China's Industrial Response to Hollywood:

A Transnational History, 1923-1937

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film, Television, and Media Studies, The University of Auckland, New Zealand, 2014.

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Dedicated to Jin Guanjun (1948-2011), a lifelong mentor

Abstract

This thesis explores China's industrial response to Hollywood and its contribution to the formation of the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth century. The study of the industrial relations between Hollywood and China remains nascent so far. Drawing on primary materials including studio archives, industrial surveys, official records, trade journals and English and Chinese newspapers, this thesis addresses the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry by examining issues including the role Hollywood played as a transnational force, the dynamics of China's industrial response to Hollywood, the contribution of the figures who acted as the intermediaries, and the consequences of the industrial response. An investigation of the industrial relations between Hollywood and China should be considered in a transnational context, not only due to the transnationality of Hollywood, but also due to the blurred national boundaries between China and the United States with regard to the film industry. Therefore, this study is associated with the current paradigmatic shift from a national cinema approach to a transnational cinema approach. This thesis advocates the positive impact of Hollywood on the Chinese domestic film industry and demonstrates that the conscious response to Hollywood commenced and consolidated the domestic film industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

Acknowledgements

I vividly remember the glaring light when I first came to New Zealand. Xuelin picked me up from the airport and eventually we passed a small square and went into a low building. It was the building where I spent five years. During the following five years, I began to go bald and some of my hair turned grey, but fortunately I completed this thesis. Without the supports of supervisors, friends, and family, I could not have survived.

I thank Xuelin Zhou and Laurence Simmons, the two supervisors of this thesis, for their invaluable advice, for their patience, and for their strong support and tolerance during my PhD study. Despite my five years' study as a graduate student in China, I was confused when I was required at first to propose an argument for my doctoral thesis. It was Xuelin who taught me how to conduct research in an academic manner. In addition, he was there to help me to consolidate my ideas and to improve the quality of each chapter. Laurence carefully reviewed all chapters of my thesis and significantly enhanced the quality of my research. His support on my change of topic in my third year of study deserves special mention.

Paul Clark, as my PhD adviser, immensely aided my research in various ways. Paul's research on Chinese film audiences in the 1950s enlightens my analysis on the box office receipts of Chinese films and Hollywood in China in the 1930s. As a pioneer in Chinese film studies, his encouragement and suggestions proved to be helpful in the early stages of this project.

Zheng Han, one of my supervisors in China, continued to offer me insightful advice when I came to New Zealand. His suggestions were greatly beneficial to me on teasing out ideas and structuring the whole thesis. Sun Shaoyi and Suguwana Yoshino reviewed one chapter and offered valuable feedback respectively. Shi Chuan provided

the original copy of Lu Jie's diary, which significantly benefited the writing of my chapter on the mode of production. In addition, I am indebted to the following scholars for their suggestions during the writing of this thesis: Ma Ning, Lim Song Hwee, Long Jin, Misha Kavka, Annamarie Jagose, Hilary Chung, Yang Kuisong, Li Suyuan, Xiao Zhiwei, Yeh Yueh-yu, Lu Ye and Howard Cox.

Numerous librarians and friends offered energetic assistances with my archive searches. Lin Haiqing in Chinese Collection and Sarah Etheridge in the Audio-visual Library of The University of Auckland assisted me to use the facilities of The General Library of The University of Auckland. I would like to thank Alice Mendoza, Uma Chinni, Mathew Morton and Emma Richardson for providing numerous interlibrary loans. The archives I interloaned from Australia and the United States constituted some major primary materials in this thesis. Librarian Chie Emslie helped me in Japanese translation and purchased several Japanese publications for me. In Shanghai, my friends, Li Yan, Niu Haikun and Wei Xiaofang, copied several volumes of archive material from the Shanghai Municipal Archive. I am also indebted to the following libraries and institutions: The General Library of The University of Auckland, The City Library of Auckland, Shanghai Library, Shanghai Municipal Archive, The National Library of Australia, The Santa Monica Public Library (Los Angeles), The National Library of New Zealand, China National Microfilm Centre for Library Resources, National Archives and Records Administration and The Wisconsin Historical Society.

I am grateful to friends and colleagues in China and New Zealand for their continuous encouragement and support: Chen Jian, Jani Wilson, Susan Potter, Cassandra Barnett, Anna Jackson, Emma Kelly, Chen Chen, Echo Zi Fan, Luo Ting, Cao Xiaojie, Debjani Mukherjee, Sunni Pavlovic, Song Shasha, Zhang Yanling, Zhao

Peng, Xu Jia, Hong Daixing, Jiang An, Adam White and Katie Petrie. I wish to thank my proofreaders sincerely: Michael Jenkins, Russell and Jani Wilson. The research is funded by the China Scholarship Council.

I would like to express my great appreciation to the anonymous thesis examiners for their constructive and insightful comments and suggestions.

This thesis could not have been written without the supports of my wife Hou Haibo, my parent-in-law, Hou Haipeng, and my family in the small village in China. Haibo, you are my reason to continue.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What would Hollywood bring to a domestic film industry outside of the United States? This question has been raised since Hollywood started to dominate world film markets after the World War I. The reason is that, in the words of Kristin Thompson, "Most national cinemas…consist not only of domestic tendencies, but also of the influences film-makers and audiences picked up from the presence of American films".[1] Left-wing critics, in particular those who employ cultural imperialism, assert that an aggressive Hollywood is a threat to a domestic film industry outside of the United States, as the hegemony of Hollywood diverts domestic film audiences and oppresses the development of the domestic film industry.[2] Meanwhile, right-wing critics argue that Hollywood benefits a domestic film industry as it provides a competitive environment and a model for the domestic film industry.[3] Such debates

[1] Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934*. London: BFI Publishing, 1985, ix.

[2] Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communication and American Empire*, Boulder: Westview, 1992. Francis Shor, *Dying Empire: U.S. Imperialism and Global Resistance*, London: Routledge, 2010. James Petras, "Cultural Imperialism in the Late 20th Century", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 23, 2, 1993, 139-148; Cultural imperialists contend that the domination of the Hollywood film industry in the global film market has tendency of cultural homogenization through devouring small national industries (Christophe Germann, "Content Industries and Cultural Diversity: The Case of Motion Pictures", in Bernd Hamm and Russell Smandych (eds.), *Cultural Imperialism: Essays on the Political Economy of Cultural Domination*. Ontario: The Broadview Press, 2005, 93-113).

[3] An example of such "right-wing" account is A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, "The Many Faces of Imperialism", in P. Golding and P. Harris, *Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Globalization, Communication, and the New International Order*, London: Sage, 1997, 49-68. The notion of the right-wing critics echoes with the cultural globalists who do not take American domination for granted. The oft-cited examples include such cases as the "export of Brazilian television program to Portugal and the Mexicization of southern California" (James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, "Introduction", in James Curran and Myung-Jin Park eds., *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, London: Routledge, 2000:4). With regard to the case of China, scholars such as Michael Curtin have given close attention to China's

have become inflamed in the wake of the upsurge of the theory of globalisation and in particular cultural imperialism. A better understanding of the relations between Hollywood and the domestic film industry, in my view, needs to be based on a more detailed understanding of the past.

I believe that Hollywood can help domestic films in some cases, and oppress it in other cases, depending on how the domestic film industry responds to the influence of Hollywood. Using the case of China, this thesis addresses how the Chinese film industry responded to Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s. It focuses on the formation of the Chinese film industry and the role Hollywood played in the process of that formation. My thesis shows that the Chinese film industry consciously responded to Hollywood as it commenced and consolidated its own industry in the 1920s and 1930s. The expansion of Hollywood in China and the emergence of the domestic film industry shows that the domestic industry does not necessarily diminish under the shadow of Hollywood. By contrast, the case of China in the 1920s and 1930s demonstrates that the domestic film industry could emerge and achieve growth along with the expansion of Hollywood in the local market.

Whilst the finding of China's industrial response to Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s seems to echo the "right-wing critics", an intention of building a definite link between the presence of Hollywood and the development of the domestic film industry is beyond my ambition. I agree with some notions of the right-wing critics, such as Hollywood provided a competitive surrounding for the domestic film industry. However, I believe that it is a mistake to set a definite link between Hollywood's

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active response to Hollywood, arguing that the blossoming of Chinese cinema, along with China's rise as a superpower in the globalisation era, has undermined Hollywood's hegemony. See Michael Curtin, *Playing the Biggest Audience in the World: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 3.

presence and the growth/diminish of the domestic film industry. The growth/diminish of the domestic film industry in the shadow of the presence of Hollywood is subject to a number of factors and contexts including the size of the domestic industry, the role the local government played, and the attitude of the domestic film industry towards Hollywood.

The industrial relations between Hollywood and China are one of the most important topics in contemporary Chinese film studies. Firstly, Hollywood was the first and foremost counterpart for the domestic film industry in the first half of the twentieth century. Hollywood films dominated the Chinese film market since the late 1910s, by taking up around 75 per cent of the total market share in terms of box-office revenues. Compared with domestic films, Hollywood films were sophisticated in language, performance, financial budget and commercial promotion. Domestic films were forced to maintain competitive advantages when competing with Hollywood films. Secondly, Hollywood was the most significant source for the Chinese industry to imitate. When the Chinese film industry commenced in the early 1920s, Hollywood films had already been present as a giant counterpart and source of inspiration. To Chinese film practitioners, there were few options but to learn from Hollywood films. Scholars have found abundant evidence on how Chinese film practitioners learned from Hollywood in the first half of twentieth century, from camera movement to montage, from film production to film exhibition, according to Leo Ou-fan Lee.[4]

The aim of my doctoral thesis is threefold. Firstly, the central concern of my doctoral thesis is to articulate the industrial relations between Hollywood and China in the 1920s and 1930s. I examine four prominent perspectives with respect to this topic,

[4] Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 104.

including, 1) the role Hollywood played in the formation of the Chinese film industry; 2) the dynamic of China's industrial response to Hollywood; 3) the contribution of the intermediaries between Hollywood and China; 4) the results of China's industrial response to Hollywood. These four perspectives are either ignored or deserve rethinking due to the problematic methodology of the existing literature. I hope my investigation of the relations between Hollywood and China from a historical and industrial perspective will contribute to the current debate on cultural globalisation within the broader field of the film industry as well as the transnational cinema studies.

Secondly, my doctoral thesis intends to deepen the understanding of the history of the domestic film industry in 1920s and 1930s China. This is a period of formation for the Chinese film industry when domestic film production began taking shape. There is clear evidence that the number of domestic films released was maintained at over 50 in the 1920s and 1930s, while no more than five films were produced prior to the 1920s. Watching films became a popular and regular entertainment in urban cities. Chinese film practitioners established and innovated a series of industrial systems during this period, including a studio system, distribution system, film star system and theatre chain system. Meanwhile, China completed its cinema transition to talkie pictures. However, in contrast to the fruitful literature on film culture, scholarship on industrial research remains extremely poor.[5] My thesis aims to enrich the study of the Chinese film industry, through investigating the film

[5] Recent studies on film culture in 1920s and 1930s China include Lee, *Shanghai Modern*; Laikwan Pang, *Building a New China in Cinema, The Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002; Yiman Wang, *Moving the Image between Shanghai, Hong Kong and Hollywood from 1920s to 1990s*, Doctoral Thesis, Durham: Duke University, 2003; Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

distribution system, film technology, figures of intermediaries, box office reception and the mode of production of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

The third contribution of my thesis relies on understanding the presence of Hollywood films in China in the early twentieth century. Hollywood dominated the Chinese film market in terms of total market share including box office income and the number of titles, as I mentioned previously. In addition, Hollywood films stood as the model for the domestic film industry, as well as a constructive force in the making of the domestic film industry. As Xiao Zhiwei points out, "no discussion of Chinese film history can be complete without taking into full account the presence of Hollywood".[6] However, the picture of Hollywood's presence in China is far from clear at this stage, due to the lack of fundamental information. In this thesis, I explore several key issues which contribute the knowledge of Hollywood films in China, including the introduction of Hollywood talkie pictures into China, the number of Hollywood films circulated in China and the box office receipts of Hollywood films in China in the 1930s. The exploration of such issues will benefit discussions such as cultural imperialism by providing empirical support.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

It will prove to be useful to link my research with the recent paradigmatic shift of film studies from a "national cinema approach" to a "transnational cinema approach". National cinema approach locates "films and cinemas within their national contexts and/or treats a country's cinematic output as a distinct object of study".[7] To a large extent, national cinema is "defined against Hollywood", suggesting a clear-cut

[6] Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey", *Chinese Historical Review,* 12, 1, Spring, 2005, 72.

[7] Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 277.

distinction between Hollywood and the domestic film industry/culture.[8] The conventional approach of "national cinema" concentrates on the sector of production. By the 1980s, a national cinema approach was the dominant paradigm in film scholarship. However, since the late 1980s, the national film approach has been increasingly challenged, and film scholarship has called for

> "A paradigmatic shift from unity (a myth of national consensus) to diversity (several cinemas within a nation-state), from self-identity (a cinema defined against Hollywood) to self-othering (a nation's internal heterogeneity), from text (auteurist studies) to context (cultural history, political economy), from elitist (great intellectual minds) to popular (mass audience), from production (studio-centered) to financing, distribution, and exhibition (process-oriented)".[9]

Two prominent figures deserve special notice in problematizing the national cinema approach: Andrew Higson and Stephen Crofts. Andrew Higson remedies the national cinema approach by suggesting a "more inward-looking means, constituting a national cinema… in terms of its relationship to an already existing national political, economic and cultural identity and set of traditions".[10] In the same vein as Higson, Stephen Crofts addresses the varieties of national cinema. In his taxonomy, Crofts differentiated the types of national cinema into eight that "takes into account the three

[8] Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s", in Williams Alan ed., *Film and Nationalism*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002, 49.

[9] Yingjin Zhang, "Chinese Cinema and Transnational Film Studies", in Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman (eds.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2010, 124.

[10] Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema", in Alan Williams ed., *Film and Nationalism*, 60.

main industrial categories of production, distribution and exhibition, and audiences as well as those of textuality and national representation".[11] The essays of Higson and Crofts may have remedied "national cinema" theory, but they still leave many questions unsolved. In a 2000 account, Higson admits that his earlier formulation is problematic since it "tends to assume that national identity and tradition are already fully formed and fixed in place" and "takes boarders for granted".[12] Higson thus suggests a replacement of the concept of "national cinema" with "transnational cinema". The reason, according to Higbee and Lim, is that the "transnational cinema" term is "a subtler means of understanding cinema's relationship to the cultural and economic formations that are rarely contained within national boundaries".[13]

"Scholarship on Chinese cinemas", as Higbee and Lim indicate, "has been at the forefront of the theorizing [of] the transnational".[14] Sheldon Lu is one of the first scholars who entered "transnational" into film studies. In 1997, Lu points out that "Chinese *national* cinema can only be understood in its properly *transnational* context [emphasis added]" and "one must speak of Chinese cinemas in the plural and as transnational in the ongoing process of image-making throughout the twentieth century".[15] Lu's edited volume became a "watershed moment in the study of Chinese

[11] Stephen Crofts, "Concepts of National Cinema", in John Hill and Pamela Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 389.

[12] Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema", in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation*, London: Routledge, 2002, 67.

[13] Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies", *Traditional Cinema*, 1, 1, 2010, 9.

[14] Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema", 14.

[15] Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, "Historical Introduction, Chinese Cinemas (1896-1996) and Transnational Film Studies", in Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997, 3.

cinemas" and the "transnational Chinese cinemas" now "name the field that we study and are used routinely".[16]

Inspired by Lu, in this thesis, I employ the transnational cinema approach and shed light on a specific question: how the domestic film industry was formed in the early twentieth century through its response to a transnational force: Hollywood. Here, I deliberately use the term "domestic", instead of "national", because I realise the risk of treating the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century as a national industry. Despite their requests for transnationally understanding Chinese cinemas, few scholars seem to entirely abandon the term "the national film industry" when referring to the film industry prior to 1949. For instance, Lu writes, "the life-and-death struggle of China's national film industry is isomorphic with the plight of China as a nation-state in the twentieth century" although he claims the transnational elements in the "prehistory" of the Chinese film industry.[17] Whilst admitting that Chinese cinema in terms of "national cinema" is "a messy affair" and "fundamentally dispersed", Zhang Yingjin still maintains the concept of "national cinema" and employs it to structure his chronological survey of Chinese cinema.[18] However, the national cinema approach begs too many questions when describing the Chinese film industry prior to 1949. In terms of production, the coproduction between China and foreign countries (in particular the United States and the United Kingdom) crossed the national boundaries (an instance which will be detailed in Chapter Five). In the domain of distribution, the national film approach neglects the contribution of foreign film distributors (including a large number of Chinese merchants) to the so-called "national building" of the Chinese film industry. In terms of exhibition, the Chinese

[16] Chris Berry and Laikwan Pang, "Introduction, or, What is an 's'?", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 2, 1, 2008, 3.

[17] Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinema*, 4.

[18] Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2004, 3.

diaspora communities in South East Asia were the second largest market for Chinese films. To a large extent, the tastes of the audiences in these countries shaped China's film production in particular in the 1920s and 1930s. [19]

Employing a transnational cinema framework, instead of the conventional national framework, could benefit the study of history of the Chinese film industry in two ways. First, it could provide a better understanding of issues and debates which the previous national paradigm finds it difficult to deal with. Hollywood's contribution to the domestic film industry is a case in point. The previous national approach acknowledges the contribution of Hollywood as an outside force since it takes the national boundaries for granted. Therefore, it explores how the national cinema imitates Hollywood from modes of production, to film style, to industrial system, or how the national cinema differentiates itself from Hollywood in order to define itself. Scholars such as Higson tend to examine the inside function of Hollywood in domains including film exhibition and consumption within the framework of national cinema. However, as John Hill argues, Higson's essay could "lead to the conclusion that Hollywood films are in fact a part of the British national cinema because these are the films which are primarily used and consumed by British national audiences".[20] As a matter of fact, Higson's argument could destabilise the national film theory to a considerable extent, given that national film is usually

[19] Fan Xuepeng 范雪朋 recalled that film dealers in Nanyang requested her to perform a film for the sake of satisfying local audiences. According to Fan, "it was simply natural that the Nanyang dealers had the power to decide the content of a film script" in the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s. See Fan Xuepeng, "Wo de yinmu shengya de huiyi/The Memory of My Screen Life" 我的银幕生涯的回忆, in Wang Hanlun 王汉伦 (et al), *Gankai hua dangnian/Muse upon Our Past* 感慨话当年, Beijing: China Film Press, 1962, 76.

[20] John Hill, "The Issues of National Cinema and British Film Production", Petrie Duncan (ed.), *New Questions of British Cinema*, London: BFI, 1992, 14.

defined against Hollywood, as I mentioned above. A transnational framework could solve the problem of the conventional national framework with regard to the receipts of foreign films in a great way. The reason is that the transnational approach regarding the national is something constructed and transnational force could contribute to the construction of the national. In Chapter Two, I will examine the contribution of the transnational force, Hollywood in my case, to the construction of the national in the domain of film technology.

Secondly, the transnational framework could shed light on the "blind spots in film history that were previously covered or glossed over the national cinema paradigm".[21] The transnational cinema studies could make space for the blind spots like "the phenomena that not only cross but straddle and defy borders".[22] The intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry are an instance. These intermediaries such as Chinese merchants who distributed Hollywood films straddled the national borders since they registered their companies overseas. Their contributions to the Chinese film industry have been forgotten and misunderstood in the national cinema accounts that placed the national in the central light. A transnational cinema framework could help to re-evaluate the function of intermediaries which has been obscured by a national cinema approach.

1.2 Literature Review

The study of the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry remains nascent so far due to the political and pragmatic reasons. First, Hollywood was treated

[21] Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*, Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2010, 16.

[22] Chris Berry, "Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies", in Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (eds.), *Chinese Cinema Book*, London: BFI, 2010, 11.

as aggressor to the domestic film industry outside of the United States during most of the twentieth century. Such treatment was worse from the 1950s to the 1980s, when the ideological conflicts between the United States and China were fierce. Therefore, standard Chinese film literature about the period this thesis studies had little intention of admitting the influence of Hollywood on Chinese films.[23] Secondly, primary material is one major obstacle for the study of the industrial relations between Hollywood and China. For an industrial research, primary documents for both sides of China and the United States are necessary. However, a number of key materials on the China side were lost in the wake of the bombings of Shanghai by Japanese forces in 1932 and 1937.

Nevertheless, there exists a limited amount of literature that provides valuable background information about Hollywood in China, the rise of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s and China's response to Hollywood films. In the following passages, I will review the existing literature from these three perspectives.

Given China's insignificant position in Hollywood global market at the time, the materials on Hollywood films in China remains limited when studying Hollywood's overseas market. In her study on the rise of Hollywood dominance in the world, the eminent film historian Kristin Thompson briefly illustrates Hollywood's market in China in the 1910s and 1920s. Thompson shows the dominance of Pathe production in the early 1910s and how Hollywood films gradually replaced the position of French films by virtue of "institut[ing] distribution procedures abroad".[24]

A pioneer who examines Hollywood in China is Marie Cambon. Her master's

[23] One exception is Zheng Junli's 郑君里 *Xiandai zhongguo dianying shilue/A Short History of Modern Chinese Film* 现代中国电影史略 (Shanghai: Shanghai Liangyou Book Company, 1936). Zheng acknowledged here that the development of Chinese films was a consequence of learning from Hollywood.

[24] Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, x.

thesis examines the "pervasive" role Hollywood films played in the "consumer and film culture" in the "cultural context of Shanghai".[25] The major research objects of Cambon's thesis are film audiences and the production of Chinese films. Her thesis is one of the first accounts of Chinese film audiences. Based on her interviews with film audiences of the 1930s, Cambon suggests that film audiences in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai 1) had a stronger preference for Hollywood than Chinese films, in particular among intellectuals; and 2) were more "diverse" than described in historical texts.[26] Cambon's research on the production of Chinese films unfolds from two perspectives: film genres and film aesthetics.

Xiao Zhiwei is one of the few historians who specialises in Hollywood films in China and the Chinese film industry. His "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey" and the updated version "American Films in China Prior to 1950" are insightful studies on the "reel relations" between China and the United States from the industrial dimension.[27]

Xiao's two essays provide a chronological survey of Hollywood in China from the early days of Hollywood's penetration into the Chinese market in the late nineteenth century to the moment of Hollywood was banned from Mainland China in the 1950s. Xiao presents a large amount of useful information about the territorial scope of Hollywood's distribution and its profit-sharing system employed in China. Xiao also points out that the exhibition of Hollywood in China was subject to the

[25] Marie Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai: American Films in China's Largest Metropolis 1920-1950*, Master Thesis, Vancouver: Simon Fraser University, 1993, 6.

[26] Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai*, 50.

[27] Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950", 72; Zhiwei Xiao, "American Films in China Prior to 1950", in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (eds.), Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 55-69.

variations of territory, the length of showing time, as well as the tastes of Chinese audiences.

In addition, Xiao estimates the number of Hollywood films screened and the income of American corporations in China. Through exploring primary materials from China and the United States, Xiao proposes, "the number of American films distributed in China averaged 400 titles annually".[28] These 400 titles were newly released films. In the 1930s, China's cinemas screened numerous old Hollywood films. According to the analysis of the records of commercial screenings, 896 Hollywood films were screened in Shanghai from January to August 1933.[29] It was believed that China had screened around 2,700 American titles in 1934 across the nation. In addition to the number of American films circulated in China, Xiao also estimates that "Hollywood's average annual earnings from China" ranged from six to seven million US dollars.[30]

A more recent account on Hollywood in China is Zhang Qian's 2009 doctoral thesis *From Hollywood to Shanghai: American Silent Films in China*.[31] Zhang focuses on "how Hollywood films were consumed" in 1920s Shanghai and "what impact [Hollywood films] might have upon Shanghai culture".[32] Drawing upon the primary materials of the United Artists Corporation, one of the major Hollywood corporations,

[28] Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950", 82.

[29] This is my statistic of the screening commercial published in *Xinwen Bao*, a Shanghai-based daily newspaper from 1 January to 31 August 1931.

[30] Xiao, "Hollywood in China", 87. Unlike Xiao's estimation, my speculation, which is based on the record of box office sales of United Artists, suggests that Hollywood's box office amounted to around 2,642,000 US dollars. See details in Chapter Six.

[31] Qian Zhang, *From Hollywood to Shanghai: American Silent Films in China*, Doctoral Thesis, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2009.

[32] Zhang, *From Hollywood to Shanghai*, 10.

Zhang articulates the function of the distribution agents of Hollywood majors. Zhang details how the distribution of Hollywood operated in the 1920s, using the case of an agent of United Artists in Shanghai, Krisel & Krisel. Zhang's thesis shows how the revenue sharing and block booking systems operated in China and how the distribution agent worked closely with American diplomats to beat piracy and promote Hollywood films.

To sum up, the aforementioned accounts provide a well-grounded basis to understand Hollywood in China and the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth century. Yet, several prominent dimensions remain largely under studied. Firstly, little is known about the distribution system of Chinese films, although several essays briefly address the distribution of Hollywood films in China.[33] Secondly, the field of technology in the Chinese film industry is almost invisible to English literature. For instance, compared to the scholarship on Hollywood's sound conversion, there exists little scholarship which addresses the history of the conversion to talkies in China in the 1930s.[34] Thirdly, the existing literature fails to present a systematic account on China's mode of production. Fourthly, the study of the box office receipts of Chinese film and Hollywood in China, together with audience and exhibition studies in general, is new to Chinese film studies.[35] I aim to fill in these research gaps regarding

[33] Xiao, "Hollywood in China", 74; Xie Quan 谢荃 and Shen Ying 沈莹, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying chanye fazhan lichen/The Development of the Early Chinese Film Industry* 中国早期电影产业发展历程, Beijing: China Film Press, 2011. Yu Li 于丽, *Zhongguo dianying zhuanyeshi yanjiu: dianying zhipian faxing fangying juan/The Research of Chinese Film History: Production, Distribution, and Exhibition* 中国电影专业史研究: 电影制片、发行、放映卷, Beijing: China Film Press, 2006.

[34] Douglas Gomery, *The Coming of Sound, A History,* New York: Routledge. 2005.

[35] Apart from Xiao Zhiwei's effort on estimating the box office receipts of Hollywood in China, some recent publications on the exhibition and film reception of Chinese cinema appeared in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*. One related study is Matthew Johnson's "Journey to the seat of war: the international exhibition of China in early

the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s in my doctoral thesis.

The following passages will examine the literature on the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry, and Chinese films in general. The existing literature acknowledges the essential influence of Hollywood on the Chinese film industry and China's imitation to Hollywood film systems, including the film star system and the film studio system. In comparison with the scholarship on film industry, literature on Chinese film culture and film texts realises the complexity of the relations between Hollywood and Chinese films. Some scholars notice that Chinese filmmakers went beyond mere imitation, and created the unique identities of Chinese films through incorporating other sources. [36]

Cambon, who explores Hollywood's encounters in China in her master's thesis, also analyses the relations between Hollywood and Chinese films from an industrial perspective. She pays special attention to the exhibition of Hollywood films in Shanghai and the related issues invoked. Cambon details the confrontation and compromise between Hollywood's distributors and Chinese practitioners including exhibitors, Chinese authorities, and cultural elites. Specifically, she examines 1) how the expansion of Hollywood's exhibition business invoked the reactions from nationalists such as Hong Shen; 2) how Chinese authorities censored Hollywood films with regard to issues of "humiliating China"; and 3) how the Chinese exhibitors united together to "secure better deals" from Hollywood distributors in the late 1930s.[37]

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cinema" (*Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 3, 2, 2009, 109-122). It traces the earliest trails on projecting China by western travel lecture and missionaries. Johnson argues that the colonialism of Western, mirrored in the racist pictures to China, "stimulated" the Chinese nationalists to produce the first Chinese films.

[36] See details in page 20.

[37] Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai*, 123.

Cambon notices the imitative attitudes of the Chinese film industry towards Hollywood. She demonstrates how Chinese filmmakers "modeled" Hollywood in the development of genres, such as detective films and melodrama.[38] Cambon also briefly introduces China's film star system and regards it as an imitation of Hollywood. According to Cambon, China's film star system emerged after Mary Pickford's visit to Shanghai.[39] The star-making system, like Hollywood, was associated and endorsed by the commercialism of Shanghai. In addition, the naming and configuring of Chinese film stars apparently showed the strong influence of Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s.[40] Like Cambon, Xiao mentions how the Chinese film industry imitated Hollywood in the early twentieth century. Xiao proposes that "Hollywood provided an important source of inspiration as well as materials for the Chinese film industry".[41]

This approach suggesting imitation is striking but it is inadequate to describe the complicated relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. It is evident that the approach of imitation pays attention to the similarities between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. However, it fails to notice the ways in which they are distinct from each other. The system of the Chinese film industry is subject to the conditions of industrial development and the specific situation of its

[38] Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai*, 55-57, 66-67.

[39] Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai,* 136. Zhang Zhen argues that the emergence of China's film star system dated back to the early 1920s. At that time, the first generation of film actresses including Wang Hanlun 王汉伦, Zhang Zhiyun 张织云, and Yin Mingzhu 殷明珠 went into public discourse. See Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, xxv.

[40] Two examples in hand are Han Langen 韩兰根 and Liu Jiqun 刘继群, and Tan Ying 谈瑛. Han Langen and Liu Jiqun modeled on Laurel and Hardy, while Tan Ying was promoted as the "mysterious lady", echoing Greta Garbo. See "Camera News", *Kaimaila/Camera/开麦拉*，1932, 121, 2; Jiazhen, "Huangzhong jiabao tanying/Tan Ying: Garbo in Yellow Face", Qingqing dianying/Young Movie/青青电影, 1934, 3, 1.

[41] Xiao, "American Films in China", 65.

Chinese context. Taking China's distribution system for instance, it is true that China's distribution system is generated from an imitation of that of Hollywood. However, along with the development of the Chinese domestic film industry, some conditions of the Chinese domestic film industry configured its distribution system. An instance is that China did not follow the conventional policy on Hollywood's distribution, that is, allowing only one print circulated at a certain run theatre in a given city. On contrary, Chinese distributors circulated as many prints as possible at Shanghai theatres in the 1930s. The operations were attributed to the pressure of cost-recovery and the favour from government (this will be discussed in Chapter Three). In this thesis, I intend to demonstrate that China's industrial response to Hollywood involved different stages of response which are more complex than mere "imitation" or "sinification" that suggested by the existing literature.

In comparison with the preliminary study in the field of the film industry, film literature on Chinese film texts and cultures has begun to realise that the complexity of the relations between Hollywood and Chinese films, involves more than mere imitation. These scholars introduced what I called the "synthesis" approach to describe how Chinese films emerged its identities in the wake of learning from Hollywood films. Ma Ning is one of the first scholars who introduced the approach of "synthesis" into examining China's response to Hollywood. In his 1989 essay "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Chinese Leftist Films in the 1930s", Ma examines the mode of filmmaking of the leftists films in the 1930s with respect to their relations to the Hollywood model. Ma notices that Chinese filmmakers "deviated from" the tradition of Hollywood norms in melodramas with the purpose of transforming Chinese audiences.[42] The central argument of Ma's essay is that Chinese

[42] Ning Ma, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical: Reconstructing Chinese Leftist Films in the

films built up "unique Chinese synthesis" of Hollywood continuity editing and Soviet montage.[43] Here, Ma suggests, Chinese film imitated Hollywood film but differed itself from its Hollywood model by introducing other sources of model (Soviet montage in this case), therefore, built up its own uniqueness. It is not exaggerated to say that Ma Ning has established a paradigm in the study of the relations between Hollywood and Chinese films.

Following Ma's example, scholars on film culture pointed out how other sources, together with Hollywood's model, were synthesized into the Chinese film texts. In his account on Hollywood's influence to Chinese films in the 1930s, Leo Lee firstly mentions how Chinese filmmakers imitated their Hollywood counterparts. For instance, the establishment of theatre chain is regarded as "a move in direct imitation of the Hollywood distribution system".[44] In addition, Chinese film practitioners "simply imitated the acting styles and lighting design as well as the camera movements of Hollywood pictures."[45] Furthermore, Lee states that Chinese films went beyond mere imitation. Taking Chinese film narratives for instance, Lee argues that "Chinese cinema was a popular hybrid genre consisting of diverse cultural elements—both old and new, drawn from both visual and print sources".[46] For instance, the slow rhythm in early Chinese films and the combination of the traditions of montage and long take can be seen as a "stylistic hybridity", due to the limitation of the physical

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1930s", in Harry Kuoshu (ed), *Celluloid China: Cinematic Encounters with Culture and Society*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 2002, 100.

[43] Ma, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical", 101.

[44] Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 85.

[45] Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 104.

[46] Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 114-115.

conditions of filmmaking in the 1930s.[47]

Nationalism is one central issue concerning the construction of the Chinese film industry and it shapes the attitude of China towards Hollywood. In *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939,* Ruth Vasey examines how the foreign film market influenced Hollywood's business strategy and shaped the content of Hollywood films. With respect to the case of China, Vasey points out the "cultivation of diplomatic channels of protest" in and outside China "had a significant impact on the [American film] industry", although China's market only accounted for 0.8 per cent in Hollywood foreign market.[48] For instance, Warner Bros studios had to insert a preface to *West of Shanghai* (dir. John Farrow, 1937) to explain why the uniform worn by the protagonist is different from that of the National Army of China, in view of the possible protest from the Chinese authorities.[49]

A significant account of nationalism in Chinese film is Hu Jubin's *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949*. Hu structures Chinese early cinema by different types of nationalism and claims, "The issue of nation is the determining principle shaping the Chinese cinema before 1949".[50] The 1920s was a period of industrial nationalism and the 1930s witnessed the interaction between class nationalism, the ideological discourse of the Communist Party and traditional nationalism, invested by the Nationalist Party. Industrial nationalism in the 1920s, in Hu's words, "prioritized the establishment of the film industry as the Chinese nation's

[47] Lee, *Shanghai Modern,* 112.

[48] Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939.* Devon: University of Exter Press. 1997, 85, 154-155.

[49] Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood*, 175-179.

[50] Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949,* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003, 4.

domestic industry".[51] The major theme of nationalism in the 1930s in the Chinese film industry conformed to the ideological conflicts between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party. The class nationalism and traditional nationalism shared an ideological base, that is, the anti-imperialist standpoint, because both parties alleged they were fighting against the aggression of imperialism, in particular the Japanese imperialism. However, the two "ideologies" of nationalism varied in the issue of class, since class struggle was the "central value" of the Communist Party, while the Nationalist Party "advocated the idea of national survival by endorsing Confucian values as 'Chinese tradition' and entirely evading the issue of class".[52] The major concern of Hu's study is on film productions and film culture, but Hu notices the industrial development of Chinese film of the 1920s. Hu probes how Chinese film practitioners associated the establishment of film corporations to the discourse of "contend[ing] with foreign film companies" and "safeguard[ing]…the economic and cultural interests of the Chinese nation".[53] Under the light of nationalism, two production tendencies existed in the 1920s: westernisation and sinicisation. The examples of westernisation include the genres of slapstick, family melodramas, and social problem films, while traditional costume films and martial arts films reflect the tendency of sinicisation in 1920s China.

From an industrial point of view, it is probably correct to say that nationalism was not the central concern of the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century, although it may serve as the central concern of later Chinese film culture. With regard to the film industry, the Chinese film industry prior to 1949 was

[51] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 48.

[52] Lawrence R. Sullivan, *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Communist Party*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012, 61; Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 48.

[53] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 48.

driven by profits rather than a nationalistic sentiment. The nationalistic accounts neglected prominent figures who had few nationalistic sentiments and their contributions to the domestic industry. A case of such figures is Lu Gen (卢根, a.k.a. Lo Kan), a paramount film exhibitor in the early twentieth century in China. Other than filmmakers who enjoyed the spotlight, exhibitors like Lu Gen seldom expressed their political viewpoints publicly. In many cases, they deliberately concealed their sentiments and sought not to involve unpredictable political campaigns. Consequently, their contributions are usually buried under the dust of nationalistic texts. In addition, the nationalist point of view runs a risk of simplification as it neglects the complexity of film practitioners in the Chinese film industry. As an industrial study, I observe the practitioners as figures of intermediaries that stood between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry and will shed light on their contributions to the domestic film industry instead of their nationalistic sentiments.

My approach of examining the function of the intermediary can be seen in a similar light to Xiao Zhiwei's *Translating Hollywood Film to Chinese Audience.*[54] Xiao's essay is the first account addressing the "in-between production" of agency/intermediary in relations to the consumption of Hollywood films in Chinese context. Specifically, Xiao underlines how the intermediaries between Hollywood films and Chinese audiences, encompassing film authorities, critics, distributors and exhibitors, "shaped audience reception of American films" by injecting their own political, economic and cultural agendas.[55] In addition, the original texts of Hollywood films in a number of cases were redefined, consciously or unconsciously,

[54] Zhiwei Xiao, "Translating Hollywood Film to Chinese Audience: The Role of Agency and Appropriation in Transnational Cultural Encounters", in Philippa Gates and Lisa Funnell (eds.), *Transnational Asian Identities in Pan-Pacific Cinemas,* New York: Routledge, 2012, 88-100.

[55] Xiao, "Translating Hollywood Film to Chinese Audience", 94.

in the process of translating film titles into Chinese. Inspired by Xiao's essay, my study will further explore the function of the intermediary between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry, focusing on how the intermediary benefited the development of the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth century.

To sum up, the existing literature has carried out pioneering research on the industrial relations between Hollywood and China in the 1920s and 1930s. Some preliminary study has been done from an industrial perspective on the rise of the domestic film industry and Hollywood's presence in 1920s and 1930s China. However, some issues remain open for study. First, little has been done on several prominent domains of the Chinese film industry, including the film distribution system, film technology and the market performance of the domestic film industry. Secondly, China's industrial response to Hollywood deserves further exploration from several perspectives, given the flaws in the existing literature. These perspectives encompass the role of Hollywood has played in the making of the domestic film industry, the dynamics of China's industrial response to Hollywood and the function of intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. These research gaps will become the starting point of my research.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions of my thesis are as follows:

1) From the perspective of Hollywood, what is the role Hollywood played in the Chinese film industry as a global/transnational force? It is known that Hollywood stands as the largest rival and the model for the Chinese film industry, however, some other functions of Hollywood with regard to the domestic film industry deserve investigation.

2) From the perspective of the Chinese film industry, what are the dynamics of China's industrial response to Hollywood? In other words, in what way does the Chinese film industry respond to Hollywood? Is it merely an imitation? Or did a more complicated dynamic operate in the history of China's response to Hollywood in the early twentieth century?

3) What is the contribution of the figures of the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry? There is a group of intermediaries who stood between Hollywood and China, responsible for introducing Hollywood's knowledge and technology into China and their roles to a large extent shaped China's response to Hollywood.

4) How can one evaluate the results of China's response to Hollywood in terms of box office receipts? In the 1920s and 1930s, to what extent can one say that Hollywood dominated China's film market? A thorough investigation of China's industrial response to Hollywood should include the outcome of the response, and box office receipts serve as a critical gauge of it.

In this study, I will place these research questions in the context of the construction of the Chinese film industry from 1923 to 1937 in order to examine the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry.

1.4 Periodisation

A major concern of the thesis lies in the selection of the history of the Chinese film industry from 1923 to 1937. According to Zhang Yingjin, "each periodization scheme necessarily fulfils a different objective in film historiography".[56] In his literature about Chinese film, Zhang Yingjin separated Chinese films prior to 1949 into two periods:

[56] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 11.

1896-1929 and 1930-1949. Nineteen thirty, in Zhang Yingjin's account, was a watershed moment since it was "a year in which Lianhua (联华, a.k.a. the United Photoplay Services, hereafter Lianhua) was launched with high expectations to 'revive national cinema'".[57] Another prominent account of early Chinese films divides Chinese films prior to 1949 into five parts, i.e. "pre-1920s, the 1920s, 1931-1936, 1937-1945, and 1946-1949".[58] The standard of the periodisation lies in the different patterns of nationalism. The 1920s was regarded as the period of "industrial nationalism", while the moment of 1931 to 1936 presented the interaction between "class nationalism", an ideology of the Communist Party emphasizing class struggles in Chinese society, and "traditional nationalism", which the Nationalist Party subscribed to with the goal of achieving social harmony and stability.[59] Nineteen thirty-one was significant because it was the moment that Japanese troops occupied Northeast China and therefore shifted the main emphasis to national crisis instead of class struggle. With respect to Chinese film, the intense crisis transformed the direction of film production towards nationalistic films, with or without the ideology of class struggle.[60]

Unlike other periodisations, I select the period from 1923 to 1937 as my research object in this thesis. Such selection is based on three reasons. First, the real development of the Chinese film industry started in 1923. This was the year when Mingxing (明星, a.k.a. Star Motion Picture Corporation, hereafter Mingxing) released its *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* (孤儿救祖记, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1923). *Orphan* is

[57] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 58.

[58] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 26.

[59] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 26, 86.

[60] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 75.

a "benchmark" in the history of Chinese film from several perspectives.[61] As Zhang points out, along with *Orphan*,

> "[E]arly Chinese cinema had completed a number of significant transformations: artistically, from a cinema of attractions to a narrative cinema; conceptually, from film as leisure entertainment to social enlightenment; institutionally, from filmmaking as opportunist investment to a legitimate business".[62]

In addition, the success of *Orphan* at the box office not only rescued Mingxing from bankruptcy, but also attracted a number of investors into the film business and therefore brought about a substantial expansion of the Chinese film industry. "Premiered on 21 December 1923, the film kept a record of running for almost 100 days at ten Shanghai cinemas" and more than seven cities outside Shanghai.[63] In Zhang Zhen's words, *Orphan* "provided the film industry as a whole with the impetus to move toward institutionalization and industrialization".[64] In the three years from 1921 to 1923, only thirteen feature films were produced. A tide of Chinese film productions emerged and was sustained after the release of *Orphan*. For example, a year after the release of *Orphan*, fourteen films were produced in 1924 and the

[61] "Benchmark" is a term that Yeh Yueh-yu and Darrel Davis used to describe the position of *Hero* (英雄, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2002) to the Chinese-language film in the twenty-first century. From a historian's perspective, the significance of *Orphan* is equivalent with that of *Hero* in terms of its contribution to the Chinese film industry. See Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, *East Asian Screen Industries*, London: BFI, 2008.

[62] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 26.

[63] Xuelei Huang, *Commercializing Ideologies: Intellectuals and Cultural Production at the* Mingxing *(Star) Motion Picture Company, 1922-1938*, Doctoral Thesis, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University, 2009, 35.

[64] Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 151.

number of Chinese features amounted to 66 in 1925. Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, one of prominent directors in the first half of twentieth century, underlined that the success of *Orphan* marked the emergence of the capitalisation of the Chinese film industry.[65]

Secondly, scholarship has arrived at the conclusion that 1937 was a watershed moment for the Chinese film industry. Nineteen thirty-seven was a crucial year not only for Chinese film but also for modern China. China went into a state of war for eight years as the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War occurred in 1937. In the wake of Japanese troops bombing Shanghai, the operation of the Chinese film industry was suspended. In the second half of 1937, the Chinese film industry only released nine new films, compared with 51 new films in the first half. In addition, the war and subsequently economic and political situations resulted in the restructuring of the Chinese film industry: Mingxing went into bankruptcy; Lianhua shifted its ownership and was then eliminated from market; Tianyi (天一, a.k.a. Unique Film Company, hereafter Tianyi) relocated its business to Hong Kong. In turn, Xinhua (新华) raised and reshuffled the structure of the Chinese film industry. The significance of 1937 for Hollywood was not as important as it was for China. Hollywood continued to show in China's screens until 1941 when United States became involved the Second World War.

Thirdly, the development of the Chinese film industry from 1923 to 1937 was sustainable. The breaking point of 1930 or 1931 aforementioned, however, is not applicable with regard to the literature concerned with the film industry. Although the 1931 invasion of Japan resulted in China losing its Northeast film market, the Chinese film business in general shows less significant impact. As a matter of fact, 1931 was a

[65] "Zhongguo dianying wang hechu qu?/Whither the Chinese Film Industry?" 中国电影往何处去, *Diasheng/Movietone* 电声, 3, 31, 1934.

satisfactory year for the domestic film industry. The industry was gradually consolidated into "the hands of a few capable, better equipped and financially responsible companies".[66] Additionally, in contrast to its American counterpart, the worldwide depression appeared to have little influence on motion picture theatres in China in 1931 and the film business continued to grow.

I must confess that although major focus of this thesis is on the moment from 1923 to 1937, some historical facts happened in the 1910s is occasionally mentioned. The reason is that a clear-cut time framework is not that straightforward with respect to the topics like the intermediaries between Hollywood and China.

1.5 An Industrial Overview

Before I proceed further into China's industrial response to Hollywood, a brief introduction of the rise of the Chinese film industry will be helpful to readers. In the following section, I trace the history of the emergence of the Chinese film industry along with the development of Hollywood's trade in China. First, I point out two major characters of the market structure of Chinese cinema, that is, it is market-driven and a duopoly. Secondly, this section observes the rise and expansion of Hollywood business in China, focusing on its domination in China. Thirdly, I examine the rise of the Chinese film industry along with the expansion of Hollywood films, addressing the paths of its development and other fundamental information of the Chinese film industry.

The Chinese film market is basically a capitalist structure in the early twentieth century. That is to say, commercial orientation is the vital character of the Chinese film market, not only for Hollywood's exploration in China but also for the

[66] Richard Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", *Records of the U.S. Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of China, 1930-1939*, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/41. 17 October. 1932, 54-55.

Chinese film industry itself. For the film practitioners in the Chinese film industry, pursuing profits is their primary aim. Therefore, in this thesis, I will treat the innovation of film technology and film system in the Chinese film market as a drive for pursuing profit, rather than "retrieving economic rights"[67] or other grand nationalistic discourse employed, although I have little doubt about the patriotic sentiments of the Chinese film practitioners. In addition, a dual hegemony, Hollywood and Chinese film in this case, stands as another major character of the capitalist structure of 1920s and 1930s China. Despite the occasional appearance of European films, Hollywood and domestic production dominated China's screens in the 1920s and 1930s. The unfamiliarity of European languages excluding English was one major obstacle for the expansion of European film into China.[68] As an American market survey noticed, "American distributors in China give no thought to competition from other foreign films. They are concerned with competition from Chinese…films".[69] The expansion of one industry could possibly have constituted a threat to the other. For instance, American diplomats in China kept close eyes on the production of Chinese sound films since they believed, "any substantial increase in the number of sound films produced by Chinese studios will eventually operate to curtail the demand for foreign pictures as good Chinese pictures will divert a large portion of Chinese patrons from foreign pictures."[70]

The first film screening place in China occurred in Hong Kong in 1897,

[67] Huo Wenzhi 火文之, "Wo duiyu zhongguo yingpian shiye zhi xiwang/My Hope to the Chinese Film Industry" (我对于中国影片事业之希望), *Dianying zazhi/Film Magazine* 电影杂志, 1924, 1-3.

