



EDITED BY

CARLOS  
ROJAS  
EILEEN  
CHOW

≡ The Oxford Handbook of  
**CHINESE  
CINEMAS**

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
**CHINESE CINEMAS**

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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CHINESE  
CINEMAS

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*Edited by*

CARLOS ROJAS

*and*

EILEEN CHENG-YIN CHOW

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**CHINESE CINEMAS**

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# INTRODUCTION

## *chinese cinemas and the art of extrapolation*

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CARLOS ROJAS

Cinema is the art of extrapolation—the production of the appearance of movement from an array of still images. While this process is most obvious with the technology of film itself, in which this illusory movement is the product of a series of transparencies presented at a rate such that the brain perceives them to be in continuous motion, even nonfilmic technologies of the moving image—ranging from precinematic devices such as the zoetrope, phenakistoscope, and parxinoscope, to what we might call postcinematic media such as video and DV—similarly use a constellation of static elements ranging from discrete images to individual pixels in order to create a semblance of movement. The magic of cinema, therefore, lies not in any of its individual constituent images, but rather in the imagined space that opens up between them.

A comparable process of *conceptual* extrapolation, meanwhile, undergirds our understanding of the field of cinema itself. Any body of cinematic production—from a single director's oeuvre to an entire genre—comprises a set of works, people, and institutions that are perceived as being linked to one another in a salient manner. Like the illusory movement that stitches together a succession of individual film frames into a moving picture, however, the networks of connections viewed as holding a field together are not intrinsic to the field itself, but rather are essentially projected onto it by outside observers. The field of Chinese cinema, accordingly, is grounded not on the individual works themselves, but rather on the extrapolated networks within which those works are positioned.

To be clear, though, the point is not that there are *no* connections linking the works within a putative field to one another, but rather precisely the opposite—there are simply *too many* vectors along which we might perceive these relationships. In classifying works into meaningful taxonomies, we could, for instance, use criteria such as the works' subject, language, length, audience, ideology, historical period, funding sources, political orientation, or medium of production. These various criteria overlap with and diverge

from another in complicated ways and rarely, if ever, map straightforwardly onto the intuitive understanding that we may have of a cultural field.

Some of the theoretical stakes inherent in this question of the constitution of a conceptual or cultural field are illustrated in a famous thought experiment proposed by the late philosopher W. V. O. Quine—in which he suggests that we imagine an extraterrestrial anthropologist observing an earthling saying the word *gavagai* while pointing at a rabbit loping across a field. While a terrestrial anthropologist would probably assume that *gavagai* simply means “rabbit,” Quine’s extraterrestrial might very have a very different conceptual mapping of the world, which might lead it to assume that the new term could mean something as seemingly esoteric as “an isolated temporal slice of rabbit” or “undifferentiated rabbit parts.” Quine concludes that the meaning of a term is not deducible from any isolated utterance, but rather is necessarily grounded in a complicated set of assumptions about the epistemological field within which the utterance is made. The meaning of a term, in other words, is determined by its ontological and epistemological ground, together with the matrix of linkages between the term and its lexical environment.

A similar argument could be made about Chinese cinema. If Quine’s hypothetical extraterrestrial were to see an earthling point at a film and call it *Chinese cinema*, the alien’s inferences about what the term means would necessarily hinge on its intuitions about a variety of underlying issues. To begin with, there is the question of what precisely a cinematic work is in the first place. Does a work retain its identity across all possible media (e.g., if viewed as a film, a video, a laser disc, and so forth)? What if it has been released in different versions (e.g., for different markets)? Under what circumstances are subtitles, dubbed voices, and other paratextual elements considered to be part of the work, as opposed to mere parasitic supplements? Would the work retain its identity if the original script were to be reperformed and rerecorded by others? How about if the work were to be creatively reinterpreted? Would a film retain its identity if the original print were to be carefully restored? How about if it were to be intentionally altered or defaced? These questions about the status of the film as a discrete work are ones about which there is bound to be considerable disagreement even among people who think they understand what the term *cinema* means, much less a hypothetical alien not familiar with these discursive conventions.

Some of these sorts of questions are explored in Olivier Assayas’s 1996 film *Irma Vep*, in which a fictional French film director recruits the Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung 張曼玉 (playing herself) to remake the classic French silent film serial *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, dir., 1915–1916). The fictional project quickly spirals out of control, however, and Assayas’s film concludes with his fictional director screening not the remake of *Les Vampires* that he had originally proposed to produce, but rather a deliberately defaced print of the original silent film. *Irma Vep*, therefore, presents three distinct repetitions of portions of Feuillade’s film: it rescreens select scenes from the French classic, it introduces contemporary reenactments of the earlier work, and it concludes with a screening of a vandalized print of the original film. Many viewers would probably regard the “straight” rescreenings as an unproblematic extension of the historical film,

and the contemporary restagings as fundamentally new creations. The final screening of the defaced print appears to be positioned on the knife-edge between these extremes—resembling both an act of extreme fidelity to the original work and a violent rupture from the historical continuity associated with that work.

Part of the reason why the fictional director's attempted remake of *Les Vampires* is challenged within Assayas's film is because his crew object, on apparently nationalistic grounds, to the director's determination to cast the ethnically Chinese Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung—whom he adores for her work in a series of popular Hong Kong action films—in the lead role of the French classic. While this implicit reflection on the protectionist, perhaps even xenophobic, tendencies of the French film industry may be read as a critical commentary on France's role in having spearheaded the European Union's 1989 "Television without Frontiers" directive—which stipulated that a majority of a European nation's television entertainment broadcast time should be reserved for works of European origin—Assayas's film could also be seen as a reflection on similar anxieties about the status of Hong Kong cinema on the eve of Hong Kong's return to Chinese control in 1997. Maggie Cheung's prominent position in the French work serves as a reminder that France's concerns about the autonomy and identity of French cinema in the shadow of global Hollywood mirrors contemporary Hong Kong's concerns about the future of Hong Kong cinema (and culture) in the shadow of Mainland China.

As a multilingual and multiethnic territory that had long been functionally autonomous from Mainland China, meanwhile, Hong Kong is associated with a distinctive cinematic tradition that defies easy categorization as to whether it is "Chinese" or not—and by extension a focus on Hong Kong also implicitly dramatizes some of the taxonomical tensions inherent in the concept of *Chinese cinema* itself. In particular, the adjective *Chinese* in the (English-language) phrase *Chinese cinema* is semantically ambiguous and may be understood in either linguistic, ethnic, cultural, political, or territorial terms. Although these various understandings frequently overlap with one another, there are also many situations in which they diverge. A work may, for instance, originate from China but be in a language other than Chinese, just as it may be from outside China yet still feature Chinese dialogue. It may feature ethnically Chinese actors in a diasporic setting, or it may present ethnic minorities or foreigners in a Chinese setting. It may receive funding from China (or Hong Kong or Taiwan) but be set in the West, just as it may be set in China but receive all of its financing from abroad. While it is certainly possible to posit certain criteria for determining whether a work is "Chinese" (such as whether a majority of its dialogue is in a dialect of Chinese), the result is unlikely to precisely match our intuitions about the term and its corresponding cultural field.

In this volume, accordingly, we do not attempt to specify any necessary and sufficient criterion (or criteria) for determining what constitutes Chinese cinema, and instead treat the field as shaped by a fluid constellation of partially overlapping attributes—or what Ludwig Wittgenstein calls "family resemblances." We use this notion of family resemblances to reaffirm popular intuitions regarding what is considered to be a Chinese film, while at the same time interrogating our assumptions about the meaning of the concept



itself. Part of the appeal of Wittgenstein's notion is that it suggests that a category like Chinese cinema may be seen not as a static and singular entity, but rather as a dynamic field that is continually transforming and reconstituting itself. Rather than delimiting our field of inquiry to a narrow focus on either cinematic works from Mainland China, works that feature primarily Chinese-language dialogue, works by ethnically Chinese directors, or on works with substantial funding from China or Greater China, we instead treat *Chinese cinema* as a category with fuzzy boundaries that are continually evolving and being renegotiated.

To this end, in the following chapters we examine a wide range of works, including many that are frequently regarded as paradigmatic examples of the field—such as Ren Qingtai's 任慶泰 *Dingjun Mountain* (定軍山, 1905), regarded as the first Chinese film; Zhang Shichuan's 張石川 *The Songstress Red Peony* (歌女紅牡丹, 1931), the first Chinese sound film; Fei Mu's 費穆 *Eternal Regret* (生死恨, 1948), Chinese cinema's first color film; and Ang Lee's 李安 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (臥虎藏龍, 2000), the highest-grossing foreign-language film in U.S. box-office history. Even as these canonical films provide models against which other works may be compared, however, many of them are also positioned at crucial junctures in the development of Chinese cinema—marking, for instance, the development of color cinema, the introduction of sound, and even the birth of Chinese cinema itself. These iconic works, therefore, serve as an important reminder of the field's inherent dynamism and continual capacity for reinvention.

We also, however, discuss many works that occupy a more marginal position within the field as currently conceived, including films such as the 1943 Manchurian musical *My Nightingale*, which featured a mostly Russian cast and was filmed mostly in Russian; Yengtha Her's 2005 film *Overseas Romances*, which was produced collaboratively by a Hmong-American man and a Miao woman from China and which circulated primarily in the Chinese diaspora; Harald Swat's 2010 version of *The Karate Kid*, which was filmed in China but featured an international cast and received mostly foreign funding; together with the Shanghai-based blogger and amateur filmmaker Btr's digital short *Night is the Tender*, which was disseminated over the Internet and was designed to be viewed on computers, cell phones, and other handheld devices. These latter sorts of works help defamiliarize conventional assumptions about the field of Chinese cinema, while pointing to alternate directions that the field might have taken, or might yet take.

Our attempts to interrogate the category of Chinese cinema are also reflected in the structure of this study itself. The volume is divided into three parts, each of which adopts a very different approach to the field. Part I looks at historical periodizations, Part II examines categories that share formal characteristics, and Part III looks at various structural elements involved in the production, distribution, and reception of the works themselves. While there will inevitably be a certain degree of overlap between these disparate approaches (it is, for instance, difficult to discuss formal considerations without also considering the underlying structural elements that grant the works their recognizable form in the first place), the idea is that each grouping foregrounds a distinct set of entry points into the field.

We make no claim here to comprehensiveness. Neither the volume as a whole, its three main parts, nor any of its individual chapters pretends to present an encyclopedic overview of its corresponding topic. Instead, our objective is to present a set of innovative analyses—the equivalent of an array of still images from which the reader may extrapolate new ways of viewing the fields and subfields into which they coalesce. We seek not to present a unified vision of the field of Chinese cinema, but rather to explore the interpretive spaces that open up *between* different conceptions of what form the field might take. It is here, we contend, that we may find the key to a richer understanding not only of a singular “Chinese cinema,” but more importantly of an eclectic body of mutually overlapping *Chinese cinemas*.

## HISTORY

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At the origin of Chinese cinema we find not a film, but rather a still image—a 1905 photograph of opera star Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培 in full costume performing scenes from the Beijing opera *Dingjun Mountain* (see fig. I.1). The photograph was taken at the Fengtai Photography Studio in Beijing, as Tan was being filmed by studio owner Ren Qingtai (also known by his style name, Ren Jingfeng 任景豐) and his assistant Liu Zhonglun 劉仲倫. The resulting three-reel, half-hour work (of which the only print was destroyed in a fire in the 1940s) is regarded as the first Chinese film.

While questions have been raised regarding this received account of Ren Qingtai’s 1905 filming of *Dingjun Mountain*,<sup>1</sup> even if we were to stipulate to the general reliability of the narrative itself, it would remain an open question what exactly it means to describe *Dingjun Mountain* as the marking the birth of Chinese cinema. To begin with, if we follow current practice and understand *cinema* as including not merely film but also a broader range of technologies of the moving image, the history of “cinema” in China would likely antedate *Dingjun Mountain* by several centuries. The fourth century CE historical text *Record of the Western Capital* (西京雜記), for instance, contains a description of how the Western Han craftsman Ding Huan 丁緩 (active in the first century BCE)<sup>2</sup> developed an optical device consisting of a circular band with images of birds and animals positioned around a lamp such that the heat from the lamp would create convection currents causing the band to rotate, thereby making the bird and animal images appear to “move quite naturally” (though it is unclear whether this is a reference to *illusory* motion of the individual images, or to the *actual* movement of the images through space). Historian of science Joseph Needham has proposed that this device (together with later “trotting horse lamps” [走馬燈]) may have been an early zoetrope—a technology that, when it was (re)invented in Europe in the 1830s, became an important predecessor for the development of film in the 1890s.<sup>3</sup>

Even if we were to understand the term *cinema* more narrowly, as referring only to actual filmic technologies, it would still be unclear in what precise sense Ren Qingtai’s 1905 work might be considered to be the “first Chinese film.” *Dingjun Mountain*, for instance,



FIGURE 1.1 Photograph of Tan Xinpei performing the Beijing opera *Dingjun Mountain*, reportedly taken during Ren Qingtai's 1905 filming of the work by the same title

was certainly not the first film to be *screened in China*. As early as August 11, 1896, several Lumière shorts were shown in Shanghai just a year after they first debuted in Paris, and these sorts of events became so popular that in 1904 a British envoy was invited to contribute some film footage for the empress dowager Cixi's seventieth-birthday celebration in the Forbidden City (the projector notoriously caught on fire during the performance, leading to a short-lived ban on screenings in the imperial palace). *Dingjun Mountain* was also not the first film to include *Chinese content*. In the winter of 1900–1901, for instance, James Williamson filmed a documentary entitled *Attack on a Chinese Mission*, which features re-creations of scenes from China's ongoing Boxer Rebellion. Produced in Britain, with British actors playing the parts of both the Chinese and the Europeans involved in the conflict, this work was followed by a series of similar reenactments. *Dingjun Mountain* wasn't even the first film *produced in China*, either. As early as 1901, the British filmmaker Joseph Rosenthal traveled to China, where he recorded at least one short film of a Shanghai street scene. Nor was *Dingjun Mountain* the first cinematic work produced in China *by a Chinese*, given that we can reasonably assume that Ren Qingtai and Liu Zhonglun must have made other recordings in preparation for their historic half-hour session with Tan Xinpei, one of the leading Beijing opera performers of the time.

We might, therefore, describe *Dingjun Mountain* as the first *complete* film produced in China by Chinese filmmakers and featuring Chinese content. Even this more precise formulation, however, leaves ambiguous what exactly is meant by the terms *China* and *Chinese*, not to mention what constitutes a “complete” work to begin with. In 1905, what is now Mainland China was still ruled by the (ethnically Manchu) Qing dynasty, Hong Kong was a British colony, and Taiwan had recently come under Japanese control. Even today, the Chinese nation is officially composed of not only Mainland China but also Hong Kong (currently a quasi-autonomous “special administrative region” within the People’s Republic of China) and Taiwan (a functionally autonomous nation-like entity that still claims sovereignty over the entirety of Mainland China, and vice versa), and each of these three regions is regarded as having its own distinctive cinema. In light of this contemporary tripartite division of “China” and its respective cinematic traditions, it is fitting that *Romance of Three Kingdoms* (三國演義)—the classic Ming dynasty novel of which the Beijing opera version of *Dingjun Mountain* was itself an adaptation—was set in a similar period of political disunity following the collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE, whereupon “China” fractured into three competing kingdoms.

