

From Hollywood to Shanghai: American Silent Films in China

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My dissertation re-constructs the history of Hollywood movies in 1920s Shanghai through archival work in both China and the United States. Before that decade, film exhibition in China was little more than a novelty with limited social influence. The 1920s saw a boom in American film production and attempts to develop foreign markets for it. Consequently, Hollywood films flooded into China, just ahead of the development of the local national film industry in the late 1920s, and hence shaped the environment for that development. As heralds of a new medium with unprecedented capacity for shaping people's perceptions, beliefs, and viewpoints, American films were received and interpreted by Chinese audiences in a transnational context.

My research is mostly based on rarely or never used primary sources both in the United States and China, mainly in archives including the U.S. official documents of the Department of State located at the National Archives, the special collection of the United Artists at the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library, indexed *New York Times*, and D.W. Griffith's unpublished documents such as *D.W. Griffith Papers 1897-1954*, *1927 Yearbook of Chinese Cinema*, 1920s fan magazines such as *The Movie Guide*, *The China Film Pictorial*, *The Stage and Screen*, *The Photoplay World*, *Photoplay Pictorial*, *The Movie Magazine*, and *Cineograph*, a collection of film plot sheets, and local popular magazines such as *The Good Companion*.

Through my dissertation, I have found that the promotion and consumption of American films in 1920s Shanghai did not result in a homogeneous American culture as the Chinese re-deployed, re-invented, and appropriated American films for local political, cultural, and social discourses. During that turbulent decade, Hollywood films played into the Chinese political discourse of nationalism and modernity. The modernity discourse was prominent in the Chinese filmic texts and extra-textual filmic spheres. Hollywood's impact on China can be examined by the reaction of the Chinese film industry toward American films, the changing lifestyle of Chinese locals, and their perception of American people and values.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

My dissertation aims to re-construct the history of Hollywood movies in 1920s Shanghai through archival work in both China and the United States. Before that decade, film exhibition in China was little more than a novelty with limited social influence. The 1920s saw a boom in American film production and attempts to develop foreign markets for it. Consequently, Hollywood films flooded into China,¹ just ahead of the development of the local national film industry in the late 1920s,² and hence shaped the environment for that development. Hollywood films' suddenly heightened local presence in urban exhibition centers gave them immense social influence. As heralds of a new medium with unprecedented capacity for shaping people's perceptions, beliefs, and viewpoints, American films were received and interpreted by Chinese audiences in a transnational context.

Trans-cultural products, like these films, are subject to interpretations of different, sometimes opposite meanings in different geopolitical contexts. One example is D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919), which has been widely regarded by later scholars as a racist film in the United States. An advertisement in the 1925 *Mingxing Supplement*, a popular film fan magazine,

¹ William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Tino Balio ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

² Jihua Cheng, *History of Chinese Film Development* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chu Ban She, 1963); Jiancheng Gu, *History of Chinese Film Development* (Beijing: Zhongguo Jiaoyu Dianying Xiehui, 1934).

indicates that it was actually distributed in China as a film that promotes Chinese culture and Buddhism. Locals simply did not see the racism so obvious to American critics.³

Such critical analyses of the Chinese interpretation of Hollywood films serve as an effective move in the scholarly examination of Chinese understanding of the United States and American culture. To be sure, American films during the era covered in my analysis never reached a large population in inland China because in those turbulent years in the 1920s, few film exhibitors would risk their business in warlord-infested areas.⁴ However, the viewers of Hollywood movies at least represented urban, educated, and middle-class consumers who were more likely to participate in public sphere activities and to influence how less wealthy and more rural populations might have perceived American culture.

I chose the 1920s as the period for my research for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, the early and mid-1920s saw an influx of American films into China as it was during this period that the eight major American studios established their branch offices in Asia. Second, 1929, the end of the decade, was the year that the first sound film was shown in Shanghai. Talkies, of course, immensely complicated international exhibition, and this important topic deserves more extensive treatment than I can afford here. Moreover, most American film historians categorize films in terms of decades (book series such as Rutgers University Press's *The Screen Decades* are organized in this fashion). Finally, the 1920s was also an important period in which the Chinese film industry went from the stage of copying American movies to that of creating national films. By analyzing the influence of American films on Chinese national films, my research can also suggest the impact of American culture on 1920s China, as well as the meaning of American media products in a transnational and post-colonial context.

³ *Ming Xing* 2, February 1925.

⁴ Jay Leyda, *Dianying: An Account of Films and Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972).

I chose Shanghai for my dissertation topic for several reasons. First, as the “Oriental Paris of the 1920s,” the city saw the birth of the nation’s first movie theater—Hongkew Theater, which opened in 1908. The city also saw an increasing number of movie theaters over the decade—by 1917, there were only 10 movie theaters in the city, by 1923, the number increased to 25 and, by 1929, the city had 35.⁵ The growing number of cinemas indicated a dynamic movie culture and a growing consumption of films in the city. Second, 1920s Shanghai, as the nation’s center of printing and publishing,⁶ saw a flourishing of movie-ad-bearing newspapers, film plot sheets, and movie fan magazines, which are important for profit-driven film cultures to flourish and which in themselves offer primary sources for my project.

The main intent of this dissertation is to present a comprehensive account of the consumption of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai and the impact of American silent films upon Chinese culture and society. In doing so, my work will reconstruct print culture through

⁵Shuren Cheng, “Ying Xi Yuan Zong Biao,” in *Zhong Hua Ying Ye Nian Jian* (Zhong Hua Ying Ye Nian Jian She, 1927), 1-37. However, according to one account, there were 23 movie theaters in Shanghai by that time (Ruiyong Wang. “Shanghai Ying Yuan Bian Qian Lu,” *Shanghai Dianying Shi Liao*, no.5, 82-83). Using one issue of *Shen Bao* (November 5, 1923, 17) as an example, I found these cinemas existed in Shanghai by the end of 1923: Athena Theater (Shen Jiang Da Xi Yuan), Isis Theater (Shanghai Da Xi Yuan), Apollo Theater (Ai Pu Lu Da Xi Yuan), Olympic Theater (Xia Ling Pi Ke Da Xi Yuan), Carlton Theater (Ka Er Deng Ying Xi Yuan), Hu Jiang Movie Theater (Hu Jiang Ying Xi Yuan), French Grand Movie Theater (Fa Guo Da Ying Xi Yuan), New Helen Theater (Xin Ai Lun Ying Xi Yuan), Gong He Movie Theater (Gong He Ying Xi Yuan), Zha Bei Movie Theater (Zha Bei Xing Xi Yuan), Empire Theater (En Pai Ya Da Xi Yuan), China Grand Theater (Zhong Guo Da Xi Yuan), Carter Movie Garden (Ka De Da Ying Xi Yuan), and Nan Shi Popular Movie Association (Nan Shi Tong Su Ying Xi She). Among these cinemas, five cinemas were mentioned in the English-language paper, *North China Daily News*: Apollo Theater, Carlton Theater, Isis Theater, Olympic Theater, and Victoria Theater.

⁶ Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press 2004).

which American films were advertised, promoted, interpreted, and reviewed by the Chinese, as well as the surrounding visual culture of the specific films publicly screened. As a form of culture, both print culture and visual culture are socially and historically constructed, and both privilege certain ways of seeing or interpreting and at the same time downplay the others.⁷ One example in the area of print culture is the Chinese translation in a movie magazine of the title of *Broken Blossoms*: Can Hua Lei, which means “broken blossom tears.” By imitating the traditional Chinese opera names such as *Huan Sha Lei*, or “Tears about a Clothes-washing Girl,” a Chinese opera about the tragic story of a working girl, the Chinese title of the film shapes viewers’ perception of the film: it is a tragedy about an innocent girl of whom the Chinese might find its prototype in their traditional culture. Actually in the *Mingxing Supplement*, it was the photo of Lillian Gish’s melancholy and innocent face to indicate the film’s theme and tonality.⁸

Another important contribution my research can make is to understanding the impact of media in a transnational context, or, more specifically, the relationship of media consumption⁹ and identity formation,¹⁰ within the context of the impact of global media upon local cultures and reception.¹¹ The notion of media imperialism has long been challenged, as argued by such media scholars as Ien Ang¹² and John Tomlinson,¹³ because the spread of a global culture (or

⁷ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, New York: Penguin, 1972); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁸ *Ming Xing* 2, February 1925.

⁹ Robert Bly, *The Sibling Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995); John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Mike Featherstone, “Lifestyle and Consumer Culture,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 4 no. 1(1987): 55-70; John Storey, *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life* (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Miller, “Consumption and Its Consequences,” in *Consumption and Everyday Life*, ed. Hugh Mackay (London: Sage), 13-63.

¹¹ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991); Felipe Korzeny, Stella Ting-Toomey, and Elizabeth Schiff, *Mass Media Effects Across Cultures* (London: Sage, 1992).

¹² Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹³ Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism*.

American culture) does not necessarily lead to a homogenous global culture. According to these two scholars, media are not so powerful as to help us form our identities and viewpoints of the world because our experiences and identity are shaped by media as well as by other cultural behaviors and experiences. Despite the fact that the production, distribution, and dissemination of cultural products are relatively homogenous and standard, the reception and perception of cultural products are not homogenous and universal; instead, cultural reception is mediated by factors other than media.¹⁴ In terms of the reception of American films in 1920s China, the Chinese appropriated Hollywood images and utilized them for their own nationalistic discourse. Alan Warde sharply points that in analyzing the relationship between foreign cultural products and domestic consumers, we also need to examine the local nationalistic discourse, as well as the consumer's ethnicity, occupational status, and kin relationships.¹⁵ My research aims, through an intensive case study, to further our understanding of the interrelationships among identity formation, the construction of worldviews, and transnational cultural consumption.

Cultural consumption of Hollywood in the 1920s can also be examined in the context of post-colonial scholarship, which "provides a historical and international depth to the understanding of cultural power."¹⁶ After all, the opening of the Chinese film market to Hollywood in the port cities in the 1920s was one of the outcomes of American imperialism and colonialism in the late nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, China had turned into a semi-colonial and semi-feudalistic society in which the Chinese were treated as "the other" in the domination of colonists, feudalists, and bureaucratic capitalists. This alterity, or

¹⁴ Robin Means Coleman, ed., *Say It Loud! African-American Audiences, Media and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 249-284.

¹⁵ Alan Warde, "Afterword: The Future of the Sociology of Consumption," in *Consumption Matters*, ed. Stephen Kegell, Kevin Hetherington, and Alan Warde (Oxford: Blackwell/The Sociological Review, 1996), 302-12.

¹⁶ Raka Shome and Radha Hedge, "Postcolonial Approaches to Communication: Charting the Terrain, Engaging the Intersections," in *Communication Theory* 12:3 (August 2002): 252.

“otherness” of the Chinese, which resulted from “denial of coevalness”¹⁷ by the dominant powers in 1920s China, greatly affected Chinese perception and consumption of Hollywood films, which, in turn, might have promoted, maintained, or de-constructed alterity. By situating the research in post-colonialism, this project can not only further our understanding of Chinese consumption of Hollywood films in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, it can also contribute to the scholarship of cultural consumption in a larger historical and geographical context of global power. This track of research helps to answer these questions: what are the differences between Chinese reception of Hollywood and reception of Hollywood by audiences in other parts of the world?¹⁸ How did colonialism construct Shanghai people’s identity?¹⁹ What is the relationship between colonialism and modernity in 1920s Shanghai?²⁰

To sum up, this dissertation attempts to fill an important lacuna in several contiguous bodies of interdisciplinary scholarship by addressing the issue of Hollywood’s initial and long-term impact upon the Chinese and their culture, with a specific focus upon Shanghai. In doing this project, I attempt to answer such questions as: How did Hollywood movies help shape the Chinese movie industry and Chinese nationalistic discourse? How did advertising in 1920s Shanghai print media help to sell American values and dreams? How did 1920s fan magazines construct the identity of Hollywood stars and celebrity? How did social consumption of

¹⁷ Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 37-70.

¹⁸ Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990).

²⁰ Tani Barlow, *Formations of Colonial Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Stuart Hall, “When Was the Post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit,” in *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, ed. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (New York: Routledge, 1996); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 1988); idem, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000).

American films and consumption of Hollywood-related print media shape the discourse of modernity in 1920s Shanghai?

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a limited amount of scholarship directly related to this topic. Michael Wall's 2000 dissertation "Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and the Chinese in American Motion Pictures Prior to 1949" mainly covers organized censorship after 1926.²¹ The well-written dissertation gives us a glimpse of a few Hollywood films exhibited in China over five decades rather than detailed analysis of films distributed and exhibited within the crucial decade of the twenties. The essays in Yingjin Zhang's edited book *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* mostly focus upon the boom in Shanghai entertainment culture, as seen in, say, jazz concerts, rather than exclusively on film culture in the 1920s.²² In Jihua Cheng's book *History of Chinese Film Development*, commonly regarded as one of the most comprehensive histories of Chinese film, silent Hollywood film is only mentioned in passing. From his work, we only know that "After World War I, American films replaced French films in the Chinese market. Among the most popular ones were Charles Chaplin's comedies. One could hear people talking about his funny way of walking and his personae almost everywhere."²³ Zhiwei Xiao contributed several

²¹ Michael Wall, "Chinese Reaction to the Portrayal of China and Chinese in American Motion Pictures Prior to 1949." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2000).

²² Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²³ Jihua Cheng, *Zhongguo Dianying Fa Zhan Shi*, or Chinese Film Development History (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1981), 165.

valuable essays²⁴ to this topic, however, questions such as promotion and exhibition pattern of Hollywood films still remain unanswered. Zhang Zhen's *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* is a recounting of 1930s Chinese films in a grander narrative of "cinematic modernity."²⁵ Naturally, Zhang briefly touches upon the start of Chinese national cinema in mid-1920s, the relationship between the Chinese film industry and foreign films, as well as that of Shanghai vernacular culture and Hollywood films.²⁶ However, he is more concerned with Chinese films in the 1930s than the social consumption of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai or its impact upon local popular culture.

What little scholarship directly relates to my topic nevertheless allows me to construct a fragmented picture of Hollywood in 1920s Shanghai that my work can fill out. Works on the years immediately before the American flood of films can give me a baseline from which to measure subsequent changes. For example, Kristen Thompson mentions that "even in the early war years, American observers reported from China that Pathe had a virtual monopoly over the Chinese film market."²⁷

Other scholars provide facts and figures on which I may base my investigations. Zhiwei Xiao, for one, writes that "the U.S. export of films to China increased from 189,740 feet (including both exposed and unexposed) in 1913 to 323,454 feet in 1918...After the war, Hollywood continued to increase its exports to China, which reached 5,912,656 feet in 1925. To put these numbers in perspective, the overall value of U.S. exports to Chinese increased four times from 1913 to 1925, film exports increased more than seventeen times during the

²⁴ Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey," *Chinese Historical Review* 12, no.1 (Spring 2005): 77.

²⁵ Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

²⁶ Zhang, *An Amorous History*, chaps. 1 and 2.

²⁷ Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-1934* (Tonbridge, England: The Whitefriars, 1985), 5.

same time period.”²⁸ According to Thomas Guback, “in 1913, the last prewar year, some 32 million feet of motion pictures were exported from America; a decade later, the amount had more than quadrupled, and by 1925 it stood at 235 million feet. During these dozen years, American film exports increased fivefold to Europe and tenfold to the remainder of the world, as the industry developed markets in the Far East, Latin American, and in a few parts of Africa.”²⁹ Comparing two groups of figures: U.S. exports of films to China amounted to about 190,000 feet in 1913 and U.S. exports of films to the world to some 32 million feet in 1913; U.S. exports of films to China consisted of 6,000,000 feet in 1925 whereas U.S. exports of films to the world were 235 million feet in 1925, we can find that the percentage of U.S. export of motion pictures to China increases from around 0.6 percent in 1913 of its aggregate film export to the world to 2.5 percent in 1925. The percentage increased less than five times. The percentage increase, however, was not as large as the markets the U.S. film industry developed in the other areas of the Far East, Latin America, and in a few parts of Africa.

In her book, Ruth Vasey lists a table of percentage of foreign income of Hollywood in 1927,³⁰ in which we can see that in 1927, the Chinese film market took 0.8 percent of the whole Hollywood foreign income that year, while the top in the list is the Great Britain, 30.5 per cent and the lowest is Bermuda, 0.03 per cent. Of the Asian countries listed in the table, China stood in the middle, while Japan at 3.1 percent ranks the top, and the Philippines, with 0.4 percent stood at the bottom. Obviously, in 1927, the Hollywood income in the Far East was still a small fraction (altogether around 5 percent) of its total foreign income. Kristin Thompson confirms in her book that despite the large population (around 4 million) in China, the film market was

²⁸ Xiao, “Hollywood in China,” 77.

²⁹ Thomas Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market,” in Balio, *American Film Industry*, 465.

³⁰ Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 85.

proportionally insignificant.³¹ However, despite the market's relation to the entire population, American films took up around 90 percent of the Chinese film market in 1923.³² The figure was further confirmed in 1926 by Luther M. Jee, a Chinese distributor and film-maker, who estimated that during 1926, about 450 foreign films had been shown in China, with 90 per cent being American and around 10 per cent being Chinese.³³

Hollywood major studios used the share-profit method to control the Chinese market. According to Wang, this kind of method was used no later than the mid-1920s. The method entails both the distributors and the cinemas sharing income in accordance with a prior agreement, normally at some ratio. Therefore, there are strict stipulations between the two sides in terms of films' screening time and detailed box-office reports about them. In order to ensure profit; Hollywood distributors usually promoted block-booking and blind-booking both for domestic and foreign markets.³⁴ For normal films, Hollywood distributors garnered at least half of the share, for best-sellers, they might get more.³⁵

All these film scholars put the Chinese film market in a big picture of the international market; however, they fail to answer such questions as how Hollywood films were consumed, by whom they were consumed, what impact they might have upon Shanghai culture. These I hope to answer in my dissertation.

In answering the question regarding the relationship between consumption and construction of values, Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream* lays the foundation of the scholarship as this classic work of his especially deals with how advertising helped

³¹ Thompson, 143.

³² Thompson, 144.

³³ Thompson, 144.

³⁴ Chaoguang Wang. "Haoleiwu Chenfu," in *Meiguo Yanjiu*, p.116.

³⁵ Wang, 117.

construct and sell criteria of happiness and modernity and, how, in so doing, it redefined the American way of life.³⁶ Following Marchand's work, I consider how advertisements of Hollywood films in 1920s Chinese print media sold American values and publicized the American way of life in a transnational context.

If Marchand's book focuses upon consumption of advertising in the United States between two world wars, then Jackson Lears' *Fables of Abundance* discusses how advertising, together with other social institutions constructs individual's identity by producing dominant desires.³⁷ Based upon Lears's work, I will try to answer this question: how did the advertising of Hollywood films, as well as other American products in 1920s Shanghai print media, help form readers' identity and viewpoints of the world?

One important impact of media upon society and culture is construction of celebrity. Leo Braudy's *The Frenzy of Renown* is a classic book on social construction and consumption of celebrities and movie stars. The book aims to show "how its (fame's) pursuit both inspired and warped individuals and culture."³⁸ Like a Jekyll/Hyde story, fame both shapes and distorts individual's personality and viewpoints. However, what impact did a foreign star/celebrity have in another culture? How was social consumption of Lillian Gish and Charlie Chaplin in the United States different from that of these two stars in 1920s China? Below I will attempt to respond to these and the aforementioned issues.

In analyzing film advertisements in *Shen Bao* and *North China Daily News*, visual rhetoric provides useful concepts and techniques, such as Kenneth Burke's notion of

³⁶ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

³⁷ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

³⁸ Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 596.

“identification” and “dramatism.”³⁹ According to Burke, “Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, or a study of the means of persuasion available for any given situation.”⁴⁰ It is an art to persuade others by identifying our interests with theirs. In light of this definition, we can think of film advertisements in 1920s Chinese-language media as rhetorical texts, with the aim to persuade Chinese to go to the movie theaters. It is not uncommon to see the same film advertisement appearing on the same page of a newspaper for days. *Shen Bao*, a Shanghai-based Chinese-language daily is an example. With film advertisements appearing every day, sometimes, it had the same film advertisements day after day for weeks. By trivial repetition and dull daily reinforcement, the newspaper was, intentionally or unintentionally, practicing the art of persuasion—to persuade its readers by identifying its interests with their interests. The newspaper’s interest is to sell advertisements, which aims to encourage readers to see films. The readers’ interest is to see movies that were entertaining. By using such catch phrases in film advertisements as “multi-reel,” “latest,” and “a smash-hit when it was premiered in the United States,” the newspaper managed to identify its interests in selling films with readers’ interests in buying films. Through daily repetition of these terms rather than exceptional rhetorical skills, *Shen Bao* managed to be identified with its readers who liked to watch the latest American blockbusters that were box-office hits in the United States. In addition to analyzing film advertisements in *Shen Bao*, a visual rhetoric approach is also useful in studying Hollywood film as visual texts.⁴¹ It also provides tools for understanding the visual culture surrounding Hollywood film in 1920s Shanghai, such as the aforementioned fan magazines and film plot

³⁹ Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). According to Burke, all life and communication is a drama. By studying Act (what), Scene (where), Agent (who), Agency (how), and Purpose of a discourse (why), we might be able to tease out the motive of an action.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 46.

⁴¹ Thomas Benson and Carolyn Anderson, *Reality Fictions: The Films of Frederick Wiseman* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Charles Hill and Marguerite Helmers, *Defining Visual Rhetorics* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004).

sheets.⁴²

1.2 METHODOLOGY

My dissertation research is mostly based on rarely or never used primary sources both in the United States and China, mostly in archives. First, the U.S. official documents of the Department of Commerce located at the National Archives have been scouted, dealing with export of motion pictures in the Chinese film market, trade opportunities, correspondence between U.S. diplomats and motion picture equipment companies, film distributors, trade organizations.⁴³ Second, records of major film companies have been examined including the special collection of the United Artists records at the Wisconsin State Historical Society Library.⁴⁴ Next, I have examined film trade magazines in the United States such as *Variety*⁴⁵ to find out the industry's discourse in the distribution of Hollywood movies in China. Also indexed popular newspapers, such as *New York Times* offered a rich source to analyze the U.S. public discourse of film distribution in China.⁴⁶ Finally, I have used in a limited way unpublished documents regarding well-known American directors such as *D.W. Griffith Papers 1897-1954*, available at Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh.⁴⁷

As to primary evidence in China, I have visited the major archives there. These archives are: the China Film Archive, Beijing Film Academy Library, Shanghai Municipal Library,

⁴² Cara Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photos* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003); Sonja Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2004).

⁴³ General Records of the Department of Commerce, Record Group 42, 1898-1991, U.S. National Archives.

⁴⁴ <http://www.sibmas.org/idpac/north-america/uswim001.html#8>, last accessed on November 6, 2006.

⁴⁵ Available on line through pittcat.

⁴⁶ Available on line through database of pitt's library.

⁴⁷ David W. Griffith, *D.W. Griffith Papers, 1897-1954* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1982), microfilm.

Shanghai Municipal Archive, and Nanjing No.2 Historical Archive. I located a *1927 Yearbook of Chinese Cinema*⁴⁸ and a good collection of 1920s fan magazines, such as *The Movie Guide*, *The China Film Pictorial*, *The Stage and Screen*, *The Photoplay World*, *Photoplay Pictorial*, *Photoplay Times*, *The Story World*, *The Movie Magazine*, and *Cineograph*. I also located a collection of film plot sheets of Beijing Theater in Shanghai, promoting the film *Safety Last* and *Phantom of the Opera* in late 1920s.⁴⁹ These materials have enabled me to reconstruct urban and popular discourse about Hollywood films in Shanghai. In addition, I have a good collection of popular magazine and journals in 1920s Shanghai such as *The Good Companion* and *The Oriental Magazine*. Utilizing articles on films in these two journals, I have been able to reconstruct public discourse regarding film. Also, I have a collection of commercial documents such as “The Commercial Advertising Company correspondence with the British Chamber of Commerce in July, 1925 regarding film slides,”⁵⁰ “Pictures of film slides depicting Chinese strikers in May 1925,”⁵¹ and *The Fundamental Regulations of the International Settlement*,⁵² all of these materials helped me construct the political and social discourse surrounding films in and shortly after 1925, a year that saw the biggest nationalistic movement in China including Shanghai.

My secondary sources include seven bodies of scholarship. First, I consulted sources on the social and historical context of 1920s Shanghai, such as *Shanghai Sojourners*, co-edited by Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh⁵³ and Meng Yue’s *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ China Film Archive.

⁴⁹ China Film Archive.

⁵⁰ Shanghai Municipal Archive.

⁵¹ Shanghai Municipal Archive.

⁵² Shanghai Municipal Archive.

⁵³ Wakeman Frederic and Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1992).

⁵⁴ Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edge of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Second, I have reviewed the scholarship on 1920s Shanghai print culture through which American films were advertised and interpreted, as well as more general or theoretical works on journalism history or, via the history of the book, on printing's impact on society and culture. As Cara Finnegan pointed out in *Picturing Poverty*, photography journals would not be able to flourish without wide use of halftone, it was impossible for fan magazines with illustrations to exist without use of advanced printing technology in 1920s Shanghai.⁵⁵ In studying this issue, Christopher Reed's book *Gutenberg in Shanghai* has provided a good account.⁵⁶ The third body of literature includes works on silent film history, both American and Chinese. In studying American silent film history, I have developed a good understanding of the production of Hollywood films, their distribution, and exhibition pattern. I can discern how exports to the Chinese market may have differed from the trends in overall production for domestic distribution. By studying Chinese silent film history, I have been able to get a sense of the impact of American films on Chinese national films, but also, because the Chinese national film industry tended to react to American films, I can get clues about larger patterns of reception from the way Chinese filmmakers reacted. The fourth body of literature I have examined is reception theory. In terms of reception, I invoke Robert Darnton's "dual strategy," which combines both rhetorical analysis and empirical research.⁵⁷ In doing this, I call upon Nina Baym's method of studying social discourse through the analysis of reviews in newspapers and journals.⁵⁸ I have studied the reviews of and comments about Hollywood films in from the community of critics and pundits in fan magazines, newspapers and popular journals. In addition, the published

⁵⁵ Cara Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photos* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Robert Darnton, "First Step Towards A History of Reading," in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* ed., James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York: Routledge, 2001, 160-79).

⁵⁸ Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers and Reviews: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

memoirs and essays that touch upon Chinese reception of American films during the period have been included in this body of literature. The fifth body of literature concerns visual culture, with focus upon films themselves such as artifacts, fan magazines, film plot sheets, and film advertisements in newspapers. My sixth body of literature is about the construction of celebrity and social consumption of advertising as films, newspapers, and fan magazines form intertexts that combined to sell American values to the Chinese. The final main body of literature covers scholarship of transnationalism and post-colonialism. In doing this, I have been able to put social consumption of Hollywood films in a larger historical and geographical context.

1.3 CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER DESIGN

This dissertation is organized in terms of promotion, exhibition, and critical reception, using case studies in different time periods to present a comprehensive picture of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai. In doing so, my dissertation is divided into nine chapters, following a narrative arc from Hollywood to China, from production in Hollywood to Chinese reception of American films and their impacts upon Chinese culture.

In the first chapter, I examine reasons why Hollywood was interested in the international market, with a specific focus upon China. This chapter aims to answer these questions: What are the motives for Hollywood's majors to open up branch offices in China? What was the level of consciousness of China among American film producers? What were representations of China

and Chinese in American films?⁵⁹ In answering these questions, such primary sources as Hollywood studios' papers were examined, one of which is "United Artists Corporation Records, 1919-1961."⁶⁰ Legal records, executive records, and financial records of the United Artists in the 1920s related to its export of films in China were investigated to reconstruct an information flow between the parent company and its branch offices in China, the relationship of the parent company to its Chinese subsidiaries, and its overall corporate policy in the international market.

The second chapter, following the narrative thread of the first chapter, focuses upon the activities of Hollywood branch offices in China, with an emphasis upon Shanghai. Based upon such primary sources as the United Artists records and *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*, this chapter investigates the location of Hollywood major's branch offices in Shanghai, their daily activities and functions.⁶¹

In the third chapter, I give a historical account of Shanghai theatrical performances before the big influx of Hollywood in early 1920s. In doing this, first, I provide a background description of the city of Shanghai in the late 1910s: its international settlements, French concessions, and Chinese territory;⁶² second, I discuss performances of Chinese operas in 1920s

⁵⁹ Ruth Vasey, "Foreign Parts: Hollywood's Global Distribution and the Representation of Ethnicity," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 4, Special issue: Hollywood, Censorship, and American Culture (December 1992): 617-642. See also her *The World according to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). Also see W.V. Strauss's "Foreign Distribution of American Films," *Harvard Business Review* 8 (April 1930): 307-15. While these works are helpful in providing a broad picture of Hollywood's global strategies, they do not specifically focus upon Chinese market.

⁶⁰ United Artists Corporation Records (referred to as UAC in the following footnotes), Series 2A: O'Brien Legal File, 1919-1951, Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁶¹ Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey," *Chinese Historical Review* 12:1 (Spring 2005): 71-96. In his article, Xiao mentions that "these offices served multiple purposes that included dealing with local censors, providing feedback to headquarters in New York about the performance of American films, collecting data about China's film market, supervising Chinese theaters contracted to show American films, handling the profits" (77). My research in this chapter will use specific examples that focus upon Shanghai offices.

⁶² Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners*. Also see Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires*. Also see Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University of Press, 1996). Also see Zhang's *An Amorous History*.

Shanghai stages as well as their potential audience;⁶³ then, I discuss locations of theaters in the city and the structure of Chinese traditional theaters and their daily practices.

In the fourth chapter, I study the advertising of American films as well as advertising in general in print media in 1920s Shanghai.⁶⁴ In doing this, I aim to answer these questions: how were American films promoted? How were other American products promoted, such as cigarettes and soaps?⁶⁵ Were there any similarities or differences in advertisements of Hollywood films and other American products?⁶⁶ What did these similarities or differences mean in a trans-national context?

In Chapter Five, using *Shen Bao* and *North China Daily News* as major primary sources, I show how American comedy was promoted in a Chinese theatrical tradition. Advertisements of Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!*⁶⁷ in both the Chinese daily and English daily will be analyzed to demonstrate how the American comedy film was promoted in a Shanghai style "huaji" tradition.⁶⁸

⁶³ One major primary source for this subject is *Shenbao*'s daily theater page in late 1910s, on which Chinese operas were advertised, previewed, and reviewed.

⁶⁴ Christopher Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*. Also see Lears, *Fables of Abundance*; Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

⁶⁶ *Cinema Pressbooks from the Original Studio Collections* (microfilm) (Woodbridge, Conn.: Primary Sources Microfilm, 2001).

⁶⁷ *Safety Last* was first shown at Apollo Theater on October 7, 1923, six months later than its American premiere in April, 1923. See *Shen Bao*, October 5, 1923, 1, November 26; 1923, 1; *North China Daily News*, October 15, 1923, 16.

⁶⁸ *Huaji* originates from *Shi Ji*, or *Annals of History* written by Shi Maqian. *Huaji* is the name of a court clown who serves an emperor. He can talk boldly but in a joking way about bad decisions an emperor made with the purpose of pointing out the ridiculousness of the decisions. But he does it in such an artistic and funny way that the emperor will laugh and sometimes change the decisions instead of getting angry and kill him. Its role is similar to that of *fool* in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. *Huaji* gradually becomes a metonym for being funny in Chinese. Starting from the early twentieth century, it also refers to a dramatic genre in the Shanghai area.

In Chapter Six, advertisements of D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* are analyzed to show how American melodrama⁶⁹ was promoted in a Chinese dramatic tradition of romance.⁷⁰ I focus upon D.W. Griffith's films because many of his major melodrama films were shown in 1920s Shanghai (e.g., *Broken Blossoms*, *Orphans of the Storm*, *Mammy's Boy*, and *The White Rose*). Among all of Griffith's films that were shown in Shanghai, *Way Down East* was the most popular one—not only was it exhibited for weeks at different theaters in Shanghai,⁷¹ but also a Chinese film was made especially to explain the American film to Chinese audience.⁷²

In the seventh chapter, using *Shen Bao*, *North China Daily News*, and *1927 Yearbook of Chinese Cinema*, and other primary sources, I reconstruct exhibition pattern of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai, such as the names and locations of the first-run, the second-run, and the third-run movie theaters as well as the changing ownership of these movie theaters over a decade.⁷³

⁶⁹ Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer, eds., *The Silent Cinema Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004); John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, *American Cinema and Hollywood: Critical Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Richard Abel, ed., *Silent Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Jane Gaines, *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Gerald Mast, Cohen Marshall, and Leo Braudy, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Robert Lang, *American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁷⁰ As to Chinese dramatic tradition, see: William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976); Adolphe Clarence Scott, *An Introduction to the Chinese Theater* (Singapore: D. Moore, 1958); idem, *The Classical Theater of China* (New York: Macmillan, 1957); idem, *Actors Are Madmen: Notebook of a Theatergoer in China* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983); Adolf Eduard Zucker, *The Chinese Theater* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1925); Cecilia S. L. Zung, *Secrets of the Chinese Drama: A Complete Explanatory Guide to Actions and Symbols as Seen in the Performance of Chinese Dramas* (New York: B. Blom, 1964).

⁷¹ *Way Down East* was shown at Athena Theater in Shanghai for ten days, three times a day, starting from November 9, 1923. Its Chinese title is called *Lai Hun*, or "Tampering with Marriage." *Shen Bao*; November 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 16, 1923, pp.1, 1, 1, 1, 1, and 17.

⁷² *Shen Bao*, November 11, 1923, 1.

⁷³ The Second Series of Shanghai Study Materials, or Shanghai Yanjiu Zilian Xuji (Shanghai Tongxun, ed, 1985), 536.

The eighth chapter summons fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai,⁷⁴ to examine fandom of Hollywood films in Shanghai. This chapter addresses these questions: how were American fans of a Hollywood star different from or same as his/her Chinese fans?⁷⁵ What did the different readings and perceptions indicate in a transnational scenario?⁷⁶ The major stars I have examined include: Charlie Chaplin,⁷⁷ Harold Lloyd,⁷⁸ and Lillian Gish.⁷⁹

In Chapter Nine, I discuss the critical reception of American films using the fan magazines, but other materials as well, like published memoirs, contemporary newspaper reviews, and what can be discerned from the corpus of Chinese-produced films reacting to American ones. Despite the fact that articles and comment might not perfectly represent general readers' view, they were representative of film critics' viewpoints which, as Nina Baym has argued for criticism of American novels, partake in a common discourse shared by critics and non-critics alike. She calls the shared discourse the "cultural concept of novel" reviews,⁸⁰ or "the

⁷⁴ *The Movie Guide, The Stage and Screen, Photoplay World, Photoplay Pictorial, Photoplay Times, The Story World, The Movie Magazine, Cineography.*

⁷⁵ In *An Amorous History*, 354, Zhang mentions Xuan Jinglin, a Chinese actress' allusion to Lillian Gish. Xuan, formerly a prostitute, changed her name to Xuan Jinglin, alluding to Lillian Gish (Gan Lixu in Chinese transliteration). This examples shows Lillian Gish's innocent image in Chinese perception.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, *Transnational Cinema: the Film Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown*; Charles Ponce de Leon, *Self-exposure: Human-interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jeremy Butler, ed., *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy, ed., *Stars: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁷ Andre Bazin, *Essays on Chaplin* (New Haven, Conn.: University of New Haven Press, 1985); Charlie Chaplin, *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Wes D. Gehring, *Charlie Chaplin's World of Comedy* (Muncie Ind.: Ball State University, 1980); John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Kenneth Lynn, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁷⁸ William Cahn, *Harold Lloyd's World of Comedy* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1964); Annette D'Agostino, *Harold Lloyd: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994); Tom Dardis, *The Man on the Clock* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); Jeffrey Vance & Susan Lloyd, *Harold Lloyd: Master Comedian* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

⁷⁹ Charles Affron, *Lillian Gish: Her Legend, Her Life*, New York: Scribner, 2001; Lillian Gish and Ann Pinchot, *Lillian Gish: the Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

⁸⁰ Baym, 1984, 8.

general sense of the genre that guided writing and reading in the two decades before the Civil War.”⁸¹ By using film comment and reviews in fan magazines, I set forth the “cultural concept of film reviews” and give a comprehensive picture of critical reviews of American films in Shanghai, which might affect (or reflect) their popular reception.⁸²

In the conclusion of my dissertation, I try to answer these questions: How did Hollywood film play into the Chinese New Cultural Movement? How did American films in China play into Chinese national discourse? Obviously, the promotion and consumption of American films in 1920s Shanghai did not result in a homogenous American culture as local people appropriated American films for local political, cultural and social discourse. One point emerges from the language used in inter-titles: was vernacular Chinese used or was classic Chinese used? In light of this, how was film used to reinforce national identity?⁸³ My research will contribute to the scholarship of post-colonialism and trans-nationalism in the aspects of inter-relationships among identity formation, construction of worldviews, and transnational cultural consumption.