[68] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 47-48.

[69] "Motion Pictures in China", *Records of the U.S. Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of China, 1930-1939*, 893.4061 Motion Pictures/41., 10 July 1931, 29.

[70] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 50.

although Shanghai owned the credit in the literature for a long time. Law Kar and Frank Bren convincingly demonstrated that on 23 April 1897 Maurice Charvet presented films in Hong Kong for the first time with two machines, namely the Cinematograph and the Kinetoscope.[71] A month later, Maurice Charvet, together with Lewis M. Johnson and Harry Welby Cooke, went into Shanghai, screened films at the Astor House and then marked as the beginning of film market in Mainland China.[72] The film machine used in the Astor House was the Animatoscope, an invention by Edison.[73] "Lewis M. Johnson [is] perhaps first major distributor [in the Chinese film history], to use the term loosely."[74] Although the American merchants took the lead in exploring Mainland China's market, French films dominated the Chinese film market till to the end of the World War I. A report in 1914 showed that American films accounted for merely 25 per cent of the total market share in terms of box office income in China, although audiences in Shanghai enjoyed American films, "because of their realism, purposefulness, and strength of plot".[75]

Ever since the end of the World War I, Hollywood had established and maintained its domination in China. Evidence for this is that the imported exposed film stock from the United States to China had boomed more than twenty times in less than twenty years. In 1913, the feet of exposed film stock imported into China were 170,740. The number amounted to 3,484,265 in 1929. In addition, Hollywood also maintained its domination in film equipment. There are at least four factors for explaining the success of the domination of Hollywood films in China. The first factor

[71] Law Kar and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-cultural View*, Lanham: Scarecrow, 2005, 6.

[72] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 11.

[73] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 12.

[74] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 11.

[75] "Motion Picture Trade Abroad", *The Moving Picture World*, 22, October-December 1914, 79.

is the interruption of French film production in China after World War I. Like other European films, the business of French films were largely handicapped by World War I. "[N]ew production was drastically reduced…[and] shipping problems…from Europe to other areas play havoc with what little production remained".[76] Such an opportunity helped the expansion of American films in China.

Lewis M Johnson

Source: The Hawaiian gazette, *20 January 20, 1899*

Secondly, the opening of distribution branches worldwide is crucial to Hollywood's success in international market.[77] In the early 1910s, most American films were distributed into China through their sale agents in London, such as M. P.

[76] Kerry Segrave, *American Films Abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens*, London: McFarland, 1997, 12.

[77] Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, x.

Sales Company, the sale supplier for the Arcade theatre in Tianjin in 1913.[78] After World War I, American companies shifted their distribution strategy to directly set up distribution branches abroad, instead of the pre-war agents. In 1917, Universal took the lead in establishing branch office in China. Fox followed in its step. By 1927, eight major Hollywood studios all had branch offices or sale agents in China. In addition to the direct representatives and sales agents in China, there are a number of Chinese distributors who are responsible for the circulation of Hollywood films. They handled with older American films as well as European and Chinese films.[79] With little doubt, the distributors had a great responsibility for the expansion and dominance of Hollywood film in China.

Thirdly, Hollywood's sophistication in its utilisation of film language and technology benefited Hollywood's dominance. Compared with the Chinese film industry, Hollywood developed a universal film language, not only satisfying domestic film audiences but also catering to international patrons. In addition, English was the most popular foreign language used in China. It was understood by most foreign residents and upper- and middle class Chinese citizens, who constituted the bulk of the audience for Hollywood films in China.

Fourthly, the American government provided a strong backup for the expansion of Hollywood. As Kerry Segrave proves, Hollywood obtained massive indirect aids from the American government.[80] When conflicts happened between Hollywood and China, American diplomats and consulates would spare no efforts to facilitate Hollywood's interests, such as helping Hollywood films become exempt

[78] "A Chat from China", *The Moving Picture World*, 15, 2, January 1913, 150.

[79] Letter from American Consulate General, Shanghai, China to Modern Film Sales, New York, 840.6 Motion Pictures, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), 17 December 1934.

[80] Segrave, *American Films Abroad*, 1997.

from censorship and reducing duty and taxation.[81]

The total number of Hollywood films shown on China's screens is not clear so far. In the 1930s, the number of Hollywood films imported into China exceeded 300 per annum. A number of old American films were also showing on China's screens. A detailed statistic shows that the United Artists Corporation distributed fourteen new films in 1934, while its total number showing on China's screens amounted to 112 in this year. Based on the statistics of the screening records, roughly 1,300 American films were circulating in Shanghai's cinema theatres.

The reception of Hollywood films varied depending on the taste of Chinese audiences. In the 1920s and 1930s, almost every Hollywood feature film was introduced into China. However, not all films were appreciated. The American market survey noticed that Chinese audiences enjoyed films with "a minimum of dialogue, a maximum of action, good scenic effects and a universal plot".[82] Therefore, comedy, musical, and action were the top three genres in terms of the popularity in China.[83] In addition, a market survey noticed that the taste of Chinese audiences varied as well. For instance, *Tom Sawyer* (dir. John Cromwell, 1930), a picture adapted from Mark Twain's children's literature, was appreciated by the Chinese students since "Mark Twain's classic has been translated into Chinese and is considered a true portrayal of American life during the middle of the nineteenth century".[84]

In the wake of screening foreign films, China started its own experiments in

[81] *Records of the U.S. Department of State relating to the Internal Affairs of China*, 1930-1939, 893.4061-Motion Pictures, NARA.

[82] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 40.

[83] "China-Box Office Value", June 7, 1934, China Competitors, *Series 1F: Black books: Foreign Statistics*, United Artists Corporation Records, Box 4, Folder 4-6, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

[84] "Motion Pictures in China", 28.

film production. In 1905, Fengtai Photography Studio is alleged to produce the "first Chinese film"—*Ding Jun Mountain* (定军山, 1905) in Beijing, a documentary of popular Peking Opera.[85] Despite of Beijing as the birthplace of Chinese films, Shanghai was the centre of the production, distribution, and exhibition of Chinese films in the first half of twentieth century. The Asiatic Film Company (亚西亚制造影片公司), set up in 1913 in Shanghai, is one of the first enterprises in Chinese film history if it is not the first one. It is known for introducing the "Founders of Chinese Films" including Zhang Shichuan 张石川 and Zheng Zhengqiu 郑正秋. Early writings identify Benjamin Brodsky as the founder of the Asiatic Film Company in the late 1900s. Recent research however suggests that Brodsky's film business appeared to have little connection with the Asiatic.[86] My own research indicates that it is too early to ascertain the relations between Brodsky and the Asiatic. At this stage, it is safe to say that the Asiatic was in the hands of two American merchants, named Thomas H. Suffert and Arthur J. Israel.[87] The Asiatic Film Company was probably defunct after 1915.

The moment prior to 1923 can be seen as the dawn of the Chinese film industry. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, several film companies were established in Shanghai while they did not bring substantial change for film industry in general. In 1918, the Commercial Press, then the largest private publication house, organised a

[85] Huang Dequan 黄德泉 points out that *Ding Jun Mountain* may not be the first Chinese film. Huang argues that Fengtai Photo Company had no capacity to produce films at that time. However, I maintain that Huang's argument is not fairly convincing due to the lack of primary and "hard" evidence. See Huang Dequan, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shishi kaozheng/A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History* 中国早期电影史事考证, Beijing: China Film Press, 2012, 30-45.

[86] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 2005; Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 46-81.

[87] A detailed analysis of the two organisers and the company is available in Chapter Five.

film department and started to produce scenarios for educational films. In 1921, another two new corporations were established, namely the Shanghai Film Society and the Shanghai Motion Picture Corporation. However, the establishment of these film companies did not bring dramatic change to the Chinese film industry in general. For instance, the number of the domestic feature films released remained fixed at two or three every year. Limited as it is, the feet of the imported negative film and unexposed film for production annually might offer a reference to documentary the development of the industry. The negative film stock used for film production was less than 120,000 feet by 1922 annually. By contrast, the figure of 1924 accounted for 2,165,005, twenty times those in 1922.

The scenario of the Chinese film industry had a dramatic change after 1923 when Mingxing released *Orphan*. The success of *Orphan* lured many Chinese speculators, eager for quick turnovers in the middle of the 1920s, into the film field. In 1925, the number of registered film companies amounted to over a hundred. A source described such so-called "mushroom" corporations: "Three of four optimists would scrape together a few thousand dollars, secure a play, rig up or hire a studio and equipment of sorts, engage the necessary actors, and set to work."[88] Most of them did not survive their first year. One exception that deserves special note is Tianyi. By virtue of producing traditional costume films (where story background was set in ancient China and protagonists wear traditional Chinese costume), Tianyi became a major studio in the Chinese film industry, parallel to Mingxing. Tianyi was also a pioneer in producing sound pictures. After a volcanic eruption of development in 1925, the Chinese film industry had been steadily developing. The feet of motion picture films for domestic productions were maintained at a level of over 1,000,000

[88] "The Chinese Film Industry", *People's Tribune*, IX, 1, 1 April 1935, 26.

from 1925 onward.

The capacity of the Chinese film industry had been strengthened by 1931 due to the organisation of Lianhua. Luo Mingyou 罗明佑, a powerful figure in the film exhibition business, organized Lianhua by merging several mid-size studios. Lianhua transformed the direction of production to "an unpromising attitude to social problems and in a sense connected filmmaking to the May Fourth spirit" in the early 1930s.[89] More importantly, the establishment of Lianhua reinforced the power of the Chinese film industry in the 1930s. American official market reports regarded Lianhua as "the most important producing corporation" from the point of financial backing and possible development.[90] Lianhua was capitalized with one million yuan, the largest investment in the film business then.[91] By contrast, the registered capital of Mingxing was only 100,000 yuan, accounting for ten per cent of that of Lianhua. In addition, the pictures released by Lianhua were all well received and made a profit of 45,000 yuan in 1931, an outstanding record for the domestic film studios.[92]

In the 1920 and 1930s, China basically maintained an oligopoly structure with respect to the Chinese film industry. In the 1920s, large studios including Mingxing, Tianyi and Great China Lilium (大中华百合) were loosely seen as the "Big Three". Lianhua replaced the position of Great China Lilium in the 1930s after it merged the

[89] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 60.

[90] "Motion Pictures in China", 19.

[91] "Motion Pictures in China", 19. According to another resource, the capital of Lianhua is said to be one million Mexico dollars, however, only half of them "has been paid up". See "Letter from Bank of China", Shanghai Municipal Archive (hereafter SMA), *Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguanan yingpianye de diaocha ziliao/The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank* 上海商业储蓄银行有关影片业调查资料, Q275-1-1949.

[92] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

latter. These three studios dominated the production of the Chinese film industry in the 1930s. China released 1,169 films from 1922 to 1937, while the total number of films released by Mingxing, Tianyi and Lianhua amounted to 413, accounting for 35 per cent of total.[93] From 1935, newly-organized studios such as Xinhua and Yihua (艺华, a.k.a. Yihwa) challenged the positions of the "Big Three". Both Xinhua and Yihua had a strong capital background. In the wake of China's transition to talkie pictures, both Xinhua and Yihua were supplied with sound machines and released nothing but sound pictures. Their films were well received in the Chinese film market. By contrast, the "Big Three" either suffered from deficits or a current cash shortage. In 1936, Lianhua declared bankruptcy and Mingxing was on the edge of bankruptcy. After the outbreak of second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the economic structure of the Chinese film industry changed dramatically. Mingxing suspended its production, while Tianyi shifted its business to Hong Kong and Nanyang. Yihua and Xinhua continued to release films and replaced the positions of Mingxing and Tianyi in the Chinese film market.

Another significant character of the economic structure of the Chinese film industry is vertical integration. Unlike its Hollywood counterpart, vertical integration is not very common in Chinese studios. Mingxing was one of few cases exhibiting vertical integration. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mingxing was the largest production studio at that time. In addition, the executives of Mingxing also maintained a distribution corporation and had a theatre chain. Their distribution corporation Huawei (华威, a.k.a. Wha Whei Trading Co., hereafter Huawei) was also a key concern in distribution business whose turnover exceeded 100,000 yuan. The Central

[93] A survey of the number of Chinese films prior to 1937 is conducted by Long Jin based on the commercial published in *Shen Bao*. I am grateful to Long Jin 龙锦 for his permission to cite this unpublished statistics.

Motion Picture Corporation (中央影戏公司) in charge of five cinemas was Mingxing's theatre chain. The existing literature appears to overestimate the vertical integration of Lianhua in the 1930s.[94] Its vertical integration concentrates on production and distribution sectors. Lianhua, together with Huawei, dominated the distribution business for domestic pictures in the 1930s. The existing literature mentions that Lianhua owned the North China Amusements Ltd. which controlled about 30 theatres in north China.[95] As a matter of fact, the North China Amusements Ltd only operated three theatres in Beijing and Hebei in the 1930s. In addition, there is not sufficient evidence to support the conjecture that these theatres had a preference for showing Lianhua's pictures. There is one cinema affiliated to Lianhua in Shanghai, that is, Guanghua 光华.

The increasing number of Chinese pictures released suggested the growing scale of the Chinese film industry. A close look at Figure 1 finds that there was a general increase in the number of Chinese pictures in the 1920s and 1930s. In the three years from 1921 to 1923, only thirteen pictures of length were produced in China. In 1924, sixteen productions were released, or more than the number produced in the previous three years combined; in 1925, the number was 66. Since then the industry continued to grow until approximately 100 pictures were produced in 1931. Despite the number of pictures released declined since 1931, it appeared that the Chinese film industry "has passed through the period of the stabilization".[96] In the wake of China's conversion to sound since 1931, "firms with little or no capital have

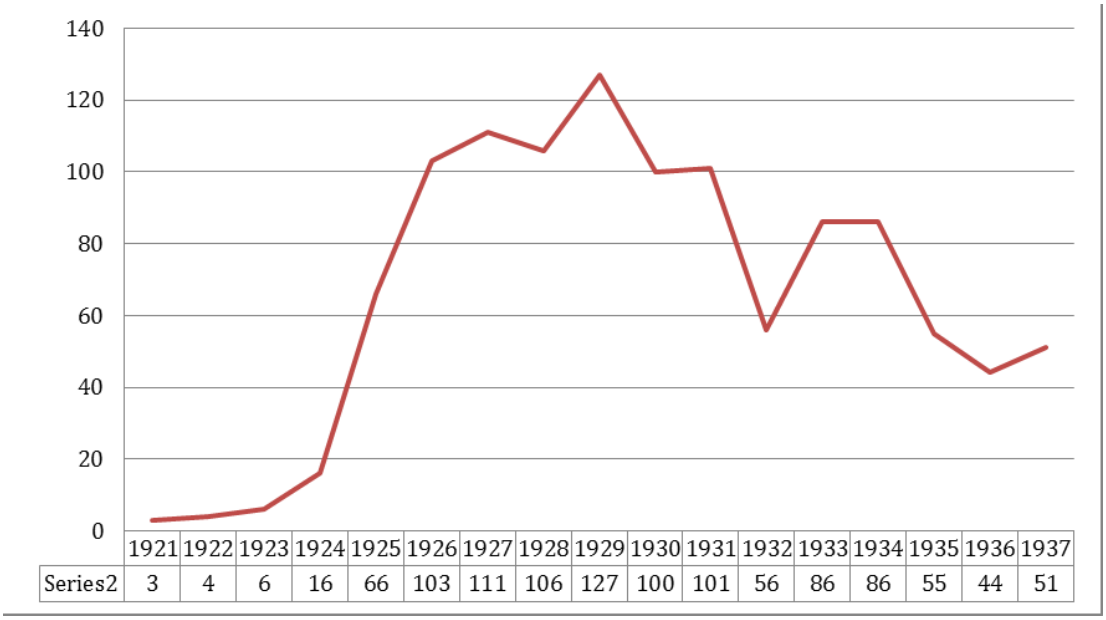
[94] Ying Zhu and Seio Nakajima, "The Evolution of Chinese Cinema as Industry", in Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (eds.), *Art, politics, and commerce in Chinese cinema*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 17-34.

[95] Zhu and Nakajima, "The Evolution of Chinese Cinema as Industry", 17-34.

[96] "Motion Pictures in China", 18.

nearly all been eliminated, and only those with adequate financial backing appear to have survived the exigencies of the past five years (1926-1931) of competition".[97]

Figure 1 Number of Chinese Feature Films, 1921-1937



Source: Shen Bao *and* Xinwen Bao. *I am grateful to Long Jin for permission to cite his unpublished statistics.*

No film historian has even questioned that the Chinese film industry could not compete with its Hollywood counterpart whether in terms of production costs or industry scale. The production costs for a silent Chinese picture were roughly 30,000 yuan, while the cost of a sound picture amounted to 50,000 yuan.[98] The scale of the production end of the Chinese film industry can be seen through the number of employees and the total amount of investment. A market survey indicates that the Chinese film industry employed approximately 2,000 persons and incurred an

[97] "Motion Pictures in China", 18.

[98] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 65-66.

investment of 1,429,000 yuan in property and equipment in 1932.[99]

The growth of Hollywood's trade and China's own internal trade contributed to the prosperity in the exhibition sector. China's film exhibition started in the 1897. The first standard cinema in Shanghai was established by a Spaniard named Antonio Ramos in 1908. Ramos subsequently established several other theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong and became a film mogul. Up to 1931, the number of theatres in China amounted to 273, and the total seating capacity accounted for 195,000, giving 716 programs daily.[100] The scales of investments in exhibition sector including land, buildings and equipment exceeded seven million yuan.[101] A market survey estimated that "the total daily attendance in China's theatres amounted to 292,500" in 1931.[102] With respect to the gross receipts of Chinese theatres, a 1936 source estimated "roughly at about 10,000,000 yuan, or just about one-third of one percent of the gross receipts of American movie houses for the same year".[103]

From any point of the film business, Shanghai was the most significant centre in China. For Hollywood, Shanghai, together with Hong Kong, was the centre of the distribution of Hollywood films in China. In the 1930s, nearly all distribution representatives of American major studios situated their head offices in Shanghai. To the domestic film industry, Shanghai was the principle centre of motion picture production. "In 1934, out of 55 concerns engaged in film production, 48 were in

[99] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 23. The conversion makes at the rate on 1 October 1932.

[100] "Motion Pictures in China", 8.

[101] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 22.

[102] "Motion Pictures in China", 9.

[103] Chien, P. Y, "China's Film Magnet, T.J. Holt, to Seek Ideas Abroad for Development of Moving Picture Industry", *The China Weekly Review*, 27 February 1937.

Shanghai".[104] Shanghai was also the principle centre of film exhibition. In 1931, 44 out of total 273 cinemas were located in Shanghai and the revenue from these theatres "amounted to about one-third of the entire revenue" for China.[105] In addition, Shanghai was the port of importation of not only motion pictures but motion picture production and reproduction equipment. Considering the significance of Shanghai, the major concern of my thesis focuses on this urban city.

1.6 The Organisation

The thesis constitutes of seven chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter Two explores the role Hollywood played in the Chinese film industry in the 1930s, paying particular attention to the case of Chinese cinema's conversion to sound. This chapter shows that Hollywood served not only as a model for the Chinese film industry, but was also directly integrated into the construction of the domestic film industry.

Chapter Three examines the dynamic relations between the Chinese film industry and Hollywood. This chapter focuses on the emergence and optimisation of the Chinese distribution system by virtue of imitating Hollywood's. It shows that China first imitated Hollywood's distribution system in the 1920s and innovated its own based on Hollywood in the 1930s. This chapter suggests that a power-relation analysis is the key to understanding the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry.

Chapter Four investigates China's mode of production prior to 1937 in comparison with its Hollywood counterpart. With regard to the dynamic relations with Hollywood, China's mode of production shows little difference with its distribution

[104] Lowenthal Rudolf, *The Present Status of the Film in China*, Peiping: Reprint from the Collectanea Synodalis, 1936, 89.

[105] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 107.

system: starting from a position of imitation and then developing its culture-specific features. However, in contrast to the distribution system, the traits in China's production system—the powerful position of director—proved to be rather negative in terms of film economy. The traits developed in China's mode of production, I suggest, contributes to a vulnerable film industry in the 1930s.

Chapter Five highlights the function of intermediaries in China's industrial response to Hollywood. The figure of the intermediary refers to the merchants and practitioners standing between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. Three groups of intermediary are specified in this chapter, i.e., American film practitioners in China, Chinese merchants distributing Hollywood films and Chinese film practitioners with American study backgrounds. The standard historical literature, fuelled by nationalism, failed to value them consequently neglecting their contribution to the domestic film industry. This chapter shows that the figures of intermediaries bridged the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry and facilitated the development of the domestic film industry. The chapter suggests that patriotic sentiment should not be the only criterion in the evaluation of the history of the Chinese film industry.

Chapter Six explores the market performance of the Chinese film industry with respect to the box office by comparing it with that of Hollywood in China. This chapter explores the outcome of China's industrial response to Hollywood. It shows that Hollywood's dominance was not monolithic with respect to the Chinese film industry. The domestic film industry outranked Hollywood from certain perspectives. I argue in this chapter that the growth of the domestic film industry in the 1920s and 1930s was achieved through competition, both direct and indirect, with Hollywood.

This thesis advocates the positive influence of Hollywood in the making and

development of the domestic film industry outside of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. However, I have no intention of producing a definitive answer to the question of the influence of Hollywood on the domestic cinema industry outside Hollywood. A case by case study with nuanced analysis of the economic and social situation of the national cinema market is suggested for further exploration of the relations between Hollywood and the domestic film industry.

1.7 Methodology

As a historical study, the thesis relies heavily on primary materials about the film industry located in China, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Four categories of primary materials are used in this thesis: studio and industrial archives, English and Chinese newspapers in the early twentieth century, trade journals and market reports and unpublished diaries of producers.

The United Artists Corporation Records located with the Wisconsin Historical Society provides exclusive primary records about Hollywood's business in China. The statistics about the box office receipts of films distributed by United Artists have proved to be very significant in speculating the total receipts of Hollywood in China in the 1930s and providing an object of comparison with that of Chinese film. In addition, the black book, correspondence and reports between the agents in China and the New York headquarters of United Artists have significantly benefited my study on Hollywood's distribution in China and general information on the Chinese film market.

Another prominent source about Hollywood's film business in China and the industrial background of Chinese film is to be found in "*Records of the U.S. Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of China*" released by National

Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Two specific market reports benefited this study a great deal, namely "*Motion Pictures in China*" (1931) and "*The Motion Picture Industry in China*" (1932). These reports were conducted by various American consular officers throughout China. These film market surveys provided thorough investigations of the Chinese film market concerning Hollywood films in China as well as the domestic film industry in the early 1930s. With respect to Hollywood's film market in China, these two surveys examined Hollywood's distribution and exhibition practices, the taxation and the censorship of Hollywood films in China. With respect to the domestic film industry, these two surveys supplied reliable information about the production modes and the reception of Chinese films. In addition, a general introduction of the history of China's transition to talkie pictures was also attached in these surveys.

The Shanghai Municipal Archive contains invaluable archives about the operation of Chinese production studios. Three items proved most beneficial to this study: Firstly, the records of the minutes of the meetings of Mingxing shareholders (1927, 1931 and 1933). These records provide a reliable record of the business operation of the largest film concern in the Chinese film industry at that time. Secondly, the surveys concerning film business in Shanghai (mainly about production and exhibition) collected by the Shanghai Commercial & Saving Bank.[106] Most of the surveys were conducted through the China Mercantile Agency. The investigated companies include Mingxing, Lianhua, Tianyi, and Huawei. The contents include authorised capital, corporation structure, financial situation, short introduction of

[106] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank,* Q275-1-1949; SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank,* Q275-1-2041.

corporation executives and shareholders; and thirdly the memos of the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank with Mingxing. These detail the sound machinery Mingxing granted from the United States by Hong Shen and the value of those machineries. In addition, they document the economic situation of Mingxing from 1935 until its bankruptcy.

The National Library of Australia contains a rich array of newspapers from China, published in Chinese and English. The Chinese newspapers used in this thesis include *Xinwen Bao* (新闻报, Shanghai), *Shen Bao* (申报, Shanghai), *Shang Bao* (商报, Tianjin) and *Qingdao Shi Bao* (青岛时报, Qingdao). English newspapers related to my study, in particular *North China Daily News* and *China Press*, were from the National Library of Australia through the interloan service of The Library of The University of Auckland. *North China Herald* and *China Weekly Review* were accessed from the database of *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chinese Newspapers Collection*.

Apart from the primary materials, Chinese film journals and periodicals published in the early twentieth century were accessed at the Shanghai Library and a database named *Duxiu* (读秀). *Diansheng* (电声, translated as Movietone), a comprehensive film trade periodical, was purchased from the National Microfilms Centre in China through financial support by The Library of The University of Auckland.

This thesis employs simplified Chinese characters instead of *pinyin* and the simplified Chinese characters are followed by the English name if applicable. One will find that the English translations of film titles in this thesis are slightly different from the accepted ones. The English titles I used in this thesis basically originated from the preview of commercial Chinese titles published in English newspapers and periodicals in 1920s and 1930s China, in particular *North China Herald* and *China*

Press. Such English titles were translated and promoted by Chinese studios at that time. For instance, China's first sound picture *Genv hong mudan* (歌女红牡丹, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1931) is translated as *The Singing Peony*, instead of *The Sing Song Girl Peony*, which is popular in English literature. I have used the accepted translations with respect to those films without published English titles. A filmography is attached at the end of this thesis with Chinese titles, English titles and the corresponding accepted English titles.

Chapter 2: Technology and the Trans/National: The Contribution of Hollywood to China's Transition to Sound, 1931-1936

This chapter is a study of Hollywood's contribution to the cinema's conversion to sound in China from 1931 to 1936. Hollywood's transition to sound in the late 1920s has drawn enormous attention while little is known about the history of cinema's sound transition in other countries like China.[1] In addition, the literature dealing with the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry concentrates on Hollywood's function as a model for the domestic film industry while it fails to examine Hollywood's other significant functions.[2] Through an examination of the evolution of China's transition to sound in the 1930s, I argue that Hollywood serves as a constructive force in the formation of the domestic film industry. This chapter suggests that the existing literature advocating the concept of a "national cinema" fails to explain adequately the function of Hollywood in the making of the Chinese national film industry.

To provide a background of China's transition to sound films, I begin this chapter with a brief introduction of the introduction of Hollywood talkies into China in the late 1920s and early 1930s. I then provide an analysis of Hollywood's impact on the coming of sound in Chinese films focusing on economy and technology. This chapter firstly investigates Hollywood's economic influences by asking how Hollywood impacted on the earliest Chinese talkies and at the same time encouraged

[1] Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*, 2005; Crafton Donald, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound 1926-1931*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. An exception is Zhang Zhen's *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*. She traces the development of China's transition to sound films by focusing on the transformation of film style due to introducing sound into films.

[2] Cambon, *The Dream Palace of Shanghai*, 1993; Xiao, "Hollywood in China", 72; Zhu and Nakajima, 17-34.

the continued production of silent films. This chapter then explores the function of Hollywood in the field of technology. Three specific issues are stressed: 1) Why Hollywood at the beginning failed to play a vital role of China's sound conversion? 2) How Hollywood benefited the upsurge of the first wave of competition on sound? 3) What role Hollywood played when China manufactured its own sound machines? The chapter concludes by linking the analysis of Hollywood's contribution in China with the current development of the trans/national cinema studies.

2.1 The Coming of Hollywood Talkies

Like its American counterparts, silent films in China had been viewed with live musical accompaniment.[3] Quality theatres employed orchestras to attract patrons during the silent period. In some theatres film explainers offered live accounts of the narrative.

As the principle centre of film production, distribution and exhibition in China, Shanghai was known to be aware of new sound film experiments in the United States from the 1910s to the 1930s. *North China Herald* pointed out that "Shanghai had the reputation of always being up-to-date, getting the latest and newest of everything, especially in regard to entertainment for the public", thanks to the close communication between Shanghai and the outside world.[4] One year after Edison invented the acoustic kinetophone in 1913, Shanghai audiences could experience it at

[3] Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1995. Hu Daojing 胡道静, "Shanghai dianyingyuan de fazhan/The development of Shanghai film theatres" 上海电影院的发展, in Shanghai Tongshe ed., *Shanghai yanjiu ziliao xubian/Continuation of the Research of Shanghai* 上海研究资料续编, Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Press. 1984, 532-555.

[4] "Sound Pictures", *North China Herald*, 2 February 1929.

the Victoria Theatre 维多利亚戏院.[5] The preview commercial mentioned that audiences could see and hear programmes including "the latest musical comedies, dramas, operas and well known STARS from the Vaudeville Stage faithfully reproduced by this wonderful invention" [emphasis in the original].[6] In the end of 1926, Lee De Forest's Phonofilm was brought to the Pantheon Theatre 百星大戏院 by Y. Minagawa, a Japanese exhibitor who had obtained sole rights for the Far East.[7] The Phonofilm presented several programmes including music by Roy Smeck and a speech delivered by President Coolidge in the White House.[8] The Phonofilm had another show in Shanghai two years later, through the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), an important conduit for introducing new technology into modern China. Dr C. H. Roberson, the general secretary of the YMCA in Shanghai, brought another film made by De Forest and exhibited its ability at the Martyrs Memorial Hall in Shanghai in November 1928.[9]

The first fully equipped sound apparatus theatre in China was the Embassy Theatre 夏令配克影戏院 in 1929. The brand of the sound reproduction equipment was the Photophone made by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA).[10] In January 1929, *Captain Swagger* (dir. Edward Griffith, 1928) was premiered at the Embassy. The expert from the United States credited with installing the equipment and training

[5] *North China Daily News*, 10 November 1914; Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zuwen 程季华、李少白、邢祖文, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi/A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* 中国电影发展史, Beijing: China Film Press, 1980, 156; Hu, "The development of Shanghai film theatres", 532-555.

[6] *North China Daily News*, 10 November 1914.

[7] "Talking Film in Shanghai", *North China Herald*, 18 December 1926.

[8] "Talking Film in Shanghai", 18 December 1926.

[9] "Talking Motion Pictures To Be Demonstrated To The Shanghai Public", *China Press*, 11 November 1928.

[10] "Pre-view of Talking Picture at Embassy Delights Hearers", *China Press*, 7 February 1929.

the operators and mechanics at the Embassy is J. P. Koehler. After his job at the Embassy, Koehler travelled to Perth in July 1929 and introduced the Photophone machine in Australia for the first time.[11]

The initial responses to talkie pictures from the public were mixed. A comment in the *North China Herald* suggested, "The talking completely killed the film. Interest and illusion vanished in a flash. Action slowed down and the actors became utterly wooden and amateurish".[12] In addition, the quality of synchronized sound was far from perfect. The author complained, "Consonants vanished…and half the words were guesswork… [T]here was little or nothing to connect the speakers and with their words".[13] The author prophesied, "[The Embassy] should ship the apparatus back to America and stick to the silent drama".[14] But there were positive responses. A letter from S.C. Kingsbury suggested it was important to exercise patience until sound film technology improved. Kingsbury stated, "The equipment which Mr Hertzberg had installed undoubtedly represented a tidy sum".[15] Although there were controversial responses and discussions, the talkie box office at the Embassy was promising due to the scarcity of talkie pictures in China. The Embassy opened to packed performances three times a day, and it was reported that the box office receipts broke records.[16]

Attracted by Embassy's promising business and encouraged by the rapid development in sound technology, the owners of first-class cinemas in Shanghai rushed to install sound machines. Up to the end of 1930, at least twelve out of 53

[11] "Capitol Talkies Are Now Being Installed", *Sunday Times*, 21 July 1929.

[12] O.M.G., "Talking Pictures", *North China Herald*, 2 March 1929.

[13] O.M.G., "Talking Pictures", 2 March 1929.

[14] O.M.G., "Talking Pictures", 2 March 1929.

[15] S.C. Kingsbury, "Talking Pictures", *North China Herald*, 2 March 1929.

[16] "Talkies", *China Press*, 22 September 1929.

theatres installed sound projectors and most first-class theatres showed sound films exclusively.[17] Outside of Shanghai, cities including Hong Kong, Canton, Tianjin, Hankou, Beijing and Harbin had installed sound equipment.[18]

Generally speaking, there are two types of sound apparatus in terms of their function. One is a sound reproduction machine or sound projector designed for theatres and the other is a sound recording machine designed for producing films in studios. Both sound reproduction and sound recording machines have two formats, sound-on-disc and sound-on-film. At the beginning, the sound reproduction apparatus installed at Shanghai theatres such as the Embassy employed sound-on-disc technology. This technology was soon replaced by a more sophisticated and reliable sound-on-film technology. American products dominated the sound reproduction equipment market. Eleven out of 29 sound reproduction machines installed in Shanghai theatres were West Electric products, while the number of RCA machines was eight, according to 1932 statistics.[19]

2.2 The Gap in the Market and Inspiration: Two Contributions of Hollywood in Economy in the Early 1930s

I now focus on the role Hollywood played in the field of the economy in the history of China's transition to talkies. Hollywood's move to sound immobilised its own production of silent films. By the end of 1932, Hollywood's absence in the silent film market created a gaping hole in the Chinese film industry. China continued to produce silent films until 1936. Along with the continued development of technology, Hollywood talkies demonstrated to Chinese filmmakers that sound film would be an

[17] Way, "Motion Pictures in China", 1-16.

[18] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 160-162.

[19] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 160.

inevitable move in the future. Chinese film producers realized that a transition to sound films was coming and under these circumstances, Chinese film practitioners commenced by experimenting with sound-on-disc technology from 1931.

In its earliest days of the transition to sound, Hollywood films decreased in popularity in China in general because Hollywood cut the number of silent films to increase the gross of talkie productions. However, Hollywood talkies did not receive the same treatment as its silent films had. A fundamental barrier for Hollywood talkies was language. Although a proportion of student audiences would watch Hollywood films as a way of learning English, the number of English speaking Chinese residents remained few. Even not all intellectuals could understand English. An editor from a leading newspaper claimed he had seldom gone to cinemas after the arrival of sound film in Shanghai because he had not yet reached the required level of English language comprehension.[20] Another barrier for Hollywood talkies in China was the slow process of installing sound machines in theatres outside of Shanghai. It is noted that over 66 per cent of talking picture theatres in 1932 were located in five principal cities (Shanghai, Hong Kong, Canton, Hankou, and Tianjin) of China.[21] "The original expense of installation, the lack of facilities for servicing and the dangers and difficulties of transportation to interior places" were barriers for the cinemas in interior cities for installing sound equipment.[22] With regard to the price for equipment installation, the sound equipment at the Eastern Theatre 东海大戏院 in Shanghai, for instance, alone cost 11,285.11 yuan, a major expense for any cinema.[23] Given the

[20] Feng Shuluan 冯树鸾, "Xiegei mingxing/To the Star Motion Pictures Corporation" 写给明星, *Mingxing/Star* 明星, 7, 1, 1936, no page numbers.

[21] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 72.

[22] Way, "Motion Pictures in China", 5.

[23] SMA, *Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha ziliao/The Theatre Houses Industries, A*

price of admission was between 20 to 30 cents, cinemas in cities like Fuzhou and Yantai did not have enough capital to install sound equipment.[24]

Hollywood's executives, however, paid little attention to the situation of small film markets such as China. The Chinese film market was considered a minor one for Hollywood in the first half of the twentieth century, only accounting for around one per cent of Hollywood foreign revenues.[25] Because of this, the success of talkies in North America and Europe persuaded Hollywood's moguls to shift production to talkie pictures from 1928.[26] Consequently, in the early 1933, only three out of 121 Hollywood films imported to China were silent. That is to say, cinemas without sound capabilities would face serious film shortages. Meanwhile, some of the Chinese audiences became increasingly indifferent to Hollywood's sound films due to the language barrier. This demand for silent films in the local market generated an opportunity for the silent Chinese film industry.

Chinese filmmakers soon realized the opportunity for development and continued producing silent films to meet this market demand. This is one key reason why Lianhua was set up in 1930 to produce silent films. Luo Mingyou, the executive of Lianhua, and his employees produced several silent films between 1930 and 1931, such as *The Reminiscence of Peking* (故都春梦, dir. Sun Yu, 1930), *Love and Duty* (恋爱与义务, dir. Bo Wancang, 1931) and *When a Brother Sacrifices* (义雁情鸳, dir. Wang Cilong, 1930). These silent films not only changed the direction of Chinese film production, but also brought considerable profits to Lianhua. It was logical for

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Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank 上海商业储蓄银行有关影戏院调查资料, Q275-1-2041.

[24] Way, Motion Pictures in China, 9.

[25] Vasey, *The World according to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 85.

[26] Gomery, *The Coming of Sound*.

Lianhua to retain its profitable silent film production, rather than taking the risk of moving to sound. It proved to be a wise decision in the initial stages of transiting to sound. From July 1932 to June 1933, the net profit of Lianhua amounted to 15,911.44 yuan, while several other studios such as Mingxing were in serious deficit.[27]

Apart from taking advantage of the gap in the market left by Hollywood talkies, other key factors contributed to Chinese filmmakers' choice to stay with silent films. First, Chinese films also had a problem of language engagement in talkie production. In contrast to a relatively unified written language, China has numerous dialects. The legitimate national language, Mandarin, did not spread markedly in the 1930s despite the central government's efforts on enforcement. Local governments in autonomy such as Canton authorities strongly resisted the government attempts at enforcing the homogenization of a national language. They regarded Canton dialect as a cornerstone for maintaining local independence.[28] The Chinese film authorities, however, allowed no film to be produced with a language other than Mandarin. Therefore, the government pressure on Mandarin as the national language represented a high risk for Chinese filmmakers. Employing Mandarin effectively meant a loss of the Canton market, the second largest in China. Also in employing Cantonese, filmmakers would face a punishment from the government. This dilemma prevented the development of Chinese sound pictures to some extent. As Luo Mingyou declared in 1932, "Owing to the existence of many local dialects in China it is difficult for a

[27] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[28] Zhiwei Xiao, "Constructing a New National Cinema Culture: Film Censorship and the Issues of Cantonese Dialect, Superstition, and Sex in Nanjing Decade", in Yingjin Zhang (ed.). *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 184.

Chinese film company to make a talking picture with a popular appeal".[29] The second reason is because the cost of producing talkie pictures was higher than for silent films. The price of a regular sound recording machine amounted to 10,000 yuan in the 1930s. This was a considerable burden for Chinese studios. In addition, the cost for producing a Chinese silent film ranged from 2,000 to 8,000 yuan while a sound film would cost 8,000 yuan to 17,000 yuan, a significant difference in comparison with the silent films.[30]

Accordingly, China consolidated its silent film business in the late 1920s and early 1930s. When Hollywood introduced sound films to China in 1929, 127 silent films were produced in China, peaking in the first half of the twentieth century. The number of silent productions remained over 100 in both 1930 and 1931. In addition, the studio earnings increased dramatically from 1929 to 1931. Taking Mingxing for instance, the gross earnings in 1929 accounted for 356,562.58 yuan and this doubled over the next three years.[31]

The prosperity of silent films, however, was short and the arrival of the sound picture was inevitable for the Chinese film industry. The quality of talkie pictures had a remarkable improvement since the first talkie was shown in China, thanks to the fact that the apparatus had been perfected mechanically. The tastes of Chinese audiences had evolved to include sound pictures. The talking picture, therefore, was permanently established and this was evidenced by the thriving business of Hollywood talkies in China after its decline in the initial stages. But the dialogue still annoyed Chinese audiences who barely understood English. All these situations

[29] "Numerous Dialects Make Chinese Talkies Difficult, Says Lo", *China Press*, 29 November 1932.

[30] "The Chinese Film Industry", *The People Tribune*, IX, 1, 1 April 1935, 28.

[31] China Educational Film Association 中国教育电影协会, *Zhongguo dianying nianjian, 1934/1934 China Film Yearbook* 中国电影年鉴, Beijing: China Broadcasting and TV Press, 2008, 917.

suggested that the time for producing Chinese-speaking talkies was coming. A number of studios wanted to earn the credit for producing the first talkies in China for the sake of the honour as well as the predictable profit. And the credit went to one of the most powerful companies.

The Singing Peony was the first Chinese talkie picture, which was released by the Mass Paminphone Co. Ltd, a joint company created by Mingxing, a leading film studio, and the Pathe Orient Corporation, a leading recording company and a branch of Pathe in China. Mingxing took responsibility for filming and editing, Pathe was in charge of recording and other sound technology. As early as August 1930, Mingxing announced its plan for producing talkies. On a 100,000 yuan budget, Mingxing assigned its most reputable director Zhang Shichuan, scriptwriter Hong Shen 洪深 and its most recognizable actors Butterfly Wu 胡蝶 and Gong Jianong 龚稼农 to ensure *The Singing Peony* drew a large audience. After eight months' work, *The Singing Peony* was released in March 1931 with its premiere at the Strand Theatre 新光大戏院. It was advertised as "a talkie blockbuster that had never been seen before" and "the benchmark film in the Chinese film industry".[32] Indeed, *The Singing Peony* was "an attraction because of its novelty and the fact that it [was] a timely attempt to make a Chinese sound picture".[33] Distributor Huawei sold its copies to Philippines for 18,000 yuan and Indonesia for 16,000 yuan, a much higher price than regular productions.[34] After releasing *The Singing Peony*, Mingxing and Pathe Orient released another synchronised feature *So, This is Paradise* (如此天堂, dir. Zhang Shichuan)

[32] *Shen Bao*, 10 March 1931.

[33] "Motion Pictures in China", 21.

[34] Xu Bibo 徐碧波, "Zhongguo yousheng dianying de kaiduan/The Prospect of the Chinese Talkie Pictures" 中国有声电影的展望, *Shanhu/Carol* 珊瑚, 6, 1932, 3.

later in 1931.

Small and midsize studios also partook in experimentation with sound film production. Youlian (友联, a.k.a. U Luien Film Co.) released *The Singing Beauty* (虞美人, dir. Chen Kengran) on 24 May 1931, two months after *The Singing Peony*. It was the second synchronized feature in the history of Chinese cinema. By the end of 1931, Lianhua presented its first synchronized feature *Two Stars* (银汉双星, dir. Shi Dongshan, 1931), despite most of its energy being diverted to silent film production. In order to prepare its talkie production, Lianhua established a "folly" school through incorporating the renowned Bright Moon Follies to train film actors in voice and articulation. In addition, Luo signed performing artists Mei Lanfang 梅兰芳, Li Minghui 黎明晖 and Zi Luolan 紫罗兰 to join the cast. Zi Luolan cast as the heroine in *Two Stars*, which debuted at the Nanking Theatre on 13 December 1931. Unfortunately, the response to *Two Stars* was unsatisfactory because the film was not properly synchronized in places. More importantly, the attraction of audiences at that time had already shifted to a more reliable sound technology.

2.3 Supplier and Model: Hollywood's Contribution in Technology in the Mid-1930s

The technology utilized in *Two Stars* was the same as *The Singing Peony*, that is, sound-on-disc, a technology that had already been abandoned by Hollywood. In this section, I examine the technological contribution of Hollywood to China's transition to sound. I investigate the various stages of China's transition to sound and explore Hollywood's contribution in these phases. Most specifically, I focus on three aspects: 1) Hollywood's role at the beginning of China's transition to sound particularly when China engaged in the sound-on-disc technology; 2) How the first wave of the Chinese

talkies benefited from Hollywood; and 3) How Hollywood served as a successful model for Chinese engineers during the development phase of Chinese technology.

When China first engaged in sound-on-disc technology during the earliest stage of China's transition to talkies, Hollywood did not show much influence in technology, as the sound-on-disc technology had dissipated in the United States. The focus of American producers had already shifted to the sound-on-film technology when China started to engage in sound film experiments in 1931. However, Chinese studios could not afford the expense of installing sound-on-film machines in the very early 1930s. For instance, in its initial effort to produce sound films, Mingxing contacted the representatives of West Electric and RCA in Shanghai, seeking out keys to profitability. Both corporations employed similar policies, that is, studios producing sound films needed to pay bonds and royalty fees accounting for around eight per cent of box office returns. However, due to the low profits at that time, Mingxing could not afford such costs as their Hollywood counterparts did. [35] Chinese filmmakers, therefore, were forced to seek support from other sources, and the recording industry became their target. The decision to choose the recording industry was made on the basis of technology since the technology of sound-on-disc films maintained similarities with that of record production. Sound engineers in the Pathe Corporation, during the production of *The Singing Peony* made considerable efforts to resolve this issue. Youlian, the producer of China's second sound-on-disc film, could not afford the new technology whereas Mingxing could. Thus, Youlian used common sound recording technology which recorded discs with audio track first and then linked it to the image track.

[35] Xu Bibo, "Zhongguo yousheng dianying de kaiduan/The Beginning of the Chinese Sound Films" 中国有声电影的开端, *Zhongguo dianying/Chinese Film* 中国电影, 4, 1957, 59.

The results of this sound-on-disc technology, however, were unsatisfactory and synchronisation was an evident problem. During the production of *The Singing Peony*, sound distortion occurred due to a slow rotating speed, which caused the actors' voices to sound sharp.[36] Due to the post-recording process, a slight mistake in an actor performance could easily ruin synchronicity.[37] This was a long and expensive process. Mingxing's financial reports showed production budgets increased by 33 per cent in 1930 due to sound-on-disc film production.[38] Therefore, after these sound-on-disc trials, Chinese film practitioners opted to pursue more sophisticated form of technology, that is, sound-on-film technology. Luckily, it did not take long.

In contrast to sound-on-disc, Chinese filmmakers had few options apart from employing Hollywood's sound-on-film model. The complexity of the sound-on-film technology prevented Chinese filmmakers from finding alternative machines. China's first sound-on-film movie, *Peace after Storm* (雨过天青, dir. Xia Chifeng, 1931), was recorded by an American machine. It was released by Huaguang Sound-on-film Motion Picture Corporation (华光) on 1 July 1931, which was slightly later than the release of *The Singing Beauty*, the second sound-on-disc talkie in China. Huanguang's publicity claimed the sound machines employed in *Peace after Storm* belonged to K. Henry, an American news cameraman for Paramount studio who was then in Japan. With the intention of reducing costs and ensuring equipment quality, Huaguang dispatched actors and crews to Japan, instead of shipping the equipment to

[36] Xu, The Beginning of the Chinese Sound Films , 59.

[37] Gong Jianong 龚稼农, *Gong jianong congying huiyi lu/The Memoirs of Gong Jianong* 龚稼农从影回忆录, Taipei: Biographical Literature Press, 1980, 201.

[38] SMA, *Mingxing yingpian gufen youxian gongsi di yi jie juesuan baogao/The Seventh Accounts Report of the Star Motion Picture Corporation* 明星影片股份有限公司第一届决算报告, Y9-1-460.