Rather than seeing *Dingjun Mountain* as marking an unambiguous point of origin for Chinese cinema as a singular and unitary tradition, we might instead regard the popular fascination with this 1905 work as a symptom of a collective *desire* for identifiable historical origins. Indeed, of the myriad rubrics available for categorizing Chinese cinematic works, historical taxonomies are perhaps the most common. We intuitively group Chinese cinema into different “generations” or roughly decadelong periods, on the assumption that contemporary sociopolitical factors and patterns of mutual influence play a critical role in shaping the cinematic output of any particular period. Each of the chapters in Part I takes as its starting point a different historical period, from the early twentieth century to the contemporary moment—though this emphasis on historicity is inevitably inseparable from political and geographic considerations, and consequently we don’t trace a singular historical movement but rather several overlapping ones. In general, our objective in this section is not simply to reaffirm existing historical categories, but rather to present a new perspective on familiar periodizations while at the same time suggesting new ones.

The first three chapters focus on the first decades of the twentieth century, or what is often regarded as the “golden age” of Chinese cinema. First, Jianhua Chen examines the origins of China’s film industry in the 1920s, and particularly the influence of iconic American director D. W. Griffith and his favorite leading actress, Lillian Gish. Chen points to the irony that China’s nascent film industry emerged out of a dialogue with American works that themselves arose against the backdrop of a political and cultural context quite distant from that of early twentieth-century China. Kristine Harris then turns to the 1930s, and specifically Bu Wancang’s 卜萬蒼 1931 silent film *Love and Duty* (戀愛與義務). Taking as her entry point the film’s uncanny use of legendary actress Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 to play a double role of both a mother and the adult version of the daughter whom she was forced to abandon when she was still a young girl, Harris examines the film’s complicated relationship to its own figurative “mother”—a novel by

the Polish-born author S. Horose, known in Chinese as Madame Hua Luo Chen 華羅琛夫人. Harris places particular emphasis on a key moment of (mis)recognition late in the film, when the now-elderly mother, working as a seamstress, is hired to make a dress for her now-adult daughter (who believes her mother to be dead). The scene culminates in a poignant close-up of the mother's face as she leans close to her daughter, who remains blithely unaware of her identity. In the third chapter, David Der-wei Wang develops an analysis of two 1948 films by legendary director Fei Mu—the widely acclaimed *Spring in a Small Town* (小城之春) and the opera film *Eternal Regret*. Wang argues that these two works—of which the first is widely regarded as one of the best Chinese films ever made and the second, the first color picture in Chinese cinema, is often viewed as an intriguing failure—illustrate Fei Mu's attempts to draw on a combination of new technologies and traditional representational practices to explore what Wang describes as “the fate of modern Chinese visual subjectivity.” A concern that runs through all three of these chapters, therefore, involves the ways in which early Chinese cinema was shaped by a productive tension with other national traditions and representational practices.

The following three chapters turn to the midcentury period, looking specifically at bodies of films that complicate conventional assumptions about what it means for a work to be considered “Chinese” in the first place. Jie Li examines a set of 1930s and 1940s films from the Japanese puppet state of Manchuria, arguing that these works reflect the complicated nationalistic strategies of the period. Noting that Beijing has declined to make most of these Manchurian films available for viewing or study, Li speculates that this decision may be precisely because the films illustrate all too clearly the sorts of imbrications of cinema and nationalism on which the political imaginary of the PRC itself is grounded. In the following chapter, Yomi Braester turns to the early years of the People's Republic, arguing that film criticism during this period was grounded on a form of cinephilia emphasizing the creation of interpretative communities to discuss and appreciate cinematic works. Despite the popular perception of Maoist era cultural production as being highly insular and ideologically driven, Braester illustrates how, at least during the mid-1950s Hundred Flowers campaign, several state-sponsored cinema journals were openly looking abroad in their discussions of film, to the point that even a prominent state-affiliated journal with a title like *Chinese Cinema* was publishing numerous articles on French cinema and theories of cinephilia. Finally, Poshek Fu considers how Hong Kong's film industry attempted to negotiate its relationship with Mainland China's cultural, political, and economic influence during the midcentury period. Drawing on a rich body of newly discovered archives and other materials, Fu demonstrates how shifting market conditions and configurations of human capital during this period helped drive the direction of Hong Kong cinema. All three of these chapters, therefore, examine how contestations of national identity—both in Mainland China and along its periphery—are refracted through the cinematic field.

The next two chapters consider some of the directions that Chinese cinema has taken in contemporary Hong Kong and Taiwan. First, Tsung-yi Michelle Huang looks at how several recent Hong Kong films use female characters to comment allegorically on Hong Kong's relationship with Mainland China during the post-Handover period. Huang

argues that precisely at a moment when the number of Hong Kong–mainland coproductions were growing rapidly, many of these same films began using a focus on Mainland Chinese women (ranging from wealthy professionals to undocumented immigrants) to critically comment on the implications for Hong Kong’s mainland-orientated practices and tendencies. Next, Song Hwee Lim considers the dramatic disjunction between the relatively small size of Taiwan’s film industry and the remarkable international acclaim that Taiwan New Cinema has received. Through a detailed analysis of the conditions of the production, distribution, and reception of contemporary Taiwan cinema, Lim argues that Taiwan New Cinema—and cinematic new waves in general—presents us with not only “another kind of cinema,” but also “another way of looking at cinema” and its relationship to the nation.

The final two chapters in this part turn to the broader question of the relationship between Chinese and global cinema. First, Michael Berry examines the increasingly complicated interpenetration of China’s film industry with that of global Hollywood. He argues that this convergence of China and Hollywood assumes many forms—ranging from Chinese remakes of Hollywood films to foreign financial investment in Chinese productions—with the result being a wide-ranging, and ongoing, reassessment of conventional assumptions regarding what constitutes “Chinese cinema.” Finally, Pheng Cheah considers an inverse set of questions about the relationship between Chinese and “global cinema,” arguing that Jia Zhangke’s 賈樟柯 2006 film about the Three Gorges Dam relocations, *Still Life* (三峡好人), may be seen as an example of global cinema insofar as it attempts to present the world with an image of China (e.g., displaced migrant workers) that the government has attempted to keep from view. Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s concept of the “world picture”—which posits that the act of conceiving the world as a virtual picture implies a gesture of epistemological mastery over that which it contains—Cheah argues that Jia’s film underscores a paradox wherein global cinema’s attempts to represent and “give voice” to marginalized peoples may, by reducing the world to the status of a figurative “picture,” be unwittingly reinforcing the very conditions of global inequality that have contributed to that marginalization in the first place. Contending that *Still Life* manages to sidestep the reductive consequences inherent in Heidegger’s logic of the “world picture,” Cheah proposes that the film instead presents a vision of the world as shaped by forces of contingency, in which “radical chance is that which lets a new world come amid the ruined one made by globalization.”

We may apply a similar logic to the historical origins of Chinese cinema itself. The iconic 1905 photograph of Tan Xinpei performing scenes from *Dingjun Mountain*, for instance, functions as a potent emblem of the various historical contingencies—such as the fire that later destroyed the only existing print of the film, from which the photograph is derived—that have helped shape our contemporary understanding and perception of the field as a whole. A comparable point may be made about several of the specific historical narratives discussed here. Bu Wancang’s *Love and Duty*, for instance, was long feared lost and was not rediscovered until 1994, while most of the Manchurian films produced in the 1930s and 1940s are now effectively inaccessible in China. Given the inherent fragility of the filmic medium, combined with the political and social turmoil that engulfed China



throughout much of the twentieth century, our view of Chinese film history is necessarily shaped by a myriad of historical contingencies. The Tan Xinpei photograph, accordingly, stands as a powerful reminder that a different configuration of these constituencies would likely have generated an alternative view of Chinese cinema's past, while also having consequential ramifications for the directions it might yet take in the future.

## FORM

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In addition to the Tan Xinpei photograph discussed above, there is also another sense in which a vision of Ren Qingtai's 1905 film remains available today. In 2000, the New York-based filmmaker Ann Hu 胡安 made her directorial debut with the feature film *Shadow Magic* (西洋鏡), which presents a fictionalized restaging of the circumstances surrounding the production of Ren's film, together with re-creations of clips from the original work. The result is a contemporary production that uses a combination of Chinese and foreign funding to re-create a seminal moment from the very beginning of Chinese film history.

Ann Hu's film presents Liu Zhonglun<sup>4</sup>—whose biological father in the film wears glasses with thick lenses (see fig. I.2)—torn between three surrogate father figures: Ren Qingtai, who owns the photography studio where Liu works; an amateur British filmmaker named Raymond, who is in Beijing screening his films and for whom Liu begins to moonlight; and Tan Xinpei, with whose daughter Liu becomes romantically involved over the course of the film. Liu's attempts to calibrate his relationship with these different father figures allegorically rehearses his concurrent efforts to negotiate his relationship with the visual paradigms they each represent (i.e., photography, cinema, and Beijing opera), suggesting that Liu is struggling to negotiate his position not only between different representational forms and practices, but also between distinct modes of *seeing* the world and his position in it.

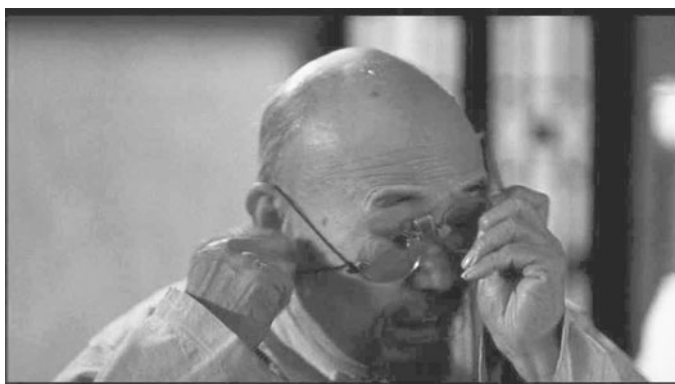


FIGURE I.2 The father of Liu Zhonglun's character in Ann Hu's *Shadow Magic* (2000)

While Part I is structured around historical periodizations, Part II focuses on cinematic taxonomies based on formal affinities. The latter include not only conventional cinematic genres like opera film and martial-arts film, but also categories of works whose formal characteristics are directly influenced by their specific medium of production. Works conceived and produced for television, cell phone screens, or the independent film festival circuit, for instance, tend to have recognizable features that distinguish them from each other as well as from 35 mm feature films produced primarily for theatrical release. While some of these formal categories flourished at specific historical moments, others have persisted throughout much or all of the history of Chinese cinema, and consequently this part's focus on formal affinities offers a different perspective on the historicity of Chinese cinema than that generated by the sorts of period-based analyses found in Part I.

The opening pair of chapters in this second part examine categories of works that are the product of a synergistic interrelationship between cinema and other representational media. Stephen Teo begins by noting that Chinese opera film, despite having hitherto received comparatively little attention in the West, has actually been of critical importance within the history of Chinese cinema. He argues that Chinese opera film has consistently provided a testing ground for many key technological advances within Chinese cinema—including the introduction of color and synchronized sound, not to mention the development of cinema itself—and furthermore the genre literally stages some of the central tensions between foreign and indigenous cultural practice located at the heart of conventional visions of Chinese cinema itself. Teo contends that, unlike other genres—which frequently needed to be granted Chinese characteristics, or be “sinified,” in order to thrive in China—opera film was instead already *too* sinified, and it was precisely this intensely sinic quality that helps to explain both the popularity of the opera film, in its heyday, and its subsequent marginalization. Next, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh considers a category of work known in Chinese as *wenyi pian* (文藝片), or “*wenyi* pictures.” Derived from a term that literally means “arts and letters,” the phrase *wenyi pian* originally referred to films that had been adapted from literary works (particularly ones of Western origin), and carried connotations of progressive worldliness. Yeh not only presents a “short history” of this distinctively Chinese genre, she also surveys some of the historical *treatments* of the genre, including attempts to subsume the *wenyi* picture under the familiar Western category of melodrama. Both opera film and *wenyi* film, therefore, are paradigmatically Chinese categories whose fate is inextricably linked with that of the Western genres with which they are in dialogue.

The next two chapters examine cinematic categories that foreground overtly political considerations. First, Ban Wang looks at the genre of the revolutionary war film, focusing on a pair of Chinese works dealing with the Korean War. In contrast to *Shanggan Ridge* (上甘岭, 1956), which he suggests is a more conventional revolutionary war film that stresses physical combat and national pride, Wang argues that *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (英雄儿女)—released in 1964, several years after the war had already concluded—obeys a rather different logic, using an emphasis on personal narrative and transnational kinship ties to promote a vision of third-world internationalism. Gary Xu



then turns to a subcategory of what we might call “Maoist film,” and specifically cinema from the latter half of China’s Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). While films from this period are frequently discounted on account of their overtly propagandistic nature, Xu instead proposes a more nuanced understanding of this political logic, arguing that some works encourage a noncoercive emotional identification with their protagonists by deploying a quality of what he calls “affective edification.” In his analysis of the 1974 film *Bright Sunny Sky* (艷陽天), for instance, Xu notes how the work uses a thematics of kinship love as a stand-in for romantic love, which in turn is itself a stand-in for the emotional bonds underlying “the imagined big revolutionary family of collectivism.” Like Ban Wang, therefore, Xu demonstrates how some examples of highly politicized genres like those of the revolutionary war film and the Cultural Revolution film use a thematics of kinship attachments as a screen against which to explore some of the national and transnational implications of the genres themselves.

The following two chapters turn to a pair of cinematic categories that revolve around an interest in issues of corporeality and desire. Michael Eng examines the genre of the kung fu action film, which came to prominence in Hong Kong during the Cultural Revolution period. Taking as his starting point the genre’s repetitive and formulaic treatment of vengeance against the backdrop of the male body, Eng argues that this repetitiveness may be seen as a symptom of Hong Kong’s unresolved legacy of colonial modernity and its attendant sense of racial melancholia. Next, Sean Metzger considers the category of queer cinema, or films characterized by a focus on homoerotic topics and themes, though Metzger’s interest here lies not so much in the actual contents of the works in question as in the transnational networks through which the works are distributed. He argues that this category of queer cinema has destabilizing implications for the presumptive national frameworks within which the works in question are assumed to be positioned. While Ban Wang and Gary Xu look at how a thematics of kinship underlies the ostensibly political focus of some war and Cultural Revolution films, therefore, Eng and Metzger instead examine the political and ideological implications of categories of works defined by their attention to corporeal and sexual issues.