⁸¹ William L. Hedges, “Review,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40:1 (Jun., 1985): 105-108.

⁸² Robert Darnton, “First Steps Toward a History of Reading,” in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 160-79; Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Linda Docherty, “Women as Readers: Visual Interpretations,” in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 107, pt. 2 (1997): 335-388; Steven Mailloux, *Interpretative Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socio-Literary Experience Among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

⁸³ Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, *China’s Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Keith Schoppa, *The Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002).

2.0 CHAPTER ONE: IS CHINESE FILM MARKET ONLY A HALF LOAF OF BREAD?

My dear Mr. Douglas Fairbanks, I have pleasure of stating to you that, I take much interest in the moving pictures so I made it a rule to visit the Cinema halls on very Sunday. I have recently seen a picture titled '*The Nut, The Mark of Zorro* and *The Three Musketeers*, and have been much impressed with your playing your part very well. I shall be very happy if you would kindly let me have a photograph of yours if you please as I wish to keep it as gift from my esteemed American gentlemen! I am a Japanese boy of fifteen years of age, am finished a middle school in March this year have learned English a little at school. Thanking you in anticipation. I am your future Japanese friend. R. Hatanaka, no 470, Takinagama, Tokyo, Japan.⁸⁴

In his newly-learned English, the fifteen-year-old Japanese film fan expresses his admiration for Douglas Fairbanks, whose recent films have inspired him to go to a movie theater in Tokyo every week. Moreover, this “future Japanese friend” of Douglas also asks for a photo from the American star as a gift, a common request in a fan letter. The hand-written letter was

⁸⁴ R. Hatanaka, a Japanese film fan to Douglas Fairbanks, Tokyo, Japan, November 21, 1921, the United Artists Corporation Records (referred to as UAC in the following footnotes), Series 2A: O'Brien Legal File , 1919-1951, Box 93/7, Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research, Wisconsin Historical Society.

dated on November 21, 1921, only three months after the release of *The Three Musketeers* in the United States.⁸⁵ The teenager would never imagine that this letter of his as well as those by other Japanese fans addressed to the American star sent an important, and doubtlessly shocking message to Douglas Fairbanks as it gave an unmistakable evidence that pirated copies of the three movies, perhaps of other movies are being shown in Japan or in the other Far East countries. And moreover, it shows that business of pirated or duped copies is thriving. Naturally, as one of the partners in the United Artists, Fairbanks' interests went beyond that of an actor in the company's business. The schoolboy probably would never know that his letter prompted John Fairbanks, the famous actor's half-brother to make a suggestion to Dennis O'Brien, attorney for the United Artists to "open exchanges in the Far East." In a letter to the lawyer, which was dated December 13, 1921, the younger Fairbanks wrote, "we are certainly going to lose a lot of money if we don't either open exchanges or arrange with some releasing corporation to handle our pictures in these countries. Of course, I realize how easy it is to dupe our pictures and get them into foreign countries and sell them to unscrupulous exhibitors in nations who do not respect the rights of anybody."⁸⁶ Obviously, Fairbanks was upset over the fact that the copyright of their films was flagrantly violated in the East. However, he was not certain about what kind of office to open, or when and where to open it. All he believed at that time was that the Eastern Asia market was soon to be saturated with pirated films or duped copies of UA films if the company did not start to consider tapping the market in that part of the world. The business

⁸⁵ *The Three Musketeers*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0012752/releaseinfo>, last accessed August 4, 2008. The film was released in the United States on August 28, 1921.

⁸⁶ John Fairbanks to Dennis F. O'Brien, December 3, 1921, O'Brien, 93/7, UAC.

is worth pursuing even at the cost of less profit. In his words, “half a loaf is better than no bread.”⁸⁷

Apparently, this correspondence shows that one major motive for UA to open a branch office in the late 1910s, or the early 1920s, was to generate more revenue in the Far East. According to Howard T. Lewis, in the 1920s, international distribution made up 20 to 30 per cent of the total revenue of the American film industry.⁸⁸ However, compared with the European market in the 1920s, the Asian market was almost insignificant in terms of its percentage in revenue. For example, in 1925, Japan, with the largest number of movie theaters in Asia, only made up 3 per cent of the America’s foreign revenue, while Great Britain accounted for 35 per cent.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, as maximizing profit was Hollywood’s major goal, a larger market meant larger profits, even if they were relatively small. With prevalence of pirating business already in the distribution system in the East, the Hollywood had only two main ways to take up that market: first, they might be forced eventually to cut deals with the illegal distributors; second, they might launch a campaign against the pirating. In a word, it would either compromise by letting the violators have a larger share or it would bravely fight with them at any cost. Either way it was not free of charge for Hollywood.

As we all know, Hollywood did not start its extensive global expansion until during and after World War I for several reasons as analyzed in detail by film scholars such as Kerry Segrave and Ruth Vasey.⁹⁰ According to film historians Jihua Cheng and Kristin Thompson,

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Howard T. Lewis, *The Motion Picture Industry* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1933), 393.

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Motion Picture Industry*, 397.

⁹⁰ Almost all film scholars mention the devastating consequences of World War I on European film industry. See Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 14.

before the war, it was the French films that dominated the Chinese film market.⁹¹ The European film industry was destroyed during the war while the American film industry formed into a giant conglomeration with a huge investment in each film production. Moreover, the extremely high production cost, the promotion by U.S. government of its films, and the Hollywood distribution system of block booking all prompted or prepared American studios to sell their products to the world market.⁹² As the conditions for Hollywood's expansion overseas improved after the war, distributors just needed some incentives to take the first step. Then, for the United Artists Corporation, it was piracy of popular films starring Douglas Fairbanks in the Far East that directly triggered a substantial move towards opening a branch office there. Choosing a location of its office was naturally the next step. In his article "No Place for a White Man," Michael Walsh examines in detail UA's distribution and exhibition business in Tokyo.⁹³ According to him, initially, instead of Tokyo, George Mooser had thought Shanghai would be a good place and he had good reasons for thinking so. First, Shanghai's position was more central compared with that of Japan. Second, U.S. dollar had currency advantage over Mexican dollar, which was commonly used in Shanghai at that time. And third, UA agent was able to get protection of the U.S. law in the Shanghai International Settlement.⁹⁴ However, Tokyo turned out to be a center for UA's operation in Asia. According to Zhang Zhen, UA chose Tokyo for its branch in East Asia for three main reasons: first, there was a larger market of movie-goers in Japan than

⁹¹ Jihua Cheng, *History of Chinese Film Development* (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1963). Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985). Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey," *Chinese Historical Review* (*Shixue Pinglun*) no.1 (2005): 71-96. In the article, he mentions that the U.S. export of film to China increased from around 190,000 feet in 1913 to over 320,000 feet in 1918.

⁹² Kerry Segrave, *American Films Abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screens From the 1890s to the Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997), 1-20.

⁹³ Michael Walsh, "'No Place for a White Man': United Artists' Far East Department, 1922-1929," *Asian Cinema* (Winter 1995): 18-33.

⁹⁴ Walsh, "No Place for a White Man," 19.

anywhere in Asia. Second, movie theatres in Japan provided their audience with translation of English-language movies, which made them easier to understand to local audiences. Finally, the illiteracy rate in Japan was lower than that of any other countries in East Asia, one factor that was crucial in reading inter-titles in silent movies.⁹⁵ Also, Japan had the largest number of movie theatres in East Asia. However, Zhang does not mention the factor of piracy in East Asia in early 1920s, of which Walsh makes a big point. “UA reasoned that if the piracy of films could be squashed in Japan, duped prints would no longer be available for re-export from Japan to the remainder of the region.”⁹⁶ It turned out later that this reasoning was not entirely practical because Shanghai was also a center for the transaction of pirated film prints. In this sense, George Mooser’ original suggestion was a sound one.

The company was not among the first of the American major studios to tap the East Asian market. When United Artists opened its Far Eastern headquarters in Tokyo in March 1922, Universal, Fox, and First National, Paramount already had their Far Eastern offices in the city, doing business with exhibitors in Shanghai directly or through local agents in the city.⁹⁷ In a letter to Dennis O’Brien, the UAC attorney in New York, Alexander Krisel, the company’s would-be agent in Shanghai wrote in detail regarding the business of other Hollywood major distributors there. According to him, Paramount provided movie programs for the Ramos Amusement Company in Shanghai under a contract, while First National channeled films for the Isis Theater directly through its Far East office.⁹⁸ As one can imagine, it was much cheaper to use an agent to distribute films than to operate a branch office. It was not until the late 1920s that

⁹⁵ Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 120.

⁹⁶ Walsh, “No Place for a White Man,” 20.

⁹⁷ Harry Owens to John Fairbanks, February 12, 1922, O’Brien, UAC, 93/7.

⁹⁸ Alexander Krisel to Dennis O’Brien, May 29, 1922, UAC, O’Brien, 58/4.

some Hollywood majors started to open branch offices in Shanghai. For example, the Fox Film Corporation opened one there in February 1927; before that, Fox films were handled by agents under the supervision of its head office in Tokyo.⁹⁹ In his self-promotion letter to John Fairbanks regarding his own ability and knowledge of the film business in the Far East, Harry Owens mentions the overall failure of Hollywood majors' in the film distribution in the region except the Universal, "as for distribution of pictures in the Orient, investigation will disclose the Fox, Paramount, and several other companies, have been absolute failures. Universal, alone so far, having met with success."¹⁰⁰ A later report of George Mooser, who was hired as the managing director for the United Artists in the East in early 1922, confirmed Harry Owens' observation about the exceptionally good business of the Universal in the Far Eastern market.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, generally speaking, during the 1910s and early 1920s, the whole East was plagued with the issue of piracy, or in George Mooser's words, "the whole East is honey-combed with this evil."¹⁰²

Obviously, when United Artists started to distribute its films in the Asian market, a distributing business of pirates was thriving there. As earlier mentioned, one major factor that made UA decide to open its branch office in Tokyo was piracy. As it turned out, flagrant violation of film copyright plagued East Asia including Tokyo and Shanghai. Although pirated prints flooded both China and Japan, piracy in Japan was more of an open one while that in China was of unknown degree. In his article, Michael Walsh examines the issue of piracy from different perspectives.

⁹⁹ Anonymous to Arthur Kelly, February 15, 1927, O'Brien, UAC, 95/5.

¹⁰⁰ Harry M. Owens to John Fairbanks, February 12, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹⁰¹ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, the UAC president, September 19, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹⁰² George Mooser to Mr. Hines, April 18, 1922, Tokyo, Japan, O'Brien, UAC, 97/7.

To the Americans the issue was a straightforward one-the opponents were simply thieves. Japanese exhibitors, on the other hand, insisted that they were operating in good faith, buying films which had not previously been offered for sale by their U.S. makers.¹⁰³

From this analysis, we can see that Walsh believes that it was cultural differences in the issue of piracy between American and Japanese. In contrast, Ramos's film distribution and exhibition business in Shanghai was one of more guilty and intentional nature. Here is Walsh's analysis,

The major conduit for pirated films appears to have been the Ramos Amusement Company, a distribution and exhibition company registered in Shanghai, and operating under the protection of the Spanish Consul-General due to the Spanish citizenship of its owner.¹⁰⁴

If piracy in two countries happened for different reasons, the outcome was the same, that is, it prevented the United Artists from making a profit in the first several years, both in China and Tokyo. Without analysis of this situation, one can not understand what really happened of the American film business in 1920s Shanghai. If pirating was Hollywood's major obstacle to running a profitable business in the Far East, then initially, what strategies did they take to fight against unscrupulous distributors in that region, or specifically in Shanghai? How aware of China's piracy were American distributors when they started their film business in Shanghai? In addition to piracy, what were the other factors that might have affected Hollywood majors' distribution business in Shanghai? In answering these questions, this chapter will use United

¹⁰³ Walsh, "No Place for a White Man," 20.

¹⁰⁴ Walsh, "No Place for a White Man," 21.

Artists as a case study and reconstruct the establishment and development of the firm's Shanghai agency.

I use the United Artists as a case study for several reasons. First, a relatively complete collection of the United Artists document is available allowing for detailed reconstruction of Eastern marketing within the context of the company's larger business adventures.¹⁰⁵ Second, as UA distributed such smash-hits as *Way Down East* (1920) and *The Circus* (1928), the company's available documents provide information concerning the reception of popular American films in 1920s Shanghai. I will divide this chapter into three sections: in the first part, I will give a general picture of the distributing business of pirated prints of United Artists Corporation films in Shanghai before the company had its representative in the city in May 1922. In the second part, I will cover other challenges that United Artists were facing when it started its distribution in Shanghai. Finally, I will describe the strategies that UA's Shanghai agent took to prevent or stop piracy in the early 1920s.

2.1 UNITED ARTISTS CORPORATION IN SHANGHAI IN 1922

When United Artists started to consider opening its branch office in the Far East in late 1921 and early 1922, Shanghai was one of its choices for location. From George Mooser's letter dated January 4, 1922, addressed to Hiram Abrams, the United Artists' president, we can tap into his extensive discussion with the correspondent. The writer gives three major reasons for the company to open a branch office in Shanghai instead of Tokyo. First, the Mexican dollar was

¹⁰⁵ The UA collection is located at the Wisconsin Center for Film & Theatre Research with the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Shanghai's common currency, the use of which made the U.S. dollar, also known as the gold dollar, more valuable because one of these equaled two-and-a-half Mexican. Second, because downtown Shanghai was made up of two extraterritorial zones: the international settlement and the French Concession, as an American company, the United Artists Corporation was able to do business under the protection of American laws in Shanghai international settlement. Finally, in terms of transportation of film prints, both Shanghai and Tokyo are convenient ports as the two cities were only a few days away by ship. Film copies could be transported via Shanghai or directly to Tokyo, and vice versa.¹⁰⁶ Another reason that might have caused Hiram Abrams to consider Tokyo as the UAC's branch office in Asia could be the overwhelming number of movie theatres in Japan, compared with that in China. In early 1920s, there were less than 50 movie theaters all over China while in Japan, according to Michael Walsh, there were around 470 movie theaters, 40 of which showed exclusively foreign films.¹⁰⁷ As Harry Owens commented in his letter to John Fairbanks on February 12, 1922, "Japan is where the volume of return comes from."¹⁰⁸ Despite the fact that the UA board of directors did not choose Harry Owens to be the managing director of the Far Eastern office, they took his advice: to open its new branch office in Japan instead of China because of the need and market for American films in this East Asian island country.

In addition to the above-mentioned differences between Tokyo and Shanghai, no one seemed to be aware of one similarity the two cities shared, that is, the issue of piracy. Moreover, what made the situation worse was that an American company had to fight against flagrant

¹⁰⁶ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, January 4, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹⁰⁷ Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "The Urban Milieu of Shanghai Cinema, 1930-1940: Some Exploration of Film Audience, Film Culture, and Narrative Convention," in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 75. According to Lee, by the end of the decade, there were 32 to 36 movie theatres in Shanghai. Walsh, "No Place for a White Man," 20.

¹⁰⁸ Harry M. Owens to John Fairbanks, February 12, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

violation of copyright in countries without sufficient protection of intellectual property. The situation in 1920s Shanghai was more complicated than that in Tokyo for two reasons: first, China did not have a copyright law until later; even in early 1930s, intellectual materials such as books and films were not protected unless they benefited Chinese only.¹⁰⁹ Second, as a semi-colonial city, Shanghai had a legal system influenced by extraterritoriality, a state of foreign powers being exempt from the jurisdiction of local law. Aside from the mixed court system in which cases involving locals and foreign people were handled, foreigners from countries with the privilege of extraterritoriality were only tried in their own consular courts.¹¹⁰ Through Krisel's letter to the UA headquarters in New York regarding the difficulty of pursuing a copyright law case in Shanghai, we can also have an idea of the trial procedure in a consular court in Shanghai: if a case involved a plaintiff and a defendant of different nationalities, the consular court of the defendant's nationality would be the trial court.¹¹¹ No doubt, often, a consular court is more likely to give favorable decision to the party of its own nationality than of others. "European consular courts are notorious for their failure to accord justice," wrote Krisel in his report to Dennis O'Brien, United Artists' attorney in New York.¹¹² This awareness of the legal system in 1920s Shanghai helps further the understanding of copyright issue in the city; it also partly explains George Mooser's unsuccessful attempt against Antonio Ramos, one of the biggest violators of American film copyright in 1920s Far East. As Ramos was a Spanish citizen in Shanghai, the American copyright law would not be able to reach him as he was protected by the Spanish law under the Spanish consular court, which was accused of practicing favoritism to its

¹⁰⁹ Chinese Ministry of Interior to Krisel and Krisel, February 9, 1934, O'Brien, UAC, 58/2.

¹¹⁰ Extra-territoriality was imposed upon Shanghai and other port cities in China in the Treaty of Nanjing after China was lost to the Great Britain in the first Opium War (1839-1842). Manley Hudson, "The Rendition of the International Mixed Court in Shanghai," *American Journal of International Law* 21, no. 3 (July 1927): 454. In his article, he also mentions the mixed court in Shanghai underwent two major changes in 1911 and 1927.

¹¹¹ Alexander Krisel to Dennis O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4.

¹¹² Ibid.

own citizens. Ramos also owned most of the movie theaters in Shanghai before 1926. Alexander Krisel, the Shanghai agent for the United Artists referred to him as “the biggest importer and exhibitor of films in China...who has in the past been pirating American films.”¹¹³ Agents in Europe and the United States supplied the Ramos Amusement Company with stolen and duped film copies. Correspondences between UA’s head office and its Far East office provide abundant instances of Ramos using all three main trafficking routes to transport illegal copies of American films: one was from Europe to Tokyo or Shanghai via Hong Kong, a free port under the British jurisdiction; another was from Seattle or Honolulu to Shanghai or Tokyo; and the last was from New York to Shanghai or Tokyo.¹¹⁴ Transportation via any of the three routes took about three to four weeks by ship, which means that there would not be much delay in distributing pirated copies of the newly-released American films.¹¹⁵ Sometimes, a pirated copy was exhibited in less than three weeks after the formal release of a film because a stolen print might be already on its way to Asia while the film is being premiered in the States. In one of his long letters that discussed the illegal film business in China, George Mooser explained to Hiram Abrams in detail Ramos’ route of transferring pirated copies after they first arrived in Shanghai. According to his account, most of the time, after pirated film prints arrived in the port city, they were transported to distributors in Japan, Siberia, the Philippines, Singapore, India, and even Spain (if prints came from the United States).¹¹⁶ In addition to foreign countries, the Ramos’ company also distributed prints to the other parts of China. Prices for a pirated copy varied with such factors as a film’s release date, its reception in the United States, and the number of prints. For example, in April

¹¹³ Alexander Krisel to George Mooser, November 3, 1922, UAC, O’Brien, 93/8.

¹¹⁴ George Mooser to Hines, April 18, 1922, UAC, O’Brien, 93/7; Haruo Takamura, affidavit, April 17, 1922, UAC, O’Brien, 93/6.

¹¹⁵ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, April 13, 1922, UAC, O’Brien, 93/7.

¹¹⁶ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, September 19, 1922, O’Brien, UAC, 93/8.

1922, Haruo Takamura, a film distributor in Tokyo paid \$5,000 for one print of the film *Way Down East*.¹¹⁷ This price was extremely high considering the fact that then in Tokyo it only cost a first-run movie theater \$600.¹¹⁸ Also, a copy of an old film usually cost less than that of a new release. For example, in Shanghai, Ramos paid only \$150 for an old print.¹¹⁹ The exorbitantly high price for a copy of this two-year-old smash-hit of D.W. Griffith's was mainly due to, as claimed by B. Goldenberg, manager of the Ramos Amusement Company, the fact that it was the only print of *Way Down East* available in East Asia at that time.¹²⁰

Examples abound of trafficking of pirated copies. Aside from the Ramos Amusement Company, the Oriental Film Company was also actively involved in distributing pirated prints of American films in East Asia.¹²¹ The company mainly transported pirated prints from Seattle or Honolulu to Shanghai or Tokyo.¹²² In a letter to Hiram Abrams, George Mooser described his experience of tracking down illegal transactions done by the Oriental Film Company. In his letter, he mentions that in early 1922, the Oriental sold *Way Down East* to Kobayashi, a Japanese distributor at the cost of \$15,000 for its distribution all over Japan and China.¹²³ In the early 1920s, an illegal film trafficking had been well-established between Tokyo and Shanghai. Pirated films were freely distributed and re-distributed in both directions via sea within five days.

Like any other businessman, film dealers had a sophisticated communication network that guaranteed an efficient and fast information flow among them, mainly via telegram and

¹¹⁷ Haruo Takamura, affidavit.

¹¹⁸ George Mooser to Hines, April 18, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93-7. In the letter, Mooser also mentions that a smaller cinema paid only \$200 for its monthly programs.

¹¹⁹ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, September 19, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹²⁰ Haruo Takamura, affidavit, April 17, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/6.

¹²¹ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, September 19, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹²² George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, April 13, 1922, UAC, O'Brien, 93/7.

LWM to the Director of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, December 4, 1919, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter 'NARA'), College Park, File 281, Record Group-59 (hereafter "RG-59").

¹²³ George Mooser to O'Brien, April 18, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

mail. For example, regarding the alleged exclusive purchase of the copy *Way Down East*, two letters and three telegrams were exchanged between the Japanese film distributor Takamura and the Ramos Company in Shanghai. More often than not, initial correspondences prompted further contact or even a visit in person. Here is a case in point that gives us a glimpse of a typical information flow of film distributing network from the United States to East Asia: on November 23, 1921, Goldenberg received a telegram from an agent in New York, notifying him of the availability of *Way Down East*, shortly after, he sent the information out by telegram to his regular customers including Takamura; two weeks later the Japanese film dealer met Goldenberg in Shanghai regarding the purchase of the film. In March 1922, they started to negotiate and finally struck up a deal. In this case, it only took less than half a year to successfully closing the deal. Obviously, hunting for potential buyers of a pirated copy before the actual print was available could expedite the whole distributing process.¹²⁴

Ironically, the distribution business of pirated films also built upon trust among film dealers. A smaller distributor did not have to pay the cost of an expensive print in full amount if they had been doing business with each other for a while. Payment by installment was acceptable in some cases. Again take Takamura's case as an example: having been buying pirated prints from the Ramos Amusement Company since 1918, the Japanese businessman was only requested to remit the first installment of Mexican \$4,000 (USD 1,600) by telegraphic transfer to obtain the supposedly "only" copy of *Way Down East*.¹²⁵ The copy arrived in Japan just five

¹²⁴ Haruo Takamura, affidavit; Tsunejiro Miyaoka to Dennis O'Brien and George Mooser, May 18, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹²⁵ Tsunejiro Miyaoka to Dennis O'Brien, May 17, 1922, UAC, O'Brien, 93/7.

days after the first payment, together with posters and still photos showing scenes from the film.¹²⁶

Naturally, the well-organized illegal film distribution of pirated prints in the Far East including Shanghai hurt Hollywood's profit: it undercut the market for authorized prints. In some cases, an exhibitor could buy a pirated print at one tenth of the regular price offered by a legitimate seller.¹²⁷ For instance, even six months after the United Artists had an agent in Shanghai, film dealers in the northern part of China still attempted to rent the pirated print of *Way Down East* as its rental was much lower than what the UAC Shanghai agent offered. On November 1922, P.S. Crawley, an American film dealer in China, contacted Krisel, the United Artists' agent there, offered to pay 2,500 Mexican dollars (equivalent to USD 1,000) for exhibiting *Way Down East* in China's three northern cities for ten weeks. Of course, the cunning lawyer refused. However, Crawley told him that there was another print (pirated one) in China, owned by Ramos. Finally, the negotiation ended up with Crawley's threat to screen the pirated version in the north of China.¹²⁸ In a letter, Krisel expresses his strong concern regarding the dilemma UA faced in China: "if Ramos tried to pirate one of our pictures and we could not stop him from doing so through the courts, this fact would only conclusively prove to the other small exhibitors and film traders in China that they can flagrantly continue to carry on the nefarious business of pirating film."¹²⁹

It was in the midst of flagrant violation of copyright of American films, or more specifically, the lack of international copyright law protection that George Mooser opened the Far Eastern branch office of the United Artists Corporation in Tokyo in April 1922. Having been

¹²⁶ Haruo Takamura, affidavit.

¹²⁷ Alexander Krisel to George Mooser, October 25, 1922, UAC, O'Brien, 94/3.

¹²⁸ Alexander Krisel to George Mooser, November 3, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

living in both China and Japan for over ten years, he was appointed as the managing director of the branch office, with a salary of USD 1,000 a month, plus 25 per cent of the net profit of the business in the Far East.¹³⁰ His branch office was responsible for distributing United Artists films in Eastern and Southeastern Asia including Japan, China, Philippines, and India. As his first order, George Mooser would be given three prints of eighteen United Artists Corporation pictures from the company's New York headquarters, together with three sets of lithographs and accessories for each of the eighteen films, among which was *Way Down East*.¹³¹ Concerning the large territory he had to cover in a short time, Mooser decided to develop his own strategy, that is, to establish an agent in Shanghai first. On May 10, 1922, one month after the United Artists' branch office in Tokyo was established, Mooser signed an agreement with Alexander Krisel, an attorney in Shanghai regarding his responsibilities as a local agent for the United Artists. As a legal representative for the company, initially, the Krisel & Krisel was supposed to give legal advice and assistance relating to the company's business, to write reports when necessary, and to represent the company as attorney on request. In return, the United Artists Corporation would pay the law firm in Shanghai an annual retaining fee of 500 taels (equivalent to USD 633).¹³² Starting as UA's attorney in Shanghai mainly for its trademark and patent issues in the country, by 1925, Krisel & Krisel, as UA agent, had handled all its business in Shanghai and in other cities of China. Differences between an agent and a branch office lie in the bearing of the cost expenses and responsibility. An agent was paid by certain percentage of contracts it made

¹³⁰ Memorandum for Dennis F. O'Brien, January 12, 1922, UAC, 93/7; contract between Hiram Abrams and George Mooser, March 7, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/6.

¹³¹ The eighteen pictures are: *The Three Musketeers*, *Way Down East*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Disraeli*, *The Nut*, *Dream Street*, *Through the Back Door*, *Iron Trail*, *Mark of Zorro*, *Love Flower*, *Love Light*, *Romance*, *Mollycoddle*, *Down on the Farm*, *Suds*, *When the Clouds Roll By*, *Pollyanna*, *His Majesty the American*. Abrams to Dennis F. O'Brien, March 28, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹³² Tael is an English name for the Chinese measure of weight and currency. In 1922, one tael equaled 1.266 US dollars. The agreement between Alexander Krisel and George Mooser, May 10, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4.

without incurring any further expenses from the company, while the expenses of a branch office was borne by the company. In terms of the company's legal documents, the head office in New York was supposed to bear all the cost of running its branch office in Tokyo. However, according to the agreement between Krisel and Mooser, the company was not responsible for the cost, operation, and management of Krisel & Krisel. Instead, in the 1920s, the agent in Shanghai was paid by the company a commission of 20 per cent of all the contracts it made all over China.¹³³ Obviously, using an agent cost much less than running an office because the former practice saved many overheads. As it turned out Krisel and Krisel ran such a prosperous business of Chinese distribution in the late 1920s in China that the United Artists raised its commission by 5 per cent by September 1930.¹³⁴

Alexander Krisel was a lawyer who specialized in foreign patents and trademarks. From the available sources, it was hard to know the size of his firm and the number of his staff. However, the correspondence between him and the UA home office provide some information regarding the local agent: registered as an American company, it was located first on the Jinkee Road, and later on the Museum Road in the International settlement.¹³⁵ Also, in addition to the Krisels, Lo Kan, a British citizen in Shanghai, worked for the firm as well. The United Artists Corporation would not be able to run its business in Shanghai without help from Alexander Krisel, a shrewd and diligent lawyer. Initially, he gave legal advice and made suggestions, and later he negotiated with other distributors and exhibitors in China and signed contracts for the American company for its distributing business there. In his report to the home office on

¹³³ UA Vice President and Treasurer to Alexander Krisel, July 28, 1930, O'Brien, UAC, 58/2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Alexander Krisel to Dennis F. O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4. Jinkee Road is currently known as Renji Road in Shanghai.

Alexander Krisel to A.W. Kelly, December 1, 1930, O'Brien, UAC, 58/2. The Museum Road is currently called as Huqiu Road.

January 15, 1928, E.H. Benson wrote, “It is only our continuous sale effort in this field in cooperation with Mr. Krisel that has enabled us to maintain any footing.”¹³⁶ With Krisel’s legal expertise and business acumen, the United Artists Corporation’s distributing business in China survived the nineteen twenties, one of the most turbulent periods in the Chinese history, also perhaps, one of the most ambitious decades in American film history.

If the UA could barely “maintain any footing” in Shanghai even in 1927, then it was more challenging for it to start its business in the city in the early 1920s when the film distribution was plagued with piracy and chaos. Now I am going to give an account of the effort made jointly by both Mooser and Krisel to fight against the pirated print of *Way Down East* in Shanghai in 1922. As UA’s campaign against piracy of movies was launched at the same time both in Tokyo and Shanghai, inevitably, events in Japan will be recounted whenever it is relevant to what happened in Shanghai. Despite the fact that pirated print had long been a nightmare for the UA in China, the year 1922 saw the most intensive battle against piracy by George Mooser. Not being intimidated by the difficult situation, the embattled American manager brought a series of legal suits in Japan, which cost him profit, reputation, and finally his job in the East Asia in less than one year. Because of the different situation in Shanghai and legal advice by Alexander Krisel, the UA Shanghai agent, more cautious measures were taken to handle the piracy of the Ramos company.

It was not long before George Mooser discovered in person how serious piracy was in Japan. Right after he arrived in Tokyo in mid-March 1922, together with his first order of eighteen UA movies, he found out that several pirated prints of D.W. Griffith’s *Way Down East* were already on their way to Shanghai and Tokyo. In Shanghai, approximately in early April

¹³⁶ E.H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, January 15, 1928, O’Brien, UAC, 95/4.

1922, Ramos already had at least two pirated copies of *Way Down East*, which were sent out from New York.¹³⁷ On April 24, one of Ramos' pirated prints was received by the Japanese distributor Haruo Takamura. Meanwhile, in Tokyo, the Mikatsu Company, Japan's biggest film distributor, with 250 movie theaters on its contract, already had the film's pirated print.¹³⁸ Moreover, through a telegram from the United States, Mooser learned that pirated prints of the film were en route to Hong Kong while more copies were being prepared in San Francisco for shipment to Japan.¹³⁹ To make the situation worse, by mid-April, Mooser had not yet received the copyrighted version of *Way Down East*, scheduled to be sent to him via Seattle by the UA Shipping Department in early March. Although he did not get the waybill for the shipment, he still went to customs and tried to find the authorized print of *Way Down East*. Following is his report about his excursion on April 13, 1922 to the customs house in Tokyo in search of the film's print, "both today and tomorrow are holidays, and they told us that it would take five days to clear the stuff. We got their man to go to the customs with us, and with the aid of Chap from the Grand Hotel, and Thirty Yen, we were allowed to open the cases. Much to our disappointment, neither *Fauntleroy* nor *Way Down East* were there!"¹⁴⁰ Mooser was desperate to find the authorized print of the film, even at the cost of a petty offense (bribery). In his mind, only with a copyrighted version was he able to stop the upcoming exhibitions of the film's pirated print at the Victoria Theater and Olympic Theaters, two of Ramos's major theaters. Even without an authorized copy, Mooser was determined to challenge the biggest film thief in Shanghai. On that night, he sent Howard A. Boyle on his trip to Shanghai immediately. "Now I must send Boyle without the film, as I want him to be there to make an effort to stop them

¹³⁷ Haruo Takamura, affidavit, April 17, 1922, UAC, O'Brien, 93/6.

¹³⁸ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, April 13, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹³⁹ *Japan Advertiser*, April 30, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹⁴⁰ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, April 13, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

showing the film if he has to commit arson or burglary!...I instructed him to contract with Hertzberg, with whom I have been in communication, for the showing of *Fauntleroy* and *Way Down East* and get the advance. Will have him see the District Attorney in Shanghai.”¹⁴¹

Obviously, Mooser felt it necessary or worthwhile to commit a crime such as arson or burglary to prevent a more serious one like piracy. Like Ramos, S. G. Hertzberg was one of the major film exhibitors in Shanghai. The Apollo Theater, which Hertzberg opened in 1910, was among China’s earliest movie theaters. Moreover, located on the North Sichuan Road in the international settlement, the Apollo Theater was a potential rival of Ramos’ Victoria Theater, which was just a short distance away. Obviously, Mooser’s strategy was to let Hertzberg show copyrighted print of *Way Down East* first at Apollo Theater so that Ramos would make much less profit even if he showed the pirated one at the nearby first-run Victoria Theater. Moreover, even if Ramos showed his pirated version in other movie theaters of his, such as Olympic Theater or China Theater, Mooser might already have made his profit by selling the film’s authorized print if Hertzberg showed it first. Certainly, Hertzberg’s communication with Mooser remained a secret at least to the other two exhibitors in Shanghai: Ramos and Tsung Huantang. Tsung owned the Isis Theater, which was located on the North Sichuan Road in the Chinese territory. According to Mooser, Hertzberg, Ramos and Tsung ganged themselves together and put a bond of \$5,000 not to rent the United Artists prints unless the company gave them the deal at their demanded low price.¹⁴²

Apparently, Boyle’s mission was not an easy one, especially since that he did not know when the authorized version would be arriving. He was expected to accomplish three missions on his trip to Shanghai: first, he should finalize the deal with Hertzberg so that *Way Down East*

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² George Mooser to Laurence L. Cassidy, July 1, 1922, O’Brien, UAC, 93/8.

and *Fauntleroy* could be shown as soon as possible; second, he was supposed to get the payment in advance; third, in case Ramos showed his unauthorized print, Boyle should go to the American District Attorney in Shanghai for legal assistance. To his disappointment, by the end of April, Boyle was not successful with any of the tasks. In a long report by Mooser to UA President Hiram Abrams, the frustrated branch office director described his great effort to get the delayed shipment of print of *Way Down East* and mentioned in passing what happened to Boyle in the past two weeks: "Boyle wires that the pirated print is in Shanghai, and that our Consul General there can give him no protection, and that he can not prevent their showing."¹⁴³ However, Mooser was determined to foil Ramos's plan. On May 17, he took the ship Suwa Maru from Moji to Shanghai.¹⁴⁴ This time he planned to consult about the case with Krisel and to negotiate with other exhibitors in Shanghai regarding the showing of UA's pictures. In Shanghai, Mooser made an important and wise decision, that is, he was not going to bring a lawsuit against Ramos in Shanghai. It seemed that Krisel talked him out of it. With no copyright law in China, even if the United Artists was able to prove that it had the exclusive right of exhibiting the film, and further prove that Ramos infringed on the film's copyright, Ramos could still raise the defense that there was no law to prevent him from doing this.¹⁴⁵ In his letters to George Mooser and Dennis O'Brien, Alexander Krisel gave two main reasons that the United Artists should not pursue the film copyright issue in court with Ramos. The first one was the favoritism in the Spanish consular court in Shanghai to its citizens. As Ramos was a Spanish citizen, in a law suit in which he was a defendant, he would be tried in the Spanish Consular in Shanghai, where

¹⁴³ George Mooser to Hiram Abrams, April 28, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7. The U.S. consul general in Shanghai in 1922 was Edwin S. Cunningham, who was in that position even in May 1926. Edwin S. Cunningham to Alexander Krisel, June 20, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4. Clarence J. North to F. H. Elliot, May 10, 1926, NARA, College Park, File 281, RG-59.

¹⁴⁴ Tsunejiro Miyaoka to Dennis F. O'Brien, May 17, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹⁴⁵ Alexander Krisel to George Mooser, November 3, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

favoritism to its own citizens was prevalent. Second was the amount of deposit required to initiate a lawsuit in the court. As a pre-requisite to bring a suit, the Spanish consular court required a deposit of USD 3,000 in cash. If the United Artists sued Ramos for violation of copyright, chances were great that it would lose both the law suit and the deposit.¹⁴⁶ Also, Krisel's analysis shows that a lost case for the United Artists could only result in more piracy in the city, "It is a very important matter to be thoroughly considered, for if Ramos tried to pirate one of our pictures and we could not stop him from doing so through the courts, this fact would only conclusively prove to the other small exhibitors and film traders in China that they can flagrantly continue to carry on the nefarious business of pirating film."¹⁴⁷ Obviously, the experienced lawyer preferred more cautious measures to fight against Ramos's pirating business in Shanghai. First, with the purpose of outselling, Krisel planned to make allies with other exhibitors and let them show authorized prints before Ramos had a chance to exhibit pirated ones. Second, he was going to solicit some copyright protection from the U.S. consulates all over China in case a lawsuit arose. By the time Mooser left Shanghai for Tokyo at the end of May, he achieved his first goal—he had a contract with the Isis Theater for the screening of the copyrighted *Way Down East* for one week in May. Moreover, starting from 1922 till the end of the 1920s, the Isis Theater had always been the United Artists' second-run theater.