Shanghai.[39] Fuelled by nationalism, film critics attacked *Peace after Storm* as a Japanese production and called for its prohibition. The premiered date of *Peace after Storm* was just two months before the Manchurian Incident, in which Japanese troops occupied Northeast China and caused a national upsurge of hostility towards Japan. A riot occurred during the screening due to nationalists letting off fireworks, despite the fact that no official prohibition had been issued concerning *Peace after Storm*. However, Huaguang did not continue producing talkie pictures, possibly due to the high cost of sound equipment.

Hollywood benefited the first wave of producing talkie pictures in China after two leading studios, Tianyi and Mingxing, secured the sound-on-film equipment from the United States in 1931. In June 1931, Tianyi announced it had secured Fox's Movietone, a relatively sophisticated sound-on-film device by virtue of the intervention of Leon Britton, a veteran American producer who was known as a fight promoter. Apart from Britton, the experts who were invited to assist in producing Tianyi's talkie picture included Charles Hugo, associate, Bert Cann, chief cameraman, Bryan Guerin, sound engineer, and Joseph Smith, chief of the laboratory.[40] To perfect synchronicity in their first talkie, Tianyi was reported to have "completely remodeled" the former studio and "built a complete new laboratory in accordance with the most recent developments in the industry".[41] Tianyi also sacrificed its production speed, despite the fact that it has known for its production efficiency. For instance, for

[39] "Advertisement", *Shen Bao*, 9 June 1931.

[40] By virtue of allying themselves with Tianyi, Leon Britton and Charles Hugo produced a two-reel documentary named *War in China*, presenting the actual war scenes between China and Japan. The film was screened at the Roosevelt, Chicago in 1932. (see "Educational Releasing Leon Britton War Film", *Film Daily*, 4 March 1932; "War Film Booked", *Film Daily*, 21 March 1932).

[41] "Man Who Interested King in Movies to Start Talkies Here", *China Press*, 21 July 1931.

Tianyi's first talkie, *Romance of Opera* (歌场春色, dir. Li Pingqian, 1931), the studio could only shoot four or five scenes per day in comparison to ten scenes per day in the silent film era.[42] After a three-month promotional newspaper campaign, *Romance of Opera* finally debuted at the Strand Theatre on 29 October 1931. It was a tremendous box-office hit in Southeast Asian countries.

Tianyi's acquisition of sound-on-film technology was a massive blow to its main rival, Mingxing. The Mingxing executives were clear that the future of talkie pictures was the sound-on-film technology, because of the exceptional sound synchronisation.[43] They were aware of the potential threat to their leading position in the Chinese film industry if they did not evolve their sound technology. Like Tianyi, the executives of Mingxing contacted an American middleman, Harry Garson, a Hollywood producer, was in Shanghai "arranging for the filming of a local color picture of China" and leading Universal's expedition to film *Ourang* at that time.[44] Through the mediation of Garson, Hong Shen, the scriptwriter of *The Singing Peony*, was dispatched to the United States in July 1931 on behalf of Mingxing to select suitable talkie machines. On 22 August, Hong and Garson returned to Shanghai with sound equipment and 14 technician crews including Sidney Lund, Jack Smith, and Jimmy O. Williamson.[45]

[42] *Shen Bao*, 4 September 1931.

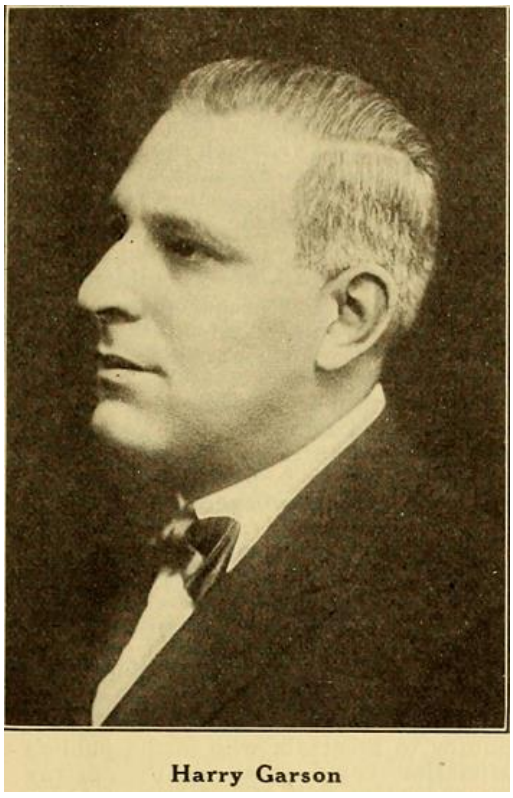
[43] SMA, *Mingxing yingpian gufen youxian gongsi di ba jie juesuan baogao/The Eighth Accounts Report of the Star Motion Picture Corporation* 明星影片股份有限公司第八届决算报告, Y9-1-461.

[44] "Perplexities Surrounding Famed Garbo Redoubled By Shanghai's Nadia Astrova", *China Press*, 21 June 1931; "'Ourang' Expedition on Last Lap of Journey to Borneo", *Hollywood Filmograph*, 5 July 1930.

[45] "Cameramen off to China", *International Photographer,* August 1931, 38; "Pierce Due in City August 21", *China Press,* 12 August 1931; "Moving Picture Party Arrives on S.S. Pierce", *China Press,* 22 August 1931.

Leon Britton

Source: U.S. Passport Application of Leon Britton, 1919, *Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and www.ancestry.com*



Harry Garson

Source: "Detroit keeps on making records", The Moving Picture World, *39, 12, 22 March 1919, 1637.*

The history of Hong Shen's American journey deserves detailed commentary, since fundamental information is lacking about the apparatus, such as the brand, quantity and expense. Historical archives prove to be the most promising source for this investigation. For instance, a financial archive recorded documents about the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank loan to Mingxing in 1936, including 59 letters between Mingxing, the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank, and their lawyers.[46] According to this archive, Mingxing borrowed 160,000 yuan from the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank. To convince the bank of its repayment ability, Mingxing vouched for all its productions, the business property, the immovable property and a detailed list of business properties (Table 1). These were double-checked by two bank employees and returned with one report (Table 2) on 21 February 1937. Mingxing had at least purchased five items of machinery in 1932 (No. 7, No. 8, No. 9, No. 10, and No.11 in Table 1 and Table 2), where were two sound records and colour cameras, 84 mercury vapour lamps, two editing machines, one film bulk printing for sound films and one film splicer. These purchase lists indicate the costs of each machine and the miscellaneous effects. Mingxing paid between 186,766 yuan (counting items from No.7 to No.10 in Table 1 and Table 2) and 194,298 yuan (counting items from No.7 to No. 18 in Table 1) for purchasing the apparatuses including sound recorders and colour cameras. The real costs would be higher since the costs listed in the documents did not include the expense of Hong's journey fee and wages for foreign technicians. Unfortunately, I cannot ascertain the brand of the sound-on-film apparatus as the original documents do not include the brand of sound-on-film apparatus, but the existing literature

[46] SMA, *Jiaotong yinhang zonghang yewubu ji benhang chengzuo mingxing dianyingpian gongsi yakuan de wanglai wenshu/Correspondences between the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues* 交通银行总行业务部及本行承做明星电影片公司押款的往来文书, Q55-2-1371.

suggests two possibilities. The first is RCA's Photophone. A news report from *Shen Bao* and the memoir of an actor who served Mingxing for over ten years confirms this idea.[47] Second, a Chinese film history journal claims it could have been the Audio-Camex machine.[48] However, both of these are speculative. But it is evident that the colour machine purchased by Mingxing is the Multicolor.[49]

To fully utilising these machines, Mingxing and Garson entered an agreement of "forming a closed company which would be titled the Orient Pacific Picture Corporation".[50] This company would have "direct contact with the R.K.O. (Radio-Keith-Orpheum) Distributing Corporation, which would market the films made in China, in the United States and in other countries".[51] The plan of establishing the Orient Pacific Picture Corporation, however, was aborted due to Garson breaking the agreement for an unclear reason.[52] In hindsight, the enormous expense of the apparatus, of course, consolidated Mingxing's leading position in the Chinese film industry, while it also resulted in a considerable deficit for Mingxing. In 1931, Mingxing's net profit was 19,986.83 yuan. After purchasing the apparatuses in 1932, Mingxing had a sizable deficit of 47,320.62 yuan.[53]

The sound-on-film apparatuses leased from the United States by Mingxing and

[47] *Shen Bao*, 21 August 1931; Gong, *The Memoirs of Gong Jianong*, 207.

[48] Xu Bibo, "Zhongguo yousheng dianying de zhanwang/The Prospect of the Chinese Sound Film Business" 中国有声电影的展望, *Carol*, 11, 1932, 4.

[49] *Shen Bao*, 20 September 1931; "Ben gongsi zhi sheyingji/ Our Company's Cameras" 本公司之摄影机, *Mingxing/Star*, 1933, 1, 4, 34; Fan Yanqiao 范烟桥, "Mingxing nianbiao/A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation" 明星年表, *Mingxing/Star*, 7, 1, 1936, no page number.

[50] "New Film Firm Is Formed Here", *China Press*, 2 July 1931.

[51] "New Film Firm Is Formed Here", 2 July 1931.

[52] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

[53] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

Tianyi caused them to complete as many productions as possible to take full advantage of the lease period. Mingxing and Tianyi fully understood that Chinese talkies were scarce products and they should capitalize on the market by all means possible. Consequently, synchronized feature production reached its first peak in 1932. Each studio produced eight sound films. To take advantage of sound films, both studios applied for more exhibition permits. The average number of per annum licence applications for talkie pictures had a noticeable increase in comparison with silent films in 1930s China. Tianyi applied for 1.9 licences for its silent films, in contrast to 4.43 licences for sound films, and Mingxing's average screening permits for silent films were 3.96, while sound productions were 7.55, around two times that silent films.

Hollywood's sound-on-film recording equipment also spawned Chinese imitators. In the 1930s, there were at least seven imitators including sound reproduction apparatus and sound recording apparatus in the Chinese film market. China's attempts to produce its own sound equipment dated back to 1930. Huawei distributed and manufactured sound reproduction equipment named Huawei feng/Whaweiphone.[54] Strictly speaking, Whaweiphone was allegedly copied from Movietone, instead of being an original production of Huawei.[55] Whaweiphone, according to a market survey, "had met with a limited acceptance in China", and only eleven Whaweiphone were in operation nationwide.[56] Apart from Whaweiphone, another reproduction machine named Orthola circulated in China's film market in the

[54] In some cases, Whaweiphone was called Sidatong/Startone. It is easy to be confused because the sound recording machine that Hong Shen imported from the United States was also named Startone.

[55] Xu Bibo, "Zhongguo yousheng dianying de zhanwang/The Prospect of the Chinese Sound Film Business" 中国有声电影的展望, *Carol*, 4, 1932, 3.

[56] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 74.

1930s. Orthola was assembled by the Electric Service Corporation, using both American and Chinese manufactured components. The Electric Service Corporation was registered as an American film company under the provision of the China Trade Act with its base in Shanghai. Like Whaweiphone, there were eleven theatres equipped with Orthola.

Aisitong/Sinophone, produced by Shi Shipan 石世磐, is the first experimental sound recording equipment designed for film production in China. Shi had been previously educated in the United States and worked in a Hollywood company producing arc lights. His American education and experience provided Shi with a sound knowledge about the available technologies in Hollywood. After returning to China, Shi worked as a producer and cameraman for Mingxing.[57] Shi was inspired to produce sound machinery after seeing R.C. Robertson's Phonofilm device in 1928.[58] In 1932, Sinophone was finally invented. However few studios were willing to engage with it and Sinophone dissipated despite being used to produce several short documentary films.

After Mingxing and Tianyi secured sound machines from the United States in 1931, Chinese sound engineers began attempts at duplicating these sound-on-film machines, winning support from the executives of the Chinese studios because leasing American sound machines was a considerable expense. Shao Zuiweng 邵醉翁, the owner and executive of Tianyi, then invited several Chinese engineers to confidentially observe Movietone. The observers included Wu Weiyun 吴蔚云, Situ

[57] Cheng Shuren 程树仁, *Zhongguo diaying nianjian/China Film Yearbook* 中国电影年鉴, Shanghai: China Film Industry Pressing House, 1927, no page number.

[58] Xu, "Zhongguo youshengdianying de zhanwang/The Prospect of the Chinese Sound Film Business" 中国有声电影的展望, *Carol*, 10, 1932. 1-5.

Huimin 司徒慧敏 and Tao Shengbai 陶胜百. Situ Huimin and Tao Shengbai later contributed to the outcome of two Chinese sound machines respectively in 1933, Sanyou shi/Sanyou Record and Zhonghua tong/Chinatone.[59]

Having been educated in the United States, Gong Yuke 龚玉珂, Situ Yimin 司徒逸民 and Ma Dejian 马德建 formed Diantong (电通, a.k.a. Denton Sound Studio) to market Sanyou Record in 1933. Situ Huimin, who was present at the Movietone demonstration at the Tianyi Studio, was the main promoter of Sanyou Record. In its short life, Sanyou Record was used in several prominent films in Chinese film history. One such film was *Children of the Clouds* (风云儿女, dir. Xu Xingzhi, 1935). The theme song of the film, *March of the Volunteers*, was later adopted as the national anthem of the People's Republic of China after 1949. Sanyou Record had also been used in two Lianhua productions, *Big Road* (大路, dir. Sun Yu, 1934) and *Song of the Fishermen* (渔光曲, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1934). And the latter obtained one of the first international awards—"an honorary prize at the 1935 Moscow Film Festival"—and achieved the record of the longest continuous run of any film displayed in China.[60]

Tao Shengbai, another observer of the Movietone, invented Chinatone in 1933, the most widely used sound device prior to 1949. At least seven large and mid-size studios utilized it with Chinatone in 1934 and it was even exported to South-east Asia for producing sound films in 1941.[61] The first film which employed Chinatone was

[59] Zhao Leshan 赵乐山, "Shanghai dianying luyin jishu fazhan shigao/A Preliminary Study on the Development of Film Recording Technology in Shanghai" 上海电影录音技术发展史稿, *Shanghai dianying shiliao/The Historical Collection of Shanghai Cinema* 上海电影史料, Shanghai: Shanghai Film Bureau, 1995, 208.

[60] Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao, Encyclopedia of Chinese Film, London: Routledge, 1998, 105.

[61] These seven film studios include Mingxing, Lianhua, Yihua, Xinhua, Kuaihuolin (快活林), Jinan (暨南) and Meihua (梅花), according to its advertisement. China Educational Film Association, *China Film Yearbook 1934*,

The Legend of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (红羊豪侠传, dir. Yang Xiaozhong, 1935), which was premiered at the best theatre in Shanghai. Encouraged by the success of this sound film experiment, Zhang Shankun, the producer/investor of the film, formed Xinhua Studio in 1936 and grew to be a recognisable film baron in the 1940s. Not surprisingly, Chinatone continued to record Xinhua's productions, including *New Peach Blossom Fan* (新桃花扇, dir. Ouyang Yuqian, 1935), *Song at Midnight* (夜半歌声, dir. Maxu Weibang, 1937) and *Sable Cicada* (貂蝉, dir. Bo Wancang, 1938).[62]

It would be evident to say that most Chinese sound machines were duplication of their American models. A market survey conducted by the American consul in China indicated that, by virtue of little protection for foreign patents and copyrights in China, Chinese manufacturers could easily duplicate American sound projectors.[63] The market survey pointed out two versions of Chinese sound equipment as examples where copying had taken place, that is, Sinophone and Heming tong/Hemingtone (another Chinese sound machine manufactured by Yan Heming 颜鹤鸣 in 1933). The statement of the survey was probably correct. Shi Shipan, the founder of Sinophone claimed that the structure of Sinophone was the same with the RCA's Photophone machine, despite Sinophone's copyright license.[64] In contrast, Hemingtone even failed to patent an application. The authorities pointed out that Hemingtone was nothing but

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102; A'dan 阿丹, "Zhonghuatong luyinji chuguo rongyu/The Honourable Record of Chinatone Sound Machine" 中华通录音机出国荣誉, *Guolian yingxu/The Film Bulletin of Legend of Nations* 国联通讯, 1, 1941, 4.

[62] Zuo Guifang 左桂芳 and Yao Liqun 姚立群, *Tong Yuejuan huiyilu ji tuwen ziliao huibian/The Memories of Tong Yuejuan* 童月娟回忆录暨图文资料汇编, Taipei, Cultural Construction Committee, 2002, 42.

[63] "Motion Pictures in China", 15.

[64] *Shen Bao*, 1 December 1932; "Woguo yousheng dianying shiye zhi diaocha/The Survey of Our Country's Talkie Picture Business" 我国有声电影事业之调查, *Gongshang banyue kan/Commerical and Industrial Semimonthly* 工商半月刊, 17, 1931, 29-32.

a sound machine "firstly used in China by employing the foreign latest method".[65] In addition, the quality of these duplicated machines could not be put on a par with their American models. A case in point is Chinatone, which was supposedly a more reliable device than others. A director recalled that, Chinatone was only equipped with a five-pound-weight microphone, connected by a fish-pole with the recording machine. The polar pattern of the microphone was so poor that only one direction could be recorded, requiring on-going adjustment for distance or angle, or it would collapse the sound recording completely.[66]

Regardless of copyright and quality, a major advantage of Chinese sound machines was the cost in comparison to the American equipment. According to a market survey conducted in 1932, "of the three American [recording] makes being marketed [in China], the cheapest model sells for approximately 11,900 yuan, [h]owever, the same type of Chinese equipment sold at 8,000 yuan, around 3,900 yuan cheaper".[67] The low price was evidently a key reason why some Chinese production studios prefer to employ Chinese sound machines instead of American machines, despite risks to the quality of their products.

American sound experts provided technical support and training for Chinese engineers. As I mentioned previously, the sound machines of both Mingxing and Tianyi were obtained through the mediation of American filmmakers, Harry Garson and Leon Britton respectively. In addition, a bunch of technicians were invited to assist the talkie production in the initial stage of China's transition to sound. These experts were highly criticized in the historical literature due to their lofty attitudes,

[65] *Shen Bao*, 16 May 1934.

[66] Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩, *Dianying banlu chujia ji/The Film Career of Mine* 电影半路出家记, Beijing: China Film Press, 1961, 58.

[67] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 74-75.

personalities and high wages.[68] However, these technicians are recognised as those who trained the first generation of the Chinese sound engineers. As mentioned above, Tianyi's executive confidentially invited Chinese engineers to observe the imported sound machine to conceptualise China own devices. Studio executives like Zhang Shichuan also arranged Chinese assistants for these foreign experts with the intention of "stealing" their knowledge about sound machines. As soon as the Chinese assistants grasped the knowledge about operation of the machinery, then the executives could dismiss these experts in order to avoid paying high wages. It was recorded that the first generation of sound recordists such as He Zhaozhang, He Zhaohuang and Zhao Maosheng received their professional knowledge through instruction from the American technicians.[69]

2.4 Thinking "Trans/National" in the Domain of Technology

China's transition to sound provides a case for examining the function of Hollywood within the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century. During China's transition to talkie pictures, Hollywood played a crucial role in the development of the economic and technological perspectives, suggesting Hollywood as a constructive force in the formation of the Chinese film industry.

A study of the sector of film technology, particularly the cinema's conversion to sound in China, can be seen as a response to the academic transition from the national cinema approach to the transnational cinema approach. As Chris Berry points out, "The national cinema as a theoretical model…cannot accommodate the movement of films across borders, reception of foreign films and so forth".[70]

[68] Gong, *The Memoirs of Gong Jianong*, 208.

[69] Zhao, "A Preliminary Study on the Development of Film Recording Technology in Shanghai", 201.

[70] Berry, "Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies", 9.

However, a replacement of terminology from the national cinema approach to the transnational cinema approach does not mean that one ignores the significance of the relations between cinema and the national since "the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational film-making practice".[71] The sector of film technology in China is a case in point. The cinematic conversion to sound can be seen as an effort to construct the national within technology. First, in contrast to other products which relied almost entirely on importation, sound equipment is one of very few sectors where China released its own national products. Secondly, Chinese film critics clearly associated technology with national identity. Zhou Jianyun 周剑云, for instance, denies the "Chineseness" of Chinese films since the film equipment and raw material were imported from Europe and American, rather than originated in China.[72] Parallel to Zhou, some Chinese film critics refused to regard *Peace after Storm* as Chinese film, since it used American sound apparatus and was produced in Japan.[73] Additionally, Chinese engineers resorted to a nationalistic rhetoric to promote their sound machines, praising their own machines as "glories of the Chinese nation". Therefore, Berry and Farquhar suggest the need of putting "the problem of what the national is—how it is constructed, maintained, and challenged—into center" in Chinese film studies.[74]

In the process of constructing the national, the contribution of the transnational, Hollywood in this case, should be taken into account. This stands as a major distinction between the conventional national cinema approach and the transnational cinema approach. Under the influence of "national cinema", the

[71] Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema", 10.

[72] Quotes from Hu, *Projecting a Nation,* 16.

[73] Xu, "The Prospect of the Chinese Talkie Pictures", 3.

[74] Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen,* 3.

methodological approach in the existing literature polarizes the function of Hollywood with respect to the Chinese film industry. National cinema account points out, "The American cinema looms large as a term of reference for every national cinema in the West and many beyond".[75] China is no exception. The existing literature claims the role Hollywood played as a model for the domestic film industry in domains such as the film star system and the film studio system.[76] An assumption in these writings is a clear-cut boundary between Hollywood and the domestic film industry. Literally speaking, a model suggests an *outside position* to the domestic film industry. One can imitate the model or incorporate the model's style but the model itself still strictly stands outside of the subject. An assumption of a clear-cut boundary between Hollywood and the domestic film industry is closely linked with the conventional cinema approach, which argues that a national cinema asserts "its difference from" others and proclaims "its sense of otherness".[77]

As a matter of fact, the function of Hollywood is far more than just a model for the domestic film industry. Hollywood as an industry crossed the national boundary and served as an "inside" force integrating itself into the making of the Chinese film industry as this chapter has demonstrated. In terms of economy, Hollywood stands as the competitor, inspiring and encouraging the Chinese film industry. When Hollywood talkies came into the Chinese film market, the imported sound pictures created market space for Chinese silent films. Many Chinese film practitioners took advantage of the gap in the market, by continuing to produce silent films until 1936. Meanwhile, the further development of sound synchronisation

[75] Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2002, 90.

[76] Cambon, *The Dream Palaces of Shanghai*; Xiao, "Hollywood in China", 71-96; Zhu and Nakajima, "The Evolution of Chinese Cinema as Industry", 17-34.

[77] Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema", 18.

technologies continued in Hollywood, causing Chinese practitioners to realize that talkies were the future of their film industry. China commenced its own sound experiments from 1931 stimulated by Hollywood's sound film dominance.

Turning to technology, Hollywood was the supplier of technology and master of sound techniques. Big Chinese studios leased sound equipment from the United States directly. American sound technicians were required to train the initial Chinese sound engineers. Furthermore, Hollywood's professional sound equipment became the object that Chinese engineers aimed to imitate, if not duplicate. The copycat devices, together with the imported American equipment, contributed to the final stage of the conversion to sound in 1936.

2.5 Conclusion

China completed its conversion to talkies in 1936. Thanks to American and cheap copycat sound recording machines, more and more Chinese studios started to release talkies. In 1935, Lianhua became the last major studio to release talkie pictures exclusively after purchasing a second hand recorder from the United States. In this year, 16 out of 55 Chinese films were silent films. The number had dropped to two by 1936. In the first half of 1937, no silent films were released, five years after China had released its first sound film.

For a long time, Hollywood was regarded as an invader to the domestic Chinese film industry. Taking this approach, emphasis was placed on Hollywood's threat to the domestic film industry and it was suggested that little conceivable approach could be found for the Chinese film industry apart from resisting Hollywood. Regarding Hollywood as a constructive force for the Chinese film industry helps to move beyond the bipolar model of repression versus resistance. It enables us to notice the multiple functions of Hollywood in Chinese film studies, not

only as a rival, but also as a constructive force. From this point of view, an open attitude towards Hollywood is crucial for the prosperity of the domestic industry.

Table 1 The List of the Business Property of Mingxing

No.	Item	Year of Purchase	Original Price
1	Office Property	Since 1924	46,798
2	Costume, Stage Set, and Props	Since 1924	33,442
3	Arc Lamp (59 items)	Since 1925	31,946
4	Film Printer for Silent Films (11 items)	Since 1925	22,828
5	Mercury Vapour Lamps (96 items)	Since 1925	2,252
6	Small Pathe Projector (1 item)	1934	875
7	Sound Record and Colour Camera from the U.S. (2 items)	1932	125,000
8	Mercury Vapour Lamps for Sound Production (84 items)	1932	46,166
9	Film Editing Machine (2 items)	1932	5,854
10	Film Bulk Printing for Sound Film (1 item)	1932	7,860
11	Film Splicer (1 item)	1932	1,885
12	Components of Camera	1932	2,314
13	Components of Film Editing Machine	1932	1,928
14	Hand-operated Film Splicer Rotation	1932	112
15	Glass Spotlight and Variable Glass	1932	479
16	Cassette and Components of Film Printer	1932	1,746
17	Components of Sound Film Equipment	1932	267
18	Green Light for Dark Room	1932	910
19	Vehicle for Delivering Film	1934	270
20	Cars	--	10,097
	In Total	--	342,280

** A note beneath this table mentioned, "One film camera for producing sound films with cost 14,000 yuan was not listed in the table".*

Source: "A Contractor between Mingxing and the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank", 12 May 1936, Shanghai Municipal Archive, Correspondences between the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues, *Q55-2-1371.*

Table 2 The List of Collateral Security for Mingxing

No.	Item	Year of Purchase	Original Price
1	Office Property	1924	46,798
2	Costume, Stage Set, and Props	1924	33,442
3	Arc Lamp (59 items)	1925	31,946
4	Film Printer for Silent Films (11 items)	1925	22,828
5	Mercury Vapour Lamps (96 items)	1925	3,252
6	Small Pathe Projector (1 item)	1934	875
7	Sound Record and Colour Camera from the U.S. (2 items)	1932	125,000
8	Mercury Vapour Lamps for Sound Production (84 items)	1932	46,166
9	Film Editing Machines (2 item)	1932	5,854
10	Film Bulk Printing for Sound Film (1 item)	1932	7,860
11	Film Splicer (1 item)	1932	1,885
	In Total	--	324,034

Source: Wang Xianglai 王翔来 and Hu Qixiang 胡起祥, "Report to the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank, 21 February 1936". Shanghai Municipal Archive, Correspondences between the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues, *Q55-2-1371*.

Table 3 Film Productions in China, 1931-1937

Studios	1931		1932		1933		1934		1935		1936		1937	
	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound	Silent	Sound
Mingxing	16	5	10	9	18	5	18	6	4	5	0	12	0	3
Tianyi	4	4	1	7	3	7	6	7	1	4	0	5	0	3
Lianhua	8	1	17	0	9	0	14	4	5	7	0	5	0	1
Yihua	—	—	—	—	2	0	2	3	0	7	0	9	0	2
Xinhua	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	2	0	5	0	1
Yueming	14	0	5	0	5	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Others	49	0	7	0	34	3	16	8	6	6	2	6	0	2
In Total	91	10	40	16	71	15	58	28	16	39	2	42	0	12

Source: Dianying jiancha weiyuanhui gongbao/Bulletins of Film Censorship Committee *电影检查委员会公报, 1932-1937 and Chinese Educational Film Association,* 1934 China Film Yearbook, *2008.*

[*] *Sound films include dubbing film, sound-on-film picture, sound-on-record picture, half-sound-half-silent films. The data of 1937 only includes the first half of this year, given that the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in July 1937 and Chinese film production was halted.*

Chapter 3: From “Parrot” to “Butterfly”: China’s Response to Hollywood in Distribution Systems in the 1920s and 1930s

This chapter explores the dynamic relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry by examining the evolution of China’s distribution system in the 1920s and 1930s. Chinese cinema of two decades has attracted intensive attention from scholars, in particular the 1930s, the period regarded as “the Golden Age of the Chinese film”.[1] However, serious study of distribution systems has not occurred yet. The literature has only focused on some aspects of detailed information about the operation of distributing Hollywood and Chinese films. This chapter intends to examine the distribution system of China in the 1920s and 1930s by employing various primary sources including studio archives and newspaper commercials. I will explore the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the distribution domain and examine the influence of those elements on China’s response of Hollywood in the distribution system. My argument is that the analysis of power relations is a key to understanding China’s response of Hollywood in its film industry.

With regard to the response of national culture to foreign cultures, Paul Lee has suggested four patterns of responses based on the transformation of form and content, namely, “Parrot, Amoeba, Carol and Butterfly”.[2] The “parrot” pattern refers to a given culture imitating foreign cultures from forms to content, like a parrot’s mimicry. The “amoeba” pattern names a condition in which form is changed while the substantial content remains. The “carol” pattern describes a modified form whose substantial content is changed while the form remains. The “butterfly” pattern

[1] Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 44.

[2] Paul Lee, “The Absorption and Indigenization of Foreign Media Cultures: A Study on A Cultural Meeting Point of the East and West: Hong Kong”, *Journal of Asian Communication*, 1, 2, 1991, 64.

describes a cultural product whose form and content are both changed.[3] In this chapter instead of form and content, the rationale for classification is the growth of distribution system, with respect to film system. The development of China's distribution system can be regarded as undertaking a shift from the "parrot" pattern to the "butterfly" pattern with regard to responding to the Hollywood system. In the early 1920s, China's distribution system could be viewed as a naive parrot, mimicking Hollywood's system. A decade later, the distribution system grew up into a "butterfly", from which emerged a uniqueness. The "butterfly" pattern is more appropriate in the context of the film market in China.

This chapter starts with a brief introduction of the emergence of the Chinese distribution business in early Chinese film history from its beginnings into the early decades of the twentieth-century. As an examination of the response process in the distribution system, I first analyse how the Chinese film industry learned from and imitated Hollywood within the distribution system in the 1920s. Specifically, a "run-clearance-zone" system is highlighted to characterise the distribution system. In the wake of the evolution of the distribution business, Chinese film practitioners gradually developed their own distribution system by responding to the Hollywood model within the context of China. This chapter then traces the development of the distribution system in 1930s China. Through a comparison of the distribution systems between Hollywood in China and Chinese film itself, my conclusion is that the Chinese distribution system, by the 1930s, had grown into a sophisticated and flexible institution, which was more appropriate in the context of the Chinese film market. This chapter concludes with an analysis of power relations in the process of the formation of the Chinese distribution system. Power relations stand as the rationale

[3] Lee, "The Absorption and Indigenization of Foreign Media Cultures", 64.

for identifying different patterns, stages, and types of mixing in the process of response. Therefore, I suggest power relations as a key to understanding the response process of the Chinese film industry.

3.1 The Rise of the Distribution Business in China

Film distribution in China began with the business of screening foreign films in treaty ports like Shanghai. Prior to the emergence of professional distribution corporation, exhibitors screening foreign films in some ways functioned as distributors as well. For instance, Galen Bocca, one of the first pioneers in film exhibition business in Shanghai, started his screening business using a shabby film projector and several used film reels.[4] Bocca sold his showing business together with those film reels to A. Romas, who subsequently built up a screening empire.[5] In the wake of an upsurge of film screenings, personal and private importation could not satisfy the exhibition demand. As a result, professional distribution corporations emerged. In the 1900s and early 1910s, French films dominated China’s screens by virtue of the distribution of Pathe-Phono-Cinema-Chine. American films were obtained “mostly through European exchanges”.[6] For instance, a British corporation M.P. Sales Company of London was responsible for distributing American films to the Arcade theatre in Tianjin.[7] Gradually, professional American exchange corporations emerged in 1910s China. An instance is Benjamin Brodsky’s Variety Film Exchange. It set up branches

[4] SMA, *Shanghai dianyingyuan shangye lishi yange/The Evolution of Shanghai Cinema Theatres* 上海电影院商业历史沿革, S319-1. Juan Escudero suggests that Galen Bocca is actually Bernardo Goldenberg. See Juan Escudero, *España y los españoles en el Shanghai de entreguerras (1918-1939)/ Spain and Spanish in interwar Shanghai (1918-1939)*, Master Thesis, Barcelona: Pompeu Fabra University, 2012, 88.

[5] SMA, *The Evolution of Shanghai Cinema Theatres*, S319-1.

[6] “China”, *Moving Picture World*, 9 September 1911, 9, 9, 703.

[7] “A Chat from China”, *Moving Picture World*, 11 January 1913, 15, 2, 150.

in Hong Kong and Shanghai, responsible for distributing American films to China. In addition, major Hollywood studios invaded the Chinese film market through corporations in China and Singapore. For instance, Lu Gen's Hongkong Amusements Corporation was reported to monopolize distributing business of Hollywood films in China in 1922-1923.[8] In addition, Fox pictures in the early 1920s in China was distributed by a Singapore film exchange named Middle East Films Ltd.[9] Apart from official film distribution, pirated films were rampant in the early 1920s. Ramos Amusement Company and the Oriental Film Company are two major criminals in circulating illegal American film prints to China.[10] Along with the growth of the Chinese film market, Hollywood started to set up branch offices in China to "coordinate the distribution of their films in the country", spearheaded by Universal in 1921.[11] By the early of 1930s, major studios in Hollywood had set up their branch offices or exclusive agencies in China, with their head-offices in Shanghai and branch offices in the larger cities such as Tianjin.[12] "In cities where the distributors ha[d] no branches or representatives, checkers [were] usually maintained to oversee arrivals and return shipments of films to verify box office receipts".[13] In addition, Hollywood distributors in some cases entrusted their "silent films and supply distant interior cities through Chinese film exchanges", a distribution method somewhat like "farm out" nowadays.[14]

China's own distribution business emerged with the film production business.

[8] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 121.

[9] "Fox Closes Orient Deal", *The Film Daily*, 2 June 1922.

[10] Zhang, *From Hollywood to Shanghai*, 33.

[11] Xiao, "Hollywood in China", 77.

[12] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 52.

[13] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 52.

[14] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 53.

Regular film production in China dated from the early 1920s. In the early days, film production corporations were responsible for their own distribution business. At that time, communication and connection were very rare among distribution branches in the studios of China.[15] Large studios like Mingxing and Commercial Press gradually became involved in business of distributing other productions, apart from their own direct distribution business. For instance, most of the Chinese films shown in Xiamen (Amoy) in 1927 were distributed by Mingxing.[16] Additionally, another source shows that Mingxing in 1925 had obtained the distribution rights to *Shanghai of Victory* (战功, dir. Xu Xinfu, 1925), a Great China Lilium production.[17] By the 1920s, professional corporations which were responsible for distributing Chinese films had emerged as well. The first cartel formed by Chinese distributors—The United Film Exchange Corporation commenced in 1926. However, it dissolved in a short time. In the 1930s, two film exchanges dominated the distribution market of the Chinese film industry, that is, Huawei and Lianhua. They signed long-term contracts with studios and with theatres exhibiting Chinese pictures. One source shows that at least 65 theatres all over China signed distribution contracts with Huawei in 1931.[18] Like their American counterparts, Chinese distributors usually employed a revenue sharing system. Large distributors like Huawei divided the country into districts, “each district

[15] Xu Chinhen 徐耻痕, *Zhongguo yingxi daguan/A Grand Sight of Chinese Cinema* 中国影戏大观, Shanghai: Cooperation Publishing House, 1927.

[16] C. J North, “The Chinese Motion-picture Market”, *Trade Information Bulletin*, No. 467, Washington, United Sates Government Printing Office, 1927, 9.

[17] China Film Archive 中国电影资料馆, *Zhongguo wusheng dianying/Chinese Silent Films* 中国无声电影, Beijing: China Film Press, 1996, 1451.

[18] “Huawei maoyi gongsi guanggao/Advertisement of the Wha Wei Trading Co. Ltd” 华威贸易公司广告, *Shen Bao*, 15 March 1931.

being under the control of an agent".[19] The distributors charged "a commission of ten per cent" on the net revenue producers obtained and "allot[ed] five per cent to district agents".[20] In its prosperous period, the total sales of Huawei amounted to 700,000 yuan with a net profit of 30,000 yuan in 1934.[21]

With respect to the details of distribution operations in China, many characteristics were shared by Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. Both Hollywood and Chinese film engaged in two methods of distribution. A film was "either leased to the theatre at a certain sum for a definite number of showings or it [was] released on a profit-sharing basis".[22] The profit-sharing basis was more popular for both Hollywood and Chinese film. E.I. Way documented the detailed operation of the profit-sharing system in 1930s China:

> First and second run theatres usually exhibit film on a percentage basis of approximately 35 per cent of the box-office receipts, with deductions for advertising and minor expenses. All subsequent-run theatres pay anything from $40 to $150 Mex. ($14 to $50 U.S.) per program of nine reels. No legitimate distributor sells outright, since films are usually the perpetual property of the producer.[23]

Geographically speaking, the circuit of distribution for Hollywood and

[19] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 56.

[20] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 57.

[21] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[22] North, "The Chinese Motion-picture Market", 8.

[23] Way, "Motion Pictures in China", 4.

Chinese film was similar in the 1920s—a broken line with a starting point of Shanghai or Hong Kong from which films went one by one from city to city. Shanghai and Hong Kong were the “real distributing centres for China” in the 1920s and 1930s.[24] Hong Kong stood as a centre for distributing foreign films in South China, while most Hollywood films and Chinese films screened in China were obtained from Shanghai. It is understood that Hollywood and Chinese films usually premiered at the first-run theatres in Shanghai. Distributors then sent film prints in parcels by means of freight or shipment to other big cities including Fuzhou (Foochow), Hankou, Tianjin (Tientsin) and Nanjing (Nanking). After the showing in these big cities, films were distributed into mid-size cities nearby, such as Beijing (Peking), Qingdao (Tsingtao), Hangzhou (Hangchow), Wuxi (Wusih) and Xiamen. The film prints were finally shipped back to Shanghai for a third and subsequent run show. Therefore, in the 1920s patrons in mid-size cities like Qingdao had to wait for a rather long period to watch a new film, either a Chinese or Hollywood film.

3.2 China’s Distribution System in the 1920s, A “Parrot” Pattern

It is fair to say that the establishment of China’s distribution system was mainly based on imitating and learning from Hollywood. As a matter of fact, Chinese film distributors did not conceal their attitude towards Hollywood. In 1926, when the United Film Exchange Corporation, the first cartel created by Chinese distributors, was organised, the advertisement in its opening ceremony admitted, “the united distribution of our American counterparts is our example”.[25] This attitude of imitating and learning is also visible through a close examination at the institution of the

[24] Way, “Motion Pictures in China”, 4.

[25] “Liuhe yingping gongsi kaimu guanggao/Advertisement of the Opening Ceremony of the United Film Exchange” 六合影片公司开幕广告, *Shenzhou tekan/Special Issue of Shenzhou Studio* 神州特刊, 4, 1926.

distribution system. This section looks at the film market in 1925 in Shanghai as a means of investigating the distribution systems of Hollywood and Chinese film. One can find a similarity existing in 1925 between Hollywood and Chinese films in their distribution systems. The attitude of imitation for Chinese film was attributed to the condition of the Chinese film industry and in its very initial stages, the rationale of the Chinese film industry was to seek to imitate and learn from its distribution systems from sophisticated Hollywood. Both Hollywood and Chinese film followed the rule of "run-clearance-zone".

The "run-clearance-zone" was seen as a regular and basic distribution system in the classic Hollywood period. It was invented and firstly engaged in the American film industry. According to Richard Abel, American film companies in the 1910s such as General Film Company "innovated a number of distribution practices: a pricing strategy based on each film's age, an early form of block booking, and a run-clearance-zone system".[26] In the 1920s, the run-clearance-zone distribution system was generally employed by other industries. "Run" refers to "the successive exhibitions of a motion picture in a given area, first-run being the first exhibition in that area, second-run being the next subsequent and so on".[27] The criteria for a dividing run for a given theatre include its location, decoration, equipment and other facilities. "Clearance" means "a period of time, usually stipulated in license contracts, which must elapse between runs of the same feature within a particular area or in specified theatres".[28] A major aim for setting clearance is to channel audiences to watch films from early run theatres. Therefore, this method could guarantee the

[26] Richard Abel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2005, 270.

[27] Alexandra Gil, "Breaking the Studios: Antitrust and the Motion Picture Industry", *New York University Journal of Law & Liberty*, 3, 83, 2008, 86.

[28] Gil, "Breaking the Studios", 84.

optimisation of the box office, since the major studios owned 80 per cent of the first-run houses and the most profitable subsequent-run houses in the United States.[29] “Zone” is a term referring to “the areas into which a city is divided for purposes of granting exclusive rights to runs”.[30]

Generally speaking, both Hollywood and Chinese film basically followed the rule of a “run-clearance-zone” mode of distribution in 1925. I have analysed the screening records published in the newspaper X*inwen Bao* (Shanghai) from 1 January to 1 July 1925. In the period of these 172 days, Shanghai had 1,935 screening of 256 films, 219 of which were foreign films and 37 Chinese. The first perspective is the “run” operation and theatre runs for screening foreign films were clearly visible in 1925. Carlton 卡尔登戏院, Embassy and Isis 上海大戏院 theatres were the first run houses. Empire 恩派亚影戏院, Republic 共和影戏院, Universal 万国影戏院, Hongkew 虹口活动影戏园, Victoria, New Allen 新爱伦影戏园 and French Concession Theatres 法租界大影戏院 were the second run houses. Other cinemas including Chapei 闸北影戏院, British 大英影戏院 and Freedom 自由影戏院 were seen as third run theatres. Theatres screening Chinese films also showed some character of “run”, although the theatre chain system for Chinese film was in general far from being mature. The Palace Theatre 中央大戏院 can be seen as the first run house for Chinese films. However, other subsequent runs remain ambiguous. In addition, it is hard to find a fixed sequence for the showing of Chinese films. Taking *Awareness* (觉悟, dir. Ling Lianying, 1925) for example, its showing at Empire (17 April to 18 April) was earlier than that at Olympia (the predecessor of Embassy) (23

[29] Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939*, New York: Macmillan, 1993, 7.

[30] Michael Conant, *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, 58.

April to 25 April). However, in the screening of *After Separation* (别后, dir. Qin Zhengru, 1925), Embassy (4 January to 7 January) was earlier than that at Empire (16 January to 18 January).

A similarity can also be found in terms of the factor of “clearance”. In all 49 out of 219 foreign films, one can observe the presence of “clearance”.[31] Forty-four of them (90 per cent) have the character of “clearance”. *Helen's Babies* (dir. William A. Seiter, 1924) is a case in point. As Table 4 illustrates, this film was released at Olympia from 8 February. Twelve days of “clearance” had been set until it reappeared in the second-run house Empire. Moreover, this film had another two days clearance from 24 to 26 February.

Table 4 The Distribution Schedule of Helen’s Babies *(1924) in Shanghai*

Cinema	Olympia	Empire	Carter
Run	1	2	3
Time	8.2-11.2	23.2-24.2	26.2-1.3

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1925.

Out of a total of 37 Chinese films, one can observe the character of the “clearance”.[32] In the later grouping, 20 (or 74 per cent) show the character of “clearance”. Taking *Foundling* (弃儿, dir. Dan Duyu, 1924) for instance, Table 5 shows the exhibition schedule of this film in 1925. The runs of the listed houses are hard to identify, but the character of “clearance” can be found through its exhibition schedule. As one can see, twelve days of “clearance” were set after showing *Foundling* at China Cinema. Similarly, the film was cleared for 38 days after been

[31] Other 170 foreign films were invalid data in terms of “clearance” because they had been shown in only one cinema in Shanghai.

[32] Other 10 films had been shown in only one cinema and did not show the character of “clearance”.

screening at New Allen Theatre.

Table 5 The Distribution Schedule of Foundling *(1924) in Shanghai*

Cinema	**China**	**French Concession**	**New Allen**	**Popular**	**Republic**
Time	8 Feb-11 Feb	23 Feb-24 Feb	26 Feb-1 Mar	9 Apr-12 Apr	26 Apr-29 Apr

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1925.

To sum up, in 1920s China, Hollywood had set up a “run-clearance-zone” system for distributing films, a sophisticated system derived from its American base. For the Chinese film industry in its nascent stage, there were few options apart from following in the footsteps of Hollywood. The “Run-clearance-zone” system therefore became a major distribution method for Chinese films in the 1920s.

3.3 The Distribution System in the 1930s

The film market of China had a leap forward from 1925 onward. Firstly, in the exhibition market, the number of cinema houses had significantly increased. China had 106 cinemas in 1927.[33] The number had increased to 233 by 1930, more than doubling in three years’ time.[34] The theatre chain system had also been well established in large cities like Shanghai, Tianjin, Hankou and Guangzhou. Each cinema had a set run. Compared with the situation in 1925, a theatre chain system for Chinese films had also been set up. Secondly, in the field of studio’s finance, the domestic Chinese film industry had reached growth from 1925 onward, and therefore film studios could invest more money to expand expense including purchasing more film prints for one film. In addition, in broad terms it is reasonable to argue that the

[33] North, “The Chinese Motion-picture Market”, 13.

[34] Way, “Motion Pictures in China”, 5.

political and military environment was influencing the prosperity of the film market in China. Compared with the riots and instability of domestic wars in 1925, a national and unified government had emerged since 1927. A relatively peaceful environment was contributing to a rapid development of the economy.

The year of 1933 is chosen in this section as a sample year for the 1930s for examining the distribution practices in China. The year of 1933 is named as “the year of Chinese films”.[35] Several prominent Chinese films were released during this year, such as *Night in the City* (城市之夜, dir. Fei Mu) and *Toys* (小玩意, dir. Sun Yu). In addition, it is the moment of a heyday in box office for the Chinese film industry. Moreover, Hollywood also reached its “golden age” in China in 1933. For instance, the box office of Paramount in China reached 340,000 yuan in 1933, a peak for this major Hollywood studio. Since then, its income dropped annually. In 1934, the box office of Paramount in China was 320,000 yuan. The number dropped to 19,200 yuan by 1935, 40 per cent down in comparison with 1934.[36] In this section, I trace the exhibition records from 1 January 1933 to 15 May 1933 through the cinema commercials published in *Xinwen Bao* (Shanghai), *Shang Bao* (Tianjin) and *Qingdao Shibao* (Qingdao). These advertisements document the situation of distribution practices in six cities, i.e. Shanghai, Tianjin, Qingdao, Nanjing, Wuxi and Changzhou. As the centre of film production, distribution and exhibition, Shanghai showed 567 films 3,422 times screening from January to May 1933. Four hundred and ninety-six of them were foreign films showing for 2,220 times, while 71 were Chinese films, showing for 1,202 times. On average, each foreign film was shown 4.48 times, while

[35] Hong Shen 洪深, “1933 nian de zhongguo dianying/Chinese Film in 1933” 1933 年的中国电影, *Wenxue/Literature* 文学, 2, 1, 1934.

[36] “Excerpt from General Report of 2 December 1935”, *United Artists Corporation Records: Series 1F: Black Books: Foreign Statistics*, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1935.

Chinese films were shown 16.93 times, 3.37 times that of foreign films.