The next pair of chapters consider two other politically inflected categories of works that, like Metzger’s queer cinema, are shaped by their networks of distribution. Yingjin Zhang examines the politics of contemporary independent documentaries. Drawing on Edward Soja’s concept of Thirdspace to identify a region between what Manuel Castells calls a “space of flows” and a “space of places,” Zhang considers the translocal dimension of post-1980s Chinese documentaries, suggesting that this translocality provides a bridge between the specificity of places and broader networks of distribution and consumption. Ying Zhu then surveys recent trends in Mainland Chinese historical tele-dramas, arguing that these multiepisode, made-for-television movies offer a sensitive barometer of shifting political attitudes within contemporary China. Zhu focuses on the emergence of what she dubs “officialdom dramas”—which cynically present a vision of official corruption as pervasive and inevitable. Though mutually opposed in ideological terms, therefore, Chinese tele-dramas and independent documentaries both closely track the interface between official and popular attitudes on sociopolitical topics.

The final two chapters in this part look at categories of works informed by their use of specific representational media. Audrey Yue examines the comparatively new phenomenon of large-screen productions in China. While the most widely viewed of these productions is almost certainly Zhang Yimou's 張藝謀 opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympics—which featured thousands of live actors performing on and around the world's largest (147m by 22m) scrolling LED display and was viewed by a global audience estimated at around two billion—Yue focuses primarily on Zhang's *Impression Series* (2004–2010), which consisted of five government-commissioned outdoor performances that all incorporate large-screen projections. Noting that these latter works have earned more than five times as much as the total U.S. box-office gross of Zhang's six most-successful feature films *combined*, Yue explains how these large-screen productions have “produced new modes of spectatorships, structures of media convergence, and practices of social inclusion.” Paola Voci then turns to the inverse phenomenon of *small-screen* cinema, or short works that circulate over the Internet and are typically viewed on a computer or mobile device, arguing that this nascent phenomenon encourages a more active and engaged form of cinematic spectatorship whereby viewers are encouraged to actively manipulate and redistribute the works they watch. Voci argues, however, that this sort of interactivity is not unique to small-screen cinema; instead it illustrates some of the unrealized possibilities implicit in mainstream cinema. Although the large- and small-screen technologies that Yue and Voci discuss here are both relatively new, the distinctive qualities of large-screen and small-screen cinemas that they explore in their respective chapters are not unique to these specific media but rather offer a glimpse of alternate potentialities that were always already present within Chinese cinema as a whole.

Some of these alternate visions of cinematic spectatorship are hinted at near the end of Ann Hu's *Shadow Magic*, when Liu Zhonglun's father learns that his son needs a new lens for his film projector and resolves to help him acquire one by exchanging one of the lenses from his own eyeglasses (see fig. I.3). With the newly fixed projector, Liu then proceeds to screen a short film for his community. Significantly, this final sequence of



FIGURE I.3 Liu Zhonglun's character, with the new camera lens obtained from his father

Ann Hu's movie features a screening *not* of Tan Xinpei performing *Dingjun Mountain* (the work that is the ostensible focus of the movie as a whole), but rather of footage Liu had shot of his own Beijing neighbors. The spectators in this final sequence therefore see *themselves* on screen, suggesting that the new projector lens helps resolve not only Liu's relationship to his various father figures, but also his neighbors' perception of *themselves*. Read allegorically, this scene implies that Liu Zhonglun's struggle to choose between different father figures has ramifications for his position within competing representational practices, as well as for the ways in which his future audiences will come to perceive their own position within the world.

## STRUCTURE

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In 2006, six years after the release of Ann Hu's *Shadow Magic*, China-based director An Zhanjun 安戰軍 released his own cinematic re-creation of the events leading up to the production of Ren Qingtai's 1905 film. Entitled *Dingjun Mountain* and produced as part of the centenary celebration of the birth of Chinese cinema, An Zhanjun's film rehearses the same basic narrative depicted in *Shadow Magic*, though from a different perspective.

In An Zhanjun's film, for instance, Ren Qingtai's character plays a more prominent role than he does in Ann Hu's version, actively canvassing Tan Xinpei to convince him to perform for the camera. At one point, Ren even films *himself* dressed up in Tan's *Dingjun Mountain* performance costume (see fig. I.4)—and this portrayal of a filmmaker acting in his own film while his desired actor observes as a spectator speaks not so much to the historical status of the original recording of *Dingjun Mountain* as to the processes



FIGURE I.4 Ren Qingtai filming himself in An Zhanjun's *Dingjun Mountain* (2006)

of production, distribution, and reception within which the original film was positioned. Not only do we see Tan Xinpei and others watching a short film that Ren Qingtai produced in preparation for filming *Dingjun Mountain*, we also find here an implicit commentary on the institutional processes by which a work is deemed to be “complete” in the first place (insofar as the former recording is presented as a mere rehearsal subsequently forgotten by history, while the latter is presented as an iconic film whose legend would outlive even the physical print itself). This scene, in other words, underscores not only the historicity of the original *Dingjun Mountain* production and its status as an opera film, but also the array of structural elements involved in the work’s production, distribution, and reception.

Cinema consists not merely of individual films, but also of the broader cinematic apparatus within which they are positioned—including the technical and institutional elements underlying the works themselves, together with the matrix of beliefs and assumptions that help shape how works are both produced and received. While Parts I and II of this volume are structured around historical and formal taxonomies, Part III takes as its starting point various structural elements involved in cinema’s production, distribution, and reception. In particular, in this part we examine some of the technical, conventional, and institutional factors that inform how works are produced, circulated, and consumed.

The opening three chapters in this part focus on key elements of cinematic production: acting, directing, and the sound track. First, Jason McGrath compares the acting techniques associated with early cinema with those found in traditional Chinese opera. McGrath argues that the dramatic contrast between stage and film acting conventions reflects a tension between the emphasis on abstract semiosis within Chinese opera and cinema’s comparatively greater reliance on direct mimesis. He notes that while this emphasis on mimetic performance is partially grounded in film-specific techniques such as that of the close-up, it must also be viewed within the context of a broader early twentieth-century interest in realism across a wide range of media, including stage performance. Next, James Tweedie returns to the question, discussed from a different perspective by Song Hwee Lim, of the distinctiveness and consequences of Taiwan’s New Cinema movement, focusing on the movement’s notorious emphasis on the figure of the directorial auteur. Building on a close reading of Edward Yang’s 楊德昌 1985 film *Taipei Story* (青梅竹馬), Tweedie returns to the early auteur theory of François Truffaut to argue that an auteur’s cinematic vision is, somewhat counterintuitively, most clearly visible in a film’s *mise-en-scène*—and in Edward Yang’s works this *mise-en-scène* specifically reflects the director’s architectural vision of a modern, and increasingly cosmopolitan, Taiwan. Finally, Darrell William Davis considers the role of music in film. Noting that cinema consists not only of images but also of sound (even before synched sound technology was popularized in the 1930s, film screenings were often accompanied by live musical accompaniment), Davis argues that the relationship between sound and image in cinema may be described as a “marriage of convenience,” wherein some films aspire to an integration of music and narrative, while others contain songs that may function independently of the visual narrative.

The following two chapters turn to some of the institutional settings within which Chinese films have been released and distributed. First, Zhiwei Xiao examines practices of regulation and censorship as they pertain to the early decades of Chinese cinema—focusing on how rules designed for theatrical and operatic performances were adopted and modified for cinematic screenings. While discussions of Maoist-era and post-Mao PRC cinema frequently stress issues of political censorship, Xiao demonstrates how regulatory regimes during the early twentieth century were driven more by practical and institutional considerations than by explicitly political ones. Laikwan Pang then turns to Chinese film policy during the first three years of the People's Republic—between 1949 and 1952, when China's film industry was fully nationalized. Like Yomi Braester in Part I and Gary Xu in Part II, Pang challenges a simplistic vision of Maoist-era cinema as being narrowly ideological and instead argues that in the early 1950s films representing a wide variety of orientations and perspectives were not only permitted but even encouraged. In particular, China's film industry during this transitional period reflected the tensions between Beijing's attempts to actively shape cultural production and the continued influence of the nation's still largely autonomous film production companies.

The next three chapters consider ways in which films depict different kinds of social collectives. Rey Chow examines the position of “woman” in a wide range of Chinese-language films from the early twentieth century to the present, Louisa Schein considers the role of ethnographic elements in a variety of contemporary works from feature films to documentaries to privately produced videos, and Andy Rodekohr looks at how the figure of the “crowd” has been mobilized in works from the early twentieth century to the present. Even as each of these chapters grapples with the question of how films attempt to represent an amorphous social collective (i.e., “woman,” “ethnic minorities,” and “the crowd”), they simultaneously underscore the role of cinema in helping to shape and redefine popular understandings of these categories themselves. One of the concerns that all three chapters share involves the relationship between a politics of representation, on one hand, and an ethics of self-presentation and self-perception, on the other.

The next pair of chapters examines cinema's position at the interstices between different national traditions and representational media. First, Kwai-Cheung Lo returns to the issue of transnational coproductions that Poshek Fu touches on in his chapter in Part I. Lo examines midcentury cinematic production within the context of the competing discourses of “Asia(nism),” arguing that the evanescent ideal of Asia provides a figurative screen against which a complex network of regional and political antagonisms and alliances is played out. Next, Eugene Wang considers the relationship between cinema and other representational media, including painting and photography, during the post-Cultural Revolution period. While many discussions of 1980s Chinese films tend to emphasize the increasingly *cinematic* quality of these works (which was made possible by shifts in cinematic training and funding following the conclusion of the Cultural Revolution), Wang argues that many of the formal innovations associated with this period were actually developed at the interstices of cinema and other media such as painting and the graphic novel. Both Lo and Wang, therefore, approach “Chinese

cinema” by focusing, somewhat counterintuitively, on works that diverge from conventional assumptions of what is “Chinese” or “cinematic” in the first place.

The following two chapters explore different forms of cinematic repetition. Ying Qian examines different approaches to documentary filmmaking, and particularly the relationship between documentaries that incorporate actual historical footage and others that instead feature reenactments of historical events. Focusing on the 1950 Sino-Soviet coproduction *Victory of the Chinese People* (中國人民的勝利) (which is regarded as the Chinese Communist Party’s first color documentary) and the 1949 documentary film *Million Heroes Crossing the Yangtze* (百萬雄獅下江南), Qian compares how both works present the same historical event (the Battle of Liaoshen, from China’s recently concluded civil war)—with the former relying entirely on reenactments and the latter using documentary footage of the actual battle. Qian then reflects more generally on the assumptions about realism and reality embedded within the genre of the documentary, together with how *Victory* helped lay the groundwork for the cinematic practice, in the early decades of the PRC, of what was referred to as “documenting the future.” Next, Yiman Wang turns to a parallel phenomenon wherein films restage not historical events but rather *other films*. In particular, Wang considers the increasingly popular practice of remaking Hollywood films as Chinese-language productions, which she views in the context of a Chinese pursuit of the Hollywood-inspired *dapian* (大片), or blockbuster. Wang argues that the resulting emergence of a cinema with “Chinese elements” further underscores the free-floating nature of the qualifier *Chinese*, as it functions here not in a linguistic or geopolitical sense but rather as a product of the global circulation of culture and capital.

The parallel phenomena Qian and Wang describe in their respective essays come together in An Zhanjun’s 2006 *Dingjun Mountain*, which is both an unwitting *remake* of Ann Hu’s 2000 film *Shadow Magic*<sup>5</sup> and a *reenactment* of the historical circumstances surrounding Ren Qingtai’s 1905 filming of *Dingjun Mountain*. These twin processes of repetition and reenactment are foregrounded particularly clearly in the sequence in which Tan Xinpei watches a short recording of Ren Qingtai playing Tan’s own title role from the opera *Dingjun Mountain*—in which we see Ren Qingtai performing opera scenes for which Tan Xinpei is himself famous, in hopes of convincing Tan to act out the same scenes for the camera. The operatic work derives its identity from a process of constant repetition—with each individual performance building off of the work’s prior performative history. In this scene from An Zhanjun’s film, meanwhile, we find the Ren Qingtai character restaging a scene from the famous Beijing opera, precisely in order to convince Tan Xinpei to translate his own title role into a different medium, which he ultimately does in one of the final sequences of the film (see fig. I.5). Each act of citation and repetition, therefore, reaffirms the authority of the earlier work or tradition while at the same time creating a space for potential change and innovation—just as each intervention within the field of Chinese cinema similarly reaffirms the field’s perceived status and authority while simultaneously setting the stage for its inevitable transformation.

One of the ironic twists in An Zhanjun’s film, meanwhile, is that the actor who plays Tan Xinpei is actually the historical Tan Xinpei’s own grandson, Tan Yuanshou 譚元壽.





FIGURE 1.5 A screening of a film screening in An Zhanjun's *Dingjun Mountain*

A member of a multigenerational line of opera performers, Tan Yuanshou is presented here as “representing” his grandfather in two discrete senses of the term—simultaneously *playing the part* of his grandfather (and of the Beijing opera characters on which his grandfather’s reputation was grounded) while also literally *standing in for* his famous ancestor. The 2006 film’s depiction of Tan Xinpei agreeing to perform (for Ren Qingtai’s camera) the *Dingjun Mountain* role for which he is now famous, therefore, directly mirrors his grandson Tan Yuanshou’s subsequent decision to perform (for An Zhanjun’s camera) the role of the grandfather on whom his family’s fame is partially grounded. Like the poignant scene of acute (mis)recognition in *Love and Duty*, in which Ruan Lingyu plays a double role of both a mother reencountering long-lost daughter *and* the daughter who fails to recognize her own mother, this scene in *Dingjun Mountain* presents a startling moment of intergenerational desire and identification. The result is a decidedly queer moment in which the (diegetic) opera performer’s desire to performatively enact the figure he sees on screen comes full circle with the (real life) actor’s decision to performatively enact the role of his own grandfather (see fig. 1.6).

There is a similar scene of interfamilial desire and projective identification near the end of Tsai Ming-liang’s 蔡明亮 1997 film *The River* (河流), in which a father and son unwittingly have sex with one another in a dark bathhouse—each initially believing the other to be a stranger. In the final chapter of this volume, I use a detailed reading of this notorious scene to reexamine some of the implications of the concept of suture—or the process by which a viewer figuratively sutures him- or herself into a cinematic text by identifying with an embedded gaze within the work itself. I argue that the scene stages a crisis of recognition that simultaneously underscores and undermines one of the dominant spectatorial logics of cinema itself. That is to say, the scene illustrates not only the urge for human connection that underlies cinematic spectators’ attempts to figuratively



FIGURE 1.6 Tan Yuanshou performing the role of his grandfather Tan Xinpei in An Zhanjun's *Dingjun Mountain*

insert themselves into the diegetic space of a film, but also the necessary possibility that this process of projective identification may fail. I conclude, however, that the film presents this perspectival failure as something productive and enabling, insofar as it opens up new and more complicated spaces of identification and self-understanding.