As there was neither copyright nor trademark laws in China, Krisel chose a more efficient and effective way to get a certificate of registration—to register the trademark "United Artists Corporation" with the U.S. Consulates in China instead of registering a copyright for each UA film. In his opinion, at least, this measure would have stopped any U.S. citizen from distributing or exhibiting pirated films. Also, Krisel did this in the hope that a provisional

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Krisel to Dennis O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/7.

¹⁴⁷ Alexander Krisel to George Mooser, November 3, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

certificate might be able to turn into a permanent one in case in future the U.S. government signed an agreement with the Spanish government regarding the copyright issue in China. In addition, he also expected that China would establish an intellectual protection system in the near future.¹⁴⁸ It was a smart move for Krisel to register the UA trademark rather than to register each individual film. Due to the country's unstable situation and bureaucracy in its different agencies and offices, in some cases, it took nearly four months to complete a registration in a US consulate. In this way, it might be too late for any legal redress because a pirated print could have already been shown all over China before a film's copyright is formally registered.

At the end of June, Krisel started to send letters signed by George Mooser regarding UA's copyright of twenty films as well as his request for registration of the UA's trademark at the U.S. consulates in China's nine port cities: Shanghai, Tientsin, Hankow, Mukden, Harbin, Chefoo, Foochow, Dairen, and Canton.¹⁴⁹ By the end of June, most consulates responded to his trademark registration except U.S consulate in Guangdong. Here is an except of the letter from Edwin S. Cunningham, the U.S. consul-general in Shanghai, dated June 20, 1922:

With reference to your letter of June 5, 1922, requesting the filing at this Consulate-General and at the Branch Office of the Bureau for Registration of Trade Marks in the Chinese Custom House at Shanghai, of trademark—"the United Artists Corporation"—on behalf of United Artists Corporation, #729 Seventh Ave., New York City, U.S.A. (covering MOTION PICTURE FILMS), for record pending the coming into force of the Regulation governing the registration of trademarks and patents in China, you are informed that the

¹⁴⁸ George Mooser to Laurence L. Cassidy, July 1, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹⁴⁹ Krisel and Krisel to Dennis F. O'Brien, April 27, 1923, UAC, O'Brien, 58/4. Tientsin is currently called Tianjin; Hankow is called Hankou; Mukden is called Shenyang; Harbin is called Haerbin; Chefoo is called Yantai; Foochow is called Fuzhou; Dairen is called Dalian; and Canton is called Guangdong.

trademark in question has been recorded at this Consulate-General under Consular No. 4280, and that, according to a letter from the Custom House dated June 17, 1922, has been temporarily filed in the archives of the Branch Office under reference Nos. 23612.¹⁵⁰

The letter approved the application of trademark registration of the United Artists Corporation in Shanghai, although, ironically, there was no intellectual property protection all over China at that time. However, at least, the U.S. consulate in Shanghai acknowledged the fact that the United Artist Corporation had an exclusive right of exhibiting its films in the port city. It was the only formal course of action that the company could take at that time to fight against Ramos. Krisel was delighted in his initial triumph against Ramos. In the lawyer's mind, Ramos was intimidated by his warning regarding the exhibition of the pirated *Way Down East* in Shanghai. In his letter to UA's home office, he mentions the fact that when the authorized version of *Way Down East* was exhibited at the Isis Theater for one week in May 1922, Ramos did not give any formal response.¹⁵¹

After the first round of battle against "the film thief" in Shanghai, Mooser felt confident of his ability to win the whole campaign against piracy. In his July report to the headquarters in New York, Mooser expressed his confidence, "I think, however, that we have pulled Ramos' teeth as we have pretty well smashed the market for stolen films and I do not anticipate much trouble from him in the future.....Hertzberg, one of the three exhibitors has contracted with me for four of our pictures to be shown in October and November and I have no doubt that Tsung

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Consulate in Shanghai to Alexander Krisel, June 20, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4.

¹⁵¹ Alexander Krisel to Dennis F. O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4.

and Ramos will likewise come through in the course of the next two weeks.”¹⁵² Why was Mooser so confident about Ramos’s future surrender? As Shanghai’s biggest exhibitor, Ramos controlled nearly half of the movie theaters in the city. Besides, he also had a wide connection with distributors and exhibitors in the other parts of China. Hertzberg, the owner of the three-hundred-seat Apollo Theatre, did not seem to pose a serious threat to Ramos’s thriving business. Why did Mooser think that Ramos would not cause “much trouble in the future?” Was there something else going on in Mooser’s mind when he wrote that he has “pulled Ramos’ teeth?” Or was Mooser just exaggerating his own achievements? On November 27, Goldenberg, manager of the Ramos Amusement Company, was murdered in his bedroom. After his murder, China Cinema, the movie theater in his name, was transferred to Ramos.¹⁵³ Strangely, not one single letter between the branch and the home office ever mentioned the murder case considering the fact the Goldberg was a high-profile name in the company’s previous correspondence; moreover, neither Ramos nor Goldenberg was ever mentioned in any letters after November, 1922. Like a taboo, both of their names suddenly disappeared from the company’s records. Was Goldenberg’s murder a message sent out by Mooser to warn Ramos of an alternative he might take if the Spanish film thief continued to confront the issue with the UA? Or was Goldenberg killed by Ramos because the unlucky manager had some secret arrangements with Mooser behind Ramos’ back? Or, was Goldenberg killed because he witnessed too many secret transactions of Ramos? With available sources, this project can’t answer these questions. Perhaps, Goldenberg’s murder will remain a historical mystery.

¹⁵² George Mooser to Laurence L. Cassidy, July 1, 1922, O’Brien, UAC, 93/8.

¹⁵³ Runyong Wang, “Shanghai Yingyuan Bianqian Lu,” or “History of Change of Shanghai Movie Theaters,” 85. China Cinema was opened by Goldberg on September 15, 1920.

It was a costly campaign that Mooser had launched against piracy in both Japan and China: by January 1923, the balance of his office in Tokyo was reportedly to have showed a loss due to expensive lawsuits and travel costs in both Japan and China; moreover, to be in a better position to negotiate, Mooser had to cut out a deal with exhibitors, which means he had to sell the UA rental at a reduced price; last but not least, after several lawsuits in Japan, as examined in Walsh's seminal article, some local exhibitors were reluctant to do business with the UA because they were under the impression that the American distributor was litigious and difficult.¹⁵⁴ Upon pressure from the home office, in June 1923, Mooser submitted his letter of resignation, which was supposed to take effect six months later.¹⁵⁵ In Mooser' another letter to O'Brien, Mooser referred to his one-year experience in the Far East as "working..under the most difficult conditions": despite the difficulties, he regarded his effort as productive because he attained success in "stopping the pirating of our pictures and the distribution of our product."¹⁵⁶ However, United Artists, together with other American film distributors, had a long way to go. Even in 1934, American motion pictures were still not protected by the new copyright law in China as evidenced by a decision given by the China Ministry of Interior regarding the application for the copyright of *Catherine the Great* (1934), a Paramount film directed by Josef von Sternberg.¹⁵⁷

Referring to the above application, we desire to inform you that motion pictures are shown to the general public irrespective of Chinese or foreigner and, therefore, are not useful to the Chinese exclusively. Accordingly, Article 14 of the Detailed

¹⁵⁴ Anonymous to Hiram Abrams, October 25, 1923, O'Brien, UAC, O'Brien, 94/3. Walsh, "No Place for a White Man," 18-31.

¹⁵⁵ George Mooser to UAC, June 25, 1923, UAC, O'Brien, 94/2.

¹⁵⁶ George Mooser to Dennis F. O'Brien, June 20, 1923, UAC, O'Brien, 94/2.

¹⁵⁷ *The Scarlet Empress* (1934), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0025746>, last accessed on August 14, 2008.

Regulations of Copyright Law is not applicable in this case and your application can not be approved.¹⁵⁸

From the letter we can see that even in the mid-1930s, copyright protection only applied to the intellectual property materials that were useful to Chinese. American films were still not protected under the Chinese copyright law. Fighting against film piracy was rather the duty of individual Hollywood agent in Shanghai than that of the Chinese government. One main means for Hollywood majors to battle against piracy was to establish their own local agents and sign contracts with local exhibitors. As Marie Cambon points out, “the monopoly of Hollywood in Shanghai...existed in the distribution system, not the ownership of venues.”¹⁵⁹ Through gradually controlling the distribution business in Shanghai and China’s other port cities, Hollywood majors managed to protect their products.

¹⁵⁸ Chinese Ministry of Interior to Krisel and Krisel, February 9, 1934, O’Brien, UAC, 58/2.

¹⁵⁹ Marie Cambon, “The Dream Palaces of Shanghai: American Films in China’s Largest Metropolis Prior to 1949,” in *Asian Cinema* 7 (Winter 1995): 40.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO: A NEW DOOR FACING THE INTERNATIONAL SETTLEMENT

The lack of revenue in Shanghai has for a great deal been due to the rebuilding of our second-run theater, the Isis Theater. This theater is located in Chinese territory and suffered very much from the strict Chinese martial law regulations. By a smart operation Mr. Lo Kan bought last winter a strip of land behind the theater facing one of the principal streets in the International Settlement and rebuilt the theater in such a manner that it now will have its entrance from the International Settlement and no doors leading out to the Chinese territory, whereby it will not suffer from the Chinese military troubles.¹⁶⁰

This is an excerpt of the General Report in October 1927 to Arthur W. Kelly, vice president and treasurer of the United Artists, written by John Albeck, the third managing director of the UA office in the Far East since 1922. The office was expected to submit a monthly report to its headquarters in New York regarding the political, economical, social, and cultural events that had affected the operation of each branch office in the East and Southern Asian countries.¹⁶¹ In the company's monthly review regarding the film business in China, Shanghai had always

¹⁶⁰ John Albeck to Arthur Kelly, November 20, 1927, O'Brien, 95/5, UAC.

¹⁶¹ The countries that the UA office in Tokyo covers include Japan, China, the Philippine Islands, and India. November 20, 1927, O'Brien, 95/5, UAC.

been a major focus as it was the hub of film industry in China. Moreover, run by Alexander Krisel, a cunning and diligent lawyer of intellectual property, the UA Shanghai Office could be considered as the most efficient one among UA branch offices in Asia. Unlike the reports in 1922, those in 1923 and after no longer address the issue of piracy, one issue that I have examined in Chapter One. Instead, factors that might affect regular distribution business were more often reported.

The above-mentioned passage also describes one of the many daily activities that the Shanghai office of the United Artists did on a daily basis: in order to bypass the Chinese martial law, Lo Kan, a British citizen who worked for Krisel, made the entrance of the Isis Theatre face Sichuan Road, a busy street in the International Settlement, therefore, relocating the Isis Theatre from the martial-law controlled Chinese territory to the less restricted International Settlement. Of the city's three regions including the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese territory, the International Settlement was known for its better management and greater freedom. As each region was supposed to be governed under its own laws and regulations, a business in the International Settlement was only subject to the laws and regulations made by the Shanghai Municipal Council, an Anglo-American government established in 1854 for the management and development of the Shanghai International Settlement.¹⁶² Despite the fact that there was no gate between the two foreign sectors, there were gates between the International Settlement and the Chinese territory. Whenever a martial law was enforced, the gates between the two regions would be shut, which prevented pedestrians from passing freely. As a martial law was frequently carried out in the Chinese territory, movie theatres in that region were often

¹⁶² R.S. Gundry, "the Status of the Shanghai Municipality," *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law*, 3^d ser., 2:1 (1920): 52. According to him, when the council was first formed in 1854, French consul was also one member. Later, the France withdrew from the council, and had control over its own French Concession.

closed before nine o'clock in the evening, which apparently hurt late business. Through the renovation, Lo Kan managed to bypass Chinese martial law. Later, in an announcement in a fan magazine in Shanghai, he covered up his real reason for changing the direction of the door by saying that it was out of convenience that the door would be moved from the Qiujiang Road to the Sichuan Road. The notice, together with a picture of the old door says, "it is decided that the door of the movie theatre will be rebuilt so that audience will be able to enter from Sichuan Road directly instead of turning from Qiujiang Road." Obviously, changing the door's location made a difference in business because the theatre would not conform to curfews as it used to do.¹⁶³ Lo Kan's tactic is a good case in point that illustrates the daily operation and function of a Hollywood major's branch.

In an article on the activities of Hollywood agents in China, Zhiwei Xiao mentions several major functions Paramount offices in China served including "dealing with local censors, providing feedback to headquarters in New York about the performance of American films, collecting data about China's film market, supervising Chinese theaters contracted to show American films, handling the profits, etc."¹⁶⁴ Obviously, Lo Kan's behavior can be broadly categorized as practicing supervision over a contracted theatre. As Hollywood monopolized the Chinese film market through its distributing system rather than through directly investing in building movie theatres, it was crucial for a Hollywood agent to establish a cinema chain with first, second, and third-run theatres and to supervise them closely. In her article, Marie Cambon discusses the ownership of movie theatres in Shanghai between the early 1920s and mid-1940s. According to her, in the 1920s, few movie theatres were American owned, "there were actually

¹⁶³ *China Film Pictorial* 7 (July 1, 1927): 51.

¹⁶⁴ Zhiwei Xiao, "Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey," *Chinese Historical Review* 12:1 (Spring 2005): 71-96.

very few American-owned, or even foreign owned, theatres in Shanghai by the thirties.”¹⁶⁵ It seems that Cambon uses the three phrases “foreign-owned,” “American-owned,” and “Hollywood studio-owned” interchangeably. Actually, as I discussed in Chapter One, in the early and middle 1920s, Antonio Ramos, a Spanish businessman in Shanghai owned many movie theatres in the city. Therefore, most movie theatres in that period in Shanghai were foreign owned if not owned by Hollywood studios.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hollywood major studios started their global expansion during and after World War I. The international market including China was extensively tapped by Hollywood in the late 1910s and early 1920s, as evidenced by an increasing number of American film exports. According to Thomas Guback, in 1913, the United States exported about 32 million feet of motion pictures to the world; in 1923, the amount increased to 128 million feet, and by 1925 the amount almost doubled to 235 million feet. During over two decades, “American film exports increased fivefold to Europe and tenfold to the other parts of the world, as the industry developed markets in the Far East, Latin American, and in a few parts of Africa.”¹⁶⁶ Comparing two groups of figures: —U.S. exports of films to China about 190,000 feet in 1913 and U.S. exports of films to the world some 32 million feet in 1913; U.S. exports of films to China around 6 million feet in 1925 and U.S. exports of films to the world 235 million feet in 1925—we can find that the percentage of U.S. export of motion pictures to China increased from around 0.6 percent in 1913 of its film export to the world to 2.5 percent in 1925. The percentage increased almost five times. The percentage increased, however, not as big as the industry developed markets in some other parts of the Far East, Latin American, and some

¹⁶⁵ Marie Cambon, “The Dream Palaces of Shanghai: American Films in China’s Largest Metropolis Prior to 1949,” *Asian Cinema* (Winter 1995): 38.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas H. Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market,” in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 465.

parts of Africa.¹⁶⁷ Kristin Thompson confirms in her book that “In spite of China’s huge population, the market was relatively small.”¹⁶⁸ However, in the small market, American films took a big share, which is around 90 percent of the 1920s Chinese film market. Thompson quoted estimate by Luther M. Jee, a Chinese distributor and film-maker in the 1920s, who observed that of the 450 films shown in China in 1926, over 400 were American films and around 50 were Chinese films.¹⁶⁹

With a growing number of American film exports every year, Hollywood started to set up its own agents and offices to distribute films all over the world including China. According to Zhiwei Xiao, it was Universal that first established its branch office in China. “By the mid 1920s, Columbia, First National, Fox Paramount, RKO, United Artists, and Warner Brothers all followed suit” in setting up branch offices.¹⁷⁰ While the reports from UA’s Eastern Asia office confirmed the lead Universal took in China, they indicated a smaller number of Hollywood branch offices in China: in early 1927, Universal and Fox were the only two majors’ that had their offices in China, while the other American distributors only had their agents in Shanghai. Peacock Motion Picture Corporation was an agent for the First National. Pictures of the Warner Brothers and of Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin were distributed by the Pathé. The Odeon Theatre handled Paramount productions, and the Klein-Kwei Orient Company handled those of Columbia’s. And the Krisel and Krisel was an agent for the United Artists. By the late 1920s, Hollywood’s majors started to merge. For instance, MGM merged with the Far Eastern

¹⁶⁷ Zhiwei Xiao, “Hollywood in China, 1897-1950: A Preliminary Survey,” *Chinese Historical Review (Shixue Pinglun)* 12:1 (Spring 2005): 77.

¹⁶⁸ Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-34* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1985), 143.

¹⁶⁹ Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 144.

¹⁷⁰ Xiao, “Hollywood in China,” 77.

Headquarters of the UA on September 1, 1929.¹⁷¹ According to the agreement between the two American film companies, the MGM started to take over some of the UA operations in Asia including five offices in Tokyo, one in Singapore, and one in Korea. Understandably, Krisel and Krisel, the one in Shanghai, was not included in the merging of the two distributors because as an agent, it did not belong to the UA company.¹⁷² However, the merger actually expanded the business for the Krisels as it gave the Shanghai agent more first-run films to sell.¹⁷³

Before getting into details of Hollywood film distribution business in 1920s Shanghai, I will examine the reasons why Shanghai became China's center of culture and entertainment. In his article called "Early Film Industry in Shanghai and the Course of Shanghai Modernization," Chaoguang Wang examines the city's development in the 1920s. According to him, the film industry in late 1910s and 1920s Shanghai was part of the city's modernization and industrialization process. Shanghai became a birthplace for China film industry for several reasons. First, Shanghai had a large population of immigrants from both home and abroad. Second, unlike some other big cities like Beijing, Shanghai was not dominated by traditional Chinese literary men and gentry, instead, small urbanities (*xiao shimin*) formed an urban culture characterized by a pursuit of new and Western ideas and images. Also, as China's commercial and financial center, Shanghai saw a rising middle and upper class who interacted with foreigners at work and who was more ready to enjoy Hollywood movies. Finally, as a semi-colonial city, the large number of foreign population was also potential audiences of movies.¹⁷⁴ Aside from the above-mentioned reasons regarding potential audiences of American films in

¹⁷¹ United Artists Corporation to Christopher Dunphy, "Proposed Plan for the Acquisition by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corporation of United Artists Corporation of Far East," June 21, 1929, O'Brien, 157/10, UAC.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelley, September 10, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

¹⁷⁴ Chaoguang Wang, "Early Film Industry in Shanghai and the Course of Shanghai Modernization," *Archives and History* 3 (2003): 29.

Shanghai, there are other factors that contributed to Hollywood's popularity in the city.¹⁷⁵ First, as a port city with its convenient transportation to other parts of China and of the world, Shanghai was the hub of trade and transportation. Second, as almost all film distributing companies were located in the International Settlement, they were seldom affected by the local Chinese laws, which enabled them to maintain a steady business. Next, with its first movie theatre established in 1908, the city had seen a fair number of movie-goers by the 1920s, which made film distribution a profitable business. Finally, 1920s Shanghai was also the center of the Chinese film industry as evidenced by nearly two hundred Chinese films that were produced in the city.¹⁷⁶ Also, for foreign entrepreneurs, the city's positive attitude towards foreign business made it more attractive. For example, when Isaac O. Upham first came to China in 1919 with the intention of establishing a film distribution company called Oriental Pictures Corporation, his first choice was Beijing, where the American Legation was located. However, after an unresponsive presentation to the potential investors in Beijing, he decided to go to Shanghai to try his luck because he believed that people there were "more used to foreign ways of doing business."¹⁷⁷ Eventually, Upham managed to open a business in Shanghai dealing with Chinese films in overseas market.¹⁷⁸

In 1920s semi-colonial Shanghai, film distribution became an important business in film industry. Following the narration of the first chapter, I will focus upon a Hollywood agent's activities in Shanghai, mainly using United Artists as a case study, based upon such primary

¹⁷⁵ William W. Lockwood, Jr. "The International Settlement at Shanghai, 1924-1934," *American Political Science Review* 28:6 (Dec. 1934): 1031. According to him, geographic, historical, and political factors combined to make Shanghai one of China's most important cities in modern history.

¹⁷⁶ Kann, Atsu, Benjamin Cheng, and D.S. Chen, *1927 China Film Yearbook* (Shanghai: Dadong Printing House 1927). By January 1927, over one hundred and seventy Chinese films were produced in Shanghai.

¹⁷⁷ LWM (Acting Commercial Attache, American Legation in Beijing) to director of the Bureau of the Foreign and Domestic Commerce, December 4, 1919, National Archive and Registration Administration (NARA), 281, RG-59.

¹⁷⁸ *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

sources as the company's records and the *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*, this chapter will investigate Hollywood majors' branch offices in Shanghai, their daily activities, and functions, as well as the communication between a branch and its home office. In so doing, this chapter will be divided into three parts: in the first part, I will give a general picture of the Hollywood's major offices in 1920s Shanghai, including their locations and their developments; then, I will examine the distributing practice of an agent; finally, using the United Artists Shanghai office as an example, I will examine their daily activities and functions in distributing American films in Shanghai and other parts of China. Again, as mentioned in the first chapter, I use the United Artists as a case study mainly for two reasons: availability of primary sources of the company and popular films it distributed in China, which can help us get a relatively complete picture of Hollywood business (distribution, exhibition, and reception) in the city.

3.1 HOLLYWOOD AGENTS AND OFFICES IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Distributing agents for the Hollywood majors could be a law firm such as the Krisels or a company that specialized in the film-related business like the Peacock Motion Pictures Corporation. More often than not, agents handled business for more than one Hollywood major studio. Krisel and Krisel is a case in point. By early 1927, the firm was distributing films for three majors: UA, MGM, and Paramount. Sometimes, a company was also involved in producing a film and selling film-related products. Take Peacock Motion Pictures for an example; founded in 1922, the company not only distributed the First National films, but also sold motion picture equipment including Simplex motion picture projectors and Holmes Portable

Projectors.¹⁷⁹ In addition, it was also the producer of the Chinese film *Lovers' Sacrifice*, or *Kong Que Dong Nan Fei*. Based upon the classic Chinese love tragedy, the film recounts a story of an ill-fated couple who are forced to divorce by the manipulative and merciless mother-in-law.¹⁸⁰ Pathé-Orient is another example that shows the scope of business of a Hollywood agent in 1920s Shanghai. The company handled a wide range of business in films and film-related business. In terms of films, it claimed to have a stock of over 8,000 films of different genres and by different companies for rental. They included Pathé's productions such as Pathé features, serials, British Gazettes, and American Gazettes. It also had films of other studios such as Warner Brothers Pictures and Producers Distributing Production. Felix and Inkwell cartoons and comedies by Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Mack Sennett were also among their list. In addition to the film rental business, the company also sold Pathé projectors, Debrie cameras, and Matipo printing machines, as well as "everything for the professional studio and laboratory works."¹⁸¹ Apparently, the company aimed to provide all the materials and equipment used for film production and exhibition.

Usually, a company with various film products had different offices or agents to take care of its business in several cities in China. For instance, in addition to Shanghai, Pathé also had offices in Hong Kong and Tianjin. Also, the Universal Pictures Corporation had branch offices in five cities: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tianjin, Harbin, and Hankow. Obviously, Shanghai, Tianjin and Hong Kong were among the most frequently chosen cities to set up an agent or a branch office. The reason is self-evident, as the three coastal cities were located respectively in the northeastern, central-eastern, and southeastern parts of China, the country's most populous and

¹⁷⁹ C.J. North to Shanghai China Office, Washington, D.C., November 1927, NARA, 281, RG-59.

¹⁸⁰ *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁸¹ *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

developed regions. An agent in the port city Tianjin was able to facilitate business in the northern parts of China; an agent in Hong Kong could take care of the business in southern China as evidenced by the Pathé's Hong Kong office that supplied foreign films to Amoy, a city in the south.¹⁸² Also, as a hub for international transportation and commerce in 1920s China, Shanghai was an entrepot. A studio with a larger number of agents or offices generally had a better distribution network as it allowed the company to cover a wider area. With two more offices in Haerbin and Hankow, Universal was able to handle its business in central and far northern China. From the locations of the agents or branch offices of Hollywood majors, we can see that the remote regions in Western China were not prime markets due to their unstable situation, inconvenient transportation, and sparse population.

There were two main ways to become an agent of a Hollywood major or an American distributor: one was through mutual contact, and the other was through the third party's introduction. It was through a long-term contact that the Odeon Theater and Company became an agent for the Paramount. Likewise, Pathé might also have established contact with the Warner Brothers through business. Sometimes, a company in Shanghai with the intention of being an agent might just request a third party to introduce it to a Hollywood studio. For example, in May 1925, B. Roth and Co., an American company located on the 24 Bund of Shanghai in the International Settlement wrote a letter to the U.S. trade commissioner in Shanghai, expressing its intention in serving in China as its representative for the motion pictures made by the Schulberg Productions.¹⁸³ The letter was forwarded to the director of the Bureau of the Foreign and

¹⁸² Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929, M 329, Microfilm Roll 123, 0943, NARA, RG-59.

¹⁸³ Viola Smith to the director of the Bureau of the Foreign and Domestic Commerce, May 27, 1925, NARA, 281, RG-59

Domestic Commerce in Washington D.C.,¹⁸⁴ then, it was sent to A.S. Hillyer, chief of the Commercial Intelligence Division, from him, it was forwarded to the Division's New York District Office.¹⁸⁵ Later, A.J. Barnard, the district manager sent his response back to the Bureau of the Foreign and Domestic Commerce in the capital, together with a letter addressed to B. Roth written by the vice president of the Schulberg Productions.¹⁸⁶ Finally, the letter from the Schulberg was sent by Herbert W. Gruber, acting chief of the Commercial Intelligence to George Howard, American Trade Commissioner in Shanghai on August 12, 1925.¹⁸⁷ The whole contact-establishing process lasted almost four months. Unfortunately, it seemed that the Schulberg Productions did not have rights to distribute its pictures in countries other than the United States because it already had its overseas agent. Obviously, we can imagine that most local companies would prefer direct contact with American producers rather than through a third party such as the American Trade Commissioner. It took time to establish an initial contact, and it took more time to build trust. For the companies that were already in the film distributing business, a third-party introduction was unnecessary. However, for those interested in starting the business, it was a good way to approach an American film distributor and producer, or at least to get some basic information about the business concerned.

The branch offices and agents of the Hollywood's majors were all located in the International Settlement, three of which were on the Sichuan Road in the Hongkew District. These included the Pathé, the Odeon Theater and Co., and the Universal Pictures.¹⁸⁸ Fox Film

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ A.S. Hillyer to New York District Office of Commercial Intelligence Division, August 1, 1925, NARA, 281, RG-59.

¹⁸⁶ A. J. Barnard to Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, August 6, 1925, NARA, 281, RG-59.

¹⁸⁷ Herbert W. Gruber to George Howard, August 12, 1925, NARA, 281, RG-59.

¹⁸⁸ The Pathé was located at 234 Middle Sichuan Road; The Odeon Theater and Co. was located on 2512 North Sichuan Road; the Universal Pictures were located at 4978 Middle Sichuan Road. *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

Corporation was almost next door to the Krisel and Krisel;¹⁸⁹ Fox seemingly shared the same office building with the United Film Exchange, a major distributor of Chinese pictures for the domestic market.¹⁹⁰ Most likely, all of these eight agents and offices were formed and registered as American companies because such a business could be better protected whenever a lawsuit arose. As an American company, it was only subject to U.S. laws. In addition, a U.S. company could also have a tax relief according the China Trade Act (1922), a law that aimed to help sell American products in China that were made in the United States.¹⁹¹ The main requirements to be deemed a firm covered by the American Trade Act corporation included: 1) the president and treasurer must be Americans; 2) the company must handle business furthering American trade in China; 3) the account books must be kept in English subject to annual auditing; and 4) majority of the directors, usually three, must be residents in China.¹⁹² Because of the tax break, branch offices and agents of American films were likely to enroll as American Trade Corporation companies as they could easily meet the pre-requisites. To fulfill the afore-mentioned fourth requirement, a Hollywood major could hire local Chinese or Chinese with an overseas education to be directors or chief staff members. People who headed the agencies were mostly foreigners. Chinese who had overseas educational experience were usually hired as managers because of their knowledge and expertise in films, bilingual ability, and familiarity with the local culture. For example, Luther M. Jee, a Chinese graduate from Harvard University, was hired by the

¹⁸⁹ Fox Film Corp. was located at 35 Jinkee Road (Renji Road); the Krisel and Krisel was located at 25 Jinkee Road, *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁹⁰ Both Fox Film Corporation and the United Film Exchange were located on the 35 Jinkee Road, however, they had different phone numbers. They might shared a house with different floors, or they might be in different rooms of an office building. *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁹¹ *The China Trade Act*, June 15, 1982, www.ita.doc.gov/ooms/ChinaTradeActRCS.pdf, last accessed October 29, 2008.

¹⁹² *China Trade Act*, 1934, O'Brien, 58/5, UAC.

Peacock Motion Pictures Corporation as a general manager.¹⁹³ Before him, it was Chamberlain and Richard Patterson that held that position. However, after reportedly mismanagement and bad office politics, finally, a Chinese manager took over.¹⁹⁴ Jee did much work to promote the company and First National productions. He was not only active in translating film-related materials in both Chinese and English, but also good at writing articles on film industry for both the Chinese and English journals in Shanghai. Aside from Peacock Motion Picture's Jee, Gui Zhongshu, a Chinese graduate from the University of Madison in Wisconsin, was hired by the Odeon Theater and Corporation as a chief translator for motion pictures and other film-related publicity materials.¹⁹⁵ Apparently, the act had a double effect on Chinese employees. On the one hand, it encouraged an American company to hire talented Chinese; on the other hand, it prevented a Chinese manager from getting a top position in an American company in China because of his or her nationality. The law aimed to make sure that it was an American company that benefited from the tax policy.

Interestingly, some of these agents had logos that had vivid visual representations of their names. For example, Peacock Motion Pictures had as its logo a heavy-feathered, chubby peacock (Fig.1); for Universal Pictures, its logo was a round ball circled by the company name, which symbolizes the company's wide coverage of business (Fig.2). Also, Universal's logo conveys a sense of speed and modernity.¹⁹⁶ The logo of the Pathé had a happy rooster singing and dancing in the spotlight, with the flowery-style word Pathé covering most of the proud bird's small body (Fig.3). A rooster communicates a sense of earliness and freshness as its singing indicates the breaking of a new day. Imaginably, by using a rooster as its logo, the company tried to shape its

¹⁹³ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁹⁴ A. J. Barnaud to Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, March, 4, 1926, NARA, 281, RG-59.

¹⁹⁵ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁹⁶ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

image as the earliest film distributor in the world. The clear and concise logos helped the local distributing agents establish their products' identity and play into the local film market.

3.2 HOLLYWOOD MAJORS' DISTRIBUTING PRACTICE IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Hollywood majors' agents and offices were a small part of film distribution in China. By early 1927, there were approximately forty-one companies that distributed foreign films, mostly American films all over China, twenty-three of which were located in Shanghai, six were in Tianjin, and four were in Hong Kong. These included Asia Film Exchanges, China Film Syndicate, Oriental Films Limited, Ramos Amusement Corporation, the Lyric Motion Picture Corporation, and the Continental Film Corporation.¹⁹⁷ These non-Hollywood-major companies could also be involved in dealing with films produced or distributed by a Hollywood major via second-hand distribution in China's smaller cities or in some Asian countries; such as the Philippines. Aside from over forty foreign film distributors, there were around forty-five distributors of Chinese films for both home and abroad, of which, twenty-five had a branch office in Shanghai.¹⁹⁸ It seemed that distributors of Chinese films did not deal with foreign films, and vice versa. These figures confirm that Shanghai had been the center of film-distributing business in 1920s China.

There were two common practices in film distributing in 1920s China: in the first, a film distributor provided particular number of programs, or a package deal to an exhibitor on a

¹⁹⁷ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

¹⁹⁸ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

regular basis, which was commonly known as block booking; in the second practice, a distributor supplied single films to an exhibitor. A program was usually made up of a feature film, or two episodes of a serial, and a comedy or comedies to complete the eight reels. A distributor could also just rent single films to an exhibitor. The Pathé was famous for providing programs to exhibitors all over China. The block-booking practice, usually based upon a contract with a distributor and an exhibitor, was more often used in 1920s China as it was cheaper than that of single film rentals. Take Amoy, a port city in southern China, as an instance, in 1926, for a serial program, the rental price per week was around \$23, while that of an ordinary feature program was about \$20, and special feature rental was the most expensive, approximately \$30. Of the film rental prices, American feature films were the highest. A small theater in Amoy probably would spend around \$200 for a package deal from a distributor or several distributors of serials and American feature films, with two different programs every week.¹⁹⁹

One big change in film distribution in mid-1920s Shanghai was that it was no longer a monopolized business for Antonio Ramos. Instead, with a growing number of new movie theaters and distributors, the business was more competitive. By 1927, Ramos had rented most of his movie theaters to local exhibitors. Because Hollywood majors had either their branch offices or agents in Shanghai to handle their rental business, an American film distributing business model was established in the city characterized by more efficiency and higher charges. In the Ramos-period (before 1926), Hollywood majors' agents in Shanghai sold the royalty for a print. For example, in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Ramos paid Paramount Famous Lasky a royalty of \$150 a print for all its distribution in China.²⁰⁰ However, in 1926, it cost HK\$350 a month to

¹⁹⁹ NARA, RG-59, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929, M 329, Microfilm Roll 123, 0944.

²⁰⁰ George Moose to Dennis F. O'Brien, Sept. 19, 1922, O'Brien, 93-8, UAC.

rent the six-reel film *Joan of Arc* (1917) directed by Cecil DeMille, and Lilian Gish's five-reel *The Children's Pay* (1916) cost HK \$300 to rent for one month.²⁰¹ As the period of one month also included the traveling time from a distributor to an exhibitor, this might shorten the actual exhibition days if a print was exported to another city. Aside from a higher price for a film print in the late 1920s, compared with earlier in the decade, films were rented on a stricter terms than in earlier days. For example, a film could only be rented to the theater specified in the contract, and for exhibition over no more than four consecutive days, and for screenings at most twice every day. In the late 1920s, with well-established agents and offices, American distributors usually required tighter control of their prints, especially in times of war or emergency, which I will cover in the latter part of this chapter using the United Artists as an example. As the word "rental" indicates, ownership of a film print still belonged to its distributor.²⁰² Even a damaged print was required to be sent back to its distributor.²⁰³

Unlike distributors of American films, their Chinese counterparts both rented and sold prints. For example, in 1923, the Commercial Press Limited of Shanghai, a producer and distributor of Chinese films, claimed to sell various types of films. One advertisement said that the company had "the films deal with Education Affairs, Chinese plays, and Humors, with heading in English and Chinese."²⁰⁴ An education-subject film could be a one-reel film with the title *Y.W. C.A Pageant Girls' Physical Demonstration*, which cost one-and-half dollars for rent per run, and ninety dollars for sale. A Chinese drama film could be one-reel *The Fairy Scattering Flowers*, a Peking opera play by Mei Lanfang, a famous Chinese opera singer. It cost five dollars

²⁰¹ NARA, RG-59, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929, M 329, Microfilm Roll 123, 0946.

²⁰² Ibid, 0944.

²⁰³ Ibid, 0945.