Table 6 The Distribution Schedule of Grand Hotel *(1932) in China*

Cinema	**Run**	**Location**	**Time**
Cathay	1	Shanghai	2 Feb-11 Feb
Carlton	2	Shanghai	23 Feb-27 Feb
Carlton *	2	Shanghai	8 Mar-11 Mar
Empire 平安	1	Tianjin	17 Mar-23 Mar
Ritz 荣光	3	Shanghai	30 Apr-6 May
Star 明星	--	Qingdao	30 Jun-4 Jul

Sources: Xinwen Bao (1933), Shang Bao (1933) and Qingdao Shibao (1933).

* The Carlton Theatre had shown *Grand Hotel* twice. This was not a usual phenomenon in 1930s China. A possible explanation is that the box office at the Carlton Theatre performed so well that the distributor licensed Carlton to show this film for a second time.

The distribution of Hollywood films in 1933 shows little difference from the situation in 1925. It still basically followed the rule of "run-clearance-zone". There are less than ten exceptions for foreign film in following the system of "run-clearance-zone" in all 496 films analysed in this investigation. Hollywood's "run-clearance-zone" can be reflected through a close observation of the showing of *Grand Hotel* (dir. Edmund Goulding, 1932) in Shanghai. As indicated in Table 6, Cathay Cinema premiered this film from 2 February to 11 February. After twelve days of "clearance and zone", it had shown at the second-run theatre Carlton. After another 60 days of "clearance and zone", this film then had a third chance to show in Shanghai's screens. During this period of 60 days, Hollywood distributors had delivered this picture to Tianjin where it was screened at Peace Theatre 平安大戏院. After finishing its

Shanghai journey, this film had travelled to Qingdao for screening in June 1933.

With respect to the distribution system of Chinese films, there are enormous distinctions to be uncovered when comparing the situation in 1933 with that in 1925. In this section, 31 Chinese films which premiered from December 1932 to April 1933 have been chosen as sample to study the distribution system of Chinese films. Three major differences have been found by comparing Hollywood and Chinese films of 1933 as compared with 1925, namely the “run and clearance”, the “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” and the “zone without clearance”.

3.3.1 “Run and clearance”

The distribution of Chinese films still obeyed the rule of “run” operation in 1933. From this point, there is seldom any difference in Hollywood and Chinese cinema practice since 1925. However, the run for Chinese film is rather configured and fixed in 1933. In Shanghai, the first run for Chinese films included cinemas like Strand, Peking 北京大戏院, Guanghua and Palace. The second-run houses were Victoria, Star, Western 西海影戏院, Eastern, South-east 东南影戏院, Crystal Palace 黄金大戏院, Chekiang 浙江影戏院 and Venus 荣金大戏院. The third-run houses included Empire 恩派亚大戏院, Carter 卡德大戏院, China, Boon Lay 蓬莱大戏院, Ward 华德影戏院, Republic and Universal. In terms of “clearance”, Chinese films in general in 1933 followed the pattern of “clearance” at the first-run and second-run houses, while not following it after the second-run.

Table 7 The Distribution Schedule of The Spring Dream of the Lute *(1933) in Shanghai*

Cinema	Run	Time
Isis	1	16 March-18 March
Palace	1	16 March-19 March
Victoria	2	20 March-22 March
South-east	3	1 April-4 April
Eastern	3	6 April-10 April
Star	3	12 April-14 April
Carter	3	16 April-19 April
Universal	4	25 April-27 April
Empire	4	30 April-3 May
Paradise 天堂	4	8 May-10 May

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1933.

The “clearance” between first-run and second-run is relatively visible in Chinese films. In all 31 observed samples, sixteen films followed this pattern. Taking *Morning in the Metropolis* (都会的早晨, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1933), produced by Lianhua for example, this film was premiered in Shanghai at Peking Theatre from 22 March to 8 April 1933. After eleven days of “clearance”, it started its secondary showing at Guanghua, Western, Eastern, Shanse 山西大戏院 and South-East Theatres. The situation of production of another major studio named Tianyi was similar with that of Lianhua. *Pursuit* (追求, dir. Qiu Qixiang, 1933)—one of Tianyi’s productions—released at Strand from 22 March to 25 March 1933. After eighteen days of clearance, it appeared at Peking Theatre as a second-run showing. So did productions from small studios like China Star 华星大戏院. Its production *The Stone of Life* (三生石, dir. Wang Chunyuan, 1932) made its debut at Guanghua from 1

March to 4 March. Then it was pulled and cleared for eleven days, till reappearing at South-east Theatre.

However, after the second-run showing, Chinese film abandoned the pattern of “clearance” and engaged in a method of “clearancefree”. “Clearancefree”, in my definition, refers to a distribution system which sets a time interval of less than five days between two given shows. In the Chinese films examined in this section, 25 out of 31 (81 per cent) employed “clearancefree” after second-run showing. Table 7 shows an example of “clearancefree”. *The Spring Dream of the Lute* (琵琶春怨, dir. Li Pingqian, 1933) premiered at two houses (Isis and Palace) on 16 March and had a second round show at Victoria from 20 to 22 March 1933. After eight days of clearance, it came into a period of “clearancefree”. On average, there were only 2.7 days of “clearance” for each show.

A reasonable explanation for China’s engagement with “clearance” between first run and second runs is a consideration of the profit, while “clearancefree” can be seen as a consideration of a cost-recovery method. Despite the lack of data in the 1930s, a survey of a Chinese studios in 1946 reveals that sales in the first run theatres account for 60 per cent of film rentals for Chinese film, 30 per cent of the gross income comes from the second-run theatres, while the others only take ten per cent.[37] In addition, producers could reach the income from the first-run theatres after two months, while it usually took six months to obtain the revenue share from the third- and fourth- run theatres.[38] Therefore, the income from first-run houses was paramount to the Chinese film producers, as it was with Hollywood producers. This should be a

[37] SMA, *Zhongyang dianying fuwuchu diaocha baogao/Market Survey of the Central Unit of Film Service* 中央电影服务处调查报告, Q78-2-15.

[38] SMA, *Market Survey of the Central Unit of Film Service*, Q78-2-15.

major reason why Chinese film distributors employed the “clearance” system between first and second-run theatres to protect sales from the first-run theatres. With respect to the box office after the third run, it is not fair to say that Chinese film distributors paid no attention to their income, but the pressure from cost-recovery was more important than the small income. One needs to bear in mind that the shortage of capital was a long term condition in the Chinese film industry. In 1927, around 75 per cent of the Chinese studios were inadequately financed.[39] The situation had not changed significantly in the 1930s. For small studios, if a film’s cost could not be recovered, it would mean a high risk of the bankruptcy of the studio.

3.3.2 Zone: “Same-run-multipoint-exhibition”

One may notice that much of the emphasis of “run” and “clearance” methods for Chinese distribution system was focused on Shanghai. The reason is clear. Shanghai was one of the few cities that had theatre chains at that time. Many cities like Hangzhou and Wuxi only had one regular venue for screening Chinese films. It is not adequate to employ the methods of “run” and “clearance” in cities without theatre chains. Nevertheless, Shanghai failed to take a lead in employing a “zone” method in the distribution system. A close look at the exhibition market in 1933 shows that the “zone” system had been well enforced in Tianjin, Changzhou, Nanjing, Wuxi and Qingdao. However, Shanghai, the largest film market in China, had not made good use of the “zone” strategy.

It is easy to understand the engagement of “zones” in cities like Changzhou, Wuxi and Qingdao. Only one cinema in these cities regularly screened Chinese films and it consequently became a natural “zone” restriction. Taking Qingdao for instance,

[39] North, “The Chinese Motion-picture Market”, 4.

three cinemas were operating in Qingdao in 1933, that is, Folozu 福禄寿, Star 明星 and Shantung Theatre 山东. At these three houses, Star concentrated on foreign films, especially Hollywood films. Folozu occasionally showed Chinese films, but it was closed from April 1934. Therefore, the only venue that showed Chinese film regularly was Shantung Theatre. Tianjin and Nanjing had more theatres than Qingdao. Nanjing, the capital of the National government, had nine cinemas in 1933. Two theatres were the base for Chinese films, World Theatre 世界大戏院 and Capital Theatre 首都影戏院. However, these two cinemas had their own preferences. World Theatre had more interest in productions from Tianyi, while Capital focused on the films of Lianhua and Mingxing. As a treaty port, Tianjin had ten picture houses, three of which showed Chinese films exclusively: Grand 光明大戏院, Tiangong 天宫影戏院 and Hopei Theatre 河北大戏院. In addition, cinemas in Tianjin had reached a relative fixed run system. For the Chinese film exhibition, Grand Theatre was the first-run cinema, while Hopei and Tiangong belonged to the category of second-run cinemas. The screen records indicate that all three cinemas had different schedules of exhibition in 1933. Table 8 shows one example about the “zone” set in Tianjin. The premier showing of *Morning in the Metropolis* in Tianjin was at Grand Theatre from 20 April to 21 April 1933. After 27 days of “clearance and zone”, this film was shown at Hopei Theatre on 18 May 1933. On 30 June, Hopei Theatre exhibited this film again for two days. Until October, Tiangong Theatre screened this film for the fourth time. One can see that the showing of *Morning in the Metropolis* in Tianjin followed the rule of “run-clearance and zone” quite firmly.

Table 8 The Distribution Schedule of Morning in the Metropolis *(1933) in Tianjin*

Cinema	Grand	Hopei	Hopei	Tiangong
Run	1	2	2	3
Time	20 April-21 April	18 May	30 June-1 July	4 October-8 October

Source: Shang Bao (Tianjin), 1933.

As the most important venue for film production, distribution and exhibition in China, Shanghai did not engage in the “zone” system. The reason can be traced to the situations of the theatres of the time. In the 1930s, Shanghai had the most cinemas in China. One source shows that Shanghai had 53 cinemas with a combined 37,000 seats in 1930.[40] Analysis of the newspaper *Xinwen Bao* shows that there were 38 cinemas in 1930, together with another ten vaudeville houses part of whose business involved showing films. Among these 38 cinemas, ten specialised in foreign films, while another 26 cinemas exhibited both foreign and domestic films. Most of the theatres screening Chinese films are identified as the second- and third- run. Among these 26 cinemas, at least eight houses were second-run, while seven were third-run, based on their location, equipment, decoration and ticket prices aforementioned. That is to say, if one distributor wished to employ “zone” in a second-run house in Shanghai, it could not show in other seven second-run houses simultaneously. This had two consequences: one the one hand, it would largely extend the period of screening, which would definitely increase the burden of cost-recovery; on the other hand, it would take the risk of losing huge audiences, resulting in a great loss for producers and distributors. One needs to bear in mind that Shanghai was the largest city in China with 3.6 million people in the 1930s. Apparently, the market for Chinese films could not be satisfied by showing in just one theatre at one time.

[40] Way, “Motion Pictures in China”, 4.

Table 9 The Distribution Schedule of Night in the City *(1933) in Shanghai*

Cinemas	**Run**	**Time**
Guanghua	1	8 March-15 March
Peking	1	8 March-21 March
Western	2	24 March-31 March
Eastern	2	24 March-31 March
South-east	2	24 March-31 March
Shanse	2	1 April-6 April
Chekiang	2	1 April-6 April
Foh On	3	8 April-10 April
Ward	3	9 April-11 April
Guanghua	1	12 April-15 April
Venus	3	13 April-14 April
Boon Lay	3	22 April-26 April
Republic	3	23 April-29 April
Paradise 天堂	3	28 April-30 April
China	3	27 April-29 April
Orpheum 奥飞姆	3	7 May-9 May

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1933.

Chinese film distributors clearly noticed the character of the film market in Shanghai and a “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” system was employed. Literally speaking, “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” refers to a distribution system showing films simultaneously in as many as cinemas under a given run. If Hollywood’s “zone”

system is a strategy of hunger marketing, “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” focuses on saturation management. It stresses occupying a market as large as possible to avoid a loss of audience and therefore maximise sales in a given period. In addition, this system could avoid competition of cinemas under the same run. An example is *Night in the City*, one of Lianhua’s productions (as shown in Table 9). This picture was released at two theatres, Guanghua and Peking, in Shanghai on 8 March 1933. On 24 March, three cinemas—Western, Eastern and South-east—started the second round showing of this film. From 1 April, another two houses (Shanse and Chekiang) joined the showing for the third round. The fourth round commenced on 8 April at Foh On 福安影戏院 and Ward theatres. The record for employing “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” is *Morning in the Metropolis* (1933). Five theatres screened this film in Shanghai (Guanghua, Western, Shanse, Eastern and South-east) concurrently from 24 to 29 April.

In summary, the Chinese distribution system in the 1930s matured and moved beyond mimicing Hollywood’s “run-clearance-zone” system. In cities excluding Shanghai, the “run-clearance-zone” system was inherited. But in Shanghai, the home of film production, distribution and exhibition in China, Chinese distributors developed a unique “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” system based on the context of the film market of Shanghai.

3.2.3 A Special Case, Mingxing’s “zone without clearance”

As the biggest production studio in 1930s China, Mingxing engaged in a unique distribution system in Shanghai, namely the “zone without clearance” system. “Zone without clearance” refers to a distribution system which engaged in “clearancefree” in the theatre runs in Shanghai, while simultaneously employing the setting of “zone”.

This “clearancefree” system had been enforced in almost every theatre including the first and second run houses. I believe that the structure of Mingxing as a studio is the key to understanding the uniqueness of its distribution system.

With regard to “clearancefree”, out of the seven films released from January to May 1933, six films were employed in “clearancefree”. Taking *Adventures in the Battlefield* (战地历险记, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1933) for instance, this film premiered at Palace on 14 January 1933. As shown in Table 10, it started the second-run showing at South-east Theatre without any “clearance” in Shanghai. The third run round began from 25 January, only three days’ after its second round. Meanwhile, on 30 January, the fourth round showing began. Similarly, without “clearance”, the fifth round started immediately after the fourth round. Before its seventh-round show, any time interval for *Adventures in the Battlefield* was less than four days. One exception was *The Flower of Liberty* (自由之花, dir. Zheng Zhengqiu, 1933). This film employed “clearance” between first-run and second-run showing. After the first showing at Peking Theatre on 2 February, it was pulled into a 21-day-clearance until Peking and Palace carried the second-run show on 23 February.

Table 10 The Distribution Schedule of Adventures in the Battlefield *(1933) in Shanghai*

Cinemas	**Run**	**Time**
Palace	1	14 January-17 January
South-east	2	18 January-22 January
Star	2	25 January-31 January

Carter	2	30 January-3 February
Victoria	2	4 February-7 February
Universal	3	11 February-14 February
China	3	4 April

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1933.

Although Mingxing did not engage in the “clearance” system, it employed the rule of “zone” in distribution, i.e. the productions of Mingxing would show in cinemas one after another. Table 11 shows the distribution schedule of *Torrent* (狂流, dir. Cheng Bugao, 1933) in Shanghai. It indicates that *Torrent* was screened at twelve houses in Shanghai from March to May. Apart from four days (24 March, 25 March, 8 April and 28 April), there was only one theatre showing *Torrent* on any given day in these two months. *Torrent* was not alone in “zone” restriction. The other six films produced by Mingxing had more or less engaged in the “zone” system in Shanghai. As Table 11 shows, apart from 30 and 31 January, the showing of *Adventures in the Battlefield* in Shanghai also followed the “zone” restriction as well.

Table 11 The Distribution Schedule of Torrent *(1933) in China*

Cinema	**Run**	**Time**
Isis	1	5 March-8 March
Palace	1	5 March-11 March
South-east	2	12 March-16 March
Star	2	21 March-25 March

Victoria	2	24 March-28 March
Eastern	2	1 April-5 April
Western	2	6 April-10 April
Empire	3	8 April-12 April
China	3	20 April-22 April
Paradise	3	25 April-26 April
Carter	3	27 April-27 April
Universal	3	28 April-1 May

Source: Xinwen Bao (Shanghai), 1933.

An explanation of the engagement of the “zone without clearance” distribution system can be traced to the corporate structure of the Mingxing Company in the 1930s. In 1933, all productions of Mingxing were shown at cinemas belonged to the Central Motion Picture Corporation (中央影戏公司). The Central Motion Picture Corporation was a theatre chain in charge of five cinemas including Palace, Victoria, Empire, Cater and Universal. The relation between Mingxing and the Central Motion Picture Corporation could be described as “twin brothers” in ownership. Most of the Board of Directors in the Central Motion Picture Corporation were also the owners of Mingxing, including Yao Yuyuan 姚豫元, Zhang Shichuan, Zhang Juchuan 张巨川, Zheng Zhengqiu and Bian Yuying 卞毓英.[41] The Central Motion Picture Corporation commenced its operation in April 1925. In 1926, by obtaining the lease rights of Victoria, Empire, Carter and Universal, the Central Motion Picture Corporation became the first theatre chain for Chinese films. Unlike its American counterpart, the

[41] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

theatre chain owned by the Central Motion Picture Corporation covered three runs rather than just focusing on the first run. In addition, it had its own orderly sequence for screening Chinese films, that is, Palace, Victoria, Empire, Carter and Universal theatres. With respect to Star Theatre, a cinema fully owned by Mingxing, its sequence for screening Chinese films was arranged to be after Victoria and before Empire.

A major concern for Mingxing in conducting the “zone” system was how to guarantee the sales of the Central Motion Picture Corporation. If one allowed the simultaneous screening of a film in two cinemas it would certainly be a threat for either cinema’s box office sales. Similarly, there was a consideration for extending the showing time and avoiding local competition within nominated “zones” in the theatre chain. From the viewpoint of the Mingxing stockholders, all box office sales would be their own income, no matter how the revenue was shared. Therefore, in order to optimise revenue income, it would be rational to take advantage of the chain houses of the Central Motion Picture Corporation.

With regard to “without clearance”, this could be regarded as a sacrifice for cost-recovery for Mingxing. Like other corporations, Mingxing also had financial problems in the 1930s. According to its annual report, the average annual profit for this largest studio in China was only around 20,000 yuan until the early 1930s. In 1934, however, Mingxing had a dramatic deficit of 600,000 yuan due to the importing of the sound machines and mis-management.[42] Therefore, Mingxing had to sacrifice its setting of “clearance” in order to bring out cost-recovery as soon as possible.

[42] Fan, “A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation”, 1936, no page number.

3.3 Power Relations in China's Response

This section looks at power relations as a rationale for understanding the process of response to Hollywood in the Chinese film industry. The analysis of power relations analysis is one of the central concerns in the theory of political economy.[43] In the case of the Chinese film industry, I suggest that the analysis of power relations is a key to identifying different patterns, stages and types of mixing in the process of China's response to Hollywood.

In explaining the process of the indigenisation of foreign culture, Paul Lee suggests that a particular pattern of indigenisation, like the "parrot" or "butterfly" aforementioned, is configured by the interplay of a series of factors.[44] Lee notes seven factors that contribute to the emergence of various patterns with three direct, two indirect and two contextual factors.[45] The three direct factors are consumer power, strength of indigenous production and strength of exogenous production. Indirect factors include competition and stimulation from other forms of culture. Demographic changes and government policies stand as two contextual factors.[46] With respect to the case of the Chinese film industry, the response to Hollywood in the distribution system is attributed to the interplay of a great variety of factors, including the strength of the Chinese film industry, the strength of Hollywood and the government policy on license application. The strength of the Chinese film industry and the strength of Hollywood are the two direct factors. Government policy stands as an indirect factor in the process of responding to Hollywood in 1930s China.

[43] Peter Golding and Graham Murdock, "Culture, Communications and Political Economy", in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society*, London: Arnold, 2000, 71.

[44] Lee, "The Absorption and Indigenization of Foreign Media Cultures", 66.

[45] Lee, "The Absorption and Indigenization of Foreign Media Cultures", 66.

[46] Lee, "The Absorption and Indigenization of Foreign Media Cultures", 66.

The correlation of power between the strength of the Chinese film industry and that of Hollywood is crucial for the pattern of response to Hollywood within the distribution system. Generally speaking, the extent of the growth of distribution system is positively correlated with the strength of the Chinese film industry. The weaker the Chinese film industry, the greater is the likelihood of the “parrot” pattern in distribution systems. The Chinese film industry in 1925 remained at a nascent stage compared with Hollywood. The number of production studios had a significant boost in this period, although the production quality remained at a low level. The first integrated theatre chain for Chinese film did not appear until 1926 with the Central Motion Picture Corporation. Prior to that, studios suffered from frustration with respect to distribution channels.[47] Another issue that needs to be considered is that the distribution system of China had just emerged in the 1920s and references to other systems could seldom be made apart from Hollywood, considering the weakness of the European film business in China. At the same time, Hollywood, on the contrary, was enjoying a period of stability after a decade of exploration in China’s film market. One source shows that 125 of the 215 films shown in Tianjin in 1925 were of American origin.[48] Professional corporations for the distribution of Hollywood films had emerged, such as Peacock Motion Pictures Corporation. Theatres which were showing Hollywood were visible and run had been fixed. With little doubt, the correlation of power had been significantly attributed to Hollywood. Therefore, there were few options for the Chinese film industry except to mimic Hollywood in its distribution system in the 1920s.

The stronger the Chinese film industry became, the greater the likelihood of

[47] Xu, *A Grand Sight of Chinese Cinema*, 1927.

[48] North, “The Chinese Motion-picture Market”, 2.

the “butterfly” pattern emerging. The strength of the Chinese film industry had increased significantly from the 1920s to the 1930s. However, Hollywood had changed little in terms of its strength in the field of distribution. Therefore, power relations between the Chinese film industry and Hollywood had changed and the dominance of Hollywood had been challenged. With respect to the Chinese film industry, the production quality had improved both in silent and sound film making. Professional distribution corporations had grown in maturity after a decade of development. The income of the distribution corporations like Huawei, the largest distribution corporation of China at that time, had increased up to 700,000 yuan and the net profit was around 30,000 yuan in 1934.[49] In addition, the number of cinemas in 1930 had doubled from the figure in 1927 as mentioned before. The increase in the number of houses suggests an upsurge in audiences. Theatre chains for showing Chinese film had been established in big cities like Shanghai, Tianjin and Hankou. On the contrary, Hollywood seldom carried out improvements to the distribution system in 1933 compared with those of Chinese film. Although major Hollywood studios had established branches in Shanghai in 1933, distribution had not progressed significantly and the exhibition of Hollywood films was still limited to no more than ten major cities in China.[50] As one source indicates, the barriers for Hollywood’s expansion included “the lack of communication facilities, the disturbed political situation and the low purchasing power of the largest part of inhabitants”. [51] Hollywood’s distribution work has been well indicated by the imports of motion-picture films. In 1925, the positive film reels imported into China amounted to

[49] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[50] Xiao, “American films in China”, 25.

[51] Way, “Motion Pictures in China”, 4.

2,738,222 feet, while increasing to 3,484,265 feet in 1929. The figure declined to 927,461 feet in 1930, largely due to China’s indifference to Hollywood sound pictures.[52] In addition, Hollywood in the early 1930s had suffered much with the Great Depression since 1929. This initiated a decline of the film industry and the national economy of the United States would not recover until 1934. Therefore, it is fair to say the dominance of Hollywood in distribution had been challenged by the Chinese film industry in the 1930s, despite its dominance in other fields such as film technology and exhibition.

Apart from the efforts of the Chinese film industry itself, the Nationalist government penetrated its power in the field of film distribution and facilitated China’s challenge to Hollywood’s dominance. Unlike other issues in the film market of China, the Nationalist government became deeply involved in the field of film distribution through its licence application and tax policy. The Nationalist government set up a national committee to deal with film censorship and license application issues in 1931. It engaged in a discriminative policy on license application. At the beginning, the censorship committee issued licence permits for no charge to Chinese films. The policy was then changed so that fifteen yuan was charged for Chinese films due to the financial difficulty in operating the censorship committee. By contrast, the application fee was 100 yuan for Hollywood films and one needed to pay another 100 yuan for re-registration when the permit expired. Apart from licence fees, taxation was another heavy burden for Hollywood. One source shows that the Chinese Nationalist government made a charge of around 800 yuan for censorship and tariff on every foreign film imported into China.[53] In addition to the central government, three other

[52] Way, “Motion Pictures in China”, 3.

[53] “Report to Ministry of Interior Affairs and Ministry of Education”, *Bulletin of Film Censorship Committee*, 2,

censorship committees existed in Shanghai in the 1930s. One direct influence of licence application policy was that it greatly limited Hollywood's number of prints in China. In the 1930s, most Hollywood films had only one print circulated in China, apart from several highly popular films like *All Quiet on the Western Front* (dir. Lewis Milestone, 1930) and *The Love Parade* (dir. Ernst Lubitsch, 1929). Therefore, Hollywood could do little except to employ the "run-clearance-zone" system with one print in order to guarantee sales from the first-run theatres in major cities. With regard to Chinese films on the other hand, studios usually applied for more than one print due to the low application fee. Mingxing, for example, regularly applied eight permits for exhibition. Another big studio, Lianhua, applied seven permits when releasing a new film in the 1930s. The multiple prints strategy then provided the possibility of employing different distribution systems. The strategy of multiple prints had a direct influence on the circuits of distribution for Chinese films. The circuits of distribution for Chinese films had been similar to that of Hollywood in the 1920s. Both Chinese films and Hollywood followed a route of "broken line". A print of a Hollywood film usually started its journey from Shanghai or Hong Kong and then went on to the big cities one by one. It travelled back to Shanghai or Hong Kong and was shipped to another location in Asia, like Nanyang.[54] However, the strategy of multiple prints changed the route of distributing Chinese films which now went out simultaneously from Shanghai to other major centres (as compared with the "broken line" aforementioned). Taking Mingxing's production for example, a usual circuit for Mingxing's distribution in the 1920s was Shanghai, Nanjing, Hankou, Tianjin and Fuzhou. After the exhibition in Fuzhou, audiences in Xiamen then had the opportunity

29, 21 November 1933.

[54] Xiao, "American films in China", 25.

to watch a new film.[55] However, in the 1930s, Mingxing divided the country into several districts, such as Shanghai district, Zhejiang district, West-China district, North China district, South China district, Shandong District, Fujian District and Sichuan district.[56] Mingxing usually employed eight prints for a new film and then sent these prints simultaneously to the districts. Therefore, audiences in Fuzhou could watch the film simultaneously with those in Tianjin or Hankou. The time for a film to reach a place like Qingdao was greatly shortened as well due to the multiple prints being circulated.

The power relations between the strength of the Chinese film industry and Hollywood affected the patterns of response to Hollywood in distribution systems. However, it is a mistake to regard it as a necessary condition. In an imbalanced structure, the pattern of response could also have the possibility of an advanced form like the “butterfly” pattern. As shown in the field of the distribution system, lack of capital was one of the major handicaps for the Chinese film industry. However, it was this difficulty that contributed to innovation in the distribution system. Due to a lack of capital, Chinese film practitioners had to spare efforts for cost-recovery, which forced Chinese distributors to abandon the “clearance” system after the second-run theatres. The pressure of cost-recovery led Chinese distributors to employ a “same-run-multipoint-exhibition” system in Shanghai to avoid losing their audience. Similarly, Mingxing had to give up “clearance” between the first- and second-run theatres for the sake of cost-recovery. Another factor which could result in a “butterfly” pattern in imbalanced power relations was the structure of the corporation. In 1930s Shanghai, no studios except Mingxing owned an integrated theatre chain

[55] North, “The Chinese Motion-picture Market”, 9.

[56] Butrick, “The Motion Picture Industry in China”, 57.

(Lianhua only owned one cinema in Shanghai named Guanghua). Therefore, studios had little desire to set “zones” in Shanghai to protect the interest of theatres, apart from Mingxing. This may serve as a reason for employing the system of “same-run-multipoint-exhibition”. With respect to the corporation structure of Mingxing, the theatre chain Mingxing owned was different from that of major Hollywood studios as well. In the American film industry, most theatre chains owned by major Hollywood studios concentrated on first-run theatres.[57] However, the theatres Mingxing owned belonged to the first, second and third run separately. Therefore, it was rational for Mingxing to employ the technique of “continuous exhibition”, rather than a “clearance” system that would protect the interests of the first-run theatres.

3.4 Conclusion

The relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry serve as one of the most significant topics in Chinese film studies, considering the paramount function of Hollywood’s influence on Chinese films. How China responded to Hollywood becomes a hot topic in Chinese film studies, since scholarship regards the attitude of Chinese film towards Hollywood as being crucial for the future of the Chinese film industry. Scholars noticed that China learned from Hollywood in film language, film institution and film technology. Imitation, adaption and sinification are three major terms in explaining the attitudes towards Hollywood.[58] This chapter has analysed China’s response to Hollywood in terms of its distribution systems during the 1920s

[57] Mae Huettig, “Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry”, in Tino Balio (ed), *The American Film Industry*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, 300.

[58] Zhu and Nakajima, “The Evolution of Chinese Cinema as Industry”, 2010, 17-34; Yuehyu Yeh, “Historiography and Sinification: Music in Chinese Cinema of the 1930s”, *Cinema Journal*, 41, 3, Spring, 2002, 78-97; Zhen Zhang, “Cosmopolitan Projections: World Literature on Chinese Screens”, in Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds.), *A Companion to Literature and Film*, New York: Blackwell, 2004, 144-163.

and 1930s. It suggests that China’s response to Hollywood involved different stages of response including duplication, imitation, integration, sinification and even rejection. This chapter calls for an analysis of power relations to explain the rationale of configuring different stages.

I have tried to demonstrate in this chapter that the process of responding to Hollywood can be explained through the analysis of power relations in the context of a political economy. The strength of the Chinese film industry and the strength of Hollywood in China serve as two direct factors in impacting the pattern of China’s response to Hollywood. A common logic is that the pattern of response is in positive correlation to the strength of the Chinese film industry, while being negative to the strength of Hollywood in China. In the field of distribution systems, the dominance of Hollywood was challenged with the growth of the Chinese film industry. However, the pattern of “butterfly” does not exist in a power structure in which the Chinese film industry is stronger than Hollywood. Some negative conditions for the Chinese distribution market could also contribute to the configuration of the “butterfly” pattern in an imbalanced power structure. As mentioned before, the lack of capital and the uniqueness of corporate structure benefited the innovation of the Chinese film industry in terms of its distribution systems.

This chapter has examined the process of response to Hollywood in the field of distribution system in China of the 1920s and 1930s. It has shown that China’s distribution system started from a “parrot” pattern with the Chinese film industry naively mimicking Hollywood in the 1920s. After a decade, the distribution system of China had grown into maturity and its uniqueness emerged. A “parrot” finally became a “butterfly”. However, this is not to say that the response to Hollywood was a linear process with regard to the Chinese film industry. In a given domain in the film market

of China, the response to Hollywood would be quite different and the patterns of response would vary according to the interplay of power involved. Therefore, it is fair to say that China’s response to Hollywood in the film industry was far more complex and the analysis of power relations may serve as a method to explain the dynamic of response.

Chapter 4: Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: The Mode of Production in Chinese Films Prior to 1937

This chapter explores the evolution of China's production practices before 1937 and focuses on its mode of production in comparison with its Hollywood counterparts. In Chapter Three, I have demonstrated that Chinese film practitioners had developed its distribution system into maturity and it emerged in a uniqueness from the 1930s. However, not all the uniqueness of the film industry is good. The evolution of the mode of production to 1937 is a case in point. From one side, China's mode of production followed a similar step of that of Hollywood in the early twentieth century from the cameraman system to the central producer system. On the other side, some traits were maintained, which were to have negative impact on the film industry. The strong position of the director is such a trait in the central producer system in China. To make it worse, the financing system had little impact the position of the director in the mode of production. The strong position of director in China's mode of production, I argue, contributed both to the vulnerability and the fleeting success of the Chinese film industry in the 1930s.

This chapter starts with a description of the concept of the mode of production and a brief introduction of the evolution of China's mode of production, from the cameraman system to the central producer system. Drawing on unpublished primary materials including producers' diaries and studio records, I examine the management structure of Lianhua, as a case study of the central producer system in the Chinese film industry. I address two major characteristics of Lianhua, that is, the unstable corporation structure and the weak position of the producers. In contrast to the weak position of its producers, directors retained powerful positions in Lianhua's mode of

production. Apart from the producing method, the financing system of the Chinese film industry injected little influence on the production system, in contrast to its Hollywood counterparts. This chapter concludes with an analysis of the lessons of China's production practices in the 1920s and 1930s.

4.1 The Mode of Production: Perception, Practice and Its Evolution in Chinese Cinema

Janet Staiger's study on Hollywood's mode of production offers a model of how to analyse a filmmaking system. The mode of production, as a concept that originated with Karl Marx, refers to "the wider social character of production" and is used as a synonym for "the relations in which productive forces are developed".[1] The mode of production is composed of three elements that are involved in the relations, including "the labour force, the means of production, and the financing of production".[2] Marxism regards developing productive forces, a determining feature of historical development, as the impetus for the transition of mode of production from primitive communism to ancient civilisation, to feudalism, to capitalism, and last to communism. Efficiency stands as one major gauge for the growth of productive forces and a detailed division of labour is introduced as a type of work arrangement with the intention of pursuing efficiency. Hollywood's mode of production is classified as mass production, a specific type of the capitalist system. Braverman argues, "No society before capitalism systematically subdivided the work of each productive specialty into limited operations", although "all known societies have divided their work into

[1] S. H, Rigby, *Marxism and History, A Critical Introduction*, Vancouver: United of British Columbia, 1998, 24.

[2] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema, Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, 89.

limited operations".[3] In a detailed division of labour, "the process of making a product is broken down into discrete segments, and each worker is assigned to repeat a constituent element of that process".[4] As it in the general sector, detailed division of labour in Hollywood's mode of production "allowed faster and more predictable product output".[5] Staiger "splits the detailed division mode into five specific systems" and Hollywood experienced four types of mode of production from its beginning to the late 1920s "in a sequential order", that is, "the cameraman system, the director system, the director-unit system and the central producer system".[6]

The evolution of China's methods for making films is akin to that of Hollywood. The process can be characterised from the cameraman system, to the director system, to the director-unit system, and to the central producer system. The Chinese film industry, in a broad sense, emerged from the foreign cameraman's film activities in the early twentieth century. Amerigo Enrico Lauro (1879-1937), an Italian cinematographer and an agent for the Cines Co., was a pioneer of producing cinema in China dating back to 1902.[7] According to Jay Leyda, "Lauro's interest in Chinese showings for his records is almost unique among foreign cameramen. Here was a situation that prevailed in no other film producing company…of the enormous quantity of documentary material filmed in China by foreigners".[8] The documentaries produced by Lauro including "*Shanghai's First Tramway* (1908), *Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking* (1908), *Lovely Views in Shanghai Concessions* (1909), and

[3] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973, 71.

[4] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 91.

[5] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 93.

[6] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 93.

[7] "The Isis Theatre", *The Shanghai Times*, 22 May 1917.

[8] Ledya, *Dianying-Electric Shadows*, 7-8.

Cutting Pigtails by Force (1911)".[9] He also photographed some activities of Sun Yat-sen in Shanghai, taking pictures "of cutting of the queues when everyone in Shanghai underwent the operation".[10] Like the travelogues at that time, Lauro produced these films by his own hand: he selected the subject, operated the camera, developed and edited the film project. In 1912, Lauro erected a studio including a wooden stage and a machine room at 1001 Huangpu (Whangpoo) Road in Shanghai for his benefit of film production.[11] The alleged first Chinese film, *Ding Jun Mountain*, should have been produced under the cameraman system, if any. The filmmaking system of Commercial Press is also classified as the type of cameraman system. In 1920, Commercial Press set up a film department and Liao Enshou 廖恩寿 was hired as photographer. The productions of Commercial Press, like its Hollywood counterparts in the early days, focused on scenes from Peking operas performed by Mei Lanfang, or from natural scenes in China's cities from Shanghai to Beijing, or news films.[12] Although a director named Chen Chusheng 陈春生 was assigned, most work including photographing, developing and printing were done by Liao himself. Such situation had not significant changes after Commercial Press shifted to fictional narrative. The cameraman system phase was short in China because it relied much on the ability of a cameraman who should know "the entire work process, and conception and execution of the product".[13] In the case of China, such talents were significantly rare in the early teen. The reason is that film was still new to the Chinese people, other

[9] Ledya, *Dianying-Electric Shadows*, 7.

[10] "Far East Pioneer Here", *The North-China Herald*, 15 May 1935.

[11] "Plans of New Buildings Approved", *The Municipal Gazette*, 13 June 1912.

[12] A list of the production from the Commercial Press to 1923 is listed in Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 111-112.

[13] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*,116.

than some foreign cinematographers in China. Few people saw films, let along knew how to produce them.

The emergence of the director system is the result of the division of labour. Under the director system, a director is responsible for staging the action and the cameraman photographed it. The Sino-foreign collaboration (usually Chinese was responsible for director, while foreigners were used as photographers) was particularly popular in the initial stages of the director system. Such a division of labour happened when the film subject shifted from natural scenes to the cultural topics such as indigenous customs and dramas. The foreign cameramen in China from one side may have had the knowledge about producing a film, but they probably did not have sufficient knowledge about China's culture. From other side, Chinese gradually generated interest in making films while techniques and equipment were two major barriers. Therefore the division of labour seems necessary in this circumstance. A case in point is the filmmaking system of the Asiatic Film Company, commenced in 1913. The Asiatic was organised by American merchants (Israel and Suffert) in Shanghai with the purpose of satisfying Chinese audiences. Two Chinese who had abundant stage acting experiences, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, were employed as directors. Zheng was responsible for arranging actors and guiding the actors' performance. As a matter of fact, the actors all came from a theatrical troupe headed by Zheng and Zhang.[14] The carpenter and wardrobe were also from this theatrical troupe. American cameraman William Lynch was signed by Israel and Suffert to take charge of photography and probably developing and printing films. In his memoirs, Zhang Shichuan claims that he himself supervised the cameraman's

[14] Qian Huafo 钱化佛 and Zheng Yimei 郑逸梅, "Yaxiya yingxi gongsi de chengli shimo/The rise and fall of the Asiatic Film Company" 亚细亚影戏公司成立始末, *Dianying yishu/Film Art* 电影艺术, 1956, 1, 76-78.

camera movement. Such supervision is doubtful given the fact that Zhang's film knowledge was next to nothing and Lynch was probably the only person who knew how to operate a camera in the Asiatic.[15] Under the same collaboration method, Zhang Shichuan cooperated with Lauro, the Italian cameraman, and produced another picture, *The Curse of Opium* (黑籍冤魂, dir. Zhang Shichuan), in 1916.

The director system continued to be a dominant method of production after China started to set up its own production ventures. In 1922, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, the two directors in the Asiatic, set up Mingxing in Shanghai together with other stakeholders. Mingxing still engaged with the director system. Zhang Shichuan supervised the first short films and nine features up until to 1925. Most of these productions were written by Zheng Zhengqiu. A considerable difference between Mingxing and the Asiatic was the position of directors. In the Asiatic, the directors and the cameramen were employed by the investors, Israel and Suffert. In Mingxing, Zhang Shichuan retained exclusive control over the entire production. As the sole director and the owner and executive of Mingxing, Zhang selected the cast, made decisions about photography, and edited films. Zhang Weitao 张伟涛, as the photographer, merely became a worker under the supervision of Zhang Shichuan. Apart from director and cameraman, it is necessary to point out that a detailed division of labour was quite clear in the Mingxing's production practice. The published plan for organising Mingxing claimed that one major merit of Mingxing was that it had talents including film script writers who had ten years' experience in studying literature and art (probably referring to Zheng Zhengqiu), film developing talents from the United States, film directors with extensive drama experiences

[15] For a detailed analysis of the function of William Lynch and the operation of the Asiatic Film Company, see Chapter Five.

(referring to Zhang Shichuan), and set designing professionals with abundant experience in oil painting.[16]

In the wake of the rapid progress of the film business, Chinese film studios went into a period of the director-unit system in the late 1920s. Through releasing the box-office hit *The Orphan Rescues Grandfather*, Mingxing not only emerged from bankruptcy, but also moved into a period of prosperity. After releasing *Orphan*, Mingxing's filmmaking crew, including Zhang Shichuan (director), Zheng Zhengqiu (scriptwriter) and Dong Keyi 董克毅 (cameraman), produced another eight features. With the expansion of its business, Mingxing organised a second film crew and released *Why Divorce* (新人的家庭, dir. Ren Jinping) in 1925. This means a shift to a director-unit system in Mingxing. The crew was consisted by Ren Jinping 任矜萍, cofounder of Mingxing, Chen Shouyin 陈寿荫, assistant director, and Bo Wancang, cameraman. After Ren Jinping left Mingxing, Zhang Shichuan signed Hong Shen as director, a returned student from the United States who majored in drama studies. The hierarchy of the directors was apparent in Mingxing's director-unit system. As the director/producer and the executive of Mingxing, Zhang surely retained more power than Hong Shen. At its peak in the 1920s, Mingxing maintained four production teams "under the direction of Zhang Shichuan, Zheng Zhengqiu, Hong Shen and Bo Wancang respectively". [17] After leaving Mingxing, Ren Jinping set up Xinren Company and employed the director-unit system as well. A news report from *Shen Bao* indicated that five direction groups were working simultaneously in Xinren Company in 1927, including Ren Jinping, Chen Shouyin, Cheng Bugao 程步高, Zhao

[16] "Mingxing yingpian fufen youxian gongsi zuzhi yuanqi/The Origin of the Star Motion Picture Producing Co. Ltd" 明星影片股份有限公司组织缘起, *Yingxi zazhi/Film Magazine* 影戏杂志, 1, 3, 1922, 40.

[17] Huang, *Commercializing and Ideologies*, 41.

Chen 赵琛 and Hong Ji 洪济, the latter is Hong Shen's younger brother.[18]

A considerable feature of the director-unit system is the departmentalized organisation. Departmentalisation in the film industry is developed following the "standard assembly system in mass production". [19] Different departments are organised to achieve "harmonious co-operation" and secure "the highest average of efficiency".[20] The date or name of the first studio employing departmentalisation in China's system cannot be precisely determined, but as early as 1925, Moonlight (月光) Company, a small studio created by Cai Lianxi 蔡连溪, was reported to have set up a story consultant department in his studio.[21] An instance of departmentalisation is Guoguang Company (国光), a firm organised from the Commercial Press. In 1926, Guoguang Company published its corporation structure: four departments under the board of directors. A studio department (剧务) operated film scripting practice and film directing practice, with the head of Yang Xiaozhong 杨小仲. Two film script writers Chen Zhiqing 陈趾青 and Cao Yuankai 曹元恺 and two film directors Wang Fuqing 汪福庆 and Ren Pengnian 任彭年 worked under Yang. A film production department was in charge of photographing film, developing film and drawing scenarios. Its head was Liao Enshou. The general business department (总务) was led by Chen Chunsheng, whose work was probably to provide electrical, mechanical, and publicity services. The sales department, headed by Zhou Yongnian 周永年, was in

[18] "Xinren gongsi zhi fazhan/The Development of Xinren Company" 新人公司之发展, *Shen Bao*, 3 May 1927.

[19] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 124.

[20] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 124.

[21] "Ji yueguang ruyi jinxing zhong zhi yang guifei/The Film *Yang guifeng*, produced by Moonlight Company" 纪月光锐意进行中之*杨贵妃*, *Shen Bao*, 8 September 1925.

charge of distributing films.[22] The division of these four departments clearly provided an assembly line and aimed to increase the efficiency.

China's filmmakers made some trials with independent production under the director-unit system in late 1920s. Due to the deficit of the studio and the lack of capital, the executive of Great China Lilium carried out a method of independent production, or *Bao xi zhi* (包戏制, literally means a system which is responsible for its own play) in 1929. Under such system, the staff and equipment of Great China Lilium were divided into two groups, which were in charge of Zhu Shouju 朱瘦菊 and Wang Yuanlong 王元龙 respectively.[23] These two groups were responsible for producing films separately. They used the studio facilities of Great China Lilium and distributed their products were under the name of Great China Lilium. Each production group maintained personnel autonomy. For instance, Zhu Shouju employed Yang Xiaozhong into Zhu's group in April 1929.[24] It seems that at the beginning, Great China Lilium continued to invest the film production of each group, but later it became the group's responsibility to find financing. Employing the independent production method enhanced the speed of production, but sacrificed the quality in a significant way. As Lu Jie 陆洁 pointed out, "each group could complete a film within twenty days, but the final product was short and the story was plain. Therefore, the credit of Great China was completely destroyed in reception".[25] The independent production method was abandoned after Great China Lilium suspended its business and was amalgamated into Lianhua in 1930. A different mode of production employed by Lianhua is named as the central producer system, which will be analysed in

[22] Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 119.

[23] China Film Archive (ed), *Lu Jie riji zhaicun/An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary* 陆洁日记摘存, unpublished version, 1962, 30 December 1928.

[24] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 15 April 1929.

[25] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 30 June 1929.

the following section.

4.2 The Central Producer System in Lianhua

A similar route of evolution does not mean that China's mode of production was merely a duplication of its Hollywood model. This and the following sections will show the traits of China's mode of production through exploring China's central producer system in the 1930s. I examine how the film producing method functioned in Lianhua as a case study. There are two major reasons why Lianhua employed the central producer system: help in coordinating personnel relations and relieving the pressure caused by the shortage of capitals. No matter how it restructured, Lianhua did not change the situation of the weak position of producer in its film making system.

Lianhua is one of the most important film ventures in Chinese film history. It was set up in 1930 by Luo Mingyou through incorporating several mid-size studios and soon became one of "Big Three" in the Chinese film industry (the other two are Mingxing and Tianyi). Luo Mingyou became involved in film business in 1919 by opening a film theatre in Beijing. Later, his business expanded into a film venture named North China Amusements Ltd, which controlled a dozen of cinemas in its peak. Attracted by the thriving film business, Luo started to become involved in the film producing business. As a trial, Luo Mingyou employed Sun Yu, a director, and released *Reminiscence of Peking*. The success of the film at the box office confirmed Luo's ambition to move into film production. In August 1930, Luo set up Lianhua by taking over Li Minwei's 黎民伟 China Sun Motion Picture Co. Ltd (民新) and Wu Xingzai's 吴性栽 Great China Lilium Film Company.[26] China Sun became Lianhua's

[26] China Sun was amalgamated into Lianhua with a price of 40,000 yuan, while Great China Lilium was 45,000

first studio and Great China Lilium was the second studio. In 1932, Luo Mingyou incorporated a Hong Kong film company and transferred it into Lianhua's third studio. Later, Dan Duyu's 但杜宇 Shanghai Film Company joined Lianhua and became the fourth studio. After incorporating others studios in Beijing, Chengdu, and Singapore, Lianhua became the largest film production venture in China then, owning seven studios in total. Apart from film production, Lianhua was a vertically integrated firm involving business including film distribution, exhibition and film journal publishing. Lianhua's headquarter was located in Hong Kong with a management branch in Shanghai.