If cinema is understood as the art of extrapolation, we may by extension regard suture as a model for the process of bridging the gap not only between spectator and a specific work, but also between individual observers and a broader cinematic field. It is precisely because we feel a desire to relate in some way to a perceived body of work that we ultimately affirm, or reaffirm, the extrapolative logic that undergirds the field's status as a coherent cultural body. In the case of Chinese cinema, the extrapolative logic that knits the cinematic field together is a product of an array of fluid and contingent processes that are cloaked in a sheen of necessity. By interrogating these various processes, we not only derive a better understanding of the constitution of the field as currently conceived, we may also catch a glimpse of some of the alternate directions that it might once have taken or may yet take. Or, to put this another way, by underscoring some of the uncanny and even incestuous dynamics generated when the field's incommensurate vectors of desire and identification come into tension with one another, we may productively reassess and reimagine some of the "family resemblances" on which our current vision of the field of Chinese cinemas is tacitly grounded.

## NOTES

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and other Duke departments and programs for generously funding a workshop at Duke University in Spring of 2011, at which many of the contributors to this volume presented preliminary drafts of their chapters.

1. For more on the doubts about the reliability of the claim that *Dingjun Mountain* was China's first film, see the discussion in Voci's chapter in this volume.
2. According to *Xijingzaji* (西京雜記) [Record of the Western capital], Ding Huan lived at the end of the Western Han. Many contemporary English-language sources, however, follow Joseph Needham, who incorrectly states that Ding Huan was active around 180 CE (which is more than a century and a half after the fall of the Western Han). See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 4, *Physics and Physical Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 123–124.
3. Needham, *Physics and Physical Technology*, 123–124.
4. All of the characters in the film appear under names that are slightly different from those of the historical figures on whom they are based. For the sake of convenience, here and below I use the names of the historical figures in discussing the fictionalized characters whom they inspired.
5. An Zhanjun was aware of the existence of Ann Hu's film although, somewhat oddly, he appears not to have watched the work itself (in an interview, for instance, he incorrectly claims that Hu's film focuses not on the making of *Dingjun Mountain* but on the initial introduction of film into China in 1901). See Gao Qiao 高橋 and An Zhanjun 安戰軍, "Dingjun Shan: 100 nian lai hui" 《定軍山》100年來回 [*Dingjun Mountain: Back and forth over a century*], *Dazhong dianying* 大眾電影 [Popular cinema] 24 (2005). <http://www.51dh.net/magazine/html/286/286195.htm>.

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PART I

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# HISTORY

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## CHAPTER 1

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# D. W. GRIFFITH AND THE RISE OF CHINESE CINEMA IN EARLY 1920S SHANGHAI

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JIANHUA CHEN

When D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1920) premiered in the Shanghai Theater on May 22, 1922, an advertisement for the film appeared on the front page of *Shenbao* 申報, one of the largest newspapers in Shanghai. "*Way Down East*," it trumpeted, "was directed by Griffith, the king of the globally known film industry, who spent ten months making this eleven-reel and 12,000-foot movie at the cost of 800,000 U.S. dollars. On the night of its premiere in a grand theater on 44th Street in New York, celebrities and young ladies flocked to watch it, despite tickets that cost ten dollars a seat."<sup>1</sup> Both the film's advertising rhetoric and its enthusiastic reception were unprecedented, and when the work returned to the same theater in October, another front-page advertisement announced: "The world's most famous and most sensational movie returns!" Over the next several months, reports from Beijing and Tianjin noted that Griffith's film had been enthusiastically received there as well.

*Way Down East* was a pivotal work not only for Griffith and for Hollywood, but also for China. In fact, no Hollywood director exerted more influence than Griffith on Chinese cinema in the silent era. At the same time, however, Griffith also epitomized the ups and downs of Hollywood in China. After 1949, his name virtually disappeared from canonical histories of Chinese cinema,<sup>2</sup> and even Jay Leyda, in his pioneering history of Chinese cinema, *Electric Shadows*, praised Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) for its favorable portrayal of the "Yellow Man," only to lament that he had "seen no reference to this film being shown in China."<sup>3</sup> In fact, from May 1922 to July 1924, at least nine of Griffith's works were screened in Shanghai, including *Way Down East*, *Broken Blossoms*, *Intolerance* (1916), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921), each of which aroused considerable excitement (see Appendix 1.1 at the end of this chapter for a list of these works). Beginning in the 1990s, Chinese film historians began to reappraise Griffith's contribution to early Chinese cinema, though their

information about his film exhibitions in China was based on Zheng Junli's 鄭君里 1936 history of Chinese cinema, in which the first screening of *Way Down East* is erroneously dated to the spring of 1924, which was actually *after* the Chinese debuts of most of Griffith's films.<sup>4</sup>

Around the time Griffith rose to fame, the Chinese film industry began to flourish following the successes of the nation's first three feature-length films, *Yan Ruisheng* (閻瑞生, 1921), *The Sea Oath* (海誓, 1922), and *Red Beauty and the Skeleton* (紅粉骷髏, 1922). What did the coincidence mean? By recuperating Griffith's glamour in the early 1920s, this chapter argues that Griffith signified the dominance of Hollywood, to which Chinese cinema was itself paradoxically indebted. Griffith's films played an enormous role in helping shape early Chinese cinema, far beyond merely influencing the genre of the "love film" (愛情片), as scholars have generally held.<sup>5</sup> Actually, along with the hegemony of classical Hollywood cinema, Griffith's fame in China grew into a myth that provided, in Miriam Hansen's terms, "a sensory-reflexive horizon for the experience of modernization and modernity," along with a kind of "vernacular modernism, as a cultural counterpart and response to technological, economic, and social modernity."<sup>6</sup> By contextualizing this myth, this chapter will discuss a set of related "local" issues, such as the intellectual acceptance of cinema as a superior art form and a dynamic medium for national education, the rise of the film audience and critical film discourse, together with the early 1920s Shanghai film industry's competition with and appropriation of Hollywood. The urban landscape ramified into nationalist, cosmopolitan, and metropolitan trends, driven by the new momentum of film enterprise. Not the least spectacular among them was the feminist mobilization toward publicness, indebted not only to Griffith but to Lillian Gish, the leading actress in many of Griffith's films.

## GRIFFITH AND ACCEPTING FILM AS ART

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It is well accepted that Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* helped make the feature film a crowning genre in Hollywood studios, and that his masterpieces marked the beginning of cinema's transition from mere entertainment to high art. Likewise, Griffith also played a decisive role in Chinese acceptance of cinema as a noble art. Film arrived in China as early as 1896 and, as suggested by the neologism *yingxi* 影戲 (literally, "shadowplay"), it was initially viewed as merely a folk amusement. Film scholars correctly attribute the slow development of Chinese cinema to an initial shortage of capital and technology, yet little attention has been paid to the specific intellectual climate that likely played an even greater role in shaping the growth of the industry. This might be clearer if we compare the conditions under which Japanese cinema developed. In 1896, motion pictures also arrived in Japan, where—owing to Japan's aspirations for Western civilization and capitalist growth in the Meiji period—a nascent film industry developed quickly, as exemplified by the publication of the film magazine *Katsudō shashinkai*

(活動寫真界) in 1909, the establishment of Nikkatsu (日活) Studios in 1912, and the emergence of the “pure film” movement before 1920.<sup>7</sup> In the Chinese context, following the conclusion of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894, intellectuals began to embrace Western civilization, but most of them were devoted to pursuing national salvation by means of reform or revolution, and their elite bias against this imported visual novelty was inherited by the May Fourth Movement. Even after the Chinese film industry had begun to flourish in the early 1920s, some moralists still rejected cinema as a pernicious medium.

*The Difficult Couple* (難夫難妻), a four-reel feature film made by Zhang Shichuan 張石川 and Zheng Zhengqiu 鄭正秋 in 1913, is recognized as a gem of early Chinese cinema. The film looked trendy at the time, but as Du Yun-chih 杜雲之 has pointed out, *The Difficult Couple* and other works produced by the Asia Film Company “could not be shown in the better movie theaters where Western movies were released. They could only be screened as extra entertainments after the ‘civilized dramas’ (*wenming xi* 文明戲) had concluded.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, given that at the time foreign-run, Western-style movie theaters in Shanghai were screening dramas like *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1913), *Three Musketeers* (1914), *Quo Vadis?* (1912), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1908),<sup>9</sup> a film like *The Difficult Couple* could hardly compete. Moreover, Zheng Zhengqiu, when invited by the Asia Film Company to make films, claimed that he knew nothing about filmmaking, and instead was more committed to directing “civilized dramas.” It is likely, therefore, that *The Difficult Couple* was used to promote a “new drama,” as seen from advertisements announcing that “for the first time the Chinese stage performance has been filmed.”<sup>10</sup> And, in fact, that year Zheng Zhengqiu’s new drama movement had great success, carrying with it his agenda to reform family and society.

At the time, cinema was undergoing what Miriam Hansen has described as a “paradigmatic shift from early to classical cinema,”<sup>11</sup> and this shift was reflected in a column that Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑 wrote for the newspaper *Shenbao* 申報 between 1919 and 1920. In this column, entitled “Discourse on Cinematography” (影戲話), Zhou commented on dozens of the Western films he had watched over the preceding decade, combining his personal viewing experiences with information gleaned from American film magazines.<sup>12</sup> Despite his praise of the genres of comedy and detective serials for their popular appeal, Zhou nevertheless reserved judgment on them. It was Griffith’s work, however, that led Zhou to heartily embrace cinema. After watching *Intolerance* and *Hearts of the World* (1918), Zhou enthusiastically praised the works’ advanced technology, visual effects, and, most importantly, lyrical style and moral theme that distinguished them from Chaplin’s comedies, which sought mainly to entertain their audience.<sup>13</sup> Zhou witnessed film’s development from nickelodeon shorts to feature films, from multinational products to Hollywood domination, and from the idea of cinema as vulgar entertainment to a complicated and sophisticated art form.

In the second decade of the century, a number of essays on motion pictures in *Eastern Miscellany* (東方雜誌) and other periodicals had introduced Chinese readers to recent cinematic innovations and developments in the West. These pieces were mostly translated from foreign sources and sometimes also featured brief comments on their

educational function in a modern society. Yet none of these essays could compare with Zhou's "Discourse on Cinematography" in terms of the latter's aesthetic observation of early world cinema combined with its local vision in cosmopolitan context. By using the term *yingxi* to translate *cinematography*, the acceptance of cinema was modernized. This hybrid notion of *yingxi* invoked discursive explorations among film theorists in later years. Furthermore, building on Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 famous turn-of-the-century call for a "literary revolution," Zhou argued that "not only fiction but film is a major key for mass enlightenment."<sup>14</sup>

## THE GRIFFITH PHENOMENON AND COMMERCIAL WAR

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Beginning around 1922, amid a rapid growth in film audiences, film companies, and movie theaters, film discourses began to come to the fore, and within a few years they had established a ground on which Chinese cinema might compete with Hollywood. There emerged several types of film discourse related to a variety of newspapers and magazines, each with its own goals and readership. *Shenbao*, for instance, took the lead in opening dedicated film sections that reflected how cinema was rapidly progressing as a modern art medium, as a highly competitive business, and as a new form of consumer culture. Other columns included a monthly report on box-office returns of Shanghai movie houses, film reviews, news from local and American film companies, and discussions of world cinema. Such a fascination with cinema, and particularly Hollywood, was understandable, as the Chinese audience felt that it needed to make up for what it had missed over the preceding decade.

This embrace of Hollywood echoed an expression of cosmopolitanism articulated by Deng Guang 鄧廣 in his 1925 introduction to *Motion Picture World* (影戲世界), in which he argues that, as a "universal language," cinema carries with it "cosmopolitanism" (世界主) aimed at "an ideal harmonious world."<sup>15</sup> However, it would be naive to ignore the local concerns implicit in this cosmopolitan perspective. In fact, Chinese cinema had no choice but to compete with Hollywood, given that it could hardly progress unless its audience was firmly secured. In this respect, keeping Hollywood in check was no less important than supporting the Chinese film business. As revealed by the reviews of Chinese movies, a complex psychology had developed, in that most viewers judged Chinese films by the standards of Hollywood, and even when apologizing for local cinema's shortcomings, they nevertheless applauded it precisely because it was homemade and still in an embryonic stage. In the competition under the shadow of Hollywood, reflected by the market, Chinese film benefited from patriotic support.

Even as Hollywood was establishing its market hegemony, Chinese filmmakers were by no means reluctant to jump into the fray. Advertisements for Chinese films were

replete with patriotic sentiment, as exemplified by one on March 14, 1923, for the educational film *New Nanjing* (新南京). The advertisement covered half a page, larger than those for foreign films, with the headline, "Chinese-Managed Hujiang Movie Theater." In April, two large advertisements appeared for the French Theatre and the New Helen Theatre, respectively, boasting that they screened Chinese movies. Sometimes there would appear an advertisement for a Chinese movie that was larger than usual, with an urgent call: "Chinese should see their own movies!" Behind this patriotic excitement was a remarkable increase in Chinese audiences and investment. New theaters opened in the Zhabei district, where Chinese films were screened more cheaply, to cater to dense populations from lower economic strata. Not only were China's first three long features repeatedly screened, comic shorts by the Asia Film Company from the previous decade were circulated with cheery advertisements.

Amid this feverish interest in Hollywood, Griffith became an idol, an inexhaustibly inspirational source and indisputable standard for both foreign and Chinese movies. In 1924, for instance, the director Cheng Bugao 程步高 published a lengthy essay entitled "The History of D. W. Griffith's Success" (葛禮斐斯成功史) in *Movie Magazine* (電影雜誌), which began by noting that "Griffith is recognized as the foremost film director in the world. As a senior among film directors, no one can compare with him, except for the famous Rex Ingram. . . . Since the release of *Way Down East*, Griffith has become a household name in Shanghai, and his directing mastery is widely acclaimed."<sup>16</sup> In 1926, the dramatist Tian Han 田漢 noted that Griffith used "literary methods," such as fragmentary pictures, psychological description, close-ups, juxtaposed images, together with fade-ins and fade-outs, and concluded that, thanks to Griffith's innovations, "cinema has made great progress."<sup>17</sup>

When *The Birth of a Nation* was first screened in Shanghai in June 1923, it aroused a great sensation. Reviews of the film in newspapers applauded it for its magnificent war settings, spectacular cinematic techniques, virtuosic performances, and humanistic revelation. For refined viewers, this film invited a new perspective on Griffith. Whereas *Way Down East* was impressive for its romantic and tragic forces, *The Birth of a Nation* added epic and heroic dimensions. The epic-lyric mode was regarded as Griffith's signature style, and further expected by Chinese audiences. For example, when *The Girl Who Stayed at Home* was screened in Shanghai, its title was translated as *Ouzhan fengliu shi* 歐戰風流史, or literally "a romantic history of the European war."