²⁰⁴ Lansing W. Hoyt to director of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, May 17, 1923, NARA, 281.

to rent for one run and one hundred and twenty dollars to buy the copy. A Chinese comedy such as the two-reel *A Fool to Catch a Thief* cost eight dollars to rent for a show and two hundred and forty dollars for a purchase. In the early 1920s, Chinese films were already made with both English and Chinese inter-titles, which intended for both Chinese and English-speaking audiences. In addition to price differences in film rental and sale, to rent a film from the Chinese company, an exhibitor was required to pay a deposit, or get a reliable third party as a guarantor. It was very likely that it was a common practice in film distributing business for both Chinese and foreign films.²⁰⁵

It seemed that an exhibitor bore more cost for a film rental than a distributor did. For example, if a print was damaged, lost, or destroyed during its transportation, an exhibitor had to pay fifty dollars per reel for its replacement. Also, it was expected that an exhibitor should pay for the shipping costs and insurance for the print.²⁰⁶ As to the profit-sharing, if with a contract, a distributor normally charged an exhibitor rental price and shared the profit with the exhibitor by fifty and fifty. If without a contract, a distributor would charge an exhibitor a list price for a print, usually prepaid in cash.²⁰⁷ Since distributors made their money by film rentals and profit-sharing with exhibitors, the more movie theaters, or the more first-run and the second-run theaters a distributor had, the more profit he was able to make. Frequently, a distributor would send to exhibitors a list of upcoming movies available so that they could book movies in advance. Here is part of a list circulated by distributors regarding available movies to be booked (Table 1):

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ NARA, RG-59, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929, M 329, Microfilm Roll 123, 0945.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Table 1. Exhibitor's list of available films

Title	Name of “Star”	Rental Price (Hong Kong Currency)
<i>Mystery of Eagle’s Cliff</i>		1 Reel \$75
<i>The Lost Empire</i>		3 Reels \$175
<i>Little Reformer</i>	Besse Love	5 reels \$350
<i>Honorable Algy</i>	Charles Ray	5 Reels \$350
<i>The Desert Man</i>	William S. Hart	5 Reels \$350
<i>The Gun Fighter</i>	William S. Hart	5 Reels \$300
<i>Cross Currents</i>	Helen Ware	5 Reels \$250
<i>A Gamble for Love</i>	Violet Hopson	5 Reels \$300
<i>Thias</i>	Mary Garden	6 Reels \$375
<i>Grand Passion</i>	Dorothy Philips	6 Reels \$450
Comedies:		
<i>Fatty at San Diego</i>	Roscoe Arbuckle	1 Reel \$100
<i>Charlie’s Recreation</i>	Charlie Chaplin	1 Reel \$150

<i>The Adventure</i>	Charlie Chaplin	2 Reels \$200
<i>Behind the Screen</i>	Charlie Chaplin	2 Reels \$225
<i>All For Nutting</i>	Charlie Chaplin	1 Reel \$75
<i>A Small Town Bully</i>	Arbuckle & Normand	2 Reels \$225

The latest films in the list were dated in 1917, nearly ten years old when the list was being circulated among exhibitors in the southern parts of China.²⁰⁸ Also, the list gives us an idea about the price range, type of films being shown, and the selling point of a film. As nowadays, a movie star can be a selling point of a picture as his/her name was listed side by side with the film. Rental prices varied with types and length of a film. Apparently, comedy was more expensive for rental: one reel of comedy cost from \$75 to \$113 while one reel of the drama film only cost between \$50 and \$75. The longer a film was, the more rental charge it would have. Among films with the same number of reels, it is hard to find a correlation between a film's production date and its price. For example, although *Cross Currents* (1915) was fifty dollars cheaper than that of *A Gamble for Love* (1917), Charlie Chaplin's *Behind the Screen's* (1916)

²⁰⁸ *Honorable Orgy* (1916), *The Desert Man* (1917), *The Gun Fighter* (1917), *Cross Currents* (1915), *A Gamble For Love* (1917), *Thias* (1917), *Fatty at San Diego* (1913), *Charlie's Recreation* (1914), *The Adventurer* (1917), *Behind the Screen* (1916), *All for Nutting* (1916), *A Small Town Bully* (1915), <http://www.imdb.com>. The list was part of Leroy Weber's report to the Department of the State in Washington D.C. in April 1926. Weber was a consul at Amoy at that time. Amoy is currently called Xiamen.

rental was a little bit higher than that of *The Adventurer* (1917).²⁰⁹ From the list, we can see that Charlie Chaplin's early comedy shorts still attracted Chinese audiences in the late 1920s. Inevitably, there was typo in the list, which might be made by a distributor, or by a typist: the short *All For Nutting* (1916) was under Chaplin's name. Released in May 1916, the short film starred Orral Humphrey and Lucille Ward, two names that did not sound so familiar to Chinese audience as that of Chaplin. It was a possibility that the distributor might just deliberately make the mistake to sell a work by less popular stars. Once an exhibitor made his choice in the films he wanted, he would contact the distributor. Negotiation of prices was always involved. Once a contract was finalized, prints would be sent to the exhibitor a few days before it was played so as to allow the exhibitor to have a pre-screening event, at which, journalists and film critics would be invited. Commonly, it was a distributor who provided an exhibitor all advertising materials such as photos, posters and slides. This kind of practice made advertisements of a film look similar in different newspapers, sometimes even in different parts of the country, especially if the materials were given by the same distributor. Like a film print, film-related publicity materials were required to be returned to their distributor, otherwise, the exhibitor would have to pay for them. If a print was transported to another city for screening, it was usually put in metal containers, which were sealed and packed in 12-cubic-feet wooden boxes and sent by direct ship or train.²¹⁰

In the previous part of this chapter, I have given a general account of the film distribution business in 1920s Shanghai including the Hollywood's major offices and agents in the city

²⁰⁹ *The Adventurer* (1917), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0007613>, last accessed October 29, 2008; *Behind the Screen* (1916), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0006414/>, last accessed October 29, 2008. *The Adventurer* is thirty-one minutes long while *Behind the Screen* is fifteen minutes long.

²¹⁰ Leroy Webber, "Motion Picture Theatres in Amoy," April 10, 1926, *Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China 1910-1929*, NARA, M329, Roll 123: 1-11, RG-59.

including their locations and their business practice; in the remaining part of this chapter, using the United Artists Shanghai agent as an example, I will investigate the agent's regular activities and functions in distributing American films in Shanghai as well as in other parts of China.

3.3 A CASE STUDY: THE UNITED ARTISTS IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Aside from the flagrant piracy of American films in the early 1920s, the Shanghai agent of United Artists in the 1920s experienced one of the most turbulent events in Chinese history: the May 30th Massacre in Shanghai in 1925. There were also civil wars between warlords from 1920 to 1928, and the war between the Nationalist Party with the Beijing Government from 1926 to 1928. Even as early as in 1924, reports from the UA agent in Shanghai mentioned the military situation in the city and all over China. The warring state of China was not over until in 1928 with the National Party army occupied Beijing, China's capital. The hostile situation in China was well discussed in the United Artists' monthly or bi-monthly reports to its Tokyo office as it had badly affected the company's distribution business in China. As a matter of fact, civil wars in 1920s China were one of the most important factors that affected the performance of the Krisel and Krisel in the country as throughout its correspondence with the UA Tokyo office, the word war and that of similar kind appeared constantly in the reports. Here is the report of January 1925 by John Albeck, the general manager of UA Tokyo office, sending a mixed message about the situation in China,

Although civil war has badly interfered with business 1924 showed
marked progress above 1923 and we expect further progress in

1925....Peking stopped showing completely for about 2 months and the last month has been very bad in Shanghai with revolutionary soldiers camping in the outskirts of the city.²¹¹

Unlike his prediction, the hostilities continued through March 1925 as the report to the headquarters in New York said, “There has been a terrible slump of business in China which may be traced down to the Civil War, as the primary cause thereof.”²¹² The situation continued to affect the distribution business of the UA Shanghai office even in the summer 1925. Here is a passage from the report of June 5, 1925,

We want to inform you that civil war of rather serious character has broken out in Shanghai, and unfortunately, will affect our business in this city rather badly for the time being. We expected an exceptionally good June month in Shanghai with two super-features and a number of our ordinary features scheduled for release, but we will now probably have no playings in this city at all during the present month.²¹³

The civil war referred to the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925, which led to a nationwide anti-imperialistic movement. The movement started in early May of 1925 with a conflict between the Chinese workers and the management of a Japanese cotton mill in Shanghai. It reached its climax when the Chinese worker Ku Chen-hung was killed by a Japanese foreman.

²¹¹ Chas. Dreher to Dennis F. O’Brien, January 31, 1925, O’Brien, 94/4, UAC.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ John Albeck to the UAC headquarters, June 5, 1925, O’Brien, 94/5, UAC.

Inspired by Ku's death, students went to protest on May 30, joined by more workers. An intense conflict took place between the students and the police force in the International Settlement, in which 13 students were shot dead and 20 were seriously wounded. After this massacre, a general strike against imperialism was organized, which lasted two months.²¹⁴ During the period, all the movie theaters in the city were closed because it was not safe for people to go to see a foreign movie at a movie theater run by a foreign owner in an international settlement.

Sometimes, the United Artists headquarters would write to the Krisel and Krisel to warn the Shanghai agent of a political crisis in China. Edmund H. Benson wrote to Krisel in January 1927, "We are much concerned with the political situation which at present exists in China and Manchuria. We realize from newspaper reports that a crisis is imminent and that the situation may change within 24 hours...."²¹⁵ The civil war lasted the whole year of 1927 and part of 1928 as the following report indicated, "the political situation continues to affect business, particularly in the out-ports of China. Actually warfare is going on in and about Soochow and Nanjing, two cities respectively one and five hours' train from Shanghai. Frankly, matters have reached such a serious crisis in China that theatre business is shot to pieces."²¹⁶

The situation in Shanghai was getting so bad that Krisel even considered sending his wife and three children back to the United States because the city might not be a safe place to stay any more.²¹⁷ From the reports to the UA headquarters in New York, we can see that the year 1927 seemed to be the worst year for its agents in Shanghai. In early 1928, the report changed to a more optimistic tone about its business in China, with a mood of retrospection,

²¹⁴ Hung-Ting Ku, "Urban Mass Movement: The May Thirtieth Movement in Shanghai," *Modern Asian Studies* 13:2 (1979): 197-216.

²¹⁵ TPM (UAC's assistant manager of foreign department), a letter to E.C. Raftery, January 26, 1927, O'Brien, 95/5, UAC. Edmund H. Benson was appointed as the Special Representative of the UA Headquarters, Japan approximately in June 1926.

²¹⁶ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, April 12, 1927, O'Brien, 95/1, UAC.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

...We are able to predict a healthy outlook for the year 1928, providing that no hostilities break out in the neighborhood of Shanghai, which at this writing seems very unlikely. Like Japan, China has passed through one of its most disastrous years in history, and hundreds of mercantile establishments have closed their affairs in this territory pending the cessation of hostilities which at present make operations both unsafe and unprofitable.²¹⁸

It was not until in June 1928 when the Nationalist Party army defeated the Beijing government and seized the capital city that the civil war in China came to an end. It was in this kind of unstable situation that the Krisel and Krisel ran its business in Shanghai as well as other parts of the country. As is shown in its reports, wars had a devastating effect upon the distribution business in several ways. First, when a war broke out, martial law was declared, which meant fewer movie shows would be given as cinemas had to be closed before ten in the evening, sometimes, before eleven o'clock.²¹⁹ Second, war also affected the transportation of prints to other parts of the country because railway or waterway system might be temporarily disconnected.²²⁰ Also, military trouble could affect the main staff of the Shanghai agent as evidenced by the report indicating that Krisel might leave with his family back to the United States due to the increasingly critical situation in Shanghai.²²¹

²¹⁸ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, January 15, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

²¹⁹ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, April 12, 1927, O'Brien, 95/1, UAC.

²²⁰ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, Sept. 10, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

²²¹ Benson to Kelly, April 12, 1927.

In addition to the political situation that greatly affected the United Artists distributing business in Shanghai, such factors as weather and emergence of new popular entertainments could also have an impact upon its performance. Summer was not a good season for going to a movie theater because temperatures in the hottest season in Shanghai could go as high as 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Outdoor movie shows at night were thus more popular than indoor shows. Also in cities other than Shanghai, some movie theaters were even closed in July and August.²²² In addition to the seasonal factor, the rising popularity of the greyhound racing club was a strong rival to the movie business in late 1920s Shanghai. The greyhound racing club was established in early 1928 in the French Concession jointly by French and Chinese businessmen. It had two admission scales: one and two Mexican dollars, which were almost the same admissions for movie theatres. Because the racing was held every Saturday night, which was the best night of all week for the movie business in Shanghai, it was believed to draw about 10,000 people away from the city's movie theaters.²²³ "The greyhound race clubs still constitute very serious competition to the motion picture theaters."²²⁴ Because of these factors, the UA Shanghai office tried to avoid scheduling the latest release pictures at the Carlton Theater, its first-run movie theater in Shanghai. "(We) still consider it safest to withhold playing of percentage first runs during July and August."²²⁵

Sometimes, attitudes of audiences towards a film could also affect the Shanghai agent's performance. For example, when *Sadie Thompson* (1928) had its first run at the Carlton Theatre in 1928, its box office was not satisfactory partly because American missionaries who made up of a large percentage of audiences refused to go to see the movie due to the film's controversy

²²² John Albeck to the UAC headquarters, July 2, 1925, O'Brien, 94/5, UAC.

²²³ Benson to Kelly, Sept. 10, 1928.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

back in the United States.²²⁶ Based upon Somerset Maugham's short novel, the film describes a story of a missionary who attempts to rescue Sadie Thompson, a "fallen" woman. Before the novel was put onto screen, it had a stage version in which Mr. Vargas, the soul-saving priest does not have audiences' sympathy. The role incurred "displeasure of the censorial bodies."²²⁷ No wonder, when the movie was shown, it was criticized for the role as well.²²⁸ This example also shows the possible main audiences in the first-run theatres in 1920s Shanghai.

Despite the political and social situations in China, Krisel and Krisel still managed to fulfill its regular functions during the most difficult years in its history. As UA's only agent in China, the office mainly performed six main functions, which included writing reports, negotiation, scheduling pictures, expanding distributing business in other cities; contacting the US government agents regarding film distribution, and controlling print. In the following part, I will illustrate its function in detail with examples.

UA's Shanghai agents did not write reports directly to the headquarters, instead, they were supposed to report to the UA office in Tokyo, who would submit a monthly or bi-monthly report to the office in Tokyo. A monthly report to Tokyo office covered almost everything regarding the factors that affected film business all over China, from the disconnection of railway system to the military mobilization of a staff member. Certainly, it also included the box office of a first and second run film. For example, when Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* was shown at the Carlton Theater and the Isis Theater in 1928, the report gave high credits to the comedian's attraction to the audiences in Shanghai, "Our percentage return in addition to the stipulation guarantee proved that our faith in Charlie Chaplin's drawing power in China was well

²²⁶ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, July 10, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

²²⁷ Mordaunt Hall, "The Screen," *New York Times*, February 6, 1928, 12.

²²⁸ "Paris Bewildered by 'Rain,'" *New York Times*, March 3, 1927, 23.

founded.”²²⁹ This kind of feedback was important as it could help shape the headquarters’ decision in distributing movies that were profitable in the Chinese market.

The agent was responsible for establishing and maintaining the first and second run theaters in the city. For example, when the Capitol Theater was being built in 1927, Lo Kan, who worked for the Krisel and Krisel, tried to make the state-of-the-art theater part of the United Artists’ theater circuit.²³⁰ Besides expanding business in Shanghai, the UA Shanghai agent was also actively involved in distributing business in other parts of China. Unlike Universal, United Artists did not have agents in different parts of the countries; instead, it only had its office in charge of the distribution business all over China including: Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjing, Harbin, Dalian, Mukden, Canton, Hong Kong, and Macau. For example, in 1927, a representative from the UA Shanghai agent managed to make a contract of the first and second releases in Harbin, a northern city in China.²³¹ Starting from 1928, through its Shanghai agent, United Artists was able to secure growing revenues because of increasing distribution from the country’s northern cities, including Beijing and Tianjing.²³²

Contacting governments regarding tax and censorship issues was also one of the responsibilities of the Krisel and Krisel as a film distributing agent. For instance, in November 1925, an international conference was held in Beijing, at which, the issue of tax increase was raised. Since the end of the 1900, the import duty in China had been 5 % ad valorem on all articles, including films. However, various proposals for a tax increase from 5% to 7.5%, 10%, or 12.5% ad valorem were given. In order to get updated information on the conference, Krisel

²²⁹ A Report to New York Headquarters, April 15, 1928, O’Brien, 95/4, UAC.

²³⁰ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, April 12, 1927, O’Brien, 95/1, UAC. Owned by the Messrs. S.E. Shahmoon & Co., the Capitol Theater was built for both stage plays and motion pictures. With a capacity of 890 seats, it was supposed to be the only movie theater that had the cooling plant system.

²³¹ John Albeck to the UAC headquarters in New York, August 22, 1927, O’Brien, 95/5, UAC.

²³² E.H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, November 20, 1927, O’Brien, 95/5, UAC.

and Krisel also kept close contact with the American Embassy in Beijing on the issue.²³³ Another main function of Krisel and Krisel in the UA film distributing business in China was to make sure that the company's print should be safely returned. Especially in the time of war, loss or damage of a print could mean a high replacement fee, screening without compensation, and dissemination of piracy.

Aside from print control, the agent was also in charge of scheduling United Artists pictures with the movie theaters. By May, 1928, it had established a sophisticated the UA circuits in Shanghai with Carlton Theater as the first-run theater, the Isis Theater as the second-run, the Beijing Theater showing the third-run releases, and the Wuchang, New Helen, Moon Palace, and the Great World Entertainment Club as the exhibitors of oldest releases.²³⁴

To sum up, film distributing business in 1920s Shanghai was affected by different factors such as war, weather, tax, and the changing taste of the city's local and foreign community. Because of so many variables, more often than not, it was difficult to predict whether a film would be well-received, especially in a transnational context. It was also important for Hollywood distributors to work closely with local exhibitors regarding the reception of a film. In the next chapter, I will examine the exhibition of Hollywood films in Shanghai in order to give a whole picture of the film business in 1920s China.

²³³ John Albeck to Montford Steele, November 14, 1925, O'Brien, UAC, 94/5.

²³⁴ June report, pictures shown in theatres of Shanghai in May 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

4.0 CHAPTER THREE: PARIS OF THE ORIENT—SHANGHAI IN THE 1920S

A black-and-white photo of the Fuzhou Road in 1920s Shanghai has a busy scene: the flat and wide street is flanked by various stores and shops, with banners announcing big sales flying in front. At these stores, shoppers could find almost everything they needed to enjoy a traditional or modern life such as long-play disks, beautifully-illustrated books, and freshly-roasted teas (Fig. 4). Not only do the stores show a mixture of old and new cultures, the transportation on view also symbolizes the city's transition to a modern era: rickshaw runners jostle with cars and buses in the midst of Chinese in either native clothes or Western-style suits.²³⁵

Shanghai in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s was a metropolis with two-million people, full of transition and excitement. On a busy street, two-wheeled carts moved with agility among sedan chairs, horse carriages, bicycles, private cars, taxis, and trolleys.²³⁶ Electricity lamps started to replace gas lamps at home and in public places although gas was still a major energy source for lighting all over the city. The hand-cranked telephone was regarded as the

²³⁵ A photo I purchased in Shanghai in 2007, with a caption of Tea Shop at Foocho Road. The Foocho Road is the old name of the Fuzhou Road. Unfortunately, there was no information on the photo regarding its photographer and for what purpose it was taken.

²³⁶ Tao Xu, "The Popularization of Bicycles and Modern Society of Shanghai," *Historical Review*, issue 1 (2007): 103-113.

<http://www.sass.org.cn/eWebEditor/UploadFile/00n/ull/20070518142738276.pdf>, last accessed October 21, 2008.

most efficient way of communicating; nevertheless, hand-delivered letters were still widely used within different sectors of the city because phone lines had not yet connected the districts.²³⁷ The government-run postal system began offering more services, yet, foreign-run mails still competed with it for business.²³⁸ Above all, Shanghai was the first city in China to go through the transition to modernization: in the 1920s it was the nation's industrial, commercial, financial, foreign trade, transportation and cultural center.²³⁹

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Shanghai had been divided into three sections: the International Settlement, the French Concession, and the Chinese territory, which I discussed briefly and broadly in the second chapter. This chapter, after greater detail, I will examine how foreign concessions in 1920s Shanghai shaped the entertainment and culture in the city. Known as *zujie* to the Chinese, the International Settlement and the French Concession were managed by foreigners. The two *zujie* are similar in nature, structure, and function.²⁴⁰ The governments in both territories exercised extraterritorial jurisdiction and administrative authority, in most cases, independent of the Chinese authority.²⁴¹ As “a country inside the country,” residents in *zujie*

²³⁷ Liyong Xue, *Jiu Shanghai Zujie Shi Hua*; or *History of Old Shanghai Zujie* (Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2002), 144.

²³⁸ Xue, 153.

²³⁹ John E. Orchard, “Shanghai,” *Geographical Review* 26:1 (January 1936): 1-36.

²⁴⁰ Ducheng, Ruan, *Zu Jie Zhi Du Yu Shanghai Gong Gong Zu Jie*; or *Concession System and Shanghai International Settlement* (Shanghai: Fa Yun Shu Wu, 1936): 2. A settlement refers to one area designated by the Chinese government which a foreign government can rent directly from local Chinese. As the lease is between individuals, that is, foreign and local residents, the settlement system is also called “min zu,” or “rent among people.” A concession refers to one designated area rented directly by the Chinese government to a foreign government. As the lease is between governments, it is called “Guo Zu,” or “rented among nations.” Chengkang Fei, *Zhong Guo Zu Jie Shi*, or *History of Chinese Concession* (Shanghai: Publishing House of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1991), 392. According to Fei Chengkang, both Shanghai International Settlement and Shanghai Concession of French are of the category of settlement because foreigners from both areas rented their places directly from individual Chinese. The French Concession was called “concession” because there was no equivalent French word for “settlement.” Both of them were called *zujie*, while the International Settlement is called “gong gong zu jie,” which means public concession, the French concession is called “fa *zujie*,” just as its French name indicated.

²⁴¹ *Ming Guo Cong Shu*; or *Serial Books of the Republic Period* (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore, 1931): 93-94. The government of the International Settlement of Shanghai is “Gong Bu Ju,” or Shanghai Municipal Council. They held meetings every two or three weeks. They are not paid for the position as council members as all of them had

enjoyed more political and economic freedom than their counterparts in the city's Chinese territory. More banks, companies, schools, hospitals, publishing houses, opera houses, and movie theatres were built in *zujie*, or foreign concessions than in the Chinese territory. Writing of the Peking opera's presence in the area, Catherine Vance Yeh identifies the lack of restriction there as a key factor: "as the Foreign Settlements knew none of these restrictions, theatres and actors there found a new type of public arena in which they were free to develop entertainment into a major attraction."²⁴² The city's thriving entertainment business could also be contributed to two main factors, according to Yeh in her significant work on Shanghai culture at the turn of the twentieth century, one was "the effective control over organized crime" and the other was "the efficient management of the city's civic center." All these factors helped make Shanghai as the country's center of traditional entertainment business.²⁴³

In addition to helping establishing Shanghai as the center of Chinese traditional opera, the less restricted control in the foreign settlements in 1910s Shanghai also promoted the boom of modern entertainment sites such as movie theaters. It was the *zujie* that saw the birth of the nation's first movie theatre—Hongkew Cinema in 1908 and the succeeding boom of movie theaters in the 1910s: the city's ten earliest cinemas were all opened in *zujie*. According to Zhang Zhen, the emergency and flourishing of cinema in Shanghai suggested a dynamic, mixed, mass, and commercial urban culture that went beyond the cinema itself. As "an integral part of

business or profession. By 1930, it had 13 committees, one of which was the newly-founded Publicity Committee. Xue, 32-33. According to Xue, in early 20th century, the Shanghai Municipal Council had two committees, one of which was Board of Film Censors. The government of the French Settlement is called La Municipalite Francaise de Changhai, or "Gong Dong Ju."

²⁴² Catherine Vance Yeh, "Where is the Center of Cultural Production?: The Rise of the Actor to National Stardom and the Beijing/Shanghai Challenge (1860s-1910s)," *Late Imperial China* 25: 2 (December 2004): 90.

²⁴³ Catherine Vance Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850-1910* (Seattle: University of Seattle Press, 2006), 12.

Shanghai's metropolitan identity," it not only helped transform the city's cultural landscape, but also helped the people there acquire new means of expression.²⁴⁴

Zujie also nurtured a commercial culture in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. Since the late 1900s, the city had seen a thriving economy of Chinese traditional operas such as *Huju*, *Yueju*, *Kunju*, and *Huiju*, and *Peking* opera performed in nearly twenty newly-built Western-style opera houses. To Chinese opera fans, new-style opera houses meant different viewing habits from teahouses: in an opera theatre, they could no longer expect hot towels, or sometimes hot tea during a show; and they had to pay admission before entering a theater to see a show.²⁴⁵ Moreover, there was a pricing system in the admission of an opera house while traditional Chinese tea houses charged a flat rate.²⁴⁶ Yeh believes that this "more consciously commercial" pricing system, together with the star system at opera theatres, both contributed to the rise of cultural production in 1910s Shanghai.²⁴⁷ Aside from full-length Chinese operas, short, individual acts were also performed in small tea houses and gardens for cheaper prices.

By the late 1910s, Chinese operas, American movies, Chinese stage plays, and other variety shows were all present in Shanghai public entertainment sites. Chinese operas predominated this mix. One can have a glimpse of taste of Shanghai audiences from the advertisements of the New Year's Day issue of *Shen Bao* in 1920. Of the fifteen entertainment advertisements, two are for spoken stage plays, two are for magic shows, four are for movie

²⁴⁴ Zhang Zhen, 43-89.

²⁴⁵ Hongxin Shen and Bingkun Zhang, "Ceng Jing Cang Hai Nan Wei Shui," or "After experiencing the magnificence of ocean, all other sources of water seem inferior," *Xinmin Evening*, March 4, 2007. The title, using a line from a famous Chinese poem, tries to show that early in the 20th century is one of the best time for the development and prosperity of the traditional Chinese operas.

²⁴⁶ Yeh, "Where is the Center of Cultural Production?: The Rise of the Actor to National Stardom and the Beijing/Shanghai Challenge (1860s-1910s)," 82. According to Yeh, The admissions to an opera theatre in Shanghai depended upon the location of the seat.

²⁴⁷ Yeh, "Where is the Center of Cultural Production?: The Rise of the Actor to National Stardom and the Beijing/Shanghai Challenge (1860s-1910s)," 82-83.

shows, and seven are for Chinese opera performances. Not surprisingly, advertisements for Chinese operas took over most of the entertainment advertisement page.²⁴⁸ From the ad, we can see that during this period, film still had yet to gain its legitimacy as a popular entertainment in the city.

By the late 1910s, Shanghai had around ten movie theatres, all of which were located in foreign concessions. These included: the Hongkew Theater (1908), the Victoria Theatre (1909), the Helen Theatre (1910), the Apollo Theatre (1910), the Olympic Theatre (1914), the Dong He Theatre (1914), the Republic Theatre (1915), the Isis Theatre (1917), the China Theatre (1917), and the Carter Theatre (1917). Before 1914, films exhibited at the handful number of movie theatres were French, American, German, and British, with French dominating. However, after World War I, more American movies swarmed into Shanghai theatres. Of the city's earliest cinemas, six were built during the war. Indeed, immediately thereafter American product almost monopolized the China's film market.²⁴⁹ The late 1910s and early 1920s saw a boom in American film production and attempts to develop foreign markets for it, as I examined in the previous two chapters. However, before that period, film exhibition in China was little more than a novelty with limited social influence. Instead, traditional Chinese opera was a dominant public entertainment during that period.

What was the situation like when China was flooded with American films? When and how did Hollywood start to gain its legitimacy as a popular mass medium in Shanghai? And how was this foreign medium received? Answers to these questions can further our understanding of exogenous cultural products in a transnational context.

²⁴⁸ *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1920, 5.

²⁴⁹ Jinghua Cheng, *Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi*, or *History of the Development of Chinese Film* (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1981), 12.

In this chapter, I will give a historical account of Shanghai theatrical performances before the big influx of Hollywood in the early 1920s. In so doing, first, I will give a background description of the city of Shanghai in the late 1910s, its international settlements, French concessions, and Chinese territory.²⁵⁰ Therefore, I aim to show how the foreign settlements construct cultural and social contexts in the city. Second, I will discuss performances of Chinese operas on 1920s Shanghai stages as well as their potential audience.²⁵¹ Then, I will discuss locations of theaters in the city and the structure of Chinese traditional theaters and their daily practices in order to provide a point of comparison with the changes wrought by the arrival of American films.

4.1 THE CITY OF SHANGHAI IN THE LATE 1910S

Shanghai was among China's port cities that first opened to foreign trade under the Nanjing Treaty after the Opium War (1840-1842), a war between the Great Britain and the Qing Dynasty.²⁵² The war ended with the Britain's overwhelming victory. When the British built its settlement in Shanghai in the 1840s, the city was already the country's commercial center.²⁵³ Following the example of the Great Britain, France and the United States established their

²⁵⁰ Frederic Wakeman and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of East Asia Studies, University of California, 1992). See also Meng Yue, *Shanghai and the Edges of Empires* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University of Press, 1996); and Zhang's *An Amorous History*.

²⁵¹ One major primary source for this subject is *Shenbao*'s daily theater page in late 1910s, on which Chinese operas were advertised, previewed, and reviewed.

²⁵² John E. Orchard, "Shanghai," *Geographical Review* 26:1 (January 1936): 4.

²⁵³ Orchard, 3. However, Manley Hudson believes that Shanghai was not the country's commercial center until it was formally opened to the foreign powers in the 1840s. See Manley O. Hudson, "the Rendition of the International Mixed Court at Shanghai," *American Journal of International Law* 21:3 (July, 1927):452.

settlements in the late 1840s. In 1899, the American Settlement and the British Settlement, initially divided by Suzhou Creek, merged and formed the International Settlement of Shanghai.²⁵⁴ Even in 1920, local people still referred to the area north of the Creek as the American Settlement. For example, in one 1920 issue of *Shen Bao*, one film advertisement had this line: “The Shanghai Isis Theatre is located in the American Settlement.”²⁵⁵ Hongkew District was located in the initial American Settlement, a relatively remote area compared with the initial British and French settlements.

By the late 1910s, the town had been a metropolis known as “Paris of the Orient.” People of all professions and from all over the world came to the city to make their fortune, to experience exciting adventures, or simply to make a living. The city’s population increased ten times between 1842 and 1945. Population in the foreign concessions doubled or trebled twice within two decades.²⁵⁶ Following are some census numbers of both *zujie* (Table 2):²⁵⁷

Table 2. Census numbers in 1920s Shanghai

Year	International Settlement	French Concession
1920	783,146	170,229
1925	840,226	297,072
1930	1,007,868	434,807

²⁵⁴ Chengkang Fei, *Zhong Guo Zu Jie Shi*; or *History of Chinese Concession* (Shanghai: Publishing House of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 1991), 251.

²⁵⁵ *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1920, 5.

²⁵⁶ Wakeman and Yeh., *Shanghai Sojourners*, 1

²⁵⁷ By 1914, the area of the International Settlement had been over 13.3 square kilometers, the area of the French Concession is 6.7 square meters. By the early 1920s, the *Zujie* area expanded to over 60 square kilometers. Fei, 271.

The majority of the population in *zujie* was Chinese, moreover, more Chinese lived in the area outside *zujie*, which was called “hua jie,” or Chinese territory because of relatively low cost of living there. The population of the whole city increased at the rate of over 100,000 a year, in 1920, it was almost 2 million, in 1925, it was over 2.6 million, and in 1930, it was over 3.1 million.²⁵⁸ The population in Shanghai was largely made up of people from other parts of the world or the country. People could travel freely among *zujie* and *huajie* unless there was a martial law during a war.²⁵⁹ According to Zhang Zhen, they are “floating subjects, including foreign travelers and refugees (notably Russians) and Chinese migrants (who often arrived in waves of war and natural disasters).²⁶⁰ Class difference was also striking among the city’s population. To capitalists, Shanghai was a paradise where they could make a fortune over night. However, to most local workers, Shanghai was a place of torture where they could barely survive, “the most gripping image of Shanghai capitalism and private ownership in its prime was captured perhaps by Xia Yan, the writer and journalist, in his classic reportage of the system of teenage women contract labor in the city’s cotton mills. Shanghai, wrote Xia Yan, was “a city of forty-eight-storey skyscrapers built upon twenty-four layers of hell.”²⁶¹ These lower-class industrial workers made less than one yuan a week,²⁶² in striking contrast with wealthy people who made at least two thousand yuan a month.²⁶³ Between these polarized classes was the middle-class Shanghainese such as skilled workers, peddlers, businessmen, office clerks,

²⁵⁸ As to the foreign population in the International Settlement, in 1920, it had 23,307 out of 783,146, less than 3 % of the population in the settlement; in 1925, it had 29,947 out of 840,226, nearly 3.6 %; in 1930, it had 36,471 out of 1,007,868, a little over 3.6 %. The data of the French Concession is not so complete, according to its 1930 census data, the foreign population in that region is 12,335 out of 434,807, a little over 2.8 % of the whole French Concession population in that year. *Shanghai Encyclopedia* (Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing House, 1989), 11. *Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao*, 139-140, 147.

²⁵⁹ Xiong, 57.

²⁶⁰ Zhang, 45.

²⁶¹ Wakeman & Yeh, 5.

²⁶² E. Perry Link, Jr, p.12.

²⁶³ Wu, 381-384.

Chinese teachers, or Chinese butlers in white families. People in this group earned around 15 to 25 yuan a month.²⁶⁴

In the new modern commercial metropolitan culture, however, these people, regardless of their background and economic situation, sought out their favorite pastimes, and became consumers of modern mass cultural products including cinema, public amusement parks, and popular cheap novels.²⁶⁵ In a metropolis, not only could Chinese find entertainment for themselves, foreign residents could also join in exciting events or games. According to E. Hauser, an American who lived in Shanghai from late 1910s to 1930s, Shanghai was a paradise for single foreigners, especially at night. Here is his description of this unmarried foreigner's hectic life in 1920s Shanghai;

If he is single, he will invite some single friends to have dinner with him. After dinner, they can go out to seek exciting entertainments. Shanghai is the most convenient place for a single man. Its night life is extremely developed, even regarded as top in the world. In bright neon-lights were numerous dancing halls, gambling houses, movie theaters, teahouses, brothels, bars. Moreover, it is packed everywhere.²⁶⁶

As the city was partly built upon migrants, both from home and abroad, it was not strange that there were many places that a single man could go to spend evenings. From Hauser's narration, we can find that the movie theatre was one of entertainment sites for foreigners in Shanghai.

²⁶⁴ Nicolas Yi Wu, 381-384, 410.

²⁶⁵ Zhang, 42-77.

²⁶⁶ E. Hauser, "The Soul of Shanghai," in *Shanghai Zujie Wenti, or Issues in Shanghai Concession*, ed. Nicolas Wu (Taipei: Zhengzhong Publishing House, 1980): 381-384.

Moreover, movie theatre was also one of the major public cultural places where Chinese and foreign viewers shared constant presence.

Elaborating upon the rise and subsequent boom of mass cultures in 1910s Shanghai, Zhang concludes that the new urban outlook was a “juxtaposition and mixture of the Chinese and foreign mores and ideas.”²⁶⁷ As a whole, Shanghai residents had the mixed Chinese and foreign cultures. However, in the International Settlement, people had more political and cultural freedom than in the Chinese territory. For example, in 1911, laws were published regulating the places that exhibited films in the Chinese territory in Shanghai, one of which was that men and women must sit separately.²⁶⁸ By contrast, movie theatres located in the International Settlement were not strictly regulated in terms of gender-based restrictions. Women and men could sit together at their own will. In terms of public entertainment, the International Settlement had an even more relaxed policy than that of the French Concession. For an instance, in the International Settlement, there was no advertisement tax if a theater put up posters, circulated flyers, or ran ads in the newspapers, however, in the French Concession, such tax was levied, sometimes at a much higher rate than that in the Chinese territory.²⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, of the earliest ten movie theaters in Shanghai only one was opened in the French Concession and the others were all opened in the International Settlement.²⁷⁰ In her research, Catherine Yeh also finds that the role *zujie* plays in Shanghai’s rise as the country’s center for cultural production and consumption. One of the main reasons is that “the unique environment of the Shanghai Foreign Concessions created a leeway in Chinese society to loosen long-held social prejudice

²⁶⁷ Zhang, 50.

²⁶⁸ Cheng, 11.

²⁶⁹ Such tax was introduced in Chinese territory before 1926. *Xiju Yuekan*, or *Theater Monthly*, June, 1928, v. 1-6. *Zhongguo Ju Chang Shi Lun*, ed. Huabing Zhou & Lianqun Zhu (Beijing Broadcasting Academy, 2003):567.