The general structure of Lianhua can be seen as that of a central producer system. Under a central producer system, the producer, instead of director, takes over "the management of the pre- and post-shooting work for *all* the films in the studio".[27] The producer "superceded" the director and therefore it can be seen as a type of pyramid in terms of organisational structure.[28] In the case of Lianhua, Luo Mingyou was the general manager of Lianhua, who was only answerable to the Board of Directors. He took care of all general business of Lianhua. Under Luo Mingyou, there were four offices located in Hong Kong, Shanghai, North China (Beijing) and Singapore. The general management office was located in Hong Kong, in addition to a studio. Shanghai was the major base for Lianhua's production business with three studios. Each studio had a producer in charge of the making of films and the day-to-day operation in studio. The producer in the first studio was Li Minwei, the producer

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yuan. Wu Xingzai also invested extra 55,000 yuan in cash into Lianhua. See Luo Mingyou, "Wei lianhua zuzhi baogao tongren shu/A Public Letter to Colleagues Concerning the Organisation of Lianhua" 为联华组织报告同人书, *Yingxi Zazhi/The Film Magazine* 影戏杂志, 1, 10, 1931, 46.

[27] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 136.

[28] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 136

in the second studio was Lu Jie, and the third was Zhu Shilin 朱石麟. The three studios were under the direction of the Shanghai management office.

In Lianhua's producer system, the detailed division of labours and the departmentalisation were visible. Each studio had its own directors and professional departments including general affairs department, art design department, production department, photograph department, and printing department. A more detailed division of labour was also involved under these departments. For instance, the art design department included an art design unit (responsible for drawing and decorating respectively) and a scene set unit (including carpenter, painter, and blacksmith). In addition, each studio signed its own casts and these actors/actresses served the studio exclusively. Unlike its Hollywood counterpart, there are few substantial differences of the productions among Lianhua's studios regarding genres, although some product style might have been distinct between studios.

As a general manager, Luo Mingyou was responsible for adjusting the structure of Lianhua's production units. From 1930 to 1936, Lianhua had at least four major changes and six small changes of corporate structure. Personnel relationship and a financing management are the two major concerns for structuring Lianhua. In the following passages, I will explore several restructurings of Lianhua in order to solve these two problems. Despite the efforts of restructuring, both problems did not have a satisfactory resolution in the end.

Lianhua was organised by amalgamating Great China Lilium and China Sun. In his initial plan, Luo suggests that the organisation of Lianhua could initially implement the "branch system" (分厂制), which maintained the original production units including personnel, studios and other applications. The production branches could be concentrated gradually into one general production factory and therefore

become a "film city".[29] As a matter of fact, the separation of studios is a consideration of coordinating the personnel relationship between each studio, in particular between the first and second studio.[30] Partly due to the personnel and partly due to the competition between each other, the leaders between the two studios did not get along with each other. A case in point concerns the "borrowing" of actors from each other. Cai Chusheng, a director of the second studio, once intended to invite Chen Yanyan 陈燕燕, an actress affiliated with Li Minwei's studio, as a cast of *Volcano, Love, and Blood* (火山情血, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1932). Lu Jie recalled that Li requested "an insufferable term" for "borrowing" Chen Yanyan.[31] Under the separation of studios, the overheads for maintaining two separated studios would be high because each studio had its own equipment and personnel. In order to reduce overheads, Luo Mingyou finally incorporated the two studios into one in April 1935. Under the new structure, Lu Jie (the producer of the second studio) was in charge of general affairs, while Li Minwei (the producer of the first studio) was in charge of film technology including film printing. However, the personnel relationships could still not be solved. Three months later, the production business had to be returned to the original structure: a separation of two units, which were headed by Lu Jie and Li Minwei respectively.[32]

[29] Gong Sunlu 公孙鲁, *Zhongguo dianying shihua/An Unofficial History of Chinese Cinema* 中国电影史话, 3, Hong Kong: Tiannan Book Publishing House, 1961, 12-13.

[30] It seems that the personnel relationship problem is not unique among studios in Lianhua, a *Diansheng* report points out some conflicts between Luo Mingyou and Wu Bangfan 吴邦藩, the head of the sales department. A major reason is that the staff in the sales department whose salary was paid by Lianhua also involved in distributing films produced by other corporations, but they did not share the profit with Lianhua. See "Lianhua yingye bu zhi qianyi wenti/The Issues on the Move of Lianhua" 联华影业部之迁移问题, *Movietone*, 5, 25, 1936.

[31] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 21 April, 1932.

[32] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 29 June 1935; Li Xi 黎锡 (ed), *Li Minwei riji/Li Minwei's Diary* 黎民伟日记, 29 June 1935, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 2003.

The problem of personnel relationship could not be solved until the ownership of Lianhua was shifted to Huaan (华安) in 1936. Unable to solve the economic crisis of Lianhua, Luo Mingyou decided to resign as general manager and Wu Xingzai took over Lianhua and changed the name into Huaan in 1936. The personal relationship problem was solved with the departure of Li Minwei and Luo Mingyou.

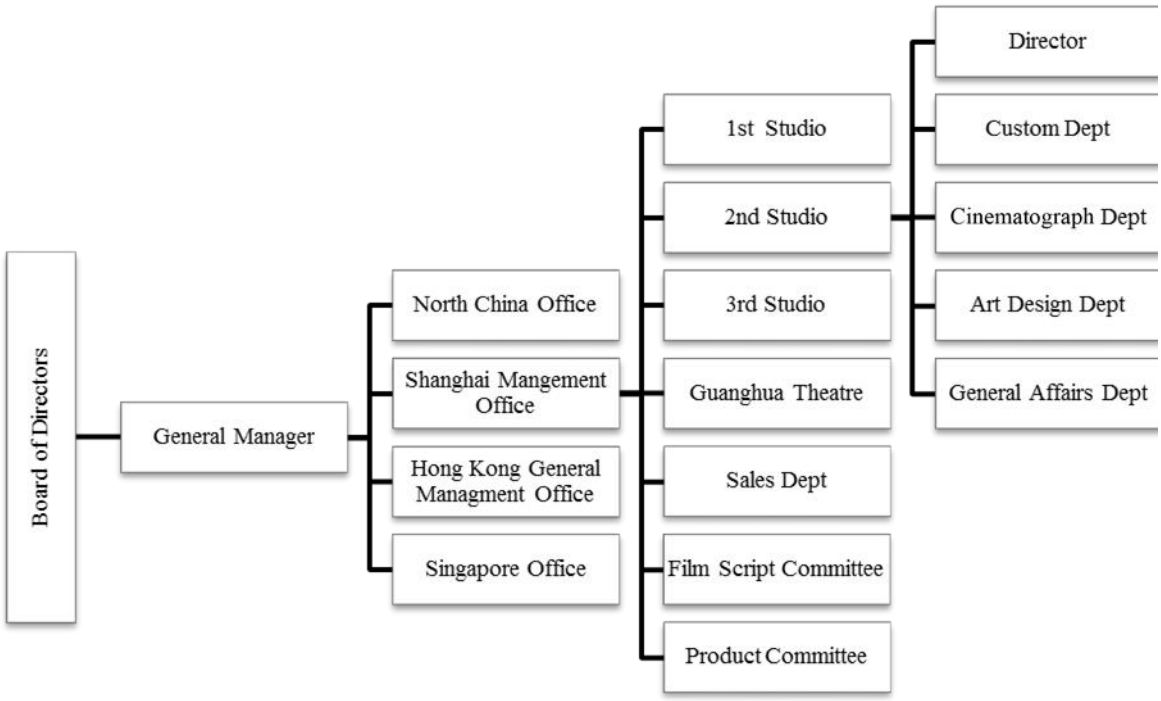
The lack of a working fund was another reason for restructuring Lianhua. Apart from the original studios and capital, Luo Mingyou had put little investment into Lianhua's film production business. In 1931, Luo Mingyou intended to increase investment by calling for capital but failed. Therefore, Lianhua faced a serious lack of working funds for maintaining its studio operation. In 1932, after having rejected the motion of selling Lianhua into Lu Gen, Luo Mingyou transferred Lianhua's second studio to Wu Xingzai. Wu restructured the second studio and named Lianan (联安) after investing 50,000 yuan.[33] After releasing four productions, Luo Mingyou restored the operating rights of the second studio by investing in Lianan in early 1933. However, Lianhua still suffered from a lack of working funds. In 1933 and 1936, Luo Mingyou and Zhu Shilin promoted the idea of employing independent production systems twice with intention of solving the problem the lack of working funds. According to the system of independent production, instead of Lianhua's management branch, it was producers and directors that had responsibility for raising fund for film production. Lianhua was merely in charge of providing studios and distributing the product. However, the suggestion of an independent production system was rejected due to strong objections from producers and directors.[34] In 1934, Lianhua acquired financing support from the syndicated loan from Yukang (裕康). However, 20,000

[33] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 16 April 1932.

[34] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 29 June 1933.

yuan only solved the front-burner issue and the shortage of capital resulted in the final restructure of Lianhua in 1936 and the ownership of Lianhua was transferred to Wu Xingzai.

Chart 1 The Organisation of Lianhua, 1934



Source: Lianhua 联华, "Lianhua yingpian gongsi sinian jingli shi/Four Years' Evolution of Lianhua" 联华影片公司四年经历史, in China Educational Film Association, 1934 Chinese Film Yearbook, *970-971.*

Another significant trait of Lianhua's structure is that the position of the producer was highly restricted. Lu Jie, as a producer in the second studio, acted as the liaison between Luo Mingyou and the directors. Lu was well known in film circles from his involvement as an editor of *Movie Magazine* 影戏杂志, the first professional film publication in China. In 1924, Lu, together with other merchants, organised the Great China Film Company and Lu acted as the scriptwriter. In 1925, Lu became the head of the production department and a film director after Great China merged with

the Lilum Film Company. In 1930, Great China Lilum Company was amalgamated into Lianhua and became the second studio of Lianhua. Lu Jie took charge of the production of the second studio, serving as the executive producer answerable only to Luo Mingyou, the studio head. Lu Jie supervised directors including Sun Yu 孙瑜, Cai Chusheng, Shi Dongshan 史东山 and Tan Youliu 谭友六. As the executive producer, Lu made budget plan for every production, supervised the production process, coordinated personnel relationships and signed contracts with studio staff in the second studio of Lianhua. Under Lianhua's system, Lu Jie did not have financial and personnel autonomy since the financial right was vested in the management branch, a department directly controlled by Luo Mingyou. As a producer, Lu was responsible for making production budgets, together with directors. The budget plans were submitted to the management branch. Due to the lack of capital, it was common for the management branch not to issue money to the production unit. Therefore, much of Lu Jie's energy was wasted in applying for funds from the management branch. For instance, from 1931 to 1936, Lu Jie's diary was full of complaints concerning fund application: at least once in every month. In June 1931, Lu spent four days applying for money from the management branch without any success. Similarly, Lu could sign contracts with film staff, but the approval of the management branch and Luo Mingyou superseded that of Lu.

Partly due to the lack of finance and control over personnel, Lu therefore had less control over the production process. Lianhua employed story and script committees to make decisions on scripts, although Lu participated in the committees. In addition, it seems that Lianhua had no effective punitive regulations to control the pace of production. Supervising the speed of production was one of Lu's jobs, but in fact it was quite common for directors not to finish production on time. However, Lu

seemed to have few solutions to control production pace except for "trying to persuade directors", partly due to the lack of punitive measures. For instance, Lu wrote in his diary on 26 January 1934: "The production of *Wind* (风, dir. Wu Cun, 1934) is suspended for several times, due to the private affair leave or sick leave of the director Wu Cun 吴村. This afternoon, I [Lu] visited Wu and tried to persuade him to complete the production as soon as possible".[35] Even the directors of Lianhua such as Sun Yu admitted that it was the directors instead of producers who were responsible for the slow speed of production.[36]

4.3 The Powerful Position of Directors in Lianhua's Producer System

In this section, I explore the position of directors in Lianhua's producer system. The weak position of the producer resulted in an enhanced position of director in Lianhua's mode of production. Although Lianhua employed a central producer system, directors, instead of producers, topped the hierarchy of workers. The directors in Lianhua not only had "complete charge over" every stage of film production (including pre- and post- shooting), but also served as unit heads.[37] Four characteristics of the powerful position of directors are suggested in this section.

An intriguing trait of the mode of production of Lianhua, and arguably all Chinese film studios, is that the division of labour between scriptwriter and director was not obvious in the 1930s. In her survey on the evolution of Chinese films, Zhang

[35] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 26 January 1934. To be fair, the slow speed of producing *Wind* is not entirely attributed to the director. Lu Jie mentioned that the lack of punctuality of Tan Ying, the leading actress of *Wind*, was also a major reason. See China Film Archive, *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 26 October 1934.

[36] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 17 April 1934.

[37] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 136.

Zhen points out that, Chinese films only had "a lean outline" and "a shooting script was unheard of" in the 1910s.[38] "With the onset of the long story film, however, a synopsis was no longer adequate for a cinema that relied on a sustained plot and dramatic conflict".[39] Therefore, from the 1920s on a number of fiction writers such as Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, Zhu Shouju and Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鹃 were employed to write film scripts. In some cases, film studios would solicit scripts from outside and they employed the selected for production. However, in the majority cases, the writing of film scripts was still left to the director. Out of a total of 63 films produced by Lianhua from 1930 to 1936, there are 40 films whose scripts were written by its directors. In addition, it is necessary to point out the scriptwriters here refer to the persons who wrote the film story. The scriptwriters were not responsible for the continuity writing. In the case of China, it was the responsibility of directors to turn film scripts into continuity scripts, even though the director was not the scriptwriter.[40] Like its Hollywood counterpart, the shooting script was designed to be a "blueprint for the workers" in China's central producer system and the published continuity writings like that of *Song of China* (天伦, dir. Fei Mu, 1936) showed that "each shot was numbered consecutively" and "the description of the *mise-en-scene* and action was very detailed".[41] However, the shooting scripts offered little control over the director since the director could easily change the scripts during the shooting process.[42]

Secondly, directors could easily insert their opinions on cast selection, due to

[38] Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 153.

[39] Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 153.

[40] Ouyang Yuqian, "Daoyan fa/Directing Method" 导演法, *Dianying yuebao/Film Monthly* 电影月报, 1, 1928, 1.

[41] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 138.

[42] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 138.

retaining rights on writing shooting scripts. In some cases, the director already made his decision regarding the cast during the writing of the filmscripts. In his memoirs, Sun Yu, the scriptwriter and director of *Big Road*, claimed that he selected Jin Yan 金焰, Zheng Junli, and Luo Peng 罗朋 as the main cast of the film.[43] In another case, Sun appointed Wang Renmei 王人美 as the protagonist of his production *Wild Rose* (野玫瑰, dir. Sun Yu, 1932), because the film script was deliberately written for Wang. Sometimes, the producer or president of Lianhua may be involved in the selection of the film cast, but the director's decision was highly respected. A case in point is Shi Dongshan's film *Strive* (奋斗, 1932). It seems that Shi Dongshan insisted on using Chen Yanyan as protagonist. Lu Jie, the producer of the film, had to help Shi to "borrow" Chen from the first studio though he had reservations about the casting arrangement, as I mentioned previously.[44]

Thirdly, directors retained the final decision on issues such as choosing shooting locations and stage sets, although some technical work was done by department experts. It seemed that the budget plan which was made by the producer was not clearly circulated, due to the ambiguousness of the scripts. When Cai Chusheng prepared the shooting location of *The Lost Lamb* (迷途的羔羊, 1936) in Suzhou, he himself decided the number of extras and properties.[45] When conflicts happened on the film production, in particular stage sets, the directors could sometimes win the negotiation with the producers, even with the studio president. During the production of *Return to Nature* (到自然去, 1936), the director Sun Yu

[43] Sun Yu 孙瑜, *Yinhai fanzhou/Cruising in Cinematic Sea* 银海泛舟, Beijing: China Film Press, 1980,179.

[44] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 20 June 1932; 23 June 1932.

[45] Cai Chusheng, "Suyuan jixing/The location Shooting Log in Suzhou" 苏垣纪行, *Lianhua Pictorial* 联华画报, 8, 1, July 1936, 13.

insisted on adding a luxury scene about the Presidential Palace. Lu Jie wrote in his diary on 4 July 1936: "the stage set that is needed is considerable grand, which will be not only overly costly, but also protracted".[46] Twenty five days later, Luo Mingyou, the president of Lianhua, negotiated with Sun Yu about abandoning the scene, but Sun still insisted on his idea. It seems that both Luo Mingyou and Lu Jie yielded. On 1 September, Lu wrote that Sun had begun to shoot scene about the Presidential Palace.

Fourthly, the directors of Lianhua and in China in general had responsibility for editing. A close look at the crew listed in 1930s Chinese films will find that no editors were credited, although a position of film editor existed in the corporate structure of Lianhua, which was under the printing department. As an article points out, "the film editor is significant and should develop into a separate job in the film making process. An un-appropriate editor would destroy the integrity and sentiment of a film. In the case of China, however, the editing job is just done by directors".[47] Lu Jie's diary recorded several times that he had cautioned directors about the slow pace of film editing.[48]

One consequence of the powerful position of the director in Lianhua's mode of production is the extremely slow speed of production. Because directors retained more control over production and because much of the energy of directors was spent on writing the shooting script and editing the film, the pace for releasing a film was considerably slow in Lianhua. In addition, the slow speed should be attributed to the

[46] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 4 July 1936.

[47] Weiming 韦明, "Dianying chahua/Comments on Film" 电影插话, *Lianhua Pictorial*, 5, 12, June 1936, no page number.

[48] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 2 February 1933. In today's diary, Lu wrote, "[I] talked to Cai (Chusheng) and reminded him that it had been half a year since *Morning in the Metropolis* started. I hope that he could complete the film editing as soon as possible".

selfishness of the directors. An article in Lianhua's own publication pointed out,

> "Directors are the head of a production unit in the Chinese film industry. In a circumstance where China's mode of production is not well organised, directors retained a great deal of responsibility. Therefore, a greater responsibility results in a greater selfishness. For the sake of his own reputation, the director spent more time on choosing a film script, selecting the film cast, and retaking again and again. It may benefit the quality of film, but throw cold water on the passion for the development of the Chinese film industry".[49]

The slow speed of Lianhua is evidenced by the number of films it released. Although Lianhua maintained several studios, it had no significant difference in production speed compared with other film companies with one sole studio. A director in Lianhua could only release one or two films a year. In his five years' service in Lianhua, Cai Chusheng only produced six films. The worst case is Wu Cun. Based on his contract with Lianhua, Wu was required to produce three films in one year. However, Wu only handed out one film. In 1934, Lianhua released 18 films. Other than Zhu Shilin, Jiang Qifeng 姜起凤, and Zheng Jiduo 郑基铎 who released two films, the other film directors only produced one film in a year. The situation of 1935 was worse: only nine films were released: Other than Yang Xiaozhong, no directors released more than two films. Some directors such as Cai Chusheng even could not complete one production in an entire year.

[49] Zhao Ce 赵策, "Heyi guochanpian buneng daliang shengchan/The Reason Why Domestic Films Cannot Be Mass Produced" 何以国产片不能大量生产, *Lianhua Pictorial*, 7, 12, 1936, 2.

The slow speed might help the stylistic impression of the production, but it jeopardised the economic situation of the production studio. In Chinese film history, the films produced by Lianhua, such as *Big Road, Toys,* and *Song of the Fishermen* are seen as "classics" and made a great contribution to the "golden age of Chinese films" in the 1930s. By contrast, their production did not bring a "golden age" to Lianhua in terms of revenue. The slow speed and the small number of products increased Lianhua's overheads in a significant way and delayed the return of the cost-recovery. Lianhua's own publication *Lianhua Pictorial* admitted, "Even the sales of the product is profitable, such profit could be highly diminished by more overheads, not to mention that some products could not make a profit".[50] *Song of the Fishermen* was probably the bestseller of Chinese films in the 1930s, bringing Lianhua a gross of 200,000 yuan. However, the net profit of the film took a back seat due to its high expense and one-year-long production schedule. To make things worse, one cannot ensure that a slow speed of production would definitely result in a good box office receipts. Take *Wind* for instance, Wu Cun spent eight months (from August 1933 to April 1934) to produce his first film, but the result proved to be a failure both in terms of film art and box office receipts.

Lianhua's authorities clearly recognised the problem of high overheads caused by the powerful position of directors and made efforts to reduce those overheads. A 1935 market survey indicated that the overheads of Lianhua were over 15,000 yuan per month, which topped the figure for China's film studios.[51] For the sake of solving the overheads problem, Lianhua's authorities employed several methods. Increasing the number of products was the first one. In 1932, Luo Mingyou set a target for Lu Jie

[50] Zhao, "The Reason Why Domestic Films Cannot Be Mass Produced", 2.

[51] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

and his second studio to release twelve films each year. However, the plan was aborted due to the strong resistance of Lu Jie, arguing that it would sacrifice quality. In 1935 during the strike of Lianhua's staff, one proposal initialled by Wu Bangfan, head of Shanghai management branch, was to enhance the number of products.[52] Wu argued that if Lianhua could increase the number of products to 27 each year (in 1935, Lianhua only released ten films in entire year), the crisis would be resolved.[53] The second method for reducing overheads was to merge Lianhua's studio into one. In a 1934 document titled *An Abridgment Regarding Raising Capital of Lianhua*, Luo Mingyou claimed that "by means of merging two studios into one, there will be a saving in overheads of 6,000 yuan if Lianhua could produce three products every month in comparison with one product".[54] Such a combination was promoted as imitating Hollywood since it happened after Luo Mingyou returned from his trip to Hollywood. However, the actual reason was more likely to save overheads, according to Lu's diary. Unfortunately, neither enlarging the number of products nor merging the studios reduced overheads in an essential way, again this was due to the inability to deal with the powerful position of the directors.

4.4 The Financing System of the Chinese Film Industry

Apart from the internal power structure, the financing system can also impact on the mode of production of a film industry. This section looks at the financing system in

[52] "Fasheng jianxin fengchao/A Riot Invoked by Salary Cutting" 发生减薪风潮, *Dianying xinwen/Film News* 电影新闻, 1, 4, 1935, 4.

[53] "A Riot Invoked by Salary Cutting", 4.

[54] "Lianhua yingye zhipian yinshua youxian gongsi zengshou ziben jielue/An Abridgment Regarding Raising Capital of Lianhua" 联华影业制片印刷有限公司增收资本节略, in SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

the Chinese film industry and its effect on the standardisation of the film production in the 1920s and 1930s. In the case of Hollywood in its classical period, three major external financing sources, according to Janet Staiger, are employed, that is, "1) funds from distribution firms to finance part of the negative costs; 2) direct financing from loans by private individuals or banks and investment firms; and 3) public stock issued by studios".[55] Financing by outside capital reinforced "the industry's adherence to be efficient", as Staiger points out.[56] The established banks or investment corporation which loaned money to film studios could impact Hollywood's production practice through placing "representatives on boards of directors [of the film studio] and control the industry and the economy through interlocking directorships".[57] China's film studios had similar financing sources like those of their Hollywood counterparts. However, I argue that the financiers did little in affecting the mode of production of the Chinese film industry and this resulted in a failure to impact on the production system in the 1920s and 1930s.

Like its Hollywood counterparts, three major methods dominated China's financing system in the first half of the twentieth century. First, distributors and exhibitors participated in film financing, particularly for small production companies. Such a financing method is evidenced by a civil case in 1930s Shanghai. In 1931, Chen Zah-ming of the Siam Cinema Co, a film theatre venture in Siam (now known as Thailand), had advanced 1,000 yuan to Wang Yuanlong, a film director in Shanghai, for "producing a film, entitled *Three Heroes in North* in a period of 60 days". Although Wang failed to produce the film on time, Chen further paid "a sum of 500 yuan together with 600 yuan value of film [stocks]" for another film entitled

[55] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 314.

[56] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 315.

[57] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 315.

Three Heroes. However, the fact was Wang "had no such films as were stipulated in the agreement, and that the two sets of moving pictures were already sold out to other theatres".[58] Therefore, Chen prosecuted Wang for a sum of 2,2000 yuan. The case indicates that film exhibitors showed their intent to influence film productions such as requiring the deadline for completing a film through financing the production. However, this is not a common case. A more common example was that an exhibitor or distributor invested in a film production. As a reward, the exhibitor/distributor would obtain part of the film's exclusive rights. For instance, Wang Yuting 王雨亭, a distributor in Singapore, signed a contract to invest in the production of *Mei Jen Chi* (美人计, dir. Lu Jie, 1928). Therefore, Wang obtained the film's distribution rights in Dutch and Britain Settlements in South-east Asia.[59]

Loans from banks or investment firms were the second financing method for Chinese film studios. One case in point is Mingxing secured a loan of 160,000 yuan from Shanghai Jiaotong Bank. In 1936, when Mingxing was in dire crisis after constructing a new studio and while the box office was unsatisfactory, Zhou Jianyun approached banks for loan. News reports revealed that Zhou first contacted Nanjing Jiaotong Bank. The proposed plan between Mingxing and Nanjing Jiaotong Bank also concerned cooperation on film production.[60] The news report pointed out that Nanjing Jiaotong Bank would obtain the management rights of Mingxing, by paying a price of 60,000 yuan in advance to Mingxing each month. Mingxing would release two products each month with the grant of this money. Under this agreement, the established bank would be directly involved in the film production business, like its

[58] "Film Director Hits Money Snag", *The China Press*, 7 June 1932.

[59] China Film Archive (ed), *An Abridgement of Lu Jie's Diary*, 28 October 1927.

[60] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

Hollywood counterparts.[61] However, it seems that the plan did not eventuate for unclear reasons. Mingxing was finally granted a loan of 160,000 yuan from Shanghai Jiaotong Bank.

To Shanghai Jiaotong Bank, the fiancial interest was not the sole criteria for the approval of the loan to Mingxing, the social, political and cultural considerations were taken into account. The financial records of Shanghai Jiaotong Bank reveal that the reasons why the bank loaned money to Mingxing were threefold. First, Mingxing obtained a recommendation letter from a significant figure, Chen Guofu 陈果夫, who was a senior cadre of the Nationalist Party and Head of Jiangsu Province. The second reason is the quality of Mingxing's films. The internal evaluation report of Shanghai Jiaotong Bank pointed out that Mingxing, "as a pioneer of film production in China, is known for its contribution to film art".[62] The report continued, "Mingxing is one of the few companies which are armed with sound machines, which could benefit its competition with foreign arrivals".[63] Thirdly, a sense of nationalism can be found in the rationale of the loan. The bank report claimed that "Mingxing's film business, as a part of the local film industry, could facilitate restoring China's economic interest in some extents through fighting against the business of importing foreign films".[64] With little doubt, the financial consideration was necessary for a bank to loan money. To secure the loan from Shanghai Jiaotong Bank, Mingxing was requested to vouch for

[61] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[62] SMA, *Correspondences between the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues*, Q55-2-1371.

[63] SMA, *Correspondences between the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues*, Q55-2-1371.

[64] SMA, *Correspondences between the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues*, Q55-2-1371.

all its fixed assets. To convince the bank of its ability to repay, Mingxing firstly proposed to transfer its production income from Jiangsu to Shanghai Jiaotong Bank. The proposal claimed that on average, Mingxing could release three sound pictures every two months, which would bring an income of 15,000 yuan in Jiangsu each month. After the establishment of the new studio, Mingxing could release two pictures each month and the income would increase to 30,000 yuan, which could secure paying the principal and the interest of the bank. It seems that Mingxing's proposal was rejected, possibly due to the concern of the uncertainty of Mingxing's income in Jiangsu. The established agreement revealed that Mingxing used all its productions after February 1937 as the mortgage to secure the loan. According to the agreement, Shanghai Jiaotong Bank would possess all income from Mingxing's productions from February 1937 and this would be returned to Mingxing after the deduction of the principle and the interest.

No matter what the mortgage was, it is evident that Shanghai Jiaotong Bank played little role in affecting Mingxing's mode of production. In the case of Hollywood, as Janet Staiger points out, the involvement of banks in loaning funding to the film production business furthered the standardisation of Hollywood's product.[65] The reason is that banks made financing decision based on an investigation of "the quality of the product, story, stars, and directors" of a film studio and they "continued to require these quality standards as the basis for the use of their capital and banking facilities".[66] Therefore, "financing by outside capital reinforced not only the industry's adherence to efficient, contemporary business practices but also its product practices of the dominance of the story and the use of stars".[67] In contrast,

[65] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 314.

[66] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 314.

[67] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 315.

Shanghai Jiaotong Bank did not create effective external pressure on the standardisation of the film products of Mingxing. The agreement did not specify on how to use the loan. It did not provide any detailed requests on Mingxing's film quality standards. More significantly, no requirement was set on Mingxing's production pace. That is to say, the bank completely stayed out of the film production process. As a matter of fact, the loan of 160,000 yuan hardly benefited Mingxing's film production. It was actually used to pay Mingxing's debts caused by establishing the new studio. As we have seen, the new studio did not enhance the production speed at all. In the following ten months since moving to the new studio (from June 1936 to April 1937), Mingxing produced 14 films.[68] In terms of production speed, there was no difference with its previous period when Mingxing could release three pictures every two months on average. In addition, it is necessary to point out that borrowing money from banks was uncommon for China's film studios. Two reasons can be suggested here. On the banks part, they had reservations about loaning money to film studios, since the film business was seen more as an entertainment business rather than an industry. There were worries for banks concerning the repayment ability of film studios. To studios, loans from banks would introduce a series of restrictions such as inspection on film production and evaluation. Therefore, there were few financing records between banks and film studios in the 1920s and 1930s.

Subscription of investment by organising a joint-stock company is the third finance path for Chinese production companies. Film historian Long Jin mentions that most film production companies were organised as a sole proprietorship entity or joint enterprises in the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century.[69] A

[68] *Bulletins of Film Censorship Board*, June 1936 to April 1937.

[69] Long Jin, *Zhanqian zhongguo dianying qiye gaikuang yu jingying moshi/Chinese Film Companies and Their*

sole proprietorship entity refers to "a natural person who owns the business and is personally responsible for its debts".[70] In the case of the Chinese film industry, the production company with sole proprietorship was usually organised by a single person and was supported by his family members. A case in point is the Oriental First Company, owned and operated by Ren Pengnian, a director who used to work in Guoguang. It released a film *A Worker's Wife* (工人之妻, dir. Ren Pengnian, 1926). Ren's wife and son stood as the protagonists. Ren's younger brother was the photographer and the film was even developed and printed in Ren's kitchen.[71] The second type of company was a joint company, referring to the entities which were invested in by two or more partners. As Long Jin points out, most organisers of joint companies in the Chinese film industry had less ambition to further their development.[72] The partners treated film as nothing but a pure commercial business. If the product was profitable, they might continue to produce or just terminate it after sharing the profit.[73] Both the sole proprietorship entity and the joint company suffered if they were small in size due to a lack of capital.

By contrast, joint-stock companies proved to be an effective form with respect to raising capital. A joint stock company, as a form of advanced capitalism, is "financed with capital invested by the members or stockholders who receive transferable shares, or stock".[74] A major distinction between a joint company and a

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Business Mode Prior to 1937, 战前中国电影企业概况与经营模式, Master Thesis, Beijing: China Art Academy, 2002, 24.

[70] Michael Spadaccini, *Business Structures: Forming a Corporation*, Entrepreneur Media, 2007, 4.

[71] Long, *Chinese Film Companies and Their Business Mode Prior to 1937*, 24.

[72] Long, *Chinese Film Companies and Their Business Mode Prior to 1937*, 25.

[73] Long, *Chinese Film Companies and Their Business Mode Prior to 1937*, 25.

[74] http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Joint+Stock+Company, accessed 20 October 2013.

joint-stock company is that the latter did not have identifiable owners because the ownership was spread by raising capital from outside. Mingxing and Lianhua are two of the very few joint-stock companies in the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century. Huang Xuelei illustrates the subscription of investment conducted by Mingxing in the 1920s. The executives of Mingxing firstly obtained investment from eminent figures from Shanghai including Yuan Lvdeng 袁履登, Mai Junbo 麦君博 and Lao Jingxiu 劳敬修 and Mai then headed the board of directors in Mingxing.[75] In 1928, Mingxing initialled another round of subscription of investment and successfully raised its capital to 200,000 yuan. Compared with Mingxing, Lianhua acquired more capital. It did not start its business until its capital reached 250,000 yuan after issuing stocks.[76]

Effectiveness in raising capital, however, does not automatically mean effectiveness in supervising capital. Theoretically speaking, a joint-stock company is managed by a board of directors on behalf of stockholders. The executive/s of a joint-stock company is/are seated in the board of directors as inside director/s. Major shareholders also have representation on the board of directors.[77] With regard to the organisation of a corporation, Chinese film corporations had no significant difference from their Hollywood counterparts. An instance is Mingxing. The chief executive of Mingxing was Zhang Shichuan, who was answerable to the board of directors. Zhang was also the chief director of Mingxing. The board of directors was constituted by major shareholders such as Yuan Lvdeng, He Yongchang 何泳昌 and Zheng Zhengqiu. An annual general meeting was held to elect the board of directors, audit sets of

[75] Huang, *Commercializing and Ideologies*, 2009, 37.

[76] Luo, " A Public Letter to Colleagues Concerning the Organisation of Lianhua", 45.

[77] John Downes and Jordan Elliot Goodman, *Dictionary of Finance and Investment Terms*, New York: Barron's, 2010, 69-70.

account and make decisions concerning significant issues. However, the actual operation of the joint-stock company was different than it was supposed to be. In his analysis on the economic situation of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s, Zhou Jianyun, a co-founder of Mingxing, pointed out that a very limited number of China's capitalists may finance a joint-stock company and have a seat on the board of directors.[78] However, the fact they invested in a film company was more due to friendship than being interested in film business or foreseeing the future of a company. They attended the annual general meeting for no reason other than sharing the net profit. The shareholders paid less attention to the operation of the company and had little knowledge of their interest and responsibility in the company.[79] As a matter of fact, such problems of the joint-stock company occurred in Zhou's Mingxing as well. Apart from the executives of Mingxing including Zhang Shichuan, Zheng Zhengqiu and Zhou Jianyun, other members in the board of directors seemed to care less about Mingxing's business and some board members were merely titular. An example is He Yongchang. As Zhang Shichuan's father-in-law, He Yongchang sat on the board of directors merely due to the fact he strongly sponsored Zhang for organising Mingxing and there are few records about He Yongchang attending the annual general meetings. The indifference of shareholders resulted in the unlimited power of the executives in the joint-stock company. As Zhou Jianyun argues, some executives manipulated the film companies and developed their own power by virtue of the indifference of shareholders.[80]

To sum up, this section has shown that China had similar resources for

[78] Zhou Jianyun, "Zhongguo yingpian zhi qiantu/The Future of Chinese Cinema" 中国影片之前途，*Dianying yuebao/Film Monthly* 电影月报, 4, May 1928, 10.

[79] Zhou, "The Future of Chinese Cinema", 10.

[80] Zhou, "The Future of Chinese Cinema", 10.

financing in the film industry as did Hollywood. Three major methods are analysed in this section, that is, funds from distributors and exhibitors; direct financing from loans and public stocks from organising a joint-stock company. Despite some occasional cases, however, the financing system in China in general failed to impact the mode of production of films, as it did in Hollywood.

4.5 Conclusion

If one can say that Chapter Three examines the beautiful or "butterfly" side of the Chinese film industry with regard to responding to Hollywood in the 1930s, this chapter looks at the "ugly" other side. It is evident that China's mode of production, like its distribution system, was learned from Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s. Like its American counterpart, China's mode of production also experienced an evolution from the cameramen system to the central producer system. In addition, parallel to its distribution system, China developed its uniqueness in the domain of its mode of production. However, such uniqueness was often not that suitable for the economic context as it was in the distribution system. In China's producer system, film directors retained a great deal of control of film production compared with their colleagues in Hollywood. In addition, the financing system in China failed to insert impact on the mode of production in a significant way. This situation fostered the position of directors in China's producer system.

The vulnerability and the fleeting success of the film market is one major consequence of China's mode of production. The powerful position of directors, as Kristin Thompson argues, would result in the "industry's continued dependence on small production companies" and, I would like to add, upon the personal performance

of the directors.[81] If an unexpected event happened to directors, this would significantly shake the basis of a studio. For instance, after the death of Zheng Zhengqiu, the director of *Two Sisters* (姊妹花, dir. Zheng Zhengqiu) in 1935, Mingxing could not return to prosperity. Generally speaking, China reached its peak in the film industry in the 1933 and 1934. In these two years, box-office hits like *Two Sisters, Song of the Fishermen* and *Big Road* were all released. But China soon entered a chilly winter in the film industry in the following years. Other than the macroeconomic factors such as China suffering from the world economic crisis and the threat of the war between China and Japan, the decline of the Chinese film industry should also be attributed to its mode of production.

[81] Kristin Thompson, "Early Alternatives to the Hollywood Mode of Production: Implications for Europe's Avant-Grades", *Film History*, 5, 4, 1993, 391.

Chapter 5: Film Matchmakers: The Intermediaries between Hollywood and China in the Early Twentieth Century

This chapter considers at length the perception and practices of foreign intermediaries during the early twentieth century, focusing on their contributions to the construction of the Chinese film industry. When examining the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth-century, one may notice that major executives of the Chinese film studios had few chances to visit Hollywood during their lives. Their perceptions of the American film industry were largely obtained through film practitioners who had American study background and through watching American pictures, mainly imported by Chinese distributors. Such an interesting phenomenon calls for light on a group that is neglected and misunderstood in the history of Chinese cinema—intermediaries. Who were the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry? To what extent they were responsible for the expansion of Hollywood business in China? What did the intermediaries bring to the Chinese film industry? In the literature of Chinese film history which employs the national cinema approach and is fuelled by nationalism, a number of intermediaries are buried or labelled as "aggressors"/"traitors" because they are regarded as helping the expansion of Hollywood's business and thus oppressing the domestic film industry. In my view, the nationalistic film historiography reduces the complex role that the intermediaries played in Chinese film history. This article attempts to demonstrate that the intermediaries served as 'matchmakers' between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. This chapter attempts to demonstrate that the intermediaries served as "matchmakers" in the relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. The chapter argues that the intermediaries bridged the film industries of

Hollywood and China and made significant contributions to the formation of the Chinese film industry.

The term "intermediary" in the chapter refers to the figures and enterprises responsible for the intercommunication between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. Xiao Zhiwei is one pioneer who notices the significance of the intermediaries. Xiao incisively introduces the notion of "in-between production" into the history of how distributors appropriated Hollywood content into the Chinese cultural context.[1] "In-between production" refers to a process of "repetitions, evocations, translations and reproductions" in areas like the introduction of English words into Chinese in linguistic studies.[2] In the vein of Xiao, I intend to address the functions of the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth century. Three types of intermediaries are singled out in this chapter according to their jobs and nationality, that is, 1) American citizens who came to China for film business; 2) Chinese merchants who made business with American corporations, in particular, film distributors; and 3) Chinese students who returned from an American study background. It should be noted that the intermediaries between Hollywood and China are not limited to these three groups. The film press which reported Hollywood news and stories in China can be seen as an intermediary as well. In the first half of the twentieth century, a number of film periodicals, journals, and newspapers covered a large quantity of reports about the news, the structure and commentary on Hollywood film industry, film language, film technology, and film performance. In addition, it is necessary to point out that the functions of intermediaries are reciprocal. Whilst this study focuses on the influence

[1] Xiao, "Translating Hollywood Film to Chinese Audience", 2012, 88-100.

[2] Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

of intermediaries from Hollywood to China, the opposite deserve critical attention as well. For example, some Chinese filmmakers in the United States served as intermediaries introducing Chinese culture into American society. James B. Leong is such as a case. Immigrating into the United States in 1912, Leong first participated in Hollywood by serving as Chinese interpreter in one of D.W. Griffith's productions named *Broken Blossom* (1919). In addition, Leong produced and directed *Lotus Blossom* (1921), one of the earliest Chinese productions in Hollywood. *Lotus Blossom* engaged with a traditional Chinese story and strived to change the derogatory descriptions of Chinese in American films.

To provide a background, I start this chapter with a brief introduction of the nationalistic approach to Chinese cinema studies and the attitudes of its proponents towards the intermediaries. The chapter then follows the contributions of American practitioners to the Chinese film industry, a group of the intermediaries who are labelled as "aggressors" in the nationalistic writings. I identify William Lynch, the cinematographer of the Asiatic Film Company, as someone played a crucial role in developing the skills and careers of the first generation of Chinese directors. The chapter then investigates the Chinese merchants distributing Hollywood films in China, as the other type of intermediary. On one hand, these intermediaries helped the exploration of Hollywood in China as part of Hollywood's strategy of localisation, while on the other hand they benefited the Chinese film industry in various ways. The chapter then shifts focus to the last group of intermediaries—Chinese film practitioners who had foreign experience, examining their contributions to the Chinese film industry and pointing out their ambivalent nationalistic attitudes. The chapter concludes by suggesting in broad terms that patriotic sentiment should not be the only criteria in the study of Chinese film history.

5.1 Nationalism in Chinese Film Studies

The nationalistic approach dominates the study of Chinese film history. Nationalism is defined as "an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential 'nation'".[3] China's nationalism emerged along with the rise of nation-state in modern China from the late nineteenth century. Nationalism had grown into a major ideology of the Nationalist Party in the first half of the twentieth century. As early as the 1930s, Gu Jianchen 谷剑臣, one of the first film historians in China, subscribed to nationalism in his research.[4] Gu's nationalistic sentiment is well expressed in his statement on the cinema department of the British American Tobacco Company, which produced films with Chinese casts and purchased small cinemas in 1920s China. The commercial expansion of the cinema department, from Gu's point of view, was an example of "economic oppression" (经济压迫) of the Chinese film industry.[5]

The nationalistic sentiment was inherited and went further in the publications after the Communist Party takeover in 1949. According to Dirlik, Mao Zedong developed his ideas by "subsum[ing] Marxism with nationalism" and structured Chinese society with such theory in mind.[6] In *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema,* Cheng Jihua and his colleagues consciously employ Mao Zedong's thought in their study of Chinese film history. Bearing this in mind, Cheng and his

[3] Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, London: Polity, 2010, 9

[4] Gu Jianchen, "Zhongguo dianying fadashi/The History of the Development of Chinese Films" 中国电影发达史, in China Educational Film Association, *1934 Chinese Film Yearbook*, 321-346.

[5] Gu, "The History of the Development of Chinese Films", 3355.

[6] Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution,* Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2005, 129.

colleagues consider Chinese film history as the struggle between "the progressive culture for socialism, national liberation and people's democracy" and "imperialist and other reactive cultures".[7] The contribution of the Chinese "national capitalists" prior to 1949 is only acknowledged due to their efforts to build a national film industry and their patriotic sentiments. While American merchants, together with Hollywood films, are regarded as a form of economic and cultural aggression to the national industry.

Within the theoretical framework of "national cinema", the recent literature avoids the notion of over-ideologisation found in the previously literature but it nevertheless inherits the spotlight of nationalism. In his account of Chinese national cinema, Hu Jubin positions nationalism as a principle axis in Chinese films prior to 1949.[8] According to Hu, "what the Chinese cinema, as a national cinema, participated in and reflected, was a nationalism about politics".[9] Hu divides the pre-1949 history of Chinese cinema into five periods and characterizes each period with a different type of nationalism. For instance, the 1920s saw the upsurge of industrial nationalism, which prioritized "the establishment of the film industry as the Chinese nation's domestic industry".[10] However, an exaggerated emphasis on nationalism in the Chinese film industry is liable to neglect the contribution of the figures who had few connections with China's nation building. For instance, American film merchants, in Hu's account, are merely regarded as the rivals of the Chinese national industry, whose intention was to monopolize film industry.[11] Apart from stimulating the

[7] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 3.

[8] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 25-27.

[9] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 19.

[10] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 48.

[11] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 20.

"advocacy of a national cinema" in China, Hu remains silent on the contributions of American merchants to the domestic film industry.[12]

5.2 American Film Practitioners in China

In Chinese film history, Zhang Shichuan is known as the investor, founder and executive of Mingxing since its inception. In addition, Zhang, together with Zheng Zhengqiu, is regarded as the "Father of Chinese Cinema". During his forty-year film career, Zhang Shichuan directed over 150 silent and sound films. However, prior to becoming involved in the film business, Zhang confessed that he seldom watched films.[13] It was his experience as director in the Asiatic Film Company that inspired his interests in filmmaking and educated his film knowledge. The Asiatic Film Company is the first professional company in Chinese film history, but with staff from the United States and China. The following passage examines the contributions of the American film practitioners to the Chinese film industry, paying special attention to William H. Lynch, the cinematographer of the Asiatic Film Company.

Oddly enough, the Asiatic Film Company has received little attention in Chinese film studies. The name of the corporation is misspelled as "China Cinema Company" or "Asia Film Company" in the existing literature.[14] Early historical

[12] Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 20.

[13] Zhang Shichuan, "Ziwo daoyan yilai/The Road of My Director Career" 自我导演以来, *Mingxing/Star*, 3, 1935, 11.

[14] Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao, *Encyclopedia of Chinese Cinema*, London: Routledge, 1998, 5; Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 13; Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 58. My evidence for suggesting "Asiatic Film Company" as the English name of *Yaxiya* (亚西亚) is *The Hong List of 1915* (Shanghai: North China Herald, 1916). It was a yellow page published annually by the *North China Herald*, the largest English newspaper and publishing company in Shanghai. The business of the Asiatic includes manufacturing "cinematograph films and cinema supplies" with its studio manager E.M. Gross. The detailed information of E.M. Gross is open for

writings identified Benjamin Brodsky, the owner of China Cinema Company and the Variety Film Exchange, as the organiser of the Asiatic Film Company.[15] However, recent research suggests that Brodsky did not involve himself in film business in China until the 1910s and his business had little connection with the Asiatic Film Company.[16] At this stage, it is safe to say that the Asiatic was in the hand of two American merchants in 1910s Shanghai: Thomas Henry Suffert (萨佛, 1869-1941) and Arthur Julius Israel (依什尔, 1875-1948). Like the mangling of its corporation name, these two names are mistakenly referred to as "Yashell" or "Elsser" and "Lehrmann".[17] The Asiatic Film Company perhaps commenced its business in 1913 and was defunct after 1915.[18]

The contribution of Thomas H. Suffert to the Asiatic and Zhang Shichuan remained in the financial and executive aspects. Thomas Suffert was born in

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study.

[15] Cheng, *China Film Yearbook*, 1927; Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 16; Ledya, *Dianying-Electric Shadows*, 15.

[16] The relations between Benjamin Brodsky and the Asiatic Film Company is still open to study. Firstly, I note that one still picture that Brodsky provided to the *New York Tribune* (G. Kaufman, "Bret Harte Said It: The Heathen Chinese is Peculiar", *New York Tribune*, 27 August 1916) is the same with the picture (appeared as a still picture named *La Ha Naung Middong*) in a report about the Asiatic Film Company in *The Moving Picture World* (Clarke Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 19, 8, 21 February 1914). Secondly, another still picture is labelled as *The Three Thieves* (三贼案) in the report on Brodsky, which is believed to be a production of the Asiatic Film Company. See (Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 73). Thirdly, William H. Lynch, the manager of the Asiatic Film Company, claimed that he was one cinematographer of *A Trip Through China*, a documentary of Brodsky's China Cinema Company (*The Daily Outlook*, 2 December 1916). Fourthly, the office and sales room of Brodsky's China Cinema Company was 2 Hongkong Road, appeared in *1916 North China Desk Hong List*, while the same address appeared as the Asiatic Film Company in *Shanghai Street Directory*, another part of the same publication. See (Shanghai: North China Daily News & Herald, 1916, 47 and 200).

