Hong Kong rented *A Page of History* to screen at Central Theatre after a ceremony to raise funds for purchasing fighter aircraft and refugee relief. The film had

34. See *Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartial*), 3 June 1941 (in Chinese).
35. See *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, 4 October 1949 (in Chinese).

A Page of History (1941) is the last locally produced documentary film screened in Hong Kong before the fall of the city.

been re-edited by the filmmaker Lai Man-wai.[36] The premiere of this film on 12 November also marked the last screening of a 'documentary' film before the fall of Hong Kong.

Other non-fiction films made in Hong Kong in the 1939–1941 period include two on football matches, *The Grand Soccer Match* (1939) and *Eastern Battles South China for Hong Kong Senior Shield* (1940). The former documents a match between Hong Kong's South China Athletic Association Football Team and the UK's Islington Corinthians Football Club, which was on its 1937–1938 World Tour.[37] The latter is about the final game between two local football teams: the Eastern Sports Club and the South China Athletic Association. The appearance of these two 'sports/recreation' films exemplifies the importance of football games to the Hong Kong populace at the time.

There was also a 1940 film, *H.K.V.D.C. King's Birthday Parade*, made by a local company, Filmo Depot. H.K.V.D.C. was the abbreviation for Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, an auxiliary militia force funded and administered by the colonial government. It is very likely that the film was commissioned by the Hong Kong government, even though there is no direct evidence to confirm the hypothesis.

Filmo Depot, founded in 1936, was the major local distributor of motion picture negatives, cameras and projectors from the 1930s to 1970s. It was also the Far East agent for Bell & Howell, an American manufacturer of cameras, lenses and motion picture projectors. Filmo Depot produced and distributed educational films in the Asia-Pacific area.[38] Current data suggests that *H.K.V.D.C. King's Birthday Parade* is the only Filmo Depot production made before WWII. Most of the films about the official activities of the Hong Kong government had previously been commissioned to Yuen Sing Gam Production Company, including two promotional films for the annual Safety First Campaign in 1935 and 1936, and *New Governor Sir Geoffry Northcote's Arrival in Hong Kong* (1937). Further investigation is needed as to why the Hong Kong government ceased commissioning Yuen Sing Gam Production Company in 1938, allowing Filmo

36. Lai Man-wai was the manager of Dazhong Film Company at the time. See 'Birth Anniversary of Sun Yat-sen Today Joint Celebration of Chinese Community Associations New Life Movement's Association Screens Documentary on Father of the Nation', *Ta Kung Pao*, 12 November 1941 (in Chinese).

37. See 'Islington Corinthians World Tour 1937-38' at http://10footballs.com/islington-corinthians-world-tour-1937-38/. Accessed on 8 June 2021.

38. See York Lo, 'Filmo Depot', uploaded to 'The Industrial History of Hong Kong Group' website on 25 December 2020 at https://industrialhistoryhk.org/filmo-depot-%E8%8F%B2%E6%9E%97%E6%A8%A1%E5%BD%B1%E6%A9%9F/. Accessed on 26 December 2020.

Depot to shoot its official activities afterwards.[39]

Another film, *The Opening Ceremony of the 4th Chinese Goods Exhibition* (1941), produced by Hong Kong Sound Newsreel Agency, is considered by Aitken and Ingham as a film that can be categorised as 'colonial'—relating to the activities of the colonial government, because Lieutenant-general Edward Norton, then acting Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Hong Kong, cut the ribbon and gave a speech at the ceremony.[40] However, in view of the fact that the annual Exhibition of Chinese Products was organised by a nonprofit non-governmental organisation, The Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong, I would consider the film a 'current affairs' documentary.[41]

Aitken and Ingham speculate that the disappearance of 'colonial' (or 'Hong Kong government') genre after the eruption of the Sino-Japanese War may well be 'a victim of the rise of Chinese nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment.'[42] However, such speculation can easily be disputed by the existence of the 1940 film, *H.K.V.D.C. King's Birthday Parade*.

There is a question that should be raised: Why did the colonial government commission commercial companies to produce 'documentary' films on its official activities, rather than establish a film unit and make its own films? Possible factors may be: (1) before Hong Kong fell to the invading Japanese in December 1941, the colonial government had a 'predilection for minimal State intervention in society'[43] and 'scepticism over the worth of official public relations' in the colony;[44] (2) civil servants' 'disinclination to fund official film-making, and preference for such film-making to be carried out in the commercial sector';[45] (3) the Colonial Office of the British Government did not set up its own film unit until 1939, and thus it was not able to assist the Hong Kong government in making promotional films before that time; and (4) before WWII broke out in 1939, Hong Kong was not in Colonial Office's priority list for the founding and management of a film unit of its own. These factors need to be further investigated in future studies.

39. Up until the publication of this essay, no information could be located on Yuen Sing Gam Production Company. A reasonable guess is that Yuen Sing Gam ceased operations after 1938. However, solid evidence is needed to verify this speculation.
40. Ian Aitken and Michael Ingham put the film in the 'sport and leisure' category, but argue that it could also belong to the 'colonial' genre, note 11, p 36.
41. The annual Exhibition of Chinese Products in Hong Kong commenced on 4 February 1938 at St. Paul's College in Central. The first exhibition was organised by The Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong together with Hong Kong YWCA. See The Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong website at https://www.cma.org.hk/tc/menu/11/milestones. Accessed on 8 June 2021.
42. See note 11, p 36.
43. Ian Aitken, 'The Development of Official Film-Making in Hong Kong', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol 32, No 4, December 2012, p 603. In *Hong Kong Documentary Film*, Aitken and Ingham point out that in the 1930s, '[t]he Hong Kong Government did not yet particularly see that it had a responsibility to aid the Chinese population overmuch, whilst pressure for reform was resisted by the highly conservative expatriate (and Chinese) elites within the colony.' See note 11, p 15.
44. Ian Aitken, 'The Development of Official Film-Making in Hong Kong', ibid.
45. Ibid, p 602.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, 'documentary' filmmaking was not very common in Hong Kong in the 1930s, especially when compared with the flourishing Cantonese filmmaking industry in the colony of the same period in time. However, local audiences in the late 1930s did show enthusiasm for watching newsreels on the War of Resistance, made either locally or in the Mainland. This may well have been one of the high points in the history of Hong Kong 'documentary' films.

Another phenomenon one easily detects is that the relatively flourishing period of early 'documentary' filmmaking in Hong Kong could be attributed to the interest taken by specific people and film companies. For example, Lai Man-wai and China Sun in the 1920s, or Joseph Sunn Jue and Grandview in the 1930s. The annual number of Hong Kong 'documentary' productions dropped sharply once these people or/and companies reduced or ceased making 'documentary' films in Hong Kong.

Early Hong Kong non-fiction films were mostly shorts, shown with feature-length fiction films in theatres. Occasionally, a feature-length 'documentary' film would be produced and screened individually, such as films on the silver jubilee celebration of King George V or films on important battles in the Sino-Japanese War (e.g. the Battle of Shanghai, the fall of Xiamen, or reports on the war situation in Guangdong). The two feature 'documentary' films screened before the Japanese occupation are related to important topics in Chinese politics, namely *Scenes of Yan'an* (life within the major base of the Chinese Communists) and *A Page of History* (history of the Nationalist government from 1918 to 1928).

Finally, before the end of the 1940s, the colonial government did not see a need in establishing a public relations department, let alone a filmmaking unit to produce its own newsreels or promotional films. It relied on the commercial sector to make such films when deemed necessary. These films were mainly documentation of parades in celebration of the King or official activities of the Governor. Two special cases of films made to promote government policy were those for the annual Safety First Campaign in 1935 and 1936.

In conclusion, 'documentary' filmmaking in Hong Kong in the 1930s was rather sporadic, especially in comparison with other (semi-)colonies in East Asia, such as Taiwan, Manchuria or Chosun/Joseon (Korea), during the same period.

One final note: this essay is just a preliminary study on Hong Kong 'documentary' films from the 1930s. Many issues merit further exploration, and many questions are yet to be raised and answered by other scholars who are interested in the history of Hong Kong 'documentary' films. Hopefully, early history of Hong Kong 'documentary' films can be uncovered more fully henceforth.

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Film Stories During Wartime

1930s and 1940s
Hong Kong Cinema and Japan

Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting

Film was first introduced into Hong Kong by the French in April 1897. It took about ten more years before Hong Kong showed its first Japanese film, a documentary about the Russo-Japanese war produced by the Japan Pioneer Cinematograph Association. Thereafter, Japanese films did not cause much excitement in Hong Kong. In the early 1930s, with the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations, a number of anti-Japanese films appeared in Hong Kong. Just as the first locally produced film about the war against the Japanese, *Return from the Battleground* (directed by Wong Toi, 1934), was being produced, managing director of The United Photoplay Service Limited (UPS, aka Lianhua), Lo Ming-yau, went to Japan with filmmaker Moon Kwan Man-ching in his capacity of Inspector of European, American and Japanese Film Industries, and visited the Shōchiku's Kyoto studio as well as what was claimed to be the only colour film developing and printing laboratory in Southeast Asia, the Japan Kodak Colour Processing Centre. Before Lo set off for Japan, at a farewell party attended by Zheng Zhengqiu from Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing), cinema mogul Lo Ken and others, he rallied his colleagues to 'save the country by films', saying, 'Our film industry is still lagging behind those of other countries. Hence, we must make haste and learn from them in order to improve ourselves.'[1] Thus it can be seen, although Sino-Japanese relations were extremely tense, some filmmakers were looking to acquire Japanese technology to raise local production standards.[2]

Lo Ming-yau's decision to choose Japan for his observation mission was perhaps influenced by fellow UPS director Lai Man-wai.[3] In any case, this trip to Japan was carried

1. Moon Kwan, *Zhongguo Yintan Waishi* (*An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema*), Hong Kong: Wide Angle Press, 1976, p 149 (in Chinese).
2. The first Chinese film to borrow from Japanese technology in its production was *Blue Sky After Raining* (directed by Xia Chifeng, 1931), a 'sound-on-film' talky produced by Huaguang Sound-on-Film Company. According to one of the film's actors Zhang Zhizhi, Japanese cinematographer Kawatani Shohei (stage name Gu Zhuangping), who was living in Shanghai at the time, had suggested the director to learn from Japan. Assistance was provided by Kotani Henry, the first cinematographer to bring American technology into Japan. See 'Talk with Four Cinematic Characters', *Xin Yingtan*, Shanghai, Vol 1, No 3, January 1943, p 35 (in Chinese).
3. Lai Man-wai, one of Hong Kong's film pioneers, was born in Japan. His father was a rice merchant in Japan. At age 6, Lai returned to Hong Kong. In 1923, he established China Sun Motion Picture Co., Ltd. The company's debut film was a documentary film titled *Chinese Athletes at the 6th Far Eastern Championship Games in Japan* (co-shot by Lai Man-wai and Lo Wing-cheung, 1923). On 25 October 1930, Lai Man-wai established UPS in Hong Kong with Lo Ming-yau. The following year, UPS moved its main office to Shanghai and set up a local branch in Hong Kong.

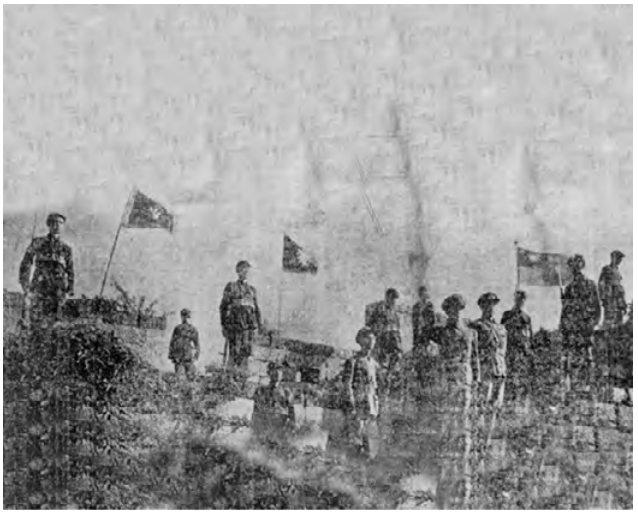
out with a different motivation than that of leftist Japanese film critic Iwasaki Akira's 1935 visit to Shanghai. According to Iwasaki, he conceived the idea of visiting China after he learned that his article 'Films: As a Device for Propaganda and Demagogy' had been translated by Lu Xun, and that the leftist film *Song of the Fishermen* (directed by Cai Chusheng, 1934) had received an award at the Moscow International Film Festival.[4] In the spring of 1935, Iwasaki went to Shanghai and visited Star, UPS, Yee Hwa Motion Picture Co. and Denton Company, Ltd. He also met directors Shen Xiling, Shi Dongshan, Ying Yunwei and Griffin Yue Feng. Upon returning to Japan, Iwasaki published an account of his Shanghai experience in two Japanese magazines *Kaizō* and *The Art of Film*. Subsequently, he became the first critic to introduce Chinese cinema to Japan. Unlike Lo and Kwan, Iwasaki visited China not for Chinese film technical achievements but for the leftist ideology presented in Shanghai films. In his article 'An Introduction to Chinese Cinema', he even stated, 'Chinese filmmaking technology is not as mature as that of the Japanese.'[5] In any case, due to Japan's increasingly aggressive intentions to invade China, Lo and Kwan's visit to Japan did not yield the expected results. For example, Moon Kwan's biography reveals his thoughts upon seeing Japanese battleships in Yokohama: 'I think Japan will never be satisfied and they will continue their invasion. An old Chinese saying states: every man is responsible for the rise and fall of his country. Although I am only an artist without power or courage, I should bear the duty of being a civilian and try my best to save my nation. I must write a script to awaken our comrades.'[6] Upon his return to Hong Kong, Kwan used his script to produce the first anti-Japanese talky, *Life Lines* (aka *Lifeline*, directed by Moon Kwan, 1935). He later directed *Resistant* (aka *Resist!*, 1936), *For Duty's Sake* (aka *Blood and Tears at the Border*, 1937) and *Enemy of Humanity* (aka *Public Enemy*, 1938), which became known as the 'Trilogy of Anti-Japanese Invasion'.

The Pacific War broke out on 8 December 1941, and Hong Kong fell on 25 December of the same year. This marked the beginning of the Japanese occupation that lasted for a total of three years and eight months. After the initial military suppression, the Japanese began what they called 'cultural construction'. To eliminate anti-Japanese filmmaking and to propagate 'Greater East Asianism', film censorship was enforced as a crucial part of 'cultural construction'. However, compared to the experience in other occupied territories like Manchuria, Shanghai and other Southeast Asian regions, the measures taken towards Hong Kong cinema by the Imperial Japanese Army were fairly sparse. For example, no major propaganda film was ever made in Hong Kong during the occupation that would

4. As a result of worldwide economic crisis, Japan's economy was sluggish during the late 1920s, triggering critical ideological, labour and arts movements. Some young filmmakers started the Proletarian Film League of Japan to actively make and show films with left-leaning ideas. Meanwhile, 'tendency films', commercial features which aimed to criticise social injustice and class inequalities, also appeared. The first critically acclaimed 'tendency film' was *A Living Puppet* (directed by Uchida Tomu, 1929). But due to suppression by the Japanese government and quality issues, the production of 'tendency films' came to an end in the early 1930s. The Chairman of the Proletarian Film League of Japan, Iwasaki Akira, foresaw the demise of 'tendency films' and became interested in Shanghai leftist films, likely because he discovered that like-minded political comrades no longer existed in Japan.
5. Iwasaki Akira, *Eiga No Geijutsu* (*The Art of Film*), Tokyo: Kyōwa Shoin, 1936 (in Japanese).
6. See note 1, p 198.

Trilogy of Anti-Japanese Invasion, directed by Moon Kwan

Resistant (1936): (1st left) Tso Yee-man; (from right) Chao Fei-fei, Tai Hau Ho



For Duty's Sake (1937)

Enemy of Humanity (1938): (back row from left) Kwong Shan-siu, Yeung Kwun-hap, Lau Kwai-hong; (middle row 3rd left) Wong Man-lei

have corresponded to *Glory to Eternity* (co-directed by Richard Poh [aka Bu Wancang] et al, 1943) and *Remorse in Shanghai* (aka *Signal Fires of Shanghai*, co-directed by Inagaki Hiroshi, Griffin Yue Feng and Hu Xinling, 1944); also, there were no prominent leaders like Amakasu Masahiko or Kawakita Nagamasa taking control in the field. Researchers at the time did not seem to pay much attention to the Hong Kong cinema under Japanese control.[7] In short, since Hong Kong lacked natural resources and housed a large number of anti-Japanese activists, the attitude of the Imperial Army towards Hong Kong and the local film industry was repressive rather than productive in comparison to other colonies and occupied territories.[8]

Wakuta Kōsuke was responsible for managing Hong Kong cinema during the Japanese occupation. (Front row from left: Sit Kok-sin, Tong Suet-hing, Wakuta Kōsuke; back row from left: Chan Pei, Lo Duen, Tse Yik-chi, Ng Cho-fan)

The fact that Wakuta Kōsuke was assigned to manage the Hong Kong film industry was something of an indication of the Imperial Army's attitude. Wakuta was born in Tokyo in 1915 and graduated from the Cantonese Division of Tenri University. He then lived and worked in Guangzhou and Hong Kong between 1934 and 1943. He had worked as a translator for the Southern China Area Army battleship *Saga*, as a contract employee for the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong, as a clerk for the Japan's Ministry of Foreign

7. For example, veteran film scholar Sato Tadao's major work, *Nihon Eiga Shi 2* (*A History of Japanese Cinema 2*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995 [in Japanese]) included descriptions of cinemas in the regions occupied by Japan, such as Taiwan, Korea, Shanghai, Indonesia and the Philippines. Hong Kong, however, was not mentioned at all.
8. Since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, refugees from the Mainland flooded southward into Hong Kong; the population of Hong Kong thus massively expanded to over 1.6 million. Food shortage became an increasingly serious issue. In the early days of the occupation, the Imperial Army had attempted to create the illusion of a 'prosperous' environment through campaigns such as 'Building a New Hong Kong' and 'Hong Kong Rebirth'. But as historian Tse Win-kuang argued, 'people were constantly living under severe conditions of semi-starvation and terror every day. There was no "building", not to mention "rebirth".' See 'Lest We Forget Historical Lessons (Author's Preface)', *Sannian Ling Bageyue De Ku'nan* (*Three Years and Eight Months of Suffering*), Hong Kong: Mingpao Publications Ltd., 1995 (in Chinese). Meanwhile, anti-Japanese activists who could not leave Hong Kong were still in contact with the Chongqing government, and the Japanese government was incapable of stopping this. The Chiang Kai-shek-led Chongqing regime was regarded as the top enemy of 'Greater East Asianism' ever since the Japanese had helped Wang Jingwei establish the puppet Nanjing Nationalist government. Tse points out that 'Japan ruled Hong Kong as though it were a Japanese colony. That is, Japan considered Hong Kong to be of the same status as Taiwan and Korea. Although some concessions in China had been returned to the Wang regime, Hong Kong was a "captured territory" and therefore had to be included in the domain of the Japanese empire. As a result, unlike other places in Southeast Asia, the ruler of the colony was not replaced by a puppet power in the name of "autonomy"' (*Three Years and Eight Months of Suffering*, p 37). This explains why the Japanese military governor of the Captured Territory of Hong Kong forced the local people to use 'Shōwa' as the era name, to sing Japan's national anthem 'May Your Reign Last Forever', to speak Japanese, and to change the name of 'Queen's Road Central' to 'Meiji's Road Central'. This also explained why the Japanese presented themselves as victors of the war.

Affairs and as a member of the South China Cultural Federation before being appointed monitor of Literary Arts Division (Information Bureau) of The Governor's Office of the Japanese Occupied Territory of Hong Kong. During wartime, Japan had sent numerous experts to work in 'National Policy' film organisations set up in China and Southeast Asia. They included distributor Kawakita Nagamasa, producers Negishi Kan'ichi, Makino Mitsuo and Kondaibō Gorō, directors Uchida Tomu, Ushihara Kiyohiko and Kurata Fumihito, and critics Iwasaki Akira, Hazumi Tsuneo[9], Tsuji Hisakazu[10] and Shimizu Akira. In contrast, the situation in Hong Kong seemed to be far more dreary, since Japan had no intention of setting up major institutions like Manchukuo Film Association ('Manying' in short) or China United Film Holdings Company Ltd ('Huaying' in short) in the territory. Instead, the responsibility of supervising the Hong Kong film industry went to the Literary Arts Division (Information Bureau) of The Governor's Office. Indeed, Wakuta seems to have been the only person who actually dealt with local filmmakers. Compared to Amakasu, the president of Manying who had military command, or Kawakita, of noble birth and in charge of Huaying, Wakuta had no real status or authority. The reason for assigning him to oversee Hong Kong's film industry was mainly because he could speak Cantonese.[11]

In the first half-month after the fall of Hong Kong, not only production but also the screening of films came to a halt. During the occupation, the 38 cinemas in Hong Kong were all under the supervision of the Information Bureau of The Governor's Office. In order to restore the city to an illusion of 'normality', the Japanese decided on a revival

9. Hazumi Tsuneo (1908–1958) was originally named Matsumoto Eiichi. He had worked for magazines *Eiga Shinbun* (*Film News*) and *Shin Eiga* (*New Films*). In 1934, he was recruited by Towa Co. Ltd and became manager of the Publicity Department. He was another Japanese film critic, after Iwasaki Akira, who showed interest in Shanghai cinema. During World War II, he was actively engaged in the promotion of Japanese films in Asian markets. In April 1942, he was appointed as assistant manager of the Planning Department of China Film Company Limited in Shanghai, and devoted his efforts to the distribution of *Xin Yingtan* and collaboration between Japanese and Chinese cinemas. During his tenure, he was the first Japanese to write a study on a Chinese director, see 'On Ma Xu Weibang—Chinese Films and their National Characteristics' (October 1944 [in Chinese]) and essays such as, 'Films of China and Japan' (*Xin Yingtan*, Vol 1, No 3, January 1943, p 25-26 [in Chinese]). After the war, he produced *Invitation to Happiness* (directed by Chiba Yasuki, 1947) for Toho Co., Ltd. He returned to Towa's Publicity Department in 1951. His other publications include *Gendai Eigaron* (*Theories of Modern Cinema*), Gendai Eiga Jūkkō (*Ten Talks on Modern Cinema*) and *Eiga Gojū Nen Shi* (*A Fifty-Year Film History*) (all in Japanese).
10. Tsuji Hisakazu (1914–1981) was born in Osaka, Japan. He started writing film reviews when he was studying at the Department of German Literature at Tokyo Imperial University (now The University of Tokyo). In 1938, he became a lecturer at the Department of Literature and Arts at Meiji University. He was conscripted and sent to Shanghai the following year, and was responsible for administration and film censorship in the Shanghai Army Information Bureau. In 1943, he was demobilised and later joined the Committee on International Cooperation Production of Shanghai's Zhonglian on the recommendation of Kawakita Nagamasa. After the war, he worked for the Daiei Studio in Kyoto as the producer of films directed by Mizoguchi Kenji and others. In 1973, he was appointed as one of the members of the Administration Commission of Motion Picture Code of Ethics. His publications include *Chūka Den'ei Shiwa—Ichi Hisotsu No Nicchū Eiga Kaisōki (1939–1945)* (*A Narrative History of Chinese Cinema—Recollections of the Sino-Japanese Cinema from a Common Soldier [1939–1945]*) (in Japanese).
11. Regarding Wakuta Kōsuke's life in Hong Kong, see his publications in Japan, and *Ng Cho-fan: An Autobiography* (Ng Cho-fan, Taipei: Longwen Publishing House, 1994), *Hu Die Huiyilu* (*Butterfly Wu: A Memoir*) (Butterfly Wu [dict] & Liu Huiqin [ed], Taipei: United Daily News Publisher, 1986), *Tang Xiaodan Pingzhuan* (*A Critical Biography of Tang Xiaodan*) (Zhang Chengshan, Fujian: The Straits Literary and Art Publishing House, 1990), 'Half a Century as a Lunatic: Wakuta and Hong Kong Showbiz' (Lo Duen, *Wen Wei Po* [aka *Wen Wei Pao*], 1987), *Ching Po Daily* (Lui Tai-lui, December 1979), *Three Years and Eight Months of Suffering* (note 8) and *Xianggang Dianying Shihua* (*Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*) *Vol 3 (1940–1949)* (Yu Mo-wan, Hong Kong: Sub-Culture Ltd, 1998) (all in Chinese), etc.

of the entertainment business, including the re-opening of cinemas. King's Theatre and Queen's Theatre (later renamed as Meiji Theatre) re-opened on 10 January 1942. More than ten others, such as Lee Theatre, Alhambra Theatre, Oriental Theatre and Majestic Theatre, likewise re-opened early that year. Because of the lack of recent local productions and the ban on Western films, theatres had to run Cantonese operas, plays, song-and-dance films and magic shows along with new and old Cantonese, Mandarin and Japanese films. The Governor's Office also set up Kowloon Correspondence Office of the Information Bureau to confiscate more than 300 Chinese and 200 Western film prints from various companies.

On 8 March of the same year, the Hong Kong Film Federation (later renamed as South China Film Federation) was founded. Filmmakers joining the Federation could enjoy a special rice allowance. Since there was a serious shortage of food at the time, more than 130 Hong Kong filmmakers became members, with director Hung Chung-ho appointed as chairman. Many people in the film industry had resorted to working as hawkers or security guards in casinos in the early days of the occupation. As the theatres re-opened later on, these people organised troupes and gave opera and drama performances. One example was the South China Star Drama Troupe, formed by Tong Tik-sang, Yeung Kung-leong and Lee Tak-kei in January 1942. Members included Wang Naidong (aka Lyton Wong), Wang Yuen-lung, Ng Cho-fan, Lo Duen, Yee Chau-shui, Chu Po-chuen, Chow Chi-sing, Chao Fei-fei, Cheang Mang-ha and Ko Lo-chuen. Other examples include the Shanghai Filmmakers Drama Troupe, founded in April 1942 by the Hong Kong Film Federation, whose members included Wang Naidong, Wang Yuen-lung, Chin Tsi-ang, Li Jingbo and Lu Mei; and the South China Filmmakers Drama Troupe, organised in August 1942 by the Hong Kong Film Federation and consisting of Wong Pang-yik, Chin Tsi-ang, Li Jingbo, Yee Chau-shui, Leung Mo-sik, Leung Mo-sheung, Lee Tan-lo, Chao Fei-fei, Ngai Pang-fei, Wong Sau-nin, Ho Lai-wan, Chow Siu-ying, To Sam-ku and Cheang Mang-ha. On 1 January 1943, the Hong Kong Film Federation was replaced by The Hong Kong Branch of the Japan Film Distribution Company. This replacement seemed to be a result of most of the local members in the federation having left the city. Meanwhile, the Japanese aligned several Hong Kong businessmen to form the Committee on Film Distribution for the classification of theatres and ticket prices. Participants included the representative Takeyama Masanobu from the Japan Film Distribution Company, Kōndō Shutarō from Huaying, Leung Kei-siu from the Hong Kong and Kowloon Theatre Association, and Runde Shaw[12] from the Union of Cantonese Filmmaking Units.

The Imperial Army issued the extremely harsh 'Censorship Regulations for Film and

12. Runde Shaw, the second son of the Shaw family, was in charge of Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company). In June 1934, Runje Shaw, the eldest son and director of Shanghai's Unique Film Productions (aka Tianyi), set up a studio in Hong Kong. Unique's Hong Kong studio, later renamed as 'Nanyang Film Company', was financially supported by the third son, Runme Shaw, and the sixth son, Run Run Shaw, in Singapore. During WWII, Japanese scriptwriter Hideo Koide devoted a large portion of his book, *Nampō Engei Ki* (*A Show Biz Record of the South*) (Tokyo: Shinkigensha, 1943 [in Japanese]), to explaining how illustrious the Shaw brothers were in Singapore and appealing to his compatriots and colleagues to pay more attention to them.

Stage Performance' (hereinafter 'the Regulations') on 5 June 1942, which made filmmaking almost impossible in Hong Kong. On top of that, the Information Bureau of The Governor's Office set up the Film Censorship Section in order to hasten its control of the film industry. In view of the tie between Hong Kong and Chongqing, these measures can be seen as methods to prevent the production of Chinese films that would potentially cause unnecessary trouble. For example, Article 3 in the Regulations states: 'Films or dramatic works which contain any or all of the following conditions [Writer's note: i.e. disrespectful to the Imperial Army or beneficial to enemy or rival countries] will be banned or cut in parts'; Article 4 reads: 'Appeal to censorship decisions are not permitted. Films will be confiscated if objections are voiced.'; while Article 6 proclaims: 'If considered necessary, those works which have already been passed by the Censor may be further banned or subjected to cuts.'[13] Given such oppressive conditions, not even one film was being made in Hong Kong. Worse still, the equipment and film rolls at the local studios were seized by the Imperial Army and shipped to Huaying in Shanghai.

Throughout the three years and eight months of the occupation, all the films shown in cinemas were either dramas unrelated to current affairs or Cantonese films made before the fall of Hong Kong. Examples include *Blood Drips on the Withered Flowers* (directed by Cho Ban, 1942), *The Rich House* (directed by Hung Suk-wan, 1942), *Stubborn Lovers, Parts One and Two* (directed by Wong Fook-hing, 1943), *Forsaken in Humanity* (directed by Leong Sum, 1943), *A Couple Forever* (directed by Ko Lei-hen, 1943), *Gone with the Song* (directed by Ko Lei-hen, 1943), *Under the Roofs of Shanghai* (directed by Chen Kengran [aka Chan Hang-yin], 1943), *Marriage of Marquis Qi's Sister* (directed by Hung Suk-wan, 1944) and *Illusion of Happiness* (directed by Hung Suk-wan, 1945). New works only consisted of Japanese films such as *China Night* (directed by Fushimizu Osamu, 1940), *The Mountain Festival's Song of the Gods* (directed by Ishida Tamizo, 1942), *Bouquet in the Southern Seas* (directed by Abe Yutaka, 1942), *The Water Margin* (directed by Okada Kei, 1942), *Our Planes Fly South* (directed by Sasaki Yasushi, 1943) and *The Slave Ship of the Maria Luz Incident* (directed by Marune Santarō, 1943); and the productions of Huaying such as *Glory to Eternity, An Opera Singer's Romance* (directed by Sun Jing, 1943), *Grudge over a Fortune* (directed by Wen Yimin, 1943) and *Songs of Harmony* (directed by Fang Peilin, 1944). According to Wakuta, since the screenings were mainly targeted at Japanese soldiers in Hong Kong, the above-mentioned Japanese films were shown without Chinese subtitles.[14] Because of the shortage of coal and oil, and due to insufficient electricity supply, cinemas in Hong Kong and Kowloon had been forced to take turns closing down temporarily from September 1943 onwards. Instead, in order to promote film news in the

13. For a full description of the Regulations, see Chen Jinbo, 'The Influx of Chinese Intellectuals and Literati in the 1930s and their Film Work in Hong Kong', *Hong Kong Cinema Survey 1946–1968* (The 3rd Hong Kong International Film Festival), Lin Nien-tung (ed), Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1979, p 81-82.

14. Wakuta Kōsuke, 'The Governor and the Driver', *Nihon Senryōka Honkon De Naniwoshita Ka—Shōgen Shōwashi No Danmen* (*What was Done in Hong Kong Under Japanese Occupation—A Testimonial of a Fracture of the History of the Shōwa Era*), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991, p 55 (in Japanese).