²⁷⁰ The Republic Theater was opened in the French Concession. The figure does not include movie theaters in entertainment clubs or movie theaters in big department stores.

and to flout prohibitions and class distinctions.”²⁷¹ This mixed seating in public entertainment sites also showed the influence of Westernized dating. Rather than creating more freedom for women, it allowed license for a new style of amorous relations between sexes, which also took place in dating with the rise of the public entertainments in urban and commercial culture in the Western world.²⁷²

The foreign influence in the city was also widely present beyond theatres in languages, architectures, and illustrated newspapers.²⁷³ “Foreigners brought in Western material civilization, municipal management, political system, lifestyle, morals, values and aesthetics, and made *zujie* a Western ‘flying land’ in Eastern culture.”²⁷⁴ The “flying land” also helped construct Shanghai people’s perception of the Western culture and civilization. In the minds of local residents, the terms such as “foreign” and “Western” indicate “new” and “advanced.” This mentality could be seen in one advertisement in *Shen Bao* in 1909. It says that building the Grand Stage Theater, which was supposed to be the city’s first Western-style theater, was a practical way to boost national spirit.”²⁷⁵ Obviously, it showed foreign presence or the *zujie*’s influence on Shanghai people: the very word “Western” had many positive connotations, such as “advanced,” “civilized,” and “wealthy.” In the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s, it was commonly believed that only the Western science and democracy could save a semi-feudal and semi-colonial China. Learning from Western culture and civilizations became a main goal for Chinese students studying abroad at that time.

²⁷¹ Yeh, 75.

²⁷² Such public entertainments include dance halls, amusement parks, cafes, and movie theatres. Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 48.

²⁷³ Zhang, 42-77.

²⁷⁴ Xiong Yuezhi, *Shanghai Zujie and Cultural Merge*, or *Shanghai Zujie Yu Wenhua Ronghe*, 57.

²⁷⁵ *Shen Bao*, December 23, 1909, 7.

As the country's first center that went through urban modernization, it was no coincidence that Shanghai became China's center of cultural production and consumption. As melting-pot of both Western and Chinese cultures, Shanghai formed a unique culture in the 1910s, as one scholar comments,

Some people laugh at the Shanghai culture, as supposedly it can hardly be categorized or labeled. It is like a monster that can fit anything or nothing. These are the characteristics of future civilization, which is a mixture of everything. During the mixing process, some strange phenomenon will happen. However, once it is made and purified, people will be amazed at its excellence. We only need to wait to see what will happen to Shanghai in future.²⁷⁶

In this perceptive observation about metropolitan Shanghai, the scholar sharply points out that with different influences, the city had a mixed culture that is hard to be defined and confined. Because of the city's diverse population, its culture was a mixture of modern and tradition, Western and Eastern, and urban and rural. A fancy movie theatre could exist only a couple of blocks away from a cheap entertainment site where an acrobatic show was being performed. A Chinese local opera could be staged at a Western-style theatre instead of a traditional tea house. A Chinese woman could have a fashionable Western-style hair-cut in her *Qipao*, a traditional dress for women, also known as a mandarin gown. The multi-faceted culture can also be seen in the reviews, comments, and advertisements of American films in Shanghai popular magazines in the 1920s. It is also shown in the opera houses in 1920s Shanghai, which I will cover in the following section.

²⁷⁶ Yuezi Xiong, "Shanghai Zujie Yu Wenhua Rong He;" or "Shanghai Concession and Cultural Merge," *Scholarly Monthly (Xue Shu Yue Kan)* 5 (2002): 70.

4.2 PERFORMANCES OF CHINESE OPERAS IN 1920S SHANGHAI

We have already seen that Shanghai, since its opening to foreign trade in the 1840s, had become an international metropolis with migrants across the country and the world. With a diverse population, there appeared a diverse urban culture. One of the important aspects of this diversity can be seen from the fact that different local operas were performed in the city to entertain people who spoke different dialects including the *Kunju* opera, the *Huju* opera, the *Yueju* opera, and *Peking* opera. There are several reasons for Shanghai to become the center of opera performance in the 1910s and 1920s. First, as the city became the nation's commercial, financial, and trade center, merchants and businessmen visiting from other parts of the country had a need for the local operas that were performed in their own dialects.²⁷⁷ Second, with a large diverse population, many small opera troupes were able to survive and thrive by giving daily performance in tea houses. Third, as China's center of publishing and printing, Shanghai saw a faster turnover of new opera scripts, which caused more exchange of ideas among opera singers and inspiration of more new works.²⁷⁸ Finally, a less restrictive regulatory environment for opera houses restriction in the *zujie* helped create a boom in Chinese operas during the 1910s.²⁷⁹

Of all the local operas, *Peking* opera enjoyed the most popularity, which is evidenced in the opera ads in *Shen Bao* in the early 1920s. This might result from the fact that as an opera

²⁷⁷ Ping Fang, "Xiyuan Yu Qing Mo Shanghai Gonggong Kongjian de Tuo-zhan," or "Theater and the Expansion of the Public Space in Shanghai in the Late Qing Dynasty," *Journal of East China Normal University* 38:6 (November 2006): 43.

²⁷⁸ Shanlin Zhao, "Jindai Xiqu de Nanfang Zhongxin—Shanghai," in *Di Yu Wenhua*, 43.

²⁷⁹ Yeh, "Where is the Center of Cultural Production?," 74-118.

promoted by the imperial court, *Peking* opera was better developed than other local operas in the 1910s. For example, when *Yuejue* opera was first performed in a shabby theatre in Shanghai in 1917, its performance was considered sub-standard compared with more sophisticated *Peking* opera show. However, after three years' effort, the *Yueju* opera troupe gained recognition in the city.²⁸⁰ This was a common way to success for many other local operas, that is, first a troupe performed on a small stage, then after it gained some fame, it would be invited to a big theatre to entertain much larger audiences.

As a matter of fact, performances were not extensively commercialized until after Shanghai's opening in the 1840s. Before that, Chinese operas were mainly performed at wealthy households for special occasions such as birthday parties and festive seasons. Sometimes, folk operas would be performed at public gatherings for the celebration of holidays such as the Spring Festival and the mid-Autumn Festival.²⁸¹ It was commonly regarded that the first commercial tea garden in Shanghai was San Yan Yuan Tea Garden, which was open in 1851 in Nanshi District.²⁸² This was the start of commercialization of Chinese opera performances. On the one hand, these tea houses provided a public place for opera fans to enjoy Chinese operas. On the other hand, entertaining opera shows in return, also promoted building of more tea houses. By 1912, over 120 tea houses had been opened.²⁸³ And nearly half of them were especially for the *Peking* opera shows.²⁸⁴ Moreover, teahouses in Shanghai were better run than those in other

²⁸⁰ Xuefeng Wang, "Yueju Zai Ershi Shiji Chuqi De Xinxing Yu Biange Fazhan," *Journal of Northwest University for Nationalities* 1 (2007): 94.

²⁸¹ Ping Fang, "Xiyuan Yu Qingmo Shanghai Gonggong Kongjian De Tuo-zhan," *Journal of East China Normal University* 38:6 (Nov. 2006): 43-49.

²⁸² Nanshi District was the old Chinese town in Shanghai.

²⁸³ Fang, "Xiyuan Yu Qing Mo Shanghai Gonggong Kongjian de Tuo-zhan," or "Theater and the Expansion of the Public Space in Shanghai in the Late Qing Dynasty," 44.

²⁸⁴ Lianhong Zhang, "'Haipai Jingju' Yu Jindai Zhongguo Chengshi Wenhua Yule Kongjian De Jiangou," *Journal of College of Chinese Traditional Opera* 26:3 (August 2005): 15.

cities including Beijing. Following is Zhuo An's description of tea houses in Shanghai, as compared with those in Beijing.

The admission to a tea house is 30 or 40 cents. Upstairs are the box seats. Downstairs are square tables covered with red silk cloth. Every table seats six guests. Guests are all served with tea, four plates of sunflower seeds. Halfway through the show, four boxes of hot food are served, together with frequent serving of towels. The service is good and makes one feel comfortable. Aside from the admission, one only needs to pay a small tip. When I arrived in Peking, the situation is so different. Tea houses in Beijing had the advertisement outside them to serve tea, however, no tea is served, let alone served with towels. Besides, tea pots and tea cups are too dirty to drink from. The seats are long benches and rough table, just like those cheapest ones in Shanghai.²⁸⁵

His comment provides us a general picture of a tea house in Shanghai. First, with affordable admissions, audiences are likely to be made up of people of different classes. Second, Shanghai people come to the tea houses for both relaxation and entertainment with food and tea serving during a show. Third, imaginably, amid tossing of towels, pouring tea, and serving food during a show, audiences in a tea house are noisy. Li Fei points out several differences between a Chinese tea house that hosts an opera show and a Western-style opera house: while a tea house gives a show at the request of rich patrons, a Western-style opera house sells tickets to audiences with a definite program for a show; in a new opera house no tea, food, or conversation is allowed during a show, therefore both actors and audiences are able to concentrate on the show; in a new

²⁸⁵ Zhuo An, "Jin San Shi Nian Lai Hai Shang Ju Chang Zhi Bian Qian Ji," in *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1927, New Year's Day Supplement, 8.

style opera house, there was no obvious class distinction because as long as a patron pays for the admissions, he can get the seat he wants.²⁸⁶

However, a new opera house charged more admission than a traditional tea house. A Western-style opera theater in a busy location meant a higher admission because of its better facilities, lighting, and ventilation compared with an old-style Chinese opera house. There is one thing that new style theaters inherited from their predecessors: different admissions for different seating and different time of the day. For example, in 1920, night admissions to Dan Gui Di Yi Tai, or Dan Gui No.1 Stage had five scales: 50 cents for a special box seat, 40 cents for a downstairs seat, 30 cents for a box seat on the second floor, 20 cents for a front seat on the second-floor, and 10 cents for a third-floor seat or back of the second floor. In contrast, day admission to Yi Wu Tai, or Yi Stage only cost 10 or 20 cents.²⁸⁷ The pricing system also influenced movie theaters in 1910s and 1920s Shanghai, especially after Victoria Theater--a proscenium-arch cinema built in Shanghai in 1909.²⁸⁸

Even after the boom of the Western-style opera houses in 1910s' Shanghai, the old viewing habit of tea-drinking and snack-eating during a show in a public performing place was still prevalent at some places such as "you yi chang," or amusement halls. For about 30 cents, one could pass whole afternoon in an amusement club, watching acrobatics and magic shows, listening to Chinese operas, playing pool, or watching a movie, even going to a ballroom dance. "Cheap admission, social conviviality, and diversity of programs and popular regional

²⁸⁶ Li Fei, "Lun Jindai Shanghai Xinshi Juchang De Yanghe Jiqi Yingxiang," *Journal of Shanghai Teachers University* 31:5 (September 2002): 25-32.

²⁸⁷ *Shen Bao*, Jan.1, 1920, 8.

²⁸⁸ Early places that screened movies in 1900s did not have this pricing system. Each admission cost the same amount of money. Wei Zhang, *Hu Du Jiu Ying*; or *Old Shadows of Shanghai* (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu Publishing House, 2002): 191.

performances were particularly appealing to the working class and migrants.”²⁸⁹ Of the five amusement halls in 1920, the Great World was regarded as the biggest and the best. Called “China’s No.1 Club,” it had a movie theater, several opera theaters and other entertainment sites. Admission to the club was only 10 cents. However, to see a movie at Qiankun Theater in the club cost another 8 or 16 cents, depending upon the seating. On January 1, 1920, four reels of the 31-reel film *bai lian jiao*, or *White Lotus Society*, was shown day and night at the theater. Interestingly, hot towels were given as a courtesy during the show in the movie theater. Perhaps it was a way to attract more audiences.²⁹⁰ The Great Wall, together with other four amusement clubs was located in the downtown city: Lou Wai Lou (1912), the New World (1915), the Great World (1917), Sincere Park (1917), and Tian Yun Lou (1918) of Wing On Department Store.²⁹¹

To sum up, we can see that as a metropolis full of immigrants from both home and abroad, Shanghai in the 1920s showcased a Chinese culture in transition as well as an exogenous culture in a transnational context. Local operas existed side by side with American movies, teahouses staged performances as well as public entertainment clubs, and movies theatres with different pricing systems catered to various groups of audiences. Despite their differences, almost all the entertainments had one thing in common, that is, they were not free of charge. This was an important aspect of the city’s culture—it was mercantile and commercialized, as I discussed in the previous sections.

²⁸⁹ Zhang, 59.

²⁹⁰ *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1920, 8.

²⁹¹ Zhang, *An Amorous History*, 58-64.

4.3 LOCATIONS OF MOVIE THEATRES IN 1920S' SHANGHAI

Shanghai's earliest movie theaters were normally located in Hongkew district, near the North Sichuan Road. Of the 15 movie theaters in 1920, two were in the French Concession, thirteen were in the International Settlement, of which two were on the East Nanjing Road, three were on the West Nanjing Road, and eight were in the Hongkew District, north of the Suzhou Creek, near or on the North Sichuan Road. There were several main reasons for this distribution of movie theaters by 1920 Shanghai. The first one was economic. Compared with prohibitively high rent near the East Nanjing Road, property near the North Sichuan Road was still affordable.²⁹² The two movie theaters on the East Nanjing Road were actually located on the top floor of the biggest department stores in Shanghai: the Sincere Department Store (1917) and the Wing On Department Store (1918). In addition to movies and thousands of items of merchandise, these two stores also had opera shows, magic shows, restaurants, and tea houses. Their function was like a shopping mall nowadays. The two department stores used movie theatres to attract more potential customers. The motion picture was still struggling for its legitimacy as a main urban entertainment in late 1910s Shanghai. For early cinema owners like Antonio Ramos and S.G. Hertzberg, the Hongkew district was a more practical place because of its low rental cost. The second reason for the concentration of theatres there was its location. Within a ten-minute walking distance from the East Nanjing Road, the North Sichuan Road was in an area that had a large flow of people, both passers-by and residents, who were potential movie-goers. The third reason was its good transportation. By 1908, four trolleys had gone through the Hongkew

²⁹² By 1906, Nanjing Road was already a busy commercial street in Shanghai, with a total of 184 stores, banks, and teahouses, and jeweler's. Its rent was the highest in Shanghai in the 1910s and 1920s. As its eastern part developed earlier than its Western part, the rent of the Western end is cheaper than that of the Eastern sector. Last accessed June 20, 2007. <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node70393/node70403/node72486/node72509/userobject1ai81016.html>

District, with one going directly on the North Sichuan Road, from Carter Road to the Hongkew Park.²⁹³ Almost all the earliest movie theaters such as the Victoria Theatre, the Apollo Theatre and the Olympic Theatre in Shanghai were on or near the trolley route. In 1917 Ramos opened Carter Theater, which was at one end of the trolley bus. Because the trolley made it more convenient for people to go to the places it passed, areas near the trolley lines became busy commercial districts. It makes business sense to open movie theaters on the route of a street car.

As movies gained more legitimacy as a daily entertainment in the city in the early 1920s, movie theaters expanded quickly. Moreover, the city also saw a wide spread of movie theatres to the city's downtown and other populous areas. From 1921 to 1924, eleven more cinemas were built in the city, almost the same number of the movie theaters built in the previous decade. Seven out of the eleven cinemas were still built in the Hongkew District, four were built in the city's downtown area. In 1921, Ramos built the Empire Theater--the first movie theater on the Joffre Road,²⁹⁴ the busiest road in French Concession, equivalent to the East Nanjing Road in the International Settlement. Of the four, two movie theaters were built on the Western Nanjing Road, one was the Carlton Theater, the other was the St. George's Open Air Cinema. Opened by Tianjin Film Company, the Carlton Theater was regarded as the No.1 theater in the whole country in 1923 when it was opened. It not only had a movie theater, it also had a ballroom hall where people could dance before a movie started. St. George's Open Air Cinema, in the roof garden of St. George's Hotel, was only open in summer. Watching movies outdoors became such a popular pastime on hot summer nights in Shanghai that in 1925 Majestic Lawn Cinema was

²⁹³ Shanghai Local History, last accessed on June 21, 2007.
<http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node4/node2249/node4418/node20207/node21371/node62879/userobject1ai8866.html>.

²⁹⁴ Its current name is Huaihai Road.

opened on the roof of the Majestic Hotel on the West Nanjing Road, and in 1926 the Verdum Cinema was opened on the Joffre Road.

Cinemas built in and after 1926 were mostly located in the areas other than the Hongkew District, expanding to downtown areas and densely-populated Chinese territory as movies became a more popular means of entertainment in the city. The year nineteen twenty-six was also a transitional period in the history of cinemas in Shanghai because starting from that year Chinese businessmen controlled almost all the movie theaters in the city. For the first time in modern Shanghai history, Chinese had complete monopoly of exhibition of films, both from home and abroad.²⁹⁵

In the 1920s, movie theaters in Shanghai increased every year since 1922. The following table shows the number of movie theaters in the city in one decade (Table 3):²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ The exhibition pattern and change of ownership will be covered in Chapter Seven.

²⁹⁶ Refer to Index I.

Table 3. Number of movie theatres in 1920s Shanghai

Year	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929
Number ...of Cinemas	15	16	16	19	26	27	33	40	43	46

From the above figures we can see that starting in 1923, there was a growing number of theaters in Shanghai and the year 1929 had saw the highest number of movie theaters in the city in a 10-year period. 1924 and 1926 are the two years that have high increasing rates, respectively 36.8% in 1924 and 22% in 1926. Compared with other cities in China, Shanghai had the largest number of movie theaters in the 1920s. By January 1927, Shanghai had 34 movie theaters, 20 more than Beijing and 25 more than Hongkong.²⁹⁷

Movie theaters in the late 1910s and early 1920s usually had around 700 to 900 seats, depending upon the size of cinemas. For example, the Empire Theater had a total of 788 seats, 466 were upstairs and 322 were downstairs.²⁹⁸ The Olympic Theater had 850 seats.²⁹⁹ However, movie theaters built in late 1920s, such as the Grand Theater with over 1500 seats, could accommodate large audiences. Like admissions to a Chinese opera house, tickets of a movie theater varied with different seating and different time of a day. The following are the admissions of different movie theaters in Shanghai:³⁰⁰

The Carlton Theater

Night Show (9:15 p.m.): Yue Lou (Box Seat): 2 yuan³⁰¹

Lou Ting (Balcony): 1.5 yuan

²⁹⁷ "Total List of Movie Theaters in China," in *China Film Year Book*, ed. Atsu Kann, Benjamin Cheng and D.S. Chen (Shanghai: China Film Year Book House, 1927): 1-41.

²⁹⁸ Last accessed June 25, 2007.

<http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node4/node2249/luwan/node37166/node37168/node62724/userobject1ai22187.html>.

²⁹⁹ Wei Zhang, *Hu Du Jiu Ying, Old Shadows of Shanghai* (Shanghai: Cishu Publishing House, 2002), 193.

³⁰⁰ *Shen Bao*, November 5, 1923, 17

³⁰¹ In *Shen Bao*, yuan is used, which is the same unit as dollar. Also in *North China Daily News*, dollar and cent are used. Since the admissions for the three cinemas appeared on the same page of *Shen Bao*, I use yuan as was originally published. 1 yuan=100 cents.

You Ting (Priority Dress Circle): 1 yuan

Tou Ting (Top Dress Circle): 60 cents

Day Show (3:00 p.m.): Upstairs Stalls: 1 yuan (for adults), 60 cents (for children)

Downstairs Stalls: 60 cents (for adults), 30 cents (for children)

The Athena Theater

Night Show (9:15 p.m.): Bao Xiang (Box Seat): 1.2 yuan

Lou Ting (Balcony): 90 cents

You Ting (Priority Dress Circle): 70 cents

Tou Ting (Top Dress Circle): 40 cents

Day Show (5:00 p.m.): Bao Xiang: 80 cents

Lou Ting: 60 cents

You Ting: 40 cents

Tou Ting: 20 cents

The Empire Theater

Night Show (7:15 p.m., 9:15 p.m.) Only: Bao Xiang: 1 yuan

Half price for children

Lou Ting: 60 cents

Te Ting (Priority Dress Circle): 40 cents

Zheng Ting (Dress Circle): 20 cents

In 1923, the most expensive cinema was the Carlton Theater as its ticket was more than double of that of the Empire Theater. Athena's admissions were in the middle of the two. The price difference might be caused by a theatre's location and its potential audiences. Located close to the East Nanjing Road, Carlton Theater was able to charge more admissions than the other two. Also, the well-decorated Carlton Theater was especially targeted for wealthy audiences who could go to see a movie after a ballroom dancing, the Empire Theater and the Athena Theater aimed to attract more common audiences in the city.

In 1920, admissions to a movie theater were similar to those of a Chinese opera house. For a cheap movie theater where only a three-reel detective film and a four-reel overly-romantic love film were shown, admissions were twenty cents for a balcony seat and ten cents for a seat in the hall, just like those of a Chinese opera house with no famous actors in. However, admissions to a more upscale opera house ranged from ten cents to fifty cents, with special box seats as the most expensive ones and upper circle seats as the lowest ones.³⁰² In early 1920s, ten cents was around 1.0% to 1.6 % of a labor worker's monthly salary if he worked ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week.³⁰³ For a skilled worker like a carpenter or a painter, his daily salary can buy five to eight ten-cent admissions to a cheap movie theater or a ticket to a nice cinema in the day.³⁰⁴ In 1920, ten cents could mean over half a pound beef, or more than one pound rice, for over an-

³⁰² *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1920, 5, 8.

³⁰³ Nicolas Yi Wu (Chunyi Wu), *Shanghai Zujie Wenti*; or *Issues of Shanghai Concessions* (Taipei: Zheng Zhong Shuju, 1980), 410; *Zhongguo Xian Dai Shi Zi Liao Xuan Ji*, or *Collection of Chinese Modern History*, ed. Peng Ming (Beijing: China People's Publishing House, 1987), 42.

³⁰⁴ Peng, 42.

hour of laughter, tears, thrills, and excitement in a shabby, noisy movie theater while watching part of a detective film or a short Buster Keaton's movie.³⁰⁵

Middle-class Shanghainese in 1920s earned around 15 to 25 yuan a month.³⁰⁶ While going to a 10-cent movie theater would not be a financial burden for them, however, watching a feature film in the best seat of a first-run movie theater such as Carlton Theater might cost 8 % to 13% of their monthly salary. However, more affordable seat in an expensive movie theater could always be an office clerk's choice of spending the night. To generate more revenue, almost all movie theaters had cheaper afternoon shows. For less than one yuan, a mother could take her child to a first-run movie theater for the latest show.

For people who earned at least two thousand yuan a month, going to a movie theater could be a pretentious occasion or a fashion show, especially when a new movie was on. "Shanghai did not have a formal opera house, or a lecture hall. One new film is a big thing in the social list. Consuls and bosses will go to see it in evening suit."³⁰⁷ Of course, these consuls and bosses won't go to a third-run movie theater in black suit, instead, they must go to a first-run theatre like the Carlton Theatre where there is a bar and a ball room. To these people, a movie theatre is more than a place for watching a show, it might also be a place for interacting or networking with their wealthy friends. Such was the situation in 1920s Shanghai: people of different cultural backgrounds could find the movie theatres that fit their own income. One good case in point that shows the luxury that a state-of-art cinema could provide is evidenced by a picture and a caption published in one issue of *The Young Companion* in 1926, a monthly

³⁰⁵ In a price list published by the Shanghai Representative Office of the Chinese Ministry of Finance in *Shen Bao*, January 4, 1920, p.6, the price of rice was: one *dan* cost five liang two qian. The conversion of liang and yuan is: 100 *liang*=138 *yuan*. The conversion of Chinese *dan* and *pound* is: 1 *dan*=92.95 *pounds*

The price of beef was: one pound cost 0.125 *liang*. The conversion of Liang and Yuan, see *East Miscellany* 21: 46-52.

³⁰⁶ Nicolas Yi Wu, *Shanghai Zujie Wenti*; or *Issues of Shanghai Concessions*, 381-384, 410.

³⁰⁷ Wu, 381-384.

comprehensive magazine popular in the mid-1920s and the 1930s in Shanghai. Here is the caption of the news photo taken by Ariel Varges, a British news photographer,³⁰⁸

On the New Year's Day, an admission to the ball-room dancing party of the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai was sold together with a lottery number. The first prize was awarded a new-style car worth 3000 *liang*. The above picture shows the prize—the automobile. On its left front is the winner—a Western woman.³⁰⁹

In the picture, in her nice and luxury dress, the first prize winner looks content, surrounded by her well-groomed and well-dressed friends, man and woman, Chinese and foreign. They all sit near or on the top of the first prize trophy—a shiny and brand-new automobile worth 3000 *liang* of Chinese silver dollars (Fig. 5). This prize might strike this rich group only as a fluke of luck. However, it can mean different things to people from other classes in 1920s' Shanghai: to a rickshaw runner, this car could be his strongest rival on a wide street; to a middle-class worker, this car could cost nearly twenty years of his/her salary; and to a university student, this car could be a proof of the advanced technology of the Western world.

However, regardless of their viewpoints and backgrounds, they could find entertainments within their purchasing power such as American films. As I will discuss in the next chapter, popularity of American films among the Chinese could be examined through the *Shen Bao*, a Chinese-language daily widely circulated in Shanghai and the neighboring areas.

³⁰⁸ He even went to Greece in 1917 and made newsreel of Greece during World War I (last accessed June 22, 2007. <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/550843?view=synopsis>).

³⁰⁹ *The Young Companion*, or *Liang You* 3 (April 15, 1926): 9.

5.0 CHAPTER FOUR: ADVERTISING *THE GOLD RUSH* ON BOTH SIDES OF THE PACIFIC

Life insurance and cinema are two new enterprises, in which life insurance is a supplement to film as the former helps development of the film industry and success of movie stars. Famous western film stars all had life insurance of thousands of thousands of dollars. The tall building in the above picture, which is of the same height as that in the film *Safety Last!*, is the new building of Hua'an He Qun Life Insurance Company.

----1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

Comparing life insurance to the film industry, this advertisement attempts to convey this message to its readers: as an essential part of the glamorous movie industry, life insurance is able not only to promote success of movie stars, but also to symbolize a movie star's success. The more famous a movie star is, the more life insurance he/she tends to buy. By connecting life insurance with movie stars, this advertisement tried to depict life insurance as a modern business that caters to those who are identified with a celebrity's life. Moreover, in order to make a deeper impression of the company's name, it refers to the film *Safety Last!*, in which the comedian Harold Lloyd is shown climbing a twelve-storey building and ultimately precariously hanging on a hand of a big clock without any protection. Obviously, the advertisement exploits Shanghai

movie-goers' familiarity with the image of a struggling Harold half in the sky.³¹⁰ In so doing, it reinforced the impression that Harold Lloyd had paid a large sum of money for his life insurance when he was performing stunts in the film. The advertisement implies life insurance eased the comedian's mind and enabled him to perform dangerous actions fearlessly.

This type of inter-textuality, i.e. "devising texts from other texts,"³¹¹ was commonly used in advertisements in newspapers and magazines in 1920s Shanghai, especially in movie periodicals. In their analysis of contemporary advertising discourse, Hitchon and Jura defined inter-textuality as "drawing on multiple texts in different media, strongly affects the construction of meaning and the operation of advertising's underlying persuasive mechanism."³¹² According to them, one main difference in inter-textuality between a classic text and a post-modern text is the dependence of a new text on its original one. In a post-modern text, a text relies heavily upon the original one while a classic one is not.³¹³ In this sense, advertisements in printed media in 1920s Shanghai could still be considered as in-between texts. On the one hand, these texts referred to the Chinese literary and dramatic tradition familiar to most readers, and on the other hand, they also referred to Hollywood movie, a new medium at that time. As inter-textuality was prevalent in the advertising of *Shen Bao* and Chinese fan magazines in the 1920s, I will explain the term in more detail by using examples in the following section.

By making a comparison or connection among different texts, writers were able to introduce a new idea, concept, value, or a product through familiar texts. The above-mentioned advertising of life insurance is a good example, as I analyzed. An advertisement does not just sell

³¹⁰ *Shen Bao*, October 5, 1925, 1. The advertising texts in *Shen Bao* and Chinese fan magazines in this chapter and the rest of my dissertation are translated by Qian Zhang.

³¹¹ Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socioliterary Experience among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), Chapter 2.

³¹² Jacqueline Hitchon and Jerzy Jura, "Allegorically Speaking: Intertextuality of the Postmodern Culture and Its Impact on Print and Television Advertising," *Communication Studies* 48 (Summer 1997): 142.

³¹³ Hitchon and Jura, 146.

a product, it also sells a desirable lifestyle of a movie star. In *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears opens his analysis of cultural significance of advertisements with the following lines,

What do advertisements means? Many things. They urge people to buy goods, but they also signify a certain vision of the good life; they validate a way of being in the world. They focus private fantasy; they sanction or subvert existing structures of economical and political power. Their significance depends upon their cultural setting.³¹⁴

According to Lears, advertisements have important cultural meanings. They not only reflect current cultural values, but also construct and reinforce them. Advertisements have a stronger political or economic appeal than they appear, at first, to have. It was through identification that advertising fulfils viewers' fantasy, just like film. "In an atmosphere redolent of sweat and cheap perfume, for the piece of a nickel, they (film viewers) were able to participate in fantasies of the most satisfying kind."³¹⁵ Like advertising, film sells values, ideas, principles, and dream. A film is an advertisement disguised in a most fanciful and dreamlike way. It constructs, subverts, and reflects current social structures and values. In 1920s Shanghai, as a novelty from the Western world, movies were represented as a high-technology product that depicted characters' lives, work, concern, and joy that engaged viewers' emotions or interests. Hollywood exports resulted in two outcomes. On the one hand, distributors generated their revenues by exporting films to the world market, and, on the other hand, American films also helped to promote American values, principles, lifestyle, cultures, and products.

³¹⁴ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Book, 1994), 1.

³¹⁵ Richard Schickel, *The Stars* (New York: The Dial Press, 1962), 12.

The social impact of film can also be found in the scholarship on film spectatorship, especially in the study of “empirical movie goers.”³¹⁶ Miriam Hansen examined how cinema spectatorship transformed the public sphere as well as female daily lives in the United States from the 1890s to the end of 1920s. “The very fact of female spectatorship, for instance, assumes a different meaning in relation to the homosocial tradition of popular entertainments.”³¹⁷ Cinema created a public space in which spectators with different backgrounds were free to make presence, express joy, and show sorrow.³¹⁸ The transformative function of cinema was also investigated in a transnational context by non-Western scholars such as Babli Sinha, who argued that American film “offered new forms of social affiliation, entertainment, and vision” in post-colonial South Asia.³¹⁹ According to her, Hollywood cinema not only created a new public sphere for urban spectators, but also had a strong presence in rural areas through its tie-in products such as film advertisements and posters.³²⁰ In this sense, social impact of film could still be felt even in places where viewers were never exposed to it.

Theories and methods of this group of scholarship can be applied to my study of the perception of American film in 1920s Shanghai. By analyzing advertisements in fan magazines, together with film review and comment, I aim to reconstruct spectatorship and reception of American film in a trans-national context, with a specific focus on 1920s Shanghai. While film review displays a critical discourse of American films, film advertisement constructs a more popular discourse that shows perception of a wider range of audiences. According to Kathryn

³¹⁶ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 3.

³¹⁷ Hansen, 3.

³¹⁸ Hansen, 91-125.

³¹⁹ Babli Sinha, “Misrepresentations and Misunderstandings”: Transnational Media Flows in the age of Imperialism,” <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/mellon/Misrepresentation%20and%20Misunderstandings.pdf>, p.10, last accessed November 6, 2008.

³²⁰ Sinha, 8.

Fuller, *Motion Picture Story Magazine* (MPSM), one of the United States' earliest fan magazines was founded to attract both female and male readers. By examining the readers' letters to the MPSM's forum, Fuller discovered that female fans were more frequently represented as legitimate consumers of film in the magazine as motion picture developed from a new technological gadget into a form of mass entertainment characterized by commercialization and professionalism in the late 1910s.³²¹ Methodologically, she analyzed the advertising in the magazine to judge the gender of its readership. "Consumer goods advertisers, as well, judged a significant proportion of *Motion Picture Story Magazines* readership to be male, as ads for men's personal products appeared prominently next to ads for women's products in the movie fan magazines from 1911 until the late teens."³²² Following her research, I intend to have a general picture of the make-up of readership of major fan magazines and other movie periodicals in 1920s Shanghai by categorizing and investigating their advertisements. As a matter of fact, the method of studying the composition of readers from advertisements of products in magazines has been widely used in fan magazine scholarship, which is based upon the assumption that advertisers are more likely to promote the products of interests to their readers in fan magazines.³²³ This methodology has its limitations in that it presumes that only a certain group might have some particular behaviours or taste. On the one hand, it can provide us with a general picture of readership of a particular magazine, however, on the other hand, it might exclude those potential readers whom advertisers might not target at. Besides, readership of a magazine could be much larger than its actual subscribers. A person does not necessarily have to buy a magazine

³²¹ Kathryn H. Fuller, "Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan," in *In the Eye of the Beholder: Critical Perspectives in Popular Film and Television*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton, Michael T. Marsden and Jack Nachbar (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 97-111, 107.

³²² Fuller, 104.

³²³ Adrienne L. McLean, "'New Films in Story Form': Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 42:3 (Spring 2003): 3-26.

to read it. In this sense, this method, at its best, can only speculate the readers that advertisers aimed at, instead of actual readers. Also such factor as cultural difference in various consumer societies should be taken into consideration because in China, or in some other parts of the world, a female reader could buy a male product for her husband, boyfriend, or her father, and vice versa. Another limitation of using advertising in fan magazines for the study of spectatorship is that consumers of a fan magazine do not necessarily go to movie theatres, as Babli Sinha observed.³²⁴ Awareness of these limitations in the primary sources can help to appreciate the uncertainty in historical investigation. Instead of arriving at a definite conclusion, I can discuss what the possibilities were and what might have happened among viewers and readers. However, despite these limitations, fan magazines are still good primary sources for historical research, especially with supplement of other primary and secondary sources. One case in point is a food advertisement that appeared in a local Shanghai fan magazine: eating good food makes you happier, (just like) watching a movie makes you wiser.³²⁵ Certainly, the advertisement's writer would not frown upon a reader's interpretation that eating food while watching a movie makes a viewer both wiser and happier. According to the ad, it is almost an established fact that a movie can make one wiser. This observation can also be confirmed by a discourse of the social and educational function of movies in the 1920s printed media, which I will discuss in Chapter Nine. This is also a good example to illustrate that advertising in mid-1920s China was more than a marketing strategy because it played into the social discourse as well.³²⁶ Therefore, use of this ad offers us a glimpse of readers' perception of film in 1920s

³²⁴ Sinha, 8.

³²⁵ *Movie Magazine* 3, June 1924, advertisement.

³²⁶ Weipin Tsai, "Nationalism, Commercialism and Individuality in Shenbao's Tobacco Advertisements, 1919 to 1937," in http://www.sinica.edu.tw/imh/symposium/abstract/abstract_WeipinTsainu.pdf, last accessed December 7, 2008.

Shanghai: a film can help increase one's own knowledge and wisdom. It is a tool for self-education. Therefore, it is also an important instrument for educating the whole society. To sum up, this advertisement is a good example to show how American silent film was perceived in the popular discourse at that period.

In 1920s Shanghai, advertisements in fan magazines and periodicals can be generally divided into seven categories: clothes and shoes, books, healthcare products, liquor, beauty cream and soap, clocks and cameras, and cigarettes.³²⁷ Advertisements of these products used such words as “fashionable,” “Western style,” “best,” or “high-class” to describe them. For example, Golden-Dragon cigarettes had the slogan “high-class people smoke high-class cigarettes” in its advertisement.³²⁸ By attaching an image of high-class people to this brand of cigarettes, it “signifies a certain vision of the good life,”³²⁹ and creates a desire in common consumers to buy the products. It encourages the general public to identify with a lifestyle of smoking this brand of cigarettes. Using film magazines as a medium, these advertisements not only aim to sell new products and merchandise, but also result in constructing a film culture and a discourse of a modern and prosperous lifestyle for movie goers. As we have seen, good appearance, health, wisdom, and wealth are part of this film-related culture. Ironically, cigarettes were highly present in the urban life in the 1920s China. It was perceived as a sign of sophistication, wealth, and high class, especially for men. In her article, Dolores Mitchell

³²⁷ Clothes and shoes include fabric, women's clothes, leather shoes; books include movie star books and dictionary; healthcare products include tooth brushes, blood tonic, razor, contraceptives, essence oil; liquor includes brandy and champagne.

³²⁸ *Movie Magazine* 12, April 1925, advertisement. *Movie Magazine* did not have page number. Instead, it is organized in the order of an article's Chinese title. If an article is over one page, it would have the only the first word of the title plus the number of the page. For example, if an article on performing skill is three-page long, then, the order of the article would be performing 1, performing 2, and performing 3. Therefore, basically, this magazine did not have numerical order. For this reason, when I make a citation of an issue of the magazine, I can only cite the issue number and the date of the magazine from which an article is cited.