[17] Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen*, 19; Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows*, 15.

[18] Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 62.

Cleveland, Ohio and he moved to Shanghai in 1895 for commercial exploration. The historical record shows that Suffert mainly served as a speculator in Shanghai.[19] In a 1916 passport application record, Suffert is referred to as "the owner and manager of an American registered firm which engaged in the import and export trade with the United States and other countries", the Central Trading Company (坤和) in Shanghai.[20] With respect to the operation of the Asiatic, Suffert seems to stand as the executive of the Asiatic. For instance, a 1913 source shows that Suffert, representing the Asiatic Film Company, applied for permission to show films at the Little Street Theatre (*de la Rue Petit*) in Shanghai.[21] In addition, Suffert attended the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers under the name of the Asiatic Film Company in 1918.[22] As a friend of Zhang Shichuan, Suffert continued to participate in Zhang's late film business, after the collapse of the Asiatic. When Zhang Shichuan was organising the Mutual Stock & Produce Company (大同日夜物权交易所) in 1921, the predecessor company of Mingxing, Suffert served as a consultant.[23] Suffert was also involved in the management of the Mingxing Shadow-play School (明星影戏学校) in 1921. In addition, Mingxing's affiliated cinema, Star theatre, was registered under the name of Suffert in the United States for the sake of avoiding taxation.[24]

[19] "Toeg & Read v. Suffert, 3 September 1907", in Charles Lobingier ed. *Extraterritorial Cases*, 1, Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1920, 112-120.

[20] U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert，*Passport Applications for Travel to China, 1906-1925,* 1916, http://www.ancestry.com (accessed 13 April 2013).

[21] Municipal Administrative Council, *Compte rendu de la gestion pour l'exercice 1913(Account Management of 1913*), Shanghai: Imprimerie Municipale, 1913, 65.

[22] "The Municipal Gazette", *The North-China Herald*, 14 March 1918.

[23] "Datong jiaoyisuo chuangli huiji/Minutes of the Establishment of the Mutual Stock & Produce Company" 大同交易所创立会记, *Shen Bao*, 28 November 1921.

[24] Yoshino Suguwana, "Film Theatres in Shanghai in Republic of China: A Research on the Business Operation of

In comparison with Suffert, Arthur J. Israel appears to have played a lesser role although he was identified as the cameraman of the Asiatic.[25] However, no certain evidence has come to light so far to support this identification. Arthur Israel was born in San Francisco in 1875. In his twenties, Israel became a cigar dealer in California. His passport application records showed that Israel went to China as early as 1902.[26] In his thirty years in Shanghai, Israel mainly focused on the business in the Shanghai Life Insurance Company, a British Company with mostly American capital.[27] During the period from 1913 to 1915, Israel served as a director, the third

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Theatres Showing Chinese Films" 民国期上海の映画館について－国産映画上映館と映画館の経営状況を中心に, *Wild Grass* 野草, 2008, 96.

[25] Cheng, *China Film Yearbook*, 1927; Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 16; Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen,* 431-439. My identification of Arthur Israel as the mysterious *Yishener* in Chinese literature is based on three reasons: 1) Israel's employee record. Israel worked in the Shanghai Life Insurance Company (U.S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel, *Emergency Passport Applications, Argentina thru Venezuela, 1906-1925*,1917, www.ancestry.com), which is supported by a Chinese source (Gongsu 公肃, "Xinju tuibian ji/A Record of New Play's Degradation" 新剧蜕变记, *Xinju zazhi/New Play Magazine* 新剧杂志, 1922, 9); 2) Israel's visa application records. In his records, Israel identified his own Chinese name as *Yisier* (伊思尔) (U.S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel 1918) and *Yishuoer* (伊硕而) (U.S. Consular Registration Certificates of Arthur Israel, *U.S. Consular Registration Certificates, 1907-1918*, General Records of the Department of State, 1763-2002, Record Group 59, The National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C., 1914, www.ancestry.com, accessed 14 April 2013), which are phonetically similar with the word *Yishener* (依什尔) in Chinese; and 3) the close relations between Israel and Suffert. In Suffert's visa application record in 1916, Israel wrote the identification letter and claimed that Israel had known Suffert since 1902 (U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert, *Passport Applications for Travel to China, 1906-1925*,1916, www.ancestry.com, accessed 15 April 2013).

[26] U.S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel, *Emergency Passport Application*, 1917.

[27] The Chinese name of the corporation is *Huayang renshou baoxian gongsi* (华洋人寿保险公司), not *Shanghai Nanyang renshou baoxian gongsi* (上海南洋人寿保险公司) as suggested in the existing literature (Zheng, *A Short History of Modern Chinese Film*, 12; Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 16).

highest position in the company.[28] In addition, Israel was occupied as the director of the Consolidated Rubber Estates Limited, a member of the board of directors of the Laou Kung Mow Cotton Spinning & Weaving Company and an executive committee of the Shanghai Amateur Baseball League.[29] During the period 1913-1915 in which the Asiatic was active, Israel had to spend several months on a business trip to Vancouver and Hong Kong from November 1913 to March 1914.[30] Even if he did operate a camera, Israel could not have had enough time to produce more than a dozen films during this period. It seems that Israel was merely an investor in the Asiatic Film Company, given his abundant experience in finance and investment. The credit of projecting films and the daily operation of the Asiatic should go to other figures.

I believe that an American citizen named William H. Lynch is owed the credit for this enterprise. Apart from English sources, one Chinese source supports my speculation.[31] Prior to becoming involved in the film business, William Lynch had operated a photo studio named the North Beach Studio in Santa Monica, Los Angeles since 1905.[32] His experience in the photo studio facilitated his job in the motion

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In addition, I am unable to find evidence regarding Israel and the Asiatic Film Company attending the Panama Pacific International Exposition as suggested by Zhou Jianyun in "Yingxi zazhi xu/An Introduction to Film Magazine" 影戏杂志序, (*Yingxi zazhi/Film Magazine* 影戏杂志, 1, 2, 25 January 1922; Cheng, *China Film Yearbook*, 1927). Israel stayed in Shanghai at least up to 1922, while Suffert died in Shanghai in 1941.

[28] "Passengers", *The North-China Herald,* 26 October 1922.

[29] "Consolidated Rubber Estates Limited", *The North-China Herald,* 13 December 1913; "Sport, Baseball", *The North-China Herald,* 21 March 1914; "Meeting, Shanghai Life Insurance Co.", *The North-China Herald*, 13 June 1914; "Laou Kung Mow Cotton S. & W. Co.", *The North-China Herald,* 19 February 1915.

[30] "Passengers", *The North-China Herald,* 15 November 1913; "Passengers", *The North-China Herald,* 28 March 1914.

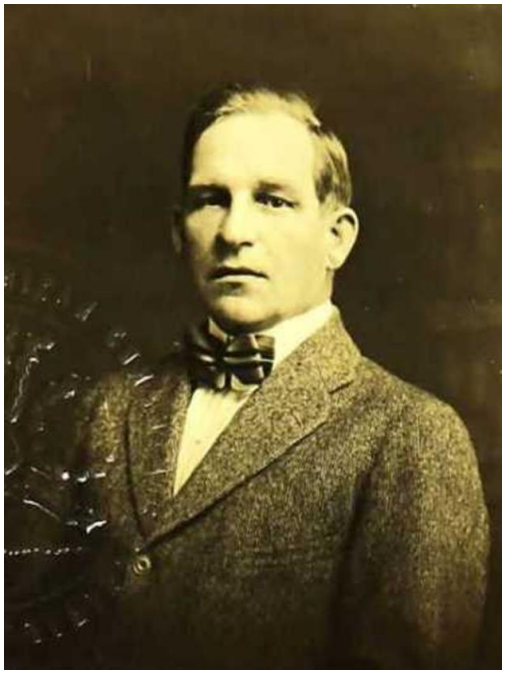
[31] Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 1914; Zhou, "An Introduction to Film Magazine", 1922.

[32] "Advertisement", *The Daily Outlook*, 20 August 1905.

picture industry as a cinematographer. In 1912, Lynch was hired to be a film cameraman by the Globe Motion Picture Company. Lynch, together with Rochefort

Arthur J. Israel

Source: U.S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel 1918, Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and www.ancestry.com



Thomas H. Suffert

Source: U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert 1916, Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and www.ancestry.com

Johns, initiated a three-month trip to Asia to film in locations including China.[33] Probably, this trip generated Lynch's interest in the Orient. Therefore, he agreed to serve as cameraman of the Asiatic Film Company in Shanghai as early as 27 January 1913.[34]

The date when Lynch joined the Asiatic would not be later than March 1913.[35] Since on that date, he wrote back to *The Daily Outlook*, a local newspaper issued in Santa Monica, Los Angeles. Lynch first described his experience in the Asiatic Film Company,

> We have located a moving picture studio and complete plant for making and finishing moving pictures here. We are starting in a new field and pictures made with Chinese actors are to be shown to the Chinese people. It is something that has not been done to this date and from reports we believe it will be a big success. We will also operate in connection with the production of the films, several theatres throughout China for the purpose of creating a greater demand and later on will put our entire time and efforts to the production of film only.[36]

[33] "Start on Trip", *The Daily Outlook,* 5 September 1912. Another report showed that Lynch would "stop first at Honolulu, then to Guam, Manila and the countries of the Orient" ("Moving Pictures of the Fire", *The Daily Outlook*, 5 September 1912). The "countries of the Orient" are very likely to include China. The passenger list shows that William Lynch departed Shanghai to Kobe on 26 October 1912. See "Passengers", *The North-China Herald,* 26 October 1912.

[34] "Women's World", *The Daily Outlook,* 27 January 1913.

[35] I found Lynch's name appeared in the published hotel register of Kalee Hotel, Shanghai from 23 June 1913 to 14 March 1914. See *North China Daily News*.

[36] "Lynch Writes to the *Outlook* from China", *The Daily Outlook,* 9 April 1913.

According to this letter, it is clear that using Chinese actors was a deliberate production and marketing strategy for the Asiatic with the purpose of satisfying its target consumers: Chinese audiences. In addition, the letter demonstrates that even if the Asiatic Film Company was not originally organised by Israel and Suffert, their alleged predecessor, Benjamin Brodsky, might not have produced substantial films as is suggested in the existing literature.[37] To Lynch, a film producing career seemed promising and therefore, he "decided to make [his] permanent home abroad [in China]" in 1913.[38]

A 1914 report of *The Moving Picture World* provided a detailed illustration of the operation of the Asiatic.[39] The report is fairly reliable since the author Clarke Irvine wrote the report based on his meeting with William Lynch in China in 1913.[40] According to this report, William Lynch, the "Shanghai manager of the Asiatic Film Company", was making films for the Asiatic, "which ha[d] many releases each month".[41] In addition,

> The Asiatic Film Company maintains a large studio in Shanghai, where sixteen star actors are daily posing before the camera. These men—no women are allowed to do this kind of work—are the first, and so far,

[37] Some scholars argue that before Israel and Suffert took over the Asiatic, Benjamin Brodsky had produced at least two films. See Cheng, *China Film Yearbook*, 1927; Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 1980.

[38] *The Daily Outlook*, 27 October 1913.

[39] Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 1914.

[40] Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 1914.

[41] Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 1914.

> the only Chinese to act before the camera. There are two directors and two interpreters who work under the supervision of Mr. Lynch. These stars are supported by a well-organized company of twenty-five actors. The laboratory and finishing plant is equipped to turn out 10,000 feet of finished film a day. The supply is for the entire country, and the releases are made just as in America and Europe. There are a number of theaters in Shanghai, two of which are operated by this company.[42]

The above passage clearly shows the significance of William Lynch to the Asiatic Film Company and by extension to the Chinese film industry in its initial stages. According to this passage, Lynch was in charge of not only projecting films, but also supervising all productions of the Asiatic Film Company. It was the most prominent position in the Asiatic, given none of the other staff, foreigners or Chinese, had professional knowledge of how to produce motion pictures. Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu were arguably the two directors under the supervision of William Lynch. With respect to the division of labour in the Asiatic Film Company, Zhang Shichuan claimed that he was responsible for supervising camera movement while Zheng was in charge of guiding the actors' performance.[43] However, in the early 1910s, the perception and practice of director was not well developed within the Chinese film industry. In addition, the very first productions of Chinese films were close to a documentary genre. There were few jobs left for the directors once actors started to perform.[44]

[42] Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays", 1914.

[43] Zhang, "Since My Director Career Commenced", 11.

[44] Law Kar 罗卡, "Jiekai xianggang dianying qiyuan de mituan/The Doubts and Suspicions of Hong Kong Movies' Origin" 解开香港电影起源的疑团, *Dangdai dianying/Contemporary Cinema* 当代电影, 2010, 81.

William Lynch returned to the United States in June 1914. His initial plan was to return to China as long as "the revolution in China subside[d] enough for operations to continue".[45] However, why Lynch did not manage to travel back to China remains unclear. Lynch's departure was one major reason why the Asiatic went into decline, apart from the shortage of film stock due to the outbreak of the World War I.

Apart from the presence of Lynch, the Asiatic Film Company deserves notice because it is one of the first Chinese film concerns which distributed films into overseas markets. In September 1913, Arthur R. Oberle, representing the Asiatic Film Company, passed by Honolulu when travelling back to the United States. Oberle stated that he secured "many thousand feet of pictures depicting actual scenes in the series of battles" in China.[46] Arguably, this is the documentary titled *Shanghai Battles* (淞沪会战, 1913) referred to in the Chinese records.[47] Unfortunately, I am unable to identify any exhibition information in the United States regarding the documentary. Nevertheless, the Asiatic Film Company successfully circulated its productions to Southeast Asia. A preview commercial showed that *Khoojin Whatchay/A Poor Man Won a Lottery* (苦力人发财, 1913), a production of the Asiatic, was exhibited at the Empire Theatre in Singapore in 1917.[48] Arguably, it was the first time that Chinese domestic films were shown in Southeast Asia, the largest Chinese diasporic

[45] "Home from Orient", *The Daily Outlook*, 29 June 1914; Irvine, "Doings at Los Angeles", *The Moving Picture World*, 21, 10, 7 September 1914. Lynch quit from the film industry after returning to the United States and became an agent in a real estate company (see "10 Lots Sold in Topanga Canyon", *The Daily Outlook*, 19 July 1915) and later a farmer. It seems that Lynch had no descendant.

[46] *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 15 September 1913.

[47] Huang, *A Textual Survey of Early Chinese Film History*, 56.

[48] "Advertisement", *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 11 July 1917.

community. Chinese film corporations followed the pathway of the Asiatic and turned Southeast Asia into the largest overseas market for Chinese films in the first half of the twentieth century.

The contribution of the American intermediaries in many cases is not appreciated but attacked by Chinese literature fuelled by nationalism. For instance, foreign figures in the Asiatic Film Company are described as imperialists who conducted economic and cultural aggression in China.[49] If we put the validity of the denouncement aside, the contribution of the foreign figures in the Asiatic such as Lynch is way larger than its potential threat to the Chinese film industry. As a matter of fact, the Asiatic can be seen as crucial to the emergence of the Chinese film industry. In addition, the productions of the Asiatic Film Company, as the first trials of the cooperation between foreign practitioners and China, stimulated China's interests in producing films.[50] Therefore, it is not exaggerated to say that William Lynch was a "torchbearer" for Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, the Fathers of Chinese Cinema, providing them with crucial film knowledge. It is also possible that Lynch enlightened and fostered the interests of Zhang and Zheng within film industry. As a result, Zhang and Zheng organised Mingxing in 1922 and this contributed to the upsurge of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s.

William Lynch and his Asiatic Film Company are merely one example of numerous American practitioners who were active in modern China. Several corporations with American capital background strived to produce films with Chinese casts and foreign directors. A case in point is the Red Seal Film Company, subsidiary of the British American Tobacco Corporation in China, an American-British cigarette

[49] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 17.

[50] Law, "The Doubts and Suspicions of Hong Kong Movies' Origin", 84.

multinational. In 1924, the British American Tobacco Corporation established a film unit and commenced its film production business. Later, the film unit transferred into the Red Seal Film Company. The director of the motion picture department was William H. Jansen, a British citizen with a background as a Hollywood cinematographer.[51] Despite the derogatory attitudes of Chinese historians towards this corporation, the film department produced several high-quality feature films. A notable one is *The Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate* (柳碟缘, dir. William H. Jansen, 1926). This film is believed to be not only the first Chinese film screened in Europe but also the only Chinese film shown in the United States from 1927 to 1933.[52] The transnational cooperation in producing and distributing *The Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate* deserves special notice. As a production of a transnational corporation, the *Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate* was directed by William Jansen, a British director, with a full cast of Chinese actors. In addition, the film was distributed abroad by Gaumont, a French corporation, together with its British corporation. Such transnational cooperation was inherited by the Chinese film industry since the twenty-first century.[53]

In addition to enlightening Chinese directors, American practitioners facilitated the Chinese film industry by systematically introducing performance practice. Naomi Bailey (贝兰, a.k.a. Naomi Booth) is such an example. She was responsible for systematically introducing the Western-style performance practice into the Chinese film industry in the 1920s. Bailey was "a member of the Theatre Guild of

[51] William Jansen, "Eight Years Pioneering in China", *American Cinematographer*, XI, 10, 1931, 11.

[52] "The Week on the Screen", *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 September 1927; "The Far East on the American Screen", *Memorandum*, 2, 6, 31 March 1933, 3.

[53] Wei-ching Wang, "A Critical Interrogation of Cultural Globalisation and Hybridity", *Journal of International Communication*, 2008, 46-64.

New York City, [and] she had done considerable work on the legitimate stage before taking up cinema work".[54] A source shows that Miss Bailey may have served as an un-credited actress in one of Charles Chaplin's comedies titled *A Day's Pleasure* (dir. Charles Chaplin, 1919).[55] Bailey went to China in 1923 and opened an acting school named the American-Oriental School of Acting at 16 Jiujiang Road, Shanghai.[56] Apart from facial expressions, the school provided a range of acting courses including "dramatic art, Shakespeare readings, and aesthetic dancing or the like".[57] Cheng Jihua labelled Bailey's school a "*foreign school of acting"* (洋派), in a derogatory sense.[58] However, this label correctly identified the characteristics of Bailey's teaching style. The courses Bailey presented apparently belonged to a Western-style education system, which is quite different from China's traditional performance system such as that of Peking Opera. In addition, one needs to bear in mind that most performers in the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and even the 1930s had little background of systematic education. Therefore, the graduates were warmly welcomed by studios in Shanghai. A number of prominent performers in Shanghai's studios including Mary Lee 李曼丽, Li Minghui, Zhu Fei 朱飞 and Chen Xiangxia 陈祥霞 had graduated from Bailey's school. Mary Lee later served as the protagonist in *The Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate*. Zhu Fei joined Mingxing and was the protagonist of *Reconciliation* (空谷兰, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1925), the bestseller of silent films in China. Prior to her death, Bailey had cooperated with the Red Seal Company and prepared to release her own picture. Bailey would probably have more profound

[54] Obituary, *The North China Herald*, 6 February 1926.

[55] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0010057/fullcredits#cast (accessed 5 June 2013)

[56] Elizabeth Pepys, "Future Chinese Cinema Stars", *The North China Herald*, 23 August 1924.

[57] Pepys, "Future Chinese Cinemas Stars", 23 August 1924.

[58] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 124.

influence had she not died in Shanghai in February 1926.

Naomi Bailey

Source: U.S. Passport Application of Naomi Bailey 1923, Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and www.ancestry.com

The contribution of the foreign intermediaries in many cases is not appreciated by Chinese literature that is fuelled by nationalism. For understandable reasons, foreign residents maintained a low profile in terms of the issues of nationalism. One of the reasons is that foreign citizens had little sentimental attachment to the Chinese nation. The foreigners in Shanghai labelled themselves as “Shanghailander”, a word with at least two meanings. Firstly, the attachment of foreign residents in China was to Shanghai rather than China as a nation. Secondly, Shanghai was no more than a living place in the perceptions of foreign residents. However, this does not mean that foreign intermediaries were free from the nationalistic sentiments. In most cases, the foreign intermediary was the target of nationalism. On 30 May 1925, a British police officer fired on ten workers during a protest against foreign capitalists in Shanghai. The May

Thirtieth Movement invoked serious boycotts towards foreign goods as well as protests against foreign corporations in China. The British American Tobacco Company was one of the major targets due to its large business in China and its bad record in terms of strikes. As a result, William Jansen and his film unit subsidised by the British American Tobacco Company was forced to suspend operations until late 1925.[59] In addition, "the business of all movie theatres owned by foreigners was no longer brisk but quite slack after the May 30th Massacre".[60] The standard historical literature criticized imperialist corporations like the British American Tobacco Company who "intended to use film as a tool servicing for their economic and cultural invasion".[61] Their "conspiracy" it was argued was not successful due to strong opposition from the Chinese patriots "in the tide of revolution".[62]

To sum up, regardless their intention in China, foreign film intermediaries benefited the making of the Chinese film industry. It was American cinematographers who firstly introduced motion pictures into China. Their exhibition business provided a strong basis for furthering the domestic film industry. Their film production in China demonstrated the operation of a mature studio group to their Chinese counterparts. In addition, the foreign intermediaries contributed to the Chinese film industry by enlightening and educating local film talents. With respect to the evaluation of the foreign intermediaries, Zheng Junli is balanced when he admits that the domestic film industry benefited from learning from the American intermediaries, despite their

[59] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 126.

[60] Zhou Jianyun, "Wusa canan hou zhi zhongguo yingxi jie/Chinese Shadow Play Circles After May 30th Massacre" 五卅惨案后之中国影戏界, *Mingxing tekan/Special Issue of Star Studio* 明星特刊, 3, 1926. Quotes from Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 63.

[61] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 121.

[62] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 126.

intention of "colonial aggression".[63]

5.3 Chinese Merchants Straddling the Divide between Hollywood and China

Returning to Zhang Shichuan, apart from his early experience with the Asiatic, Zhang continuously updated his skills as a director through watching Hollywood films.[64] A large number of these Hollywood films were distributed by Chinese independent distributors, who constitute the second type of intermediary between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. In this section, I examine this type of intermediary and their contributions to the domestic film industry, with a focus on Lu Gen.

Chinese independent distributors stood as a prominent force in distributing Hollywood films in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1910s, American films were mainly circulated into China through British and French film exchange corporations. The outbreak of World War I resulted in the upsurge of requests for American films due to the fall in availability of French films. In 1921, Universal studio set up its subsidiary organisation in Shanghai in charge of China's distribution business. Fox, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer followed step and opened their subsidiary distributing organisations in the 1930s. Nevertheless, major forces (fourteen out of eighteen distribution corporations in 1932) were direct representatives and independent distributors.[65] Alexander Krisel and the Peacock Motion Picture Corporation, a Sino-American corporation registered in the United States, were two

[63] Zheng, *A Short History of Modern Chinese Film*, 18.

[64] He Xiujun 何秀君, "Zhang shichuan yu mingxing yingpian gongsi/Zhang Shichuan and Star Motion Picture Co." 张石川与明星影片公司, *Wenshi ziliao xuanji/ Special Edition of Literary & Historical Materials* 文史资料选辑, 69, 1980, 212.

[65] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 156-157.

direct representatives of United Artists and Radio-Keith-Orpheum respectively in 1932. Independent distributors were granted film screening rights in China from their American counterparts. A case in point is Lu Gen. Born in Canton in 1888, Lu became involved in the distribution business by establishing the first distribution agent, Hongkong Amusements Ltd, in 1921. In its heyday, Hongkong Amusements monopolized the distribution of Hollywood films in China in 1922-1923.[66] Even in the 1930s when the key Hollywood studios operated through direct representatives or distribution agents in China, Hongkong Amusements Ltd maintained its large business with American studios including United Artists.[67]

Alexander Krisel

Source: U.S. Passport Applications of Alexander Krisel, 1919, Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and www.ancestry.com

[66] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 121.

[67] "General Ledgers and Producers Account", *Series 5C: Foreign General Ledgers and Journals*, Reel 3, China, United Artists Corporation Archive, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

In addition to Hongkong Amusements, Lu became as a film magnate since he operated and owned several large film firms involving equipment, distribution and exhibition business. These firms included China Theatre Ltd, Yangtze Amusements Ltd, Eastern Amusements Ltd, Cathay Amusements Ltd, Puma Films Ltd, The Theatre Equipment Company Ltd and North China Amusements Ltd.[68] Film exhibition was one of his key businesses. In the 1930s, Lu Gen directed and controlled "more than 30 of the leading cinema-theatres in China and Hong Kong, of several of which he [was] the owner".[69] One of the most significant events in Lu's legendary life in the film world is that he rebuilt the Grand Theatre in Shanghai in 1933 and updated it into a superior-first-run cinema in Far East. In 1932, Lu set up the United Theatres Corporation and registered it in the United States with 5,000,000 Mexican dollars. It was probably the largest film business in China in the first half of the twentieth century in term of registered capital. The United Theatres Corporation was designed to be a vertically integrated film enterprise including production, distribution and exhibition. One intention of the company was to organise a theatre chain that could monopolize the exhibition of Hollywood films in Shanghai. In its heyday, the member theatres of United Theatres encompassed nine theatres including Grand, Cathay, Carlton, Isis, Paris, Crystal Palace, Ritz, Ward and Pearl.[70]

As the intermediaries, the domestic film distributors such as Lu Gen benefited Hollywood's expansion in unfamiliar markets like China. To Hollywood executives,

[68] SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank*, Q275-1-2041.

[69] SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank*, Q275-1-2041.

[70] SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank*, Q275-1-2041.

the political, economic and cultural situation in China was quite different from that in the United States. The domestic distributors could help to smooth the business of Hollywood in China. For instance, Isis theatres served as second-run theatres for the United Artists in Shanghai. According to a resource in 1927, "the theatre [was] located in Chinese territory and suffered very much from the strict Chinese martial law regulations".[71] Under the management of Lu Gen, Isis changed its entrance to open into the International Settlements territory. Therefore, it successfully bypassed the Chinese military troubles. In addition, Lu's expansion into the interior cities benefited the exhibition of United Artists. In 1928, Lu contemplated opening cinemas in interior cities including Ningbo, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Yantai, Jinan, and Wuxi. Lu's plan brought opportunity for the expansion of United Artists' film business. The United Artists report for 1928 noted that "we [had] been able to negotiate for a number of our old pictures to play at these interior cities".[72]

One prominent feature of the foreign film distributors was the position they straddled between America and China. Although the entire business of the distributors focused on the Chinese film market, most of the corporations owned and operated by the distributors were registered in the United States. There were several advantages in being an American corporation, one I want to stress. As an American corporation, Lu's company could seek support from the American authorities when conflicts took place. The American government is known for protecting its citizens and their economic interests in China. An instance is the issue of the opening of a theatre in Changsha, an inner city of China. In 1923, Joseph Y. Tsau, an American citizen who opened the Lyceum theatre within the walls of the city in Changsha, filed a complaint

[71] Zhang, *From Hollywood to Shanghai*, 48.

[72] "General Report for Two Months Ending 20 June 1928", *Series 2A: O'Brien Legal File, 1919-1951*, Folder 95, Box 4, United Artists Corporation Archive, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

to American consuls against Chinese government. The Chinese authorities requested Tsau to remove the theatre outside the walls, since the inner city was not regarded as commercial port, which would have jeopardised his business. With the help of the American vice consul and the Changsha Foreign Office, Tsau finally obtained permission to continue operating his theatre within the city walls.[73]

The nationalistic writings are hostile to foreign film distributors like Lu Gen. Radical nationalists labelled Lu as a "traitor" or "imperialist" who invaded or betrayed China's economic rights to foreign imperialists. For instance, Cheng Jihua and his colleagues equate Lu's United Theatre Company with American imperialism and treat its appearance as "a further development of American intention to aggress against the Chinese film industry", because it was registered in the United States.[74] However, it is necessary to point out that such attacks on Sino-American companies were highly selective. As I mentioned previously, the Peacock Motion Pictures Company and one affiliated theatre of Mingxing were all registered in the United States, and as such they were free from nationalist attacks. Recent historians who subscribe to national cinema approach such as Hu Jubin however choose to be silent about Lu's company. Due to the distribution of films from Hollywood, an economic rival of the national industry, Lu's company, from Hu's point of view, may be thought of as not benefiting the development of the national film industry, even if it did not hinder it.

The question here is the extent to which the distribution of Hollywood films threatened the development of the domestic film industry. The expansion of

[73] "Motion Picture Theatre Permitted Within the Walls of Changsha", Letter from C.D. Meinhardt to American Consulate, 30 January 1923, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929*, Washington: National Archives and Records Service.

[74] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 88.

Hollywood and the development of the Chinese film industry are not necessarily thought to be mutually exclusive. In a rapid growth market such as China in the 1920s, the output of the Chinese film industry and Hollywood could increase simultaneously alongside each other. Even if there may be some truth to the threat of Hollywood, the other side of the coin should not be neglected. In some cases, the competition from Hollywood became an inspiration for the Chinese film industry. Additionally, Hollywood films circulated by Chinese distributors provided one of few channels for Chinese practitioners to learn from Hollywood. In the first half of twentieth century, American films remained a vital resource for China to imitate in terms of camera movement, direction, performance, and industrial systems. Hollywood brought to China film equipment and production techniques during the period of China's transition to talkies. If nationalists intended to admit the positive contribution of Hollywood films to China, the function of Chinese distributors as intermediaries introducing Hollywood films into China should not be neglected.

In addition, nationalistic writings subscribing to national cinema approach and excluding foreign film distributors from national historiography ignore the multi-identifications these distributors. In many cases, distributing Hollywood films was merely one part of the multi-business enterprise operated by these intermediaries. The intermediaries usually participated in other sectors of the film industry, and therefore blurred the boundary between national capitalists and intermediaries. Taking Lu Gen for instance, apart from distributing and exhibiting Hollywood films, Lu was responsible for distributing domestic films in Hong Kong. In the 1920s, Lu's Hongkong Amusements scored in circulating *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple* (火烧红莲寺, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1928) in Hong Kong.[75] In addition, Lu was one of

[75] Yu Muyun 余慕云, *Xianggang dianying shihua/Story of Hong Kong Cinema* 香港电影史话, Hong Kong: Sub-

prominent shareholders of Lianhua, a prominent force in China's national film industry in the 1930s.[76]

Sometimes, the intermediaries would compete directly with Hollywood counterparts through involvement in domestic film productions. By virtue of abundant capital, they turned out to be the most effective rival to foreign merchants in China's commerce. At the moment of China's sound conversion, Lu's United Theatres had 'a definite project of establishing a modern sound studio and leasing it to Chinese producing companies.[77] An advertisement for the United Theatres mentioned that Lu had already purchased modern sound equipment in advance and invited an expert from the Radio Corporation of America to supervise the erection of the studios and the installation of the equipment.[78] If the plan were to eventuate, through leasing the studios to Chinese film makers, United Theatres would not only "obtain a handsome return on its capital", but also "obtain a first refusal on all pictures produced at the studios".[79] To the Chinese film industry in general, the number of China's sound pictures would rise from fifteen per annum to at least 40. As analysts for the American consuls pointed out, such substantial increase in the number of Chinese talkies would "curtail the demand for foreign pictures".[80] Unfortunately, Lu's plan was aborted partly due to the attack of the nationalists. However, Lu did not terminate his

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Culture Press, 1996, 102.

[76] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[77] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 49.

[78] SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank*, Q275-1-2041.

[79] SMA, *The Theatre Houses Industries, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial& Saving Bank*, Q275-1-2041.

[80] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 49.

investment in film production. In 1933, employing the sound equipment purchased for the United Theatres, Lu's released a box-office hit *The Fool Pays Respect* (呆佬拜寿, dir. Hou Yao, 1933) and in 1935, Lu finally erected a sound studio in Hong Kong.[81]

In summary, the distributors responsible for circulating Hollywood films in China are the second group of intermediaries. They were responsible for introducing Hollywood films to Chinese audiences. These intermediaries were labelled by nationalists as "traitors" since their talents facilitated the expansion of Hollywood in China. Apart from the possible flaw in logic, such a notion neglects other prominent contributions of the intermediaries to the development of the domestic film industry. Here, what I want to stress is that distributing merchants like Lu Gen may benefit the expansion of Hollywood's business in China, serving as so-called 'traitor' in a way, as suggested by the nationalistic writings. However, one should not ignore the multi-function role these intermediaries played in the relationship between Hollywood and China.

5.4 The Film Practitioners Who Studied Abroad

The last group of intermediaries is Chinese students who had American study backgrounds. In the history of modern China, a number of Chinese students came to the United States to receive education. Some of them returned to China and were employed in the film industry. They introduced advanced film theory and modern industrial experience into the nascent domestic film industry. This section employs Hong Shen as a case to explore the significance of these intermediaries. Unlike the first two groups of intermediary, many of them in the last group were regarded as patriots in the historical literature considering their contributions to the domestic film

[81] Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 121.

industry. Nevertheless, the nationalistic sentiments of this group of intermediaries are ambivalent due to their study abroad experiences.

Hong Shen is one of the most significant intermediaries with an American study background in Chinese film history. Hong Shen was born in 1896. He attended Tsinghua University in 1912, one of the best universities in China. Hong went to the United States in 1916 and joined Ohio State University in order to study engineering. Three years later, Hong transferred to Harvard and majored in drama. Under the supervision of George P. Baker, Hong received a systematic training in drama studies including theory, performance, and direction. Hong went back to China in 1922 and soon became notable in Chinese dramatic circles. In 1924, Hong was invited to join Mingxing and commenced his career as a film director. During his decade-long service in Mingxing, Hong directed at least six films.

Hong Shen marked himself as an intermediary between Hollywood and Chinese films through introducing American film knowledge into China. Whilst Hong did not attend film classes at Harvard, his drama knowledge benefited his career in motion pictures. As the first professional scriptwriter in China, Hong wrote and translated two books on script writing: *The Twenty-eight Questions in Film Script Writing* (1933) and *The Method of Film Script Writing* (1935). In addition, Hong addressed film performance and published a book entitled *Technique of Performance in Film and Drama* (1934). In 1935, he completed a dictionary of film glossary. In this dictionary, Hong confessed that his knowledge about film techniques came from several books in English including *Motion Picture Work* (David Hulfish, 1913), *Motion Picture Handbook* (F. H. Richardson, 1913) and *Practical Cinematography* (F. A. Talbot, 1913). The dictionary had a profound influence as the first professional dictionary on film studies in China. A prominent director in the 1930s recalled that

Hong's dictionary provided a compass for self-educated film enthusiasts like himself.[82]

Another contribution of Hong as intermediary lay in the process of China's conversion to sound. In 1931, Hong Shen, as a business representative, was responsible for obtaining sound machines and colour cameras for Mingxing. In the tide of producing sound machines, Mingxing was a primary pioneering explorer. However, the quality of sound-on-disc technology obstructed the pace of sound films. In order to maintain its edge in technology, Mingxing dispatched Hong Shen to the United States to purchase sound machines and colour cameras. The reason why Hong was chosen as representative is partly due to the trust placed by Zhang Shichuan, the executive of Mingxing, and partly due to Hong's bilingual advantage and familiarity with foreign business, arguably the shared advantages by the intermediary with an American education background. Hong spent around 190,000 yuan in order to secure the machines.[83] The machines Hong purchased had significance in the history of China's conversion to sound. As Chapter Two suggests, these machines directly contributed to Mingxing's talkie productions. By virtue of the equipment, Mingxing produced sound films including *Two Sisters* and the equipment also provided an object for imitation. Chinese engineers then could manufacture their own sound machines in the 1930s. In addition, the American experts educated China's own recording technicians. However, for Hong Shen himself, the result of the trip for purchasing machines was not positive. It was true that Hong had a bilingual advantage than other practitioners, but Hong Shen had no professional background in film

[82] Cheng Bugao 程步高, *Yingtan yijiu/Memories of Early Chinese Film Circle* 影坛忆旧, Beijing: China Film Press, 1983.

[83] SMA, *Correspondences between the Shanghai Jiaotong Bank and the Star Motion Picture Corporations on Loan Issues*, Q55-2-1371.

technology. Therefore, it is understandable that the film machines Hong obtained were not as satisfactory as expected, despite spending considerable amount of money on them. It proved to be a gigantic mistake to purchase the Multicolor colour machine. It cost around 50,000 yuan for Mingxing, and worse, this colour outcome was far from satisfactory. Mingxing was forced to abandon this colour machine after one trial on *Life's Comedy* (啼笑姻緣, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1932).[84] Mingxing studio incurred a sizeable deficit due to purchasing American film equipment. In 1931, the profit of Mingxing was 19,986 yuan, while the financial report showed the company had a loss of 65,607.39 yuan after paying for the machines in 1933.[85]

In the standard historical writings, Hong was described as a patriot. Hong was caught public attention by his demonstration in the *Welcome Danger* Incident. *Welcome Danger* (dir. Clyde Bruckman, 1929) was Harold Lloyd's first talking picture. As a famous comedy artist, Lloyd already enjoyed enormous popularity in the Chinese market at the time. *Welcome Danger* was premiered at the Grand Theatre on 22 February 1930. Hong Shen came to watch this film. He was shocked by the portrayal of Chinese people in the film and took the stage and addressed a speech to call for Chinese audiences not to watch this film. Hong's speech was echoed by other young Chinese audiences and hundreds of people asked for ticket refunds. A conflict occurred between Hong Shen and the theatre manager. Hong was then detained by the Settlement police later, as a ringleader. He was released with no charge three hours later.[86]

[84] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

[85] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[86] Michael Wall, *Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures Prior to 1949*, Doctoral Thesis, Washington: Georgetown University, 2000, 178.

In his public letter to the Shanghai Nationalist Party Committee published several days later, Hong explained his nationalistic sentiments at the portrayal of Chinese people in *Welcome Danger*. In Hong's words, the life in Chinatown portrayed in *Welcome Danger* such as opium smuggling "threatened to instil or reinforce a detrimental notion of the Chinese people that was…inaccurate".[87] The film, in Hong's opinion, "resorted to every conceivable means to slander Chinese people by describing Chinese people in the US as kidnappers and thieves".[88] Hong declared, "Such stereotypes would seduce Chinese people without abroad experience to believe that the description of Chinese in *Welcome Danger* was true. More badly, the position of China as a country and the future of China as a nation would be effected".[89] However, the American side could not understand Hong's "overreaction". In his letter to Harold Lloyd's corporation representative, C. J. North claimed, "The whole affair seems somewhat of a 'Tempest in a Teapot,' but there is no telling to what lengths sensitive nationalism is likely to go".[90] North apparently thought Hong overreacted. However, from the perspective of diplomacy, North was forced to deal with the incident with caution, in particular the nationalistic sentiment was politicised by the Nationalist government. The *Welcome Danger* Incident ended with Lloyd's apology to the Chinese people and the withdrawal of *Welcome Danger* nationwide.

It would be difficult for North to link Hong's sensitive nationalism with his six-year experience in the United States. In his autobiography, Hong claimed that the

[87] Wall, *Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures*, 184.

[88] Wall, *Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures*, 184.

[89] *Shen Bao*, 14 March 1930.

[90] C. J. North to C. A. Neeper, 16 April 1930. Quotes from Wall, *Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures*, 210-211.

discrimination in the U.S. was one of top three "unforgettable memories" in his life.[91] Hong recalled the nationalistic speech of the President of Tsinghua University which had impressed him before he went to the United States. The President asked students who would study abroad to realise that the images of Chinese students represent the image of China and Chinese nation. Bearing this in mind, Hong strived to be cautious in almost every aspect and earned respect and praise during his period of American study. However, Hong stated, he still perceived the deepest discrimination from the American people towards Chinese.[92] As Hong declared in the *Welcome Danger* Incident, he witnessed "the overseas Chinese worked hard trying to make a living under hardship" and they strived to "maintain the dignity of the Chinese race".[93] However, a film like *Welcome Danger* still maintained the stereotype of the Chinese people as kidnappers, killers, and opium smokers. Compared with ordinary Chinese citizens, the American-trained students had more experiences about discrimination in American society. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand their anger when they watched such films at the cinema.

Hong Shen was not alone, as a matter of fact, few intermediaries with study abroad experience were immune to nationalism. Cheng Shuren 程树仁, the associate manager of the Peacock Motion Pictures Corporation and a graduate from Columbia University, shared nationalistic sentiments with Hong. When he was studying in the United States, Cheng had been actively involved in opposing the racism against Chinese people. In his letter to the *New York Times*, Cheng complained about the car tours of Chinatown which simply pandered to instincts of curiosity. In Cheng's view,

[91] Hong Shen, *Hong Shen wen ji/The Selected Works of Hong Shen* 洪深文集, Beijing: China Theatre Press, 1959, 530.

[92] Hong, *The Selected Works of Hong Shen*, 530.

[93] Wall, *Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures*, 184.

such services represented a humiliation to the Chinese people, treating Chinatown as a mysterious and extra-territorial location. Cheng called for the erasure of race discrimination by stating, "All those things that American people think undesirable and bad, Chinese people think just the same. All human beings are after all alike, no matter whether they are Americans or Chinese, and no matter whether they are white or yellow".[94] Cheng also strived to change the derogatory attitudes to China in some American films. He attended a protest in 1922 against one Hollywood film which was regarded as insulting China.[95] Cheng also launched a campaign to expel a Chinese citizen from Chinatown who performed in a film derogatory to China.[96]

Nevertheless, to intermediaries such as Hong and Cheng, the different experiences they encountered on returning from the United States resulted in their distinctive nationalism. Both Hong Shen and Cheng Shuren were engaged in the film industry after returning to China. Hong served as scriptwriter and director of Mingxing while Cheng became the associate manager of the Peacock Motion Picture Corporations, a Sino-American film enterprise. Cheng appeared to maintain his plain nationalism. With intention of promoting Chinese traditional culture, Cheng adapted *The Dream of the Red Chamber* into a film in 1927, a famous novel in Chinese literature. By contrast, Hong's nationalistic sentiments were enhanced after his encounter with Marxism. In the early 1930s, Hong joined the League of the Left-Wing Writers, a radical Marist organisation in China. In view of Hong, Sino-American corporations like Lu Gen's United Theatres Corporation were imperialist and then became a target for a boycott. In his strong and influential comment to the United Theatres, Hong predicted that the Chinese domestic industry would be

[94] Benjamin S. J. Cheng, "$1 Down to See Chinatown", *New York Times*, 1 October 1922.

[95] *Shen Bao*, 10 March 1923.

[96] *Shen Bao*, 19 April 1923.

diminished to the point of death, if no one restricted the expansion of film corporations like United Theatres in China. At that time, "we [Chinese film practitioners] will have turned the sword upon ourselves and this vital weapon [film] will be in someone else's hands. Every theatre will be a place to raise slaves, where you submissively accept their domination and oppression".[97]

However, the nationalistic sentiments of Hong Shen are far from the naively xenophobic and simple as suggested by historical writings. A significant character of Chinese nationalists is their attitude towards Western culture and technology. Chinese nationalists realised that learning from the West was necessary to make China thriving and powerful. Such attitudes resulted in the trust of Western technology in the eyes of nationalists. The attitudes of intermediaries with American study backgrounds would thus be stronger since they were closer to Western civilisation than ordinary Chinese citizens. With respect to the case of Hong Shen, as a practitioner of nationalism, Hong shared the popular nationalistic sentiments towards West. One can find the attitudes of Hong Shen towards Western technology through Hong's agreement to act as a representative in purchasing American sound equipment. In Hong's words, "It is not an intolerable affair to purchase American equipment and invite American experts [to China]". The bottom line of such introduction, in Hong's view, was that "we do not surrender our initiative and invite the foreigner's dominance".[98]

Yet, the intermediary's trust of Western technology crossed line and became blind in some cases. As mentioned above, nationalists in modern China reached an agreement that China must learn from the West. Consequently, trust of Western

[97] Cambon, *The Dream Place of Shanghai*, 86; Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 188-189.

[98] Cheng Jihua, "Hong shen yu zhongguo dianying/Hong Shen and Chinese Cinema" 洪深与中国电影, *Contemporary Cinema*, 3, 1995, 30.

products pervaded among China's political and cultural elites. Hong was no exception and his blind confidence resulted in his disdain for domestic products in some cases. When Chinese engineer Yan Heming invented a sound machine and lobbied Mingxing studio to install it, Hong Shen objected to Yan's lobby. He stated, "The film sound machine [was] a great invention in science but Yan [was] just a young man without study abroad experience, how could he invent sound machine by himself without any object of imitation?"[99] As a result of Hong's objection, Mingxing declined to purchase Yan's machine. As a matter of fact, Hong Shen is not alone in his contempt for domestic products. Film moguls including Zhang Shichuan and Luo Mingyou also shared the same of distrust of domestic products. Along with Hong Shen, Luo Mingyou would rather produce silent films than install domestic sound machines.[100] Of course, it is probably true that domestic products did not have competitive advantages in quality compared with foreign products. However, the disdain for domestic products among these film practitioners may serve as a reason why little progress had been achieved in domestic film technology in general.

To sum up, Chinese practitioners with American education backgrounds served as prominent intermediaries between Hollywood and China in the 1920s and 1930s. In comparison with other practitioners in film circles, the intermediaries who graduated from the United States were more familiar with the American film industry. As middlemen between Hollywood and China, they introduced modern film theory and film technology into China. They were described as patriots in Chinese history literature. However, their nationalistic sentiment was controversial and ambivalent to

[99] "Hong shen yu yan heming xinzhao buxuan/A Tacit Understanding Between Hong Shen and Yan Heming" 洪深与颜鹤鸣心照不宣, *Movietone*, 4, 25, 1935.

[100] Minzhi 敏之, "Lianhua jiang she yousheng pian/Lianhua Will Make Talkies" 联华将摄有声片, *Movietone*, 3, 29, 1934.

some extent. Their study abroad experiences on one hand enhanced their sensitivity to negative portrayals to Chinese in foreign films, while it contributed to their blind confidence in foreign technology and their contemptuousness of domestic products on the other.

5.5 Conclusion

When one discusses China's response to Hollywood, the implied discourse is that China had already built relations with Hollywood. However, "building relations" is not an abstract notion. Figures and enterprises are necessary to connect the relations between Hollywood and China. As this chapter has shown, these figures standing between Hollywood and China, or intermediaries, bridged the communication between Hollywood and Chinese cinema.