'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', the Japanese started publishing *South China Cinema*, a Hong Kong magazine similar to Shanghai's *Xin Yingtan*, from March 1944. Notably, while British and American films had been banned as the 'cultural products of rival countries', Wakuta persuaded senior officials to lift the prohibition on less sensitive musicals and cowboy films with the excuse of raising funds for the Information Bureau of The Governor's Office. *Anecdotes of Hong Kong Cinema*, in its account of Hong Kong cinemas during that period, states that 'when showing a Western film, regardless of whether it was a premiere or a re-run, it always became a hit.'[15] However, Wakuta's suggestion on lifting the ban on Western productions became one of the charges that resulted in his eventual repatriation.

The Battle of Hong Kong (1942)
Image courtesy of Professor Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting

Due to the oppression by the Japanese and the local filmmakers' reluctance to cooperate, there was no domestic filmmaking in Hong Kong during the occupation. The films shot in Hong Kong during this period were all of Japanese origin, including the feature film *The Battle of Hong Kong* (aka *The Day England Fell* / *The Attack on Hong Kong*, directed by Tanaka Shigeo, 1942) and the documentaries *Hong Kong Rebirth* (a co-production between the Information Bureau of The Governor's Office and Hong Kong Film Federation), *A Big Scope of Wartime Hong Kong* and *Hong Kong* (directed by Aoyama Yuiitsu and Suzuki Koichiro, produced by Huaying, 1942). *The Battle of Hong Kong* and *Hong Kong Rebirth* were shown on 8 December 1942, the so-called 'First Anniversary of the Greater East Asian War'. It is said that organisers had attempted to arrange a screening of *The Battle of Hong Kong*, the one and only feature film made on location in Hong Kong during the occupation, at the 'Exhibition of the 100th Anniversary of Hong Kong Cinema' in 1994, but gave up when no print of the film could be located. Regarding the original print, scholar Ng Ho believed that it might have been confiscated and taken to the US by the Americans, along with other film-related artefacts, after the war.[16] Hong Kong history expert, Lo Kam, suspected that it could be found in the National Film Centre of The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.[17] In 2012, I had the good fortune of attending a screening of a 32-minute segment of *The Battle of Hong Kong* (audio tracks missing) at The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. The film was gifted by Austrian Film Archive in 1996. According to the November 1942 issue of *Japan Ministry*

15. Yu Mo-wan, note 11, p 76.
16. Ng Ho, 'The Mystery of *The Battle of Hong Kong*', *China & Overseas Movie News*, No 82, August 1986, p 31 (in Chinese).
17. Lo Kam, 'Tanaka Shigeo, The Director of *The Battle of Hong Kong*', *Express News*, 28 December 1994 (in Chinese).

of Internal Affairs Film Censorship Report, the running time of *The Battle of Hong Kong* was 102 minutes, so the current version consists of only about one-third of the original film.

Since the outbreak of the Pacific War, in spite of the scarcity of film rolls and other commodities, Japan insisted on carrying out the policy of 'one battle, one film' in order to boost the morale of the people. That is, whenever the Japanese defeated the Allied forces of the British, the Americans and the Dutch, they would produce a so-called 'battle record film' to promote the sentiment of 'demonising the UK and the US'. *Battle of Hawaii* (directed by Yamamoto Kajirō, 1942), *All-out Attack on Singapore* (directed by Shima Kōji [aka Shi Mashan], 1943) and *The Tiger of Malaya* (directed by Koga Masato, 1943) were examples of this kind of 'battle record film' that celebrated the victory of the Japanese. In order to cope with the political demands, Nikkatsu Corporation, Shinkō Kinema and Daito Eiga were consolidated to form Daiei Motion Picture Company, producer of *The Battle of Hong Kong*, in 1942. However, according to Okazaki Kōzō, an assistant photographer on *The Battle of Hong Kong*, the original staff of each company worked on their own with their old teams. The Shinkō Kinema crew chose the battle between Japan and the UK and shot *The Battle of Hong Kong*, while Nikkatsu and Daito crews chose to adapt other battles.[18] With the support of the Ministry of the Army, the Southern China Area Army and The Governor's Office in Hong Kong, Daiei was able to carry out and finish location shooting on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and the New Territories, and near the Shenzhen border within six months. Since there were insufficient Japanese soldiers in Hong Kong, some scenes had to be filmed in Hakone, Japan. In addition to the Japanese, the British soldiers also battled with Indian soldiers, portrayed in the film by Indians and Filipinos. Tsi Lo Lin was the only Hong Kong artist who participated, playing Chinese girl Honglian, who gets killed by a British bomb in the end. The film poster reveals how the Japanese may have intended to mold Tsi into an 'Ambassador of East Asia', a role resembling Li Xianglan (aka Yamaguchi Yoshiko).[19] But *The Battle of Hong Kong* had triggered the exile of many Hong Kong film professionals such as Tang Xiaodan, Ng Cho-fan, Tse Yik-chi and Pak Yin. In fact, Tsi Lo Lin also fled to the unoccupied Mainland areas upon returning from her promotional tour in Japan.[20] Artistically and technically, *The Battle of Hong Kong* was not particularly accomplished. Critic Iijima Tadashi commented, 'The fighting scenes shot on the spot were valuable, but the storyline was confusing and the technique was crude.'[21]

18. Kinnia Yau Shuk-ting, 'An Interview with Okazaki Kōzō', *An Oral History of Japanese and Hong Kong Filmmakers: From Foes to Friends*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012, p 134 (in Chinese).
19. Sakuramoto Tomio, 'Recommended Films by the Ministry of Education · The Year of 1942', *Dai Tōa Sensō To Nihon Eiga—Tachimi No Senchū Eigaron* (*The Great East Asian War and Japanese Cinema—A Standing Discussion on Wartime Films*), Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1993, p 80 (in Japanese).
20. Yu Mo-wan, note 11, p 63.
21. Iijima Tadashi, '*The Battle of Hong Kong* (Tanaka Shigeo)', *Senchū Eigashi Watashiki* (*A Personal Record of the Wartime Film History*), Tokyo: MG Publisher, 1984, p 121 (in Japanese). The essay was originally published in *Dai Ube*, 1 December 1942.

Following the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan, many intellectuals had fled from the Mainland to Hong Kong. After the fall of Hong Kong, however, they were forced to retreat to other unoccupied areas. With assistance from the Communist army, Xia Yan, Cai Chusheng, Mao Dun and Situ Huimin moved from Macao to Guilin where they continued their anti-Japanese activities. In order to escape from becoming the director of *The Battle of Hong Kong*, Tang Xiaodan moved from Guangzhouwan (now Zhanjiang) to Guilin, joining Tian Han, Ouyang Yuqian, Hong Shen (aka Hung Sum), Yang Hansheng and Qu Baiyin from Shanghai to work on anti-Japanese plays. While there, Tang watched several Russian films such as *Rainbow* and *Lenin in October* which would greatly influence the style of his subsequent works.[22] After the fall of Guilin, Tang went to Chongqing, where he joined China Motion Picture Studio ('Zhongzhi' in short) and remade writer Li Shizhen's *The Path to Great Harmony* into the anti-Japanese film *The Song for Police*.[23] Peking opera star Mei Lanfang, who had been stuck in Hong Kong, returned to Shanghai where he lived in seclusion until the end of the war.[24] Butterfly Wu, who had fled Hong Kong to Chongqing, had agreed to play the heroine in Zhongzhi's *The Way to Build a Country*, which was to have been directed by Wu Yonggang. However, because of an air raid on their way to a shooting location, the film was never completed, and she was greatly upset by that.[25] According to Wakuta, the popular Cantonese opera actor Sit Kok-sin had successfully fled to Guangzhouwan, but because he had failed to leave Hong Kong immediately after the occupation, he was accused of collaborating with the Japanese, and he ended up writing a letter of repentance.[26]

Although the occupation had severely hindered the Hong Kong film industry, it had a tremendous impact on post-war Hong Kong cinema, in particular post-war Cantonese filmmaking. Hong Kong artists such as Lee Ching, Lo Duen, Yung Siu-yi, Cheung Ying and Mui Yee fled to Guilin and Chongqing, where they worked with Cai Chusheng, Situ Huimin and Tan Youliu on stage plays. This strengthened the tie between Hong Kong filmmakers

22. Tang Xiaodan was one of the earliest Shanghai directors who came to Hong Kong. Following Japan's invasion of China, he directed many Hong Kong anti-Japanese films such as *Roar of the Nation* (aka *Roar of the People*, 1941). He believed that the anti-Japanese film *Small Canton* (aka *Little Guangdong*, co-directed with Law Chi-hung, 1939) greatly resembled the USSR revolutionary war film *Chapaev* (1934). See Zhang Chengshan, note 11, p 60.
23. The release of *The Song for Police* was postponed until the war ended, in December 1945.
24. Yamaguchi Yoshiko (stage name Li Xianglan) recalled that shortly before their surrender, the Japanese government had exhausted all avenues in their attempt to restore prestige. It was suggested to have the Imperial Army inviting Mei Lanfang to perform. Kawakita Nagamasa, who was highly trusted by the Chinese, was assigned to negotiate with Mei Lanfang. With the help of Zhang Shankun, Kawakita arranged a meeting of the three of them. But Mei looked under the weather, and refused the invitation by the Japanese with the excuse that he was too old and ill. However, soon after the war ended, he gave a vigorous performance at the Shanghai Grand Theatre to celebrate China's victory. See Yamaguchi Yoshiko & Fujiwara Sakuya, *Fragrant Orchid: The Story of My Early Life*, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, p 278 (in Japanese).
25. According to Butterfly Wu, she made a resolute decision of leaving Hong Kong because the Japanese had asked her to act in a film to promote Sino-Japanese friendship titled *Hu Die Touring Tokyo*. See *Butterfly Wu: A Memoir*, note 11, p 233. However, Wakuta explained that her escape was due to a terrible insult made to her by a Japanese sentry in public, see note 14, p 36.
26. Wakuta Kōsuke, 'Good Friend · Sit Kok-sin', *Watashi No Chūgokujin Nōto* (*My Memo on Chinese People*), Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1972, p 156 (in Japanese).

and their Mainland counterparts, which eventually led to the co-production of Cantonese classics such as *Tears of the Pearl River* (aka *Dawn Must Come*, directed by Wang Weiyi [aka Wong Wai-yat], 1950) and *A Forgotten Wife* (aka *Quest for a Long-Lost Husband*, directed by Tan Youliu, 1950), as well as the later establishment of leftist film studios like The Union Film Enterprise Ltd and Sun Luen Film Company.[27] For film industry professionals like Ng Cho-fan, Wong Man-lei, Lee Sun-fung, Ng Wui, Wong Cho-shan, Tse Yik-chi and Lee Yuet-ching, the experience of living in exile in Singapore and Vietnam and the resulting mutual sympathies helped in the establishment of Southeast-Asian themes and the spirit of camaraderie in post-war Cantonese films. For example, in looking at films with the theme of 'tenants living under the same roof', Shanghai's *Crows and Sparrows* (directed by Zheng Junli, 1949) is very different from Hong Kong's *In the Face of Demolition* (directed by Lee Tit, 1953) and *Typhoon Signal No 10* (directed by Lo Duen, 1959). *Crows and Sparrows* was referencing on *The New and Old Shanghai* (directed by Cheng Bugao, 1936), a cynical and broad-humoured exposé of the ugly side of human nature, while the latter two glorified the human spirit: poor people caring for their neighbours and helping one another. Meanwhile, Chinese-American filmmaker Joseph Sunn Jue (aka Chiu Shu-sun) produced films in the US. With the help of American sound recording engineer Clifton Skinner, he made numerous 16mm colour films including *Angel*

Angel (1947) was an influential colour film produced by American-Chinese Joseph Sunn Jue when he returned to the US during the war, paving the way for post-war Cantonese colour production.

27. *Tears of the Pearl River* was made with the participation of Shanghai filmmakers who had come to Hong Kong. It was produced by Cai Chusheng and scripted by Chan Chan-wan; the cinematographer was Lo Kwan-hung. The film drew a large audience when it was first released in Hong Kong and in the Mainland. Some commented that it was 'a correct, convincing and brand-new start of realism in Cantonese cinema'. See *Early Images of Hong Kong and China* (The 19th Hong Kong International Film Festival), Law Kar (ed), Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1995, p 166 (in Chinese). *A Forgotten Wife* was adapted from Qi Wenshao's play of the same title. The play was performed in different places in Southeast Asia after the war. The story was highly popular among overseas Chinese since it touched upon their ordinary lives and wartime memories. In 1950, left-wing intellectuals raised funds to make a film version so as to expose class inequalities in old-fashioned society and also the notoriety of the bourgeoisie. See *Border Crossings in Hong Kong Cinema* (The 24th Hong Kong International Film Festival), Law Kar (ed), Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2000, p 163 (in Chinese).

(aka *The Gold Braided Dress / White Powder and Neon Lights*, directed by Wong Hok-sing, 1947), profoundly influencing the development of colour film technology in post-war Cantonese films.[28]

Compared to Manchuria, Shanghai and Southeast Asia, Hong Kong's film activity was not at all bustling during the occupation. The tension between the Imperial Army and the local artists prevented any linkage from establishing between Hong Kong and Japanese cinemas. As intermediary between Hong Kong and Japan, Wakuta was ultimately removed from office and sent back to Japan for his 'pro-China' behaviours. From January 1966, Wakuta began publishing his personal memoirs and commentaries on China and Hong Kong's current affairs. In the foreword of *My Memo on Chinese People, Part II*, he wrote, 'I feel deeply regretful and apologetic in regard to Japan and the ways the Japanese had treated China. I, therefore, decided to write this book.'[29] Although some Hong Kong journalists are still questioning his real identity and standpoint, Wakuta maintained his friendships with Shanghai and Hong Kong artists including Butterfly Wu, Ng Cho-fan, Kwong Shan-siu, Cheung Ying, Tse Yik-chi, Wong Man-lei and Lo Duen.[30] Up until the end of the war, the overall connection between Hong Kong and Japanese cinemas had been very tenuous. That said, there was to be a dramatic change in the 1950s after the emergence of the Cold War. [Translated by Roberta Chin]

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28. The significance of overseas Chinese on Chinese cinema is threefold in terms of market, capital, and talent. Since the mid-19th century, many Chinese had migrated overseas to make a living, mostly from Fujian, Guangdong, and Guangxi. They spoke Hokkien, Cantonese, Chaozhou-dialect and Hakka, and often moved to Singapore, Malaya, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and South America. Because of their home-sickness, overseas Chinese communities easily became ideal markets for Chinese-language films. To tap into the surge in demand for Chinese-language films, overseas Chinese also frequently invested in filmmaking. For instance, Lai Hoi-shan, Lai Buk-hoi (aka Lai Pak-hoi) and Lai Man-wai in Japan set up China Sun; Wu Ngai-sing in Vietnam established Guolian Film Company; Chu Kei-yu and others in the Americas raised funds and set up Quanqiu Film Company. Also, Unique's Hong Kong studio, which was re-organised and renamed as Nanyang Film Company in 1936, was funded by Runme Shaw and Run Run Shaw, who began their business in Singapore and Malaya. In addition, many Chinese returned to Hong Kong after studying abroad in the US and contributed their professional knowledge to the production of Chinese films: Moon Kwan, Joseph Sunn Jue and Li Wenguang were some of them. It was thus common to see overseas Chinese involved in Chinese cinema.
29. Wakuta Kōsuke, *Watashi No Chūgokujin Nōto (Zoku) (My Memo on Chinese People, Part II*), Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1981, p 5 (in Japanese).
30. Some Hong Kong reporters indicated that, during the occupation period, Wakuta Kōsuke disguised himself as a local with a Chinese name, Lee, while working for the Imperial Army behind the scenes. See 'Painful Repercussions of the War', ibid, p 248.

Japanese Film Viewership and Filmmaking in Hong Kong in the 1930s and 1940s

Han Yanli

In the brief period between the 1930s and 1940s, Hong Kong cinema was a fledgling industry plagued with challenges that threatened its existence, such as the ban on dialect films and the Japanese occupation of the city. Through analysing original Japanese-language sources published within these two decades, this paper aims to retrace the film viewing and filmmaking activities of Japanese film professionals in 1930s and 1940s Hong Kong. I hope to elucidate the history of Hong Kong and its cinema during this period based on this novel entry point.

The film-related activities of the Japanese in Hong Kong were mostly concentrated in the years around the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, and in particular after the fall of Hong Kong in 1941. There have been books and studies on this subject, but as they are based on sources and information from post-war or non-Japanese publications, quotes from each other and discrepancies in the details of different narratives are observed. Hence the question 'What did the Japanese do in Hong Kong during this time?' (incidentally also part of the title of Wakuta Kōsuke's 1991 memoir) remains unanswered. Thus, this paper draws from research based on primary sources such as Japanese books published and distributed in the 1930s and 1940s, government documents and film periodicals. Firstly, it explores the viewing experiences of cinema-goers through the written descriptions of professionals from film, theatre and critics' circles in the 1930s and 1940s, and compares their experiences to those of Japanese filmmakers in Hong Kong before and after its occupation (Part I). This paper then uses government documents and articles by the authorities to study contemporary Japanese attitudes towards filmmaking in Hong Kong, as well as the facilities and production capacities of the major film studios and organisations in the early days of the occupation (Part II). Finally, this paper turns its attention to *The Battle of Hong Kong* (aka *The Day England Fell* / *The Attack on Hong Kong*, 1942), the only feature film produced in the city during the Japanese occupation. Through studying magazines and publications of that period, I attempt to reconstruct the film's production process from planning to shooting, examine its now-ambiguous storyline, and analyse the words and images of Hong Kong actress Tsi Lo Lin as portrayed by the Japanese media of the time (Part III).

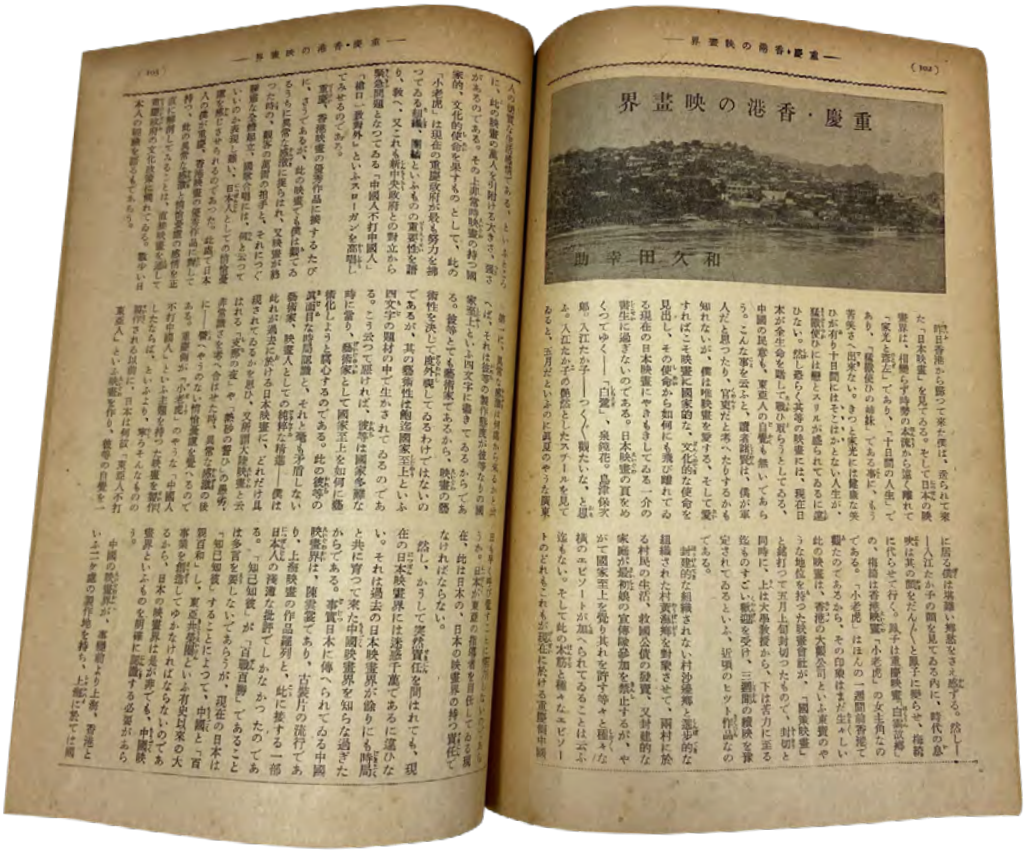
I. Film Viewership: Personal Observations and Official Data[1]

Since the 1920s, well-known people across Japan's entertainment, theatre and critics' circles had come to Hong Kong and left textual records of their travels. In 1938, famous Japanese critic and magazine editor-in-chief Ōya Sōichi spent about a month in the city. Although he did not speak Chinese, it did not seem to deter him from 'watching films whenever I [he] was free'. He often went to the cheap cinemas frequented by the general public.[2] His essay 'The Anti-Japanese Films I Watched in Hong Kong', published in a film magazine in March that year, mocked the rigid storylines of local war-related feature films. For example, 'an otherwise promiscuous woman, hoping to mend her ways, joins the Shanghai front line as a volunteer. Although the film is a romance, the trollop in the love triangle is set as a Japanese spy, who somehow has to be executed or something.' Ōya was known for his searing words. He was critical not only of China's war films, but of Japanese ones as well, observing that 'films with such shoddy plots are similar to Japan's war-themed feature films.' As Ōya had a reputation for not mincing his words, his high praise for Chinese news documentaries likely sprang from straightforward intentions. A promotional leaflet he provided to the magazine indicates he had watched a war documentary produced by an official film studio in Chongqing. He claims that 'Chinese documentaries have a magnificence that Japanese news documentaries cannot match', as they are completely 'unlike the killjoys that are Japan's official films'. He elaborates:

> Tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers march towards the front line, singing anti-Japanese songs in unison. As the audience sings along, the cinema transforms quickly into an anti-Japanese, patriotic melting pot…. Another difference from Japanese news documentaries is that famous generals often appear onscreen to give morale-boosting speeches, with Chiang Kai-shek and his spouse Soong Mei-ling making the most appearances. As soon as they appear, the audience starts applauding. Other popular figures include Communist generals Zhu De and Peng Dehuai. When the old warlords show their faces, no one claps. At the end of the film, a large portrait of Chiang Kai-shek shows up on the screen. The audience stands up and sings the national anthem.[3]

Ōya's observations in 1938 are corroborated by those of another Japanese who also wrote about his film-viewing experiences in Hong Kong prior to the Japanese occupation and had pitched his article to a magazine. A Cantonese major from Tenri University, Wakuta Kōsuke spoke fluent Cantonese and lived in Guangzhou and Hong Kong between 1934 and 1943. He had been a contract employee of the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong, a clerk to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a staff member of the South

1. Some of the content in this section is extracted from Han Yanli, 'Another Discussion on National Defence Films' in *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo De Shehui Yu Wenhua* (*Chinese Society and Culture in the 20th Century*), Ishikawa Yoshihiro et al (ed), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2013, pp 105-124 (in Chinese).
2. The high-class cinemas frequented by foreigners at the time usually charged three dollars for a ticket. But according to a theatre flyer provided by Ōya Sōichi, it can be seen that the ticket prices ranged from 15 to 35 cents. Therefore, the theatre was likely a lower-class one with rather poor facilities. See Ōya Sōichi, 'The Anti-Japanese Films I Watched in Hong Kong', *Cinema & Review*, Tokyo, March 1938, pp 46-48 (in Japanese).
3. Ibid, p 48.



重慶・香港の映畫界

助幸田久和

Wakuta Kōsuke gives a review on *Little Tiger* (1941) in the article titled 'Chongqing · Hong Kong's Film World' (*Nihon Eiga Magazine*, October 1941)
Image courtesy of Professor Han Yanli

China Cultural Federation. After the fall of Hong Kong, he became monitor of Literary Arts Division (Information Bureau) of The Governor's Office of the Japanese Occupied Territory of Hong Kong. In 1941, Wakuta, still a civilian, had two articles published in two issues of *Nihon Eiga Magazine*. In the first, he describes his experience of watching *Little Tiger* (1941) in Hong Kong in May 1941:

> It happens every time I watch an excellent Hong Kong or Chongqing film: even I become emotionally stirred. After the film ends, there's a roar of applause and everyone stands up to sing the national anthem. As a Japanese, I feel disheartened and worried beyond words.[4]

In his article, Wakuta describes the plot of *Little Tiger* and the background of Grandview Film Company Limited, the studio behind this Cantonese national defence film. He even translates and quotes from five of the film's cast on their experience of acting in the film, including Wong Man-lei and Mui Yee. He states that since the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the centre of Chinese film production had shifted from Shanghai to Chongqing and Hong Kong. He also comments that 'Japanese filmmakers do not quite understand Chinese films that have grown with the times'; that they are only familiar with 'popular period films, the gamut of Shanghai pictures, and the shallow judgement of certain

4. Wakuta Kōsuke, 'Chongqing · Hong Kong's Film World', *Nihon Eiga Magazine*, Tokyo, October 1941, p 103 (in Japanese).

Japanese critics on the foregoing.' His second article in *Nihon Eiga Magazine* introduced the plot outlines of two films: *A Bloody Lesson* (Mandarin title shot and produced in Chongqing, 1941) and *Roar of the Nation* (aka *Roar of the People*, Cantonese title shot and produced in Hong Kong, 1941). He made first-hand observations of the screening of *A Bloody Lesson*:

> The horde of loud and ignorant viewers, so unruly when buying tickets—I can only think of them this way—would stand up and solemnly sing anti-Japanese songs without being instructed to do so. Each time, I could only stand up, bite my lip, swallow my fury and bear with it.[5]

The viewing experiences of these Japanese writers in Hong Kong show that although certain national defence films did exploit the 'ideological correctness' of the 'national defence' label to hoodwink censors, high-quality Cantonese and Mandarin national defence titles and documentaries produced in Chongqing were indeed effective in stirring anti-Japanese, patriotic sentiments in the period between the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and the eve of the Japanese occupation in late 1941. The articles' descriptions of the audience's nationalistic behaviour of singing the national anthem in unison and saluting the national flag provide a sharp contrast to the recollections of famous Japanese playwright Murayama Tomoyoshi, who watched and wrote about films in Hong Kong in 1922. It is evident that people's mindsets had changed significantly in the period since then.

At midday on 17 January 1922, Murayama arrived by boat in Hong Kong, where he was to spend the night before leaving for Singapore the next day. During the short transit, he watched two foreign silent films at a cinema called Hong Kong Theatre (the site later became Queen's Theatre). What he saw after the screenings surprised him:

> Something shocking happened: the band started playing loud music all of a sudden. The audience scrambled to their feet, and kept still and upright! When I realised what was going on and got on my feet, the music had finished playing. It was the British national anthem, albeit just the small opening section of it. I see—Hong Kong is British territory. Nodding, I left Hong Kong Theatre.[6]

Such candid and vivid personal viewing records were unfortunately lost after the fall of Hong Kong on 25 December 1941, when military control was established. In their place were meticulously detailed official data.

To create the illusion of peace and prosperity, on 1 January 1942, mere days after the city's fall, Good World Theatre in Kowloon reopened to show so-called Japanese cultural films (propaganda documentaries) free of charge; and by 5 March, a total of 34 cinemas were reopened. Besides showing Japanese films and productions of Shanghai's China United Film Holdings Company Ltd ('Huaying' in short), old Cantonese films in storage as well as old American and British titles were also screened due to limited supply of new films. Over ten Japanese titles were screened during this year, mostly for the benefit of

5. Wakuta Kōsuke, 'A Sardonic Commentary on Chongqing · Hong Kong's Anti-Japanese Films', *Nihon Eiga Magazine*, Tokyo, January 1942, p 66 (in Japanese).
6. Murayama Tomoyoshi, 'Visiting Hong Kong Theatre', *Katsudo Kurabu*, Tokyo: Bungeishunju Ltd., April 1922, p 47 (in Japanese).

Japanese compatriots in Hong Kong. Each was given a two-or three-day run in first-run theatres. This continued until January 1943 when The Governor's Office wholly assigned the job of film distribution to the Hong Kong branch of the Japan Film Distribution Company. On 16 January, British and American films, as products from countries at war with Japan, were deemed 'hostile' and were banned.[7]

In 1943, after the Japan Film Distribution Company had taken over film distribution, synopses in Chinese were handed out, or Chinese subtitles were added during the screening of Japanese films. It is said that interest in Japanese films thus experienced a spike among Chinese viewers. By the end of March that year, these films had been watched by over 100,000 viewers, most of whom being Chinese, according to Japanese estimates.[8] In 1943, 57 Japanese titles, 58 Mandarin titles, and only nine Cantonese films were screened, and these films were watched by over 20,000 Japanese and 450,000 Chinese cinema-goers.[9]

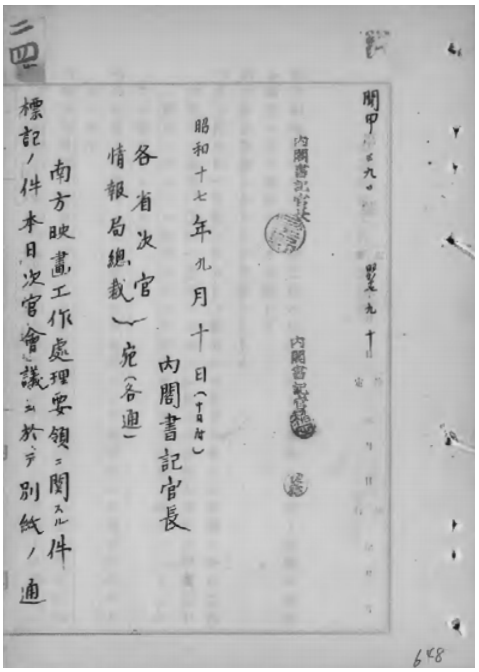
On 4 March 1942, Japanese director Tanaka Shigeo came to Hong Kong to shoot *The Battle of Hong Kong*. An intriguing point to note is that during his six-month sojourn (he left the city on 17 August), British and American productions were still allowed to be screened, so ironically Tanaka was able to watch films that had been completely banned in Japan after the outbreak of the Pacific War. At a forum held in October 1942 after he and his team had returned to Japan, a reporter asked Tanaka what his impressions of Hong Kong films were; he replied he had not watched a single one in his six months here, only some titles shot in Shanghai and quite a few 'enemy-produced feature films'. He rattled off examples of the latter, including *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940) and a few Marx Brothers pictures; and even discussed one of the film's colour palette with zeal. But in the end, Tanaka did not mention the name of a single film made in Shanghai or Hong Kong. It can be seen from this episode that the British and American films screened in the year following the occupation of Hong Kong not only entertained Chinese citizens in the occupied area, but also the Japanese population in Hong Kong, especially Japanese filmmakers who could not enjoy the same privilege in their country. *The Thief of Bagdad* was not shown in Japan until after the war, in November 1951.

II. Film Production: Japanese Tactics and the Chinese Predicament

On 10 September 1942, the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan signed an encrypted document titled 'The Essentials of Southern Motion Picture Work'. The three-pager gave a clear overview of film distribution, screening and production policies in Japanese occupied territories in East Asia, including Hong Kong. There were three main points.