*The Birth of a Nation* aroused considerable patriotism among Chinese audiences. This was expressed by Chen Xiaodie 陳小蝶, a popular writer, who found that Griffith's *Hearts of the World* conveyed antiwar sentiments much as Du Fu's 杜甫 poetry reflected the sociopolitical chaos associated with the Tang dynasty, and *The Birth of a Nation* was charged with heroic patriotism similar to Lu You's 陸游 poems from the Song dynasty.<sup>18</sup> Even as traditional Chinese classics were used to redeem and elevate Griffith's cinema, the myth of Griffith was simultaneously being encoded with Chinese ethical and aesthetic values.

It is well known that in America *The Birth of a Nation* caused a racial scandal that would mark Griffith for the rest of his career, but in China the film's reception was



rather different. Chinese viewers were so excited by the work's patriotic passion that not only did they ignore its racism, they even celebrated it. Linking the film to China in turmoil, a critic commented: "This movie should wake Chinese people up." Lamenting that China was under the control of world powers, the author praised the Klan for igniting patriotism in the United States by which freedom was rescued from the hands of blacks.<sup>19</sup>

Griffith's reputation in China, therefore, actually benefited from the reception of *The Birth of a Nation*, and he became even more adored following the release of *Broken Blossoms*. The latter work tells a sad story in London, where a young Chinese immigrant falls in love with an English girl abused by her father. As if seeking to redeem himself from the controversy following *The Birth of a Nation*, in *Broken Blossoms* Griffith depicted not only the father but all of the Westerners as brutal and vicious, in contrast to the good-hearted Yellow Man. The screening of *Broken Blossoms* in Shanghai also incited a racial controversy, as it had in the United States, though with more complicated implications.

*Broken Blossoms* premiered at the Carlton Theater on February 19, 1923. It was originally scheduled for a five-day run, but was abruptly pulled on the fourth day and replaced by another Hollywood movie. Although no official reason was given for the disruption, it was said that the authority of the foreign settlement had ordered that the show be stopped, on account of the protests from foreign audience members who were furious at the blasphemous images of the Westerners in the film. And it was said that afterward the film went to Hong Kong and was also banned there.<sup>20</sup>

The figure of the Yellow Man was also a focal point of the controversy. As Gina Marchetti points out, in the West *Broken Blossoms* was viewed through the lens of the "yellow peril," by using the "fantasy of rape and the possibility of lynching to reaffirm the boundaries of a white-defined, patriarchal, Anglo-American culture."<sup>21</sup> In 1920s Shanghai, however, the Chinese who watched *Broken Blossoms* were surprised by the humane portrayal of the Yellow Man, which stood in stark contrast to what they had observed in other American films, in which Chinese were depicted as being dirty, shameless, and stupid. An anonymous reviewer remarks, "I saw the imported films in which our people are mostly depicted as bandits, thieves, or criminals. It [Griffith's film] made me so happy, since in it their love is portrayed as noble and pure."<sup>22</sup> Another reviewer, Rui Kaizhi 芮愷之, describes how he watched the show on the first day and was excited by the scene in which the brutal father is killed by the Chinese man, but by the evening show this scene had been cut, and three days later the screenings were halted altogether.<sup>23</sup> Later, the same critic reflected, "After watching *Broken Blossoms*, I developed an even greater admiration for Griffith's noble idea and [Lillian] Gish's performance. The reason I admire Griffith is that he has a large heart and dares to practice what he believes. Most Americans despise the Chinese, but Griffith elevates and praises them while depicting Englishmen and Americans as evil and ugly.... His insights and moral judgment are far beyond his contemporaries in the spheres of filmmaking and the law."<sup>24</sup>

Even as Griffith was being praised, urgent protests were being raised in China against the racism in other American films. On May 16, 1923, for instance, *Shenbao* printed several photos from Sidney Franklin's 1922 film *East Is West* (東即西), which depicted ferocious and disgusting-looking Chinese gangsters, with the comment, "This is a shame for our nation. The bizarre costumes and the heroine's acting simply made the foreign audiences laugh." However, the author's anger was also directed at the Japanese: "In this kind of film, most Chinese characters were played by Japanese actors, who not only represented them in a distorted manner, they also intentionally depicted them with ugly, disgusting manners."<sup>25</sup> Nearly two weeks later, another photograph showed Japanese actors with a caption that read: "Films in which the Japanese play Chinese people in an ugly manner."<sup>26</sup> Rather than blaming Hollywood or asking why Japanese actors were used, the anonymous author instead condemned the Japanese actors for demonizing the Chinese "national identity" (國體) by wearing Manchu costumes and writing Chinese characters in a shabby fashion.

## LILLIAN GISH AND THE GENDER PROBLEM

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*Way Down East* is generally regarded by American film historians as a second-rate film, yet it meant more than any of Griffith's other films in terms of its impact on China's developing film industry, on the genre of "family drama," and on China's stardom culture, as well as for the way it articulated Chinese reality related to the issues of love, marriage, domesticity, and women's social mobility. This tragic story struck a chord for Chinese audiences, for whom the actress Lillian Gish displayed "tragic" power, with a social significance worthy of close observation.

In his 1919 comments on *Hearts of the World*, Zhou Shoujuan remarked on Lillian Gish, though at the time she was still so obscure that the first advertisement of *Way Down East* described her character only as a "pitiful girl," without even mentioning her by name. She nevertheless rose to fame overnight, and in the week following the first Chinese screening of *Way Down East*, an advertisement in *Shenbao* for a forthcoming issue of *Motion Picture Review* asked: "Who appears in *Way Down East*? It is she! Who is she? She is the girl named Lillian Gish. Her beautiful appearance and gestures have been made by the copperplate and printed in our magazine."<sup>27</sup>

Of course, movie stars typically drew more attention than film directors, and there is a sense in which Griffith's popularity relied heavily on that of Gish. Interestingly, at the same time she was viewed differently in America. Gish does not appear, for instance, in the lists of top male and female actors published in 1924 by the American journals *Photoplay* and *Film Daily*.<sup>28</sup> In 1925, the Chinese magazine *Motion Picture World* was inaugurated with a special issue dedicated to Lillian Gish, and in the introduction the author, Li Huailin 李懷麟, noted that "movie actors are enlighteners of human beings, social teachers, cultural vanguards, and advocates of cosmopolitanism," and singled

out Lillian Gish as “a great artist of American cinema, also a great gifted movie star in the world.”<sup>29</sup> Most of the other articles in this special issue discussed Gish’s talent, acting career, and artistic achievements. According to Lin Shuyu 林漱玉, the reason for selecting Gish out of hundreds of Hollywood stars was that she could do the same things they could, but they all lacked her gifted talent for tragic performance.<sup>30</sup>

When film companies emerged in China in the early 1920s, they faced the difficulty of recruiting actresses. They targeted women who were not only good looking but also well educated. But for these women, the road to becoming a movie star was blocked by social bias and familial opposition at a time when urban society aspired to Western civilization yet remained restrained by patriarchal order and traditional values. Under these circumstances, print media’s saturation with Hollywood stars helped to promote not only the careers of Chinese actresses but also broader goals of women’s social mobility. In 1923, for instance, the film section of *Shenbao* featured countless accounts of Hollywood stars, including nearly a hundred photos and detailed descriptions of how much they earned and how much they spent on summer vacations, cars, clothes, and cosmetics. There were also stories about actresses, such as the autobiography of Mary Pickford and the biography of Norma Talmadge that were both serialized in the film section. Despite their humble origins, both women reached stardom by virtue of their talents. They were envied by Chinese women, not only for their free social activities but also, and more importantly, for their colorful lifestyle. By contrast, the newspaper emphasized Lillian Gish’s higher profile as she talked about her acting theory and experiences. Such an ardent display of Hollywood star culture was intended to encourage an analogous Chinese stardom, while the local strategy of competition was actively enforced. For instance, between April and July 1923, amid the relentless coverage of American child actor Jackie Coogan, there emerged a campaign for his Chinese counterpart, Dan Erchun 但二春, who appeared in *Revival of an Old Well* (古井重波記) and *An Abandoned Child* (棄兒), and was praised as a “child prodigy” and a “little star.”

The emphasis on Lillian Gish’s rare talent for tragic acting had nuanced implications in this historical context. Her artistic and career successes certainly inspired Chinese women in search for free choice and social mobility, yet just as Laura Mulvey criticized classic Hollywood movies for representing women as the objects of a male voyeuristic gaze,<sup>31</sup> Gish’s girlish image in films satisfied a male fetishistic desire, as her virginal innocence, delicate beauty, and fragile manner were appreciated through a lens of classical Chinese poetics. Anna in *Way Down East*, for instance, accepts her misfortune and abuse with incredible endurance and finally wins a moral victory, positioning her as the sort of prototypical “good wife and virtuous mother” (賢妻良母) who frequently appears in Chinese “family dramas.”

After directing *The Difficult Couple* in 1919, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu collaborated again on *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* (孤兒救祖記), released by Star Motion Picture Company in December 1923,<sup>32</sup> which enjoyed unprecedented box-office success and critical acclaim. Zhang and Zheng pursued a picture of cultural localization, in which the players wore Chinese costumes and spoke in a Chinese manner, yet contemporary critics easily discerned the influence of Griffith’s *Way Down East*. One reviewer

observed, “The episode of driving the widow out of her home was borrowed from that of rescuing Anna on the ice-floe,”<sup>33</sup> while another declared that the film “was plotted with deep signification, and a tedious life was injected with humor. These were similar to *Way Down East*, though in different approaches.”<sup>34</sup> A third remarked, “This film is a family tragedy. Amid grievances humor was inserted and brought the audience a relief. Griffith had used this method in his *Way Down East* and *Orphans of the Storm* in order to comfort the resentful audience. In this respect, the Star Company was a good learner.”<sup>35</sup>

Categorized as a “family tragedy,” *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* focuses primarily on Yu Weiyu, the widow. After her husband dies in an accident, her father-in-law adopts his nephew as his heir and drives the pregnant and newly widowed Weiyu from their home on account of a rumor about her infidelity. Weiyu subsequently gives birth to a son and endures countless hardships in raising him. Ten years later, as the nephew is plotting to murder his adoptive father to gain control over the family wealth, Weiyu’s son returns to rescue his grandfather. The grandfather apologizes to his daughter-in-law, and the family reunites.

*An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* was characterized by an ambiguous gender politics, in which the type of tragic woman was incarnated in a model of “virtuous woman” as a result of her cultural localization. Unlike Anna in *Way Down East*, Weiyu is confined to the space of the boudoir, and her extraordinary endurance is empowered by Confucian ethical values. As a widow, she is submissive to the patriarchal order but is eventually rewarded for her virtue, investing the money she receives from her father-in-law to build a school. As shown in the ending, when Weiyu uses the family wealth granted by her father-in-law to build a school, the film proposes that a combination of morality and education may provide a solution for society’s problems. In this way, the figure of the virtuous widow is granted a larger significance.

As film historians have pointed out, classical Hollywood cinema was rooted in the bourgeois domestic drama, and Griffith, in adapting Dickens’s novels, shared many of his nineteenth-century Victorian values.<sup>36</sup> It was no accident, therefore, that *Way Down East* was “mid-Victorian in plot” and adapted from an “antique stage melodrama.”<sup>37</sup> This feature sheds light on the gender politics behind *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* in the context of urban development in 1920s Shanghai. Weiyu represented a new domestic subject, a self-assertive woman who was economically independent and taking responsibility for educating the younger generation. Similarly, the grandfather’s apology to Weiyu suggests an internal adjustment of patriarchal structure in the modern period. The movie was charged with a bourgeois conservative strategy to stabilize the “nuclear family” in the context of a new urban culture and as a way to respond to the radical trend of women’s emancipation.

Weiyu was played by Wang Hanlun 王漢倫, who grew up in a wealthy family and graduated from St. Mary Girl’s School. After *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* turned out to be a big hit, Wang proved herself deserving of the title of “the leading Chinese actress for tragedy.” If, according to a recent scholarly appraisal, Zheng Zhengqiu was a “Chinese Griffith” for making *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather* a perfect melodrama for early Chinese cinema,<sup>38</sup> then we may similarly see Wang Hanlun as a “Chinese Lillian

Gish.” But, as mentioned above, there was a split between Gish’s theatrical self and her real identity, and if Wang Hanlun’s characters were modeled on Gish’s, the Chinese actress appears to have taken inspiration from Gish’s real-life identity. After *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather*, Wang continued to play tragic women in a series of movies, not only because of her recognizable acting but also, it was said, because her bound feet rendered her unfit to play the role of a modern girl. Yet this condition did not prevent Wang from being a “new woman” in reality. Before joining the film circle, she married a bureaucrat in a northern province, but when she discovered his debauchery she left him and returned to Shanghai to work as a professional actress. When Wang’s family opposed her film career, she cut off relations with them and even changed her surname from Peng to Wang.<sup>39</sup> When dissatisfied with her low salary, she left the Star Company and joined another company, and in 1926 she launched a new film company under her own given name, Hanlun.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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By contextualizing the relation between Griffith and Chinese cinema in early 1920s Shanghai, this chapter has examined early Chinese film discourses and practices through the lens of cosmopolitan, anticolonial, nationalist, and metropolitan ideologies, with which the myth of Griffith and Lillian Gish was intricately entangled. In semicolonial Shanghai, the racial responses to *The Birth of a Nation* were so closely imbricated with people of color that they presented a unique spectacle in globally spreading the “vernacular modernism” of Hollywood cinema. A related issue involves a shift in cinema audience, as seen in the fact that, when *The Birth of a Nation* was shown in the Carlton Theater, the audience was half Chinese and half foreign.<sup>41</sup> One critic reported that, unlike earlier comedies or detective serials, Griffith’s films were viewed primarily by “high society.”<sup>42</sup>

Examining the Griffith legend inevitably leads us to question the concept of “Chinese national cinema,” which has generally been treated in terms of political struggles on behalf of nation-building in twentieth-century China.<sup>43</sup> In fact, none of the “influence” was neutrally exerted, but instead was always charged with the receiver’s emotions or ideologies. The emergence of Chinese cinema can hardly be separated from Hollywood, as Andrew Higson points out with respect to European cinemas. As he asserts, for many years Hollywood had been “an integral and naturalized part of the national culture, or the popular imagination, of most countries in which cinema is an established entertainment form.”<sup>44</sup> The ideologies of cosmopolitanism, anticolonialism, and nationalism orchestrated by cinematic and print media revealed the public space of women associated with scenarios of everyday modernity in the urban landscapes. Lillian Gish’s significance can be understood not only in terms of her gender, but also insofar as she provided a “sensory-reflexive horizon” in which subtle emotions and lyric tradition played significant roles.