³²⁹ Lears, 1.

examines depiction of women smokers at the turn of the twentieth century in the west. She insightfully points out that in popular art, cigarette, like cigars and pipes, was an attribute of assertive masculinity.³³⁰ In examining the history of smoking, Gilman and Zhou discusses how cigarette played into the discourse of woman liberation in the 1910s and 1920s United States. Smoking cigarette was represented as a sign of gender equality as well as a sign of “New Woman.”³³¹ Such representation of cigarette as male pleasure in patriarchal society was also evident in advertisements in *Shen Bao* and fan magazines in 1920s China. A decent woman was seldom depicted as a smoker; instead, she was represented as a spectator or a purchaser of cigarette, commonly regarded to be a male product.

The construction of cigarette as a male product struck a contrast with that of liquor, which was advertised as a medicine for all people on all occasions. Here is one advertisement of brandy that sounds like a cure-all medication, “Jin San Jiao (Golden-Triangle) Brandy was created in France, with a history of over one hundred years. It is good for supplementing your blood, keeping up your strength, especially in winter, it is able to get rid of cold if you drink it frequently. If you have an upsetting stomach or you feel dizzy, you can drink a little to make you feel better either cold or warm with boiling water.”³³² In this advertisement, the strong liquor is represented as a traditional Chinese medicine such as ginger tea that is reputed to treat almost all petty illnesses in the winter season. However, unlike ginger tea, with its exotic name, brandy is depicted as of a higher standard and more of a modern drink in the ad. No wonder, the brandy’s price was not even hinted at in this advertisement. The difference in the advertisements might

³³⁰ Dolores Mitchell, “The ‘New Woman’ As Prometheus,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 12:1 (Spring/Summer 1991): 3.

³³¹ Sander Gilman and Zhou Xun, “Introduction” in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 22-23.

³³² *Movie Magazine* 12, April 1925, advertisement.

indicate the prevalent perception of the Chinese in the 1920s: while cigarette was root of all evil for a woman, brandy was a high-quality medication for people of different genders and ages.

From these examples, we can find that advertisements in *Shen Bao* and fan magazines in the 1920s provided us with useful information regarding how Chinese popular media constructed people's perception of new foreign and domestic products including American film. Among all the advertisements, I choose to compare and analyze those of both cigarette and film for two reasons: first, both of them were initially imported products; second, both of them were prevalent in popular Chinese media, intended for a variety of consumers, with cigarette targeting different groups of male consumers. As advertising of cigarettes also shows such factors as gender and class, it provides a good example to compare and contrast with that of film. Therefore, in this chapter, by analyzing film advertisements in *Shen Bao* and 1920s American media, I will examine how Hollywood film was promoted in a transnational context. Considering the fact that there is different advertising of the same American film in print media in both China and the United States, I will examine how the meaning of film is constructed in both American and Chinese print media in the 1920s. In analyzing the differences, I discern a range of the different perceptions of a film. Because advertising was so extensive, I will focus my attention on a single case study, Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*. My examination of Hollywood film advertisements in a transnational context prompts several questions: How were American films promoted? How were other American products promoted, such as cigarettes?³³³ Were there any similarities or differences in advertisements of Hollywood films and other American products?³³⁴ What did

³³³ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*. Also see Lears, *Fables of Abundance*; Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

³³⁴ *Cinema Pressbooks from the Original Studio Collections* (microfilm) (Woodbridge, Conn.: Primary Sources Microfilm, 2001): Reel 29.

these similarities or differences mean in a trans-national context? In answering these questions, this chapter will be divided into two main sections. In the first part, using *Shen Bao* and other Chinese fan magazines, I will discuss how American products such as cigarettes were promoted in print culture in 1920 Shanghai, and how advertising of an American cigarette differs from that of Chinese brands cigarettes. In the second section, using *The Gold Rush* as a case study, I will examine how the comedy film was promoted in different media such as *Shen Bao*, Chinese fan magazines, and 1920s American press. Therefore, differences and similarities of the publicity of the masterpiece in a transnational context will be investigated. And based upon the analyses of the previous two parts, I will conclude this chapter with a summary on the role film advertising played in a film culture in the 1920s.

5.1 ADVERTISING OF CIGARETTES IN THE POPULAR MEDIA IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Like film, cigarette was an imported product in 1920s Shanghai. It was so popular in the city in the early 1930s that its downtown area had at least 1,500 neighborhood small stores that sold cigarettes, locally known as *yanzhidian*, or “tobacco-paper stores.”³³⁵ From the sundry items listed in Hanchao Lu’s article, we can find that cigarette was as common as such daily items as matches, needles, and toilet paper.³³⁶ Cigarettes had a wide presence in the urban life in 1920s Shanghai, as evidenced by prevalent advertising of them in the city’s popular media. These

³³⁵ Hanchao Lu, “Stores and Neighborhoods in Modern Shanghai,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 54:1 (Feb.1995): 102; Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 250.

³³⁶ Hanchao Lu, 102.

cigarette advertising played an important role in maneuvering between nationalism and commercialism.³³⁷ By invoking such images as a traditional Chinese soldier, the Boxer picture, and the country's iconic landscapes, cigarette advertising attempted to appeal to the nationalistic sentiments prevalent in 1920s China. However, as nationalism alone was not enough in selling domestic brand, advertisers also turned to what was commonly regarded as modern art and concepts to sell their products. Accordingly, tobacco advertising in *Shen Bao* turned out to be a mixture of nationalism, commercialism, tradition, and modernity.³³⁸

In this section, I will focus upon what strategies cigarette advertising used in both *Shen Bao* and fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai in order to appeal to Chinese consumer society, what the differences might be in the Chinese perception between the advertising of domestic and imported brands. I will examine five tobacco advertising in 1920s Shanghai. In so doing, I aim to analyze the possible perception of American goods including films in that period. Although tobacco advertising might not be entirely related to film advertising, at least, it was a good example to study the inter-textuality in advertising in general. By examining both images and words of advertisements, I also aim to analyze factors of consumer culture in 1920s Shanghai.

In cigarette advertisements in the *Movie Magazine*, Chinese brands were generally represented as a luxury in an elite society. Different brands were targeted at different consuming groups. One line in a cigarette ad in *Movie Magazine* in 1925 says, "there are a variety of cigarettes in the market, however, the best one should be the Golden Dragon brand. It is a necessity in the high society."³³⁹ According to this ad, the brand is the best because it is commonly consumed by social elites. Together with the caption are two pictures; in one picture

³³⁷ "Nationalism, Commercialism and Individualism in Shenbao's Tobacco Advertisements, 1919 to 1937," http://www.sinica.edu.tw/imh/symposium/abstract/abstract_WeipinTsainu.pdf, last accessed December 7, 2008.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ *Movie Magazine*, April 1925, advertisement.

is a big can of cigarettes with its lid off and several raised cigarettes; in the other is a well-dressed man who is smoking a cigarette while a woman is holding a can of cigarettes for him (Fig. 6). Interestingly, this advertisement not only promotes this brand of cigarettes as a male product, but also indicates that if a woman buys this brand for her man, she is very likely to please him. In the picture, the woman does not smoke the cigarette; instead, she holds a can and points at the bigger can beside her, showing to readers that she is ready to get a large number of cigarettes of the brand for the man. From the smile on her face, readers might feel her pride and contentment in being with the man. The whole image conveys such a message: by serving the brand of cigarettes, she will make the man happier, and therefore, she herself will become more appealing. If the catch phrase of the advertisement emphasizes the class factor, then the image focuses more on gender factor in the society. A woman is expected to buy this brand of cigarettes to cater to the need of a man from a high society. The image might also indicate that cigarette was actively involved in the courtesan culture in the city. According to Gail Hershatter, a hierarchy existed in Shanghai prostitution circles almost for a century, with the *shuyu* prostitute at the top of the rank and *yeji* prostitute at the bottom.³⁴⁰ While the *shuyu* and *changsan* prostitutes entertained the clients with their skills in dancing and singing as well as their expertness in being good companies for men on some social occasions, *yeji* only made a living entirely through selling sex. Here is Hershatter's description of *changsan*'s role in social events, "like *shuyu*, they performed classical songs and scenes from opera, dressed in elaborate costumes, and specialized in hosting banquets and gambling parties for merchants and well-placed officials."³⁴¹ The image in the ad that a woman holds a cigarette for a well-dressed man in a public site conforms to that of a *shuyu* or *changsan* in her service. However, Christian Henriot

³⁴⁰ Gail Hershatter, "The Hierarchy of Shanghai Prostitution, 1870-1949," *Modern China* 15:4 (Oct. 1989): 463-98.

³⁴¹ Hershatter, 468.

argues for a more commercialized and uniform prostitution culture rather than a hierarchical courtesan culture, especially in the 1920s. "...it seems that the process of sexualisation of courtesans accelerated during World War I and was completely by the early 1920s."³⁴² According Henriot, driven by mercantile motives, the so-called high-class courtesan culture had been degraded into ordinary sex trade by the 1920s. However, to Catherine Vance Yeh's disagreement, instead of falling into sex slaves, Shanghai courtesans actually utilized their own social and cultural capital for their own interests and opportunities in Shanghai Foreign Settlements.³⁴³ The above-mentioned tobacco advertisement can also be interpreted, if we apply Yeh's argument, as being a moment of a courtesan serving her rich client, thus trying to make social connections, and control her own fate. Definitely, Henriot will object to this interpretation, instead, he might argue that the woman, although dressed as a high-class courtesan, is paid for a sexual act. Therefore, according to Yeh's theory, the cigarette is a powerful means of constructing a comfortable environment in which a courtesan can work her way out, in contrast, to Henriot, cigarette is only part of the mercantile culture that increasingly accompanied prostitutes in 1920s Shanghai.

Interestingly, this same brand of cigarettes had different representations in the advertisements of *Shen Bao*—factors of gender and class changed. In one advertisement, instead of a woman offering a man a cigarette, it is a man who is handing a cigarette to another man (Fig. 7). Both of them, holding cigarettes in their hands, are sitting comfortably at the table. They appear to be having a pleasant and friendly discussion over the cigarettes' taste. Beside the image is a caption: good cigarettes are like good friends, one can not live through a moment without

³⁴² Christian Henriot, "'From a Throne of Glory to a Seat of Ignominy': Shanghai Prostitution Revisited (1849-1949)," *Modern China* 22:2 (Apr. 1996): 138.

³⁴³ Catherine Vance Yeh, "Reinventing Ritual: Late Qing Handbooks for Proper Customer Behavior in Shanghai Courtesan Houses," *Late Imperial China* 19:2 (1998): 2.

having them around. On top of the image are three large Chinese characters “jin long pai,” or the “Golden Dragon” brand. Unlike the previous advertisement in the *Movie Magazine*, this one highlights a male friendship without the presence of a woman. According to Dolores Mitchell, this is the second main depiction of smoking, as described in the following lines,

In addition to being firmly entrenched in the 19th century imagination as an aspect of male pleasure, smoking was an important element in male bonding rituals. After dinner, when the sexes separated, the men lit up and talked of sex, money, and the important affairs of the day. The smoking rooms at their clubs served the same purpose.³⁴⁴

The very act of smoking becomes a ritual of brotherhood that connects the men. Moreover, this ad also appeals to consumers’ patriotism as in its centre is a slogan, “Chinese should smoke Chinese cigarettes.” Obviously, this advertisement represents the brand as a means of making friends or reinforcing friendship in a patriarchal society. Also smoking the Chinese brand of cigarette is depicted as a sign of patriotism. Comparing the two ads, we can see that the one in the *Shen Bao* uses friendship between Chinese middle-class men as a selling point to show that the brand of cigarettes is a nice gift for men, while the one in the *Movie Magazine* depicts it as a brand with a more sexual appeal.³⁴⁵

Promotion of cigarette as a male product can also be seen in those of the Chinese “Golden Rat” brand of cigarettes. It was not clear why and how the cigarette got its name. Despite the fact that it sounds unpleasant or even disgusting to a Western ear, somehow, the Chinese in the 1920s found it an attractive brand name. Made by Hwa Ching Tobacco Company

³⁴⁴ Mitchell, 3.

³⁴⁵ *Shen Bao*, January 20, 1926, 11.

in Shanghai, this brand was promoted in the *Shen Bao* as being affordable and good quality, as evidenced by its slogan “Good tobacco taste and a good price.”³⁴⁶ Although promoted as a domestic product like the Golden Dragon brand, the Golden Rat mainly differs from the former in three aspects. First, as consumers of this product for the lower and middle class male population, cigarette smokers depicted in the advertisements, wore clothing, varying from silk to ordinary cloth (Fig. 8).³⁴⁷ Second, expressions of men were more exaggerated than those in the ads of the Golden Rat (Fig. 9).³⁴⁸ Third, perhaps because the cigarette was promoted to a wider range of consumers, a larger number of ordinary-looking people appeared in the image. For example, in one full-page advertisement of the Golden Rat cigarette, the New Year’s parade is presented to push the brand: a big parade of people with lanterns in hand, walk through a big gate, on the top of which is sitting a rat (Fig. 10). From the “Happy New Year” sign on the lantern and on the gate, readers can see clearly that it is a New Year’s parade. On the other side of the gate is a group of spectators who are saluting and cheering the parade. By the gate is a pack of the Golden Rat cigarettes. By appropriating the New Year’s public celebration ceremony in the city, in which a large population is involved, this advertisement manages to associate a happy atmosphere and popularity with the brand of cigarettes.³⁴⁹

In addition to the Chinese brand, American brands of cigarettes were also promoted in the *Shen Bao*, such as Chesterfield. In order to make it easier for the Chinese population to understand, it even has a Chinese name called “Ji Shi,” which basically means a lucky and happy gentleman (Fig. 11). With a short phrase “very satisfied,” the brand is promoted as a product for the well-educated and well-groomed male population. Instead of having an exaggerated facial

³⁴⁶ *Shen Bao*, February 17, 1926, 13.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; February 19, 1926, 13.

³⁴⁹ *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1926, the New Year’s supplement.

expression, men in the ads of the Chesterfield cigarettes are represented as being more sophisticated and with more controlled body movements. Details in the ads of the brand indicate consumers' social status. In one advertisement, one man in traditional Chinese hat and clothes, holds a cigarette, with a light smile on his face. In another ad, one man is holding a lit cigarette, with one side of his face turning to readers (Fig. 12). His well-combed hair shows that he pays attention to his appearance and that he lives a wealthy life. Although only his head and neck appear in the picture, from his clothes, it is not hard for readers to find out that he is wearing a traditional Chinese clothes as well.³⁵⁰

Ads for Chinese cigarettes in the Chinese media share one similarity with those of the American cigarettes, that is, cigarettes are for male consumers. Women are depicted as servers or spectators, but seldom smokers themselves. Clearly, in 1920s Shanghai, the general public was not yet ready for the image of a female smoker. Differences of ads of Chinese brands and imported brands of cigarettes are also obvious: in terms of images, while more people are present in ads of Chinese brand indicating a variety of their professions, Chesterfield cigarettes only have one man in its ads, which might indicate that smoking is a solitary, intellectual-related act instead of a collective act; in terms of words of ads, domestic brands tend to use a lower price and patriotic feelings as selling points while the Chesterfield cigarette emphasizes the good quality of its ingredients.³⁵¹ It seems that ads of the American product gives more details in describing cigarette's quality than those of Chinese brands in which good quality is just an empty, general catch phrase. In addition, men in the ads of the imported brand are depicted as more controlled, more intellectual, and wealthier; while men in the ads of Chinese brands are

³⁵⁰ *Shen Bao*, February 5, 1926, 12.

³⁵¹ *Shen Bao*, February 20, 1926, 18.

represented as having more exaggerated body and facial movements, and having a wider social class range.

Aside from the above-mentioned similarities and differences, ads of the both Chinese and American brands use marketing strategies, but in a different way: the Chesterfield cigarette ad asks readers to send a coupon with an address and postage to get a can of products for free,³⁵² while ads of the Chinese brands tend to encourage smokers to collect packs so that they will be given a reward after they have had enough empty packs. Here is a list of rewards and numbers of packs required to get rewards for smokers of Zhong Nan brand of cigarettes (Table 4):³⁵³

Table 4. Number of cigarette packs for a reward

25 packs	A card of beauty	50 packs	A calendar
1,500 packs	A set of Majong	4,000 packs	A gold ring
25,000 packs	A new-style bicycle	40,000 packs	A gold bracelet

Advertisers of American cigarettes used sampling to promote the product, while those of the Chinese brand adopted “reward after difficulty” method. The different marketing methods is

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ *Shen Bao*, January 1, 1926, 13.

well summarized in the following report from the overseas representative of the Department of State and Commerce, "...free distribution of samples has not been productive of good results among the Chinese, as they do not value something they get for nothing; if but a copper or a postage stamp is required the sample is more appreciated."³⁵⁴ Obviously, the above-mentioned list is a good case to testify the report's accuracy. To get a gold bracelet, one has to collect 40,000 empty packs! It seems that the Chesterfield advertiser were very familiar with the Chinese consumer mentality as instead of offering free sampling, they required people to pay 35-cents postage to get the cigarettes. By doing that, they expected that people would appreciate their cigarettes more. The two marketing strategies show, to some degree, how advertisers of the American brand managed to adapt to Chinese consumer culture and used it to promote an American product. This awareness of consumers' mentality is important to understand film advertising because cigarette and film advertisements might share similar readers, take similar techniques, and most importantly, have common social and cultural values. Furthermore, a study of advertisements of different cigarettes can also provide us with a broader picture of advertising culture in 1920s Shanghai, which further confirms the fact that class and gender had a high presence in Chinese society at that time. As consumers of new products might also be silent film spectators, we can assume that the way they interpreted cigarette and film advertising also constructed and affected the way they perceived American silent film, as we have discussed in the afore-mentioned scholarship of inter-textuality. After all, film is another kind of advertising, which draws on different texts to sell values and principles, dreams and fantasy. Examination of advertising can certainly help further our comprehension of reception of silent film as well.

³⁵⁴ C.J. North, ed., *U.S. Commerce/Trade Information Bulletin* 467 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing House, 1927), 33.

5.2 A CASE STUDY: THE GOLD RUSH —ADVERTISING AMERICAN FILMS IN 1920S SHANGHAI AND THE UNITED STATES

In this section, I am going to use Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush* as a case study to examine how American films were promoted in the city's print culture in the 1920s, mainly in *Shen Bao* and in fan magazines such as *Movie Magazine* and *China Movie Magazine*. In order to further illustrate the case, I will use the publicity of the film in the late 1920s American press to investigate how the film was promoted in the United States. By comparison and contrast, I will find out the similarities and differences of the advertising of *The Gold Rush* in both the Chinese press and the American press and I will analyze the significance of the similarities and differences in a trans-national context. In so doing, first, I will use the *Cinema Pressbooks from the Original Studio Collections* to find how the film was promoted in the United States;³⁵⁵ Then, I will use *Shen Bao* and Chinese fan magazines to find out how it was promoted in China; And finally, I will summarize the significances of these differences and similarities in these ads. Since the *Cinema Pressbooks* has no exact dates of the publicity, I can only describe and analyze the types of publicity in magazines, posters, newspapers, and other relevant events without giving exact dates.

³⁵⁵ *Cinema Pressbooks from the Original Studio Collections*, microfilm (Woodbridge, Conn.: Primary Source Microfilm, 2001): Reel 29. The full title will be referred to as *Cinema Pressbooks* in the following part of this dissertation.

First released by the United Artists on June 26 1925, the film *The Gold Rush* saw one of the biggest publicity campaigns in the U.S. advertising history.³⁵⁶ Newspapers, lobby cards, posters, advertising aids, music sheets, and radio programs all had advertising, publicity, and exploitation materials related to this comedy. Moreover, these advertising materials were supposed to “enable any exhibitor, in any sized city, to put this Charlie Chaplin feature over to big box-office results.”³⁵⁷ Publicity of the masterpiece is actually a bottom-up campaign all over the country. People, old or young, were encouraged to participate in the event in different ways and through various media. Using “Gold Rush” as a catch phrase, the film’s publicity was also tied to different aspects of people’s lives, from food and clothes to habits of saving. Strategies used in the campaign can be categorized into five types: exploitation of Charlie Chaplin’s look in the film, exploitation of the film’s title, newspaper stories of the movie, scenes from the movie in newspapers, and film-related contests.

Of all the publicity campaign themes, Charlie Chaplin’s outfit was among the most exploited ones as it was the best known feature of the character in the film. His derby hat and shoes became good publicity materials for promoting locally manufactured goods in retail clothing and shoe stores. For example, a paper cut out of Chaplin’s derby hat was devised by the United Artists Corporation exploitation department to promote the film. This paper cut-out hat was especially created for children and teenagers. A patron, or an exhibitor, “might arrange with a local paper to print out these cut-outs as Sunday children’s page feature. You can get advertising by supplying these hats to newspaper boys.”³⁵⁸ The other advertising point relating to Chaplin’s personae is his moustaches and cane. People could buy the tie-in products from local

³⁵⁶ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0015864/releaseinfo>, last accessed July 29, 2008.

³⁵⁷ *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

manufacturers. A pair of big shoes is another feature of the comedian's appearance. Here is the instruction for a shoe store advertisement related to the film,

A diverting feature to tie-up with a shoe store would be a duplicate of the shoes worn by Charlie Chaplin in 'The Gold Rush.' An old, shabby pair of exaggerated size would do. A window card should call attention to the fact that shoes similar to these, worn by Charlie Chaplin in 'The Gold Rush' at the _____ Theatre, have carried Chaplin to fame and fortune.³⁵⁹

The above window display in a shoe store serves three functions. First, using a pair of shoes that resemble that of Chaplin, it attracts attention. Second, it successfully advertises the upcoming screening of the film at a particular theatre. And third, it also helps to promote sales of regular shoes in the store. It is a good example of a win-win situation in which Chaplin's outfit is utilized to promote the film.

In addition to the comedian's outfit, his walk was also exploited to advertise the movie. For example, an imitation of Chaplin is suggested by the United Artists Corporation as part of the movie's publicity campaign. Here are some tips to exhibitors, "for a street ballyhoo, nothing can surpass a Chaplin imitation, playing pranks on passers-by, walking in the Chaplin manners, etc."³⁶⁰ Sometimes, the person who was dressed like Chaplin also had an announcement of the upcoming film on his back, for the purpose of publicity.

If Charlie Chaplin's personae were fully exploited to promote the film, names of other film stars were not spared. One case in point is the Postal Telegraph Company's tie-in with the comedy. In the event, the company was supposed to have a window display in its local offices all

³⁵⁹ "Stir Up Your City with Famous Chaplin's Hat," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶⁰ "General Exploitation and Prologues Suggestions," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

over the country of congratulations on *The Gold Rush* from other famous movie stars such as Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Norma Talmadge, and Rudolph Valentino. With 1,200 offices across the country, it managed to promote both its own service as well as the film.³⁶¹

The second intensively used advertising point is the film's title. Meaning making fast fortune, the very name *The Gold Rush* seemed to satisfy people's fantasy about fortune and wealth in 1920s America. Both commercial sectors and government agents appropriated the name to promote their own service, products, and even government bonds. A bank statement with Chaplin's signature was released to encourage people to save money, and to go to see the movie,

“The only ‘Gold Rush’ in which every man, woman and child can be absolutely sure of finding riches is the rush to the bank with the weekly pay check. Habit is the hardest thing in life to overcome—that’s why I think everybody should think form the habit of saving as early as possible. (signed Charlie Spencer Chaplin) Charlie Chaplin is appearing at the_____ Theatre in his greatest comedy ‘The Gold Rush.’”³⁶²

The bank tie-up publicity managed to interpret both the word “gold” and “rush” separately, which means a weekly bank rush. It also conforms to the American value “a penny saved is a penny earned.” By including everybody in the “rush,” this advertising scheme attempts to help a bank grow its patrons and at the same, to help a local movie to theatre to promote the films to those bank customers.

³⁶¹ Postal Telegraph Company Tie-up, *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶² “Stir Up Your City With Famous Chaplin Hat,” *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

As the film's title has the word "gold," the film could almost be tied to any store and any business. For example, "gold nuggets" candy was made by one confectioner in connection to the screening of the film at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. The two gold nuggets were in a small canvass bag, which looked like a gold prospector's bag in the film. The name of the confectionery was printed on the bag, which was distributed at the theatre before the film was shown.³⁶³

In addition to the commercial use, the film's title was also utilized for selling the U.S. Defense Bonds. Here is the line, "Join the Gold Rush-Buy U.S. Defense Bonds for your Present Safety and Your Future Profit." Like the Midas' touch, the title was widely exploited for any fortune-making chance.³⁶⁴

The final publicity strategy of *The Gold Rush* is a wide variety of contests related to the film, ranging from essay contests on savings,³⁶⁵ commentary contests,³⁶⁶ and the poster contests³⁶⁷ to Chaplin imitation contests,³⁶⁸ three-day colouring contests and biggest laugh contests.³⁶⁹ Most of these contests aim to promote the comedy among children and teenagers. Called "Selling the Youngster Means Selling the Grownups," one short essay described in detail a three-day colouring contest related to the film,

Always a popular sport with the younger set, a picture colouring contest takes on added fascination when the subject is that famous screen pantaloon, Charlie Chaplin. Here are three drawings of Charlie as he appears in 'The Gold Rush,' made in outline by a well-known artist, ready for crayons or paint set of kids

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ "Greatest Laugh-Blizzard Screen Has Ever Known!" *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶⁵ "Stir Up Your City with Famous Chaplin Hat," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶⁶ "Selling Points the Way to Rush at Your Ticket Wicket," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ "Exploit," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

³⁶⁹ "Three-day Colouring Contest," *Cinema Pressbooks*, Reel 29.

who want to have some fun and win free tickets to the show...--and don't forget that when you sell the kids you've sold their parents as well!³⁷⁰

Together with the above mentioned instruction are three sketches of scenes from the film: in one picture, Chaplin is sleeping with both his feet in an oven (Fig. 13); in the other picture he is being held by the neck by Big Jim (Fig. 14), and the final one shows that Chaplin is standing alone, with one shoe missing (Fig. 15). As among the most high-profile scenes in the film, they again depict moments of the character's loneliness, helplessness, and meanwhile funniness in the film. As the description indicates, letting children participate in colouring the drawings of these scenes can not only let them have fun, but also attract attention to parents as well.

To sum up, the bottom-up publicity campaign of *The Gold Rush* in 1920s America was basically tied up to almost every aspect of lives and every age group. Nearly all aspects of the film and the comedian were fully exploited. The film also provides a platform for different agencies to promote their products, while it makes full use of different agencies to promote the film itself. In contrast, in China, advertising of this film stressed its big production and high box return. The plain expressions in the promotion of the comedy in the United States strike a contrast with the high-flown words in its Chinese advertisements, which I will discuss in the following subsection.

The Gold Rush was premiered at the Isis Shanghai Theatre on February 16, 1926. It was shown three times a day for three weeks: two thirty and five thirty in the afternoon, and nine fifteen in the evening. *Shen Bao* started to run its advertisement on February 7, 1926. Called "Chaplin's only masterpiece in his life," the ad emphasized the big cost of the film and its big

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

box office in other parts of the world. Moreover, like that of *Safety Last!*, the ad also promoted the comedy as “the last work” of the *huaji* master. Originating from Huaji, a Chinese court jester, the word became a metonym of hilarity. Starting from the early twentieth century, it also referred to a dramatic genre in Shanghai and its surrounding areas.³⁷¹

This comedy is Charlie Chaplin’s lifelong masterpiece. Also as the world’s No.1 *Huaji* film, it makes people laugh from the beginning to the end. This September when it was shown at the Mike Theatre in New York, it raked in 72,400 dollars, a record high earning report for the world’s movie theatres. When it was shown in such metropolis as London and Paris, it also sold well, even several times more than *Way Down East* and *The Thief of Bagdad*. It took Charlie Chaplin three years to make this *huaji* film. We might have to wait several years before we get a chance to see his work again. It is hard to tell. Those of you interested in Chaplin’s comedy, please pay attention to the upcoming screening time of the film so that you won’t miss it.³⁷²

Promoting *The Gold Rush* as a Huaji film, the ad mentions mainly one point to emphasize its popularity: its high box office return in big cities such as New York, London, and Paris. It even gives a number to make it sound more credible. In addition, it also compares the film’s earnings with big hits including *Way Down East* and *The Thief of Bagdad*. From this film ad, we can see that in 1920s Shanghai popularity was part of the commercial culture. One main, or perhaps the only measure of a film’s popularity was its box office return. Also, New York, London, and Paris became a metonym of modernity and sophistication, which set up a good

³⁷¹ See Chapter Five.

³⁷² *Shen Bao*, February 7, 1926, advertisement.

example for the city Shanghai to follow. Interestingly, like that of *Safety Last!*, this ad also uses “swan song” strategy to promote the film. It seems that describing a film as an actor’s swan song or nearly swan song was a common marketing strategy in 1920s *Shen Bao*. It tended to make a film more appealing and more marketable to Chinese movie-goers.

Another strategy prevalent in the advertising of *The Gold Rush* was to use Chinese people’s desire for wealth and fortune. Here is one example. On February 16, 1926 when it was first shown at the Isis Theatre in Shanghai, *Shen Bao* had a three-column top to bottom advertisement of the film. Instead of being called its original name “Tao Jin Ji,” the film was renamed as “Cai Yun Heng Tong,” which means wish you a good fortune. The advertisement had these lines,

If you want to make a good fortune, please look at this Chaplin’s comedy *The Gold Rush*. After watching it, you are sure to make a fortune. One Chinese proverb says, ‘harmony breeds fortune,’ after you see the movie, you must give a hearty laughter, which makes you happy and harmonious, therefore, you must be wealthy this year.³⁷³

Unlike the previous ad of the comedy in *Shen Bao*, this ad utilizes Chinese culture to promote the film. Watching the film became closely linked to being wealthy, not only because of its name, but also because of its content. Harmony, an important concept in the Chinese culture, means to get along with other people. It is a pre-requisite for success and prosperity, especially for businessmen. If the previous ad in the *Shen Bao* attempted to use Western consumer culture to promote the film, then this ad managed to exploit Chinese traditional culture. By presenting

³⁷³ *Shen Bao*, February 16, 1926, advertisement.

this cultural formula: *The Gold Rush*=(equals) laughter = harmony = wealth, it associated the very act of watching the film with the outcome of being financially prosperous, thus managed to market the favoured Chinese language. When the film was first exhibited, for several days, it was shown four times a day, more frequently than any other film that was screened in the city.³⁷⁴ Moreover, one admission for a night show ranged from one dollar to three dollars, and even the cheapest ticket for a day show was as high as ninety cents. Ads for the film, which ran every day in the *Shen Bao* until the last day of its show on March 5, all featured Chinese traditional culture instead of Western consumer culture except the preview ad on February 7. Clearly, the Chinese harmony message is better liked by editors of the daily than the box office return advertisement.

Another channel to promote the film was through sending greeting cards, a popular practice during the Chinese New Year season. Here is one instance. In February 1926, several days before the Chinese Lunar New Year, many stores and households in downtown Shanghai received a greeting card with Charlie Chaplin's name on it, which went, "Charlie Chaplin will visit you in this delightful New Year season and he wishes you a gold rush in the coming New Year!" It is the Chinese tradition that during holiday seasons, people visit each other in person to give greetings. The person who intends to pay a visit normally drops a card beforehand with his name on it, together with the time he plans to come.

This promotional strategy is a good example of using identification to create film audiences and promote American film which was foreign to most Chinese audiences in 1920s Shanghai. First, catering to the customs of the Chinese New Year in promoting the film, the advertisement shows Chaplin's potential involvement with the Chinese community. Second, by wishing people a good fortune, which is one of the most liked greetings during the Chinese New

³⁷⁴ Ibid. The film was shown four times a day: 11:00 a.m., 2:30 p.m., 5:30 p.m., and 9:15 p.m.

Year holiday, it adapts the film's title into a more familiar Chinese phrase. By appropriating the Chinese holiday customs and greeting lines, the advertisement manages to be identified with the Chinese audience.

The advertisement, together with others of the film in print culture helped construct a visual and consumer culture unique in Shanghai in the 1920s, a transitional period from tradition to modernity and from a blind worship of foreign culture to a mixed feeling of patriotism and xenophobia. As I discussed in the previous section of this chapter, during the same period, a publicity campaign of *The Gold Rush* was also being launched all over the United States, which likewise, helped promote a lifestyle and consumers' culture on the other side of the Pacific. Comparing the film's promotional activities in the two countries, we can see that the U.S. publicity campaign differed, and to some extent, surpassed that in China insofar as the former made full use of existent media and to different age groups through different agents; on the contrary, publicity in China was only for adults and it came mainly through print culture. In terms of content, ads in Chinese print culture exploited the film's title and tied it to Chinese mentality and customs. There are two trends in the film's publicity in 1920s Shanghai: on the one hand, the film was promoted as a comedy in popular newspapers like the *Shen Bao*; on the other hand, in fan magazines, it was promoted as a film with a moral message, which was supposed to be more profound than a comedy. It indicates that the two different media targeted different readers. Interestingly, in both countries, the film's title was extensively exploited in the film's promotional activities; however, they were used in a different way. In the United States, the name shows a common practice in a daily life such as the saving habit, while in China, it indicates a friendly new year's wish. Even the very effect of viewing the film was stressed in the Chinese advertisements as a means to make a peaceful or a happy mind. The

film's box office return was advertised as a proof of its quality production and commercial success. This was a common practice in the film advertisements in the 1920s Chinese media. Comparing the advertisements of the comedy and those of cigarettes in *Shen Bao*, we can find that cigarette was advertised as a male product, while the film was promoted as catering to the general public. Moreover, the price in the film's advertising was not as emphasized as that in cigarette advertisements. This might be partly because the quality and price of a film copy did not vary much from cinema to cinema in 1920s Shanghai, while the quality and taste of cigarettes varied. Also, both cigarette and film were given a Chinese name, which sounds more familiar to readers. Chinese cigarette advertisements appealed to consumers' patriotism, which also happened in the advertisements of Chinese films from the 1920s throughout the 1940s. As a whole, from ads in the Chinese media, we can see that a film was advertised as a product of more universal nature than that of cigarettes in Shanghai in the 1920s.

To sum up, film, as a new form of public amusement, was both urban and commercial in 1920s Shanghai. It contributed to the construction of modernity in that it introduced news ideas, values, products, and life-styles into the Chinese society. Through film, fan magazines, and its tie-in products, Chinese critics started to question the traditional Chinese values and promote the film's educational values, which I will examine in the following chapters.

6.0 CHAPTER FIVE: CHAPLIN AND HAROLD: *HUAJI* MASTERS IN SHANGHAI

I am an editor for this magazine. I just come from the countryside to Shanghai...As a bumpkin, I do not know a single word of the Shanghai dialect, and I made mistakes in using translated names of American movie stars. For example, there are several Chinese versions of Charlie Chaplin, so are Lillian Gish. I am really confused and frustrated by these translations.³⁷⁵

This is an editorial in the *China Film Pictorial*, a 1920s fortnightly film magazine published in Shanghai.³⁷⁶ In this editorial, the self-deprecating editor expressed his/her frustration in using translated names of foreign movie stars in the magazine. Part of reason for the difficulty, as we can infer from the short article, arises from the fact that there were different translated versions of Hollywood stars' names in the Shanghai dialect. It was difficult for a non-speaker of the Shanghainese to connect the referred version of translation with its original English name. On one hand, the editorial shows non-standardized version of foreign names in 1920s China; on the other hand, it also shows that American movie stars, especially such comedians as Charlie Chaplin, had become part of the local cultural scene in public

³⁷⁵ Editor, "Brutal Report," *China Film Pictorial*, July 1, 1927, 46.