7. Tōyō Keizai Shimpō Sha (ed), *Gunseika No Honkon: Shinsei Dai Tōa No Chūkaku* (*Hong Kong Under Military Rule: The Newborn Nucleus of Greater East Asia*), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tōyō Keizai-sha, 1944, pp 292-293 (in Japanese).
8. Takeyama Masanobu, 'Hong Kong's Film Industry', *Eiga Junpō*, Tokyo, 1 July 1943, p 18 (in Japanese).
9. The actual numbers are 21,973 Japanese, 457,058 Chinese, and 840 people of other nationalities, note 7, pp 294-295.

First, 'film distribution is to be handled by the Japan Film Distribution Company'; second, 'The Japanese Motion Picture Corporation is tasked with the production of newsreels and cultural promotion films'; third, 'the making of feature films must for a certain period of time use existing organisations under the instruction and supervision of the Army and the Navy. For the time being, recruiting filmmakers from studios on the mainland (that is, within Japan) for local productions is allowed, should the occasion call for it. A permanent solution will be discussed hereafter.'[10]



'The Essentials of Southern Motion Picture Work' offers a clear overview on film distribution, screening and production policies in Japanese occupied territories in East Asia, including Hong Kong.
Image courtesy of Professor Han Yanli

The third point above indicates that the Japanese had, at least in the short term, no plans to build a new filmmaking facility in the South China war zone, unlike in the North where they established three national policy studios: Huaying, Manchukuo Film Association ('Manying' in short) and Huabei Film Company. One reason may be that the Japanese were experiencing combat fatigue from the long and extended Pacific War, and no longer had the leisure to develop new studios. Second, the Japanese had other plans for the three existing production facilities on the Mainland, including sending staff from Shanghai and other places to Hong Kong to shoot films[11], or dubbing Mandarin films made by Mainland national policy studios into Cantonese to meet the needs of the southern regions.[12] The third reason was, of course, the uncooperative attitude of local filmmakers. At least in Hong Kong, Southeast Asia's largest film production hub, it was impossible to find filmmakers to make films 'under the instruction and supervision of the Army and the Navy'.

Besides the lack of human resources, the truth was that the Battle of Hong Kong had inflicted huge damage on the city's studios and equipment. An article by Takeyama Masanobu, head of the Hong Kong branch of the Japan Film Distribution Company provides information on the facilities and production capacities of Hong Kong's five major studios. Table 1 is compiled by the author based on data listed in Takeyama's article. Horizontal lines are inserted where no data is provided:[13]

According to Takeyama's study, over half of the facilities of the five studios listed

10. 'The Essentials of Southern Motion Picture Work', 10 September 1942, p 3 (in Japanese).
11. For example, Huaying in Shanghai later came to Hong Kong to make the documentary *Hong Kong* (1942).
12. Kozaka Takeshi, 'A Report on the Current Situation of Hong Kong's Film Industry', *Eiga Junpō*, Tokyo, November 1942, p 30 (in Japanese).
13. See note 8, p 16.

[Table 1] Hong Kong's Five Major Film Studios in the 1930s and 1940s

Company	Studios	Cameras	Recording Facilities	Developing and Printing Machines	Lighting Equipment	Directors	Actors	Cinemato-graphers	Average Monthly Productions
Nanyang (aka Nan Yeung)	4	6	3	1	60	14	M 14 / F 10	6	6
Chi Min	2	2	2	1	30	Over 30			2
Grandview	1	2	2	2	25	Around 100			2
Nanyue	1	2	2	–	Over 20	–			–
Kwokar	1	1	1	–	Over 10	–			0.5

above were damaged by war and had fallen into disuse, with actors and crew all scattered around the country. For instance, Chi Min Motion Picture Co., Ltd.'s equipment was almost completely destroyed, and the company director Chan Kwun-chiu subsequently died of illness. Nanyue Film Company, the only studio on Hong Kong Island, had the best equipment but suffered huge losses as its facilities were in close proximity to where the Japanese army landed. In addition, there was a shortage of film stock during the war. The Japanese did not intend to use local facilities and crew to make films, and in any case Hong Kong's studios had been dealt a devastating blow and could not resume production anytime soon. In the early days of the occupation, feature films could only be produced by Japanese studios that could come to Hong Kong, as stated in 'The Essentials of Southern Motion Picture Work'. And indeed these studios were eager to come here. Cameras had begun rolling for *The Battle of Hong Kong* even before the official release of 'The Essentials of Southern Motion Picture Work'.

On the night of 12 February 1942, a group of five from Daiei Motion Picture Company left Tokyo for Hong Kong via Taiwan. Daiei had been formed only half a month ago on 27 January through a merger of Shinkō Kinema, Daito Eiga, and Nikkatsu Corporation. From planning to execution, the film materialised quickly. This was because when the Japanese army began attacking the city on 8 December of the previous year, key studio personnel already had their ears glued to the radio for the latest war reports, in preparation for the studio's debut work on the Battle of Hong Kong.[14] When the news of Hong Kong's surrender came on 25 December, Daiei immediately applied to the Japanese army for a shooting permit in the war zone. The occupation of Hong Kong was a temporary victory for Japan in its strive to challenge Western superpowers. To show its support for the new national policy studio, the army headquarters immediately approved Daiei's application to send a crew to Hong Kong.

The film's working title was *Hong Kong*. In the early stages of planning, there was discussion on whether to make a feature film or a reportage-documentary. Once they decided on making a feature film, director Tanaka Shigeo and screenwriters Suyama

14. Kuroiwa Kenji, 'The Planning of the Film *Hong Kong* and Its Significance', *Nihon Eiga Magazine*, Tokyo, April 1942, p 48 (in Japanese).

Muguruma Osamu details the production of *The Battle of Hong Kong* (1942) in the article 'A Film Shoot in Hong Kong'. (*Shin Eiga* [*New Films*], October 1942)
Image courtesy of Professor Han Yanli

Tetsu and Takaiwa Hajime checked into a hotel in Hakone where they began to write the screenplay in seclusion. According to the records of Muguruma Osamu, manager and head of the contemporary drama (*gendai-geki*) unit at Daiei, the first team to arrive in Hong Kong on 4 March consisted of five people: the director, two screenwriters, the cinematographer and the producer. They brought a finished draft of the script and upon arrival, with help from the Information Bureau of the Expeditionary Army of Imperial Japan, they invited young generals and colonels to attend a briefing at the hotel. Then, after touring the actual sites, they appealed to the chief of staff of the garrison, the Chief of the Information Bureau, and The Governor's Office in Hong Kong for guidance.[15] Muguruma kept detailed notes of all these, presumably to emphasise that the script had been inspired by real-life events and not entirely a figment of the imagination. As will be described later, there are certain far-fetched scenes in *The Battle of Hong Kong* and parts of the story did not adhere to facts. Yet big changes could not be made to the main storyline. This may have been to do with the fact that the *China-Trilogy* (1939–1940), three films produced by Manying starring Li Xianglan (aka Yamaguchi Yoshiko), was heavily criticised in Japan for focusing too much on the romantic entanglements of its main characters. Hence this national policy film that began shooting in Hong Kong in 1942 never intended to use cheap romance as its main storyline. However, since it was not exactly a war documentary either, it had to consider the public's need for an interesting story. With romance out of the question, the conflict options within the story available to filmmakers were pretty limited.

15. Muguruma Osamu, 'A Film Shoot in Hong Kong', *Shin Eiga* (*New Films*), Tokyo, October 1942 (in Japanese).

III. *The Battle of Hong Kong*: War News Chronicle and Melodrama

The initial team of five came to Hong Kong to shoot the battle re-enactment scenes with the assistance of the military. In June, a second team of 16 arrived from Japan, including actors Usami Jun, Kuroda Kiyo and Nagata Yasushi. It was then that the filming of the dramatic scenes began. According to the Japanese Film Database, the film was originally 101 minutes long, and comprised 11 reels measuring a total of 2,772 metres. In 2011, I had the opportunity to watch the surviving 36 minutes of the film at The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. They were mostly battle scenes; little is left of the dramatic scenes and one could hardly make out the story even after watching.[16] Fortunately, many magazines had published synopses after the film premiered in Japan on 19 November 1942. Though these summaries vary in length, their details are consistent. They also stay quite loyal to the plot without any over-embellishment. Comparing the textual synopses with the surviving scenes of the film, one can piece together the main storyline:

The protagonist sub-lieutenant Kitazawa is the eldest son of a family that has been operating a shop in Hong Kong since his father's generation. The reins of the family business have been handed to his younger brother Kosuke, his mum and his younger sister, while Kitazawa himself works at the Hong Kong branch of Mitsui & Co. The company sends him to its Tokyo headquarters. Upon returning to Japan, he is drafted into the army and becomes a sub-lieutenant. Coincidentally he is sent to Hong Kong again where he takes part in the Battle of Hong Kong. Kitazawa knows full well that his family is still in the city, but in order not to dampen his comrades' morale, he makes no mention of it. He throws himself into the war without hesitation.

Leaving aside the story's unconvincing premise, the film's corny plot twist of having its main character sacrificing his home for the greater good evokes *Ardent, Loyal Souls*, which China Motion Picture Studio (a government-affiliated organisation, 'Zhongzhi' in short) had shot in Wuhan in 1938. Written and directed by Yuan Tsung-mei, the film features a brigadier who leads an invasion of his hometown and orders an attack on his own residence without trying to find out whether his family is there.[17] In fact, before the five-man crew arrived in Hong Kong, they had had a talk with Watanabe Masao, Hong Kong correspondent for *Asahi Shimbun* who was in the city at the time of the Battle of Hong Kong, during which Watanabe politely commented on the unlikelihood of sub-lieutenant Kitazawa's character. He wondered aloud, 'Coincidences are possible, of course, but would too much emphasis on them weaken the other parts of the story?' Screenwriter

16. Han Yanli, '*Hong Kong Conquered*: The Only Feature Film Made in Japanese-occupied Hong Kong', *Newsletter*, Hong Kong Film Archive, Issue 58, November 2011, pp 19-24. (The original Japanese title can be transliterated as *Hong Kong Conquered: The Day England Fell*, also known as *The Battle of Hong Kong*.) I would like to make a clarification about this essay, in which I mistook the Kitazawa siblings as husband and wife. Also, in the original screenplay published in *Motion Picture Times* in 1958 (in Japanese), these two characters were unmarried lovers who grew up together.
17. The plot is summarised with reference to Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai & Xing Zuwen (eds), *Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi* (*A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*) *Vol 2*, Beijing: China Film Press, 1998 [1963], pp 22-23 (in Chinese).

Suyama dismissed his concern, 'What we just described might have made the plot seem far-fetched...but this is only one part of the entire chain that is the story.'[18]

If the problem with sub-lieutenant Kitazawa's character is that he experiences too many coincidences, his family being stranded in Hong Kong and eventually becoming the target of his attack is factually inaccurate. Watanabe stated that by that time, ordinary Japanese citizens had been evacuated from Hong Kong; only the consulate, the South Manchuria Railway, the newspapers, and large corporations like Mitsui and Mitsubishi would leave a young staff member to guard the premises. It was impossible that Japanese women from small, privately owned shops would remain in the battle zone. Unfortunately, Watanabe's shrewd observation that 'too much fabrication renders the story ineffective; even if the storyline is weak, capturing reality is good enough' was never heeded. In the film, Kitazawa's mother reminds her younger daughter as the battle rages on, 'Even if we are killed by Japanese artillery fired by your brother, bear in mind that this is but a fulfilment of our greatest wish.' What is presumably the most moving line in the melodrama leaves a strange taste in the mouth for those who personally went through the situation. But from the film's 10th place ranking in *Motion Picture Times* (aka *Kinema Junpo*), it is likely that innocent Japanese tears might have been shed over a situation based on a misunderstanding.

In the film's secondary plot, Hongkonger Mr Liang and his sister Honglian are friends with the Kitazawas; the two families have been friends since their father's generation, which makes Mr Liang and Honglian pro-Japanese. Before the invasion of Hong Kong, the two visit the Kitazawa family shop where Mr Liang chats with Kosuke and observes that 'Hong Kong's Chinese are escapist; they hide in their little shells, enjoying life from within.' Various versions of the synopsis make no mention of Honglian's lines, and in what is left of the damaged film, she does not utter a word. Analysing the synopses, I believe that the visit to Kitazawa's shop which I watched marks Honglian's only appearance in the film. Since the director had Japanese actors playing Hongkongers deliver their lines in barely comprehensible Cantonese anyway, there was no reason not to let Honglian speak in her only scene. Venturing a guess, I would say the most likely reason is that Tsi Lo Lin, who played the role of Honglian, had refused to say her lines. Honglian is subsequently seen taking a stroll outdoors with Kitazawa's younger sister, and perhaps to make up for her lack of dialogue, in the final long take of this scene, Honglian is seen suddenly placing her head on the other woman's shoulder and begins to sob. Without dialogue, the audience can only imagine why she is crying. In the film's first scene, the Kitazawa siblings send reporter Fujimoto off at the pier. Then Mr Liang and Honglian appear but not in time to bid Fujimoto farewell. Is this the reason for Honglian's tears? One can only speculate as what

18. 'Seminar: Discussion about *Hong Kong* (A Work by Daiei)', *Eiga No Tomo* (*Friends of the Movies*), Tokyo, April 1942, p 88 (in Japanese).

remains of the film contains no evidence of Honglian's feelings for the Japanese journalist.

Reviews after the premiere show that my doubts about the plot cannot be explained away simply by lost footage or damaged sound. In a review published in January 1943, Mizukami Tanzo writes, 'Overall, character design is extremely inappropriate. In particular, the long, silent stroll of the pro-Japanese woman and Kitazawa's younger sister is completely unnecessary. Judging from the script, the pro-Japanese woman was probably romantically involved with Kitazawa's reporter friend, but somehow this subplot was cast aside and that scene was left in the film as meaningless residue.'[19] But the official film stills and location shots of this short and baffling 'residual' segment appeared multiple times in Japan's film magazines. So even though the scene may be 'meaningless' from a narrative point of view as Mizukami opines, it was hugely meaningful from a marketing perspective.[20]

At the end of the film, after the Japanese army attacked and occupied Hong Kong, Mr Liang pays another visit to Kitazawa's shop alone to announce that his sister Honglian died while trying to flee. Kosuke's response is 'My brother shed blood in the war too. Japan and China have both shed precious blood over East Asia. We will make sure this does not happen in vain!' Mr Liang and Kosuke, both of whom have lost a family member, then grip each other's hands tightly. Liang's character was played by Koshiba Kanji. According to director Tanaka at the October 1942 public forum, the role was intended for a Hong Kong actor, but because 'the actor's thinking was not in line with ours', the plan was abandoned.[21] From Liang's speech and behaviour in the two scenes described above, such unreasonable 'thinking' would never have enjoyed unanimous agreement between director and actor. In actual fact, film magazines had, up till August 1942, billed Kuroda Kiyo as the actress playing Honglian.[22] Even if one discounts the significant amount of time it would have taken for the latest news to reach and be published in Japan, it is evident that finding a Hong Kong actress posed challenges for the production crew and it was clearly not a decision made in the early planning stages.

After Tsi Lo Lin was given the part, she appeared in all promotional stills before and after the premiere, and always occupied the most conspicuous spots in the photos. Although the character shows her face but once in the film and very likely does not utter a single word, Tsi Lo Lin as the only Hong Kong cast member and a female one at that, played into the Japanese-created illusion of the 'East Asia Co-Prosperity' stance. Therefore she was constantly featured in the film's promotion; an artist even painted her portrait

19. Mizukami Tanzo, 'Review of *The Battle of Hong Kong*', *Nihon Eiga Magazine*, Tokyo, January 1943, p 32 (in Japanese).
20. The original screenplay published in *Motion Picture Times* in 1958 shows that the screenwriter and director had no intention of making the stroll scene with no dialogue. In the film, Honglian wants to ask the journalist Fujimoto to bring a handknit sweater to Kitazawa, who has gone to the frontline. But she does not have a chance to see Fujimoto, and is thus frustrated. It would have been hard to convey the complex sentiments of a young woman accurately without dialogue. No wonder Mizukami Tanzo and the audiences at the time felt that this long and silent stroll was totally unnecessary.
21. 'Returning from Hong Kong Public Forum', *Eiga No Tomo* (*Friends of the Movies*), Tokyo, October 1942, p 67 (in Japanese).
22. Otsuka Kano, 'Location Shooting of *The Battle of Hong Kong* Goes Smoothly', *Eiga No Tomo* (*Friends of the Movies*), Tokyo, August 1942, p 58 (in Japanese).

An advertisement for *The Battle of Hong Kong*: The slogan 'Thanks to big, powerful ideas, the historical reality of the end of the century-long brutalisation by the atrocious British manifests again! Powerful, beguiling performance by the charismatic Tsi Lo Lin!' amplifies the role of Tsi Lo Lin as an exotic symbol. (*Eiga No Tomo* [*Friends of the Movies*], October 1942)
Image courtesy of Professor Han Yanli

while discussing the differences in physical attributes of Chinese and Japanese women. The exploitation of the actress's physical image extended beyond the screen. The flimsiness of Tsi Lo Lin's character may have been due to her reluctance to be part of the performance, but even if her onscreen presence was minimised, she could not avoid being used as a marketing prop. Apart from her physical image being featured in many promotional stills and location shots, her name Tsi Lo Lin was repeatedly and hyperbolically evoked as a symbol of exoticism. This two-liner appears in the magazine advertisement: 'Thanks to big, powerful ideas, the historical reality of the end of the century-long brutalisation by the atrocious British manifests again! Powerful, beguiling performance by the charismatic Tsi Lo Lin!'[23] Clearly, as this slogan shows, Hong Kong actress Tsi Lo Lin's participation was used as a prime marketing feature, but the importance of her role was grossly magnified.

Not yet 18 at the time, Tsi Lo Lin went to Japan to film the interior scenes and for promotion. At the public forum mentioned, reporters tried all means to lure her to speak, but her answers were terse. Despite the excited atmosphere around her, she only responded twice to reporters' questions. Perhaps due to the brevity of her replies, the cinematographer and the director stepped in to save the show. The details of the exchange effectively convey the overall vibe as well as Tsi Lo Lin's predicament.[24] The rather abrupt ending of the

23. *Eiga No Tomo* (*Friends of the Movies*), Tokyo, October 1942 (in Japanese).
24. See note 21, pp 69-70.

public forum also seems to indicate that the reporters gave up trying to fish words out of Tsi Lo Lin's mouth. Perhaps director Tanaka had experienced the same exasperation and surrender when he tried in vain to make her say her lines and in the end compensated by inserting an ambiguous crying scene.

Conclusion

This paper is based entirely on primary historical sources, including Japanese books, official government documents and film periodicals published in the 1930s and 1940s. It attempts to explore and illuminate Japanese film viewership and filmmaking in Hong Kong during this period. I hope Japanese records of what went on in Hong Kong cinemas, Hong Kong's various filmmaking organisations, their production capacities and other details will help to supplement certain areas of research into Hong Kong film history. Historical literature was also used to shed light on Japanese attitudes towards filmmaking in Hong Kong and actual filmmaking activities during the occupation, as well as the storyline of *The Battle of Hong Kong*, often seen by researchers to be shrouded in mystery. I hope this paper can serve as reference for further research on these topics. [Translated by Piera Chen]

The majority of Japanese film magazines quoted in this paper comes from the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute collection. Although the pandemic posed challenges for research, the assistance of Ms Yukiko Wachi of the Institute was invaluable, and for her help I am grateful.

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The 1940s and Post-War Demobilisation

Dialect, Politics, and the Media Mobilisation of Leftist Filmmakers: A Discussion of Criticisms of Cantonese Films in Hong Kong *Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartial*) (1948–1950)

Su Tao

I. Hong Kong *Ta Kung Pao* and Its Film Criticism

In the late 1940s, caught up at a critical juncture in history, the Hong Kong film industry faced a great deal of uncertainty in its future. Against the context of British colonialism, a group of leftist critics remained in Hong Kong, hoisting the flag of leftist film criticism as inherited from the 1930s. Through their film reviews, they streamlined local cultural debates, diverted public trends and influenced filmmaking directions, as they sought mainstream support. Not only did their writing expand the impact of progressive culture on the local film industry, it also deeply influenced the development of post-war Hong Kong cinema. Their work bears considerable significance in the history of Chinese film criticism.

Hong Kong *Ta Kung Pao*[1] is one of the most important news media outlets controlled by leftist critics. Founded in 1938, it was forced to cease publication at one point after the eruption of the Pacific War. In November 1948, less than a year after it resumed business, *Ta Kung Pao* switched political allegiance and became a key contributor of the leftist camp in Hong Kong news and culture.[2] Upon recommencing publication in April 1948, *Ta Kung Pao* began issuing a weekly publication titled *Cinema and Drama Weekly* (aka *Dianying Yu Xiju Zhoukan*), which was renamed as *Yingju Zhoukan* after 1949. The publication contained articles on drama and cinema, with a special focus on the latter. Perhaps sensing the widespread influence of films, especially their importance in overseas propaganda efforts, *Ta Kung Pao* dedicated one individual section of the paper to cinema after 1950. Previously published weekly, *Moviedom* (aka *Dianying Quan*) later increased its appearance to twice a week, a reflection of the paper's regard for cinema. The relatively fixed columns in *Cinema and Drama Weekly* and *Moviedom* included

1. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Hong Kong *Ta Kung Pao* (*L'Impartial*) in this essay will appear as *Ta Kung Pao*.
2. For details on the establishment, suspension and subsequent return of *Ta Kung Pao*, see Li Kwok-sing, *Xianggang Zhongwen Baoye Fazhan Shi* (*The Development History of the Chinese Language Newspapers in Hong Kong*), Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2005 (in Chinese).

'Seven Film Critics', 'Collective Reviews on Cantonese Cinema', 'Weekly Cantonese Film Review', 'Film Hospital', etc. They reviewed foreign films, as well as Chinese films (including Mainland productions and Mandarin and Cantonese films produced in Hong Kong), covering a wide range of subjects such as the creative principles behind the films, their modes of expression, topics and themes, content and form, and audiences and markets.

Cantonese films were one of *Ta Kung Pao*'s key focus in its film criticism. For a certain period of time, Cantonese films received even more attention than their Mandarin and foreign counterparts. In the eyes of leftist critics, Cantonese cinema possessed a broad audience base that represented possibilities for promoting progressive culture. For this reason, critics felt that the values and ideas promoted by Cantonese films that were deemed unsuitable for the times (e.g. superstition, sex, fantasy) had to be reformed and could not be left to fester. Generally speaking, 1948 to 1949 was the period in which criticism of Cantonese films in *Ta Kung Pao* was at its most intense. A vast array of articles was published, comprising overviews of Cantonese cinema development and reviews of specific films. Through the interaction among film critics, filmmakers, and audiences, a powerful wave of public opinion was generated, directly leading to the emergence of the Third Clean-Up Movement of Cantonese Cinema.

This essay focuses on the Cantonese film criticism published in *Ta Kung Pao* between 1948 and 1950. On top of clarifying how leftist critics understood and judged the characteristics of Cantonese cinema, I look into how they found fault in these films' poor production values, as well as elements of sex, superstition, and fantasy. Analyses of such critiques, as well as how they contributed to the Third Clean-Up Movement of Cantonese Cinema, form the primary basis of this paper. I also provide commentary on the influence and implications of *Ta Kung Pao*'s criticisms of Cantonese cinema in the conclusion.

II. Critics' Understanding and Analysis on the Characteristics of Cantonese Cinema

In the article 'On Cantonese Film', veteran Cantonese filmmaker Cai Chusheng analysed in great detail the history and contemporary state of Cantonese cinema, as well as the challenges it was facing. Overall, his views were representative of those held by leftist filmmakers and critics towards Cantonese film at the end of the 1940s. In this seminal essay, Cai recognises the value of the existence of Cantonese cinema while recounting the history of its development: 'The dialect of a place is formed through longstanding factors, such as its human geography, and the Cantonese dialect has had a very long history. It cannot be homogenised in a short period of time; nor can it be eliminated easily.'[3] Therefore he opposed the 'orthodox' view of replacing Cantonese cinema, and argued that because Cantonese films were easily accessible and understandable to a great number of mainstream audiences, they held special importance in the film development of

3. Cai Chusheng, 'On Cantonese Films', write-up by Lu Jue, *Ta Kung Pao*, 28 January 1949 (in Chinese).

New China. Cai also discussed the commercial market for Cantonese cinema, which, as he pointed out, was vast, comprising Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong, Macao, and Southeast Asia: 'These expansive regions have an estimated population of over 60 million, which is some 15% of the country's overall population.' He added: 'As long as we improve the quality of Cantonese films, they can be promoted to even more far-reaching locations.'[4]

The themes and style of Cantonese films were also given considerable attention in the *Ta Kung Pao* film reviews. One critic sharply observes that the topics of Cantonese cinema were limited, as they mostly focused on adapting Cantonese operas and foreign films: 'Any sort of Cantonese opera, no matter whether it is suitable or not, is transposed onscreen'; 'The foreigners' "Tarzan", "Arabian Nights", "Madame Butterfly"—as long as they make money, we'll remake them again and again.'[5] The critic emphasises that mindless copying of the 'American style' would only doom Cantonese cinema irretrievably; its best hope for survival lies in choosing the path of realism. The filmmakers resting on their laurels in their choice of topics would eventually cause a loss of local flavour and nationalist characteristics in Cantonese cinema. According to the critic, this was a cause for concern because once they lose their distinctive, local traits, Cantonese films would lose their value and their reason for existence.

Cantonese cinema was perceived to be lagging behind its competitors, and the analysis of the underlying reasons by Ye Ge (aka Sima Wensen) is illustrative. In his review of Hong Kong films of 1950, he outlines some reasons for their sluggish development: film studio revenues were dropping due to the shrinking market, leading to widespread poor production values; some filmmakers were so keen to appeal to the mass market that they resorted to pornographic and supernatural gimmicks; the Cantonese film community lacked unity and their ideological stance was not strong enough, meaning that they often bowed down to commercial pressures; the oppressive colonial context (e.g. film censorship) was also an objective factor contributing to the chaotic scene of Cantonese cinema.[6] Contrary to the acerbic criticisms of Ye Ge and his allies, Cai Chusheng offered a different perspective due to his in-depth knowledge of the Cantonese film industry. His analysis of the pros and cons of Cantonese cinema did not focus solely on political berating, but placed more emphasis on the importance of industrial and economic factors. According to Cai, the backwardness of Cantonese cinema was not due to its ideological failings. Instead, the problem had deeper roots in the flawed industrial structure upon which the industry was built, i.e. Cantonese cinema was controlled by a handful of exploitative bosses, who used their powers in production and distribution to abuse filmmakers, thereby leading to the overall downfall of the industry.

Generally speaking, leftist film professionals/critics such as Cai had a relatively thorough understanding and accurate assessment of Cantonese cinema in the late 1940s. Unlike their Mandarin counterparts of the same period, Cantonese films were cash-strapped and technologically behind; their industry lacked organisation and scale, and were thus ill-equipped to deal with new challenges and risks in the market. In the attempt to stay afloat, production

4. Ibid.
5. Ye Ge, 'On the Source Materials of Cantonese Films', *Ta Kung Pao*, 11 February 1949 (in Chinese).
6. Ye Ge, 'Hong Kong Films in the Past Year', *Ta Kung Pao*, 1 October 1950 (in Chinese).

companies slashed their budgets and invested almost solely on *wuxia*, supernatural, sex, and folktale films, thereby engaging in a vicious cycle that they were unable to break. Such problems were further exacerbated by the complexities of the colonial context and the muddled ideologies that Cantonese filmmakers held. These perceptions and ideas formed the basis of leftist criticism of Cantonese cinema, and critics went on to use *Ta Kung Pao* as their public opinion platform for the gradual development and expansion of their pointed critiques targeted towards local cinema. The targets of their censure included the production modes of Cantonese films, their topics and styles, their methodology, their appeal to audiences, their distribution and markets and the need for ideological reform among Cantonese filmmakers, etc.

III. Critical Focus: Poor Production Values and Backward Thinking

The lack of production values in Cantonese cinema, as well as its promotion of hackneyed values and attitudes, naturally drew the ire of *Ta Kung Pao* critics. They mostly commented negatively on the lack of budget and technique in the productions, and were ruthless in their skewering of how cheaply and poorly Cantonese films were made. One essay analysing the budgets of Cantonese films even points out: in the late 1940s, a mid-range Cantonese picture would have a budget of around $40,000, whereas low-budget pictures, which constituted the majority of Cantonese productions, would have budgets of around $20,000 to $30,000. In comparison, Mandarin films on average had budgets of $120,000 to $160,000.[7] Being severely underfunded, Cantonese productions visibly struggled with every part of the filmmaking process, leaving ample room for critics to attack the roughness of their technique and the sloppiness of their execution. For example, *Owing* (directed by Chu Kea, 1949) is lambasted in an essay for being 'entirely blurred from beginning to end, while the plot drags on and is cobbled together in a confusing fashion', such that 'one gets nothing from the viewing experience, apart from puzzlement'. Even 'the dubbing, the lighting and the set designs are utterly awful.'[8]

However, compared to the poor technical quality of Cantonese films, *Ta Kung Pao* critics were more offended by the retrograde, reactionary thought in Cantonese cinema, and their comments were considerably harsher, even outright condemnatory. Indeed, some articles can be described as 'denunciations'. To leftist critics, representations of feudalistic thought, superstition, sex, fantasy in Cantonese films had a toxic and harmful influence on their audiences. Historically, attacks on feudalism and its related ideologies have long been a tradition in leftist cultural criticism. In an article on *Turmoil at the Spider Web Cave* (aka *Pigsy Destroys the Spider Cave*, directed by Chan Ping, 1949), the writer reprimands the film for its fantastical and sexual elements, arguing that it 'numbs the audience, whitewashes reality, disarms viewers of their drive, and seduces them into decadence.' The article further suggests that 'such crimes of poisoning audiences' minds under the guise of art and culture are utterly devoid of conscience and humanity!'[9] Similarly, *The*

7. Yi Chou, 'How Much Does it Cost to Make a Cantonese Film?', *Ta Kung Pao*, 12 August 1950 (in Chinese).
8. Fang Yuan, '*Owing*, a Shoddy Film', *Ta Kung Pao*, 10 June 1949 (in Chinese).
9. Xiao Yue, 'What Kind of a Film is *Turmoil at the Spider Web Cave*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 8 April 1949 (in Chinese).