## APPENDIX 1.1

## SCREENINGS OF GRIFFITH'S MOVIES IN SHANGHAI, 1923–24

Date	Title	In Chinese	Movie Theater
Feb. 19–23, 1922	<i>The Greatest Question</i>	<i>Zuida zhi wenti</i> (最大之問題) The biggest question	Shanghai Theater 上海大戲院
May 22–29, 1922	<i>Way Down East</i>	<i>Laihun</i> (賴婚) Cheated marriage	Shanghai Theater
Oct. 16–23, 1922	<i>Way Down East</i>	<i>Laihun</i> (賴婚)	Shanghai Theater
Feb. 19–21, 1923	<i>Broken Blossoms</i>	<i>Canhua lei</i> (殘花淚) Tears of Broken Blossoms	Carlton Theater 卡爾登影戲院
June 25–30, 1923	<i>The Birth of a Nation</i>	<i>Chongjian guangming</i> (重見光明) The restoration of brightness	Carlton Theater
Aug. 9; 15–19, 1923	<i>The Girl Who Stayed at Home</i>	<i>Ouzhan fengliu shi</i> (歐戰風流史) A romantic history of the European war	Shenjiang Theater 申江大戲院
Oct. 1–7, 1923	<i>Orphans of the Storm</i>	<i>Luanshi guchu</i> (亂世孤雛) Orphans in a turbulent world	Carlton Theater
Oct. 1–4	<i>Fatal Marriage</i>	<i>Buxing zhi hunyin</i> (不幸之婚姻) Unfortunate marriage	Shenjiang Theater
Oct. 18–23, 1923	<i>Intolerance</i>	<i>Zhuanzhi du</i> (專制毒) The evil of dictatorship	Shanghai Theater
Nov. 2–8, 1923	<i>Intolerance</i>	<i>Zhuanzhi du</i> (專制毒)	Shenjiang Theater
Nov. 9–18	<i>Way Down East</i>	<i>Laihun</i> (賴婚)	Shenjiang Theater
Dec. 26–29	<i>Love Flower</i>	<i>Xiaonü chenzhou</i> (孝女沉舟) A pious daughter in a sinking boat	Carlton Theater
Feb. 10–17	<i>Way Down East</i>	<i>Laihun</i> (賴婚)	Shenjiang Theater
Feb. 18–24	<i>Way Down East</i>	<i>Laihun</i> (賴婚)	Hujiang Theater 滬江影戲院
April 1–7	<i>Orphans of the Storm</i>	<i>Luanshi guchu</i> (亂世孤雛)	Shanghai Theater



## NOTES

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1. *Shenbao* 申報, May 22, 1922, 1.
2. See, for instance, Cheng Jihua 程季華, Li Shaobai 李少白, and Xing Zuwen 邢祖文, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* 中國電影發展史 [The historical development of Chinese cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963).
3. Jay Leyda, *Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 32.
4. See Zheng Junli 鄭君里, “Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shilue” 現代中國電影史略 [A brief history of Chinese cinema], in *Zhongguo wusheng dianying* 中國無聲電影 [Chinese silent cinema], ed. Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan 中國電影資料館 (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 1398. Several recently published scholarly works adopted Zheng’s incorrect dating of *Way Down East*. See, for instance, Li Suyuan 鄺蘇元 and Hu Jubin 胡菊彬 *Zhongguo wusheng dianying shi* 中國無聲電影史 [A history of Chinese silent cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1996), 148; and Qin Xiqing 秦喜清, *Oumei dianying yu Zhongguo zaoqi dianying* 歐美電影與中國早期電影 [European and American cinema and early Chinese cinema] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2008), 2–3.
5. See Fu Xiaohong 付曉紅 and Wang Zhen 王真, “Laihun yu Zhongguo zaoqi aiqingpian” 《賴婚》與中國早期愛情片 [Way Down East and the early Chinese love film], *Dianying yishu* 電影藝術 [Film art] 342 (Jan. 2012): 138–143.
6. Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Fallen Women, Rising Stars, New Horizons: Shanghai Silent Film as Vernacular Modernism,” *Film Quarterly* 54 (Fall 2005): 10–11. Also see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1–41.
7. See Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulation of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 67; and Isolde Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema: A Century of Narrative Film* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 34–35. See also Yamamoto Kikuo 山本喜久男, *Nihon eiga ni okeru gaikaku eiga no eikyo: hikaku eigashi kenkyu* 日本映画における外国映画の影響: 比較映画史研究 [Japanese cinema and the influences of foreign cinemas: A comparative study of film history] (Tokyo: Waseda daigaku shuppanshu, 1983), 3–33.
8. Du Yun-chih 杜雲之, *Zhongguo dianying shi* 中國電影史 [History of Chinese film] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1972), vol. 1, 11.
9. See the ads in the *North-China Daily News* for *The Last Days of Pompeii* (March 3, 1914), 4; *The Three Musketeers* (April 14, 1914), 4; *Quo Vadis?* and *Antony and Cleopatra* (August 9, 1914), 4.
10. *Shenbao*, September 29, 1913, 12.
11. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 16.
12. For a detailed analysis of “Discourse on Cinematography,” see Jianhua Chen 陳建華, “Zhongguo dianying piping de xianqu: Zhou Shoujuan’s *Yingxi hua dujie*” 中國電影批評

- 的先驅—周瘦鵬《影戲話》讀解 [The vanguard of Chinese film criticism: A reading of Zhou Shoujuan's "Discourse on Cinematography"], in *Cong geming dao gonghe: Qingmo zhi Minguo shiqi wenxue, dianying he wenhua de zhuanxing* 從革命到共和—清末至民國時期文學、電影和文化的轉型 [From revolution to the Republic: The transformation of literature, film, and culture in the late Qing and Republican period] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 205–236.
13. [Zhou] Shoujuan [周]瘦鵬, "Yingxi hua" 影戲話 [Discourse on cinematography], *Shenbao*, January 20, 1920, 13.
  14. [Zhou] Shoujuan, "Discourse on Cinematography," *Shenbao*, June 20, 1919, 15.
  15. Deng Guang 鄧廣, "Fakan ci" 發刊詞 [Remarks on the inaugural issue], *Dianying shijie* 電影世界 [Motion picture world] 1925: no. 1, 1–2.
  16. Cheng Bugao 程步高, "Gelifeisi chenggong shi" 葛禮斐斯成功史 [The history of D. W. Griffith's success], *Dianying zazhi* 電影雜誌 [Movie magazine] 1924: nos. 1–7; 1925: no. 9. Reprinted in *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying huakan* 中國早期電影畫刊 [Selected periodicals of early Chinese cinema]. Eds. Jiang Yasha 姜亞沙 and Chen Zhanqi 陳湛綺. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei zhongxin, 2004. vol. 1, 331–334, 429–431, 524–526, 607–608, 723–724; vol. 2, 89–90, 195–196, 420.
  17. Li Tao 李濤, "Ting Tian Han jun yanjiang hou" 聽田漢君演講后 [After listening to Mr. Tian Han's lecture], in *Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan*, ed., *Chinese Silent Cinema*, 498–499.
  18. Chen Xiaodie 陳小蝶, "Yingxi chuyan" 影戲芻言 [A brief note on shadowplay], *Banyue* 半月 [Half-moon journal] 3.1 (Sept. 1923): 10–11.
  19. Zhizhong 志中, "Guanying Chongjian guangming hou zhi yishu" 觀映重見光明後之憶述 [A reflection after watching of *The Birth of a Nation*], *Shenbao*, July 3, 1923, 17.
  20. Sansan 三三, "Yu Naishen tan Geleifeisi zhi qi pian" 與乃神談葛雷菲斯之七片 [A conversation with Naishen on seven movies by Griffith], *Dianying zazhi* 電影雜誌 [Movie magazine] 1 (May 1924): 1–4. Reprinted in *Selected Periodicals of Early Chinese Cinema*, vol. 1: 317–320.
  21. Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 10.
  22. "Guan Kaerdun zhi Canhua lei ji" 觀卡爾登之殘花淚記 [An account of watching *Broken Blossoms* in the Carlton Theater], *Shenbao*, February 21, 1923, 21.
  23. [Rui] Kaizhi [芮]愷之, "Dianying zatan" 電影雜談 [Miscellaneous remarks on motion pictures], *Shenbao*, May 19, 1923, 18. The author's full name, Rui Kaizhi 芮愷之, appeared in the list of the editorial board members in the first issue of *Motion Picture World* in 1925.
  24. [Rui] Kaizhi, "Tan yu suo guan you Lilin Ganxu zhi yingju" 談余所觀有麗琳甘許之影劇 [On the Lillian Gish movies that I have seen], *Motion Picture World* 1925: no. 1, 28.
  25. See the captions to four stills from *East Is West*, in *Shenbao*, May 16, 1923, 17.
  26. "Riren miaoyan woguo minsu chouzhuang zhi yingxi" 日人描演我國民俗丑狀之影戲 [The films in which the Japanese play Chinese people in an ugly manner], *Shenbao*, May 28, 1923, 18.
  27. *Shenbao*, May 29, 1922, 19.
  28. Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Picture, 1915–1928* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 22.
  29. [Li] Huailin [李]懷麟, "Lilin zhuanhao yuanqi" 麗琳專號緣起 [Introduction to the special issue on Lillian Gish], *Motion Picture World* 1925: no. 1, 8–9. The author's full name, Li Huailin 李懷麟, appeared in the tenth issue of *Movie Magazine* as newly appointed chief editor, and also on the editorial board for the first issue of *Motion Picture World*.



30. [Lin] Shuyu [林] 漱玉, "Wo zhi Lilin guan" 我之麗琳觀 [My view of Lillian Gish], *Motion Picture World* 1925: no. 1, 6. The author's full name, Lin Shuyu 林漱玉, was listed in the editorial board for the journal's first issue.
31. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57–68.
32. A special panel was organized to pay homage to Zheng Zhengqiu and the Star Motion Picture Company, in which many discussions focused on *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather*. See *Dangdai dianying* 當代電影 [Contemporary cinema] 119 (March 2004): 16–41; 120 (May 2004): 44–55.
33. Bofen 伯奮, "Gu'er jiuzu ji zhi xinpings" 孤兒救祖記之新評 [New comments on *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather*], *Shenbao*, December 24, 1923, 17.
34. Qicheng 器成, "Gu'er jiuzu ji zhi xinpings" 孤兒救祖記之新評 [New comments on *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather*], *Shenbao*, January 7, 1924, 17.
35. Shuangqiu 爽秋, "Ping Gu'er jiuzu ji yingpian" 評孤兒救祖記影片 [Comments on the film *An Orphan Rescues His Grandfather*], *Xinwen bao* 新聞報 [Daily news], December 24, 1923, sec. 5, 1.
36. Gina Marchetti, *Romance and "Yellow Peril"*, 11. Also Rick Altman, "Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today," in *Silent Film*, ed. Richard Abel (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 145–162.
37. Richard Meyer, "The Films of David Wark Griffith," in *Focus on D. W. Griffith*, ed. Harry M. Geduld (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971), 122.
38. See Li Shaobai 李少白, "Zhuchiren daoyan" 主持人導言 [The host's introduction], *Contemporary Cinema* 119 (March 2004): 16.
39. See Wang Hanlun 王漢倫, *Wo ru dianyingjie zhi shimo* 我入電影界之始末 [The beginning and end of my film career], in *Zhongguo dianying ziliaoguan*, *Chinese Silent Cinema*, 357.
40. See Yan Kailei 閻凱蕾, *Mingxing he ta de shidai: Minguo dianying shi xintan* 明星和他的時代: 民國電影史新探 [A movie star and his time: A new exploration of the cinema in the Republican period] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2010), 32–34.
41. Zhizhong 志中, "Guanying Chongjian guangming hou zhi yishu" 觀映重見光明後之憶述 [A reflection after watching *The Birth of a Nation*], *Shenbao*, July 3, 1923, 17.
42. Bofen 伯奮, "Guan Chongjian guangming hou zhi yijian" 觀重見光明後之意見 [My opinion after watching *The Birth of a Nation*], *Shenbao*, June 28, 1923, sec. 5.
43. For example, Jubin Hu characterizes Chinese cinema in the 1920s as a form of "commercial nationalism," emphasizing the emergence of native film industry in this decade. Yet his notion of *nationalism* is primarily related to a "Chinese political struggle" to engage the cinema with "projecting a nation." See Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).
44. Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," *Screen* 30.4 (Autumn 1989): 39.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# OMBRES CHINOISES

### *split screens and parallel lives in love and duty*

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KRISTINE HARRIS

Ruan Lingyu and Ruan Lingyu in *Love and Duty*.

*The Film Magazine* (影戲雜誌)

This was the enigmatic caption to a publicity still for the new 1931 silent motion picture *Love and Duty* (戀愛與義務) featuring the twenty-one-year-old actress performing two roles: a frail elderly seamstress in an old-fashioned jacket shirt, taking the measurements of a radiant young woman in Western dress.<sup>1</sup> A climactic moment in the film, the split-screen shot presented Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 as Yang Naifan, an aging mother meeting face-to-face the grown daughter she last saw as a child, Huang Guanying, also played by Ruan Lingyu (see fig. 2.1).

Through the personal story of Yang Naifan, *Love and Duty* powerfully staged the larger contradictions circulating through tradition and modernity. The melodrama tracks Naifan's life from her carefree youth in a leafy residential neighborhood of Shanghai, through her experience as a wife, mother, lover, and widow, to her tragic death. At the outset, the teenage schoolgirl Naifan is spotted by a dashing student, Li Zuyi, and the two fall in love. But Naifan's father has already arranged for her to marry a different man, Huang Daren. Disillusioned yet dutiful, Naifan becomes Daren's wife, living in a well-appointed Western-style house and becoming mother of two children, Guanying and Guanxiong. Yet Daren dallies with other women, and Naifan is miserable. Only when she meets Zuyi again by chance a few years later does her passion for life return. When Zuyi proposes that they elope, she agrees, though much to her distress, Zuyi insists they leave the children behind. The couple eventually attains some happiness, living a simple life in another part of town and having a child of their own. But as gossip about the scandal spreads through the city, Zuyi gets fired and has trouble finding work. Impoverished, he succumbs to consumption, and Naifan considers joining him in death. *Love and Duty* could easily have ended with Naifan's suicide at this point—but instead, she resolves to live on and raise her infant daughter, Ping'er.