³⁷⁶ The magazine started on January 1, 1927. It ceased publication on February 1, 1929. *Shanghai Film Historical Materials*, Shanghai Dianying Shi Liao (Shanghai Bureau of Film History, 1992), 231.

entertainment sites in the 1920s. Shanghainese talked about Chaplin in their own dialect, as if he was a local celebrity. One case in point is that the American comedian master was affectionately referred to as “que li que po lin,” a Shanghai version of his full name in both the *Photoplay World* and the *Movies Magazine*, two fan magazines published in the city.³⁷⁷

Right after World War I, American short comedy films (with average running length of 1-2 reels) began to flood into the Chinese market. Together with series detective story films, one—or two-reel comedy was among the earliest movies and the most popular genres that Shanghai people enjoyed. However, comedy was not appreciated in the same way as Chinese opera. Unlike advertising of an opera, a movie ad did not normally specify names of comedians. For example, one advertisement of comedy in *Shen Bao* in 1919 just has the following line, “Keystone’s Comedy (the first reel and the second reel).”³⁷⁸ Unlike Chinese opera fans, Shanghai movie viewers were not particular about familiar faces or big names when they went to a theater. American film comedians had not yet become stars, and they were only replaceable characters within the genre. In the 1910s, early films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were popular among Chinese film audiences.³⁷⁹ By the 1920s, every movie-goer in the city was familiar with the names of major American comedians. And by the mid-1920s Charlie Chaplin had even become a metonym for film itself. For example, in 1925, Chaplin was part of the logo for the entertainment page in *Shen Bao* (Fig. 16), the most widely-circulated Chinese-language daily in 1920s Shanghai. The image of the logo uses props commonly used by Chinese performers to represent various types of popular entertainment in China. For example, a mask

³⁷⁷ “Que li que po lin” was the translation of Charlie Chaplin’s name in the Shanghai dialect, which was written in Chinese character as却利却泼林. This version appeared in the 11th issue of the *Photoplay World*, published on February 1, 1926; in the 12th issue of the *Photoplay*, published on March 1, 1926; in the 11th issue of *Movies Magazine* in March, 1925.

³⁷⁸ *Shen Bao*, March 1, 1919, 8.

³⁷⁹ Jihua, Cheng, *Zhong Guo Dianying Fazhan Shi*, or *History of Chinese Film Development* (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1963), 12.

and a hat represent Chinese opera, a drum stands for story-telling show, and a screen with Charlie Chaplin on it immediately associated readers with film. On the screen, with his bowler hat and big shoes, Chaplin spreads out both his arms, with one hand holding his stick, and walks in his distinctively waddling steps.³⁸⁰ From this picture, we can see that the American comedian was not only representative of comedies, but also of film in the mind of Shanghai movie-goers. The reason for Chaplin's success was largely due to his contribution to the genre in its earlier years. "But apart from his enormous personal popularity, Chaplin's major contribution from 1914 to 1916 was in taking comedy out of the realm of crude knockabout, refining it, and bringing it sophistication and respectability."³⁸¹ Chaplin elevated crude slapstick to comedy, a new film genre. Because of his popular success, he was imitated all over the world. According to William K. Everson, Chaplin had many imitators all over the world, "Chaplin was the most blatantly imitated of all movie comedians. Even Japan had its copy, while Hollywood had full of them."³⁸² Actually, even China had Chaplin's copy as because of the popularity of the American comedy master in 1920s China. In 1922, Zhang Shichuan, a Chinese film pioneer, directed a short comedy film called *King of Comedy Visits China*. In the 30-minute film, "Chaplin" is depicted as a funny and ignorant tourist in the city. He does what a sophisticated Shanghainese will never do in the city: when he travels, he refuses to sit in a regular sedan chair so he ends up sitting in one without a bottom and walks with it; like a blind man, he would rather use his hands than his eyes to choose a car; he practices difficult gymnastics stunts; he steps on water treadmill and sits on an ox; even his presence at a party brings laughter to people. Written by Zheng Zhengqiu, this film catered to the taste of Shanghai audiences: light-hearted, easy, and

³⁸⁰ *Shen Bao*, April 1, 1925, 7.

³⁸¹ William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 267.

³⁸² Everson, 266.

hilarious.³⁸³ The role of “Chaplin” was performed by an Englishman who worked as the manager of the Olympic Theater. Here is Zhang’s memory of the fake Charlie Chaplin, “There is one Westerner called Bill... He used to be a clown in a circus. When I met him, he was working in the Great World Amusement Club which I was managing volunteered to be Charlie Chaplin in the film. So I decided to let him try.”³⁸⁴ Obviously, even before the film was produced, presence of fake Chaplin might have been common in the public entertainment clubs in Shanghai. Actors like Bill imitated Chaplin’s appearance and movements in different shows and managed to make a good living out of it.

In Clarence North’s report of American films in 1920s China, North confirms the popularity of American comedy and comedians in China, “All the well-known comedians are very popular among the Chinese, and at least two of them are a byword the country over and in every walk of life.”³⁸⁵ Although North did not mention the names of the two most popular American comedians, from my research, we can see that in addition to Chaplin he referred to, the other one is very likely to be Harold Lloyd. While Chaplin was known to Shanghai audiences as a tramp who waddles with duck-like steps in big and shabby shoes, Harold Lloyd is represented as a middle-class intellectual as he has a pair of black-rimmed glasses, a typical look of a sensitive Chinese man of letters in the mind of most Shanghainese. Controversy arose over how much their outfit might have affected their success. Some Shanghai audiences believed that Chaplin’s humor only depended upon his image--his shoes, his stick, and the way he walks; others think that Harold Lloyd’s popularity largely lies in his black glasses. However, Yi Hanru,

³⁸³ Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu were both pioneer in Chinese film history. Zhang and Zheng worked as a team together—Zhang directed films written by Zheng. In 1913, they produced the first Chinese silent short film—*Nan Fu Nan Qi*, or *A Couple in Time of Need*; and they also produced the first successful commercial film in China in 1923—*Gu Er Jiu Zu Ji*, *The Story of an Orphan who Saves Grandpa*.

³⁸⁴ Shichuan Zhang, “Since I directed,” in *Mingxing magazine* 33 (1935).

³⁸⁵ C.J. North, “The Chinese Motion Picture Market,” in *U.S. Commerce/Trade Information Bulletins* 467 ed. C.J. North (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927), 435.

a movie critic and film buff in Shanghai believed that their success lied in their understanding of the society and the artistic expression of their feelings.³⁸⁶

According to William Everson, success of comedians such as Harold Lloyd was partly due to Chaplin's creative approach to comedy—as they would “not be trapped within the pattern of violence and slapstick that seemed essential during the period of Sennett's leadership.”³⁸⁷ However, it seems that the early Chinese imitation of both Chaplin and Lloyd in film was still limited to “the pattern of violence and slapstick,” as evidenced in both the name and plot of the short comedy film *Pound the Haunted Theater*, or *da nao guai ju chang*. Following the success of *King of Comedy Visits China* in 1922, the next year, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu cooperated again to produce this film, in which “Charlie Chaplin” and “Harold Lloyd” meet and chase each other out of misunderstanding in a theater. This three-reel comedy was another success.

Almost all the movies of these two American comedians were shown at movie theaters in 1920s Shanghai. They mainly include: *The Kid* (1921), *The Gold Rush* (1925), *The Circus* (1928), *A Woman from Paris*, *Grandma's Boy* (1922), *Why Worry?* (1923), *Safety Last* (1923), *Girl Shy* (1924), *Hot Water* (1924), *Ben-Hur* (1925), *For Heaven's Sake* (1926), *Speedy* (1928), and *Welcome Danger* (1929). Comedy film had such a wide range of audiences that their pirated versions were even common in early 1920s China. One case in point is *The Kid*, Chaplin's first full-length comedy feature in Shanghai. The film's premiere screening was that of a pirated or stolen copy at Ramos' two theatres in the city: The Victorian Theatre and the Olympic Theatre.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶ Hanru Yi, “Small Talk on *Huaji* Films,” *Ying Xi Chun Qiu*, May 16, 1925, 3.

³⁸⁷ Everson, 267.

³⁸⁸ Alexander Krisel to Dennis O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, 58/4, UAC.

It was also common for a newly built or renovated movie theater to screen a comedy at its grand opening because of the happy and hilarious spirit a comedy conveys. For example, when Zhong Yang Da Xi Yuan, or Central Theater was re-opened in April 1925 after several months of renovation, Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy* was showed, to the accompaniment of music played by a group of Russian musicians. This was not the first time that the film was shown in the city. Before, it was screened in Apollo Theater in October 1923. The comedy was so popular that it was shown four times a day for two weeks. According to an article, despite the theater's effort to exhibit the film to its full capacity, still it could not meet the market demands. It is reported that some unfortunate audiences could not get into the movie theatre because tickets were sold out.³⁸⁹ A theater built in the early 1920s could normally seat about seven to nine hundred people. If every day it was shown four times and every time it was packed, then at least every day around 3,500 people saw *Girl Shy*. For two weeks, nearly 50,000 people watched the film, which was about 2.5 per cent of the city's population in 1923. Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy* could doubtlessly compete with nowadays' Hollywood blockbusters such as *Titanic* in terms of its viewers in movie theaters in some Chinese cities.³⁹⁰

Because of the wide presence of American comedy in 1920s Shanghai, I would like to examine both the critical and popular discourse in this chapter. Using the *Shen Bao*, *North China Daily News*, and fan magazines as major primary sources, I am going to show how American comedy film was criticized in Chinese media and how it was promoted within a Chinese

³⁸⁹ Bo Lu, "Preview of Opening of the Zhong Yang Theatre," *Movie Magazine*, April 1925.

³⁹⁰ Over the past ten years, *Titanic* has been the record high box office in China. It generated revenue of over forty million dollars. In cities like Tianjin, a northern city in China, it had been screened for forty days, more than 300,000 people went to see the film. The city's population was around 1 million. All China Data Center, last accessed June 29, 2007. <https://sslvnp.pitt.edu/member/city/>, DanaInfo=chinadataonline.org+cityshow.asp. The number of viewers of *Titanic* in Tianjin is found in the online newspaper *Metro Express*, last accessed June 29, 2007. http://epaper.tianjindaily.com.cn/cskb/cskb/2007-06/06/content_631246.htm.

theatrical tradition. Advertisements of Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!*³⁹¹ in both the Chinese daily and English daily will be analyzed to demonstrate how the American comedy film was promoted in a Shanghai style "huaji" tradition.³⁹² In so doing, this chapter will be divided into two sections: first, I will give a brief account of American comedy in 1920s Shanghai and I will use *Safety Last!* to show how American comedy was promoted in popular media; second, I will examine how American comedy was perceived in critical discourse. Unlike Chapter Four, this chapter mainly focuses upon the comparison and contrast between popular and critical discourse of American comedy. This chapter is also different from Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine in two ways: first, unlike Chapter Eight, in which I will focus upon Hollywood stardom in Shanghai, this chapter will examine criticism of comedy in the media coverage in 1920s Shanghai; second, although Chapter Nine touches upon the critical discourse of comedy, it largely discusses the reception of different genres of American film, of which comedy is but one. Given the fact that the 1920s China saw a growing popularity of comedy, it is necessary to devote this chapter especially to comedy alone.

³⁹¹ *Safety Last* was first shown at Apollo Theater on October 7, 1923, six months later than its American premiere in April, 1923. See *Shen Bao*, October 5, 1923, 1, November 26; 1923, 1; *North China Daily News*, October 15, 1923, 16.

³⁹² *Huaji* originates from *Shi Ji*, or *Annals of History* written by Shi Maqian. *Huaji* is the name of a court clown who serves an emperor. He can talk boldly but in a joking way about bad decisions an emperor made with the purpose of pointing out the ridiculousness of the decisions. But he does it in such an artistic and funny way that the emperor will laugh and sometimes change the decisions instead of getting angry and kill him. Its role is similar to that of *fool* in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. *Huaji* gradually becomes a metonym for being funny in Chinese. Starting from the early twentieth century, it also refers to a dramatic genre in the Shanghai area.

6.1 ADVERTISEMENTS OF SAFETY LAST IN BOTH *SHEN BAO* AND NORTH *CHINA DAILY NEWS*

As a new genre, by the 1920s, American comedy film had been present in the city a little over a decade. Despite its increasing popularity in the Shanghai public entertainment sites, Hollywood comedy remained to have a foreign, and therefore distinct name. Because there is no equivalent genre to American comedy film in Chinese theaters, Chinese film critics had been struggling with the translation of the term “comedy” in the 1920s. A comedy film was usually translated as “Xiao Ju,” “Xiao Pian,” “Qu Ju,” or “Hua Ji.”³⁹³ “Xiao” in Chinese means to laugh. “Xiao Ju” means a play of laughing and “Xiao Pian” means a film of laughing. “Qu Ju” means a funny play. Of all these translated terms, the most commonly used one for an American comedy film is “Hua Ji.” Both Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd were called *Huaji Da Wang*, which means masters of *Huaji*. In the Chinese language, the very expression *Huaji* had multiple meanings, both historical and current: *Huaji* can refer to a group of court entertainers described in Shima Qian’s *Annals of History* such as Chun Yukun, You Meng, and Dong Fang Shuo. Born of a low birth, they served as jesters in a king’s court, just like the fool in King Lear’s court in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Quick-witted, eloquent, and perceptive, they are depicted as having both the courage and wisdom to talk a tyrant into doing a good deed or out of a bad decision through their entertaining activities. In this sense, *Huaji* means a person with eloquence, smartness, hilarity, and a realistic spirit. He/she can sharply point out absurdity of the reality, an event, or a person in a humorous way. Therefore, *Huaji* is associated with humor, laughter, and most importantly, criticism.

³⁹³ *Shen Bao*, March 1, 1919, 8.

Huaji can also mean comic shows originating in the early 20th century Shanghai, Suzhou and parts of Zhejiang province. With the purpose of making audiences laugh, *huaji* combines monologues and dialogues in different dialects together with a variety of folk operas, folk songs and popular songs to act out a story. Appearing almost the same time with Wen Ming Xin Xi, a precursor to the Chinese modern spoken drama, it is a product of urban and commercial culture.³⁹⁴ Starting from the 1910s, *Huaji* play was frequently performed in popular entertainment sites, over radio and at private parties in Shanghai. As a matter of fact, comedies of Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd first came to China during the same period when *Huaji* became a local theatrical genre in Shanghai. In the early 1920s, *Huaji* was only a kind of comic acting that garnished a stage play, or a one-man acting in open-air entertainment sites. *Huaji* mainly used such devices as exaggeration, mistaken identity, and stereotypes to achieve comic effects. For example, in an early *Huaji* show, a person's identity is shown through his/her dialect and behavior. Early *Huaji* performance had the tendency of depicting rich people in a derogatory way. *Huaji*, with these devices, gave Chinese audiences in 1920s a frame of references to understand American comedy films, which are also full of exaggerated acting and mistaken identity. With local *huaji* plays as a reference, Shanghai audiences would not have much difficulty appreciating Charlie Chaplin's exaggerating image of a tramp and Harold Lloyd's false identity as a general manager in *Safety Last!* in the presence of his fiancée. *Huaji* performances in Shanghai stages and public places made American comedies easier to understand, which in return, helped comedy develop into a film genre in early Chinese film history: by early 1927,

³⁹⁴ Wenming Xin Xi is the early stage of the Chinese spoken drama. It first appeared in China in late 19th century. It aims to represent reality using Western dramatic techniques. Its early stage was from 1899 to 1918. Baichen Chen & Jian Dong, eds., *Zhong Guo Xian Dai Xi Ju Shi Gao*, or *Historical Materials of Modern Chinese Drama* (Beijing: China Drama Publishing House, 1988), 34-71.

comedy had been formally translated as “Xiao Ju,” or play of laughing; and a total of 28 Chinese comedy films had been produced.³⁹⁵

Huaji shows and American comedy are similar in terms of their entertaining function and theatrical devices. Both aim to be hilarious and make audiences laugh. That might be one of the main reasons why advertisements in Shanghai media promoted American comedy films as *Huaji*. Despite their similarities, however, *Huaji*, as a local entertainment show differs from American comedy as a film genre in the following aspect: Shanghai *Huaji* show, a folk performance, is more language-based, it is hard for an audience to appreciate the art who do not speak the dialects related to the drama. However, American comedy film in the 1920s, is more action-based; an audience might understand a comedy even without understanding English; also a *Huaji* show in 1920s Shanghai was not a fully-developed play, instead, it was a show acted by one or two people either individually or as a supporting role in a full-length play, while 1920s American silent comedy was itself a full-fledged genre at its golden age.

Because *Huaji* and American comedy share some similarities, Chinese film critics used the term *Huaji* to familiarize local audiences with the foreign film genre. In the media coverage in 1920s Shanghai, American comedy film was also promoted and appreciated in the Chinese dramatic tradition. As what is humorous in 1920s American comedy was interpreted differently by the Chinese audiences, it is clearest to use advertisements and film comment to show how a comedy was promoted to cater to local audiences in Shanghai. In terms of themes, Chinese drama has such a tradition as a moral message, love theme and happy ending. A moral message means in addition to the entertainment function, drama should also have an educational function such as communicating a moral message. “Yu Jiao Yu Le” is a shortened expression for the

³⁹⁵ “Chinese Comedy Productions,” in *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*.

function, translated as “education through entertainment.” A love theme was another major Chinese dramatic tradition in that almost all Chinese classic opera are love-themed stories such as *Story of West Chamber*, *Peony Pavilion*, and *Yu Tang Chun*. These dramatic stories tell people that true love does not come easily. However, a couple can overcome any difficulty by being true to each other. A happy ending is the third major characteristics of Chinese dramatic tradition, especially in a love-theme story. The concept of “reward for good deeds and retribution for bad deeds” is deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy, social norms, daily practices, and drama. Doubtlessly, an act of true love as a good deed should be rewarded in the form of final union of two lovers. For example, in the famous Chinese opera *Butterfly Lovers*, the star-crossed couple re-unites finally by turning into butterflies and be together for ever.³⁹⁶

Arguably, there is not such a clear division line as in the Western drama between tragedy and comedy as in the Chinese drama.³⁹⁷ A Chinese play is a combination of both tragic and comic frames, which is determined by the roles in a play. For example, *Qing Yi*, a young female role, is more of a tragic character who usually goes through sufferings before having happiness; *Xiao Sheng*, a young male character usually appears together with *Qing Yi*. *Xiao Chou*, or a clown plays a comic role, who can laugh at audiences or the other roles in a play including an emperor without being punished. When a clown performs, it is expected that audiences give a good laughter, even in the midst of a tragic story. In the Chinese dramatic history, comedy has not fully developed into an individual genre and a comic scene is usually part of a full-length

³⁹⁶ Legend of Liang Zhu, <http://www.liangzhu.org/html/lzcs.asp>, last accessed December 5, 2008.

³⁹⁷ Xusheng, Shi, *Essays on Aesthetics of Chinese Operas*, or *Zhongguo Xi Qu Shen Mei Wen Hua Lun* (Beijing: Beijing Guang Bo Xue Yuan Chu Ban She, 2002), 236.

play. Actually, comedy in Chinese theatre is more of a philosophy or principle than a separate genre, as examined by Jingsong Chen.³⁹⁸

The three major Chinese dramatic traditions are prevalent in film advertisements and comment in 1920s Shanghai media. Advertisers promoted American comedies in Chinese traditional dramatic terms, and film story writer narrates them in the standards of Chinese drama. In the remaining part of this chapter, I am going to use Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!* as a case study to examine how American comedy was promoted according to the Chinese dramatic tradition in terms of its three major themes.

Safety Last! was shown for ten days at Apollo Theater, or Ai Pu Lu Da Xi Yuan³⁹⁹ starting from October 7, 1923, only six month later than its U.S. premiere on April 1, 1923. It was so popular that about one month after its first run, starting from November 19, it was shown at Athena Theater, or Shenjiang Da Xi Yuan⁴⁰⁰ for two weeks. The film was shown three times a day: three o'clock in the afternoon, six o'clock and nine fifteen o'clock in the evening. It is hard to judge with available evidences whether the film had the Chinese inter-titles during its first run at Apollo Theater. However, during its second run at Athena Theater, it had Chinese inter-titles as stated in an advertisement in *Shen Bao*.⁴⁰¹ According to the advertisement, both runs attracted full-house of audiences who enjoyed the hilarious performance of Harold Lloyd. Two days before the film first-run show in Shanghai, *Shen Bao* published an advertisement on its front page to promote the film: the image of Lloyd hanging from the hands of a giant clock, with a

³⁹⁸ Jingsong Chen, "To Make People Happy, Drama Imitates Joy: The Chinese Theatrical Concept of Mo," *Asian Theatre Journal* 14:1 (Spring 1997): 38-55.

³⁹⁹ The Apollo Theater was opened by S. G. Hertzberg in December 1913, it was closed in 1931. Jihua Cheng, *Shanghai Yan Jiu Zi Liao Xu Ji* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Zhu Ju, 1985), 541.

⁴⁰⁰ The Athena Theater was opened on February 16, 1923, it was changed to a Peking opera theater in March 1924, renamed as shenjiang yi wu tai. Cheng, 543.

⁴⁰¹ *Shen Bao*, November 26, 1923, 1. According to the advertisement, it has Chinese inter-titles, called Zhong Wen Shuo Ming, or explanation in Chinese.

large crowd looking up at him (Fig. 17). Together with the image are four Chinese words “xian zai, luo ke,” which means “what an adventure, Lloyd.” Called “yin han hong qiang,” or “Silver Man and Red Wall,” which means a man who loves money climbs the red wall, the film was promoted as “unprecedented” and “Lloyd’s last *Huaji* film on adventure.” However, the caption emphasizes the risky aspect of his amorous adventure:

The world-famous *Huaji* master, regardless of the danger, made this unprecedented and last seven-reel *Huaji* adventure film. The plot is as follows: in order to win the love of a young girl, a young man climbs a 12-floor high building. Several times, he almost falls off, fortunately, by getting hold of a long hand of a big clock, he manages to survive. All the adventures are risky. One can get a glimpse of the adventures and dangers Lloyd went through when making the film from the fact that even his insurance company refused to insure his life. He himself even claimed that he would never make a film like this one again. Audiences might never see a film like this in the future. Besides, the film is also full of sweet love and joy. It is a great film to watch.⁴⁰²

No word in the advertisement indicates that the film was a comedy except for the term “*Huaji*.” Although it was categorized as a “*Huaji* adventure film,” almost every sentence communicates a sense of danger rather than humor: several times the man almost falls off a 12-floor-high building, which was commonly regarded as a skyscraper in the 1920s; according to the ad, it was so dangerous that Lloyd’s insurance company even hesitated in having him as a patron. Both at the beginning and at the end, the advertisement pointed out that it was a love story. The love and adventure themes made it a film worth viewing. The plot sounds more like

⁴⁰² *Shen Bao*, Oct. 5, 1923, 1.

that of a traditional Chinese play in that it centers upon love, it has a happy ending, and it gives the message that it takes courage and effort to gain happiness. Besides, it might also give the message that one should not climb a high building because it is a risky behavior. One word in this advertisement that came to readers' attention was "last" because Lloyd might never make such an "adventure film" again. In contrast, however, the *North China Daily News* on October 15, 1923 has the following advertisement of the film: Harold Lloyd, smiling with hands in the pocket, is standing safely on a platform with words "Harold Lloyd, Laughter Specials." (Fig. 18) Together with the image is the caption which goes, "Dedicated to the cause of LAUGHTER and THRILLS. Containing all the thrills of filmdom's THRILLDOM and as many roars as the Atlantic Ocean, but louder."⁴⁰³ This advertisement seems to promote excitement and laughter made by the film instead of a sense of risk, danger, and adventure. It has a sense of humor and joy. The film's love theme is not mentioned at all, but instead, the humorous and exciting aspect of the film is highlighted with upper-case-letter words. Clearly, unlike in the Chinese advertisement, in the English advertisement, the love story, which only serves humour, was not the film's major selling point. The difference between the two advertisements is obvious here: the Chinese seemed to be more amazed by the risky and romantic deeds of Harold Lloyd (to climb the skyscraper to win his sweetheart), which almost approximate to a tragic sense (he would never make a film like this one again because it was too dangerous), while the English newspaper seemed to promote it mainly as a delightful comedy that made audiences laugh. Unlike an ad that promotes an acrobat or circus tight-rope walker, the Chinese language in the ad is more serious and formal. The advertisement in *Shen Bao* seems to communicate more of a tragic sense than its English counterpart. The Chinese advertisement promoted the American

⁴⁰³ *North China Daily News*, Oct. 15, 1923, 16.

comedy in the Chinese dramatic tradition that comic performances only make sense in a tragic frame. Without pains, even gains are meaningless. Love is only a reward for the truthful couple. Laughter is only a derivative of tears. A comic hero is only a hero when he/she serves a bigger goal than to make people laugh. This concept of comic sense is reminiscent of *Huaji* characters in Shima Qian's *History of Annals* as I discussed in the earlier part of this chapter: the significance of *Huaji* characters lies in their competence of stopping an emperor from being tragic. They serve a higher purpose than to entertain a king with jokes. They are moral disseminators. They are educators. Following this tradition, naturally, the Chinese advertisement of the comedy bears an instructive significance.

Almost five years later, starting from February 22, 1928, *Safety Last!* was shown again at the Peking Theater in Shanghai.⁴⁰⁴ It was such an attraction to Shanghai audiences that they could not wait to swarm into the movie theater, which could cause a dangerous situation, especially for women and children. To remind movie-viewers of the possible danger, on the plot sheet of the comedy for the Peking Theater, there was an attention notice which says, "Please do not push your way into the theater at the entrance, it is dangerous." The highlighted Chinese term "Wei Xian" or "dangerous" in the attention line is bigger than any other word in the plot sheet. On the one hand, it showed the popularity of the five-year-old film in the city. However, on the other hand, it seemed to indicate a possible risk of being in a crowded and chaotic theater, just like Harold Lloyd hanging in the hand of a big clock. Issued by the Peking Theatre, the plot sheet served as a program for a particular show. As its name indicates, a film plot sheet was intended to familiarize audiences with the plot and the performers of the film before the screening started. Sometimes, it even gave previews of the films to be screened in a theater. As there were no

⁴⁰⁴ The Peking Theater was opened on November 29, 1926. It was located on Guizhou Road. Wang Ruiyong, *Shanghai Ying Yuan Bian Qian Lu* or *Brief History of Shanghai Movie Theaters*, 87.

Chinese inter-titles for American films in 1920s Shanghai, a plot sheet could be counted as a crucial aid to guide the Chinese through an English-speaking film.⁴⁰⁵ The two-page plot sheet is mainly made of three parts: introduction of the cast of *Safety Last!*, narrative synopsis of the comedy, and previews of films to come at the theater (Fig. 19). Like the advertisement in *Shen Bao* five years before, the love theme is still emphasized in the narration of *Safety Last!*, using direct quotations from the famous Chinese opera *West Chamber*.⁴⁰⁶ The plot starts with the parting scene of the boy (Harold Lloyd) and the girl (Mildred Davis), Lu Shibai, the synopsis' writer, uses the lines from the *West Chamber* to give readers a frame of references to understand the plot "They (the lovers) are reluctant to part, which is reminiscent of the lines in *West Chamber*, 'one can not stop from sighing for long time, the other can not stop from frowning out of sorrow. Both sides are equally sad.'" Clearly, this comparison of farewell scene in *Safety Last!* to that of the *West Chamber* would influence audiences' comprehension of the comedy and might set up a tragic frame even before the movie started. The risky aspect of the boy's adventure is emphasized in the plot sheet as well. Here is the description of the climbing scene:

On that lucky day, Lloyd came with Pal. At that time, the news was widely spread all over the town and people all came to see. The policeman saw the Pal's photo in the newspaper and recalled the insult Pal did to him the other day. He decided to take revenge. Pal did not dare to climb the wall because of the policeman's presence. Lloyd had to climb the building himself. Pal was waiting for him on the second floor, however, chased by the policeman, he could not substitute for Harold. Harold had to climb the terribly high building himself. After many difficulties, he

⁴⁰⁵ I collected several film plot sheets of the 1920s at the China Film Archive in Beijing in summer of 2006.

⁴⁰⁶ *The West Chamber* is a classic Chinese drama. It tells the love story of Zhang Sheng and Cui Yingying. Their relationship ends in marriage after the lovers go through pains and sorrows.

managed to climb the skyscraper. Then the girl came. They kissed and hugged each other.⁴⁰⁷

The narration does not sound especially hilarious. Instead, it sounds like a Chinese traditional opera in which a man has to win over a lady through difficulties and pains. The philosophy of “reward for the good and retribution for the bad” is also obvious in the synopsis as Pal had to pay for his previous bad deeds at the critical moment. However, for a good person like the boy, even a bad situation can end in a good way.

To sum up, the English advertisement in the *North China Daily News* emphasizes comic and exciting elements of the film and promotes it in accordance with its genre. The Chinese advertisement and synopsis, by contrast, use *Huaji* to label the film, which gives Chinese audiences a reference of the film’s genre. With a combination of both tragic and comic elements, they promoted *Safety Last!* as a traditional Chinese love-theme play, through which a moral message was given that a person has to go through dangers and sufferings to make achievements or get real love. The different narratives of the story show that 1920s Shanghai audiences were still struggling with the concept of American comedy as a film genre and were trying to borrow a language from Chinese traditional drama to describe and define it.

⁴⁰⁷ Peking Theater plot sheet, no.122, China Film Archive.

6.2 CRITICISM OF COMEDY FILM IN MEDIA COVERAGE IN 1920S SHANGHAI

By mid-1920s, works of Chaplin and Lloyd had become a model of comedy, as evidenced in the following comment called “Cold *Our Hospitality*” written by Zhou Shixun on Buster Keaton’s *Our Hospitality* (1923):

Recently, the Carlton Theater has showed the new film *Our Hospitality* performed by the *Huaji* star Buster Keaton. At first, I thought the movie must be very interesting. However, after seeing it, I found it out of my expectation. My faith in Keaton was hurt. Although this might be partly caused by the playwright’s inability to put rich materials in the film script, it is also caused by Keaton’s poor performance. His tried to imitate Harold Lloyd, however, his movements are bland. It seems that he has lost his own nature in the film. Plot in a *huaji* film can not be entirely within reason, however, it can not be out of reason. There are many things that are not so natural, for example, in the first two scenes which describe the traffic situation in the United States in 1830, trains are in weird shape, the railway are too winding...Also, the film is not “true.” Keaton’s Willie McKay is exaggerated; Natalia Talmalidge’s Virginia Canfield has an unnatural facial expression...It is a cold film, cold, cold, what a pity⁴⁰⁸

In this comment, Buster Keaton’s film was criticized as unnatural, especially its plot and gags. It echoes William Everson’s criticism of Buster Keaton: his gags are so complicated that audiences had to be able to think quickly and anticipate the scenes to come in order to appreciate

⁴⁰⁸ Shixun Zhou, “Cold ‘*Our Hospitality*,’” *Yingxi Chun Qiu*, May 16, 1925, 4.

his films.⁴⁰⁹ From the above comment we can also see that Zhou, the Shanghai film critic has several criteria for judging a good comedy film: a praiseworthy performance, a well-designed plot, and true feelings. He believes even in a comedy, an actor should show true feelings in order to give a solid performance. He does not think highly of a complicated-plot comedy characterized by imaginative gags and sets. To him, all these only make a comedy bland and uninteresting. He also argues that in a good comedy, actors should show true feelings including sorrow, happiness, and frustration.

Zhou's opinion was representative of that of 1920s Chinese film critics of comedy. It was commonly regarded among them that aside from making people laugh, a good *Huaji* film is also expected to bring viewers to tears with its pathetic beauty and warmth. Above all, it should touch every movie-goer's heart, like Chaplin's films. In the *China Film Pictorial*, Zhou Jianfeng, another film critic in 1920s Shanghai wrote positively about his mixed emotions after watching *The Circus*, "when I went to see *The Circus*, I only expected to have laughter. Of course, I laughed. However, after seeing it, I felt my head was stung. When I was at home, I started to be sad and shed tears, thinking of it...This is the first time that a *Huaji* film makes me feel sad."⁴¹⁰ With the tramp standing alone in a big circle, the ending of *The Circus* is commonly regarded having a sorrowful mood. However, it is the pathos in the film that makes it differ from other comedy films. It has such a pathetic touch that the Shanghai critic even compares it to a tragedy. Regarding the powerful emotional impact of Charlie Chaplin in a critical discourse, here is another example. With the title "comment upon three masterpieces at the turn of the year," one article gives a detailed criticism on *The Gold Rush*,

⁴⁰⁹ Everson, 271.

⁴¹⁰ Jianfeng Zhou, "After Watching The Circus," *China Film Pictorial*, or *Zhongguo Dianying Zazhi*, April 1, 1928, 30.

Chaplin's films differ from those of others in that his works has a profound significance. Despite the fact that they are called "huaji," there is pathos in them. The aim of *The Gold Rush* is to make fun of those who desire to be rich overnight. There are so many people like that in the world. At the beginning of the film, scenes are shown that thousands of prospectors, one after one, tried to climb over a high mountain, some people die, and some are injured. Only a few can survive. Therefore, real wealth comes after hardship. Difficult time can make a person stronger. Just like the two prospectors in the film, who return with wealth after going through difficulties. Chaplin tried to tell people this truth of life by this comedy. Please do not see this movie like any other comedy.⁴¹¹

This criticism also points out the pathetic moments in the movie: prospectors go through blizzards in snow-capped mountains despite threat of the death. However, unlike American journalists who also focus on the moments of laughter in the film and their relationship with tragic situation in the film, Chinese writers makes use of the tragic moments and tied them to the Chinese culture: only through hardship and difficulty is one able to gain real wealth and happiness. Moreover, the article even claimed that Chaplin produced the film for the purpose of sending a moral message to the world.

As to the performance in a comedy, Chinese critics thinks a safe middle-way the best style, as indicated in Yi Hanru's short essay called "Small Talk on *Huaji* Films," in which he summarizes two difficulties of producing a good *Huaji* films in China: difficulty of writing a good script and lack of comedians. He wrote that although Chinese comedians have some funny

⁴¹¹ Xian Zong, "On Three Famous Films at the Turn of the Year," *Ying Xi Shi Jie*, or *Shadow-play World*, March 16, 1926, 41.

physical traits such as a heavy body build or flabby skin, their performance are either stiff or vulgar. He suggests that a good *Huaji* performance should combine elements of both being serious and comic. Obviously, Yi's opinion is consistent with that of most Chinese critics of comedy—a proper mixture of tears and laughter, sorrow and joy.⁴¹² In another essay on Chinese films, Ni Jiaxiang describes several emotions one has to go through when watching Chinese comedy films, “these *Huaji* films make you feel disgusted, angry, and very angry, then you start to laugh. It is not real *Huaji*.” One film he uses as bad examples of Chinese comedy are *Mr. Wife* and *Major Stick* which lack the humor of either Chaplin or Lloyd.⁴¹³

Aside from comment of a comedy's performing style and content, its social and educational function is also a main point of discussion in the critical discourse in the 1920s Shanghai. According to Yi Hanru, a comedy has two functions in our life, that is, to purge ourselves of sorrow in the heart and to help hard-headed people change their mind by attacking bad social customs.⁴¹⁴ To this group of critics, comedy as well as other genres of films all have the social responsibility of educating the general public, therefore, a good comedy is similar to a good tragedy or melodrama in its function and artistic achievement. For example, pioneer Chinese directors including Zhang Shichuan and Ren Jinping believe that, comedies by Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin were among the best of film art. Ren Jinping compares Charlie Chaplin with D.W. Griffith and concludes that the American comedy master is one of the five greatest American directors.⁴¹⁵ However, to those more conservative critics, comedy is not such a high art as a tragedy because it is supposed to low-class and un-educated people. For example,

⁴¹² See Note 303.

⁴¹³ Jiaxiang Ni, “Hu Lie La in Domestic Films,” *The Movie Guide*, July 1, 1927, 46-47. Both of the Chinese comedy films were directed by Wang Youyou and written by Xu Zhuodai, both of whom were active in producing comedy at stage and on screen.

⁴¹⁴ See Note 303.

⁴¹⁵ The other four are Rex Ingram, D.W. Griffith, Cecil Demille, and Ernst Lubitsch. Ren Jinping, *Movie Magazine*, April 1925.

Pan Yihua, a writer for the *Movies Magazine* described fans of both Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd as uneducated. “Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd are the most popular comedians. As household names, both are even familiar to women and children, who knew little about films...If talking with them about the excitement of D.W. Griffith’s films or about misery in Rex Ingram’s films, they won’t be able to understand.”⁴¹⁶ On one hand, Pan’s comment confirms the two comedians’ popularity in 1920s Shanghai, but, on the other hand, it also shows that Pan has a low opinion of comedy, women, and children. He believes that Chinese fans of the two *Huaji* masters would not be able to appreciate the works by D.W. Griffith or Rex Ingram because of their ignorance. Pan’s opinion, however, is representative of a small group of snobbish film critics, who judge a film by the composition of its audience. It also echoes the classic Greek poetic theory which attaches more importance to tragedy than to comedy as the latter is regarded as raw and unrefined.⁴¹⁷ It also shows that in the 1920s, there was a discrepancy between comedy film theory and its practice: while film directors regard a comedy as both an art and a product, some conservative film critics deny both its artistic and commercial value. Pan’s accusation of comedy as a genre for “uneducated” people might also be partly because inter-titles in American films screened in 1910s and 1920s Shanghai were not at all or not entirely translated. It was much easier for illiterate audiences to understand *The Circus* than *Way Down East*. The former is full of action and movement, Chinese audiences can understand it as if it is

⁴¹⁶ Yihua Pan, “Trend of Film Audiences’ Taste over the Past Few Years,” *Movie Magazine*, June 1924. Rex Ingram is a well-known Hollywood actor, writer, director, and producer. Born in Dublin, Ireland, he was regarded as one of the best U.S. directors. His works included *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1920) and *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925), <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002271/>, last accessed December 5, 2008.