Promotional pamphlet of *A Royal Scandal* (1949)

An advertisement for *Turmoil at the Spider Web Cave* (1949), published in *Wah Kiu Yat Po* on 3 April 1949

An advertisement for *A Devil Woman's Uproar in Hell* (1949), published in *Wah Kiu Yat Po* on 27 April 1949

Red Kid (directed by Yip Yat-sing, 1949) is 'chock-full of extreme fantasy and pornography, and offers little else'; and 'the intention behind such a production is obviously to poison the minds of the audiences. The filmmakers are incurable, unforgivable sinners of Cantonese cinema.'[10] To give a few more examples: *A Royal Scandal* (aka *Tan Kei in the Meat Hill*, directed by But Fu, 1949) is 'most dissolute and shameless'; *Blood on the Wu Tong Mountain* (aka *Fong Sai-yuk and Wu Wai-kin's Three Attempts at Wudang Mountain*, directed by Ku Wen-chung, 1949) 'promotes thuggery and banditry under the banner of "martial spirit"'; and *Ghost at the Boarding House* (aka *Ruckus at Kwong Cheong Lung*, directed by Ko Lei-hen, 1949) endorses 'reactionary fatalism'.[11] The fusion of elements such as *wuxia*, fantasy and sex was naturally rejected. *A Devil Woman's Uproar in Hell* (directed by Wong Hang, 1949) is described as 'a supernatural picture wearing a flashy, mismatched overcoat'. Not only is the film denounced as spreading beliefs about superstition and fatalism, its depiction of the War of Liberation is implied to be 'an in-fighting within the family' between brothers. The film was soundly condemned for its tortuous half-truths, which were seen to twist reality and distort audiences' perceptions.[12]

Sima Fu's Encounter with the Honey Gang (1949): Well-thought-out shooting locations, set designs and visual imagery (Left: Yung Siu-yi; right: Ng Cho-fan)

In the latter half of 1949, many Cantonese filmmakers gradually began to adjust their styles due to pressure from public opinion and mass condemnation. There was some improvement in production values, and elements of sex and fantasy were toned down to a certain extent. With this development, *Ta Kung Pao* critics thus turned their attention towards the ideology and social influence of Cantonese cinema. For example, in an essay on *Sima Fu's Encounter with the Honey Gang* (directed by Hung Suk-wan, 1949), the writer firstly praises the serious attitude of the director, but then proceeds to attack the film's ideology: 'To use such craft and technique to serve the spirit of Sima Fu is a lamentable waste'. The fictional character of Sima Fu is 'not only primarily interested in his love target, but also has a fuzzy concept of "peace" that does not distinguish right from wrong.'[13] Likewise, *Silent Dream* (directed by Ng Wui, 1949) is applauded for the serious-mindedness of its production, but the film's depiction of certain social phenomena,

10. He Xiu, 'Please Show Your Conscience!—Review of *The Red Kid*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 4 March 1949 (in Chinese).
11. Xiao Yue, 'Denouncing Toxic Films, Putting Decadent Trends in Order! A Combined Review of *A Royal Scandal, Blood on the Wu Tong Mountain* and *Ghost at the Boarding House*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 25 February 1949 (in Chinese).
12. Lu Jue, 'Robbers and Ghosts: A Combined Review of *The Junior Hero Ngai Fu* and *A Devil Woman's Uproar in Hell*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 29 April 1949 (in Chinese).
13. Ng Kei-man, Chan Chan-wan, Huang Ningying, Kuk Lau et al, 'A Review of *Sima Fu's Encounter with the Honey Gang*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 24 June 1949 (in Chinese).

such as its attitudes towards love, is still criticised. In particular, the critic finds fault in *Silent Dream*'s improper, perverse ideas about love; although the film deals with certain social issues, it does not go far enough in exposing reality. Furthermore, character development is unrealistic and contradictory, and presenting the two wealthy protagonists as 'saintly do-gooders who bring salvation to everyone'[14] is to take the wrong side in the class struggle.

Cantonese opera and folktales are important creative sources for Cantonese cinema. Given their historic context, these narratives often include vestiges of feudalistic thought, divergent from the beliefs and values of leftist critics. From the latter's point of view, if left untouched or unchanged, such feudalistic values would be immensely harmful. For instance, *Breaking the Medicinal Herb* (directed by Hung Suk-wan, 1949) is given due recognition for its auteurist intentions and thoughtfulness, but the critic laments that although the film touches upon certain negative aspects of the feudal society, it stops short of fully developing its ideas. The screenwriter and director 'neglect the fundamental nature of feudal society', and so 'wrongly apportions full blame simply to one evil female character.'[15] On a similar note, *Leung Tin-loi, the Loser* (directed by But Fu, 1949), also adapted from a traditional folktale, should have conveyed 'the people's anti-feudalism and anti-bureaucracy sentiments', for it 'has the opportunity and potential to expose shady bureaucratic operations and depict resistance against political corruption.'[16] Yet the way the film resolves its narrative conflict is highly problematic: justice depends on the competence and judgement of the emperor, which in itself is an extremely feudalistic idea. On the basis of these critiques, the film reviewer proposes a basic principle for adapting folktales: while recognising that such tales, given their widespread popularity, have their inherent meaning and charm, one should at the same time choose and modify them with care, eliminating or critiquing any original feudal elements.

Ta Kung Pao's reviews of *Goddess in Dreams* (aka *Sai See in the Dream*, directed by Chiang Oi-man, 1949) and *Third Madame Educates Her Son* (directed by Moon Kwan Man-ching, 1949) are characteristic of leftist critics' attitudes towards film adaptations of Cantonese opera. In a piece on *Goddess in Dreams*, the reviewer first commends Liu Hap-wai, the playwright of the original Cantonese opera, for his artistic talents and social conscience. Yet he further opines that the film, regretfully, distorts the critical spirit of the original work, as it fuses together Gandhi's ineffectual 'non-resistance' [Ed note: more generally regarded as 'non-violent resistance'] to colonial thinking with the feudal moral codes of the four cardinal principles and eight virtues, forming a final product that is 'lethal to the people'. At the end of his article, the writer concedes: 'if the harmful parts advocating feudalistic ideology are removed, the film is certain to remain popular even among audiences of our upcoming new society.'[17] Comparatively speaking, *Third Madame Educates Her Son*, also an adaptation of a Cantonese opera, received much harsher criticism. Despite the filmmaker's efforts in cutting and revising some of the plot in the process

14. Mak Tai-fei, Lu Jue, Wu Dehui et al, '*Silent Dream*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 1 July 1949 (in Chinese).
15. Kuk Lau, Chan Cheuk-yau, Mak Tai-fei, Ou Yongxiang et al, 'A Review of *Breaking the Medicinal Herb*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 8 July 1949 (in Chinese).
16. Lu Jue, 'A Review of *Leung Tin-loi, the Loser*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 13 May 1949 (in Chinese).
17. Huang Ningying, 'A Second Review of *Goddess in Dreams*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 22 April 1949 (in Chinese).

Third Madame Educates Her Son (1949): Criticised for promoting the virtues of women, which is in fact a denial of their autonomy and individuality (From left: Yu Kai, Wong Man-lei, Wong Cho-shan)

Everlasting Regret (1948) is a fine example of realism in Cantonese cinema.

of adaptation, 'the intention of the story is still the promotion of womanly virtue', which, in other words, is a defence of old-world values and beliefs. The praise the film heaps on the female protagonist for maintaining her virtue is in reality a denial of her individuality and autonomy as a woman; the male protagonist's triumphant and prosperous return to his hometown is an affirmation of feudal ideals regarding success and fame. At the end of the piece, the reviewer goes as far as claiming that stories as such are not worth revising or adapting.[18] Without doubt, critical evaluation of feudalistic ideologies in folktales and Cantonese opera was needed. Yet what is worth discussing is whether it was too harsh for *Ta Kung Pao* critics to demand Cantonese films to sever ties with their original source materials (often derived from unofficial versions of history or traditional plays and tales), so as to expose the nature or evils of feudal society and rule. The majority of Cantonese filmmakers were not experienced nor well-versed in progressive leftist thought or culture, and so to ask them to interpret history, folktales, and works of Cantonese opera in a completely new light, from the perspective of historical materialism or class struggle, was simply unrealistic. One must admit, therefore, that one of the key flaws in the film criticism of *Ta Kung Pao* was its tendency to regurgitate theoretical tenets of political ideology without paying heed to the realities of the Cantonese film industry.

Ta Kung Pao critics thought highly of Cantonese films with good production values and progressive attitudes. The key qualities that were praised included realism in expression, correct understanding of social development trends and a relatively sound awareness of class issues. *Everlasting Regret* (directed by Lo Duen, 1948) is a fine example of realism in Cantonese cinema and was commended for 'its daring split from the deep-rooted ills that plagued Cantonese cinema',

18. Xiao Yue, 'A Review of *Third Madame Educates Her Son*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 22 April 1949 (in Chinese).

bringing 'a breath of fresh air to the foul-smelling swamp of the Cantonese film market'. The filmmaker explicitly states that 'all the tragedies, misfortunes, baseness and sins' in the film have been caused by a corrupt social system, and that change is impossible without dismantling the old societal structures.[19] *For My Country* (directed by Chun Kim, 1949) was highlighted for its realist technique and delicate touch in depicting 'the sharp conflict between old and new societies' in a context of turbulent historical change. The film manages to find 'a reconciliation between the old and new points of view', and was hailed by the critic as 'a work of foresight' in the Clean-up Movement.[20] In the critically acclaimed *Tears of the Pearl River* (aka *Dawn Must Come*, directed by Wang Weiyi [aka Wong Wai-yat], 1950), the filmmaker is 'clearly aligned with the people and establishes an assured point of view in the film's portrayal of class dynamics, with astute judgements bestowed on the oppressors and the oppressed.' Even more admirable is the film's ability to fuse together politics and artistry, 'to vividly bring to life [its key themes] through the most realistic and specific of subject matters.'[21] *Fishermen's Song of the South Sea* (directed by Chun Kim, 1950) was recognised for being 'on the correct realist path', and in his review, the critic declares that 'the awakening of the classes, through collective solidarity, striving and resisting together in the direction of truth'[22] is the only way for the suffering poor to achieve liberation. Evidently, these films had a pronounced political stance and a healthy dose of class awareness, making them close to the ideal of leftist art.

IV. The Third Clean-Up Movement of Cantonese Cinema: Industry Perspectives and the Unification Strategy

The Third Clean-Up Movement of Cantonese Cinema, which began in the late 1940s, had a far-reaching influence on the post-war Cantonese film industry in Hong Kong. The emergence of this movement was strongly linked to *Ta Kung Pao*'s spurring of public opinion and media mobilisation.

On 8 April 1949, a group of 164 Cantonese film industry workers, including Ng Cho-fan, Cheung Ying, Chun Kim, Pak Yin made an announcement in *Ta Kung Pao*, where they pledged to henceforth 'work even harder and unite in steadfast resolution to fulfil our professional and personal duties, in the hopes of contributing to our country and the people, and to avoid falling short of the expectations held of us by society. We will stop producing films that are contrary to the interests of our nation and people, that are harmful to society, and that which poison the minds of the audiences. We will step up to honour both our audiences and ourselves.'[23] This earnest proclamation was without doubt a commendable display that showcased the professional

19. Zhou Zhe, 'Miscellaneous Thoughts on *Everlasting Regret*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 13 November 1948 (in Chinese).
20. Chan Kwan-po, 'After Watching *For My Country*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 20 May 1949 (in Chinese).
21. Ba Ding, Zi Feng, Lü Zhicheng et al, 'A Review of *Tears of the Pearl River*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 3 February 1950 (in Chinese).
22. Ng Kei-man, 'Breaking the Shackles of Slavery for Generations of Boat Dwellers: Some Thoughts on *Fishermen's Song of the South Sea*', *Ta Kung Pao*, 23 December 1950 (in Chinese).
23. 'Cantonese Filmmakers Launch the Clean-Up Movement', *Ta Kung Pao*, 8 April 1949 (in Chinese).

ethics and social responsibility of the Cantonese film community. However, this somewhat idealistic announcement was more a statement of intention and stance. To truly resolve the deep-seated problems and issues of the Cantonese film industry required specific action. To this end, *Ta Kung Pao* published a series of articles to garner support for the movement and provide suggestions on how the Clean-Up Movement could be carried out. In an essay titled 'May Glory Be with Cantonese Films!', the writer proposes three relatively defined courses of action: to stop making pornographic films; to stop making fantasy films that poison the mind; to stop making folktale adaptations that are meaningless and toxic.[24] Then, the article 'Keep On with the Clean-Up Movement' further clarifies the movement's nature and goals: it is an active movement, not a passive one. It is a long-term campaign, not a short-term one. Its two goals are to reform Cantonese cinema and to achieve transformation on an individual level among Cantonese film professionals.[25] 'A Re-Assessment of the Clean-Up Movement' attempts to critique and redress two false perceptions in the campaign: firstly, the blind allegiance to 'technical excellence', which presupposes that as long as a film was made with care, it will receive widespread support; and secondly, the sense of frustration arising from 'the loss of direction' and 'the stagnation of the situation'.[26]

The question of how to unite the vast Cantonese film industry became an important question that *Ta Kung Pao* critics were determined to resolve during their promotion of the Clean-Up Movement. One of them categorised participants of the movement into three groups: 'Some have always been pure of thought and deed, refraining from making poisonous films; some express regret for the mistakes they made in the past; some are unrepentant but think that it's still worth signing up for the movement.' Regarding the latter two groups, the critic suggests that 'their past should be overlooked, and be judged on whether their future work hold up to their promises',[27] a relatively forgiving and moderate stance.[28] Critics also paid attention to the livelihoods of Cantonese film workers, especially those who were forced to make 'poisonous pictures' in order to make a living. They suggested that some form of collective, mutually supportive network of help should be offered, to prevent these filmmakers 'from falling prey to temptation and decadence again.'[29] Also, due to the voluntary nature of the Clean-Up Movement, critics were keen to maintain filmmakers' morale, arguing that their education and reform needed to be gradual and should not be rushed: 'criticism needs to be proportionate. Where possible, we should help them learn, so that they have an opportunity to find their place in the new society of the future.'[30] It is

24. 'May Glory Be with Cantonese Films!', *Ta Kung Pao*, 15 April 1949 (in Chinese).
25. Zhou Da, 'Keep On with the Clean-Up Movement', *Ta Kung Pao*, 29 April 1949 (in Chinese).
26. Zhu Cheng, 'A Re-Assessment of the Clean-Up Movement', *Ta Kung Pao*, 15 April 1949 (in Chinese).
27. See note 24.
28. For example, Joseph Sunn Jue, Hung Chung-ho, Hung Suk-wan, But Fu and Chu Kea were among those who had been named and criticised by *Ta Kung Pao*, but eventually joined the South China Film Industry Workers Union, an organisation led by progressive filmmakers, as its 'founding members'. See *Yongyuan De Meili: Hua'nan Dianying Gongzuozhe Lianhehui Liushi Zhounian Jinian, 1949–2009* (*Eternal Beauty: The 60th Anniversary of the South China Film Industry Workers Union, 1949–2009*), Hong Kong: South China Film Industry Workers Union, 2009, p 17 (in Chinese). Leftists were keen to bring these filmmakers into their fold, which is indirect proof of the tolerance and flexibility of their united front strategy.
29. See note 24.
30. See note 25.

obvious that leftist filmmakers/critics were able to insist on their principles, and at the same time, give consideration to the working conditions and real needs of Cantonese film workers. Their approach successfully attracted many centrist filmmakers into the fold, thus further building the momentum of the Clean-Up Movement.

Once the nature, goals and target audience of the Clean-Up Movement had been clearly established, and certain pitfalls had been rectified, leftist critics turned their attention to the core of the problem: the ecosystem of the Cantonese cinema itself. They suggest replacing the current modes of film production with co-operatives and buddy collaborations. Through gaining production rights and distribution autonomy, film workers can escape the influence and exploitation of unscrupulous film companies, and transform local cinema completely. In an essay named 'A Suggestion: Proposing a Co-op Structure to Advocate the Clean-Up Movement', film veteran So Yee argues that in order to further the campaign, filmmakers need to 'strengthen and enrich the ideological content in their screenplays on the one hand, and broadly establish co-ops on the other.' These new organisational structures should 'adopt a democratic system and distribute power among the majority of the people, so that it is not manipulated in the hands of a few. After getting rid of the systems of exploitation, powers and rights would be enjoyed by all, and responsibilities and duties shared by everyone.' More specifically, these structures 'should be run by screenwriters, directors and actors at their core, who can work in tandem with progressively minded film distributors' to do financing, production and film distribution.[31] Lo Duen shared a similar view with So, and upon his thorough analysis of the Cantonese film industry structure, he makes certain proposals which conveniently supplement those from So. Lo observes that compared to the meticulously organised nature and the hierarchical structure of the co-op, buddy collaboration is simply 'of a short-term, guerrilla, "one-off" nature'. The way they could be formed was: have at its core a few actors who are movers and shakers themselves, and invite directors that they worked well with to form a small creative team. In the process of filming, the actors would forego their salary and instead be paid in shares, so then they would share the profit or loss of the picture proportionally. As for initial investment, filmmakers could use the licensing fees from markets in the Southeast Asian regions and the Americas as mortgage for the rental costs for film sets, and also utilise any advance payments from Hong Kong and Macao distributors to pay for filming. This way, 'we could start filming without spending a cent of cash.'[32] This was evidently a more flexible mode of production better suited to the realities of the Cantonese film industry, and although it would not be sustainable in the long run, it could be highly effective in the short term. The suggestions from So Yee, Lo Duen and others were quickly adopted and executed by a group of Cantonese filmmakers. Indeed, it can be argued that The Union Film Enterprise Ltd, established in 1952, was a product of the Third Clean-Up Movement of Cantonese cinema. Its production philosophy, organisational structure, operational strategy, etc. were all to a certain extent foreshadowed in the film criticism of *Ta Kung Pao*.[33]

31. So Yee, 'A Suggestion: Proposing a Co-Op Structure to Advocate the Clean-Up Movement', *Ta Kung Pao*, 6 May 1949 (in Chinese).
32. Lo Duen, 'The Clean-Up Movement and Forming Buddy Collaborations', *Ta Kung Pao*, 24 June 1949 (in Chinese).
33. For the history and production characteristics of The Union Film Enterprise Ltd, see Grace Ng (ed), *One for All: The Union Film Spirit*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2011.

Conclusion

Ta Kung Pao's writing on Cantonese cinema bore the key characteristics of leftist film criticism, an obvious political slant that adhered to the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist guiding thoughts on art and cultural works, in the hopes of preserving the fruit of the New Democratism Culture. Political stance reigned supreme in this set of critical standards, as films were mostly judged based on whether their themes and topics were 'correct', whether they realistically portrayed society and social issues, whether their character archetypes were depicted in a convincing manner. Depending on whom their criticism was aimed at, the writers' responses ranged from admonishment and debate to condemnation and denunciation. On the other hand, *Ta Kung Pao* film writers also showed ample consideration for the structural issues of the Cantonese film industry, especially in terms of its scale, modes of production and organisational structures. Apart from discussing politics and ideology, critics also incorporated economic critiques into their writing, such as considerations about distribution and film markets. They also displayed a degree of pragmatism and flexibility in their formulation and implementation of a unification strategy so as to attract unified support from Cantonese film workers. Of course, *Ta Kung Pao* critics were also not exempt from certain common problems faced by leftist film reviewers. For example, they suffered from a 'literary utilitarianism', where their film criticism solely served political goals. They also tended to 'focus more on the substance and content of the work, and pay less attention to form and technique.'[34] Lastly, some criticism also displayed a propensity for dogmatism and obduracy.

As the Cold War loomed in the 1950s, *Ta Kung Pao* and other leftist media outlets were forced to adjust their strategies and exercise caution in their treatment of politically sensitive issues to avoid offending the British-Hong Kong authorities. By the end of the decade, the number of Cantonese productions diminished even further due to strong competition from Mandarin films, and at one point in the late 1960s, they almost disappeared entirely. Facing a more complex and challenging environment, the new generation of Cantonese filmmakers had to adapt creatively in response to changes in the market. As for the role that film criticism plays in the development and transformation of Cantonese cinema in the 1960s and beyond, it is a subject worthy of further discussion and analysis in the future. [Translated by Rachel Ng]

I would like to thank Mr Law Kar and Ms Kwok Ching-ling for their valuable advice, as well as Mr Wong Ha-pak for his meticulous copyediting of this essay's first draft. I am also grateful to Ms Duan Liwen for her assistance in archival research.

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34. See Gu Zhongyi, 'To Commemorate the May Fourth Movement: Thoughts on Filmmaking in the Future', *Ta Kung Pao*, 6 May 1949 (in Chinese).

The Beginnings of Yung Hwa and Post-War 1940s Hong Kong Cinema

Kwok Ching-ling

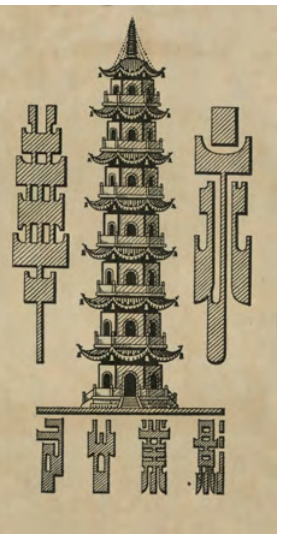
The studios established by Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries Ltd (1947–1957) were taken over by Cathay Organisation's Motion Picture and General Investment Co. Ltd. (MP & GI), and eventually Golden Harvest, playing a part in the rise and fall of one cinematic dynasty after another. Over the course of half a century, Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio in Kowloon Tong Village was completed in 1948 and subsequently relocated to Hammer Hill Road in the mid-1950s; MP & GI took over and eventually ended production in 1971, followed by Golden Harvest's acquisition of the site until the company vacated the premises in 1998. Under what circumstances did Yung Hwa, the frontrunner in this first golden age of local cinema, rise to prominence in post-war Hong Kong? What significance do the background of the company's emergence and the characteristics of its works have in understanding its inheritance within Hong Kong cinema history?

China was plunged into civil war immediately after its victory in the War of Resistance against Japan. Commodity prices in Shanghai fluctuated wildly, making it difficult for film studios to plan budgets. Consequently, they scrambled to relocate their base of operations and concentrated their funds as well as talent in Hong Kong. Among the filmmakers who came to Hong Kong in 1946 was Jiang Boying, who established Great China Film Development Co., Ltd. (aka Dazhonghua). In 1947, an article discussing the cessation of film production pointed out that Chinese cinema was at its most difficult juncture amid demobilisation. Due to domestic economic turmoil, every sector faced operating difficulties. The film industry was also dealt a harsh blow, resulting in its collapse in Hong Kong and Shanghai.[1] More specifically, the article focused on the plight of Great China, the largest film company in Hong Kong after demobilisation, which had no choice but to stop production. Nonetheless, the situation in colonial Hong Kong was relatively more stable than in the Mainland, so Yung Hwa jostled to begin operations at this moment in time. Clearly unafraid of the circumstances

1. 'The Trend of Great China Ceasing Film Production', *Screen Voice*, Singapore, No 119, 15 March 1947, p 3 (in Chinese).

that lay ahead, the company was confident it would build a first-class studio with its ample financial resources.

This essay will first discuss Yung Hwa's glorious days by examining the company's surviving documents related to the production and release of its works. It is worth noting that the multitude of talents who joined Yung Hwa were all elites from the Chinese film industry, with a number of left-wing filmmakers among them. Their presence undoubtedly transformed the face of Hong Kong cinema—but of course, the conditions of the era also played an indispensable role. Moreover, most of the filmmakers are experienced in both stage and film production, which imparted a uniqueness to both the company and its works. Although Yung Hwa did not produce many films, the studio rose to success like a bolt from the blue in the Hong Kong and even Chinese film industry in a critical period that was the late 1940s.

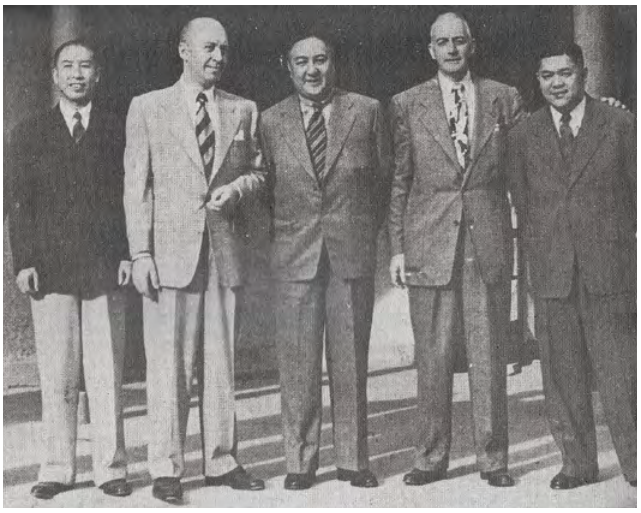


Trademark of Yung Hwa

Lost History Preserved in Documents

In 1947, Zhang Shankun, known as the 'King of Cinema', offered a proposal to the tycoon Li Zuyong to establish Yung Hwa in Hong Kong. Large-scale studios would be built at the same time to create a film empire that would rival any other in China. Originally from Zhejiang, Li was born in Shanghai to a finance magnate. After returning to China from the US, he taught at Kwang Hua University for a time and also oversaw the operations of businesses such as Daye Printing Factory. Yung Hwa, which specialised in Mandarin motion pictures, produced 22 feature films and two documentaries within the span of a decade, ten of which were made between 1948 and 1949 (see Table 1 and Table 2 at the end of this essay). With the negatives of its back catalogue destroyed by a fire in 1954, only the first three titles produced by the studio in the 1940s have survived more than 70 years later: *The Soul of China* (1948), *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (1948), and *Our Husband* (1949). Among the company's documents in the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) collection are the precious 'General Manager Office Meeting Minutes', which contain the proceedings of 30 meetings from 19 January 1948 to 2 February 1950. There is a list of the production committee members in Yung Hwa's heyday, and its operational situation as well as the difficulties it faced at the time are documented, offering a glimpse into the studio's production processes. The company's objectives are stated clearly in the minutes as to 'promote and extol traditional Chinese moral values; popularise and raise the bar on education in China.' The company was divided into two operational pillars: business and production. The former was run by Wang Yaotang, who had a background in law, while sound recording expert Lu Yuanliang (who simultaneously served as the studio head) oversaw the latter. There was also a production committee composed of Li Zuyong, Wang Yaotang, Lu Yuanliang, Richard Poh (aka Bu Wancang), Zhu Shilin, Li Pingqian, Wu Zuguang, Ouyang Yuqian, Gu Zhongyi, and Zhou Yibai. Cheng Bugao, Gao

Li Zuyong, founder of Yung Hwa



Li Zuyong (centre) and Zhang Shankun (1st right) welcoming guests from Hollywood to the Yung Hwa studio

Jilin (aka Ke Ling), and Zhang Junxiang also attended these meetings later.[2]

Having recruited a host of screenwriting, acting, and production talents, Yung Hwa set about shooting a series of films with great enthusiasm. It planted its roots in Hong Kong by constructing its studios there, with the ambition, of course, to thrive in the Mainland and overseas markets. From the box-office records of *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (see Table 3 and Table 4 at the end of this essay), we can see that the film premiered in Hong Kong on 11 November 1948, and then in Shanghai on 31 December 1948, covering the coveted New Year's slot. The first and second rounds of screenings in Hong Kong lasted half a year, while the run in Shanghai spanned five and a half months, far outstripping most films, which generally had a release period of only one or two weeks. The Mainland box office was a studio's life vein back then, much like the situation today, and the viewership of *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* exceeded 100,000 and 700,000 in Hong Kong and the Mainland respectively. Shanghai recorded the largest audience, with 289,102 viewers watching the feature across 12 cinemas, while 98,345 tickets were sold in Nanjing by one sole cinema. It is worth pointing out at this stage that not many cities screened the feature due to the civil war. The directors of *The Soul of China* and *Sorrows of the Forbidden City*, Richard Poh and Zhu Shilin, were both at one point branded as 'treasonable filmmakers' after China's victory in the War of Resistance against Japan. The fact that the two motion pictures managed to become blockbusters in the Mainland seemed to indicate that their tarnished reputation was water under the bridge at this point. It is also likely that Yung Hwa took this into account when it invested heftily into making its debut title. Box-office records indicate that in Hong Kong, there was normally a 45-55 revenue split between the company and the cinema, while the number would usually be 50-50 for the Mainland.

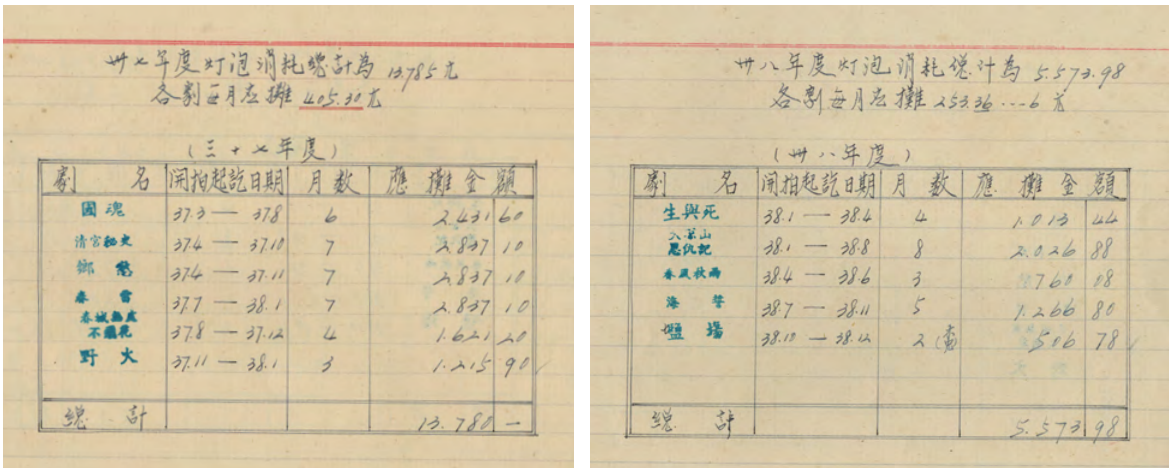
2. See Kwok Ching-ling, 'Revealed: Yung Hwa's Production Committee Meeting Minutes', *Newsletter*, Hong Kong Film Archive, Issue 85, August 2018, pp 21-28.

A spectacular moment at the screening of *The Soul of China* (1948)

These documents reveal that *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* was also screened in the Philippines and Singapore—and it is believed that there were more countries on the list. Towards the end of 1948, it was reported that Li Zuyong had taken *The Soul of China* and *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* to the US to strike overseas distribution and screening deals in a bid to tap into international markets.[3] Among the records pertaining to Yung Hwa's promotional items, it is observed that posters for *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* were sent to Vietnam, Paris, the US and Taiwan successively. They were still getting posted to Japan as late as 1950 and to France on multiple occasions. The film brochures printed by the company far outnumbered the 1,000-odd posters. For instance, 107,200 brochures were prepared for *Hearts Aflame* alone. In terms of distribution volume, King's Theatre received the most copies in Hong Kong (10,000), with Majestic Theatre in Kowloon taking 5,000, while Guangzhou received the most copies in the Mainland (15,000). As for foreign countries, Singapore was the most important market (10,000), with Maynilad (now Manila) coming in second at 5,000 copies. In fact, Yung Hwa's marketing campaigns were not only limited to the use of promotional materials. Reports in Shanghai at the time described them as 'full of splendid surprises and deploying all sorts of tricks', as the company employed strategies such as newspaper advertisements to recruit acting trainees, engaging in extensive cast poaching, churning out a barrage of new film trailers and open solicitation for scripts.[4]

The 'Studio Shooting Record' found among the documents lists all the features filmed at Yung Hwa's studios from March 1948 to December 1949. Set on realising its grand ambitions, the company recruited big-name screenwriters and directors, and shot several titles simultaneously despite having only two studios. As the filming of *The Soul of China* neared its end in August 1948, five titles were being shot concurrently (see Table 2), prompting Yung Hwa to urgently build a third studio. Subsequently, on 25 April 1949, a policy change was proposed to limit shooting to one title at the time, which could not be implemented given the

3. 'Li Zuyong Travels to the US', *The Chin-Chin Screen*, Shanghai, 16th Year, No 40, 22 December 1948 (in Chinese).
4. Shu Wen, '*The Soul of China*: What Yung Hwa Considers a Blockbuster is Nonsense to Me! A Behind-the-Scenes Look at Hong Kong Yung Hwa's Marketing Campaign', *The Chin-Chin Screen*, Shanghai, 16th Year, No 32, 6 October 1948 (in Chinese). The article also criticises the production technology used in *The Soul of China* as inadequate.