The study of the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry is linked with a recent trend of "rewriting Chinese film history" in Chinese film studies. Matthew Johnson and Paul Pickowicz address this as follows, "Chinese film studies are entering a new period of rapid renewal" through "emphasis on evidentiary methods and primary research".[101] Among the histories that need to be "rewritten", is the one of the shared ideology of nationalism. As this chapter demonstrated, nationalism is merely one facet of modern Chinese history. I have no intention of denying the fact that nationalism and nation-state building played a significant role in twentieth century China. Yet the complexity of history risks simplification in the shadow of nationalism. The figure of the intermediary between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the first half of the twentieth century is a case in point. In general, the intermediary in the early twentieth century bridged

[101] Matthew Johnson and Paul Pickowicz, "Exhibiting Chinese cinemas, reconstructing reception", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 3, 2, 2009, 105.

relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry and the making and development of the domestic film industry would have greatly slowed down without the contributions of these intermediaries. Therefore, their contributions should not be buried in the dust of historical literature overshadowed by the light of nationalism.

Chapter 6: Growth through Competition: The Outcome of China's Response to Hollywood in the 1930s

This chapter looks at the outcome of China's industrial response to Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s by examining the box office performance of the Chinese film industry in the shadow of Hollywood. Hollywood's recent domination of the mainland Chinese film market has generated much concern and scholarship. However, this is not something new. Except for the period when its products were largely banned by the government (1950s-1980s), Hollywood's dominance over the local market can be traced back to the early twentieth century when the number of imported motion pictures from Hollywood was far greater than that of domestic films. While much attention has been given to exploring this phenomenon, such critical narrative somewhat overlooks some other industrial dimensions such as box office records. Through using primary data from studio achieves and theatre records, this study aims to demonstrate that Hollywood's dominance was not monolithic and that the Chinese domestic film industry outranked Hollywood in certain perspectives. The chapter concludes by arguing that the growth of the national cinema in the 1920s/30s was achieved through competition, both direct and indirect, with Hollywood.

This chapter starts with an examination of the context and issues which the Chinese film industry faced in the 1930s. An aggressive Hollywood stance on the one hand and a limited Chinese government interference on the other hand are the two major characteristics. It then investigates a case study of box office records in a second-run cinema (Hujiang 沪江) in Shanghai in October 1933. When one checks box office receipts, the case of Hujiang intends to demonstrate the positive performance of Chinese film. In addition, the chapter looks at other areas in order to

endorse the findings through the case of Hujiang, from microeconomic and macroeconomic perspectives. The chapter concludes with a reasoned analysis of the growth of the Chinese film industry.

6.1 Aggressive Hollywood and Limited Government Interference: The Context

In the 1920s and 1930s, Hollywood, the largest rival for the domestic film industry, was quite popular in China. Evidence shows that the number of Hollywood pictures which screened in China was far greater than that of domestic films as well as of other foreign films. Based on my own analysis of screen commercials, of the 665 films shown in Shanghai from January to May 1933, Hollywood films amounted to approximately 500, accounting for 75.2 per cent of total films. Chinese films, in contrast, totalled only 93, or 14 per cent.

In comparison with Chinese films, Hollywood was superior in such aspects as technology, performance and financial budgets. In their market analysis of Hollywood films in China, the American consuls explained the reason why Hollywood films were so popular in China as follows:

> American pictures excel chiefly in technical presentation and ability of actors, which accounts largely for their success… [T]here are certain American actors who so satisfactorily interpret their roles that a mere 'smattering' of English suffices to follow them.[1]

Apart from technology and performance, Hollywood maintained a vast

[1] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 39-40.

advantage in the areas of production and budgets for promotion. The usual production expense was 375,000 US dollars (an equivalent of 1,106,000 yuan) in the 1930s. By contrast, "the production costs of Chinese films [were] exceedingly low".[2] The average cost for a Chinese picture ranged from 20,000 to 40,000 yuan. That is to say, the average costs for production in China only accounted for one to three per cent of an American picture. In addition, the American consul pointed out that Chinese audiences enjoyed the "lived happily ever after" and "triumph of right over wrong" ending of Hollywood films, rather than "the more tragic finals of many European pictures".[3]

In addition, the Chinese film industry was able to obtain only minor help from the government in the 1920s and 1930s. Government policy is a crucial force in influencing the relations between film industries and a supportive government could issue a policy of suppressing the expansion of Hollywood and favouring a domestic film industry in a given state. Such an operation would facilitate the development of a domestic film industry in certain ways. With respect to the case of China in the 1920s/1930s, the Nationalist Government could not provide enough protection for the domestic film industry apart from a tax and tariff on foreign films. In the censorship system implemented in the 1930s, the government employed direct discrimination towards foreign films. At the beginning, domestic films were exempted from the payment of the censorship fee while foreign films were charged ten yuan for every 500 meters (1640 feet) of film or fraction thereof.[4] Later, the censorship expenses rose for both Chinese and foreign films. Domestic films had to pay an amount not over fifteen yuan to cover expenditures incurred by the censorship board, while twenty

[2] Kowenthal, *The Present Status of The Film in China*, 90.

[3] North, "The Chinese Motion Picture Market", 2.

[4] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 5.

yuan was charged for foreign films for each 500 meters (1640 feet). The most effective barrier from the Chinese government against Hollywood was arguably the customs duty and tax. According to a market report from American consuls in China, imported Hollywood films were required to pay "an import duty of 25 per cent ad valorem upon entering China".[5] In addition to the duty, a Flood Relief Surtax of 10 per cent was imposed from 1932 to 1933, plus a surcharge of 4 per cent for river and harbour conservancy.[6] The duty fee for *Palooka* (dir. Benjamin Stoloff, 1934) was 1076.25 yuan while the duty fee for importing a film like *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (dir. Paul Czinner, 1934) was as high as 1944.06 yuan. Apart from the central official duty and tax, there were many local taxes for the motion picture trade. In addition, an expense of 500 to 1,000 yuan for advertising was necessary for American distributors to promote a film premier in Shanghai. Through heavy taxation, the Nationalist Government successfully restrained the income of Hollywood films and therefore to some extent helped the development of Chinese films.

Apart from duties and taxes, however, the impact of the Chinese government on China's industrial response to Hollywood was highly restricted. First and foremost, it failed to enforce the import quotas on Hollywood. In the 1930s, local authorities such as Canton strived to confine the exhibition of foreign films, but the efforts were "abolished immediately", due to strong objections from American distributors.[7] The screen quotas system on foreign pictures did not apply nation-wide.[8] As a

[5] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 5.

[6] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 88.

[7] "China-Quota, 20 August 1936", *Series 1F: Black Books: Foreign Statistics,* United Artists Corporation Records, Box 4, Folder 4-6, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

[8] The Canton authorities required all theatres in Canton scheduled "no less than 60 per cent of their showing time for domestically made films", see Xiao, "Constructing a New National Culture", 186.

consequence, almost every Hollywood film was imported into China in the 1930s. Secondly, heavy duty and tax had little impact on the quantity and gross sales of Hollywood films imported, despite its effect on the net income of Hollywood studios. Thirdly, the rigid censorship of the Nationalist Government could not obstruct the number of Hollywood films imported into China. Although the number of banned Hollywood films was much higher than that of other films, most Hollywood films passed Chinese censorship in the 1930s. For instance, the Nationalist Government banned only six out of 346 American films in 1934.[9]

6.2 Hujiang Theatre in October 1933: A Microeconomic Case

The aggressive Hollywood stance and the limited government interference did not automatically translate into the diminishing of the domestic film industry. A close look at the sale records of Hujiang Theatre in October 1933 will find that the market performance of the Chinese film industry was as good as that of Hollywood in some theatres. Hujiang was a second-run theatre in Shanghai that presented three performances per day. In 1933, admission prices were in three categories. Prices for the first two shows were 0.4, 0.6 and 0.9 yuan; the third show was 0.6, 1.0 and 1.5 yuan. Sunday, Wednesday and Friday were the days for program changes. Interestingly, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday were usually good days for box office. Sunday proved to be the highest day for box office receipts, accounting for 11,260.8 yuan, over 4,000 yuan more than the next highest day.

In the case of Hujiang, Hollywood maintained its domination of the quantity of films screened. In October 1933, Hujiang screened twelve films, including seven Hollywood films, four Chinese and one British.[10] Box office records suggest that

[9] *Bulletins of Film Censorship Committee*, 1934.

[10] *Samarang* was distributed by the United Artists, therefore is seen as an American film here, although it is

Hollywood and Chinese films competed directly at the second-run theatre. The seven Hollywood films came from five major studios, including three from M.G.M, and one from R.K.O, United Artists, Warner Brothers and Paramount respectively. The Chinese films came from the top three studios: two from Lianhua, one from Mingxing, one from Tianyi.

In contrast to its dominance in the quantity of films, Hollywood lost its edge in box office receipts at Hujiang. The sales of Hollywood and Chinese films at this second-run theatre were almost equal. Hujiang's total sales in October were 52,670.8 yuan. The box office of Hollywood amounted to 26,832.3 yuan, or 50.94 per cent while Chinese films accounted for 25,127.2 yuan, taking 47.71 per cent. The distinction of income between Hollywood and Chinese films was only 1,705.1 yuan or 3.24 per cent. British films occupied 1,030.2 yuan, taking only 1.96 per cent (Table 12).

With regard to the sales of individual films, Chinese films obtained advantages compared with Hollywood. The box office champion at Hujiang in October 1933 was *Toys*, a classic Chinese leftist film starring by Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 and accounting for 14,427.30 yuan. Second place went to the Hollywood film *Topaze* (dir. Harry d'Arrast, 1933), taking 11,702.1 yuan. These were the only two films whose sales were over 10,000 yuan. *Hell Below*, another Hollywood picture, took third place. However, Chinese films took the fourth and fifth places, with *Spring in the South* (南国之春, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1933) (4,534.8 yuan) and *White Golden Dragon* (白金龙, dir. Tang Xiaodan, 1933) (4,458.9 yuan). It should be noted that the market performance of *White Golden Dragon* nation-wide was probably much better than that at Hujiang. As the first Cantonese sound film, the box office of *White Golden Dragon*

produced by the B.F. Zeidman Production Company.

is believed to have amounted to 100,000 yuan in total, a rare record for Chinese films.[11] It appears that Shanghai audiences with their own distinctive dialects showed little fondness for the Cantonese sound film. The worst record of sales was a Hollywood picture, *Tugboat Annie* (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1933). It only accounted for 959.4 yuan after two days' showing.

Table 12 Box Office Record of Hujiang Theatre, October 1933 (yuan)

Date	Film	Distributed by	Box Office	Gross
1	Topaz	R. K.O.	6,053.70	
2	Topaz	R. K.O.	4,321.80	
3	Topaz	R. K.O.	2,316.60	11,702.10
4	Samarang	United Artists	693.30	
5	Samarang	United Artists	748.20	1,441.50
6	Moby Dick	Warner Bros	954.90	
7	Moby Dick	Warner Bros	1,412.40	2,367.30
8	White Golden Dragon	Tianyi	2,562.60	
9	White Golden Dragon	Tianyi	1,007.40	
10	White Golden Dragon	Tianyi	888.90	4,458.90
11	Tugboat Annie	MGM	594.90	
12	Tugboat Annie	MGM	364.50	959.40
13	Tell Me Tonight	Paramount	366.60	
14	Tell Me Tonight	Paramount	756.00	1,122.60
15	What! No Beer?	MGM	1,345.20	
16	What! No Beer?	MGM	249.20	
17	What! No Beer?	MGM	50.30	2,164.80
18	Soldier of the King	Gainsborough Pictures	397.50	
19	Soldier of the King	Gainsborough Pictures	632.70	1,030.20
20	Late Spring	Mingxing	582.60	
21	Late Spring	Mingxing	1,023.60	1,606.20
22	Spring of the South	Lianhua	2,289.30	
23	Spring of the South	Lianhua	1,118.10	
24	Spring of the South	Lianhua	1,127.40	4,534.80
25	Toys	Lianhua	2,862.90	
26	Toys	Lianhua	4,744.50	
27	Toys	Lianhua	3,621.00	
28	Toys	Lianhua	3,198.90	14,427.30
29	Hell Below	MGM	3,567.60	
30	Hell Below	MGM	1,896.90	
31	Hell Below	MGM	1,291.20	6,755.70

Source: Li Hongshou 李鸿寿, "Dianyingyuan kuaiji zhidu gaiyao/A Note of the Accounting System of Motion

[11] SMA, *The Industry of Film production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

Picture Theatres"电影院会计制度概要, Lixin kuaiji jikan/Lixin Accounting Quarterly *立信会计季刊, 3, 1934, 232-233.*

The average sales of Chinese films were better than those of Hollywood in the case of Hujiang. In October 1933, the average income for the four Chinese films, namely *White Golden Dragon*, *Late Spring* (残春, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1933), *Spring in the South* and *Toys*, was 6,281.8 yuan. By contrast, the average sales of the seven Hollywood films were 3,833.19 yuan, 2,448 yuan less than those of Chinese films. In other words, the average sales of Hollywood only accounted for 61.02 per cent of those of Chinese films. British films still occupied last placing and could not constitute a serious threat to Hollywood and domestic films.

It must be emphasised that the case of Hujiang is mere a fragmented and limited case in comparison of box office performance between Hollywood and China. It would be a mistake to draw a conclusion that the market performance of the Chinese film industry could compete that of Hollywood in general. One should bear in mind that Hujiang is just a second-run theatre, whilst first-run theatres were the major sources of box office revenues for Hollywood films.[12] Therefore, Hollywood distributors put major emphasis on the first-run theatres in major cities in China. However, the significance of the case of Hujiang lies with a reminder that the dominance of Hollywood films was not monolithic. Within the general picture of domination, Chinese films in certain dimensions may perform better than Hollywood.

In summary, the aggressive Hollywood stance and the limited Chinese government interference did not bring about the weakness of the Chinese film

[12] A detail analysis of Hollywood income structure and its emphasis on the revenue from first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong, see Section "Competition: China's Efforts to Success", in particular page 206 and 207.

industry. The case of Hujiang provides a fragmented example of the close race between Hollywood and Chinese films in the box office. Three major findings could be analysed in the case of Hujiang. Firstly, compared with Hollywood, Chinese films obtained advantages with respect to the sales of individual films. Domestic films were the bestsellers. Secondly, the average sales of Chinese films might be even better than those of Hollywood, suggesting that Chinese films were more popular than Hollywood films. Thirdly, Hollywood still maintained its lead in the quantity of films over Chinese and other foreign films. However, the gap in total box office takings between Hollywood and Chinese films had become significantly reduced in this theatre.

6.3 Echoing Hujiang: The Receipts of Film and Geographical Variations in the 1930s

Despite the limitation, the findings in the case of Hujiang are not alone. In the following section, I examine three intermediate variables related to the findings in the case of Hujiang, that is, the receipts of individual films, the average receipts of films, and geographical variations. The findings echo the observations in the case of Hujiang. Some Chinese films had better market performance than Hollywood ones in terms of the overall income of individual films. In particular, domestic films were bestsellers, instead of Hollywood films, in China nationwide. In terms of the average receipts of films, Chinese films outranked Hollywood films. In addition, Chinese films were better received than Hollywood films at second and subsequent runs of theatres in and outside Shanghai.

Despite Hollywood's popularity and its advantage in total box office market share, the market performance of some Chinese films exceeded its Hollywood

counterparts in terms of the overall income of individual films. After enormous efforts on securing primary materials, I draw a preliminary table to list the overall income of individual films including both Hollywood and Chinese films. It must be confessed that the box office records of Chinese films are extremely inadequate and vagueness comparing with the abundant records of Hollywood ones. Table 13 shows that the picture rental of these five Chinese films, *Two Sisters, Song of the Fishermen, Women* (女人, dir. Shi Dongshan, 1934), *White Golden Dragon,* and *Reconciliation* were over the picture rentals of *Sign of the Cross, Fashion of 1934,* and *Roman Scandals.* This finding echoes one of my observes in the case of Hujiang, that is, the market performance of some Chinese films were better than those of Hollywood in terms of overall income of individual films.

Table 13 Selected Total Incomes of Individual Films (Chinese and Hollywood)

Chinese films		**Hollywood films**	
Film titles	Picture rental (yuan)	Film titles	Picture rental (yuan)
Two Sisters	>200,000	*Modern Times*	120,797.20
Song of the Fishermen	>200,000	*Sign of the Cross*	70,800.00
Women	>100,000	*Fashion of 1934*	104,050.00
White Golden Dragon	>100,000	*Roman Scandals*	50,479.20
Reconciliation	132,337.17		

Source: The figure of the picture rental of Two Sisters, Song of the Fishermen, *and* Women *comes from "Hushi dianying zhipianye jinkuang diaocha/A Survey of the Film Production Industry in Shanghai" 沪市电影制片业近况调查,* Shen shi jingji qingbao/Economic Bulletin on Shanghai Economy 申时经济情报, *1, May 1935. The figure of the picture rental of* Reconciliation *is from Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number. The source of* Modern Times, Sign of the Cross, *and* Fashion of 1934 *is from "China, Price Guide",* Series 5A: Wright Legal Files, Box 7, Folder 7, *United Artists Corporation Records. The source of* Roman Scandals *comes from* "Foreign General Ledgers and Journals, 1929-1950", United Artists Corporations Records: Series 5C, Reel 3.

More importantly, domestic films led the way in competing with Hollywood films in terms of best sellers, as it shows in Table 13. Arguably, the best record of Hollywood films in China in the early twentieth century was Charles Chaplin's comedy *Modern Times* (1936). It screened for 33 days at first-run theatres in Shanghai. In the showing of *Modern Times*, gross sales amounted to 243,204.20 yuan. This film brought 120,797.20 yuan to United Artists in picture rental.[13] Some other pictures were received well in China. A good average top gross figure for a Paramount picture was 45,000 yuan, while in a striking case, *Sign of the Cross* (1932), the masterful historical picture directed by Cecil B. DeMille, accounted for 70,800 yuan. The top gross takings of Warner Brothers pictures in 1934 went to a musical picture, *Fashion of 1934* (dir. William Dieterle, 1934), accounting for 104,050 yuan. However, no film appears to have exceeded *Modern Times* at the box office. As "a favorite among all classes of Chinese", Charlie Chaplin had massive audiences in China.[14] Besides, *Modern Times* was Chaplin's first sound picture. Prior to its importation into China, *Modern Times* had already drawn the attention of Chinese exhibitors, since it had been successfully screened in London for 20 weeks. In order to obtain screening rights, the Chinese exhibitor He Tingran (何挺然, a.k.a. T. J. Holt) signed an irregular flat-free contract by paying 25,000 yuan to United Artists in advance. This proved to be a profitable business, bringing in 49,233 yuan to He's corporation.

However, Chaplin's production was dwarfed by Chinese bestsellers. In terms of the box office, China's champion for silent films was *Reconciliation*. This picture brought in 132,337.17 yuan for its production studio, Mingxing.[15] Revenue from

[13] "China, Price Guide", *Series 5A: Wright Legal Files*, Box 7, Folder 7, United Artists Corporation Records.

[14] "Motion Pictures in China", 31.

[15] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

sound films was better than that from silent ones. Despite the absence of exact data, the revenue of *Two Sisters* was believed to exceed 200,000 yuan. *Two Sisters* starred Butterfly Wu, the Movie Queen of China. It was screened at one first-run theatre for 60 days in Shanghai. *Two Sisters* was also circulated in 54 cities of China and six countries in Southeast Asia.[16] The income of *Song of the Fishermen*, another successful melodrama, was also reported to be around 200,000 yuan, similar to *Two Sisters*.[17] Nevertheless, the success of *Two Sisters* appears to be larger than that of *Song of the Fishermen*, since the latter was also one of the most expensive films made at that time. It was reported that *Song of the Fishermen* took more than one year and cost at least 20,000 US dollars (an equivalent of around 60,000 yuan).[18]

Apart from the receipts of individual films, Chinese films outranked Hollywood films with respect to average box office sales. Hollywood corporations documented detailed records about the box office of their films. A case in point is the box office of the films distributed by the United Artists Corporation in China in 1934. Twenty-four new films were released in China in 1934, out of a total of 112 films circulated in the Chinese market. Table 134 lists the gross takings of these 24 new released films. Based on these data, the average income of these newly-released pictures in 1934 was 12,712.02 yuan.[19]

[16] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

[17] "Hushi dianying zhipianye jinkuang diaocha/A Survey of the Film Production Industry in Shanghai" 沪市电影制片业近况调查, *Shen shi jingji qingbao/Economic Bulletin on Shanghai Economy* 申时经济情报, 1, May 1935.

[18] George Moorad, "Chinese Talkies", *Asia*, 35, 10, October 1935, 614-619. Another saying is that it cost 100,000 yuan. "Lianhua gongsi de zhimingshang/The Achilles' heel of Lianhua" 联华公司的致命伤, *Movietone*, 3, 24, 1934.

[19] It is noted that 12,712.02 yuan was only the average income of a NEW-RELEASED Hollywood movie in 1934. That is to say, the amount refers to an average income of a film in its first year in China, not the total average incomes. According to the statistics of United Artists Corporation, the total average income of a film in China was

The analysis of pictures of United Artists reveals that most foreign films had a common record in the box office. Table 134 shows that the income of *Roman Scandals* (dir. Frank Tuttle, 1933), the best seller of the United Artists in 1934, amounted to 50,479.20 yuan. It was around 70 times greater than the worst seller *General John Regan* (dir. Henry Edwards, 1933). However, the records of these two films are polarized cases. Table 134 indicates that the box office receipts of 22 out of 24 films ranged from 3,000 to 30,000 yuan. Specifically, there are ten films whose sales ranged from 10,000 to 30,000 yuan while the other 12 films ranged from 3,000 to 10,000 yuan.

For some Hollywood pictures, distribution in China was even a losing proposition. An instance is *General John Regan* from United Artists. *General John Regan* was a picture produced by Herbert Wilcox Productions and the British & Dominions Film Corporation. In order to show *General John Regan* in China, United Artists paid 1,473.31 yuan on duty and 71.45 yuan on censorship. It premiered at Nanking Theatre in Shanghai on 23 October 1934. The *Shen Bao* film critic pointed out that the film was "extremely boring" since four fifths of the plot was presented by means of dialogue.[20] The journey of *General John Regan* at the first-run theatre in Shanghai only lasted two days, due to the indifferent attitude of audiences. Up to June 1935, the sales income of *General John Regan* was only 721.78 yuan. That is to say, United Artists lost at least 822.99 yuan. In addition, it should be noted that this statistic does not include operation and print costs. As a matter of fact, Hollywood majors had to pay from 27 per cent to 32 per cent of the gross sales for operating

over 30,000 yuan.

[20] Ling He 凌鹤, "Ping jia jiangjun/Review on *General John Regan*" 评*假将军*, *Shen Bao*, 23 October 1934.

costs.[21] Such costs significantly limited the remittance of Hollywood studios.

In contrast to Hollywood's detailed statistics, the documentation of the box office records of Chinese films is extremely inadequate. So far, an exact analysis of the average income of Chinese films appears to be difficult. Studio income records could provide an indirect way to analyse the average income of Chinese films. Taking Lianhua for instance, its picture rental amounted to 300,415 yuan in 1932. Lianhua released seventeen films in that year. That is to say, an average income of Lianhua's films was 17,671 yuan.[22] By comparison, the average income for pictures from United Artists was 12,712.02 yuan, 5,000 yuan less.

The reason why Chinese films were received better on average than Hollywood films can be attributed to a greater number of screening times and a longer showing time. One source shows that theatres in Shanghai screened films for 248,014 times from January 1931 to June 1937. Chinese produced films were screened for 91,001 times, accounting for 36.7 per cent. In contrast, Hollywood films were screened for 149,318 times, accounting for 60.2 per cent.[23] However, during this period, the number of new released domestic films was 475, while the number of new released Hollywood films is roughly estimated to be 2,000. Regarding the screening times of new released Chinese films, the ratio was 1:192, while that of Hollywood films was only 1:75. That is to say, in China during the 1930s the showing times of

[21] Letter from Mr. L. Prouse Knox, April 28, 1937. "China, Competitors", *Series 1F: Black books, Foreign Stastics*, Box 4, Folder 4-6, United Artists Corporation Records.

[22] SMA, *The Industry of Film Production, A Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial and Saving Bank*, Q275-1-1949.

[23] Ye Yu 叶宇, "Boshi zhong de shichang guannian he shangye zhihui/The Market Perception and Market Smart in Check and Balance" 博弈中的市场观念和商业智慧, *Yingshi wenhua 2/Film and TV Culture 2* 影视文化 2, Ding Yaping 丁亚平 and Lü Xiaoping 吕效平 (eds.), Beijing: China Film Press, 2010, 139.

newly released Chinese films were around three times more than those of Hollywood films. Apart from the greater number of showing times, a longer showing time was another reason why domestic films were better received on average than Hollywood films. Xiao Zhiwei noticed that the distribution of Hollywood films in China was subject to its global business strategy.[24] In the 1930s, it was usual for only one Hollywood print to be circulated on China's screen. After its showing in China, the print would travel to another country. As a result, one title was allowed to show only for three to seven days at any given theatre. In contrast, Chinese films had no such limitation. Therefore, their exhibition time could be much longer than those of Hollywood films. Although there were contrasts between distributors and exhibitors, theatre owners found it relatively easy to persuade distributors to extend the showing time if one film was better received at a theatre, in comparison with their Hollywood counterparts. An instance was *Song of the Fishermen*. It was shown at a first-run theatre in Shanghai for 84 days.

The taste of the audience in China was a crucial factor for curtailing Hollywood films while facilitating domestic ones. In the early twentieth century, audience taste was subject to the Western influence and the level of formal education. The less the Western influence and lower the education level was, the less likely that the audiences would prefer foreign films. The Western influence in this context refers to the English language and cultural background. In their analysis of Chinese audiences, American diplomats noticed that English-speaking people in China constituted the bulk of foreign film audiences. It was clear that one could not follow the dialogue intelligently without a sufficient command of English in the period of sound films. Despite some efforts in inserting Chinese characters to explain the gist of

[24] Xiao, "American Films in China Prior to 1950", 22.

Table 134 Film Gross of the United Artists in China, 1934 (yuan)

Film	Genres	Gross
Roman Scandals	Comedy | Fantasy	50,479.20 *
The Count of Monte Cristo	Action | Adventure	29,288.07
The House of Rothschild	Biography | Drama	27,652.92
The Private Life of Henry VIII	Biography | Comedy	26,874.04
Nana	Drama	20,094.46
The Rise of Catherine the Great	Biography | Drama	16,889.29
Broadway Thru a Keyhole	Musical	15,106.70
Moulin Rouge	Comedy	14,862.43
Bulldog Drummond Strikes Back	Comedy | Mystery	13,814.90
The Affair of Cellini	Comedy | Drama	12,965.80
Bowery	Comedy | Drama	12,587.51
Bitter Sweet	Drama | Musical	9,516.52
Palooka	Comedy	7,628.92
That's a Good Girl	Musical	6,691.37
Gallant Lady	Drama	6,656.06
The Emperor Jones	Drama	5,789.38
Looking for Trouble	Crime | Drama	5,484.28
Trouble	Comedy	4,250.41
Up to the Neck	Comedy	3,842.99
Born to Be Bad	Drama | Romance	3,645.80
Blood Money	Drama	3,546.14
Advice to Lovelorn	Drama | Romance	3,370.18
Sorrell and Son	Drama	3,329.43
General John Regan	Comedy	721.78

Source: "Foreign General Ledgers and Journals, 1929-1950", United Artists Corporations Records: Series 5C, Reel 3.

** Parts of records include gross of 1935.*

the speeches and actions, Chinese audiences showed less fondness for films with much dialogue. Therefore, the American diplomats clearly pointed out that "with a very limited number of Chinese able to understand even the most simple English, pictures without too much dialogue are given preference over those employing spoken drama as the main medium of expression".[25]

The cultural background was also a significant factor influencing the fondness for Hollywood and Chinese films. Chinese intellectuals such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 and Liu Naou 刘呐鸥 seemed to enjoy Hollywood films since they were familiar with that cultural context. However, to less educated Chinese audiences, who were generally unfamiliar with Western modes of life, foreign films with Western cultural background were "more or less incomprehensible".[26] The unfamiliarity with Western culture as seen in Hollywood films helped the promotion of Chinese films.

The analysis of market share in the case of Hujiang appears to be applicable to other subsequent run theatres in urban cities. At Hujiang, the second-run theatre in Shanghai, the market share of Chinese films in the 1930s reached 47.71 per cent, similar to that of Hollywood. As a matter of fact, it is probably safe to say that such performance of Chinese films could be found in other subsequent run theatres in Shanghai and other urban cities. It was believed that at least 95 per cent of films screened at second- and third-run theatres in Tianjin and Beijing were Chinese films as early as 1931.[27] A film market survey pointed out, "Only a small percentage of the Chinese coming under Western influence or educated abroad consistently patronize them [foreign films] in the larger centers such as Tientsin (Tianjin), Peking (Beijing),

[25] "Motion Pictures of China", 26.

[26] "Motion Pictures in China", 49.

[27] "Motion Pictures in China", 75.

Hankow (Hankou), Nanking (Nanjing), Hong Kong, and Canton".[28] However, to major native audiences in these urban cities "where the Chinese had effected Western clothes and manners to a greater extent, and were able to understand [American] customs and speech, native productions [had] a strong appeal because they depict[ed] stories that [were] dear to the Chinese heart and entirely understandable".[29]

The situation for foreign films in the interior areas with little foreign influence was even worse, and therefore the market share of Chinese films was much better than that of Hollywood in general. Taking Jinan for instance, one among seven theatres showed foreign films, and others showed Chinese pictures exclusively. As early as the 1920s, American film analysts realised that the dominance of Hollywood films in China varied "to a certain extent with different localities".[30] C. J. North revealed that American films controlled only about one-half the showings in cities like Kunming.[31] In cities like Fuzhou, Chinese films occupied 90 per cent of Fuzhou's screenings while Hollywood only accounted for 10 per cent. A general trend was that Chinese films had the greatest appeal where foreign influence was least felt.[32] One crucial reason is that foreign films could not please the tastes of people in interior areas. In addition, in these places the foreign populace was negligible, and the number of foreign educated Chinese was also small. In treaty ports where there were a greater proportion of foreign residents, these two classes formed the bulk of first-run theatre audiences.

[28] "Motion Pictures in China", 29.

[29] "Motion Pictures in China", 29.

[30] North, "The Chinese Motion-picture Market", 2.

[31] North, "The Chinese Motion-picture Market", 2.

[32] "Motion Pictures in China", 29.

6.4 The Diachronic Macroeconomic Perspectives

This section broadens the overview at a macro-economic level to examine the market performance of the Chinese film industry. It first compares the income of Hollywood studios distributing in China and Chinese film studios. Secondly, it observes the total box office of Hollywood and Chinese films, confirming the dominance of Hollywood films in China's market in total turnover. Thirdly, this section analyses the performance of Chinese films in a diachronic dimension. It suggests that domestic films achieved a substantial and sustained development in the box office, in the shadow of Hollywood's dominance in terms of the total market share.

With regard to the first observation, the revenue of Hollywood varied from studio to studio. In the 1930s, Hollywood majors were divided into the "Big Five" (M.G.M, Paramount, Fox, Warner Bros, and R.K.O.) and the "Little Three" (United Artists, Universal, and Columbia) according to the corporation size and capital scales. Differences between these studios were also reflected in their gross sales in China. The records of United Artists Corporation reveal that the revenue of the United Artists in China in 1934 was 427,489.54 yuan. In addition, A. Krisel, the President of the China Film Board of Trade, speculated the gross business of Hollywood major distributors for 1934. Using the data of the United Artists Corporation and that of Krisel as a basis, I have estimated the gross income of eight Hollywood major studios in 1934 (Table 145). As shown in Table 145, the gross sales of Hollywood studios were polarised. The gross of M.G.M, Fox, Paramount and Warner Brothers were all over one million yuan. In contrast, the other four studios clustered at between 400,000 and 500,000 yuan. This suggests that Hollywood is not a monolithic concept and when one talks about Hollywood in China, the differences of each Hollywood major studio should be taken into account.

Table 145 Gross Sales of Hollywood Majors in China in 1934 (yuan)

Corporation	Film Numbers	Gross
Fox	543	1,141,000
Paramount	434	1,303,000
M.G.M.	384	2,090,000
Warners	440	1,385,000
R.K.O.	249	599,000
Universal	309	448,000
Columbia	264	405,000
United Artists	112	427,000

Sources: "Foreign General Ledgers and Journals, 1929-1950", United Artists Corporations Records: Series 5C, Reel 3; "Excerpt from A. Krisel's Letter of July 4, 1935", in Black books: Foreign Statistics, United Artists 1F, Box 4, Folder 4-6.

With respect to the studio income of Chinese films, the performance of Chinese films did not lag far behind, compared with the performance of Hollywood majors. A survey conducted by a professional statistics company in China provides a valuable record of the income of Chinese studios in 1934. It indicates that,

> The total income of Lianhua was believed to be around 800,000 yuan in 1934. Lianhua's bestseller was *Song of the Fishermen*, whose gross exceeded 100,000 yuan. With respect to other productions of Lianhua, the gross ranged from 50,000 to 80,000 yuan. The gross of Mingxing in 1934 exceeded 700,000 yuan. The box office takings of the two productions of Yihua Company, *Women* and *Kids* (人间仙子, dir. Dan Duyu, 1934), was over 100,000 yuan. Together with the income from other productions, the total gross of Yihua was approximately 300,000

> yuan. With regard to Yueming (月 明), the total sale was around 60,000 yuan to 70,000 yuan. Although it is claimed as major studio, the sales of Tianyi only accounted for 200,000 to 300,000 yuan in 1934 due to its mediocrity in productions. As a mid-size studio, the gross of Kuaihuolin Company reached around 70,000 to 80,000 yuan. [33]

According to the above quotation, the total sales of Chinese films in 1934 stood at around 2,130,000 yuan. In specific terms, the gross of Lianhua and Mingxing both exceeded 700,000 yuan. Compared with their Hollywood counterparts, the total sales of Lianhua and Mingxing exceeded those of each of the Hollywood majors, R.K.O, Universal, Columbia and United Artists. This can be seen as a significant accomplishment for Chinese studios over their Hollywood counterparts.[34]

Looking into the second observation, the total amount of box office takings throughout China can be deduced from the above passage (Table 145). According to Table 145, the gross of Hollywood major studios amounted to 7,798,000 yuan in 1934. By contrast, the sales of Chinese films were around 2,130,000 yuan. The sales of other foreign films such as British and German films were less than 5 per cent of the total gross in the Chinese market. Therefore, it is fair to say that Hollywood films dominated the film market of China in terms of box office as they did in terms of the quantity of films. The ratio between the gross of Chinese films and that of Hollywood was around 1: 3.66. Considering the minor market share of other foreign films, the

[33] "A Survey of the Film Production Industry in Shanghai", 1, May 1935.

[34] It should be noticed that Lianhua released nineteen new pictures in 1934 while Mingxing sixteen ones. By contrast, R.K.O. released 40 new pictures; Universal 39; Columbia 33; and United Artists, 24. That is to say, the revenue of studios echoes my argument that the average income of each Chinese film was probably better than its Hollywood counterparts.

market share of domestic films in the Chinese film market was around 20 per cent. In contrast, Hollywood films accounted for around 75 per cent.

Judging from a first glance at the total market share, one cannot say convincingly that Chinese film performed well or attained success in the early twentieth century. However, one must bear in mind that Chinese films in the 1930s were in a nascent stage. The history of the Chinese film industry can be traced back as early as 1905, but the real effective beginnings date back to the early 1920s.[35] The first Chinese film appeared in 1905. A photo studio in Beijing produced several short clips but went into bankruptcy soon after. The first professional Chinese film corporation did not commence until 1913 and the real development of the Chinese film industry had to wait till 1923 after Mingxing released *Orphan Rescuing Grandfather*. The release of *Orphan* later became a symbol for the Chinese film industry being on track.[36] Therefore, the Chinese film industry in the 1930s can be seen as a teenager in terms of real development. Compared with its American counterpart, the Chinese film industry had a drastically low performance in production scales, technology and finance. This can be demonstrated by a comparison of the wages of film actors. In the 1930s, "expenditures for salaries range[d] from 25 yuan a month for featured players to 350 for a few stars".[37] As the leading Chinese star, Butterfly Wu was the best-paid actress in China, receiving 500 yuan a month. The salaries earned in China would "probably cause a Hollywood 'star' to faint, though not with envy".[38] In Hollywood, Mae West, the leading Paramount star in the 1930s, could earn 481,000 U.S. dollars a year, which was 240 times the salary of Butterfly Wu.

[35] Lowenthal, *The Present Status of the Film in China*, 88.

[36] Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

[37] Lowenthal, *The Present Status of the Film in China*, 90.

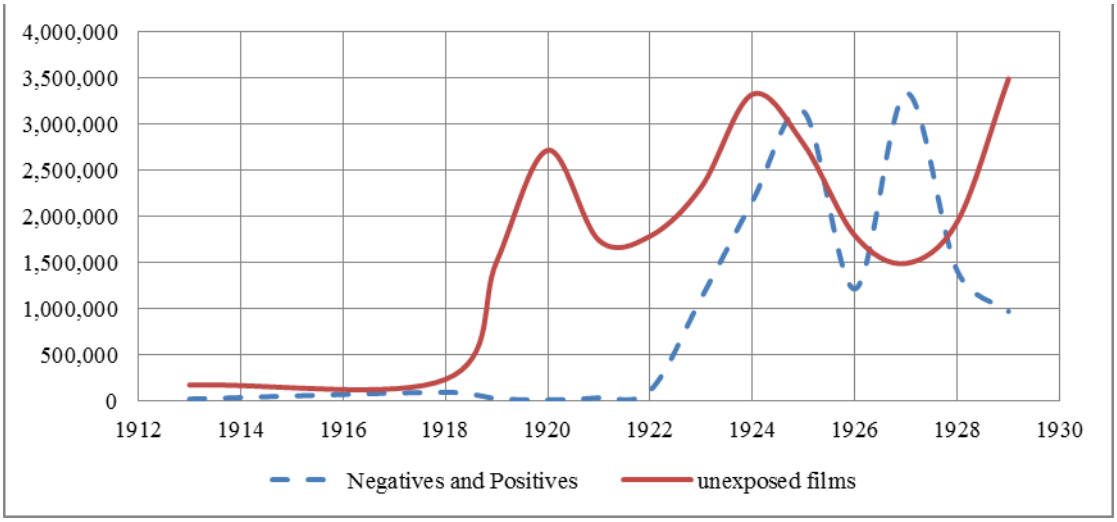
[38] "The Kinema in China", *New York Times*, 17 June 1925.

In addition, the competition between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the 1930s was probably fiercer than in any other period in Chinese film history. In the 1930s, the Hollywood's studio system was in its golden age. More importantly, almost every Hollywood film was imported into China, due to the lack of import quotas. It is estimated that approximately 2,700 Hollywood films circulated in the Chinese film market annually. Considering the intense competition from Hollywood, the 20 per cent market share can be seen as a success for the domestic film industry if not a triumph. One may have a better impression about the market performance of the Chinese film industry when compared with that in the 1990s. The market share for Chinese films (including co-production with Hong Kong) accounted for 40 per cent while Hollywood films amounted to 60 per cent in the 1990s. However, only twenty Hollywood films were allowed to screen in China per annum at that time.

From a diachronic perspective, the output of the Chinese film industry and Hollywood were increasing continuously in the 1930s. Figure 2 lists the feet of the motion picture films from the United States to China. The unexposed films were used for taking Chinese films while the negative and positive exposed films imported were designed for exhibition purpose.[39] Figure 2 shows that both the feet of exposed and unexposed films imported to China had increased notably in the 1920s when compared with those in the 1910s. In 1913, the linear feet of negative and positive films amounted to 170,740. The figure had increased to 2,488,765 by 1929, more than twenty times greater than that in 1913. The expansion of unexposed films was more striking than in exposed films. In 1925, the linear feet of unexposed films imported to China amounted to 2,165,005. This was 220 times greater than the smallest number of 1920, accounting for 9,800 feet.

[39] "Motion Pictures in China", 37-38.

Figure 2 United States Exports of Motion-picture Film to China (in value of feet)



Source: Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 101.

The feet of negative and positive films imported to China (seen in Figure 2) mirrors the development of Hollywood films in China. Figure 2 shows that the rapid expansion for Hollywood business in China is likely to have started from 1919. Although Hollywood dominated the Chinese market from 1916 onward, the linear feet imported to China was merely around 200,000 feet or around 10,000 US dollars in value by 1918. In 1919, the linear feet of films for the exhibition exceeded 150,000 for the first time. From 1919 onward, the length of the film for exhibition purposes stayed between 350,000 feet and 170,000 feet. Despite the lack of data in the 1930s in Figure 2, it seems that the development of Hollywood's business continued in the 1930s. A survey estimated "3,950,000 feet film imported into China during 1930 for exhibition purposes, and of this total 3,550,000 came from America".[40] This suggests a steadily increasing market of China for Hollywood films in the 1920s and early

[40] "Motion Pictures in China", 58.

1930s.

The unexposed film stock imported to China (in Figure 2) indicates the development of the Chinese film industry. Along with the development of Hollywood's market in China, the boom in the market for the local film industry was also visible. Because Chinese were unable to produce film stock in the first half of the twentieth century, importation was the only option for accessing motion-picture film for production. Roughly 90 per cent of imported film stocks were from the United States.[41] According to Figure 2, the development of the Chinese film industry was continuous in general. Prior to 1923, no more than 120,000 feet of unexposed film stocks was imported for film production. However, the figure increased to 1,000,000 feet from 1923, or more than eight times than before. The performance of unexposed films imported into China confirms that the real development of the Chinese film industry started from 1923, the moment that Mingxing's benchmark film *Orphan Rescuing Grandfather* was released. The feet of motion-picture films echoed this argument. After 1923, the feet of film stock remained above one million feet. This suggests a continuous development of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s. In particular, the feet of imported to China for the purpose of film production were over three million in 1925 and 1927.

Clearly, the fluctuation of the development curve of unexposed films was greater than that of exposed films, which suggests unstableness in the development of the Chinese film industry. The first fluctuation comes from 1918 to 1921. The reason is that the Chinese film industry was at a nascent period when the opening or closure of a studio would have a strong effect on the total data. For instance, from 1919 to 1920, only nine short films were produced in China. In 1921, three feature and six

[41] "Motion Pictures in China", 58.

short films were released and therefore the data of imported film stock started to rally. Thanks to the establishment of Mingxing, the data of 1922 was greater than that of 1918 for the first time. The second fluctuation was responsible for the abnormal prosperity in the period of 1924 to 1925. Inspired by the success of *Orphan*, capitalists rushed into investing in the Chinese film industry, lured by the vast potential profit. During the period from 1923 to 1926, about 100 film companies were supposed to have sprung up, and there was an ardent demand for unexposed films. However, a large number of the corporations organized during this period were so-called "mushroom" or "mosquito" companies. A typical "mushroom" company was likely to operate when "three or four optimists would scrape together a few thousand dollars, secure a play, rig up or hire studio and equipment of sorts, engage the necessary actors, and set to work".[42] By 1926, few of these "mushroom" companies had survived. Along with the waning of this "film fever", the demand for unexposed films, as well as the development of the Chinese film industry, returned to normality.

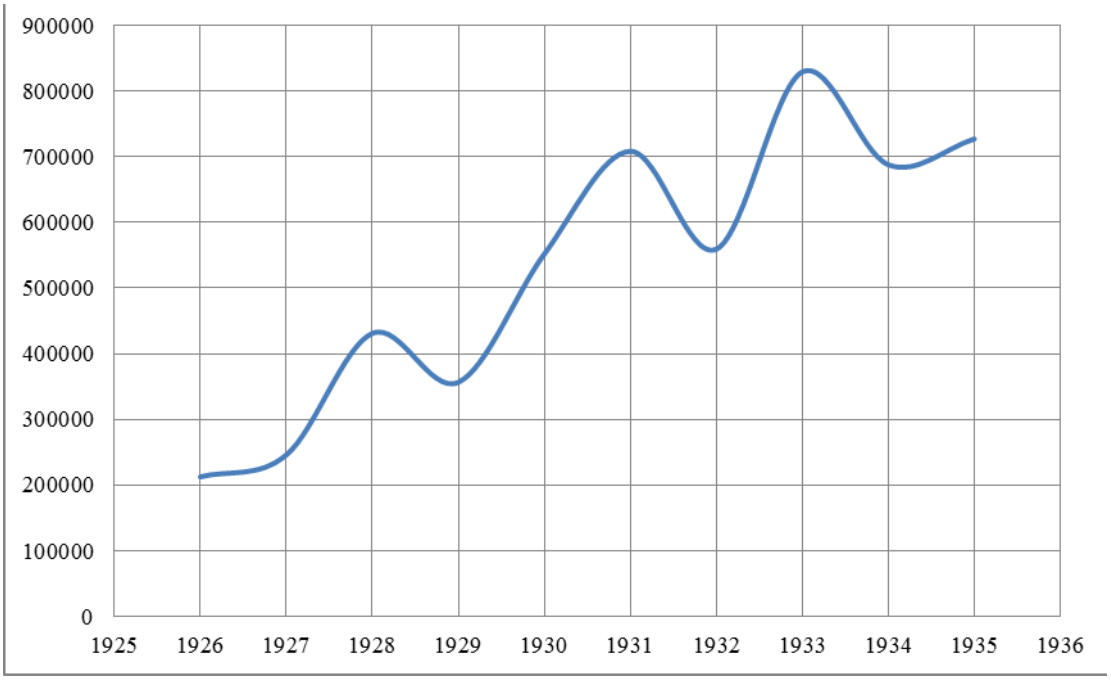
In terms of studio income, this also confirms the growth of the Chinese film industry. Figure 3 indicates the income of Mingxing from 1926 to 1935. Mingxing was one of the leading production companies at the time. The Figure indicates that the general trend of the income of Mingxing was increasing in the 1920s and 1930s. As one of the earliest film studios in China, Mingxing had been set up in 1922 "with 10,000 yuan originally earmarked for stock speculations".[43] In 1926, the income of Mingxing amounted to 212,596.91 yuan thanks to the success of such releases as *Reconciliation.* Two years later, the income of Mingxing had expanded to 431,144.62 yuan in 1928, more than double than that of 1926. The productions of *The Burning of Red Lotus*

[42] "The Chinese Film Industry", *People's Tribune*, IX, 1, 1 April 1935, 26.

[43] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 23.

Temple, a series of martial arts pictures released in 1928 attributed much to the expansion of Mingxing's income. In 1933, the revenues of Mingxing reached a peak with 829,149.74 yuan. However, the outgoings of Mingxing this year amounted to 914,827.15 yuan, resulting in a deficit of 85,867 yuan. Fortunately, Mingxing returned to a profitable status by reducing its expenses in 1935.

Figure 3 The Income of Mingxing, 1926-1935 (yuan)



Source: Fan, "A Chronological Table of the Star Motion Picture Corporation", no page number.