FIGURE 2.1 Ruan Lingyu and Ruan Lingyu in *Love and Duty*. Publicity still in *Yingxi zazhi* 影戲雜誌 [The film magazine], April 1931, 41

Grappling with the competing forces of personal desire and familial obligations, the figure of Yang Naifan embodied the dualities of the era, including the duality of the film's title and its split structure. The story restarts fifteen years later. Now older, Naifan lives frugally and takes in piecework to pay for the girl's education. She secretly remembers her other children but never discloses her past life to Ping'er. The affectionate girl does well in school and is popular among her classmates. Daren, meanwhile, now regrets having neglected Naifan. He becomes an attentive single father and respected advocate for social reform. The two children, having been shielded from the truth about their mother's abandonment, believe she died long ago. When a tailoring job brings Naifan back to the family she abandoned years earlier, a reunion seems imminent—yet they no longer recognize her. Naifan leaves without revealing her identity and returns to Ping'er. The girl has recently met a boy through her friends, but her dreams of love and marriage are shattered when his parents learn of Ping'er's background. Naifan, consumed with sadness and shame, finally takes her own life, leaving behind two letters for Ping'er and Daren that explain all and ask their forgiveness. Daren accepts her request that he care for the girl alongside their two children, and as he tells them the truth, they kneel in reverence and grief before a youthful portrait of their mother Yang Naifan.



Ruan Lingyu's star aura—doubled in the roles of both mother and daughter—was central to the power of the film. The talented young actress had already appeared in a dozen silent pictures, but it was *Love and Duty* that magnified her image and catapulted her to stardom. Presenting a woman who is expected to be one kind of person while she struggles to be another, a woman who tries following her instincts only to be crushed by broader social expectations, *Love and Duty* was a blueprint for the complex issues and tragic roles that Ruan would eventually play out in her most celebrated films, *The Goddess* (神女, 1933) and *The New Woman* (新女性, 1935), and in her own public career and private life. Though the actress's soaring career in silent cinema was cut short by suicide in 1935, her iconic performances have persisted more than a century after her birth, and today, on global screens, Ruan Lingyu surpasses even Hu Die 胡蝶 as the most memorable star of 1930s Chinese cinema.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the earliest extant feature films of the 1930s, *Love and Duty* epitomized many of the qualities and aspirations that shaped Chinese cinema of the decade: it was cosmopolitan in its style and sources, yet equally concerned with exploring what it means to be modern and Chinese. The film was produced by the new Lianhua (聯華) Film Studios, founded the previous year, in November 1929, as a merger of several companies. Among the dozen or so Chinese production companies operating in the 1930s, Lianhua fast became one of the three largest, alongside the more established Mingxing (明星) and Tianyi (天一) studios. Even as these studios looked to other film industries for models, especially Hollywood, the stated goals of Lianhua founders Luo Mingyou 羅明佑 and Li Minwei 黎民偉 (shared by their competitors at Mingxing) were to raise the standard of domestic productions, match the quality of foreign imports dominating China's market, and reach new audiences overseas.<sup>3</sup> They patriotically promoted China's film industry and developed a prominent star system, while also emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of cinema. Performers like Ruan Lingyu and her costar Jin Yan 金焰 were publicized as talented artists and role models for the public, and production values were elevated through substantial investment in set design, location shoots, innovative photography, and, gradually, sound film production. As an epic-length melodrama that was originally more than three hours long, *Love and Duty* helped establish Lianhua's reputation for producing serious films about contemporary issues and social themes, especially modern melodramas and urban stories, which became leading genres in Chinese cinema of the 1930s and 1940s. This made *Love and Duty* an important milestone in the early careers of director Bu Wancang 卜萬蒼, screenwriter Zhu Shilin 朱石麟, and cinematographer Huang Shaofen 黃紹芬, who developed into major auteurs of twentieth-century Chinese cinema.

Shot in Shanghai—still a semicolonial treaty port at the time and one of China's major centers for international commerce, new technologies, and media—*Love and Duty* put the cosmopolitanism of the city on display, even as it also invoked the rising nationalism of the era. The film was made in the city's French Concession and included bilingual intertitles in Chinese and English. Its narrative echoed literature, drama, and films from the West, as well as recent productions made in China. Indeed, the story for *Love and Duty* came from a 1920s novel of the same title by a Polish-born, French-educated writer

living in China, credited under the names S. Rosen Hoa and Madame Hua Luo Chen 華羅琛夫人. Advance publicity for *Love and Duty* foregrounded this international source material, even as it heralded the company's patriotic sentiments with the slogan "Opposing foreign cultural and economic invasion / Promoting the beauty of our nation and people."<sup>4</sup> The film itself was not overtly ideological but integrated details that alluded to the need for national self-strengthening and international cooperation. Ambitious 1930s film studios like Lianhua were galvanized by a sense of patriotism, spurred on by political movements seeking to unify and empower the new Republic of China. As the newly centralized national government along with various localities issued censorship regulations and statutes aimed at safeguarding national dignity, promoting social morality, and eliminating superstition and feudalistic ideology, film studios negotiated this growing role of politics in the media and mobilized national sentiment through their productions. Thus, *Love and Duty* was promoted as "a creative work that realistically depicts the nation and culture" and "a harbinger that unites film and art," "unveiling the sense of love and duty between the two sexes, and playing out the grievances of women."<sup>5</sup>

*Love and Duty* is an important and influential film in the history of Chinese cinema, yet it has only received nominal attention, largely because the film was lost for decades amid the ravages of war and revolution. Even since the rediscovery of a print in 1994, *Love and Duty* has circulated only in film festivals. In the interim, other films from the 1930s, such as *Daybreak* (天明, 1933), *Crossroads* (十字街頭, 1937), and *Street Angel* (馬路天使, 1937), came to be widely available in commercial DVD release and seen as representative classics of the era, especially for historians tracing the roots of China's left-wing cinema movement. Yet *Love and Duty* offers fresh insight into the sources and complexity of 1930s film culture. Viewing the film alongside the original novel, we find a penetrating social drama that confronted controversial issues in the early decades of postimperial China—the "marriage question," the "suicide question," the "woman question," and the role of individuals and the family in modern China—setting the tone for many later Lianhua productions such as *Maternal Radiance* (母性之光, 1933) and *Song of China* (天倫, 1935). Moreover, by revisiting *Love and Duty* as one of the earliest extant films featuring Ruan Lingyu, we can better understand the trajectory of the actress's performance style and the making of a star.

## LOVE AND DUTY: THE BACKSTORY

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The idea of making a film based on *Love and Duty* actually originated in the winter of 1923, some years before Lianhua was even founded. The studio's founder, Luo Mingyou, was then in his early twenties and had recently opened a cinema, the Zhenguang (真光), which would become Beijing's largest Chinese-managed movie house. He was fascinated by literature, having pursued graduate studies at Peking University during the May Fourth Movement, so when he received a copy of the story *Love and Duty* from

Hua Nanguì 華南圭—a talented civil engineer and the author's husband—Luo Mingyou read it with great interest.<sup>6</sup>

The author, styled Madame Hua Luo Chen, or simply Luo Chen, had met Hua Nanguì while they were studying abroad in Paris.<sup>7</sup> She was originally from Poland, he from Wuxi. Her formal studies at the Sorbonne were in the sciences, but her true passion was for literature and languages: she spoke French, Russian, German, English, and even Esperanto. The eclectic couple moved to China in 1910–1911, where they witnessed the fall of China's last imperial dynasty and the birth of the new Republic. They circulated among the liberal intellectual elite and foreign community, raising two children in a house of their own design that blended Western construction and amenities with Chinese tiled roofs, moon gates, and a rockery garden in a courtyard along a classic *hutong* lane of Beijing. There she would become a prolific author of novels about Chinese society, writing in English and French under various pennames, including Ho Ro-Se, Horose, S. Horose, and S. Rosen Hoa, and also publishing in Chinese under sinicized versions of those names, including Madame Hua Luo Chen, Madame Luo Chen, Ms. Luo Chen 羅琛女士, or simply Lu Cun 露存.<sup>8</sup> These amalgams kaleidoscopically reflected multiple facets of the author's life: her Jewish roots in eastern Europe, where it was common to adopt a local surname or invent entirely new names; her new life in China and marriage to Hua; and her public professional identity as an internationalist writer in both China and France. Although her work was published in Europe under the name S. Horose, for the purposes of discussing *Love and Duty* in China, this chapter will refer to the author as Luo Chen 羅琛—the name by which she was best known to her Chinese readership.

*Love and Duty* was written in 1921 and came out in early 1923 as eight installments in *The Story World* (小說世界), the new weekly literary magazine from the Commercial Press, Shanghai's largest multilingual publisher at the time. At a time when women writers and literature in translation were all the rage, the series garnered special attention with its byline, "Ms. Luo Chen," and a preface penned in December 1921 by the eminent chancellor of Peking University, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, introducing the author's European background and the many languages she spoke. The story was well received: readers selected it in the magazine's competition to choose the best pieces of the year for republication in a series of bound volumes from the Commercial Press. Thus the same text of *Love and Duty* came out in book form in June 1924, followed two years later by a slightly longer English-language version of the novel.<sup>9</sup> Each edition sold well and went through multiple printings.

Luo Chen's public persona embodied the dual qualities of cosmopolitanism and nationalism that were celebrated during China's May Fourth Movement and the broader New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s through the 1920s. Readers admired the fresh insights into Chinese society that the author offered owing to her background in other cultures and her marriage to a Chinese man; they also commented on her social contributions and love for her adopted homeland.<sup>10</sup> Cai Yuanpei noted that Luo Chen had already lived in China for a long time with her husband and dedicated herself to philanthropic causes, "especially novels that would help benefit society, such as *Love and*



*Duty*.”<sup>11</sup> Hu Jichen 胡寄塵, an editor of *The Story World* and a prolific writer himself, wrote that Luo Chen viewed “China as her second ancestral land” and that “her warm love for her second country is no less than our love for our first country.”<sup>12</sup> And the notable feminist Zhu-Hu Binxia 朱胡彬夏, who helped advance education for women in China, commented that Luo Chen “sees our country as her mother country, cares deeply for our people’s sufferings, and is equal to our people.”<sup>13</sup> The author herself was deeply committed to advancing China’s interests and later explained that she sought to illustrate through her fiction the many changes that she had witnessed in Chinese society over the two decades since 1911, including the gradual movement toward equality between men and women.<sup>14</sup>

Thematically and stylistically, *Love and Duty* resonated with multiple literary trends of the second and third decades of the century, which helps explain its broad appeal. On the one hand, the narrative engaged the complex, often competing concerns of intellectuals involved in China’s New Culture Movement: questioning Confucian patriarchy, redefining the role of the individual in society, exploring the potential of love and sentiment, promoting education and equal rights for women, and advocating national strength for China. On the other hand, *Love and Duty* also echoed themes circulating through popular culture at the time. The story’s focus on a woman torn between her romantic yearnings and Confucian obligations, and committing suicide to be reunited with her dead lover, evoked famous romances of the classic “scholar-beauty” genre, and attracted readers of contemporary popular fiction by “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” writers like Bao Tianxiao 包天笑, Xu Zhenya 徐枕亞, and Zhang Henshui 張恨水.

When Luo Mingyou read the novel *Love and Duty* in 1923, he was greatly moved by the way it depicted, as he put it, the “moribund state of the Chinese family system” and “the conflicting sentiments of love and duty experienced by the two sexes.”<sup>15</sup> Just a few days later, Luo Chen contacted him, asking if the story might be adapted for the screen, and Luo Mingyou found this idea appealing. But, as he later recalled, his feeling was that China’s film industry was not yet sufficiently developed for the project. It was only in the spring of 1930, a few months after Luo Mingyou and Li Minwei decided to unite forces as a new company called Lianhua, that the concept of filming the novel resurfaced. At the time, Li was working in Beijing on their first two feature film collaborations, *Spring Dream in the Old Capital* (故都春夢, 1930) and *Wild Flower* (野草閒花, 1930). As the two men discussed their next possible projects for Lianhua, Li suggested *Love and Duty*. Luo Mingyou was stunned at this suggestion, as he remembered reading the novel seven years earlier and had long wished to adapt it to film.<sup>16</sup>

The idea was now a timely one. By 1930, the novel had gained broader name recognition among urban audiences—the Commercial Press had already issued three impressions of the English version and four of the Chinese version. Urban readers, both male and female, were becoming avid filmgoers. Imported novels, plays, and motion pictures with similar plots and themes—romantic love, socially determined marriage arrangements, maternal duty, upward and downward class mobility—were doing well in China at the time. Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* had been staged repeatedly in Beijing and Shanghai,

and the 1927 Hollywood rendition of *Anna Karenina*, simply titled *Love*, was playing in Shanghai that very February of 1930.

Luo Mingyou dug out the book and reread it. By the summer, he had negotiated film rights with Luo Chen, and he decided upon the cast and crew over the following months.<sup>17</sup> Li Minwei was put in charge of managing the production, Zhu Shilin was hired to write the screenplay, and Bu Wancang would film it. For the lead roles of Yang Naifan and Li Zuyi, *Love and Duty* would reprise the magnetic pairing of Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yan, who had gained some acclaim for their romantic personae suffusing the film *Wild Flower*, released in fall 1930.<sup>18</sup> Luo Mingyou also hired Luo Chen as a consultant.<sup>19</sup> Since the fourth impression of *Love and Duty* had already sold out, a fifth impression was planned, but Luo Chen instead renegotiated with the Commercial Press to produce an updated and expanded edition for eventual publication after the film's release.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, she worked on a French version, which was later published in Paris under the more cinematic and enigmatic title *La symphonie des ombres chinoises*—A Symphony of Chinese Shadowplay.<sup>21</sup>

Adapting the novel to a screenplay was a formidable process. This was one of Zhu Shilin's first feature-length screenplays, but he had a decade of related experience that proved useful. Zhu had been translating foreign film playbills into Chinese for Luo Mingyou's Zhenguang Cinema in the 1920s and ran the editorial and translation department for Luo Mingyou's expanding network of movie theaters across North China.<sup>22</sup> In 1930, when Lianhua was just starting up, Zhu collaborated with Luo Mingyou on the script for *Spring Dream in the Old Capital*. As Zhu began working on the *Love and Duty* screenplay, Luo Chen provided him with an expanded manuscript that was five or six times the length of the original novel.<sup>23</sup> This he condensed into a shorter treatment and adapted into a screenplay.<sup>24</sup> The transnational source of the narrative was foregrounded in Lianhua's publicity and the bilingual opening credits of the film itself. Articles commented on the author's European background, and the very first credits in the film announced, in Chinese, English, and French: "戀愛與義務 *Love and Duty* / 華羅琛夫人原著 Adapted from Mme. S. Rosen Hoa's novel *La Symphonie des Ombres*."