A table of 'ten and a half' films in the shooting record

circumstances. The company expanded too much, too soon, rendering its business difficult to sustain. Many problems emerged, and Yung Hwa was already in dire straits less than a year into its operations.

Chinese Cinema During the War of Resistance to Post-War Hong Kong

The essence of Yung Hwa's productions was shaped by the developments of 1940s Chinese cinema in various aspects. Li Han-hsiang, who was admitted to the company's training course in 1949, wrote about the situation there at the time: there were leftists, rightists, left-inclined centrists, right-inclined centrists, as well as a Shanghai faction and a Chongqing faction. The Shanghai faction was headed by Zhang Shankun, Zhu Shilin, and Li Pingqian, supported by deputies like Liu Qiong, Li Lihua and Sun Jinglu. Meanwhile, the three directors Zhang Junxiang, Wu Zuguang and Cheng Bugao led the Chongqing faction, supported by individuals such as Tao Jin, Bai Yang, Gu Eryi, Shu Xiuwen and Gao Zhanfei. Initially, the two groups intrigue against each other covertly, but a head-on conflict eventually broke out. It was only because Li Zuyong had managed to suppress it that the company was able to maintain operations for a while longer.[5] Although Li Han-hsiang's account refers to Yung Hwa's latter days, it gives us insight into the two contextual factors at play: one, most of the veteran filmmakers from Shanghai had worked at the Japanese-founded China United Film Holdings Company Ltd ('Huaying' in short); and two, the progressive literary and art workers from the temporary capital of Chongqing were influenced by left-wing ideologies. As Yung Hwa only sought to recruit the cream of the crop, these elites of the film and theatre industries with opposing views were all recruited and welcomed into the company's fold.

Of the ten titles produced by Yung Hwa from 1948 to 1949, the first two releases were

5. Li Han-hsiang, *Sanshi Nian Xishuo Congtou* (*Passing Flickers: Looking Back Thirty Years*), Vol 1, Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd., 1983, p 122 (in Chinese).

big-budget period films directed by Richard Poh (*The Soul of China*) and Zhu Shilin (*Sorrows of the Forbidden City*). Having two already established figures in Shanghai cinema at the helm would ensure that the company started off with a bang. Zhang Shankun's decision to present two period epics as Yung Hwa's debut titles stemmed from his success in Shanghai. In 1939, during the Orphan Island period in Shanghai, *Hua Mu Lan* (aka *Maiden in Armour / Mulan Joins the Army*), directed by Poh, written by Ouyang Yuqian, and starring Nancy Chan Wan-seung, caused a sensation. At the time, films that overtly portrayed anti-Japanese sentiment were banned, thus filmmakers turned to a more nuanced approach by using the past to satirise the present. This, in turn, led to the rise of patriotic historical period films.

The Soul of China was written by Wu Zuguang of the Chongqing faction. Wu recalled that when he left Chongqing for Shanghai near the end of 1946, Gong Zhifang, the editor of a newspaper, visited him along with director Poh. He was told that Yung Hwa wanted to make an extravagant epic for its debut, and that the stage play written by Wu in 1940, *The Song of the Righteous Spirits*, depicting the selfless sacrifice of renowned Song dynasty prime minister Wen Tianxiang for his country, had been chosen as the screenplay. Wu said that when he wrote the piece in 1940, it was specifically to address the battle for the entire nation that was taking place. By the time he was approached by Poh, Japanese imperialism had already been defeated, so he feared he would not have the same zeal in writing the screenplay. Poh, on the other hand, believed that this period of history, in which the Southern Song dynasty resisted the Yuan empire, embodied the righteousness of the Chinese nation, a quality that should not be bound by time. Because the physical limits of the stage do not apply in film, the script's potential would be realised to its fullest. Wu ultimately agreed to come on board and took on his first project as a screenwriter before moving to Hong Kong.[6] Wu mentioned that the practice of using historical events as metaphors for the present was quite commonplace during the Japanese invasion of China.

Before discussing the left-wing filmmakers at Yung Hwa, such as Wu Zuguang, Cheng Bugao, Ke Ling, and Zhang Junxiang, as well as works ranging from *Virtue in the Dust* (1949) to *Little Shrimp* (aka *Life of Little Shrimp, Part One*, 1949), it is necessary to begin by talking about the left-wing film movement in the 1930s. On the subject of left-wing cinema aesthetics, Wong Ain-ling observes that 'left-wing thinking is in fact a western invention which has found favour with the youth and intellectuals in Europe and seeped into the cultural milieu of literature, theatre, film and painting since the 1920s and 30s.'[7] In China, the left-wing film movement flourished in Shanghai in the 1930s. When Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing) ran into problems in 1932, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s underground

6. Wu Zuguang, *Yibeizi: Wu Zuguang Huiyilu* (*A Lifetime: The Memoirs of Wu Zuguang*), Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing House, 2004, p 313 (in Chinese). According to Wu's account, his second screenplay was *Mister in Distress*, written in 1947. It was originally penned at the invitation of Huang Zuolin, a director at Wenhua Film Company in Shanghai, and tailor-made for Liu Qiong. The script later ended up in Yung Hwa, with Li Pingqian serving as director (pp 315-316). There was a major dispute in 1950, in which Li Zuyong set fire to parts of *Mister in Distress* that had already been filmed, and Li Pingqian, among others, left the company.
7. May Ng and Hui Pui-lam (collated), 'Wong Ain-ling on the Aesthetics of Left-wing Cinema', *Newsletter*, Hong Kong Film Archive, Issue 87, February 2019, p 10.

organisation had a meeting and decided that Xia Yan, A Ying, and Zheng Boqi would join the studio to start infiltrating privately owned film companies and gain a foothold in the realm of cinema.[8]

William Tay, Wong Kai-chee, and Lo Wai-luen point out that, similar to how the Shanghai concessions held a special status in the 1930s, Hong Kong became an important base for promoting Chinese politics, culture, and literature in the post-war period. By September 1945, the Central Committee of the CCP had already instructed the Guangdong District Committee to send cadres to Hong Kong and Guangzhou to occupy propaganda territory. Subsequently the military conflict between the Nationalists and the Communists officially broke out, and a substantial number of culture workers travelled south to Hong Kong after experiencing multiple upheavals. This, in turn, led to a sudden flourish of literary and artistic activities in Hong Kong between 1947 and 1949.[9] At the time, the left-wing approach was basically to popularise, revolutionise, and criticise the bourgeois stance on literature and art. In other words, they used literature and art as a tool and an alternative means of complementing their broader propaganda strategy.

In comparing two collective left-wing critical reviews of films in Shanghai and Hong Kong of the 1930s and 1940s, Su Tao and Li Pin spot certain obvious discrepancies, likely a reflection of the marked differences between the two eras. For the former era, 'the relatively loose collective retained a considerable degree of openness and diversity,' while for the latter era, Su and Li note that '...the films were written by a single person after collective discussion and revised by Xia Yan before official release, thus ensuring continuity and consistency in terms of critique standards.... This demonstrates a more noticeable tendency of "unification".'[10] Despite the left wing having a strong voice, many local writers in Hong Kong at the time were in fact distanced from the political affairs of the Mainland Chinese literati residing in the city, which meant the community might not have had a significant influence on local readers.[11] With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, a large group of literati who had came south immediately returned to the North to participate in the founding of the nation.

Close Encounters Between Film and Theatre

Meanwhile, the theatre movement during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai between 1937 and 1945 (including the Orphan Island period from 1937 to 1941) is also deeply connected

8. Xia Yan, 'Preface', *Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi 1927–1937 Di Shiqi Ji Dianyingji Yi* (*Chinese New Literature Series 1927–1937 Vol 17 Film Anthology 1*), Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House, 1984, p 4 (in Chinese).
9. William Tay, Wong Kai-chee & Lo Wai-luen (eds), *Guogong Neizhan Shiqi Xianggang Wenxue Ziliao Xuan (Yijiusiwu–Yijiusijiu)* (*Selected Documents on Hong Kong Literature During the Chinese Civil War [1945–1949]*), Hong Kong: Cosmos Book Ltd., 1999, p 4 (in Chinese).
10. Su Tao & Li Pin, '"Film Essays of the Seven Critics": A Supplementary and Textual Analysis', *Film Art*, Beijing, No 6, 2021, pp 155-156 (in Chinese).
11. See note 9, pp 6-9.

to Yung Hwa's early works. Among the studio's titles made between 1948 and 1949, only *The Soul of China*, *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* and *The Sins of Our Fathers* (1949) were adapted from stage plays, but there were many writers who worked in both film and theatre during this period, and almost all of Yung Hwa's directors and screenwriters had a background in the latter. Gu Zhongyi, a key figure in drama circles, experienced first-hand the theatre movement during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, and documented the rise and fall of theatre troupes over this period in 'The Decade-Long Shanghai Theatre Movement'.[12] After the War of Resistance against Japan broke out, the film industry slumped. Theatre, on the other hand, flourished unexpectedly in Shanghai. Studios and equipment were destroyed in bombings, and there was also a shortage of film stock. With shipping between China and the US cut off, there were no Western motion pictures available for screening either. Consequently, cinemas became performance venues for stage plays. In 1942, over a dozen film companies were merged to form China United Film Company Limited ('Zhonglian' in short), which was subsequently reorganised into Huaying the following year. Although most of the screenwriting and directorial elites of that era had been recruited by Huaying, there were still many filmmakers who opted for the theatre instead of joining the Japanese-controlled company. The dejected citizens of the occupied zones longed to watch plays, thus leading to the theatre boom.

The Shanghai Theatre Art Society, which was established in 1938, comprised outstanding on- and off-stage talents of the Orphan Island period. The works presented by the troupe featured writers and directors the likes of Li Jianwu, Yu Ling, Wu Renzhi, Gu Zhongyi, Chen Xihe (aka Wan Yue), Tian Han, Wu Yonggang, Hong Shen (aka Hung Sum), Zhang Junxiang (aka Yuan Jun), Huang Zuolin, and Yao Ke, etc. The troupe performed professionally on a long-term basis, expressing that its members 'worked in theatre for "survival" and "lifestyle"...but did not forget "the times"'[13]. In 1939, amateur theatre troupes surged in numbers, but then vanished without a trace when Japanese troops marched into the concessions in 1941. The Shanghai Theatre Art Society was also dissolved at this time.

Half a year after the Japanese occupation of the concessions, Shanghai fell into recession, prompting the masses to retreat to the home front. When opportunities returned to Shanghai later, the population increased again. Entertainment venues flourished and cinemas were converted into theatres. The industry was at its zenith the year before the victory of the war, but its goals were mainly avoiding enemy attention and sustaining the livelihoods of theatre workers. Tianfeng Drama Troupe, led by Yao Ke in its early days, and subsequently, Fei Mu, was among the professional troupes that were formed in this later period. After its disbandment, Fei took most of the original members with him and founded Shanghai Theatrical Art Troupe. It was the first large-scale troupe to be formally established after the Japanese occupation of the concessions.

12. See Gu Zhongyi, 'The Decade-Long Shanghai Theatre Movement' in *Kangzhan Shinian Lai Zhongguo De Xiju Yundong Yu Jiaoyu* (*Chinese Theatre Movement and Education During the Ten-Years of War of Resistance Against Japan*), Hong Shen, Shanghai: Zhonghua Book Company, 1948, pp 143-182 (in Chinese).
13. Ibid, p 155.

In the latter half of 1943, the theatre scene in Shanghai was dealt an unprecedented blow. The Japanese schemed to seize control of the industry, and theatre troupes either disbanded or voiced their objection in private. In the end, Zhang Shankun of Huaying set up United Theatre Company and recruited actors with hefty salaries. Nonetheless, half a year later, Zhang lost the will to continue running the troupe. Theatre troupes of various sizes emerged and folded one after another, among which included Film Workers United Drama Troupe, founded by individuals from Guohua Film Company (with Zhou Manhua and Shu Shi as key members), as well as touring theatre troupes (such as China Travelling Drama Troupe, led by Tang Huaiqiu). In addition to Shanghai, performances were also held in locations such as Beijing, Tianjin, Hankou, Nanjing, Hangzhou and Suzhou.

Gu Zhongyi documented the history of major theatre troupes, while Ke Ling described the success and proliferation of plays during this period as 'unexpected'. The active professionalisation of theatre resulted in the art form's gradual maturation. He summarises the situation as 'two less and three mores': 'less original scripts and less depictions of real life; more adaptations, more comedies, and more historical works'.[14] After five or six years of stage training and life experience within a trying environment, many talents became forces to be reckoned with, and a lot of them joined the Hong Kong film industry after the war.[15] Ke Ling, an adept scriptwriter in his own right, elaborates in detail the content of certain screenplays in his essay. From the examples he gives, we can decipher the influence upon Yung Hwa's filmmakers, which likely affected the subsequent variations. For instance, the trope of the henpecked husband, the social tragedies that befell farmers and fisherfolk, the poignancy infused into each work, and so on. Worthy of mention are two adaptions by Shi Huafu (aka Chen Linrui), namely *Banquet* (based on *Dinner at Eight* by American playwrights George S Kaufman and Edna Ferber) and *Burial at Sea* (adapted from Yang Chen-sing's novel *Paomao*). The former is a revealing social tragedy, while the latter depict the lives of fisherfolk, and both films have the theme of revenge at their core.[16] These works are reminiscent of productions by Yung Hwa, such as *Hearts Aflame* (1949) and *A Fisherman's Honour* (1949).

While commenting on techniques in cinematic expression, Zhang Junxiang, director of *Hearts Aflame*, stresses the emphasis that 1940s filmmakers with a theatre background placed on dramatic effect. In his self-penned *On the Unique Expression Techniques of Cinema*, he writes at length about the handling of dramatic conflicts, believing that what interests the audience is the characters' journey towards their outcomes. The relationship between the plot and the characters' personalities need to be shaped by dramatic elements in the plot, so that layer after layer is revealed as the story progresses. In other words, the characters develop as the plot develops. Only such works can capture the hearts of the audience, enable viewers to

14. Ke Ling, '"The Belt Gradually Loosens but There Are No Regrets"—A Glimpse of Dramatic Literature During the Japanese Occupation of Shanghai', *Juchang Ouji*, Tianjin: Baihua Literature & Art Publishing House and Xinhua Bookstore in Tianjin, 1983, pp 24-28 (in Chinese).

15. This period had a long-lasting influence on Hong Kong cinema. For example, there was a more noticeable presence of adaptations of world-renowned novels and comedies in the 1950s and 1960s.

16. See note 14, p 46.

become increasingly immersed as the characters gradually grow, and generate an infectious energy which stirs up emotions.[17] How are Ke Ling and Zhang Junxiang's theories and insights reflected in their works?

In the treatment of time and space, Yung Hwa's works mostly take the 'continuation' approach—that is, the timeline and story move forward with occasional time jumps, which is beneficial to character development.[18] In terms of theme, Yung Hwa's works mainly focused on 'history', 'anti-feudalism', and 'revelation' (as mentioned in the production committee meeting dated 2 February 1950). Among the company's ten or so films made in the 1940s, *The Soul of China* and *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* were period films with distinct historical backgrounds. In the early days of post-war Chinese cinema, only Yung Hwa had the ability to create such large-scale productions. At the time, the studio's features were mainly 'anti-feudal' and 'revelatory' in nature. Yet *Our Husband*, written and directed by Li Pingqian, seems to be in a league of its own. In the film, the tactful wife (played by Li Lihua) uses her wit to stand up to the headstrong and alluring courtesan (portrayed by Sun Jinglu). Each woman is beautiful in their own way, and the film is a fine example of enticing melodrama. Meanwhile, the creative characteristics of other Yung Hwa titles based on the theme of 'anti-feudalism' can be seen from the surviving film brochures, dialogue lists and screenplays.

On the eve of Yung Hwa's establishment, Kunlun Film Company and The United Photoplay Service Limited's Film Society from Shanghai produced the two instalments of *Spring River Flows East*, *Part One: The Eight War-torn Years* and *Part Two: The Dawn* in 1947, which were hits in the Mainland. Critics believe that the films' success was attributed to 'the use of the family drama genre to evoke the audience's memories of the war and to help them heal from the trauma and despair they experienced.'[19] The films also used 'mainstream melodrama to create commercial appeal, "sugar-coating" left-wing critical realism and civic education ideologies (Cai Chusheng's words), so that both the literary and artistic functions of "satire" and "entertainment" are served."[20] Yung Hwa invited Bai Yang, Tao Jin, and Shu Xiuwen, who starred in *Spring River Flows East*, to come to Hong Kong and play the leads in titles such as *Virtue in the Dust*, *A Peasant's Tragedy* (1949), *Hearts Aflame*, and *A Fisherman's Honour*. *Virtue in the Dust* and *A Fisherman's Honour* were both directed by Cheng Bugao and written by Ke Ling; Yuan Jun and Wan Yue served respectively as director and screenwriter for *Hearts Aflame*, while *A Peasant's Tragedy* was directed by Wu Zuguang and written by Tang Mo. Unfortunately, how well did the film come out remains a mystery, and we can only make inferences from the information we have on hand. Yung Hwa was

17. Zhang Junxiang, *Guanyu Dianying De Teshu Biaoxian Shouduan* (*On the Unique Expression Techniques of Cinema*), Beijing: China Film Press, 1959, pp 46-47 (in Chinese).
18. Yao Yi-wei elaborates on 'continuation' and 'concentration', two traditional approaches to the treatment of time and space, in *Drama Theory* (Taipei: Bookman Books Ltd., 1997 [1992], pp 185-189 [in Chinese]). 'Concentration' tends to highlight circumstances and events rather than characters' personality traits, and the 'action' of the story is often told backwards, pushing towards a crisis, keeping the audience emotionally engaged right until the climax of the story (pp 199-201).
19. Kenny Ng, *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow: Hong Kong Cinema with Sino-links in Politics, Art, and Tradition*, Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company (Hong Kong) Limited, 2021, pp 49-50 (in Chinese).
20. Ibid, p 22.

Early works of Yung Hwa produced in 1949: (from left) *Our Husband*, *A Peasant's Tragedy*, *A Fisherman's Honour*

ambitious, and observed that its producers and creators did not want to induce audience sympathy simply by replicating the tragic experiences of a heroine as in *Spring River Flows East*, but also attempted to offer vivid depictions of the human struggle.

The character Jinzhi (played by Shu Xiuwen) in *Virtue in the Dust* leads a turbulent life, frequently falling with the wrong men and gradually sliding into disgrace. She has an epiphany after a harrowing experience and devotes herself to serving society. The film illustrates her journey of suffering from the village to the city. On the other hand, the studio's 'anti-feudal' works focused on old society, with *A Peasant's Tragedy* and *Hearts Aflame* centred on rural villagers, and *A Fisherman's Honour* depicting the lives of fisherfolk. *A Peasant's Tragedy* is a war story about a husband and wife's internal struggles after the latter is forced into an 'affair' following the former's dispatch to the frontlines. Will this loving couple survive the ordeal? Meanwhile, *Hearts Aflame* tells of a forbidden romance in the countryside with an anti-feudal slant. Goodwill is sown, but hatred is reaped. With benevolence running deep, but malice running even deeper, is mutual destruction the only solution? Furthermore, *A Fisherman's Honour* is a film about a group of oppressed fisherfolk which also highlights their traditions. There is an unwritten law whereby everyone is obliged to take part in the rescue effort when a vessel encounters danger. At such a time of crisis, personal grudges ought to be cast aside. Must one be forced to save the life of their father's murderer in this instance? The characters are plagued by deep-seated resentment and gradually driven to bone-chilling desperation. When Lo Wai-luk compared Cao Yu's plays written in the 1930s and 1940s with their film adaptations in the 1950s and 1960s, he found that the latter often had a more hopeful ending than the original material.[21] While Yung Hwa advocated 'anti-feudalism', it was still deeply immersed in the old world. Nonetheless, from the perspective of conceptualisation, these depictions of the then present carry considerable weight. Meanwhile, the approach taken in different eras often reflects the conditions of the times and embodies the sentiments and hopes of the people therein.

The left-leaning Tao Jin starred in all three of the aforementioned films. Ironically, the progressive filmmakers' political stance at the time were scattered along the leftist spectrum,

21. Lo Wai-luk, *Xianggang Yueyupian Yishu Lunji* (*An Anthology of Artistic Treatises on Cantonese Cinema in Hong Kong*), Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company (Hong Kong) Limited, 2019, pp 140-141 (in Chinese).

and those at Yung Hwa happened to be stuck in the cracks. The studio had unparalleled talents as well as conditions at the time, and was serious about its production. However, the leftists used newspapers as bastions of public opinion and constantly criticised the company's works. These attacks, of course, were also aimed at its capitalist owner Li Zuyong. Four months after its release in Hong Kong, *Hearts Aflame* opened in Shanghai in February 1950, attracting an audience of over 80,000. The Standing Committee of the Shanghai Film Critics Association believed it was a very typical formalist work exemplifying 'technical theory'. On 16 April 1950, Hong Kong's *Wen Wei Po* (aka *Wen Wei Pao*) published an extensive article titled '*Hearts Aflame*: The Screenwriter, Director, and Actors Engage in Self-Examination'. Through the ruthless self-criticism of Zhang Junxiang and his wife Bai Yang, as well as Chen Xihe and Tao Jin, it was hoped that Hong Kong filmmakers would learn to 'overcome the tendency to fixate on formalism and technique by way of reflection'.

At this point in time, Richard Poh set about directing *The Sins of Our Fathers* after wrapping *The Soul of China*. Adapted from the stage play of the same name by Li Hongxin, it portrays conflict between the Han and Yi tribes with Liangshan as the backdrop. Following a research field trip to the Mainland, the set was built at the studios. Meanwhile, Wu Zuguang's *Little Shrimp*, adapted from Kuk Lau (aka Wong Kuk-lau)'s novel *The Story of Shrimp-ball*, saw a shift from the company's previous practice of filming mainly in the studio. Instead, it opted for location shoots in the streets and alleys, resulting in abundant Hong Kong Island and Kowloon scenery being captured on film. Zhu Shilin's second work as a director at Yung Hwa was *Life and Death* (1949), penned by his protégé Cen Fan. He would later adopt this model for cultivating screenwriting and directorial talent at Feng Huang Motion Picture Co.'s *Salt Farm*, the final unfinished feature in the 'Studio Shooting Record', was written and directed by Shu Shi, who was among many of the leftist filmmakers deported by the Hong Kong government in 1952.

A Brief Note on Yung Hwa and Late 1940s Hong Kong Cinema

Wu Zuguang can be considered the first left-wing filmmaker to join Yung Hwa. During his stay in Hong Kong from 1947 to 1949, he often attended literary and artistic events and issued joint declarations.[22] He said that he had joined the company at Li Zuyong's invitation, and that he in turn introduced Zhang Junxiang, Bai Yang and Ke Ling to Yung Hwa.[23] Although Wu's first screenplay was *The Soul of China*, which he wrote in the Mainland, he first joined Great China as screenwriter and director when he came to Hong Kong to work, making *Enjoy While Young* (aka *Waste Not Our Youth*, 1949) and *Latecomer in the Snow* (1949). Inspired by the novel *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, *Enjoy While Young* is lively and whimsy in terms of both the adaptation and shooting techniques. *Latecomer in*

22. See note 9, pp 281-433.
23. See note 6, p 322.

the Snow is a reworking of Wu's own stage play of the same name, and is based on his own obsession with Peking opera during his youth. The gentle male *dan* actor Wei Liansheng and the strong-willed fourth concubine Yuchun are polar opposites in terms of personality, but there is a subtle balance to their relationship, like two stars on the opposite sides of the horizon. It is a refreshing work completely devoid of the gut-wrenchingly tragic elements of similar *Qiu Haitang*-style films that would come later, yet it leaves a lasting impression on the viewer. *The Soul of China* was a spirited contribution to a noble national cause, but with *Enjoy While Young* receiving much criticism,[24] Wu never made features in the same vein again in Hong Kong.

Among the progressive filmmakers who joined Yung Hwa, it can be seen from the 'General Manager Office Meeting Minutes' that the renowned playwrights Ouyang Yuqian, Gu Zhongyi, and Zhou Yibai formed the backbone of the studio's screenwriting team during its early days. Gu also served as the class teacher of the company's actor training course. Li Zuyong took pride in having recruited these three veterans, and put them in charge of reviewing and assembling screenplays for the company. For example, it was Gu who recommended the script of *A Peasant's Tragedy* to Wu Zuguang, which became the first film Wu directed at Yung Hwa.[25] Ouyang, Gu, and Zhou are not credited in any titles in the company's productions, but they had, in fact, penned screenplays titled *Fragrant Grass and Cuckoo* (Ouyang), *Female Shop Assistant* (Gu), and *A Lover's Knot* (Zhou), for which filming never began. Obviously, the filmmakers did not just work for Yung Hwa. The most seasoned of them, Ouyang (who was nearing 60 at the time), had come to Hong Kong for film work as early as the 1930s. He was very active in the literary and art circles during the year he spent in Hong Kong between 1948 and 1949. In 1948, he raised funds with the likes of Gu Eryi, Gu Yelu (aka Ku Ya-lo), Gao Zhanfei to establish Daguangming Film Company, and went on to write and direct its debut title *Everlasting Green* (aka *Wild Fire and Spring Wind*, 1948). He also penned and directed *Way to Love* (1949) for Nanqun Film Company. If one were to compare *Way to Love* with Yung Hwa's productions, one would notice a stark contrast in both essence and orientation. *Way to Love* spans from the Northern Expedition to the victory of the War of Resistance against Japan and traverses vast territories, including Shanghai, Guangzhou and Southwest China. Through the intimate story of a respectable intellectual and his lover, the work captures something universal. Regarding the trials and tribulations experienced by the couple in the film, Ouyang said that this feature 'shoulders the burden of history',[26] and it also serves as a footnote to a generation of intellectuals.

In contrast to *Way to Love*, two of Nanqun's other productions, namely *Storm in the South* (aka *Seeking Filial Alliance*, directed by Zhang Min, written by Xia Yan and Ge Qin, 1949) and *Gia Liang Kiang Be My Destiny* (aka *All Quiet in the Kialing River / Quietly Flows the Jialing River*, directed and written by Zhang Min, 1949), were revolution films with clear themes. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the policy on literature and

24. Ibid, p 321.
25. Ibid.
26. Shi Kuanhuai, 'An Attempted Review of *Way to Love*', *Wen Wei Pao*, 18 July 1949 (in Chinese).

art in Hong Kong was amended. Great Wall, Feng Huang and Sun Luen thrived and took up the baton of developing leftist cinema in Hong Kong. The die had been cast, and Yung Hwa became a member of the right-wing camp due to its partiality for Taiwan.

Farewell, Yung Hwa

Lu Yuanliang, general manager of Yung Hwa Motion Picture Studio (and later general manager of Clear Water Bay Film Studio), writes in his 1997 autobiography:

> In 1947, I met Li Zuyong through the introduction of Zhang Shankun, and he invited me to help him plan the construction of a large-scale film studio.
>
> Zhang Shankun left Yung Hwa in 1949. To be honest, Zhang Shankun was the mastermind behind Yung Hwa's establishment. All the well-known screenwriters and directors were recruited by him.... Yung Hwa was not surprised at his departure, nor did they comment on it. However, after he left, it was as if Yung Hwa had lost its soul.... It took a tumble and could not get back up. Everything went downhill from there...
>
> When Yung Hwa fell into financial distress, the three deputy managers (Shao Xinhu, Zhang Xinglian, Li Zulai) and I suggested him (Li Zuyong) to separate the studio from the business, so that it could continue operating by pairing the equipment with various professionals and charging a per-item fee to carry out filming for other production units... [By adopting this model,] it would have been absolutely possible to break even and perhaps make a profit. It would have also ensured that Yung Hwa's productions were given priority. He considered this suggestion from the four of us as disgraceful and rejected it on the spot....
>
> I left Yung Hwa in March 1950.... Myself, along with the three deputy managers, Shao Xinhu, Zhang Xinglian, and Li Zulai were his closest allies. We thought of every possible way to keep the company afloat, but when our proposal for the independent operation of the studio was turned down, we ultimately opted to resign collectively.

Lu had been involved since the construction of the studio. In his written account of his time at Yung Hwa almost half a century later, he still could not conceal his indignation over his inability to turn the tide at the eleventh hour. On the other hand, Shu Shi recalls:

> Many of us were already not happy with the boss. He wanted us to make films that could be sold to Taiwan, but we wanted to make progressive films. Such conflicts were actually the conflict of the time.[27]

Meanwhile, Hu Siao-fung, who was an actor at Yung Hwa at the time (and later a director at The Great Wall Movie Enterprises Ltd), describes:

27. Wong Ain-ling, 'Shu Shi' in *Monographs of Hong Kong Film Veterans (2): An Age of Idealism: Great Wall & Feng Huang Days*, Wong Ain-ling (ed), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2001, p 57.

> After the 1949 Liberation…we formed a study group…and we studied hard, taking notes as we met in Yung Hwa's dorm. Yung Hwa didn't like that and we left the company.[28]

As the times surged forward, the privileged Li Zuyong was unable to keep everything under control. Yung Hwa acted too hastily from the outset, and Li failed to adjust the company's strategy to adapt to the circumstances. Between 1946 and 1947, Yung Hwa recruited industry elites and aspired to create quality Chinese motion pictures. It shone for a time within a specific space during that era. With the onset of political upheaval, the income from the Mainland market dropped significantly, and Li eventually lost his assets in China. Yung Hwa's operations were rendered unsustainable, and many members of the committee either returned north after the founding of New China, or sought other ways out in the Hong Kong film industry. Left-wing figures like Gu Zhongyi, Zhou Yibai, Ouyang Yuqian, and Wu Zuguang went back to China one after another. Zhu Shilin, Li Pingqian, and Cheng Bugao, who stayed in Hong Kong, joined Hong Kong leftist film companies Great Wall and Feng Huang, while Richard Poh set up Taishan Film Company. From 1948 to 1949, Yung Hwa was home to outstanding talents in various areas, who then went their separate ways. It marked a brief point in time where the best of the best came together before the Hong Kong film industry was divided into left and right camps.

The establishment of Yung Hwa had much to do with the 'King of Cinema', Zhang Shankun. Nonetheless, he had no position within the company and never attended any production committee meetings. Perhaps it was because Zhang was suspected of being a traitor at the time that he could only offer advice in the shadows and help recruit talents behind the scenes. His approach eventually went against that of Li Zuyong, and he left to establish Great Wall. After Yung Hwa released ten titles in the final two years of the 1940s, it lost momentum. The company's next production, *Prisoner of Love*, was not released until late 1951, almost two years after its most recent offering. Yung Hwa then collaborated on several films with Yan Jun between 1952 and 1956, propelling Linda Lin Dai to stardom and helping Li Han-hsiang embark on the path of directing. Even though the circumstances went from bad to worse later, Li Zuyong could not get filmmaking out of his mind. *Flying Tigers*, which began production in 1956, wrapped just before his sudden death in 1959.