6.5 Competition: China's Efforts to Success

The development of the Chinese film industry within the shadow of Hollywood suggests a question: how could the Chinese film industry achieve growth in a market where Hollywood boomed? I argue that competition stands as a key market strategy for explaining the development of the Chinese film industry in the shadow of Hollywood. Competition is defined as "a rivalry between individuals (or groups and nations), and it rises whenever two or more parties strive for something that all cannot

obtain". [44] Two types of competition are specified in this study, i.e., Product differentiation and direct competition.

The Chinese film industry employed the strategy of product differentiation in the first-run theatre competition. The distribution and exhibition practice of Hollywood films shows that the first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong were crucial to the revenues of Hollywood films. Table 15 lists the income structure of seven Hollywood films in seven Chinese cities from 1933 to 1936, based on a detailed price guide for the United Artists Corporation.[45] Table 15 indicates that the film rentals of these seven films totalled 308,983 yuan. The income in Shanghai accounted for 160,483 yuan, taking 52 per cent. Following Shanghai, the income of Hong Kong amounted to 49,733 yuan, or 16 per cent of the total income. In other words, of the total of the film rental in China, the market of Shanghai and Hong Kong took 68 per cent, or around three fourths. The significance of Shanghai and Hong Kong to American film interests can readily be realised. A close look at the income in Shanghai and Hong Kong reveals the importance of first-run theatres. Of the total of 160,483 yuan in the Shanghai market, the income of the first-run theatres including Nanking, Metropolis, Grand and Cathay amounted to 126,894 yuan, or 79 per cent. The position of first-run theatres in Hong Kong was similar to that of Shanghai. The income of the Kings, the only first-run theatre in Hong Kong, which showed the pictures of United Artists, accounted for 37,158 yuan, or 75 per cent. From a nationwide perspective, the income of the first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong

[44] George J. Stigler, "Competition", in Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume (eds.), *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, , New York: Macmillan, 2008.

[45] These seven films are *Modern Times*, *Dark Angel* (dir. Sidney Franklin, 1935), *Miserable* (Richard Boleslawski, 1935), *Kid Millions* (dir. Roy Del Ruth, 1934), *The Count of Monte Cristo* (dir. Rowland V. Lee, 1934), *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (dir. Harold Young, 1934), and *Gardens of Allah* (dir. Richard Boleslawski, 1936).

Kong represented 164,052 yuan, taking around 53 per cent. That is to say, slightly more than half of the total income of Hollywood in China came from the first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Table 15 Income Structure of Hollywood Films in China (yuan)

	1st Run	**2nd Run**	**3rd Run**	**4th Run**	**Total**
Shanghai	126,894	20,586	6,937	6,066	160,483
Canton	27,050	5,408	-	-	32,459
Hankou *	8,510	-	-	-	8,510
Hong Kong	37,158	7,273	5,302	-	49,733
Nanjing *	25,722	-	-	-	25,722
Beijing *	11,884	-	-	-	11,884
Tianjin	14,004	6,189	-	-	20,193

Source: "China, Price Guide", *Series 5A: Wright Legal Files*, Box 7, Folder 7, United Artists Corporation Records.

** Hankou, Nanjing and Beijing have no theatre chain system. All income figures are categorized as the first-run income.*

Considering the significance of the first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong, Hollywood strived to give a priority to these theatres. This can be seen from the distribution route of Hollywood films. As seen in Chapter Three, the routing of Hollywood films usually started from the first-run theatres in Shanghai and Hong Kong. After a tour of the larger cities and the principal out-ports including Tianjin, Beijing and Qingdao, the film would return to Shanghai for their second-run and subsequent-runs exhibition. In addition, "The most successful pictures [were] sometimes re-exhibited at regular rates at the first-run houses of Shanghai and the other principal cities before beginning their course of subsequent runs".[46] For instance,

[46] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 42.

Modern Times and *The Count of Monte Cristo*—two super-productions distributed by United Artists—enjoyed such treatment in Shanghai at Nanking and Grand Theatre respectively.

In turn, Chinese practitioners realised the difficulty of competing with Hollywood in first-run theatres and they therefore paid much attention to the subsequent theatres and interior cinemas as well as to overseas markets such as Nanyang (South-east Asia). As mentioned above, the taste of Chinese in subsequent run theatres in treaty ports and theatres in interior areas hampered Hollywood's expanding market. This turned out to be a good opportunity for Chinese films. As pointed out in Chapter Three, Chinese film distributors applied for multiple prints instead of one print, as Hollywood did. Considering the significance of second- and third-run theatres in Shanghai, Chinese film distributors circulated several prints simultaneously in Shanghai. Therefore, they could occupy a market as large as possible to avoid a loss of audiences and therefore maximize sales in a given period. With regard to theatres outside Shanghai, by virtue of local talents, large Chinese film exchanges divided China into several districts, sent representatives into each district and signed contracts with theatres exhibiting principally Chinese pictures. Some distributors even obtained exclusive supply rights to certain theatres. Therefore, Chinese distributors could send recent releases to the districts for circulation with a maximum benefit to distributors.

Apart from the differentiated competition in the domestic market, Chinese film distributors also endeavoured to circulate Chinese films overseas, in particular to the Nanyang market. The sales to the Nanyang market increased the incomes of production studios and reduced the pressure on the domestic film market. The history of Nanyang as a prominent community for Chinese diasporas dates back to the Han

Dynasty (202 B.C.—220). In general, the Chinese communities in Nanyang maintained their lifestyle and cultural connections with China. The Chinese in Nanyang, in particular the first generation of early twentieth century immigration, maintained a strong nostalgia for their homeland, partly due to their low social position and partly due to the lack of entertainment. In addition, thanks to the development of the local economy, the film exhibition business prospered in Nanyang. Therefore, it became a great potential market for Chinese films. Arguably, the first efforts to explore Nanyang market were carried out by the Asiatic Film Company in the 1910s, when the Chinese film industry was at its beginnings. A local newspaper reported that one of Asiatic pictures—*Khoonjin Whatchay*—was screened in Singapore in 1917.[47] After that, it was hard to neglect the position of the Nanyang market for Chinese films. In 1926, for example, approximately one third of film revenues came from the Nanyang market.[48] In order to maintain the trade in Nanyang, the taste of Nanyang audiences became the standard for the production of Chinese films in the 1920s and 1930s.[49]

However, it would be a mistake to say that first-run theatres in China were not significant for Chinese films. As a matter of fact, Chinese film practitioners had long realised that the sales of first-run theatres in Shanghai not only constituted a major part of the total income, but also served as a yardstick for subsequent-run and outside theatres. In the early 1920s, due to a lack of first-run theatres, Chinese films were forced to compete with Hollywood films directly at cinemas like the Olympia theatre. Chinese distributors had to pay a high rent for its premier shows, sometimes higher

[47] *The Straits Times*, 9 July 1917, 11.

[48] SMA, *Mingxing yingpian gongfen youxian gongsi di wu jie juesuanbao/The Fifth Accounts Report of the Star Motion Picture Corporation* 明星影片股份有限公司第五届决算报告, Y9-1-460.

[49] Zheng, *A Short History of Modern Chinese Film*, 66.

than that for Hollywood films, due to mistrust by the theatre owners.[50] In addition, Chinese distributors had no control over the arrangement of the screening date.[51] Having sufficiently suffered these obstacles, Chinese film practitioners started to build their own first-run theatres. In 1925 the Central Palace in Shanghai was organized into a first-run theatre for Chinese films. In 1926, the executives of the Central Palace leased the Olympia and transformed it into another Chinese first-run theatre. From then on, the first-run theatres for showing Chinese films were separated from those showing Hollywood films. When the Central Palace and Olympia were out of fashion, Strand and Peking theatre in Shanghai carried the torch in the 1930s. In addition, the differentiated competition could be found through a comparison of ticket prices in the first-run theatres. The ticket price for showing first-run Chinese films was usually cheaper than that of Hollywood films. For instance, the ticket prices of the Peking theatre, as the first-run cinema for Chinese films, were 0.5, 0.7 and 1.0 yuan. By contrast, the prices at the Grand theatre, the first-run for Hollywood, were 1.0, 1.5 and 2 yuan, or twice that of the Peking theatre.

With regard to the specific case of Hujiang, this chapter suggests an explanation for the Chinese film industry itself. At the Hujiang theatre, the ticket prices for showing Chinese films were the same as those for Hollywood films. However, the Chinese film industry still maintained its edge in direct competition with Hollywood as it did at Hujiang. As I mentioned above, the total gross of Chinese films in the case of Hujiang was close to that of Hollywood. In addition, Chinese films obtained advantages over Hollywood in terms of the sales of individual films and the average of sales of films. I argue that Chinese practitioners employed a

[50] Zheng, *A Short History of Modern Chinese Film*, 27.

[51] Xu Chihen, "Zhongyang yingxi gongsi zuzhi zhi jingguo/The Organization of the Central Motion Picture Corporation" 中央影戏公司组织之经过, in *A Grand Sight of Chinese Cinema*, 1927, no page number.

strategy of economic nationalism to achieve success in competing with Hollywood.

Economic nationalism in this chapter encompasses three meanings. First, it concerns the economic methods employed by the Chinese film industry to please local audiences by virtue of the culture they shared in a broad way. Compared with Hollywood, the foremost and inherent advantage of Chinese films, arguably all locally produced films in the world, was the appeal of the local populace. In the film market of the 1930s, a competition in terms of market share means competition over audiences. In contrast with Hollywood, Chinese films enjoyed immense popularity with their Chinese patrons. The reasons were simply predictable: cultural proximity, that is, "the audience's familiarity with the language and the cultural context they carry".[52]

Chinese film practitioners clearly realised their advantage, and they spared no effort to maintain such an advantage. A case in point is highlighted to show how the Chinese film industry changed their productions to appease local audiences. As mentioned above, the Nanyang market possessed a significant position for Chinese films. Therefore, Chinese producers paid particular attention to the preference of Nanyang audiences. In the early twentieth century, more than 70 per cent of Chinese diaspora in Nanyang were small shop owners, coolies and farmhands in the rubber and forestry industry.[53] Most of them and their offspring maintained strong connections with their previous lifestyles in China, including entertainment. One major entertainment in traditional China was the ballad-tune (弹词) whose narrative originated from ancient Chinese anecdotes and folk stories. Therefore, it proved to be

[52] Joseph Chan, "No Culture is an Island: An Analysis of Media Protectionism and Media Openness, in Georgette Wang, Jan Servaes and Anuraa Goonasekera (eds.), *The Emerging Television Landscape: Globalization, Localization, or Something Else?*, London: Routledge, 2000, 254.

[53] Zheng, *A Short History of Modern Chinese Film*, 68.

immensely popular when the anecdotal film (稗史片), an adaption of the ballad-tune narratives, was debuted in Nanyang market.[54] As a genre, the anecdotal film was adapted from ancient Chinese anecdotes into film narration, promoting traditional ethnic values including loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness. One anecdotal film, *Tale of White Snake* (白蛇传, dir. Shao Zuiweng, 1926) broke all records for Chinese films in Nanyang. Encouraged by its success, Chinese film studios soon changed their direction to produce anecdotal films. In the two years after 1926, at least 21 anecdotal films were produced specifically targeted at the Nanyang market.[55] The anecdotal film, together with the martial arts film (武侠片) and the immortals and demons film (神怪片), dominated productions in the late 1920s, until a new production movement, "reviving national cinema", emerged in the early 1930s.

Secondly, economic nationalism in China focused on how nationalistic discourse was mobilized to further the development of the domestic film industry. A rationale of economic nationalism is that the domestic industry would "benefit from its relation against foreign competition".[56] The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the upsurge of Chinese nationalist sentiments. Nationalism is generated from Western European and North American modernity, along with the system of the nation-state.[57] Yet "a sense of national identity" in China did not appear until the nation-state emerged from the late nineteenth century.[58] In the wake of resisting the rule of the imperial Qing

[54] Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*, 37.

[55] Gu, "The Development of Chinese Films", 2008, 334-335.

[56] Sherman Cochran, *Big Business in China, Sino-Foreign Rivalry in the Cigarette Industry, 1890-1930*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, 209.

[57] John Hutchinson, *Modern Nationalism,* London: Fontana Press, 1994, 5.

[58] Yongnian Zheng, *Globalization and State Transformation in China,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 43.

dynasty, Sun Yat-sen, the foremost pioneer of the Nationalist Party, called for a construction of a new China. Three steps were necessary to build a strong and wealthy China and the first step was "nationalism". Nationalism, according to Sun, meant a free and equal position for China in the world stage. Jiang Jieshi, Sun's successor, inherited Sun's political philosophy and legalised nationalism as a cornerstone of the ideology of the Nationalist Party.

Under the context of nationalism, Chinese film practitioners mobilized nationalistic sentiment to further the development of the Chinese film industry. A popular expression is "restoring economic rights" (挽回利权), which suggests that the film business of foreign corporations was an "aggression" against the Chinese economy. Therefore, one should fight against such aggression and foster business operated by domestic corporations. Under such circumstances, corporations with an American background were labelled as the "aggressor" and were attacked by public opinion. One case in point is China Picture Industrial Corporation. When in 1932 this Sino-American film corporation was about to organize to produce Chinese sound films, Chinese film practitioners criticized it through the press, arguing that the organisation of such a company was "a further aggression of American force in motion pictures".[59] Prominent figures in Chinese film circles such as Zheng Zhengqiu refused to cooperate with this corporation. Parallel to China Picture, a corporation named United Theatre in China was assaulted, as it was registered in the United States. The hostility of public opinion was responsible for the failure of the two corporations. In retrospect, the nationalistic fervour was unwise since it resulted in attacks on Sino-foreign corporations. The organisations of the two Sino-American corporations provided one of very few opportunities for the Chinese film industry to

[59] Cheng, Li and Xing, *A History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, 188.

obtain large capital investment. The assault from the nationalists made China miss opportunities to expand its size of its industry. However, the discourse of nationalism in a way benefited the existing film corporations. To executives of Mingxing or Lianhua, they eliminated rivals and therefore maintained their leading positions in the Chinese film industry. In addition, the domestic industry strengthened its legitimacy in ideology by virtue of the nationalistic discourse. Therefore, the Chinese film industry could invoke sympathy and identity from audiences fuelled by nationalistic sentiments. In addition, possible support from the government could also be gained, although it was rare.

Thirdly, one unique character of China's economic nationalism was its open attitudes towards learning from Hollywood. Alongside a hostile sentiment towards Hollywood's exploration in China's market, Chinese film practitioners showed a passion to learn from Hollywood. The history of film in the 1930s provided evidence of how Chinese films learned from Hollywood in terms of technology, system, and film language to enhance the level of the local film industry. In the domain of film technology, Chinese engineers imitated Hollywood's technology and manufactured China's sound-on-film equipment. In the domain of the distribution system, Chinese distributors innovated the distribution system under the basis of learning from Hollywood. Similarly, an open mind towards Hollywood contributed to the prosperity of film language. According to Ma Ning, the maturity of film language shown in *Street Angel* (马路天使, dir. Yuan Muzhi, 1937) was attributed to the synthesis of Hollywood's continuous editing and the montage employed in Soviet films.[60] The attitudes of imitation possibly stand as a major reason for the boost of the domestic film industry.

[60] Ma, "The Textual and Critical Difference of Being Radical", 101.

6.6 Conclusion

Among the indicators to examine China's industrial response to Hollywood, arguably from the point of view of the whole film industry, the box office was one of the most effective. It has been shown in this chapter that the Chinese film industry achieved growth along with its counterpart Hollywood in China in the 1930s. In terms of the total amount of box office, Hollywood still dominated the film market of China. However, the Chinese film industry did not lag far behind and achieved even better in regard to the box office receipts of individual films, geographical location and studio variation. This chapter has shown that dominance, like other terms in the film economy, is a monolithic concept. In order to reflect and grasp the actual issues of the film economy, one needs to consider not only the total amount of box office receipts or the quantity of films, but also other detailed and multidimensional variations.

This study has shown that competition with Hollywood, rather than the advantage of protectionism, was crucial for the growth of the Chinese film industry in the 1930s. Economists have claimed importance for the significance of competition by demonstrating the strong correlation between the effectiveness of competition and economic growth.[61] The function of Hollywood as a competitor remained active until the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Hollywood was re-invited into China in the early 1990s, when the film market of China was plunged into a crisis. Hollywood again played a crucial role in benefiting the development of the Chinese film industry at a time of recession. The spectacle scenes of Hollywood films attracted audiences back to cinemas. The profits from screening Hollywood films rescued the distribution

[61] Mark Dutz and Aydin Hayri, *Does More Intense Competition Lead to Higher Growth?* Centre for Economic Policy Research, 1999; Hiroyuki Odagiri, *Growth through Competition, Competition through Growth*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.

and exhibition sectors of the film market and sponsored domestic film production.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Few film industries can neglect the impact of Hollywood in the past 100 years, and the Chinese film industry is of no exception. Other than few moments, Hollywood always stands there, influencing domestic Chinese films. Even in periods when Hollywood was forced to leave, its influence was hardly to be in vain. With respect to Hollywood's impact on the domestic film industry, I claim that the influence of Hollywood largely relied on how the domestic industry responds to Hollywood. In this study, I have attempted to explore how Chinese in the 1920s and 1930s actively responded to Hollywood and forged its modern film industry by harnessing Hollywood. On the one hand, the expansion of Hollywood would "operate to curtail the demands for domestic films as Hollywood diverted a large portion of Chinese patrons, in particular foreign residents and upper-class Chinese with a sufficient knowledge of English".[1] On the other hand, Hollywood could benefit the development of the domestic film industry in its global expansion. Hollywood sets an example for domestic film enterprises to imitate, but also continuously innovates the domestic film industry in technology and inspires and uplifts domestic film business through competition. What conclusions about the film industry maybe suggested by the industrial response of China to Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s then?

Firstly, it is not certain that the domestic film industry would decline when competing with Hollywood. The case of the Chinese film industry in the 1920 and 1930s demonstrated how a domestic film industry flourished along with the boom of Hollywood. In the 1920s and 1930s Hollywood dominated the film market in China with respect to film quantity and box office. However, the Chinese film industry still

[1] Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China", 47-48.

prospered in this period. It showed competitive advantages in the reception of individual films and studio incomes in comparison with Hollywood films in China. In addition, the growth of the Chinese film industry was continuous from the 1920s to 1930s in terms of scale. The Chinese film industry completed its sound conversion in five years, a relative quick pace. The distribution system also became more sophisticated through imitating that of Hollywood. This evidence suggests there is no fixed relation between Hollywood's oppression and the shrinking of the domestic film industry.

Secondly, the boundary between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry was blurred in the 1930s. As demonstrated in the history of the cinema's conversion to sound in China, Hollywood served as an active force in constructing the Chinese film industry. In the field of economy, Hollywood inspired and stimulated its Chinese counterpart. In the field of technology, Hollywood supplied sound-on-film technology, trained domestic sound engineers and served as the model that local cinemas aimed to imitate. This suggests that the transnational aspects of the Chinese film industry occurred not only in the 1990s, but also in the early twentieth century.

Thirdly, "patriotism" should not be first and foremost the yardstick for domestic film practitioners. For a long time, historical literature about Chinese film has been dominated by nationalistic sentiment and the ideology of Marxism. Fuelled by nationalism, the merchants who assisted the business of Hollywood were condemned as "traitors", responsible for the incursion of Hollywood. The significance of the intermediaries as a bridge between China and Hollywood was highly neglected. The intermediaries introduced the advanced film systems and modern equipment of Hollywood into China. In addition, the merchants also directly invested into all sectors of domestic film business. Their contributions to the growth of the Chinese film

industry should not be neglected under the light of nationalism.

Fourthly, competition under a market-oriented market structure was the key to the prosperity of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s and 1930s. Largely due to the incapacity to enforce protectionism, the authorities in the 1920s and 1930s maintained a relatively neutral position to the film business. A market-oriented structure was developed in the film market of China. The Chinese film industry, under the market-oriented structure, generated impetus for the response to Hollywood. Two major strategies, product differentiation and direct competition, were employed by the Chinese film industry. By virtue of these strategies, the Chinese film industry not only maintained its vitality through competition, but also increased its sales income and flourished by continuously appeasing local audiences.

It is necessary to note the potential threat and limitation of the Chinese film industry under the cover of its prosperity. China's mode of production is a case in point. Although it was devoted to learning from the Hollywood system, China's mode of production differed from its Hollywood counterpart through maintaining the powerful position of director within the producer system. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the strong position of directors may contribute to the stylistic signature, but also make the Chinese film industry vulnerable. Due to largely relying on the performance of the directors, the Chinese film industry remained small scale and it was hard to achieve sustainable development.

Consequently, the prosperity of the Chinese film industry was not all pervasive. A great depression swept the Chinese film market from 1935. At worse, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 suspended the pace of the Chinese film industry. Nevertheless, a basic structure of response to Hollywood was inherited in the film market of China in the late 1930s and 1940s. China continued to import American

equipment, maintain the Hollywood-style systems and compete with Hollywood films. From 1950 to early 1990s, Hollywood films were expelled from the sight of Mainland Chinese ordinary audiences due to the outbreak of the Korean War and Chinese and American intervention.

Hollywood was re-introduced into China's market in an official way in 1994 when the Chinese film industry was facing a formidable crisis. To the Chinese film industry, Hollywood's re-entrance into China's markets in the 1990s raised once again the question which this study has asked: what did Hollywood bring to the domestic film industry? With little doubt, due to different political and economic context, China's industrial response to Hollywood in the 1990s could not be simply seen as repetition of history. However, China's film practitioners and policymakers may find lessons from history.

Filmography (in Alphabetical Order)

Adventures in the Battlefield/Zhandi lixianji/战地历险记

Mingxing, 1932

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 9 reels

After Separation/Bie hou/别后

Aimei dianyingshe/Aimei Film Association, 1925

Dir. Qin Zhengru, 8 reels

All Quiet in the Western Front

Universal, 1930

Dir. Lewis Milestone, 136 mins

Awareness/Juewu/觉悟

Sanxing, 1925

Dir. Ling Lianying

Big Road/ Dalu/大路

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Sun Yu, 103 mins

Broken Blossom

D.W. Griffith Productions, 1919

Dir. D.W. Griffith, 90 mins

Burning of Red Lotus Temple, The/Huoshao hong liansi/火烧红莲寺

Mingxing, 1928-1930

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 18 episodes

Captain Swagger

Pathe, 1928

Dir. Edward Griffith, 65 mins

Children of the Clouds/ Fengyun ernv/Children of Troubled Times/风云儿女

Diantong, 1935

Dir. Xu Xingzhi

Count of Monte Cristo, The

Edwards Small Productions, 1934

Dir. Rowland V. Lee, 113 mins

Curse of Opium, The/Heiji yuan hun/黑籍冤魂

Lauro Films, 1916

Cinematographer: A.E. Lauro

Cutting Pigtails by Force

Lauro Films, 1911

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Dark Angel

Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1935

Dir. Sidney Franklin, 106 mins

Day's Pleasure, A,

First National Pictures, 1919

Dir. Charlie Chaplin, 24 mins

Ding Jun Mountain/Ding jun shan/定军山

Fengtai, 1905

Cinematographer: Liu Zhonglun, 3 reels

Fashion of 1934

First National Pictures, 1934

Dir. William Dieterle, 78 mins

***Flower of Liberty, The/Ziyou zhi hua/*自由之花

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Zheng Zhengqiu, 11 reels

***Fool Pays Respect, The/Dailao baishou/*呆佬拜寿

Lianhe, 1933

Dir. Hou Yao

***Foundling/Qi'er/*弃儿

Shanghai, 1924

Dir. Dan Duyu

Gardens of Allah

Selznick International Pictures, 1936

Dir. Richard Boleslawski, 79 mins

General John Regan

Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1933

Dir. Henry Edwards, 74 mins

***Good Brother/Hao gege/*好哥哥

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 9 reels

Grand Hotel

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932

Dir. Edmund Goulding, 112 mins

Helen's Babies

Sol Lesser Productions, 1924

Dir. William A. Seiter, 85 mins

Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking

Lauro Films, 1908

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Kid Millions

Howard Productions, 1934

Dir. Roy Del Ruth, 90 mins

Kids/Renjian xianzi/人间仙子

Yihua, 1934

Dir. Dan Duyu, 10 reels

Late Spring/Can chun/残春

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 10 reels

Legend of Taiping Kingdom, The/ Hongyang haoxia zhuan/红羊豪侠传

Xinhua, 1935

Dir. Yang Xiaozhong

Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate, The/Liu die yuan/柳碟缘

Film Department, British American Tobacco Company, 1926

Dir. William Jansen

Life's Comedy/Ti xiao yinyuan/Fate in Tears and Laughter/啼笑姻缘

Mingxing, 1932

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 6 episodes

Lost Lamb, The/Mitu de gaoyang/迷途的羔羊

Lianhua, 1936

Dir. Cai Chusheng

Lotus Blossom

Wah Ming Motion Picture Company, 1921

Dir. James B Leong, 15 mins

***Love and Duty/ Lianai yu yiwu/*恋爱与义务**

Lianhua, 1931

Dir. Bo Wancang, 15 reels

Love Parade, The

Paramount, 1929

Dir. Ernst Lubitsch, 107 mins

Lovely Views in Shanghai Concessions,

Lauro Films, 1909

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

***Mei Jen Chi/Mei ren ji/*美人计**

Dazhonghua, 1928

Dir. Lu Jie, 24 reels

Miserable/Les Miserables

20th Century Pictures, 1935

Dir. Richard Boleslawski, 105 mins

Modern Times

Charlie Chaplin Productions, 1936

Dir. Charlie Chaplin, 87 mins

***Morning in the Metropolis/Duhui de zaochen/*都会的早晨**

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Cai Chusheng

***Mr. Right/Yi zhong ren/*意中人**

Dazhonghua, 1928

Dir. Lu Jie, 8 reels

***New Peach Blossom Fan/ Xin taohua shan/*新桃花扇**

Xinhua, 1935

Dir. Ouyang Yuqian

***Night in the City/Chengshi zhi ye/*城市之夜**

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Fei Mu, 11 reels

***Orphan Rescues Grandfather/Guer jiu zuji/*孤儿救祖记**

Mingxing, 1923

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 10 reels

Palooka

Edward Small Productions, 1934

Dir. Benjamin Stoloff, 86 mins

***Peace after Storm/ Yuguo tianqing/*雨过天青**

Huangguang, 1931

Dir. Xia Chifeng, 12 reels

***Poor Man Won a Lottery, A/Khoojin Whatchay/Kuli ren facai/*苦力人发财**

Asiatic Film Company, 1913

Cinematographer: William H. Lynch (?)

***Pursuit/Zhuiqiu/*追求**

Tianyi, 1933

Dir. Qiu Qixiang, 9 reels

***Reconciliation/Kong gulan/Lonely Orchid/*空谷兰**

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 20 reels

***Reminiscence of Peking, The/Gudu chunmeng/Spring Dream in the Old Capital/*故都春梦

North China Amusements Ltd./Lianhua, 1930

Dir. Sun Yu, 10 reels

Rise of Catherine the Great, The

London Film Productions, 1934

Dir. Paul Czinner, 95 mins

Roman Scandals

Howard Productions, 1933

Dir. Frank Tuttle, 92 mins

***Romance of Opera/ Gechang chunse/Spring Arrives at the Singing World/*歌场春色

Tianyi, 1931

Dir. Li Pingqian, 9 reels

***Sable Cicada/Diaochan/*貂蝉

Xinhua, 1938

Dir. Bo Wancang

Scarlet Pimpernel, The

London Film Productions, 1934

Dir. Harold Young, 97 mins

***Shanghai Battles/Songhu huizhan/*淞沪会战

Asiatic Film Company, 1913

Cinematographer: William Lynch (?)

***Shanghai Victory Zhangong/*战功

Dazhonghua, 1925

Dir. Xu Xinfu, 9 reels

Shanghai's First Tramway

1908

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Singing Beauty, The/Yu meiren/虞美人

Youlian, 1931

Dir. Chen Kengran

Singing Peony, The/ Genv hong mudan/ The Sing Song Girl Red Peony/歌女红牡丹

Mass Paminphone Co., 1931

Dir. Zhang Shichuan

Song of China/Tian lun/天伦

Lianhua, 1936

Dir. Fei Mu

Spring Dream of the Lute, The/Pipa chunyuan/琵琶春怨

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Li Pingqian, 8 reels

Sign of the Cross

Paramount, 1932

Dir. Cecil B DeMille, 108 mins

So, This is Paradise/ Ruci tiantang/如此天堂

Mass Paminphone Co., 1931

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 29 reels

Song at Midnight/ Yeban gesheng/夜半歌声

Xinhua, 1937

Dir. Maxu Weibang

Song of the Fishermen/ Yuguang qu/渔光曲

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Cai Chusheng

Spring in the South/Nanguo zhi chun/南国之春

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Cai Chusheng, 9 reels

Stone of Life, The/San sheng shi/三生石

Huaxing, 1932

Dir. Wang Chunyuan, 7 reels

Street Angel/Malu tianshi/马路天使

Mingxing, 1937

Dir. Yuan Muzhi, 10 reels

Strive/Fen dou/奋斗

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 9 reels

Three Thieves/San zei an/三贼案

Asiatic Film Company, 1914 or 1915

Cinematographer: William H. Lynch (?)

Tom Sawyer

Paramount, 1930

Dir. John Cromwell, 86 mins

Torrent/Kuang liu/狂流

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Chen Bugao, 8 reels

***Toys/Xiao wanyi/Little Toys/*小玩意**

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Sun Yu, 11 reels

***Two Sisters/Zimei hua/Twin Sisters/*姊妹花**

Mingxing, 1933

Dir Zheng Zhengqiu, 11 reels

***Two Stars/ Yinhang shuangxing/*银汉双星**

Lianhua, 1931

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 12 reels

Tugboat Annie

MGM, 1933

Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 86 mins

Volcano, Love and Blood/Huoshan qing xie/The Blood of Passion on the Volcano/

火山情血

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Cai Chusheng, 10 reels

Way Down East

D.W. Griffith Productions, 1920

Dir. D.W. Griffith, 145 mins

Welcome Danger

The Harold Lloyd Corporation, 1929

Dir. Clyde Bruckman, 113 mins

West of China

Warner Brothers, 1937

Dir. John Farrow, 64mins.

When a Brother Sacrifices/ Yiyan qingyuan/义雁情鸳

Lianhua, 1930

Dir. Wang Cilong, 9 reels

White Golden Dragon/Bai jin long/白金龙

Tianyi, 1933

Dir. Tang Xiaodan, 12 reels

Why Divorce/Xinren de jiating/新人的家庭

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Ren Jinping, 11 reels

Wild Rose/Ye meigui/野玫瑰

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Sun Yu, 9 reels

Wind/Feng/风

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Wu Cun

Women/Nv ren/女人

Yihua, 1934

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 14 reels

Worker's Wife, A /Gongren zhi qi/工人之妻

Dongfang diyi/Oriental First, 1926

Dir. Ren Pengnian

Filmography (by Year of Release)

Ding Jun Mountain/Ding jun shan/定军山

Fengtai, 1905

Cinematographer: Liu Zhonglun, 3 reels

Imperial Funeral Procession in Peking

Lauro Films, 1908

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Shanghai's First Tramway

Lauro Films, 1908

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Lovely Views in Shanghai Concessions,

Lauro Film, 1909

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Cutting Pigtails by Force

Lauro Films, 1911

Cinematographer: A. E. Lauro

Poor Man Won a Lottery, A/Khoojin Whatchay/Kuli ren facai/苦力人发财

Asiatic Film Company, 1913

Cinematographer: William H. Lynch (?)

Shanghai Battles/Songhu huizhan/淞沪会战

Asiatic Film Company,

Cinematographer: William Lynch (?), 1913

Three Thieves/San zei an/三贼案

Asiatic Film Company?, 1914 or 1915

Cinematographer: William H. Lynch (?)

***Curse of Opium, The/Heiji yuan hun/*黑籍冤魂**

Lauro Films, 1916

Cinematographer: A.E. Lauro

Broken Blossom

D.W. Griffith Productions, 1919

Dir. D.W. Griffith, 90 mins

***Day's Pleasure, A*,**

First National Pictures, 1919

Dir. Charlie Chaplin, 24 mins

Way Down East

D.W. Griffith Productions, 1920

Dir. D.W. Griffith, 145 mins

Lotus Blossom

Wah Ming Motion Picture Company, 1921

Dir. Francis J. Grandon, James B Leong, 15 mins

***Foundling/Qi'er/*弃儿**

Shanghai, 1924

Dir. Dan Duyu

***Orphan Rescues Grandfather/Guer jiu zuji/*孤儿救祖记**

Mingxing, 1923

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 10 reels

Helen's Babies

Sol Lesser Productions, 1924

Dir. William A. Seiter, 85 mins

***After Separation/Bie hou/*别后**

Aimei Film Association, 1925

Dir. Qin Zhengru, 8 reels

***Awareness/Juewu/*觉悟**

Sanxing, 1925

Dir. Ling Lianying

***Why Divorce/Xinren de jiating/*新人的家庭**

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Ren Jinping, 11 reels

***Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate, The/Liu die yuan/*柳碟缘**

Film Department, British American Tobacco Company, 1926

Dir. William Jansen

***Good Brother/Hao gege/*好哥哥**

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 9 reels

***Reconciliation/Kong gulan/Lonely Orchid/*空谷兰**

Mingxing, 1925

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 20 reels

***Shanghai Victory/Zhangong/*战功**

Dazhonghua, 1925

Dir. Xu Xinfu, 9 reels

***A Worker's Wife/Gongren zhi qi/*工人之妻**

Dongfang diyi/Oriental First, 1926

Dir. Ren Pengnian

Captain Swagger

Pathe, 1928

Dir. Edward Griffith, 65 mins

Burning of Red Lotus Temple, The/Huoshao hong liansi/火烧红莲寺

Mingxing, 1928-1930

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 18 episodes

Mei Jen Chi/Mei ren ji/美人计

Dazhonghua, 1928

Dir. Lu Jie, 24 reels

Mr. Right/Yi zhong ren/意中人

Dazhonghua, 1928

Dir. Lu Jie, 8 reels

Love Parade, The

Paramount, 1929

Dir. Ernst Lubitsch, 107 mins

Welcome Danger

The Harold Lloyd Corporation, 1929

Dir. Clyde Bruckman, 113 mins

All Quiet in the Western Front

Universal, 1930

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Dir. Wang Cilong, 9 reels

Love and Duty/ Lianai yu yiwu/恋爱与义务

Lianhua, 1931

Dir. Bo Wancang, 15 reels

Peace after Storm/ Yuguo tianqing/雨过天青

Huangguang, 1931

Dir. Xia Chifeng, 12 reels

Romance of Opera/ Gechang chunse/Spring Arrives at the Singing World/歌场春色

Tianyi, 1931

Dir. Li Pingqian, 9 reels

Singing Beauty, The/Yu meiren/虞美人

Youlian, 1931

Dir. Chen Kengran

Singing Peony, The/ Genv hong mudan/ The Sing Song Girl Red Peony/歌女红牡丹

Mass Paminphone Co., 1931

Dir. Zhang Shichuan

So, This is Paradise/ Ruci tiantang/如此天堂

Mass Paminphone Co., 1931

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 29 reels

Two Stars/ Yinhang shuangxing/银汉双星

Lianhua, 1931

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 12 reels

Adventures in the Battlefield/Zhandi lixianji/战地历险记

Mingxing, 1932

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 9 reels

Grand Hotel

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932

Dir. Edmund Goulding, 112 mins

Life's Comedy/Ti xiao yinyuan/Fate in Tears and Laughter/啼笑姻缘

Mingxing, 1932

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 6 episodes

Sign of the Cross

Paramount, 1932

Dir. Cecil B DeMille, 108 mins

Stone of Life, The/San sheng shi/三生石

Huaxing, 1932

Dir. Wang Chunyuan, 7 reels

Strive/Fen dou/奋斗

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 9 reels

Volcano, Love and Blood/Huoshan qing xie/The Blood of Passion on the Volcano/

火山情血

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Cai Chusheng, 10 reels

***Wild Rose/Ye meigui/*野玫瑰**

Lianhua, 1932

Dir. Sun Yu, 9 reels

***Flower of Liberty, The/Ziyou zhi hua/*自由之花**

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Zheng Zhengqiu, 11 reels

***Fool Pays Respect, The/Dailao baishou/*呆佬拜寿**

Lianhe, 1933

Dir. Hou Yao

General John Regan

Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1933

Dir. Henry Edwards, 74 mins

***Late Spring/Can chun/*残春**

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 10 reels

***Morning in the Metropolis/Duhui de zaochen/*都会的早晨**

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Cai Chusheng

***Night in the City/Chengshi zhi ye/*城市之夜**

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Fei Mu, 11 reels

***Pursuit/Zhuiqiu/*追求**

Tainyi, 1933

Dir. Qiu Qixiang, 9 reels

Roman Scandals

Howard Productions, 1933

Dir. Frank Tuttle, 92 mins

Spring Dream of the Lute, The/Pipa chunyuan/琵琶春怨

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Li Pingqian, 8 reels

Spring in the South/Nanguo zhi chun/南国之春

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Cai Chusheng, 9 reels

Torrent/Kuang liu/狂流

Mingxing, 1933

Dir. Chen Bugao, 8 reels

Toys/Xiao wanyi/Little Toys/小玩意

Lianhua, 1933

Dir. Sun Yu, 11 reels

Two Sisters/Zimei hua/Twin Sisters/姊妹花

Mingxing, 1933

Dir Zheng Zhengqiu, 11 reels

Tugboat Annie

MGM, 1933

Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 86 mins

White Golden Dragon/Bai jin long/白金龙

Tianyi, 1933

Dir. Tang Xiaodan, 12 reels

***Big Road/ Dalu/*大路**

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Sun Yu, 103 mins

Count of Monte Cristo, The

Edwards Small Productions, 1934

Dir. Rowland V. Lee, 113 mins

Fashion of 1934

First National Pictures, 1934

Dir. William Dieterle, 78 mins

Kid Millions

Howard Productions, 1934

Dir. Roy Del Ruth, 90 mins

***Kids/Renjian xianzi/*人间仙子**

Yihua, 1934

Dir. Dan Duyu, 10 reels

Palooka

Edward Small Productions, 1934

Dir. Benjamin Stoloff, 86 mins

Rise of Catherine the Great, The

London Film Productions, 1934

Dir. Paul Czinner, 95 mins

Scarlet Pimpernel, The

London Film Productions, 1934

Dir. Harold Young, 97 mins

***Song of the Fishermen/ Yuguang qu/*渔光曲**

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Cai Chusheng

***Wind/Feng/*风**

Lianhua, 1934

Dir. Wu Cun

***Women/Nv ren/*女人**

Yihua, 1934

Dir. Shi Dongshan, 14 reels

***Children of the Clouds/ Fengyun ernv/Children of Troubled Times/*风云儿女**

Diantong, 1935

Dir. Xu Xingzhi

Dark Angel

Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1935

Dir. Sidney Franklin, 106 mins

***Legend of Taiping Kingdom, The/ Hongyang haoxia zhuan/*红羊豪侠传**

Xinhua, 1935

Dir. Yang Xiaozhong

Miserable/Les Miserables

20th Century Pictures, 1935

Dir. Richard Boleslawski, 105 mins

***New Peach Blossom Fan/ Xin taohua shan/*新桃花扇**

Xinhua, 1935

Dir. Ouyang Yuqian

Gardens of Allah

Selznick International Pictures, 1936

Dir. Richard Boleslawski, 79 mins

Lost Lamb, The/Mitu de gaoyang/迷途的羔羊

Lianhua, 1936

Dir. Cai Chusheng

Modern Times

Charlie Chaplin Productions, 1936

Dir. Charlie Chaplin, 87 mins

Song of China/Tian lun/天伦

Lianhua, 1936

Dir. Fei Mu

Song at Midnight/ Yeban gesheng/夜半歌声

Xinhua, 1937

Dir. Maxu Weibang

Street Angel/Malu tianshi/马路天使

Mingxing, 1937

Dir. Yuan Muzhi, 10 reels

West of China

Warner Brothers, 1937

Dir. John Farrow, 64 mins

Sable Cicada/Diaochan/貂蝉

Xinhua, 1938

Dir. Bo Wancang

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Glossary

Bai jin long/White Golden Dragon	*白金龙*
Bai she zhuan/Tale of White Snake	*白蛇传*
Bao Tianxiao	包天笑
Bao xi zhi	包戏制
Bian Yuying	卞毓英
Bie hou/ After Separation	*别后*
Butterfly Wu	胡蝶
Cai Chusheng	蔡楚生
Cai Lianxi	蔡连溪
Can chun/Late Spring	*残春*
Cao Yuankai	曹元恺
Chen Chunsheng	陈春生
Chen Guofu	陈果夫
Chen Shouyin	陈寿荫
Chen Xiangxia	陈祥霞
Chen Yanyan	陈燕燕
Chen Zhiqing	陈趾青
Cheng Bugao	程步高
Cheng Shuren	程树仁
Chengshi zhi ye/Night in the City	*城市之夜*
Da lu/ Big Road	*大路*

Dai lao bai shou/The Fool Pays Respect	*呆佬拜寿*
Dao ziran qu/ Return to Nature	*到自然去*
Diansheng	电声
Diantong	电通
Diao chan /Sable Cicada	*貂蝉*
Ding Jun Mountain/Ding jun shan	*定军山*
Dong Keyi	董克毅
Duhui de zaochen/ Morning in the Metropolis/	*都会的早晨*
Duxiu	读秀
Fan Xuepeng	范雪朋
Feng/Wind	*风*
Feng yun er nv/ Children of the Clouds	*风云儿女*
Ge chang chun se/ Romance of Opera	*歌场春色*
Gong Jianong	龚稼农
Gongren zhi qi/A Worker's Wife	*工人之妻*
Gong Yuke	龚玉珂
Gu Jianchen	谷剑臣
Guanghua	光华
Gudu chunmeng/The Reminiscence of Peking	*故都春梦*
Guer jiu zu ji/Orphan Rescues Grandfather	*孤儿救祖记*
Guoguang	国光
Han Langen	韩兰根

Hei ji yuanhun/ The Curse of Opium	*黑籍冤魂*
He Tingran/T. J. Holt	何挺然
He Yongchang	何泳昌
Hong Ji	洪济
Hong Shen	洪深
Hong yang hao xia zhuan/ The Legend of Taiping Heavenly Kingdom	*红羊豪侠传*
Hua'an	华安
Huaguang	华光
Huawei	华威
Hujiang	沪江
Huoshan qing xie/ Volcano, Love and Blood	*火山情血*
Huoshao honglian si/The Burning of Red Lotus Temple	*火烧红莲寺*
Jinan	暨南
Jiang Qifeng	姜起凤
Jin Yan	金焰
Jue wu/ Awareness	*觉悟*
Kong gu lan /Reconciliation	*空谷兰*
Kuaihuolin	快活林
Kuangliu/ Torrent	*狂流*
Kuliren facai/ Khoojin Whatchay/A Poor Man Won a Lottery	*苦力人发财*

Lao Jingxiu	劳敬修
Li Hongshou	李鸿寿
Li Manli/Mary Lee	李曼丽
Li Minwei	黎民伟
Li Minghui	黎明晖
Lian'ai yu yiwu/ Love and Duty	*恋爱与义务*
Lian'an	联安
Lianhua	联华
Liao Enshou	廖恩寿
Liu die yuan/The Legend of the Willow Pattern Plate	*柳碟缘*
Liu Jiqun	刘继群
Liu Naou	刘呐鸥
Lu Gen/Lo Kan	卢根
Lu Jie	陆洁
Lu Xun	鲁迅
Luo Peng	罗朋
Luo Mingyou	罗明佑
Ma Dejian	马德建
Mai Junbo	麦君博
Malu tianshi/ Street Angel	*马路天使*
Meihua	梅花

Mei Lanfang	梅兰芳
Mei ren ji/Mei Jen Chi	*美人计*
Mingxing	明星
Mitu de gao yang/The Lost Lamb	*迷途的羔羊*
Nanguo zhi chun/Spring in the South	*南国之春*
Nv ren/ Women	*女人*
Pipa chun yuan / The Spring Dream of the Lute	*琵琶春怨*
Qi er/ Foundling	*弃儿*
Qingdao Shibao	*青岛时报*
Renjian xianzi/Kids	*人间仙子*
Ren Jinping	任矜萍
Ren Pengnian	任彭年
Ruan Lingyu	阮玲玉
San sheng shi /The Stone of Life	*三生石*
San zei an/ The Three Thieves	*三贼案*
Shao Zuiweng	邵醉翁
Shang Bao	*商报*
Shen Bao	*申报*
Shi Dongshan	史东山
Shi Shipan	石世磐
Situ Huimin	司徒慧敏
Situ Yimin	司徒逸民

Sun Yu	孙瑜
Tan Youliu	谭友六
Tao Shengbai	陶胜百
Ti xiao yinyuan/ Life's Comedy	*啼笑姻缘*
Tian lun/Song of China	*天伦*
Tianyi	天一
Xinhua	新华
Yin Mingzhu	殷明珠
Wang Fuqing	汪福庆
Wang Hanlun	王汉伦
Wang Renmei	王人美
Wang Yuanlong	王元龙
Wang Yuting	王雨亭
Wu Cun	吴村
Wu Weiyun	吴蔚云
Wu Xingzai	吴性栽
Xiao wanyi/Toys	*小玩意*
Xin ren de jiating/Why Divorce	*新人的家庭*
Xin taohua shan /New Peach Blossom	*新桃花扇*
Xinwen Bao	*新闻报*
Yan Heming	颜鹤鸣
Yang Xiaozhong	杨小仲

Yao Yuyuan	姚豫元
Yaxiya	亚西亚
Ye ban ge sheng/ Song at Midnight	*夜半歌声*
Ye meigui/Wild Rose	*野玫瑰*
Yihua	艺华
Yinhan shuangxing/Two Stars	*银汉双星*
Yi yan qing yuan/ When a Brother Sacrifices	*义雁情冤*
Youlian	友联
Yu guang qu/ Song of the Fishermen	*渔光曲*
Yu guo tian qing/Peace after Storm	*雨过天青*
Yu meiren/The Singing Beauty	*虞美人*
Yuan Lvdeng	袁履登
Yukang	裕康
Zhan di lixian ji /Adventures in the Battlefield	*战地历险记*
Zhan gong/ Shanghai of Victory	*战功*
Zhang Juchuan	张巨川
Zhang Shichuan	张石川
Zhang Weitao	张伟涛
Zhang Zhiyun	张织云
Zhao Chen	赵琛
Zheng Jiduo	郑基铎
Zheng Junli	郑君里

Zhou Shoujuan	周瘦鹃
Zhou Yongnian	周永年
Zhu Fei	朱飞
Zhuiqiu/Pursuit	*追求*
Zhu Shilin	朱石麟
Zhu Shouju	朱瘦菊
Zi Luolan	紫罗兰
Zimei hua/ Two Sisters	*姊妹花*
Ziyou zhi hua / The Flower of Liberty	*自由之花*