Released in spring 1931, *Love and Duty* played in major cities including Shanghai, Nanjing, and Tianjin under the familiar Minxin 民新 credit as well as the new Lianhua brand.<sup>25</sup> Minxin, also known as "China Sun," already had strong a reputation for lavishly designed, sensitively researched films in the 1920s, including Chinese classical subject films like *The Romance of the Western Chamber* (西廂記, 1927) as well as contemporary social dramas. Lianhua's publicity drew special attention to the stars' moving performances in *Love and Duty*, especially Ruan Lingyu's, and reviewers embraced the excellent acting and impressive production values. One viewer asserted that the film's quality easily matched that of foreign films, with sets and costumes that established a new standard for Chinese film production. This viewer praised, in particular, the fine accuracy of the actors' emotions and expressions.<sup>26</sup>

*Love and Duty* stands out as a relatively long film melodrama. The studio tantalized the public with the promise of additional scenes beyond the original story that was already well known: according to an advance promotional article by screenwriter Zhu

Shilin, his script drew on plenty of new material from a recently “expanded manuscript” by the author.<sup>27</sup> The film was originally released as a fifteen reeler, at a time when most Chinese feature films averaged nine to ten reels.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it’s likely that the film was reedited: not long afterward, the length was listed as fifteen reels. The extant print is two reels shorter, possibly due to further editing: some scenes described in Zhu Shilin’s original treatment do not appear in the extant film. Yet the remaining narrative is entirely coherent, and the thirteen-reel film we see today is still quite long, running two and a half to three hours at silent film projection speeds.<sup>29</sup> All told, *Love and Duty* was a project of epic proportions for Lianhua. After years of incubation, Luo Mingyou was proud that this elaborate undertaking had finally come together. As he concluded when the film came out in spring 1931, “The riper the melon, the sweeter the fruit!”<sup>30</sup>

## THE AURA OF THE STAR

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As focal points in *Love and Duty*, Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yan were crucial to the film’s success. Ruan’s performance as Yang Naifan resonated with roles she had played over the previous four years and firmly established the actress as a major star of the 1930s. Ruan, the daughter of a housemaid, had been raised in Shanghai and first met the director Bu Wancang in 1926 when, as a sixteen-year-old, she went for an initial screen test at Mingxing Studios. For his family drama *A Couple in Name Only* (挂名的夫妻, 1927), Bu cast her in the lead as Shi Miaowen, a young woman pressed into an arranged marriage against her will. At Mingxing, Dazhonghua baihe 大中華百合, Minxin, and Lianhua studios, Ruan Lingyu would appear in more than a dozen other productions—many of them dramatic “society films” (社會片) with contemporary settings, some ending in suicide—before being selected for *Love and Duty*. The variety of characters Ruan had played in these films, including romantic socialite, courtesan, impoverished girl, and spurned lover, prepared the actress for her multiple roles in *Love and Duty*.

Jin Yan, the same age as Ruan Lingyu, had lived in Shanghai most of his life and been acting on stage and screen since 1928. Originally born in Seoul and named Kim Duk-run, he was the son of a founding member of the underground Korean independence movement opposing Japanese rule. For his first credited film role in Minxin’s *The Romantic Swordsman* (風流劍客, 1929), the nineteen-year-old actor took up his father’s revolutionary code name, Jin Yan, literally “Golden Flame,” consolidating his heroic star persona. A year later, the same company cast him in *Wild Flower* alongside Ruan, and the pair performed a duet for the film that was released simultaneously as a popular gramophone record.<sup>31</sup> He even had an urbane screen name in English, Raymond King—which conveniently dovetailed with the “Movie King” title that fans would eventually bestow on him in 1933. Indeed, as Chinese actors were often compared with Hollywood stars in terms of their acting styles and role types, Jin Yan came to be hailed as a John Gilbert figure to Ruan Lingyu’s Greta Garbo. These various facets of Jin’s star persona would inflect his role as Li Zuyi in *Love and Duty*, shaping his career for decades to come.

*Love and Duty* and Lianhua's publicity for it showcased the star persona, aura, and virtuosity of the lead actors. Some of this was accomplished by making significant changes from the original novel to give the main protagonists greater prominence and more admirable qualities in the film narrative. In Luo Chen's novel, the natal families of Naifan and Zuyi had received considerable attention, yet in the extant film the parents are reduced to marginal figures. Likewise, where the original novel depicts Zuyi as a weak, even reckless, dreamer, the film makes him out to be more romantic, sympathetic, complex, and conflicted. These qualities would have made the film version of *Love and Duty* more appealing and intriguing to urban youth of the early 1930s, the main target audience for Lianhua's films.

The intertitles for this silent film are eloquent, yet sparing; much of the expressivity derives from the screen presence of the lead actors, accentuated by Huang Shaofen's skillful cinematography. Early on, when Li Zuyi first spots Yang Naifan walking to school and decides to follow her, extensive tracking shots of Jin Yan and Ruan Lingyu convey a magnetic charge between them. Ruan Lingyu, as Naifan, strides forward toward the camera in an airy schoolgirl's uniform, while Jin Yan, as the young Li Zuyi in his Western suit, is visible in the same frame just a few feet behind (see fig. 2.2). The shot bears a sense of danger as Zuyi briskly pursues the unaware Naifan. A second shot from behind the two fatefully binds them together. A set of medium tracking shots alongside each of them completes the scene, which is then repeated multiple times as Zuyi begins following Naifan daily. She, in turn, starts to notice him and returns the gaze. The tracking shots establish an unspoken yet powerful attraction between the two characters, while also lavishing attention on the stars.

Close-ups on the performers, often in extreme soft focus and radiant lighting, were used to similar effect. The actors' facial expressions convey the inner psyche of the



FIGURE 2.2 Li Zuyi pursues Yang Naifana

protagonists, especially at poignant moments for the characters, as when Naifan reacts with shock to her father's declaration that he's arranged a marriage for her to take place within the month, or when, as a young mother, she realizes her little boy might have drowned in a pond while she sat nearby lost in melancholy (see fig. 2.3). At times, the focus is so soft and the lighting so bright that some viewers felt it was exaggerated.<sup>32</sup> Even so, the visual excess accomplished two things at once: heightening the emotional excess at the core of melodrama while simultaneously foregrounding the star presence. Such soft-focus shots would become a hallmark of Ruan Lingyu's subsequent films with Lianhua.

Dream sequences and special effects played out the young protagonists' romantic desires and their psychological angst. Notably, after Zuyi embarks on an illicit affair with the married Naifan, the film devotes a full five minutes to Zuyi's solitary fantasies of saving Naifan from her husband Daren. He reads a romantic pulp novel and imagines himself the hero of the story. This launches a short film-within-the-film in which a swashbuckling swordsman, played by Jin Yan, comes to the rescue of a helpless girl, played by Ruan Lingyu. The scene is shot on a rocky shoreline, where the girl struggles to escape from a pirate, played by the same actor playing Daren. The swordsman duels the villain, vanquishes him, and wins the girl's love. The scene was shot in a style reminiscent of earlier Chinese silent films of the 1920s, which themselves often emulated swashbuckler films imported from the United States. It would have looked distinctly different, even retrograde, to 1931 filmgoers. As such, the unlikely scenario almost seems to turn a mocking eye on the male protagonist's grandiosity, as he imagines himself imitating imaginary heroes without pausing to consider the consequences. The narrative excess effectively highlighted the dashing figure of Jin Yan; it also offered an interlude of martial-arts-style action within the larger melodrama and imbued this section of the film with a period scene that captured the romantic idealism of May Fourth-era youth culture from the previous decade.



FIGURE 2.3 Naifan learns of her arranged marriage

Special effects in the following scene call attention to the male protagonist's determination and lingering anxieties. As if empowered by the heroic novel, Zuyi visits Naifan and impulsively gives her an ultimatum: if she does not elope with him that night, he will not go on living. When she finally agrees and begins packing, Zuyi insists she leave the children behind with Daren, causing Naifan great distress. At this moment, he catches a glimpse of a nearby framed photograph depicting Naifan, Daren, and their children eerily being torn apart, then reverting to its original state. The stop-motion animated shot appears to visualize on screen Zuyi's wavering conscience; then, in another set of special effects, we see his heroic intentions return. On either side of Zuyi's face, two small images appear superimposed in small vignettes: one, the novel he was reading earlier; the other, himself as the valiant swordsman. Zuyi drags Naifan from her sleeping children, she faints, and he carries her off to a car waiting outside. After their escape the couple sees a glimmer of happiness, even starting a new family, but the gossip haunts them, frustrating Zuyi's heroic dreams. This new downward turn in the couple's situation contrasts starkly with the earlier fantasy scene and its romantic consummation, heightening the narrative tension.

At key moments, distinctive shots call attention to the actress. Take, for example, a scene that occurs after their elopement and decline, as Zuyi recounts to Naifan his fruitless day of searching for work. The figure of Zuyi fills the shot, yet our focus is pulled elsewhere in the frame, to a small mirror standing on the table beside him (see fig. 2.4). There, for a brief moment, we see Naifan's face reacting to his dire news, her complex mobile expression vacillating between hope, concern, and anxiety. Miniaturized and contained within the framed mirror, Naifan's quest for fulfillment and romantic freedom now appears to be threatened by a new kind of confinement: economic constraints. The strangeness of the shot has a distancing effect, yet it also simultaneously draws us into the illusion. Our attention shifts to the moving portrait of Ruan Lingyu in the mirror,



FIGURE 2.4 Zuyi with Naifan's reaction in mirror



and we become aware of the artifice of the shot—even as we remain absorbed in Naifan's emotional reaction as performed by Ruan. This momentary preternatural image augurs a turning point for Naifan. Though Zuyi does find work, the job is so exhausting that he quickly succumbs to consumption, leaving Naifan with their newborn child. Where once Naifan was “more at home outside her home” as a carefree schoolgirl and eventually left behind an arranged marriage and bourgeois domesticity, her failed elopement now gives way to self-effacing single motherhood.

Most of the screen time in *Love and Duty* is dedicated to Ruan Lingyu, who appears in nearly every scene, especially after Zuyi's death. As Naifan stands before his grave, visual effects spotlight the actress, playing out Naifan's distress and her fears for the future. Wearing a white mourning headband, she faces the camera, cradling the infant in her arms and sobbing. The medium shot of Naifan is soon surrounded by ghostly images of her former husband and her first two children, each appearing as multiple exposures in the same frame (see fig. 2.5). Compressed between these reminders of her past, Naifan's facial expressions intensify, moving between grief, regret, and desperation. The young widow stands at Zuyi's grave trying to imagine her future, dramatized in three short cutaway scenes. In the first, Naifan returns to the children and Huang Daren, only to be slapped and sent away. In the second, she returns to her father for help, but he and his concubines condemn Naifan as an “unchaste creature” whose elopement has caused a social scandal. In the third, she considers suicide. Standing on a bridge, the young woman is surrounded by its steel beams, as if imprisoned by them, and gathers up her resolve. She begins to climb over the tall railing—but as she looks down into the river, an image of her sobbing infant dissolves into view, shimmering on the water's surface. The eerie apparition underscores Naifan's emotional trauma and foreshadows her suicide later in the film. In horror, despair, and resignation, Naifan steps back down. This last



FIGURE 2.5 Naifan recalls her abandoned children

imagined scene fades away, leaving Naifan standing in the cemetery clinging to her child and vowing that she will work to raise Ping'er to adulthood. At this point we are well into the film, and the three imagined scenes could be read as potential endings—yet all of them are forestalled by Naifan's decision to live.

## DOUBLE RUAN

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As the double-length film restarts and the film narrative jumps forward fifteen years, Ruan Lingyu undergoes a dramatic metamorphosis. Yang Naifan has withered from an elegant, vibrant young woman into an impoverished, aging widow. Living in greatly reduced circumstances, she now takes in piecework as a seamstress. Hunched over a sewing machine in a spartan room, Naifan not only looks radically different—with graying hair, wrinkled features, reading glasses, and a missing front tooth—but she also has the frail posture and tentative gestures of a broken woman struggling to survive. Indeed, from most angles, Ruan Lingyu is virtually unrecognizable when she plays the older Naifan (see. fig. 2.6).

Yet this “unrecognizability” is precisely what drew attention to the star. Where the younger Naifan matched up seamlessly with Ruan Lingyu's star image, fitting into the accumulation of role types Ruan had played up through 1930, the older Naifan went against the grain of that star persona. The actress's ability to embody a single character in two contrasting stages of life and circumstances, and to create the illusion of aging so thoroughly, was itself noticeable and thrilling. Viewers writing about the film at the time universally acclaimed Ruan Lingyu's virtuosity in the role of Naifan,



FIGURE 2.6 The older Naifan, now a seamstress



particularly her ability to convincingly portray an older woman so wholly different from herself.<sup>33</sup>

In this last third of the film, *Love and Duty* magnified the star power of Ruan Lingyu and her ability to play both ends of the drama by simultaneously presenting the actress in another role, as the daughter Naifan had abandoned years earlier, Huang Guanying. The way this new character is introduced in the narrative mirrors the way the actress herself appeared in the media: we first see the teenage Guanying pictured in the pages of a newspaper, gleaming with the same smile seen in so many star portraits of Ruan Lingyu circulating in the 1920s. Now the same age as Naifan was at the beginning of the film, the girl looks identical to Naifan in her younger years. The mature Naifan comes across this photograph of her daughter and one of her son, alongside the newspaper's announcement of an upcoming charity performance benefiting the poor, to be sponsored by Huang Daren. Naifan gazes lovingly at these small images of her children, and she clips the photographs from the paper. As she presses them to her face, it's as if the layers of simulacra begin to merge.

Ruan Lingyu's virtuosity in playing multiple roles was foregrounded in a climactic scene of *Love and Duty*, when the older Naifan is sent by the dressmaker's shop on a house call to the Huang Daren residence to tailor costumes for the children's upcoming stage show. Naifan's occupation as a seamstress is an important detail in the film and a significant change from the 1920s novel. As originally rendered by Luo Chen, Naifan supports herself by making artificial flowers for weddings and remains at best a distant observer of the family she had abandoned long before. But in the film, Naifan's tailoring work brings her into physical proximity with her clients. This modification helped the filmmakers justify a new subplot that would transport Naifan back into her former home and, potentially, a reunion with her family.

Cautious and fearful, yet also eager to see her grown children in person, Naifan enters the front parlor of the capacious house that is so familiar to her from the past. She pauses in the background by a portrait of her youthful self, still hanging high on the wall by the mantelpiece where it always was. Evidently, Naifan is still remembered and honored in the household, yet she continues to cower, as if fearful of being exposed, or reluctant to shatter the idealized image. When beckoned by her colleague to take the measurements of Guanying and Guanxiong, her anxiety builds: as a seamstress, her job will bring her into direct contact with her daughter. The viewer's anxiety likewise builds. Guanying is completely unaware that the mother she believes to be dead is actually alive and present. If Naifan and Guanying were played by two separate actresses, the dramatic irony would already be enough to build tension in the scene. The double casting of Ruan Lingyu as both Naifan and Guanying only augments the sense of apprehension. What will happen when the actress playing both roles enters the same frame? Will the characters themselves "recognize" the resemblance?

Yang Naifan gingerly, nervously raises the tape measure. In a brief split-screen shot, she stretches it across her daughter's chest. The palindromic shot conjures a sense of danger and uncanny wonder. The innocent, carefree Guanying facing Naifan appears to be a resurrection of Naifan's earlier self, bringing the narrative full circle (see fig. 2.7). At the