The War of Resistance caused much hardship amid the turbulent 1940s, and the rise of left-wing ideologies made an indelible mark on the entire country, society, as well as a generation of people. Yung Hwa's early Mandarin films were largely in the same vein as their Shanghai counterparts. The experiences of the company's talents during troubled times and their theatrical training helped make its works shine. Yung Hwa set up a screenwriting and directing committee, and even had behind-the-scenes strategists such as Gu Zhongyi participating extensively in the reviewing and assembling of screenplays. In addition to reflecting the times, each meticulously crafted script were nonetheless not limited to depicting the human concerns of one particular moment or place. However, Li Zuyong's mentality of

28. Donna Chu, 'Hu Siao-fung', ibid, p 164.

'promoting the benefits of traditional Chinese moral values' and his refusal to adapt during a time of great change meant that his ideals were destined to come into conflict with those of the progressive filmmakers who joined Yung Hwa, and increasingly so as time went on. As the boss and chairman of the production committee, Li was heavily involved in deciding the direction to be followed by each work. He even demanded that changes be made to certain films, leading to clashes.[29] At the same time, many of the established figures who were recruited to come to Hong Kong with large sums of money obviously had plans to better convey their ideas outside of Yung Hwa. As mentioned earlier, they either joined or set up other film companies.

Although the history of Yung Hwa was brief, many of the elites who were once part of the organisation would go on to become the backbone of the Hong Kong film industry in the future. Their stories show how the Hong Kong film industry developed after inheriting what Chinese filmmakers had left behind. Yu Mo-wan believed that Li Zuyong's establishment of Yung Hwa helped Mandarin features gain a foothold in Hong Kong and laid the foundation for their development. It also championed the introduction of Hong Kong films into the international film market.[30] From raising the quality of Hong Kong cinema to contributing to its prosperity, Yung Hwa indeed played a significant role in connecting the past and future of the film industry. The company's studios were eventually taken over by Cathay, and later, Golden Harvest. Meanwhile, *The Soul of China* and *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* clearly enabled Li Han-hsiang to find his true vision as a filmmaker—his ideals concerning the period drama were later realised in vivid colour at Shaw Brothers.

The establishment of Yung Hwa was an important chapter in the southern migration of the Chinese film industry's hub to Hong Kong in the post-war period. The relevant documents indicate the conditions of Hong Kong and the Mainland back then, leaving a clear footprint in the sands of time. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists broke out in the late 1940s after the victory of the War of Resistance against Japan. Everything was shrouded in chaos and society was left in shambles. There was an urgent need to restore morale and order. Yung Hwa's advocacy of 'anti-feudalism', 'upholding moral values' and 'universal education', among other ideals, were actually the propositions that aspiring filmmakers expressed through their works in the 1950s. The emergence of Yung Hwa in the transitional period of the late 1940s was undoubtedly iconic, as it paved the way for the future blossoming of Hong Kong cinema. [Translated by Johnny Ko]

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29. For example, Li Zuyong insisted on adding a scene at the end of *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* (1948) to show the people's affection for Guangxu Emperor. The screenwriter objected but to no avail. See note 2, p 26.
30. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang Dianying Bashinian* (*Eighty Years of Hong Kong Cinema*), Hong Kong: Regional Council, 1994, p 84 (in Chinese).

[Table 1] Yung Hwa's Productions Between 1948 and 1949

No.	Film Title	Director	Screenwriter/Original Story	Starring	Release Date
1	*The Soul of China*	Richard Poh	Wu Zuguang/Wu Zuguang's stage play *The Song of the Righteous Spirits*	Liu Qiong, Gu Eryi	1948.9.9
2	*Sorrows of the Forbidden City*	Zhu Shilin	Yao Ke/Yao Ke's stage play	Zhou Xuan, Shu Shi	1948.11.11
3	*Our Husband*	Li Pingqian	Li Pingqian	Li Lihua, Sun Jinglu	1949.2.5
4	*Virtue in the Dust*	Cheng Bugao	Ke Ling	Shu Xiuwen, Wang Yuen-lung	1949.5.13
5	*A Peasant's Tragedy*	Wu Zuguang	Tang Mo/Sui Qing's novel *Bolted Horse*	Tao Jin, Bai Yang	1949.6.7
6	*The Sins of Our Fathers*	Richard Poh	Li Hongxin/Li Hongxin's stage play	Liu Qiong, Sun Jinglu	1949.8.9
7	*Hearts Aflame*	Yuan Jun (aka Zhang Junxiang)	Wan Yue (aka Chen Xihe)	Bai Yang, Tao Jin	1949.10.9
8	*A Fisherman's Honour*	Cheng Bugao	Ke Ling	Tao Jin, Li Lihua	1949.11.22
9	*Little Shrimp*	Wu Zuguang	Wu Zuguang/Kuk Lau's novel *The Story of Shrimp-ball Vol I*	Shu Shi, Lü En	1949.12.15
10	*Life and Death*	Zhu Shilin	Cen Fan	Wang Xichun, Xu Li	Singapore (1949); Hong Kong (1953)

[Table 2] Yung Hwa's Film Shooting Schedule (Compiled based on the 'Studio Shooting Record')

Shooting Timetable																							
		1948										1949											
No.	Film Title	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1	*The Soul of China*	■	■	■	■	■	■																
2	*Sorrows of the Forbidden City*		■	■	■	■	■	■	■														
3	*A Peasant's Tragedy*		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■													
4	*Our Husband*					■	■	■	■	■	■	■											
5	*Virtue in the Dust*						■	■	■	■	■												
6	*Hearts Aflame*									■	■	■											
7	*Life and Death*											■	■	■	■								
8	*The Sins of Our Fathers*											■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
9	*Little Shrimp*														■	■	■						
10	*A Fisherman's Honour*																	■	■	■	■	■	
11	*Salt Farm* (unfinished)																				■	■	■

Several films were made concurrently in 1948, which peaked to a total of five films being made at the same time in August 1948. This breakneck pace had slowed down by January 1949.

[Table 3] Audience Numbers for Public Screenings of *Sorrows of the Forbidden City*

Region	Date	Number of Cinema(s)	Number of Audience Members	Remarks
Hong Kong	1948.11.11–1949.5.18	12	Over 106,436	Only box-office figures were available from some cinemas with no details on audience numbers.
Mainland China	1948.12.31–1949.5.16	28	Over 731,794	Only box-office figures were available from some cinemas with no details on audience numbers.
Macao	1949.3.5–1949.3.7	1	4,834	–
Singapore	1949.1.23–1949.2.15	5	39,383	–
Manila	1949.1.27–1949.2.2	1	–	Only box-office figures were available.

[Table 4] Audience Numbers for Public Screenings of *Sorrows of the Forbidden City* in the Mainland

Region	Date	Number of Cinema(s)	Number of Audience Members (In Descending Order)
Shanghai	1948.12.31–1949.5.16	12	289,102
Hangzhou	1949.1.28–1949.2.7	2	183,534
Guangdong Province (including Shiqi and other places)	1949.3.9–1949.5.4	6	99,453
Nanjing	1949.1.28–1949.2.22	1	98,345
Suzhou	1949.2.11–1949.2.20	3 (including Young Men's Christian Association in Suzhou)	36,455
Changzhou	1949.4.7–1949.4.14	2	14,312
Jiangxi	1949.4.14–1949.4.21	2 (including the Social Services Coordination Office)	10,593 (no audience number details from the Social Services Coordination Office)
			Total: Over 731,794

The Disunity of Body and Soul: Border-Crossing Anxieties in the First Post-War Hong Kong Song-and-Dance Film *Portrait of Four Beauties*

Timmy Chih-Ting Chen

Produced by Great China Film Development Co., Ltd. (aka Dazhonghua) and directed by Hu Xinling (1914–2000), *Portrait of Four Beauties* (1948), the first post-war Hong Kong Mandarin song-and-dance film,[1] was conceived as a comeback film for Hu Xinling and the 'Four Sisters of Shanghai Cinema': Kung Chiu-hsia, Chen Qi, Zhang Fan and Chen Chuan-chuan. In Japanese-occupied Shanghai, the four actresses starred in the film produced by China United Film Company Limited ('Zhonglian' in short), *Four Sisters* (directed by Li Pingqian, 1942), became sworn sisters and opened a café where they sang. After the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945, Kung Chiu-hsia's husband Hu Xinling was considered a 'treasonable filmmaker' because he had co-directed the controversial Sino-Japanese co-production, *Remorse in Shanghai* (aka *Signal Fires of Shanghai*, 1944), with Inagaki Hiroshi and Griffin Yue Feng. After their café went out of business, the 'Four Sisters' moved to Hong Kong to look for job opportunities. Kung Chiu-hsia starred in Great China's first post-war Mandarin film, *Gone with the Swallow* (aka *Gone Are the Swallows When the Willow Flowers Wilt*, directed by He Feiguang, 1946). Chen Chuan-chuan starred in Great China's *A Dream of Spring* (directed by Zhu Shilin, 1947), *Peach Blossoms Still Titter in the Spring Breeze* (directed by Yeung Kung-leong, 1947) and *Harmony Reigns* (directed by Yeung Kung-leong, 1948).

Preceding the Hong Kong premiere, *Portrait of Four Beauties*' Shanghai premiere took place at 9pm on Saturday, 7 February 1948 at Paris Theatre, and it was advertised that 'All proceeds would go to winter relief'.[2] The film was released in three theatres in Shanghai, starting on Sunday

1. Among the list of over 400 films listed in *Hong Kong Filmography Vol II (1942–1949)*, published in 1998 by the Hong Kong Film Archive, *Portrait of Four Beauties* appears as the first post-war Hong Kong song-and-dance film (*gewu pian*). Present-day audiences might see the film, which values singing over dancing, as closer to a singing film (*gechang pian*). However, if we reconstruct the historical context of the film's creation, publicity and reception, we find that the advertisement for *Portrait of Four Beauties* in *Shun Pao* on 8 February 1948 promoted the film as an 'unprecedented, luxurious song-and-dance film', and that critics at that time regarded the film as a failed song-and-dance film. Therefore, this essay understands *Portrait of Four Beauties* as the first post-war Hong Kong song-and-dance film.
2. *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 7 February 1948 (in Chinese).

8 February until the last day of release on Friday 20 February, when only two theatres screened it. The film ran for less than two weeks and failed both at the box office and critically. It was more poorly received than the other films released during Lunar New Year 1948, such as *Night Inn* (directed by Huang Zuolin, 1948); *Destruction* (directed by Tu Guangqi, 1948); *Dreaming to Join the Army* (1948), 'the first post-war comedy'[3] starring and directed by Han Langen; and the martial arts film, *Fourth Madam Lü* (directed by Xu Xinfu, 1948). Around half a year later, *Portrait of Four Beauties* was released in five theatres in Hong Kong, starting on Thursday 29 July 1948. Only Tai Ping Theatre showed the Mandarin version while four other theatres showed the Cantonese version. The film was screened for three days before it was buried in Hong Kong film history.

Director Hu Xinling made a comeback with *Portrait of Four Beauties* (1948), working together with (from right) Kung Chiu-hsia, Chen Qi, Zhang Fan and Chen Chuan-chuan.

Why did *Portrait of Four Beauties* fail both at the box office and critically in both Shanghai and Hong Kong? In the knowledge production of film historiography, how do we situate films which are artistic and commercial failures and rediscover their significance? This essay does not intend to assert the artistic significance of *Portrait of Four Beauties*. Rather, it approaches the film through the lens of its border-crossing failure and discusses Hu Xinling as a misunderstood border-crossing director. I argue that *Portrait of Four Beauties*, as both an artistic and commercial failure, is best understood as director Hu Xinling's subtle expression of southbound filmmakers' border-crossing anxieties as they navigated between wartime Shanghai and post-war Hong Kong film industries through the dialectic of the real and the fake, the dilemma between artistic and romantic pursuits, and the disunity of body and soul in song-and-dance performances on the part of the female artists.

Hu Xinling as a Misunderstood Border-Crossing Director

Born in Yixing, Jiangsu Province in 1914, Hu Xinling died at the age of 86 at Yangming Hospital, Taipei. In 1929, the Lihua Dance Troupe, founded by Wei Yingbo, changed its name to the Plum Flower Dance Troupe. Kung Chiu-hsia joined the Plum Flower Dance Troupe at age 14 and travelled with the troupe as a border-crossing artist. In 1931, she performed in the song-and-dance

3. Advertisement for *Dreaming to Join the Army*, *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 8 February 1948 (in Chinese).

drama, *A Woman Under the Iron Hoof*. Because her role required her to speak Japanese, she got to know Hu. Afterwards, they got married.[4]

Hu was a student at the leftist Zhonghua Art University, Shanghai. In 1933, he studied politics and economics and did drama on the side at Meiji University in Tokyo, Japan (In *Portrait of Four Beauties*, Qiuyue asks Dingxiang whether she wants to major in economics or politics at university, which can be seen as referring to Hu's Japanese background). In 1935, Hu's family collaborated in the debut film of Shanghai Culture Film Company (Shanghai Wenhua yingye gongsi), *Members of the Family* (1936), scripted and directed by Hu and starring Kung Chiu-hsia and Hu's six-year-old sister, Hu Rongrong.[5] In her screen debut, song-and-dance star Kung performs a song-and-dance drama at the 'Jiangnan Drought Relief Charity Variety Performance' in *Members of the Family*, which constitutes a rare song-and-dance scene in Chinese cinema. However, the film lost money. Hu, his wife and his sister joined Studio Two of Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing), which was set up in July 1936. Hu was closely associated with the development of Shanghai leftist cinema of the 1930s. When he worked as assistant director at Studio Two, the film directors there included Shen Xiling, Yuan Muzhi, Ying Yunwei and Ouyang Yuqian.

Influenced by his father, Hu Xinling was a devout Christian. As Kung Chiu-hsia was not Christian, Hu and Kung lived together as husband and wife without a Christian wedding ceremony. In 1938, Shanghai magazine *Movietone* reported that Kung had become Christian.[6] They finally held a wedding ceremony on 28 May 1940. Afterwards, Hu focused on his work at church and

Hu Xinling

Hu Xinling followed his wife Kung Chiu-hsia to Hong Kong from Shanghai. Eventually, he directed *Portrait of Four Beauties* (1948) and *The Unmarried Mother* (1949) for Great China.

4. Kung Chiu-hsia, 'Before and After I Joined the Film Industry', in *Wo De Congying Shenghuo* (*My Life Being in the Film Industry*), Wang Danfeng, Chen Chuan-chuan, Hsia Moon, Fu Che et al, Hong Kong: Great Wall Pictorial Publisher, 1954, pp 10-11 (in Chinese). In this article, Kung recalls that she performed a song-and-dance drama, *Tieti Xia Zhi Nüxing*, about the Japanese invasion of northeast China. The correct title of the drama should be *Yige Tieti Xia De Nüxing* (*A Woman Under the Iron Hoof*). The drama was originally titled *The Last Bullet*. See Feng Aonong, 'The Single-Act *A Woman Under the Iron Hoof*', *The Shanghai Young Men*, Shanghai, Vol 31, No 47, 26 November 1931, pp 3-10 (in Chinese).
5. The child stars Hu Rongrong and Chen Chuan-chuan were both considered China's Shirley Temple.
6. 'Finally a Catholic After a Few Months Kung Chiu-hsia Renews Vows with Hu Xinling and Finally Holds a Wedding Ceremony', *Movietone*, Shanghai, 7th Year, No 27, 26 August 1938, p 524 (in Chinese).

withdrew from the film industry.[7] Hu's Christian faith might have been his way of seeking spiritual support and disengaging from politics, which helps us understand the disunity of body and soul in his post-war film *Portrait of Four Beauties*.

On 8 December 1941, the whole city of Shanghai fell under Japanese occupation. In Japanese-occupied Shanghai, Kung Chiu-hsia starred in Li Pingqian's *Four Sisters* (1942) and director Fang Peilin's *Roses in Bloom* (1942), both of which were produced by Zhonglian. On 9 January 1943, Wang Jingwei declared war against the UK and the US. Two months later, the third anniversary of Wang Jingwei's pro-Japanese puppet regime in Nanjing was celebrated on 30 March. In the same year, Hu Xinling worked at the Japanese-managed Cultural Film Studio under China United Film Holdings Company Ltd ('Huaying' in short), which was under the control of Japanese producer Kawakita Nagamasa and Zhang Shankun. Hu was responsible for shooting 'cultural films' (i.e. newsreels and propaganda shorts). After completing a musical short, *National Anthem*, and a propaganda short, *The Nationalist Government Leaping Forward: Education*, he directed another propaganda short, *The Nationalist Government Leaping Forward: The Military* in 1943,[8] which is concerned with the formation of the army, navy and air forces during the three years since the establishment of Wang Jingwei's regime. The film ends with Wang's declaration of war against the UK and the US to realise the objectives of 'defending East Asia' and 'restoring China'.[9]

Hu Xinling co-directed with Inagaki Hiroshi and Griffin Yue Feng the 1944 *Remorse in Shanghai*, a Sino-Japanese co-production between Huaying and Daiei Motion Picture Company. Hu also acted as a translator between Chinese and Japanese personnel. After the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1945, Hu represented Huaying to assist Fei Mu in taking over the Japanese film industry in Shanghai.[10] As the director of *Remorse in Shanghai*, Hu was considered a 'treasonable filmmaker' after World War II, thus he and Kung Chiu-hsia lived in fear of being reported. In autumn 1946, Great China invited Kung to Hong Kong. She shuttled between Shanghai and Hong Kong making films. In November 1946, the directors and actors of *Glory to Eternity* (1943) and *Remorse in Shanghai*, two 'films pandering to the Japanese', were reported. Hu Xinling, Kung Chiu-hsia and Chen Qi from the latter film made *Protrait of Four Beauties* in Hong Kong.[11] On 20 November 1946, *Glory to Eternity* and *Remorse in Shanghai* were screened by Kuomintang officials for the public to 'assess whether the actors of these two films were treasonable' and the feedback was not bad.[12] However, Hu could not maintain his foothold in the Shanghai film industry and had to follow Kung from Shanghai to Hong Kong to find work opportunities in

7. Wen Chao, 'Hu Xinling Focuses on His Work at the Church Withdraws from the Film Industry', *Dongfang Ribao*, Shanghai, 14 September 1940 (in Chinese).
8. 'Hu Xinling Goes to Nanjing Kung Chiu-hsia Sees Him Off at the Shanghai North Railway Station', *Huaying Zhoukan* (*China United Film Weekly*), Shanghai, No 41, 23 June 1943, p 2 (in Chinese).
9. 'Introducing Huaying's *The Nationalist Government Leaping Forward: The Military* (Two Reels)', *Huaying Zhoukan* (*China United Film Weekly*), Shanghai, No 20, 3 November 1943, p 4 (in Chinese).
10. Huang Jen, 'An Old Filmmaker Trapped in Taiwan for 30 Years Hu Xinling', in *Zhongwai Dianying Yongyuan De Juxing (Er)* (*Long-Lasting Stars in Chinese and Foreign Cinemas [Two]*), Taipei: Showwe Information Co., Ltd., 2014, p 56 (in Chinese).
11. 'Directors and Actresses of Two Huaying Films, *Remorse in Shanghai* and *Glory to Eternity*, Were Reported to the Authorities Including Griffin Yue Feng, Wang Danfeng, Nancy Chan Wan-seung', *Xi Bao*, Shanghai, 7 November 1946 (in Chinese).
12. Zhang Ping, 'Censorship Screening of *Glory to Eternity* and *Remorse in Shanghai* at the Astor Theatre', *Shanghai Herald*, 21 November 1946 (in Chinese).

1947.[13] He ended up directing *Portrait of Four Beauties* and *The Unmarried Mother* (1949) for Great China.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Hu Xinling was put in important positions. In Tianjin in 1951, Hu represented the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to take over nearly one thousand films left by eight major American studios in Tianjin and Shanghai.[14] In 1954, Hu was sent to Hong Kong to set up the leftist Lian'gang Film Company, which distributed the productions of the Great Wall Pictures Corporation, Feng Huang Motion Picture Co and Sun Luen Film Company to Singapore and Malaysia. He was also the manager of Astor Theatre, Liberty Theatre and Nanyang Theatre.[15] According to film historian Huang Jen, who cites Hu Xinling's oral history as published by the Taipei Film Archive, in 1969 Hu brought three Japanese films to Taiwan, the rights and copies of which had been given to him by Japanese film companies. His intention was to distribute Japanese films. However, he did not expect that he would be used as a propaganda tool by the Nationalist government, which characterised him as a freedom filmmaker who had 'defected to freedom'. Hu then worked as a consultant for the Central Motion Picture Corporation (a party-run studio in Taiwan) for 20 years, during which he was not trusted because of the Cold War anti-Communist atmosphere. Hu was situated in the interstitial space between left and right, with no room to manoeuvre. Hu barely left any mark in the history of Taiwan cinema.[16]

Hu Xinling was a forgotten and misunderstood border-crossing director. As an overseas student in Japan, left-wing filmmaker, 'treasonable filmmaker', southbound filmmaker and freedom filmmaker, Hu not only shuttled between Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Tianjin, Taipei and elsewhere, but also crossed national, regional, linguistic and ideological boundaries between China and Japan, south and north, left and right, Nationalist and Communist. This essay does not intend to draw any definitive conclusions on Hu Xinling's border-crossing life and works, but proposes to preserve the ambiguity and complexity of his identities and texts through the lens of *Portrait of Four Beauties* as a commercial and critical failure shuttling between Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The Reasons Behind *Portrait of Four Beauties*' Failure

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind *Portrait of Four Beauties*' failure, it is necessary to reconstruct the historical context of film criticism and advertising through archival research to complement textual analysis. In January 1948, it was rumoured that Kung Chiu-hsia and Hu Xinling had left Great China because its founder Jiang Boying had demanded Hu finish shooting an adaption of Guo Moruo's historical drama *The Peacock's Gallbladder* (1943) within

13. Yong Sheng, 'Hu Xinling and Kung Chiu-hsia's Husband-and-Wife Collaboration in Hong Kong', *Tie Bao*, Shanghai, 12 May 1947 (in Chinese).
14. See note 10, pp 57-58.
15. Ibid, p 57.
16. Ibid, pp 51-53.

a short period of time. Hu did not want to shoot it hastily and had an argument with Jiang. As a result, Hu returned to Shanghai.[17] Before *Portrait of Four Beauties*' premiere in Shanghai during Lunar New Year 1948, Shanghai newspaper *Li Bao* printed an article titled 'Hu Xinling's Stage Has Collapsed' saying that 'The director is the soul of a film. The director should take most responsibility for whether a film is good or bad. Therefore, a film advertisement always prints the director's name.'[18] However, *Portrait of Four Beauties*' advertisement initially did not print director Hu Xinling's name. It was added later after negotiation. As Hu was kicked out of Great China by Jiang, 'Hu's stage was deliberately sabotaged.'[19] These two news items show that one possible reason behind *Portrait of Four Beauties*' failure was that there were rumours about the director's unhappy split with the founder of Great China. Whether this was fake news or not, the film advertisement gave the audience an impression that the film company wanted to cut ties with the director.

On the day of the premiere, the phrase 'written and directed by Hu Xinling' on the *Shun Pao* advertisement for *Portrait of Four Beauties* was so small that it was almost unnoticeable. The slogan 'Four Sisters of Shanghai cinema collaborate once more! Unprecedented luxurious song-and-dance film *Portrait of Four Beauties*' was placed in the centre. Below the film title was the description 'Cost $5 billion and involved more than 1,000 people'. On the upper right-hand corner and lower left-hand corner were Kung Chiu-hsia, Chen Qi, Zhang Fan and Chen Chuan-chuan's promotional photos, summoning the audience to the cinemas.[20]

One week after the Shanghai premiere of *Portrait of Four Beauties*, Kong Guang analysed the reasons behind its failure: 'First, the so-called "Four Sisters of Shanghai Cinema" have lost their appeal; secondly, for Shanghai audiences, the impression of "Hong Kong films" is worsening; thirdly, Strand Theatre and Paris Theatre are far worse than The Queen's Theatre and Crystal Palace Theatre. If Great China continues to bite off more than it can chew, its films will be abandoned by Shanghai (at least Shanghai) audiences.'[21] It is understandable why Kong Guang attributed the film's failure to the Four Sisters' loss of star appeal. Meanwhile, the other two reasons he gives are extra-cinematic. They are about the image of Hong Kong films and about the quality of cinemas, respectively.

'Hong Kong films', as a brand, had a poor image. Next to Kong Guang's review on Shanghai newspaper *Tie Bao* was a vivid article titled 'Fang Peilin Pissed Off in Hong Kong!', which can help us understand how, for Shanghai audiences at the time, 'Hong Kong films' equalled shoddily made films:

> Fang Peilin [the authoritative director of song-and-dance films] has never shot films outside Shanghai except for the exterior shots. He was invited by Great China to direct two films in Hong Kong, including *Song of a Songstress* [1948] starring Zhou Xuan…. When he walked into Great

17. Jian Feng, 'Kung Chiu-hsia and Hu Xinling Leave Great China', *Cheng Bao*, Shanghai, 8 January 1948 (in Chinese).
18. Qiu Xiang, 'Hu Xinling's Stage Has Collapsed', *Li Bao*, Shanghai, 2 February 1948 (in Chinese).
19. Ibid.
20. *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 8 February 1948 (in Chinese).
21. Kong Guang, '"Blockbuster" Chinese Films and Their Trends During Lunar New Year', *Tie Bao*, Shanghai, 15 February 1948 (in Chinese).

> China's poorly equipped film studio, he was so pissed off that he wanted to return to Shanghai. However, Great China's film studio is only secondary to the newly built Yung Hwa Motion Picture Industries Ltd. Fang Peilin was persuaded to stay in Hong Kong to work. Hong Kong films perform poorly at the box office not only because they are shoddily made, but also because of the poorly equipped studios![22]

It is worth noting that *Portrait of Four Beauties* was made by southbound filmmakers and actresses from Shanghai as a 'Hong Kong film' which premiered in Shanghai. However, Shanghai audiences did not like this 'Hong Kong film', which highlights the awkwardness and difficulties of border-crossing filmmaking, and the Shanghai-Hong Kong nexus as mutual mirror-images and competitors.

Furthermore, the three cinemas which screened *Portrait of Four Beauties* (Strand, Paris and Rainbow) could not compete with the five biggest theatres of the time (The Queen's, Golden Gate, Carlton, Crystal Palace, International), which were screening *Night Inn* and *Destruction* (on the day of *Portrait of Four Beauties*' premiere, Crystal Palace Theatre officially opened but did not screen the film). The quality of the cinemas affected whether the audience was willing to go to them. We can infer that Great China's distribution network in Shanghai was not as good as that of the Chinese Film Joint Management Office, which distributed *Night Inn* and *Destruction*.

Accordingly, the failure of *Portrait of Four Beauties* could be attributed to the 'Four Sisters of Shanghai Cinema' losing their star appeal, the image of Hong Kong films as shoddily made and the unsatisfactory cinema venues which showed the film. Moreover, a film review in *Peace Daily* titled 'Pathetic Legs and Singing: *Portrait of Four Beauties*' foregrounds the role of the relationship between film genre and national soft power in the film's failure. This anonymous film review points out that the labour-intensive, capital-intensive and material-intensive song-and-dance film is a Hollywood genre. This Chinese attempt at the song-and-dance genre 'appears to be childish and ridiculous': 'At a time when American dancers are swinging up their legs amidst waves of vivid colours, it would be a mistake to release such a pathetic song-and-dance film, making it the worst-selling Chinese film in recent times. It has neither box-office value nor left-wing consciousness. It appears to be uninspired and pathetic.'[23] There are three levels of border-crossing in this harsh review: firstly, the Chinese film industry has made a song-and-dance film which was Hollywood's forte; secondly, the reception history of Hollywood musicals in China; thirdly, created as an entertaining film, *Portrait of Four Beauties* nevertheless oscillates between an 'eye for business' and 'consciousness', between a soft film which delights the eye and a hard film imbued with left-wing consciousness.

Instead of criticising Chinese song-and-dance films as pathetic and ridiculous, we can raise a more constructive question: how did Chinese-language singing films and song-and-dance films indigenise the global standard, or what Miriam Hansen calls the 'global vernacular', established by American film musicals? In his 1934 article, 'The Struggling Chinese Song and Dance: The Future of Chinese Song-and-Dance Dramas', Huang Chia-mo, advocate of the 'soft film', traced

22. Zi Feng, 'Fang Peilin Pissed Off in Hong Kong!', *Tie Bao*, Shanghai, 15 February 1948 (in Chinese).
23. 'Pathetic Legs and Singing: *Portrait of Four Beauties*', *Peace Daily*, Shanghai, 22 February 1948 (in Chinese).

Shanghai's demand for song-and-dance dramas to the release of *Fox Movietone Follies of 1929* (1929). The key to understanding Huang's article is the intermedial interaction and synergy between stage and screen musicals, between song-and-dance troupes and song-and-dance films. Composer Li Jinhui headed the Bright Moon Song and Dance Troupe (Zhou Xuan joined the troupe at age 13). Wei Yingbo headed the Plum Flower Dance Troupe, which toured South China and Southeast Asia (Kung Chiu-hsia joined the troupe's tour at age 14). The musical talent trained by the song-and-dance troupes were quickly absorbed by the Chinese film industry. On the other hand, Hollywood musicals such as *42nd Street* (1933), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Footlight Parade* (1933), *Wonder Bar* (1934) and *Dames* (1934) broadened the horizons of Chinese audiences and were analogised by Huang Chia-mo as 'ice cream for the eyes'.[24] Huang emphasised that the soft songs and dances are not only commodities but also 'components of sound artistic expression'.[25] Huang's article concluded that the songs and dances China needed were not 'shallow imitations and cheap fun with boobs and legs', but 'noble plastic art' aimed at 'creating the modern song-and-dance drama with Oriental colours and creating the modern Oriental song worthy of the world's appreciation.'[26]

Mei Naixiang in his 1948 article, 'The Chinese Song-and-Dance Film', refuted the claim that there were no song-and-dance films in China by citing two Yee Hwa Motion Picture Co.'s productions—director Dan Duyu's *Kids* (aka *Fairies of the Mortal World*, 1934), starring Yuan Meiyun and Bai Hong (aka Pai Hung), and director Fang Peilin and screenwriter Huang Chia-mo's *Stars Moving Around the Moon* (1938), starring Zhou Xuan—and a Starlight Film Company production shot by Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd., *Save Her Mother* (1938), scripted and directed by Zhang Shichuan and starring Kung Chiu-hsia, Hu Rongrong and Shu Shi. *Save Her Mother* features very few song-and-dance scenes. Mei called this period the Golden Age of Chinese Song-and-Dance Films. The directors of song-and-dance films included Dan Duyu, Hu Xinling, etc. The song-and-dance stars included Wang Renmei, Kung Chiu-hsia, Bai Hong, Zhou Xuan, Yuan Meiyun, Yan Yuexian, Xue Lingxian, etc. After the Pacific War broke out on 8 December 1941, Zhonglian produced *Fairy Ling Bo* (1943), scripted and directed by Fang Peilin and starring Li Lihua. 'This period saw the revival of song-and-dance films. However, the number was much less than that before the war'. Huaying produced *Colorful* (1943), directed by Fang Peilin, scripted by Doe Ching and starring Li Lihua and the Toho Buyotai (aka the Toho Song and Dance Troupe) from Japan. According to Mei Naixiang's observation, 'after WWII, there were even less song-and-dance films': The first post-war song-and-dance film was *Songbird Flies over the World* (1946), produced by the Kuomintang controlled, Shanghai-based Central Motion Picture Company (aka Zhongdian) Studio Two, directed by Fang Peilin and starring Ouyang Feiying. For Mei, Hu Xinling's *Portrait of Four Beauties* surpassed *Songbird Flies over the World* in terms of artistic achievement, but 'it was not much better, which shows the lack of talent in song-and-dance films.' [27]

24. Huang Chia-mo, 'The Struggling Chinese Song and Dance: The Future of Chinese Song-and-Dance Dramas', *The Young Companion*, Shanghai, No 99, 1 December 1934, p 6 (in Chinese).
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid, p 7.
27. Mei Naixiang, 'The Chinese Song-and-Dance Film', *Yingju Huabao* (*Film and Drama Pictorial*), Shanghai, No 4, 1 July 1948, p 8 (in Chinese).

Let's return to the article, 'Pathetic Legs and Singing: *Portrait of Four Beauties*', which was situated 'at a time when American dancers are swinging up their legs amidst waves of vivid colours'. The attractions of Hollywood musicals lay in colour technology (*wucai*, literally meaning 'five colours') and the female body (*datui*, or 'legs'). If we examine the advertisements in *Shun Pao* for the four Hollywood musicals released around the same time as *Portrait of Four Beauties*, we find that they all relied on 'five colours' and 'legs' to attract the audience: *Down to Earth* (1947), starring Rita Hayworth and Larry Parks, emphasised 'five colours' and 'a thousand jade-like legs'; *Fiesta* (1947), starring Esther Williams from *Bathing Beauty* (1944), emphasised 'five emerald colours'; *Happy Go Lucky* (1943) emphasised 'five gorgeous colours' and 'seductive buttocks on fire!'; *The Time, the Place and the Girl* (1946) emphasised 'five colours' and 'an overwhelming air of spring that cannot be confined within a garden'.[28] Huang Chia-mo regarded Hollywood musicals as 'ice cream for the eyes'. In a similar fashion, Chinese song-and-dance films were considered as lacking soul: film scholar Li Daoxin pointed out that between 1945 and 1949, most Chinese musicals (Li did not consider singing films and song-and-dance films separately) 'such as *Songbird Flies over the World, Forever in My Heart* (aka *An All-Consuming Love*), *You're Smart in One Way, I in Another, Green Grows the Grass* (aka *Green Grass by the River*), *Enjoy While Young* (aka *Waste Not Our Youth*), *Song of a Songstress*, *Orioles Banished from the Flowers*, *Two Musical Girls*, *The Date in Someday*, *Rainbow Rhythms*, etc., were all reprimanded as "soulless"'.[29]

In contrast to the Hollywood and Chinese musicals Li Daoxin cited, *Portrait of Four Beauties* is not only a black-and-white film, but it also consciously values soul over body. Hu Xinling's anachronistic directorial treatment was not in line with the audience's expectations and needs regarding the song-and-dance genre. Apart from the lack of 'legs' and 'five colours' as mentioned previously, the article 'Pathetic Legs and Singing: *Portrait of Four Beauties*' criticised the film because 'there is no comedic atmosphere, no lively story, as befits a song-and-dance film. It is bland, with some forcefully inserted songs and dances'. In other words, the audience's expectation to see a lively comedic song-and-dance film was not fulfilled. One key formal and aesthetic flaw of *Portrait of Four Beauties* is that its songs and narrative are not truly integrated. If we return to the historical context and analyse the film's failure, it seems that the multiple border-crossing dimensions of the film are doomed to be misunderstood. So far, I have discussed geographical border-crossing (from Shanghai to Hong Kong), national genre border-crossing (from Hollywood to Chinese song-and-dance films), reception border-crossing (the reception of Hong Kong Mandarin films in the Mainland and the reception of Hollywood musicals in China) and ideological border-crossing (between entertainment and left-wing consciousness, between soft and hard film). Next, I will analyse how *Portrait of Four Beauties* represents the border-crossing anxieties of artistic life through the dialectic of body and soul.

Artistic life, as depicted in *Portrait of Four Beauties*, crosses multiple borders and is in constant flux. High school student Dingxiang (played by Chen Chuan-chuan) receives two

28. *Shun Pao*, Shanghai, 8 February 1948 (in Chinese).

29. Li Daoxin, 'The Early Chinese Musical as Genre: Taking Zhou Xuan's Films in the 1930s and 1940s as Examples and Comparing Them with Hollywood Musicals', *Contemporary Cinema*, Beijing, No 6, 2000, p 85 (in Chinese).

Portrait of Four Beauties (1948): Dingxiang (played by Chen Chuan-chuan) dreams of a ballet dance after watching the performance of Furong (played by Hu Rongrong). The director's use of superimposition bridges together dream and reality.

messages via letters: firstly, her classmate Furong (played by Hu Rongrong) is going to give a dance performance. Secondly, her cousin Qiuyue (played by Kung Chiu-hsia) is coming to Hong Kong with Shanghai Song-and-Dance Troupe, which will give a public performance before touring abroad. Dingxiang, who has always dreamed of performing on stage, has a dream that night. A ballerina appears in her dream as a superimposition, dancing and crossing the boundary between dream and reality. A Hong Kong newspaper reports that 'Shanghai Song-and-Dance Troupe arrives in Hong Kong today'. The troupe's touring trajectory echoes that of the southbound filmmakers and actresses who made *Portrait of Four Beauties*. They had to travel by boat from Shanghai to Hong Kong. In the beginning of the film, letters, newspapers and music are all employed to cross boundaries, convey messages and construct imagined communities.

Dingxiang naively believes that the life of an artist is a life of truth, goodness and beauty. She is unaware of the reality of touring artists who roam the rivers and lakes and go from pier to pier. In her dialogue with Shali (played by Zhang Fan), a member of the song-and-dance troupe, and her cousin Qiuyue, there is the dialectic between dream and reality, change (going from pier to pier) and comfort (studying), truth and falseness/emptiness. Qiuyue tells Dingxiang, 'Ten years ago, I would have thought the same as you do today, but it was a beautiful dream. Now I've woken up from my dream. Being in the limelight is not our goal. It's not the right time to talk about art.' Ten years before the release of *Portrait of Four Beauties*, in 1938, Shanghai had just entered the Orphan Island period (1937–1941). It was during this period that Qiuyue had believed that an artist's life is a life of truth, goodness and beauty. Ten years later, after Qiuyue has woken up from her dream, Kung Chiu-hsia and Hu Xinling have also woken up from theirs and left Shanghai for Hong Kong. The southbound filmmakers from Shanghai regarded Hong Kong as a paradise in turbulent times. However, by that time, Hong Kong was no longer a peaceful land.

The utopian imagination and potentiality in *Portrait of Four Beauties*, the first post-war Hong Kong song-and-dance film, is often penetrated by reality. Dingxiang's naive and unrealistic

The song-and-dance troupe have an enjoyable time singing the 'The Excursion Song' and enjoying the rural scenery on bike.

Pan Shao'an (played by Lü Yukun) shows off his luxurious car, which the troupe satirises through singing 'The Bedbug Song'.

imagination of the artistic life is met with Shali's sarcastic criticism of the social reality of the times: 'It's time to sell the fake but not the real. Empty-headed artists can still cheat people.' Pan Shao'an (played by Lü Yukun), who travels from Shanghai to Hong Kong with the song-and-dance troupe, asks Ye Ling (played by Chen Qi) to accompany him to the US. Ye Ling has no desire to rehearse as part of the chorus. She only wants to sing solo and eventually leaves the troupe. Dingxiang joins the troupe after an audition. Her performance of 'The Boat of Happiness' makes her an instant success.

Afterwards, the members of the song-and-dance troupe ride their bicycles to the countryside for a celebration party while singing 'The Excursion Song'. Director Lu Yi (played by Hong Bo) opines, 'In terms of the local environment, this place is indeed a paradise in turbulent times.' Another person reminds him that Hong Kong is no longer a peaceful land, as there are more and more stinking bugs (*chouchong*) and rats every day. The big stinking bug refers to the playboy Pan Shao'an, who drives to the countryside. The troupe immediately stops singing upon Pan's arrival. It is worth noting that the film juxtaposes the motion and emotion of two modes of border-crossing movement between city and countryside: Pan Shao'an's driving attitude and speed belongs to the city whereas the troupe members' leisure cycling suits the countryside. Shali and the troupe take a humorous stand against Pan by singing 'The Bedbug Song' and puncturing the tyres of Pan's car.

The villain of *Portrait of Four Beauties* is Pan Shao'an, who represents money, carnal desire and mobility, standing in opposition to the spiritual and the artistic. He dumps Ye Ling and pursues Dingxiang instead, promising to take her to Hollywood. It is worth pondering over the film's treatment on how Dingxiang faces the temptation to fall in love vis-à-vis her artistic career: when Dingxiang receives a love letter, the song-and-dance troupe receives a blackmail note, giving them three days to pay US$10,000, or else a bomb will be planted. The juxtaposition of the love

Qiuyue (played by Kung Chiu-hsia) performs 'I'm Calling You Again'. When she gets to the word 'separated', special-effects cinematography is employed to show her soul leaving her body.

Qiuyue's soul reappears when she sings the line 'I only long for us to be together'; later her soul reunites with her physical body when she sings the line 'never separated again'.

letter and the blackmail note emphasises the dangers of romantic love to aspiring artists. Qiuyue attempts to advise Dingxiang, who retorts, 'Have I lost the freedom to move on my own?'

Dingxiang's freedom of movement and agency highlight the moral choices she must make as a young artist faced with temptation. She crosses over from student to artist. With her instant success and the advances of Pan Shao'an, Dingxiang has no desire to rehearse and repeats the mistakes of Ye Ling, believing in the unrealistic dream of Hollywood. She tears a photo of herself and her cousin Qiuyue in half, sends a farewell letter to her cousin and runs away. When Dingxiang disappears, Qiuyue appears on stage to give a solo performance of 'I'm Calling You Again' with lyrics by Hu Xinling and melody composed by Chen Gexin. In the meantime, Shali is looking for Dingxiang at the train station and pier. Qiuyue sings, 'When I tried on fancy clothes, when I tasted delicious food; / You sighed and separated from me, / You said I no longer belonged to you.' When she sings, 'You sighed,' she walks slowly towards screen left; when she gets to the word 'separated', special-effects cinematography allows her soul to leave her body. Her soul walks towards screen right, while her body stays in place. Body and soul are separated. When she sings, 'You said I no longer belonged to you', her soul exits from screen right and the camera cuts to a medium shot of Qiuyue.

'Ah… I've earned everything, but I've lost you; / I'm left with a soulless body, / I'm lost and confused all day long. / Ah… Where are you? / Can you hear me calling you? / I'm calling you!' The artist addresses her soul as 'you' in the process of soul-searching. She has gained money and fame but lost her soul. 'Now I would give up everything, even fame and fortune; / I only long for us to be together, never separated again.' When Qiuyue, on screen left, sings 'I only long for us to be together', her soul reappears, walking down a sloping platform. When we hear 'never separated again', her soul is reunited with her body. Simplifying the complicated, Hu Xinling highlights the

theme of the film through the use of special-effects cinematography to embody the disunity of body and soul.

Both the love letter and the blackmail come from Pan Shao'an, who has planted a bomb in a flower basket. During her curtain call, Qiuyue is injured in the explosion. Pan is arrested soon afterwards. It turns out that he originally fled Shanghai to Hong Kong. Posing as a young master, he is in fact an impostor. Upon his arrest, he says, 'If nothing goes wrong, the fake is the real thing; if something goes wrong, even the real thing becomes fake'—words which echo the film's dialectic of truth and falseness.

After Dingxiang sees the notice about show cancellations and learns that the culprit for the bombing is Pan Shao'an, she contemplates suicide at the seashore and is rescued by Shali. The explosion causes amnesia in Qiuyue, who loses her memory and needs psychotherapy. When Dingxiang returns, the melody of 'I'm Calling You Again' is heard as background music, but Qiuyue does not recognise her anymore. The director of the troupe, Lao Xia (played by Ping Yuan), absconds with the troupe's money and leaves Hong Kong. The troupe is evicted from the hotel. Qiuyue needs to pay her medical bills and the troupe needs a popular female star to resume their performances. Dingxiang is willing to perform again for the troupe and asks Furong, her former classmate and an amateur dancer, to give a guest performance of the 'Golden Rooster Dance'.

In the midst of thunderous applause, Qiuyue reappears on stage to give another solo performance of 'I'm Calling You Again'. This time body and soul are not separated. Sitting in the auditorium, Ye Ling hears 'Ah… Where are you?', gets up and leaves her seat to join the performance onstage. Qiuyue's singing reunites the 'Four Sisters' and makes them 'never separated again' onscreen. The Shanghai Song-and-Dance Troupe's comeback performance in the film reminds the audience, then and now, that *Portrait of Four Beauties* was conceived as a comeback film for Hu Xinling and the 'Four Sisters of Shanghai Cinema'. The film ends with a four-part chorus, 'In Praise of Dawn'. Qiuyue, Shali, Ye Ling, and Dingxiang join forces to sing 'The night is over, the dawn is coming', in line with the victorious mood of the post-WWII period. The performance of 'In Praise of Dawn' is best understood as Hu's way of saying he was not a 'treasonable filmmaker'. The forced optimism of the film's ending cannot suppress the subtle but pervasive border-crossing anxieties of the southbound filmmakers between wartime Shanghai and post-war Hong Kong. Through his wife Kung Chiu-hsia's two performances of the film's most significant inserted song, 'I'm Calling You Again', Hu Xinling employs the dialectic of body and soul to respond to the post-war accusations that he had sold his soul by directing *Remorse in Shanghai* in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. An article in the *Dongfang Ribao*, published shortly after WWII, satirised Hu for 'believing in Christianity while selling his soul'. The article referred to *Remorse in Shanghai* as a 'poisonous film', urging the reader 'not to let this cultural traitor off the hook' in terms of public opinion.[30] Analysing *Portrait of Four Beauties*' failure and border-crossing anxieties, we can see that three years after the end of WWII, not only the public, but the director himself also did not let Hu Xinling as a border-crossing director off the hook. Hu's

30. Cai, 'Hu Xinling, the Japan Expert', *Dongfang Ribao*, Shanghai, 7 September 1945 (in Chinese).

complex identity as both a devout Christian and serious artist made the first post-war Hong Kong song-and-dance film a wake-up call for his and the audience's souls.

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Glimpses of 1940s and 1950s Film Production and Distribution from the Tai Ping Theatre Collection: *The Orphan's Rescue* as Case Study

Priscilla Chan

Filmmaking inevitably entails production and distribution. Related information is usually hard to come by as it touches upon confidential company data and their internal operations. Research on film production and distribution of the last century has relied heavily on second-hand data, like reports in newspapers and magazines or unconventional first-hand information such as oral history interviews. In 2006, the Hong Kong Film Archive (HKFA) was fortunate enough to receive a donation of 3,600 artefacts related to early films and theatres in Hong Kong from Ms Beryl Yuen, the third-generation owner of Tai Ping Theatre. As most of the artefacts date back to the 1940s or earlier, and include first-hand records of film production and distribution, the collection offers important clues for the research of early Hong Kong cinema.[1]

The Orphan's Rescue (1949), produced, made and distributed by The United Film Co. Hong Kong

1. After Tai Ping Theatre closed down in 1981, its associated artefacts were kept in Ms Beryl Yuen's possession until they were donated to the HKFA and other organisations. For more on the collection highlights and related studies, please refer to Yung Sai-shing (ed), *A Study of the Tai Ping Theatre Collection*, Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2015 (in Chinese).

After preliminary processing of the artefacts, we discovered that *The Orphan's Rescue* (hereinafter referred to as *Orphan*), which premiered in 1949, was a film that Tai Ping Theatre had invested in and been involved in its production. There is a diverse range of 140 film-related artefacts in question, including film stills, handbills, contracts, box-office records, letters and various kinds of documents. Although the original film is lost, information including funding, production team formation, share distribution, film distribution and screening details can be gleaned. Such rare and invaluable research materials fill the gap regarding early film production and distribution in Hong Kong; they also testify to the scope of cultural and economic interaction between Hong Kong and overseas film markets in the 1940s and 1950s.

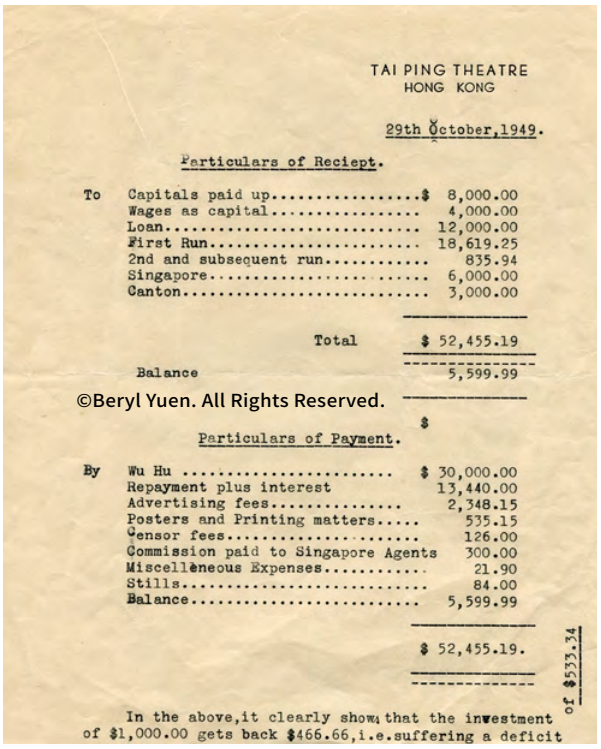
This essay introduces a selection of key artefacts in chronological order from production to public screening, and attempts to decipher the relevant data about *Orphan* regarding (1) its planning and production, (2) its local release, and (3) the trajectory of its overseas distribution, with the aim of offering some clues for further research.

Planning and Production

Orphan, one of the films that Tai Ping Theatre invested in, was produced and distributed by The United Film Co. Hong Kong. Cost control is one of the crucial aspects of film production due to its correlation with profit. According to a report in *The Kung Sheung Evening News* (aka *The Kung Sheung Evening Press*) on 13 May 1946, film companies at the time estimated that the cost for making a new film amounted to no less than HK$60,000.[2] With a total production cost of HK$52,455, as listed in the income and expenditure statement, *Orphan* was at least a medium-scale project. HK$30,000 out of the HK$50,000 was paid to the director Ng Wui, who in fact took the role of sub-contractor to oversee production expenses. Therefore, the HK$30,000 was an all-inclusive fee covering studio rental, film processing, salaries for the cast, the screenwriting fee, etc., the details of which will be discussed later in this essay.

The HKFA has collected 11 film censorship cards of *Orphan*, five for the films and six for the trailers. Apart from providing information about the film, these items offer a glimpse of the film censorship practices of the 1940s. The censorship cards indicate that the total length of the film was 9,500 feet, split into 10 reels. At 24 frames per second and 90 feet per minute, the screened version should have come to approximately 106 minutes. The trailer film was 300 feet in length, amounting to about three minutes long. Every copy and trailer came with a film censorship card and serial number. With reference to *Orphan*'s serial numbers, there should have been a total of six sets for both the film and the trailer, and the censorship card for the third copy of the film has been lost. These cards reveal that the film censorship system back then was similar to the current one, with all to-be-screened materials—both the films and the trailers—being subject to inspection.

2. 'Cost of Filmmaking Increased Sixfold Compared to Pre-War Times', *The Kung Sheung Evening News*, 13 May 1946 (in Chinese).



TAI PING THEATRE
HONG KONG

29th October,1949.

Particulars of Reciept.

To	Capitals paid up	$ 8,000.00
	Wages as capital	4,000.00
	Loan	12,000.00
	First Run	18,619.25
	2nd and subsequent run	835.94
	Singapore	6,000.00
	Canton	3,000.00
	Total	$ 52,455.19
	Balance	5,599.99

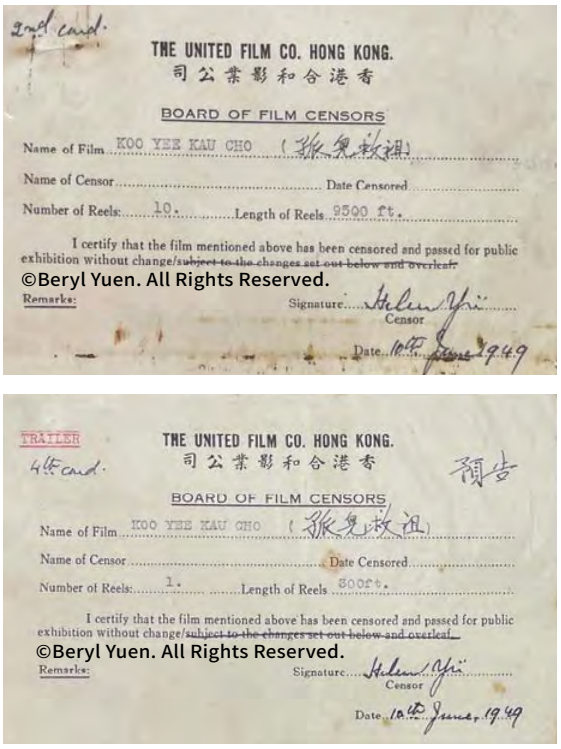
$

Particulars of Payment.

By	Wu Hu	$ 30,000.00
	Repayment plus interest	13,440.00
	Advertising fees	2,348.15
	Posters and Printing matters	535.15
	Censor fees	126.00
	Commission paid to Singapore Agents	300.00
	Miscellaneous Expenses	21.90
	Stills	84.00
	Balance	5,599.99
		$ 52,455.19.

of $533.34

In the above,it clearly shows that the investment of $1,000.00 gets back $466.66,i.e.suffering a deficit



2nd card.

THE UNITED FILM CO. HONG KONG.
司公業影和合港香

BOARD OF FILM CENSORS

Name of Film KOO YEE KAU CHO (張兒救祖)

Name of Censor ..... Date Censored .....

Number of Reels: 10. Length of Reels 9500 ft.

I certify that the film mentioned above has been censored and passed for public exhibition without change/~~subject to the changes set out below and overleaf~~.

Remarks: Signature ..... Censor

Date 16th June 1949

TRAILER
4th card.

THE UNITED FILM CO. HONG KONG.
司公業影和合港香

預告

BOARD OF FILM CENSORS

Name of Film KOO YEE KAU CHO (張兒救祖)

Name of Censor ..... Date Censored .....

Number of Reels: 1. Length of Reels 800ft.

I certify that the film mentioned above has been censored and passed for public exhibition without change/~~subject to the changes set out below and overleaf~~.

Remarks: Signature ..... Censor

Date 16th June, 1949

The income and expenditure statement of *The Orphan's Rescue*

The film censorship cards of the film (top) and trailer (bottom) of *The Orphan's Rescue*

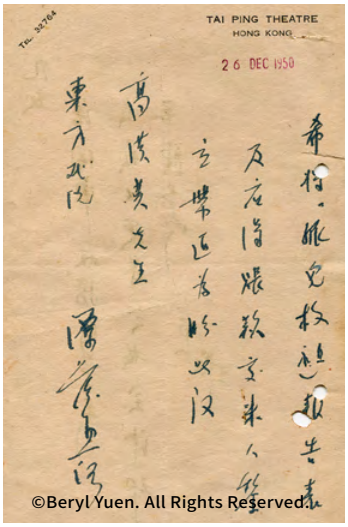
While 16 June 1949 (Thursday) was the release date of *Orphan*, the screenwriting fee receipt was dated 9 April 1949 (Saturday). Assuming payment was made shortly upon the completion of the screenplay, it can be estimated that only two months had gone by from planning and production to screening. The efficient workflow could plausibly be attributed to the smooth collaboration between the production team and the cast.

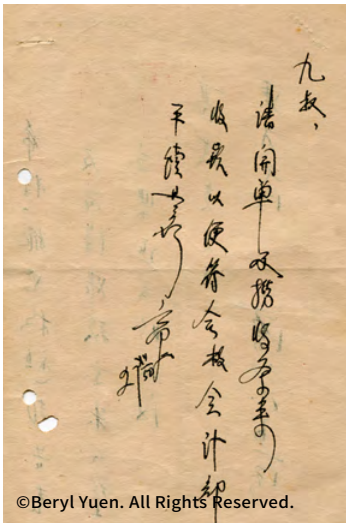
Although the original film is lost, the brochure of *Orphan* contains invaluable details such as a list of the production team members and the cast, as well as a synopsis. As the younger brother of Yuen Jim-fan, Tai Ping Theatre's second-generation owner, Yuen Yiu-fan was the executive producer of *Orphan*. Aside from *Orphan*, he also co-produced *The Secret Agent and the Mysterious Gang* (1966) and *The Secret Agent 303* (1966) with Yeung Heung. Although Yuen Jim-fan's name was not on the production team list, his signature can be found on profit-sharing agreements and expense-related documents, including a reminder from Tai Ping Theatre to Oriental Theatre, dated 26 December 1950, about the return of *Orphan*'s income statement. Tai Ping Theatre was involved in film investment, production and theatrical release. Leveraging its years of experiences in showing loaned films from distributors, it was adept at *Orphan*'s production and distribution and, in particular, cost control and the coordination of screening locations and schedules.

The director of *Orphan* was Ng Wui, originally named Ng Yiu-man. A native of Xinhui, Guangdong, Ng graduated from the Guangdong Film Academy and the drama school affiliated with the Guangdong Drama Research Centre. In 1939, the 26-year-old Ng came to Hong Kong and joined Grandview Film Company Limited as an actor. In the following year, Ng made his

A group photo with Tai Ping Theatre's owner Yuen Jim-fan (3rd left) and the executive producer of *The Orphan's Rescue* Yuen Yiu-fan (2nd right)

A letter reminding Oriental Theatre to return *The Orphan's Rescue*'s income statement, signed by Yuen Jim-fan on behalf of Tai Ping Theatre on 26 December 1950





directorial debut with *We Will See the Full Moon Again Tonight* (aka *Tonight the Moon is Full*, 1941).[3] After the fall of Hong Kong, Ng fled with his wife and daughter to Guangzhouwan (present-day Zhanjiang), where he formed a theatre troupe with actress Wong Man-lei and others. Subsequently he drifted to Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and other regions. Ng's time at Grandview, together with his professional theatre experience in Southeast Asia, helped build his network in the industry and broadened his artistic and commercial perspectives. 1949 saw seven of Ng's directorial works in theatres, making it a prolific year for him. Most of the films were romance dramas or family melodramas. In addition to *Orphan*, which had its premiere on 16 June, *Double Happiness at the Door* (7 February), *When a Woman Enters a Man's Home* (16 March), *Silent Dream* (23 June), *The Honest and the Dishonest* (14 August), *The Purple-Misted Cup* (29 September), and *Night Discovery of the Women's Trap* (aka *A Pitiable Wife*, 25 October) were also released in the same year. Such short intervals in between these seven titles' release dates show that they were possibly made at around the same time, highlighting Ng's time management prowess and especially his technique and confidence as a filmmaker.

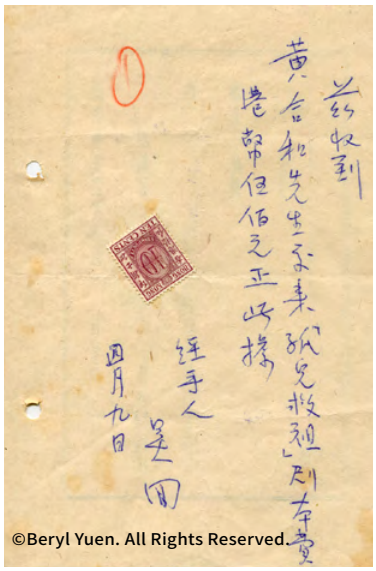
3. For a synopsis of the film, see Kwok Ching-ling (ed), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol I (1914–1941)* (Revised Edition), Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2020, p 184 (in Chinese).

Ng Wui, director of *The Orphan's Rescue*

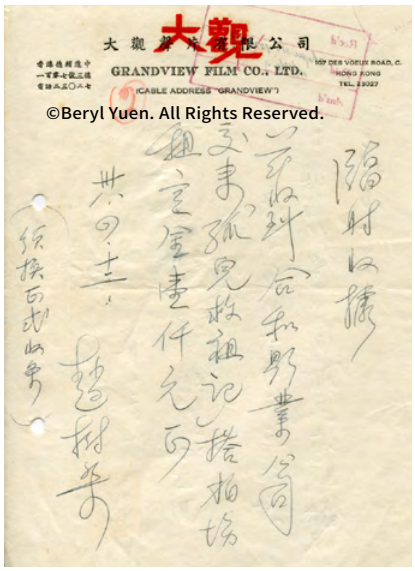
Wong Hap-wo, producer of *The Orphan's Rescue*, also played the patriarch Kong Yiu-chung in the film (Left: Wong Hap-wo; right: Yu Kai)

The literal resemblance between the names of *Orphan*'s producer, Wong Hap-wo, and the film's production and distribution company, United ('Hap Wo' in Cantonese), suggests that Wong Hap-wo was very likely to be the company's founder. Wong had acted in a number of films, including *The Prince Who Loves a Slave* (1940), *Vagabond Father* (aka *The Good Father*, 1941), and *The Death Case of Mr. Yen* (aka *The Judge Goes to Pieces*, 1948); in *Orphan*, he played the patriarch Kong Yiu-chung. Wong started out acting in plays, and was a member of the Cantonese drama group the Arrayed Fantasia (Linlang Huanjing) which was founded in Hong Kong in late Qing dynasty. Another member of the drama group was the well-known Cantonese opera artist Chan Fei-nung.[4] With reference to the *Orphan*-related artefacts, Wong was not only responsible for forming the production team, he also handled core production affairs. One of the documents records that on 9 April 1949, two months prior to the release of *Orphan*, Wong had paid a screenwriting fee of HK$500 to director Ng Wui. A few days later, United paid Ng a shooting fee of HK$1,500 in two instalments. Then on 2 May, the film company paid Ng another HK$7,000 as a portion of the 'service and materials fee'. It could be that United had hired the studio of Grandview to shoot as it did not have its own. A document dated 12 August 1949 indicates that the Grandview studio wrote to United to discuss account details concerning film distribution and studio hire. It can be deduced that due to its small size, United had to collaborate with other companies for facilities and resources. But there being no details about United nor other film distribution records, it is possible that it was a 'one-film company' set up solely for *Orphan*.

4. Chen Huaxin, 'Cantonese Opera and the Xinhai Revolution' in *Yueju Chunqiu* (*Annals of Cantonese Opera*), Literary and Historical Materials on Guangzhou Vol 42, Cultural and Historical Research Committee of the Guangzhou Political Consultative Conference & Cantonese Opera Research Centre (eds), Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Publishing House, 1990, p 137 (in Chinese). The founding year of the Arrayed Fantasia awaits further verification. From the article 'The Seventh Anniversary of the Arrayed Fantasia's Stage Debut' published in *Chinese Mail*, 11 October 1915 (in Chinese), it can be deduced that the drama group was founded as early as 1908.



Ng Wui's receipt for the screenwriting fee of *The Orphan's Rescue*, paid by Wong Hap-wo



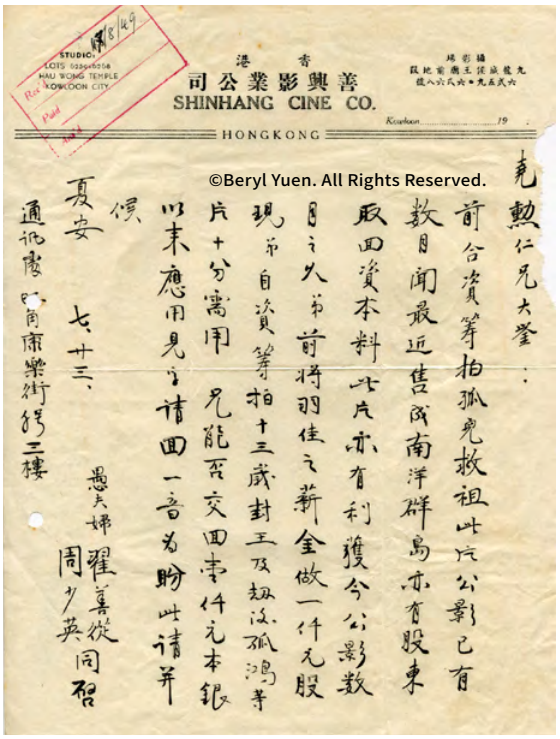
A temporary receipt issued by Joseph Sunn Jue to United, stating that a HK$1,000 deposit was received for renting and setting up the venue

Apart from the list of production crew, the brochure also contains the synopsis of *Orphan* as well as the main cast and their respective roles. The screenplay is an ethical tale centred around a family: Kong Yeung-sing (played by Luk Fei-hung), son of the patriarch Kong Yiu-chung (played by Wong Hap-wo), has two wives—the virtuous first wife Chan Cho-mui (played by Wong Man-lei) dotes on her husband and son Kong Bun-kai (played by Yu Kai); the promiscuous concubine Cheung Oi-wah (played by Yung Yuk-yi) has an affair with her cousin-in-law Kong Kam-bo (played by Fung Ying-seong) and devices a scheme to ransack the inheritance by killing her husband and framing Chan for it.[5]

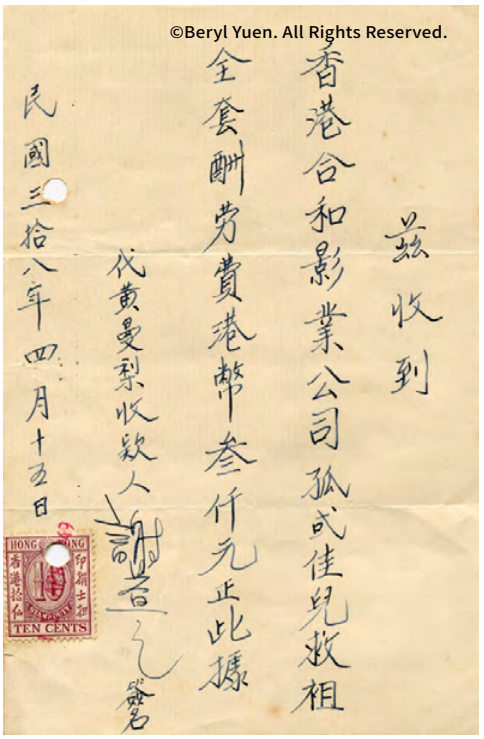
The orphan Kong Bun-kai was played by the 10-year-old Yu Kai. In 1949, Yu Kai starred in 11 films, in most of which he played a cute, quick-witted boy. In *Third Madame Educates Her Son*, he also played Wong Man-lei's son; in *Nazha Conquers the Seven Devils at Mount Mei* (which was released on 14 June, two days before *Orphan*), he played a dual role—one good and the other evil. *Orphan* sees Yu, who had been receiving Cantonese opera training from a young age, appearing alongside veterans Luk Fei-hung and Wong Cho-shan in two play-within-a-play scenes, namely 'The Couple that Raises a War' and 'Time to Go Home'. These stories within the story heightened the film's entertainment value. One of the documents in our collection reveals Yu Kai's remuneration. In a letter dated 23 July 1949, the child actor's parents Tsak Sin-chung and Chow Siu-ying wrote to Yuen Yiu-fan about their son's remuneration and share, indicating that the couple was fighting for better terms as their son's agent. Wong Man-lei, who played the first wife in *Orphan*, was known for her broad repertoire. She gave equally impressive performances as kind and virtuous wives and mothers in the early years of her career, and later as mean and formidable mothers-in-law. A number of Wong Man-lei's films share the theme of 'orphans', including

5. For basic film information and a synopsis of *The Orphan's Rescue*, see Winnie Fu (ed), *Hong Kong Filmography Vol II (1942–1949)*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 1998, p 335.

The Orphan's Rescue: Ten-year-old child star Yu Kai (1st left) plays the titular 'orphan' Kong Bun-kai; Wong Man-lei (2nd left) plays his virtuous mother.



A letter written by Tsak Sin-chung and Chow Siu-ying, parents of Yu Kai, to Yuen Jim-fan about their son's remuneration and shares



Wong Man-lei's remuneration for her acting in *The Orphan's Rescue* was HK$3,000, with the receipt signed by her husband Tse Yik-chi.

The Orphan (aka *Rescue Grandpa*, 1941) and *An Orphan's Tears* (1949). With her fame well-established at that time, Wong was paid HK$3,000 for her part in *Orphan*. Tse Pak-keung, former distribution manager of Sil-Metropole Organisation Ltd, recalls that such an amount could be considered superstar-level remuneration in the 1940s. The reason Wong was paid this much might have to do with her films' favourable box-office performances.

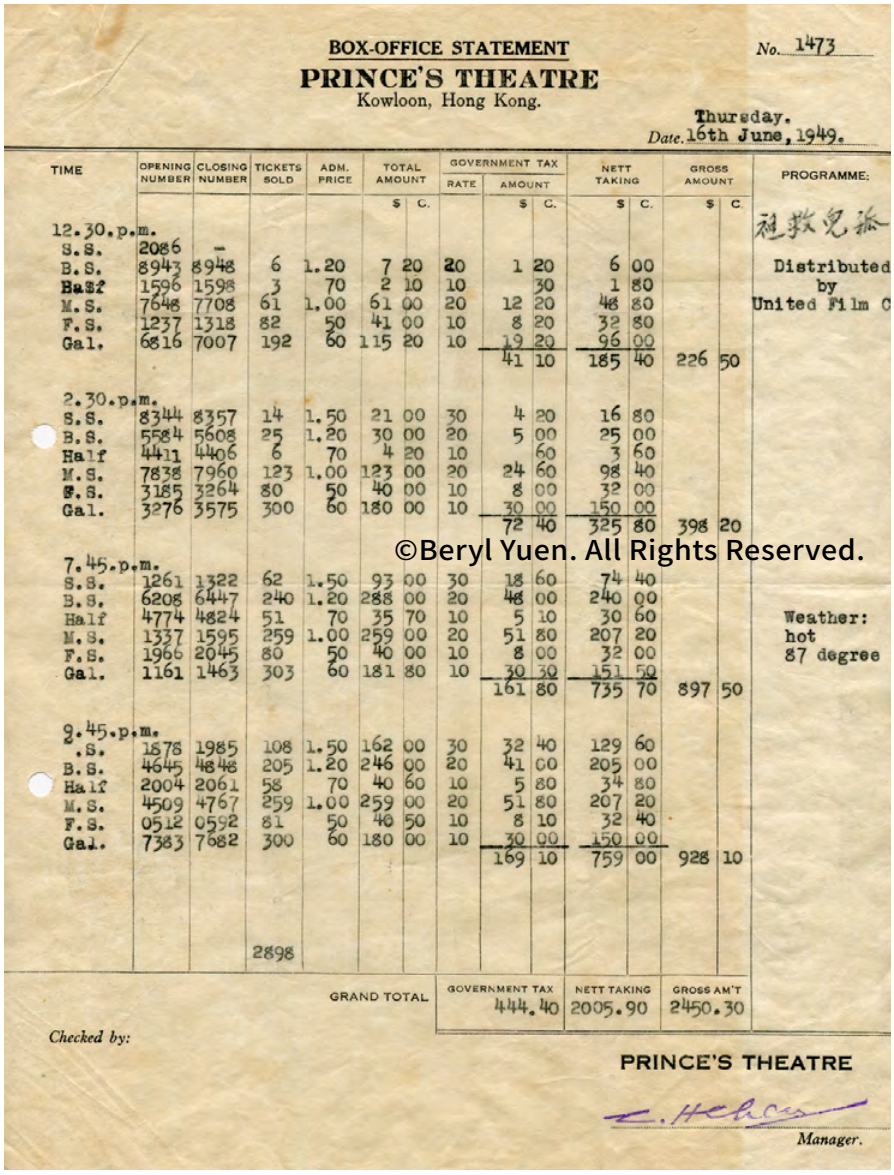
The background to *Orphan*'s production and distribution is also worthy of study. Hong Kong cinema underwent some of its main developments between the late 1940s and the early 1950s. According to statistics compiled by the publication of the HKFA, *Hong Kong Filmography Vol II (1942–1949)*, local film production experienced a huge surge in the few years after World War II.[6] According to research data collected by the HKFA as of December 2021, a total of 11 films were produced in Hong Kong in 1946, and the number soared to 184 in 1949, including 153 Cantonese titles, 30 Mandarin titles, and one Amoy film. Tai Ping Theatre's relaunch after Hong Kong's liberation from Japanese occupation could be interpreted as a plan to capitalise on this burgeoning market.

One thing worth noting is that the 'orphan' theme had been popular before the war. As early as the 1920s, *An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa* (1923), produced by Shanghai's Star Motion Picture Co., Ltd. (aka Mingxing), had stirred Shanghai's fervour for cinema. Later in Hong Kong, Grandview produced *The Orphan* (aka *The Lonely Son*, 1938), a work directed by Chin Tai-soak (aka Chin Kwong-yan) in collaboration with Xinyue Film Company. Between 1938 and 1961 in Hong Kong, an estimated seven films had the word 'orphan' in their original Chinese titles. The list includes: the abovementioned two titles of the same name *The Orphan*, with one produced by Grandview in 1938, and the other, produced by Nanyang Film Company (aka Nan Yeung Film Company) in 1941, being an adaptation of the 1923 film by the same Chinese name; *The Orphan's Rescue* (1949) by United; the abovementioned *An Orphan's Tears* (1949) by Youqiao Film Production Company; *The War Baby* (1950) by Shinghang Cine Co., *Orphan's Song* (1955) by Tiangong Film Company; and *The Orphan's Adventure* (1961) by Tao Yuen Motion Picture Development Company. These films share similar storylines surrounding an orphan and a virtuous mother, both of whom suffer at the hands of a stepmother or other cunning female characters; such a trend in relation to the zeitgeist of the time deserves further exploration. Since the subject of orphans necessitates the participation of child actors, Yu Kai played in two of the aforementioned titles. To sum up, *Orphan* was a work by an experienced production team and cast, with a popular plot and theme. From a commercial point of view, it's a work that chose to play safe and geared for success.

Local Release

After a film is completed, administrative and commercial decisions need to be made about its distribution and release, such as the assignment of screening venues, marketing arrangements,

6. Ibid, pp 437-501.



BOX-OFFICE STATEMENT No. 1473

PRINCE'S THEATRE

Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Date. Thursday. 16th June, 1949.

TIME	OPENING NUMBER	CLOSING NUMBER	TICKETS SOLD	ADM. PRICE	TOTAL AMOUNT $	TOTAL AMOUNT C.	GOVERNMENT TAX RATE	GOVERNMENT TAX AMOUNT $	GOVERNMENT TAX AMOUNT C.	NETT TAKING $	NETT TAKING C.	GROSS AMOUNT $	GROSS AMOUNT C.	PROGRAMME:
12.30.p.m.														祖救兒孤
S.S.	2086	–												
B.S.	8943	8948	6	1.20	7	20	20	1	20	6	00			Distributed
Half	1596	1598	3	70	2	10	10		30	1	80			by
M.S.	7648	7708	61	1.00	61	00	20	12	20	48	80			United Film C
F.S.	1237	1318	82	50	41	00	10	8	20	32	80			
Gal.	6816	7007	192	60	115	20	10	19	20	96	00			
								41	10	185	40	226	50	
2.30.p.m.														
S.S.	8344	8357	14	1.50	21	00	30	4	20	16	80			
B.S.	5584	5608	25	1.20	30	00	20	5	00	25	00			
Half	4411	4406	6	70	4	20	10		60	3	60			
M.S.	7838	7960	123	1.00	123	00	20	24	60	98	40			
F.S.	3185	3264	80	50	40	00	10	8	00	32	00			
Gal.	3276	3575	300	60	180	00	10	30	00	150	00			
								72	40	325	80	398	20	
7.45.p.m.														
S.S.	1261	1322	62	1.50	93	00	30	18	60	74	40			
B.S.	6208	6447	240	1.20	288	00	20	48	00	240	00			
Half	4774	4824	51	70	35	70	10	5	10	30	60			Weather:
M.S.	1337	1595	259	1.00	259	00	20	51	80	207	20			hot
F.S.	1966	2045	80	50	40	00	10	8	00	32	00			87 degree
Gal.	1161	1463	303	60	181	80	10	30	30	151	50			
								161	80	735	70	897	50	
9.45.p.m.														
S.S.	1878	1985	108	1.50	162	00	30	32	40	129	60			
B.S.	4645	4848	205	1.20	246	00	20	41	00	205	00			
Half	2004	2061	58	70	40	60	10	5	80	34	80			
M.S.	4509	4767	259	1.00	259	00	20	51	80	207	20			
F.S.	0512	0592	81	50	40	50	10	8	10	32	40			
Gal.	7383	7682	300	60	180	00	10	30	00	150	00			
								169	10	759	00	928	10	
			2898											
					GRAND TOTAL			GOVERNMENT TAX 444.40		NETT TAKING 2005.90		GROSS AM'T 2450.30		

Checked by:

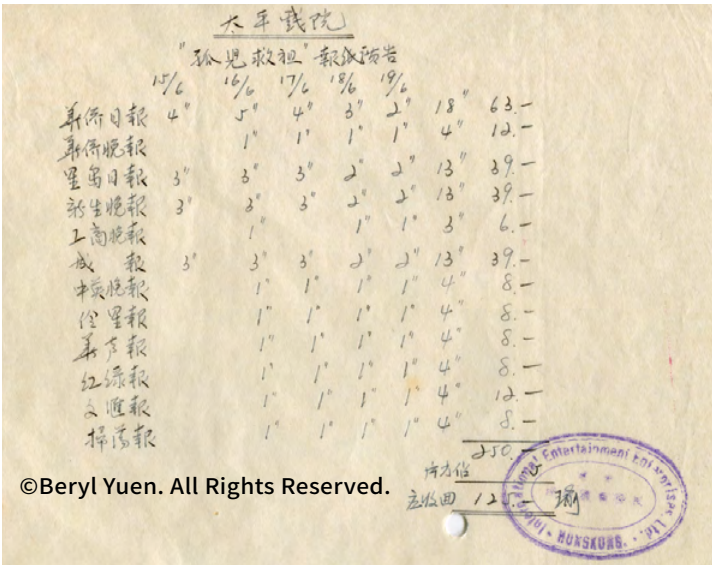
PRINCE'S THEATRE

Manager.

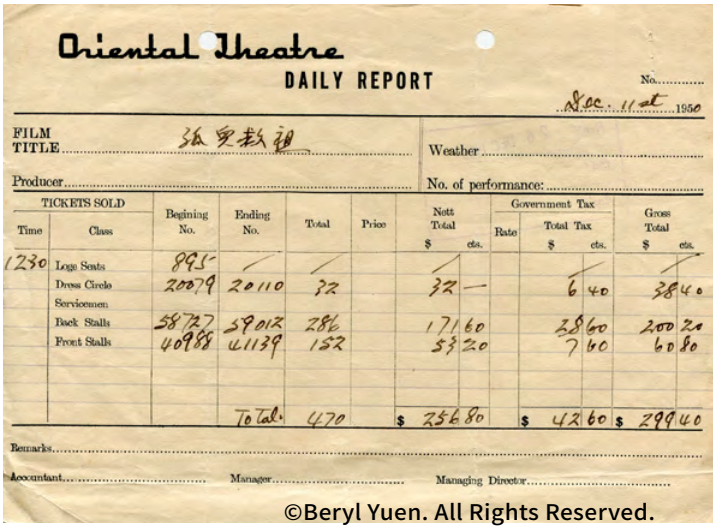
Prince's Theatre's income and expenditure balance statement of the first run of *The Orphan's Rescue* on 16 June 1949 recorded the weather information for the day.

all of which have a direct impact on revenue. Hence, film distribution decisions are extremely important from an investment point of view. The artefacts of *Orphan*'s comprise records of the film's advertisements and commercial correspondence between Tai Ping Theatre and other local theatres—altogether, they offer a glimpse into the film's distribution process.

The week prior to the release is when the production company passes advertisement materials to the newspapers. According to the HKFA's collection, which includes the receipts and information on the advertisement images on printing plates, current affairs-oriented newspapers that published advertisements on the film included *Wah Kiu Yat Po*, *Wah Kiu Man Po*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *New Life Evening Post*, *Sing Pao Daily News*, *Chung Ying Evening News*, *Wen Wei Pao* (aka *Wen Wei Po*), and *The Kung Sheung Evening News*; as well as the entertainment-based *Chun Lan Yat Po*, *Ling Sing Daily*, *The China Star*, *Hung Look*, and *Sao Tang Pao*. The film's marketing channels were clearly abundant.



Newspapers which published advertisements for *The Orphan's Rescue*


Oriental Theatre
DAILY REPORT
No.
Dec. 11 at 1950
FILM TITLE 孤兒救祖
Weather
Producer
No. of performance:

Time	Class	Begining No.	Ending No.	Total	Price	Nett Total $ cts.	Government Tax Rate	Government Tax Total Tax $ cts.	Gross Total $ cts.
1230	Loge Seats	8915							
	Dress Circle	20079	20110	32		32 —		6 40	38 40
	Servicemen								
	Back Stalls	58727	59012	286		171 60		28 60	200 20
	Front Stalls	40988	41139	152		53 20		7 60	60 80
			Total	470		$ 256 80		$ 42 60	$ 299 40

Remarks
Accountant Manager Managing Director
©Beryl Yuen. All Rights Reserved.

Oriental Theatre's income and expenditure balance statement of *The Orphan's Rescue*'s second run on 11 December 1950

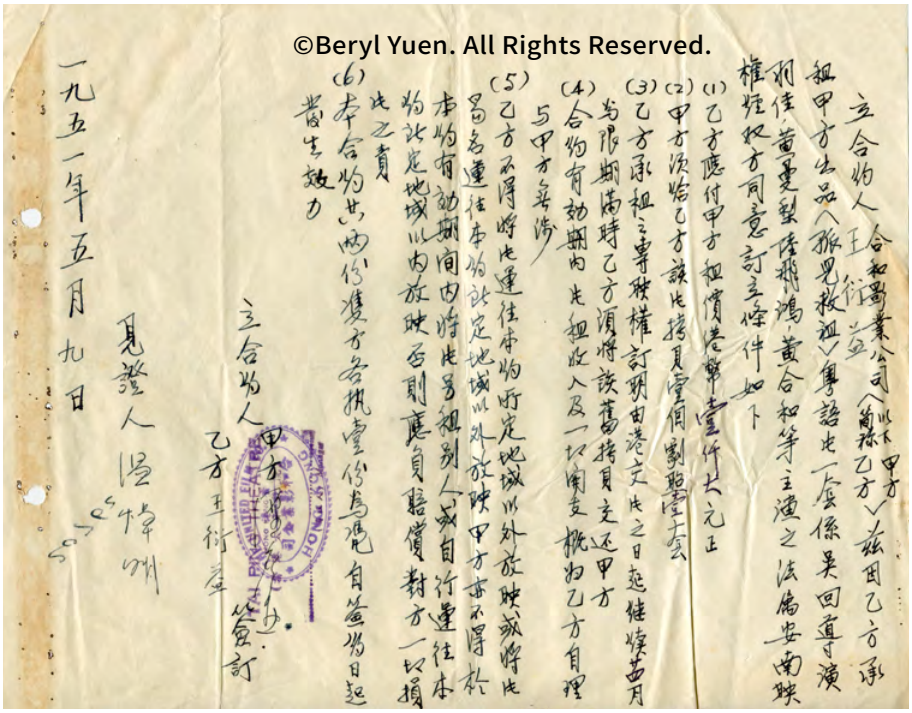
Premiere venues included Tai Ping Theatre, which financed and produced the film; Kau Yu Fong Theatre and National Theatre on Hong Kong Island; as well as Prince's Theatre, Good World Theatre and Kwong Ming Theatre in Kowloon. The income and expenditure balance statements from the theatres for the first run show the total box-office figures and the corresponding weather information (because weather conditions directly affect the audience's motivation to visit the cinema). Figure 1 at the end of this essay shows that the box office hit the peak on its release day, and then steadily dropped in the days following, which is very different from the situation today. Tai Ping Theatre as an investor had the largest share of box-office revenue. Back then, films usually ran just for four or five days: *Orphan*'s first run lasted for four days. The receipt also contains the cost for 'film run', which refers to the cost of hiring a courier to transport the film reels between two theatres. Having two theatres share a copy helped lower film printing cost in the past. Prince's Theatre, located at the junction between Nathan Road and

Nullah Road in Mong Kok, was not far from Good World Theatre on Tong Mi Road. Basing on present day calculation, it is about a nine-minute walk to travel between the two theatres, making them great 'partners' for sharing film reels. Their films' screening times were thus set at 15 minutes apart. Other than Oriental Theatre in Wan Chai, second-run cinemas were more remotely located by the standards of the time. The list covers Cheong Lok Theatre on Holy Cross Path in Sai Wan Ho, Island Theatre in Aberdeen and Cheung Chau Theatre on the outlying islands.

As shown from the records, it seems that the overall screening and profit-sharing process was well-oiled. In the second run, film companies usually lowered their profit-sharing rate. Take Oriental Theatre as an example, *Orphan* was released in the year end of 1950, one year or so after its debut. The film company lowered their profit-sharing rate to 35%, leaving 65% for the theatre. Release schedule-wise, Oriental Theatre screened *Orphan* on 11 and 12 December 1950; the theatre received the film stills and license ten days prior to screening, and the nine reels seven days prior. Two weeks after the screening, Yuen Jim-fan urged Oriental Theatre to return the statement of balance. In less than a month, on 14 January of the following year, United, as distributor, received its slice of the revenue sharing, indicating that the whole screening and profit-sharing process was seamless and efficient.

Overseas Distribution

Orphan was distributed to several places overseas. Multiple contract documents show that on 23 June, a week after its debut, contracts were signed for distribution to Macao and Shiqi; and the next day, to Guangdong and Guangxi. Not long after, on 23 July, a deal was signed for release in



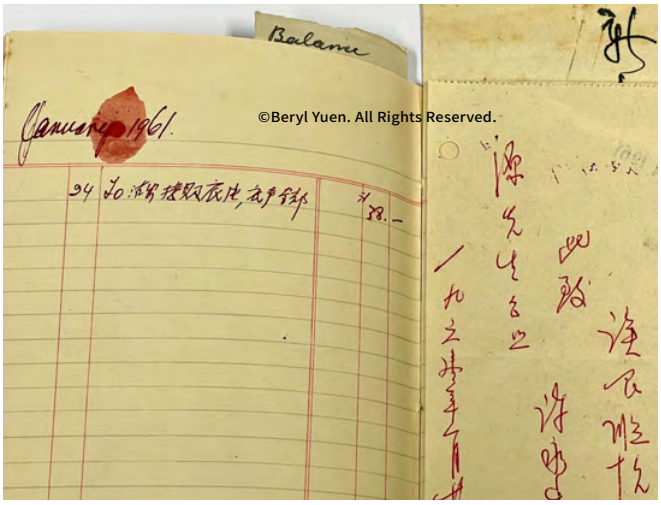
An agreement on the rights to distribute *The Orphan's Rescue* to French Annam (now Vietnam), signed by United on 9 May 1951

the four major film markets. Tse Pak-keung recalls that the four markets refer to Malaya (now Malaysia), Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. On 9 May 1951, the film was distributed to French Annam (now Vietnam). The overseas distribution process, from signing to screening, was longer than local release, taking several months to half a year. For instance, Lee Bo-lam of Macao's Teatro Vitoria (Victoria Theatre) received nine reels of *Orphan*, two sets of film stills, and one trailer at Hing Kee Hong on the 5th floor of its address at Pedder Street on 12 November, six months after contract signing. Hence, in overseas distribution, usually it took several months after contract signing before the theatre received the screening materials. Places that were farther away might take even longer time.

It is interesting to observe that the film's story is quite common in Chinese societies, and the film was distributed to regions where Chinese communities resided. This means its potential audiences were likely to be the Chinese diaspora for whom goods or cultural artefacts related to their motherland, such as Hong Kong films, offered cultural and emotional consolation in response to their nostalgia for their homeland. In the case of *Orphan*, the fact that a Hong Kong film appealed to overseas markets is evidence of overseas Chinese being able to afford cinema-going as an entertainment. The distribution contracts not only testify to Hong Kong film's overseas markets in the 1940s and 1950s; but also reflect on the entertainment, cultural and socio-economic landscapes of overseas Chinese communities. Unfortunately, the HKFA's collection only covers materials about the distributor; more information is required for in-depth research on the reception and influence of Hong Kong cinema overseas.

Film Disposal

The loss of the *Orphan* film could be attributed to film companies' then-common practice of scrapping their prints. Film conservation is costly as it requires meticulous temperature and humidity control. The film companies were not interested in the films' historical or artistic value, but whether they were profitable and what commercial value they held. Generally speaking, after several runs, the majority of potential audiences would have watched the film, and its market value would therefore plummet. Selling the reels at that moment not only lowered costs, but was also a potential income source. One side of the negatives had a gelatin coating of photographic emulsion that contained tiny photosensitive silver halide crystals, from which silver could be extracted for profit. Although certain reel owners would preserve



A receipt dated 24 January 1961 showing *The Orphan's Rescue*'s film prints, negatives and sound reels being sold for a total of HK$38

the film due to various reasons and some would even defend their stock at all costs (including with their lives, such as *A Page of History* [aka *A Page in the History of the Republic of China*, 1941]). As a commercial work, *Orphan* might not have been worth keeping from its owners' perspective, and so the reels were sold for recycling. According to the documents, on 24 January 1961, 11 years after its debut, all the film material—including prints, negatives and sound reels—were sold for HK$38. In other words, the film's commercial life lasted only a little more than ten years.

Conclusion

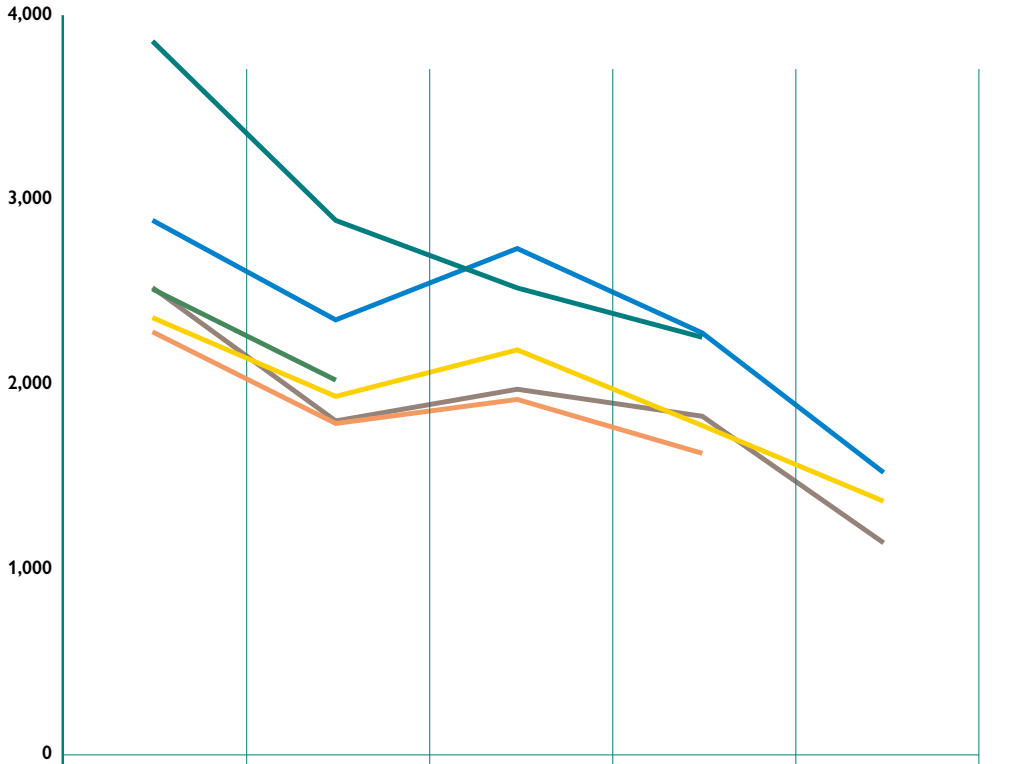
The artefacts of *Orphan* tell the story of a film's life—from production, screening, distribution, to disposal—in the 1940s. Such information not only demonstrates the production and distribution history of a single film, such as the filmmaking workflow, fundraising, profit-sharing arrangements, commercial considerations of screening locations, and the trajectory of overseas distribution; it also obliquely reflects the ecology of the film industry back then, such as child stars' parents taking up the role of managing agents, and the commercial etiquette of the industry. Tai Ping Theatre's collection proves that the theatre went beyond merely as a screening venue, that it also became a film investor. From a modern economics perspective, this operation model is an example of vertical integration.

With regard to Hong Kong film history as a whole, the *Orphan* collection leaves a number of questions unanswered. First, the connection between the screenplay's story setting and social background: as a product of popular culture, the contents of cinema should be closely tied to the socio-economic structure of its time. The character combination of an orphan alongside an evil stepmother was once common in films of the 1920s to the 1960s, and though this is no longer the case today, the underlying cause of such a trend back then is yet to be explored. Furthermore, the 'stepmother' image (which includes but is not limited to certain features pertaining to character, appearance and background) has continued to evolve according to mainstream society's changing views on 'family'. Another question is box-office revenue. Listed on the documents are the box-office details and show times of various theatres, as well as daily weather information. However, the link between revenue, show times and weather remains unclear. The third question concerns the behind-the-scenes investors. Although Yuen Yiu-fan is billed as the executive producer, his signature can be found on very few documents. His elder brother Yuen Jim-fan, who oversaw much of the film's production, could be the real behind-the-scene investor. In the 1940s and 1950s, when people were not informed on the concept of copyright, it is unclear whether having behind-the-scene investors was a common practice. Lastly, among the HKFA collection is one document with a template for group discussion of the screenplay at its back. It is possible that the screenplay of *Orphan* was a fruit of intensive group discussion, like a 1940s version of the Cinema City's 'Aspiration Room'. Yet whether this was the then-prevalent mode of creation has yet to be thoroughly studied. With my limited knowledge, I would like to take this humble essay as an invitation to more rigorous and in-depth discussions. [Translated by Piera Chen]

I am particularly grateful to Ms Beryl Yuen for her generous donation of Tai Ping Theatre artefacts, which fills a void in the study of Hong Kong film production and distribution history. I would also like to extend special thanks to Ms Amelia Cheung for her assistance on researching, consolidating and double-checking the historical information. Her efforts ensured the smooth presentation of this research at the symposium.

Priscilla Chan is Assistant Curator I (Programming) of the Hong Kong Film Archive.

[Figure 1] First Run Box-Office Records of *The Orphan's Rescue* Based on Tai Ping's Archival Documents



	16 June (Thu)	17 June (Fri)	18 June (Sat)	19 June (Sun)	20 June (Mon)
Tai Ping Theatre	3,855	2,895	2,521	2,261	—
Kau Yu Fong Theatre	2,316	1,805	1,927	1,645	—
National Theatre	2,543	1,823	1,984	1,835	1,143
Kwong Ming Theatre	2,377	1,936	2,199	1,783	1,370
Prince's Theatre	2,898	2,355	2,736	2,287	1,524
Good World Theatre	2,520	2,021	—	—	—

Acknowledgements

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