⁴¹⁷ Aristotle, “On the Art of Poetry,” in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. by T.S. Dorsh (Penguin Books: 1965): 37-38. According to the Aristotle, tragedy depicts people better than average, while comedy imitates the worst types of man. Tragedy is superior not only to epic, but also to comedy. It is the highest form of art. The quality of a tragedy depends upon six elements, which include plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song. Tragedy is better than a comedy in all these aspects.

an expressive pantomime; yet even, the latter requires more comprehension of characters, plot, background, all of which depends partly on the verbal text. It is just like the situation in which foreign audiences enjoy the martial-arts-based Peking opera *At the Juncture of Three Roads*, or *San Cha Kou* more than the singing-based Kunju opera *The Peony Pavilion*, or *Mu Dan Ting*, especially when there is no or little translation or explanation. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, Chinese inter-titles were not common in Shanghai movie theaters, even when there were inter-titles, it was not completely translated. For example, when Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* (1918) was shown in Shanghai, the forty-six-minute-long comedy had only about ten Chinese word inter-titles.⁴¹⁸ The critic's bias against comedy might also result from a wider presence of comedy in the city. Regardless of the size, location, facilities, and audiences of a cinema, comedy was always in the repertoire for a movie theatre because of its popularity and its easier attainability. To Pan, popularity is equivalent to vulgarity and coarseness.

Unlike Pan's observation, films by the two comedians were warmly welcome by both well-educated and illiterate audiences. For example, when Minsheng Women's College organized a fundraising event for its tenth anniversary celebration, the school screened two comedies, one by Harold Lloyd and the other by Charlie Chaplin, as a treat for its potential contributors, who were teachers, journalists, businessmen, and managers.⁴¹⁹ We can see that the films of the two American comedians attracted Chinese movie-goers of different classes and professions. In terms of gender of comedy audiences, it seems that Harold Lloyd would be more attractive to young Chinese women than Charlie Chaplin. A young woman's love letter to Harold Lloyd was published in the first issue of *Ying Xi Za Zhi*, or *Shadow-play Magazine*, commonly

⁴¹⁸ Huai Lin, "Little Comment upon a Woman of Paris," *Movies Magazines* 12 (April 1925). Chinese translation for *Shoulder Arms* is *Cong Jun Ji*.

⁴¹⁹ *Shen Bao*, October 30, 1921, 1. *Ying Xi Za Zhi*, or *Shadow-play Magazine*, October, 1921. The magazine is commonly regarded as China's first movie magazine.

regarded as China's first movie magazine.⁴²⁰ Moreover, the magazine had Harold Lloyd's portrait as its cover although Chaplin also appeared in the magazine together with other American stars such as Max Linder. One reason for Chaplin's less coverage in this fan magazine might be that his productions were outnumbered by Harold Lloyd's. In the 1920s, Chaplin only produced three full feature films while Lloyd had over twenty films to his name in the same period.⁴²¹ However, even during his unproductive years, Chaplin was still frequently reported on in Chinese film critical discourse for his turbulent personal life. Almost all the articles about him, more or less, touch upon his divorce or marriage. In 1921, the *Shadow-play Magazine* published Xu Xinfu's article called "The Divorce of Charlie Chaplin and His Wife," which discusses his two-year marriage with Mildred Harris and his later divorce with her in 1920.⁴²² Even five years after his divorce with Mildred Harris, the actress was introduced to Shanghai audiences as "ex-wife of Charlie Chaplin."⁴²³ Of course, this highly publicized personal life of Chaplin helped to construct Chinese movie-goers' opinion about him. Shu Tinghao, a film critic in Shanghai gave Chaplin the following evaluation, "he has a good personality except that he likes to marry again and again."⁴²⁴ Shu's comment indicates that Chaplin's marriages seem to hurt him as a good person. His statement is paradoxical considering the fact that China had a long history of polygamy for men. It shows different values of the American and Chinese cultures: in the Chinese society, men could marry many times, but not with high publicity. However, in Hollywood star system, a star is always in the spotlight. He/she is a public figure, who is

⁴²⁰ *Shen Bao*, April 1, 1921.

⁴²¹ Charlie Chaplin, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0516001/#actor1920>, last accessed February 25, 2008.

⁴²² *Shadow-play Magazine*, April, 1921, content.

⁴²³ *Movies Magazine*, March 1925, photo.

⁴²⁴ Tinghao Shu, "Short Biography of Charlie Chaplin," *Movie Magazine*, April, 1925.

supposed to be scrutinized and commented upon by the public. Chaplin's stardom in 1920s Shanghai will be examined in Chapter Eight in detail.

To sum up, there seemed to be a discrepancy between popular and critical discourse about American comedy film in 1920s Shanghai. Because comedy film was easy to understand and was highly present at Shanghai theatres, it could be counted as the most popular film in 1920s. However, because of its easy access to low-class audiences, some Chinese critics held a snobbish opinion of American comedy. In the midst of praise and attack of comedy, there was a negotiated reading about American comedy in popular media, that is, to promote it in a Chinese dramatic tradition. In this way, this foreign film genre is put in a more familiar frame so that local audiences can understand and appreciate it better.

7.0 CHAPTER SIX: AMERICAN MELODRAMA: CHINESE LOVE STORIES

Recently, a well-known film was shown at the Olympic Theater and the Victoria Theatre. Its English title is *Name the Man*, translated in Chinese as *Shui*, or *Who*. The film has an interesting plot...The story is similar to the Chinese traditional opera *Yu Tang Chun*, only with a different finale. Therefore, I call it foreign *Yu Tang Chun*.⁴²⁵

Name the Man, a ninety-minute melodrama film released by the Goldwyn Pictures in 1924, was shown at two movie theatres in Shanghai in February 1925.⁴²⁶ In the comment, the anonymous author compared the foreign film to *Yu Chun Tang*, a traditional Peking opera. The opera tells the love story of Yu Chun Tang, a courtesan and Wang Jinlong, son of a high official. At one point, the two lovers have to part with each other, and later, they lose contact. When Yu is falsely accused of being a murderer, Wang happens to be the judge, as we can imagine, she is released and the old couple is happily married hereafter. Likewise, *Name the Man*, a film of a triangular love, also has a reunion scene in court, but, instead of the marriage of Victor and Bessie, the American film makes his fiancée Fenella forgive Victor for having an affair with Bessie and marry him while he is still in prison. Strictly speaking, the comparison is

⁴²⁵ Yu, "Foreign Yu Tang Chun," *Movies Magazine*, March 1925.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

not adequate because the Chinese story is more about the everlasting love theme while the Hollywood story is about forgiveness and repentance in true love. However, the Chinese writer compares the two stories so that Chinese readers were able to understand the American film following a Chinese dramatic tradition. Even if the foreign film has a story and ending different from its Chinese “counterpart,” it was still promoted and reviewed in the theme of a Chinese opera: a happy ending or marriage, a moral message that justice is finally done, and the good eventually overcomes the evil.

To a great extent, it is convenient to promote American melodrama in the Chinese dramatic tradition as both have much in common. As a main genre of Hollywood film, melodrama can trace its historical roots back to the eighteenth century novel and theatre. With a set formula, melodrama combines both tragic and comic elements. “At the level of pure entertainment, melodrama established notoriety through its astonishing twists and turns of fate, suspense, disaster and tragedy, its last-minute rescues and its happy endings.”⁴²⁷ Clearly, a melodrama film is expected to depict the difficulty its characters have to go through in order to achieve a “happy-for-ever” ending. There is always a conflict or a problem in melodrama, and there is always a solution to it, albeit, not with easiness. In Robert Lang’s words, “Melodrama must always find an aesthetic, textual solution to ideological contradiction.”⁴²⁸ According to him, what can melodrama offer is only an unrealistic solution to an insolvable problem. In a melodrama film, viewers can only hope for the best in a worst scenario. It is represented in a spirit of optimism instead of pessimism. In this sense, Lang compares this pattern of problem and solution with the Christian metaphor of resurrection after crucifixion.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2004), 7.

⁴²⁸ Robert Lang, *American Film Melodrama* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 95-96.

⁴²⁹ Lang, 96.

The Chinese traditional drama also has a happy ending, even in a tragedy. Su Guolong summarizes four kinds of happy ending in a Chinese tragedy: a symbolic happy ending, a get-even ending, a transcendent ending, and a harmonious ending.⁴³⁰ Strictly speaking, none of the four types of ending in Chinese opera are similar to that of American melodrama film. According to Su, the four types show the Chinese's optimistic viewpoint of tragedy, "we insist on ending a whole story in joy and happiness to give a light of hope and opportunity."⁴³¹ Obviously, this seemingly optimistic solution in a Chinese tragedy coincides with that of melodrama. In the same principle of providing light to audiences, both American melodrama and traditional Chinese opera have an ending in which justice is done. As in a melodrama a problem usually arises from a conflict between the good and the evil, its story usually shows the victory of the good over the evil. Similarly, Chinese opera also gives message that the reward is given to the good and punishment to the bad. However, unlike in some melodrama, the reward or the punishment in Chinese opera can be symbolic, emotional, or sometimes even unrealistic. Chinese drama critics even consider some Chinese operas as passive and superstitious as they give an escapist's viewpoint about life. "Most (Chinese operas) end with an optimistic spirit of the victory of the good over the evil; however, some have a passive message of an escapist."⁴³² An example of an escapist's ending might be a person who can not achieve what he wants in real life, so he decides to become a monk to avoid this world. In this sense, Chinese traditional drama has a wider range of a happy ending or justice than American melodrama. An optimistic or justice-giving ending to Chinese audience might be pessimistic, or at best self-

⁴³⁰ A symbolic happy ending can be that of Romeo and Juliet, who reunite in death; a get-even ending can be that a victim gets back to a villain by haunting him after the victim's death; a transcendent ending can be that a protagonist becomes a monk that escapes from the world; A harmonious ending can be that characters in a play finally gets along with each other after a conflict. Guolong Su, "National Traits of the Chinese Classic Tragedy," in *Collection of Essays on the Aesthetics of the Chinese Drama*, ed. Zhang Geng & Gai Jiaotian (Taipei: Danqing Publishing, 1995), 52-54.

⁴³¹ Su, 52.

⁴³² Su, 54.

comforting to the Westerners. Perception of different interpretations of concepts such as a happy ending and justice is a necessity in understanding the reception of a film in a transnational context. Strictly speaking, not all American melodrama has a happy ending. However, because of the Chinese dramatic tradition, Chinese audiences were able to give a new twist to a tragic American film and perceive it as an upbeat film. One case in point is that of *Broken Blossoms*, which I will analyze in detail in the final section of this chapter. Advertising of American films in 1920s Chinese media also appropriated the similarities between American film and Chinese drama and promoted the foreign medium in the Chinese dramatic tradition. This genre of films was so well-received by audiences in 1920s China that it was confirmed by North's report, "the Chinese also prefer the 'lived-happily ever after' and 'triumph of right over wrong' ending which concludes most of our films, as compared with the more tragic finales of many European pictures."⁴³³ From the report, we can see that as Chinese audiences did not appreciate a dark ending in films, European films did not sell as well as American films in 1920s Shanghai. Closely connected with a happy ending is a moral message both American melodrama and Chinese opera tend to feature despite the fact that they might have different moral messages even in a same story. Chinese advertising of American melodrama also appropriated this similarity and promoted Hollywood film in a Chinese dramatic tradition to convey a moral message. One case in point is *The Earl of Essex*, which was compared to the Chinese historical story of Yue Fei. Called "duan dou jiang jun" in Chinese, which means beheaded general, the film was screened at the Isis Theater for five days starting from November 14, 1923. The film was promoted in a way similar to Chinese traditional drama in which the value and integrity of a hero are proven only after much suffering, difficulties, or even his death. This moral message is different from that of the original English story, which is about treason and loyalty. The

⁴³³ North, 432.

Earl of Essex betrayed the Queen after he could not recover her favor. There were almost no similarities between the Chinese hero and the English earl. However, the Chinese advertising used the familiar Chinese story to promote the foreign film and tried to convey a message of loyalty.

In addition to Chinese dramatic tradition, advertisers of American films in Chinese media also appropriated popular literature such as the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, a literary genre popular in the 1910s and 1920s Shanghai, famous for its sensational love stories of young scholars and girls. In their works, both Cheng Jihua and Zhang Zhen examine the role of this school of literature in the construction of vernacular culture in 1920s Shanghai. According to Cheng, this school appealed to Shanghai readers' taste for short amorous stories of young couples. Not only did this school have its own periodicals, its writers were also widely published in popular dailies such as *Shen Bao*. Moreover, they were also actively involved in the production and promotion of local films.⁴³⁴ Zhang believes that the school and Chinese films influenced each other not only through their common themes, but also in the construction of readers. "Readers of Butterfly fiction, many of whom would presumably also attend films based on the literature as well, overlapped with those readers of film publications, especially fan magazines and film programs."⁴³⁵ From Zhang's analysis, we might infer that butterfly writers actually helped grow a large number of movie audiences in the city. This literature, fan magazines, and film plot sheets were likely to have shared a large number of readers/viewers with films. As butterfly writers worked for popular media in 1920s Shanghai, naturally, languages of this school had a high presence in film advertisements, comment, and synopses of that period. American melodrama was advertised and promoted in a mixed

⁴³⁴ Jihua Cheng, *Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi*, or *History of Chinese Film Development* (Beijing: China Film Publishing House, 1963), 54-57. The school has nearly ten magazines to its name: *Xiaoshuo Shi Bao*, or *Short Story Times*; *You Xi Za Zhi*, or *Entertaining Magazine*; *Li Bai Liu*, or *Saturday*; *Xiaoshuo Cong Bao*, or *Newspaper of Short Story*; *Xiao Shuo Hai*, or *Sea of Short Stories*; *Ban Yue*, or *Bimonthly*; *Hong Zazhi*, or *Red Magazine*; *Hong Meigui*, or *Red Rose*.

⁴³⁵ Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 72.

discourse of education and entertainment. This double function of film is reminiscent of that of photo portraiture in nineteenth Europe, as investigated by Allan Sekula in his essay “Body and Archive.” According to him, while photos had both honorific and repressive functions, later its disciplinary function was used to distinguish “the other” in the name of science.⁴³⁶ Unlike the photo’s disciplinary function, in 1920s Shanghai, film’s disciplinary function was more disguised with more entertaining language. Film advertising in the Chinese-language media tried to strike a balance between pleasure and discipline, entertainment and education. The outcome is a mixture of moral message and sensation love languages in advertising of American film. This double-ness or ambiguity can also show that in the 1920s the film ad was still looking for languages to define and delimit itself.

In this chapter, I am going to examine advertising of American film in the *Shen Bao* and fan magazines appropriated both the Chinese dramatic tradition and popular literature genre 1920s Shanghai to familiarize Chinese audiences with the foreign art form and to sell American films. In so doing, this chapter will be divided into three parts: first, I discuss the role of the mandarin duck and butterfly school in promoting American melodrama; second, I examine educational role in advertising of American melodrama; finally, I use D.W. Griffith’s *Broken Blossoms* as a case study to examine the two main influences in promoting this film.

⁴³⁶ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 6-7.

7.1 **ROLE OF THE MANDARIN DUCK AND BUTTERFLY SCHOOL IN PROMOTING AMERICAN MELODRAMA**

Couples that love each other should stay away from sad love stories as
they should stay away from snakes and scorpions; we have love,
therefore we have the world; in this way, regardless of their structures,
no movie can be exempt from love.⁴³⁷

According to this short and over-sentimental essay, love is a red thread that goes through all films as it is the origin and ultimate significance of our world. This pan-erotic view of film represented that of “mandarin duck and butterfly,” a popular literature genre that arose with modern urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization in 1910s and 1920s Shanghai. Because of its love theme, the school was named after mandarin duck and butterfly, two creatures that symbolize a couple’s love in Chinese literature and culture.⁴³⁸ According to E. Perry Link, this genre catered to “urban middle class,” which is most likely made up of “small merchants, various kinds of clerks, and secretaries, high school students, housewives, and other modestly educated, marginally well off urbanities.”⁴³⁹ For these urban readers, the-mandarin-duck-and-butterfly novels created both a private and public reading space that enabled them to distinguish from or identify with others. Also its theme of sensational love appealed to a wide readership. According to Wei Shaochang’s research, the school has a list of 2,215 novels, 113

⁴³⁷ Chubin Lu, “Silent Dust,” *The Movie Guide*, April 1, 1927.

⁴³⁸ Lu Xun, famous Chinese essayist describes the love theme of this school in the following lines: the couple please and love each other, they can not be separated, under a willow tree, and under the flowers, they are like two flowers, or mandarin ducks.” “A Glimpse of Shanghai Art,” in *A Complete Collection of Lu Xun’s Essays* (Beijing: Renmin Literature Publishing House, 1957), 231.

⁴³⁹ E. Perry Link, Jr. *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 5-6.

magazines, and 49 newspapers and tabloids that published this genre of stories.⁴⁴⁰ One case in point is the *Saturday*, a weekly popular magazine that especially published short stories of the school. With an aim to entertain readers through love and family tragedies, the magazine was said to have a circulation of 20,000 copies per issue during its life.⁴⁴¹ More than one percent of the city's population read the magazine, which was commonly regarded as a high circulation rate for a weekly magazine in 1910s and 1920s Shanghai.⁴⁴² Another example of the school's popularity can be seen from its masterpiece *Yu Li Hun*, or *Jade Pear Spirit*, a love tragedy of He Mengxia and Bai Liniang, a widower. The story was so popular that it was re-printed 23 times in ten years after it was first published in 1912, not including numerous pirated versions.⁴⁴³

Such love stories are usually characterized by a tragic romance in which a couple can never have a chance of reuniting with each other after a small accident or fate. Obviously, this school differs from American melodramatic film in two major ways: first, while writers of the literary genre generally end their stories with a tragic or sensational touch, American melodrama has a more promising and optimistic ending; second, unlike melodrama, the school does not have a moral message in the stories. Their differences result from their respective historical background and artistic purposes. The school of mandarin ducks and butterflies is well-known for producing tragic love stories for entertaining its urban middle-class readers; while from the beginning, American melodrama aimed to cater to a wider range of viewers. Because it was considered as a vulgar literature genre with no social or educational values, the mandarin duck and butterfly

⁴⁴⁰ Link, Jr. 15. According to Link, these figures do not include short stories, sequels to popular novels, and translated works of the school.

⁴⁴¹ *Saturday* was modeled after the *Saturday Evening Post*, a weekly magazine published in the United States from August 4, 1821 to February 8, 1967. The first issue of *Saturday* magazine was published on June 6, 1914, and it ceased publication in 1916. In 1921, its publication started again. It stopped publication in February 1923 when it reached 200th issue.

⁴⁴² http://www.ibookman.com/Article_Show.asp?ArticleID=275, last accessed July 11, 2007.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

school was frequently attacked by left-wing critics such as Lu Xun for misleading readers with its degenerative content.⁴⁴⁴

Such attacks did not affect the school's popularity and activities. This school was widely present and actively involved in the popular media, the entertainment sites, and literary clubs in 1920s Shanghai. Writers of this school, including Yazhen Xu, Tianxiao Xu, Dingyi Li, and Zhou Shoujuan, were all fans of Chinese operas and familiar with its tradition. Moreover, Shoujuan Zhou was even a fan of American film. He not only wrote short stories for popular magazines and newspapers, but also wrote film scripts and film reviews. Doubtlessly, on the one hand, this inter-textual writing experience must have affected the language of advertisements of American films in Chinese-language newspapers, but on the other hand, the popularity of the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly school among readers, in return, reconstructed and reinforced the popular genre. The influence of the Chinese literary school on advertising of American melodrama could be seen in the similar categorization of love in the *Saturday* magazine and ads of American melodrama in popular media. For example, in its first issue, the magazine listed 13 different kinds of love stories such as Xia Qing, or heroic love, Ai Qing, or sorrowful love, and Can Qing, or miserable love.⁴⁴⁵ Interestingly, advertisements of American melodrama in the *Shen Bao* and the Chinese fan magazines also have a similar love-labeling system as that of love stories in *Saturday*. By examining my collection of *Shen Bao*, I find that American melodrama films, the biggest genre that was shown in Shanghai in the 1920s, were mostly promoted as *Aiqing pian*, or the love film. For example, *Tian*

⁴⁴⁴ Yuan Yang Hu Die Pai, or the mandarin duck and butterfly school, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/64351.htm>, last accessed December 5, 2008.

⁴⁴⁵ The thirteen kinds of love include: xia qing, or heroic feeling; ai qing, or sorrowful love; yuan qing, or resentful love; can qing, miserable love; ku qing, or bitter love; yan qing, or glamorous love, chan qing, or repentant love; ai qing, or love; chi qing, or foolishly strong love; qi qing, or strange love; huan qing, or imagined love; chou qing, or ugly love; xi qing, or happy love.

Fang Ye Tan,⁴⁴⁶ or *Thousand and One Nights*, or *Arabian Tales* (1919) was promoted as *shen-guai aiqing pian*, or god-monster love film, which means that it is a love story between human beings within a host culture of the gods and monsters. Both *Jin Guo* (1921),⁴⁴⁷ or *Forbidden Fruit* and *yu di yu sheng*,⁴⁴⁸ or *The City of Silent Men* (1921) were coded as *she hui yan qing pian*, or social glamorous love films; *bu zhen zhi fu*, or *The Misfit Wife* (1920) was advertised as *she hui aiqing pian*, or a social love film; *qiao fu shuo huang*,⁴⁴⁹ or *The Ladder of Lies* (1920) is regarded as *she hui aiqing feng ci pian*, or a social love satire film; interestingly, *ru ren yan fu*,⁴⁵⁰ or *Nineteen and Phyllis* (1920), which was premiered in the United States in December 1920, was promoted as *zui xin hua ji aiqing pian*, or the latest funny love film and *nie hai*,⁴⁵¹ or *The Serpent* (1916) was promoted as *she hui jing shi aiqing pian*, or social alarming love film. Clearly, categorization of American melodrama in Chinese advertisements were affected by both the mandarin duck and butterfly school as well as criticism of the school because almost all films were labeled as “social,” which was in contrast with “individual.” The mandarin duck and butterfly writers were commonly accused of writing novels about individuals’ lives without communicating a more meaningful social message. Labeling of American melodrama in Chinese advertisements shows an eclectic and inclusive approach: on one hand, advertisers tried to attract people who were fond of the so-called “vulgar” love stories; and on the other hand, they also tried to cater to the taste of readers who would like to see films that aim to tell a moral and educational message, which is one of the traditions of Chinese drama.

⁴⁴⁶ *Tian Fang Ye Tan* means night stories in the distant land.

⁴⁴⁷ *Jin Guo* means forbidden fruit.

⁴⁴⁸ *Yu Di Yu Sheng* means that the rest of the life at the bottom of a jail.

⁴⁴⁹ *Qiao Fu Shuo Huang* means smart woman tells lies.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ru Ren Yan Fu* means coward’s luck for love.

⁴⁵¹ *Nie Hai* means sea of evils.

Another influence of the butterfly school is also evinced in the translated titles of American melodrama films.⁴⁵² As the butterfly school usually has a sensational love of a young girl as its theme, titles of stories of this literary genre also convey this theme. For example, *Yu Li Hun*, or *Jade Pear Spirit* indicates that it is a story of a beautiful girl as jade indicates the beauty of a female in the Chinese literature. However, the word “spirit” conveys a tragic message as it usually indicates death or a sad ending. Some translated titles even copied directly from that of a best-selling novel of the butterfly school. For example, the Chinese title for an American film was called *Ku Yin Yuan*, or *Bitter Marriage*, an imitation of Zhang Hengshui’s popular butterfly novel *Ti Xiao Yin Yuan*, or *Unhappy Marriage*.⁴⁵³ Many translated titles of American melodrama sound like those of the butterfly stories with terms and expressions such as flower, romance, love, marriage, mandarin ducks, butterfly, and spirit. Take the term mandarin ducks as an instance, from 1919 to 1924, titles of six American films had Yuan Yang, or Mandarin Ducks in them. They include *Tie Xue Yuan Yang*, or *Iron and Blood Mandarin Ducks*;⁴⁵⁴ *Dao Luan Yuan Yang*, or *Upside Down Mandarin Ducks*;⁴⁵⁵ *Sai Wai Yuan Yang*, or *Mandarin Ducks outside the*

⁴⁵² Jianhua Chen, “D.W. Griffith and Early Chinese Film” in *Dang Dai Dianying*, or *Contemporary Cinema* 134:5 (2006): 118. He points this influence of butterfly school on the translated titles of American melodrama. One example Chen gives in his article is the Chinese translation of D.W. Griffith’s *The Girl Who Stayed at Home* (1919). “It is translated in Chinese as *Ou Zhan Feng Liu Shi*. Love plus history become a prescription for attracting film audiences.” *Ou Zhan Feng Liu Shi* means a romance during the European War, which sounds similar to that of a butterfly school story.

⁴⁵³ Yong-fang Wang et al., “A List of Foreign Films Shown in China, 1896-1924,” in *Dianying: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Chinese Film Studies* 1, *Early Chinese Cinema (I)* (Hong Kong Chinese Film Association, 1983), 263.

⁴⁵⁴ Wang, 264.

⁴⁵⁵ Wang, 265.

Border;⁴⁵⁶ *Cu Yuan Yang*, or *Vinegar (or Jealous) Mandarin Ducks*;⁴⁵⁷ *Yu Di Yuan Yang*, or *Mandarin Ducks at the Bottom of a Jail*;⁴⁵⁸ and *Jie Hou Yuan Yang*, or *Mandarin Ducks after Difficulty*.⁴⁵⁹ The translation has little to do with its original English title. For example, one can hardly figure out that *The Iron and Blood Mandarin Ducks* is the Chinese translated title for D.W.Griffith's *The Hearts of the World*. The film was commonly regarded as a propaganda film directed by Griffith at the request and support of the British government to induce the United States to participate in World War I. The love story in the film is only a sub-theme in a film that is more concerned with revealing the evils of the enemies and the righteousness of warring against them. To some extent, the film's Chinese title gives a better plot summary than its original English title: the film is about a love story in a war. However, in the Chinese translated title, the love theme is put into the foreground and the war theme is only a background that provides a context for development of the love story. The heroic and epic sense in its English title has been lost in its translation. To a confused Western viewer, the translated titles all sound like a menu in a Chinese restaurant. However, to the Chinese familiar with the butterfly school, the message they convey is clear and alluring: they indicate love-themed stories and romantic encounters in unexpected or unusual circumstances. They indicate that readers are able to expect to see similar romantic adventures in a movie theatre as well as in a popular novel at home.

⁴⁵⁶ Wang, 267.

⁴⁵⁷ Wang, 274.

⁴⁵⁸ Wang, 275.

⁴⁵⁹ Wang, 275.

7.2 EDUCATIONAL ROLE IN AMERICAN MELODRAMA FILM

In the previous section, I discuss how film advertisements in the popular Chinese media used amorous titles to promote American melodrama. In this section, I would like to examine how American motion pictures served as a public forum for Chinese critics to discuss the new mass medium's educational role and how the Chinese reception of film might be constructed in this critical discourse.

American melodrama and Chinese drama also share a tradition of conveying a moral message. According to Peter Brooks, melodrama is a product of post-sacred period in which melodrama replaces religion for giving ethical and moral lessons to people in every day life.

We might say that the center of interest and the scene of the underlying drama reside within what we could call the 'moral occult,' the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality...The melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult.⁴⁶⁰

Like a fable, a melodramatic story aims to give a moral message to a story. The ultimate goal of a melodrama is to "locate and articulate" the morals hidden in a story. The Chinese dramatic tradition shares a similar goal with melodrama—to convey a moral message through a story. Confucianism advocates that art, poetry, and music are used to teach people social ethics and etiquette. "Music and poetry are used by wise people to change people's heart. They touched people

⁴⁶⁰ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.

so deeply that they are able to change their thoughts and social customs.”⁴⁶¹ Since ancient times in China, drama has been used as a major way of educating people and informing them of history and morals. Certainly, some morals changed with society. For example, in a feudal society, remarriage for a widower is not regarded as a decent behavior, while a man can marry and remarry at his will. The stories of many Chinese operas carry these patriarchal morals. Because of high presence of moral messages in an opera, it is not uncommon for a Chinese opera fan to summarize them after watching a show. With this tradition of Chinese drama, film is expected to have an educational function on its viewers. Moral messages were prevalent in the advertising of American melodrama in *Shen Bao*. One case in point is *The Misfit Wife* (1920), which was shown at the Carlton Theatre for three days starting from November 4, 1923. The film is about how the working class girl Katie Malloy was finally accepted by her husband’s wealthy family because of her virtue, tolerance, and her sacrifice. In the *Shen Bao*, the film ad runs as follows,

In this dirty society, it is not easy to find a chaste girl. The wealthier the family a girl comes from, the less work you can do to make her better. However, a girl from a rich family is not born bad, rather, it is the environment and loose family education that make her evil. In this film, there are two girls, one is a homeless girl whose love for her husband is worth praising; the other is a well-fed and rich girl who is treated well by her husband. However, she still has an affair. What is the reason for that? If you watch *The Misfit Wife*, you will know.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ Yue ji, shi yue. Yue ye zhe, sheng ren zhi suo le ye, er ke yi shan min xin. Gan qi ren shen, qi yi feng yi shu yi.

⁴⁶² *Shen Bao*, November 5, 1923, p.5.

This advertisement correlates virtues with birth probably partly because the writer of the advertisement was from a less well-off family, or partly because the majority of readers of the newspapers were not from a privileged background. Also, it is common in Chinese opera to have low-class women as protagonists.⁴⁶³ Famous Chinese operas such as *pi pa ji*, *jing cha ji*, and *bai yue ting ji* all have lower-class women as the main character. In these classic operas, a good woman is normally depicted as an advocate of traditional values and morals: she is faithful to her husband; she is respectful of her husband's parents; and she is willing to sacrifice herself to her husband's family. Because of these good virtues, she is rewarded at the end, which is normally a reunion with her husband. This film ad appropriates the narration of a traditional drama to convey a Chinese moral message: a girl with virtues will be rewarded by marrying a good husband. One might argue that it is possible that this ad in *Shen Bao* is translated from an American film ad. However, if there existed several English versions of the film ad, the *Shen Bao's* very choice of this version shows that whoever chose the version was aware of or took advantage of its content for the purpose of selling the film to Chinese audiences.

Not only was moral message prevalent in *Shen Bao's* ads for melodramatic films, it is widely present in film reviews in fan magazines. For example, in the film comment by San San, we can see his viewpoint about new dating practices in 1920s Shanghai,

Way Down East fits the Chinese society. It gives a universal moral message. People who had seen the film all unanimously said that it was a good one. Recently, we Chinese people promoted such terms as 'openness in social interaction' and "freedom of love," therefore so many girls

⁴⁶³ Su, 57.

became Anna, victim of Sanderson. This film acted as a guide to innocent Chinese girls.⁴⁶⁴

1920s is an age of confrontation between old and new values, especially with the ongoing New Cultural Movement that aimed to challenge traditional Chinese values. The old values that bore the brunt of criticism were attitudes towards gender such as to observe propriety between men and women and to treat men and women differently.⁴⁶⁵ In the late 1910s and early 1920s, educated girls started to challenge the old practice of arranged marriages by looking for husbands themselves through normal social interaction such as parties and ballroom dances. Obviously, San San, the conservative film critic does not agree with the new dating practice of young girls. He believed that freedom of love and openness of love could only lead to an unprotected relationship for a young girl like Anna in *Way Down East*. He does not mention that Anna's final marriage with David is also an outcome of freedom of love. From this example, we can see that not only did Chinese advertisers appropriate Chinese dramatic tradition to sell American melodrama, but also the foreign art was appropriated by Chinese critics to promote the traditional Chinese values. The reciprocal influences, together with others, helped to construct film culture in 1920s Shanghai. In the next section of this chapter, I am going to use *Broken Blossoms* as a case study to examine the role of different factors in the reception of the film in 1920s China.

⁴⁶⁴ San San, "Discuss with You over the Seven Films of D.W. Griffith," *Movies Magazines*, June 1924.

⁴⁶⁵ Nan Nu Shou Shou Bu Qing, 男女授受不清, and nan nu you bie, 男女有别.

7.3 A CASE STUDY: BROKEN BLOSSOMS

Of all American melodrama shown in 1920s Shanghai, D.W. Griffith's films were doubtlessly among the most popular ones. His works such as *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916), *Broken Blossoms* (1919), *Way Down East* (1920), and *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) were all screened in 1920s Shanghai.⁴⁶⁶ Some of Griffith's productions were exhibited more than once in the city because of their popularity. For example, after its successful run the Isis Theater in 1922, *Way Down East* was shown again at the Athena Theater starting from November 11, 1923 for five days and three times a day.⁴⁶⁷ It was so popular that a Chinese film was made especially to explain the American film. From the ad, it is not clear what the explanation looked like. It can mean Chinese inter-titles were projected onto another screen, which was not a common practice in early 1920s Shanghai movie theaters.

Not only did Griffith's films achieve popular success, they received good critical reviews as well. According to Kanru Wang, D.W. Griffith's films such as *Way Down East* actually changed Shanghai's audiences' opinion of and taste for a full-length film. After the film was screened at the Isis Theater in 1922, Shanghai audiences started to like "short films" that were less than 15 reels while before that, people liked to watch 30-40 reel-long films, mostly detective story series.⁴⁶⁸ Interestingly, the film was actually commonly regarded as a blockbuster in the United States as it has 12 reels. Moreover, Griffith's films were so well-known that some

⁴⁶⁶ The records of screening of these films are: *Birth of a Nation*, June 25-31, 1923, the Carlton Theatre and May 5-11, 1924, the Isis Theatre; *Intolerance*, October 18-21, 1923, the Isis Theatre; *Broken Blossoms*, Feb. 9-21, 1923, Carlton Theatre; *Way Down East*, May 22-29, 1922, the Isis Theatre, Oct. 6-23, 1922, the Isis Theatre, Nov. 9-18, 1923, the Athena Theatre, Feb. 18-24, 1924 the Hujiang Cinema; *Orphans of the Storm*, Oct. 1-7, 1923, the Carlton Theatre, April 1-7, 1924, the Isis Theatre. Jianhua Chen, "D.W. Griffith and Early Chinese Film" *Contemporary Cinema* 134:5 (2006): 114.

⁴⁶⁷ *Shen Bao*, November 11, 1923, 1.

⁴⁶⁸ Kanru Wang, "The Length of a Film," *Movies Magazine* 8 (Dec. 1924).

Chinese films even copied the titles. Titles of two Chinese films are *The Peach Blossom* (1925) and *Faded Blossom* (1926), which sound like *Broken Blossoms*.⁴⁶⁹ The appropriation is understandable, even smart. When translated into Chinese, *Broken Blossoms* is called Can Hua Lei, which means broken blossom tears. By imitating the traditional Chinese opera names such as *Huan Sha Lei*, or Tears about a Clothes-washing Girl, a Chinese opera about the tragic story of a working girl, the Chinese title of the film shapes viewers' perception of the film: it is a tragedy about an innocent girl that Chinese might find its prototype in the traditional Chinese drama. Titles of both *The Peach Blossom* and *Faded Blossom* indicate a tragic story of a girl, just as that of *Broken Blossoms*.

The film *Broken Blossoms* was scheduled to be shown at the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai from February 9 to 21. However, its show was stopped by the British-run Shanghai Municipal Government for its derogative portrayal of the British people, according to Kai Zhi's comment of the film in *Shen Bao*.⁴⁷⁰ Not much comment was published in Shanghai about the film as the city was mainly governed by the British government. However, three years later, the film was shown in Beijing, where the British control was not as tight as in Shanghai. Its educational role in promoting the Chinese culture was emphasized in its advertising. Due to limited sources regarding its screening in Shanghai, I would like to analyze its advertising in Beijing when it was screened in 1926. In so doing, I want to show how its advertising appropriated both Chinese dramatic tradition and the butterfly school to promote the film. Shown from July 31 to August 3, 1926 at the Xinming Theater in Beijing, the 90-minute film was promoted in the *Xinming Supplement* as D.W.Griffith's contribution to Sino-American understanding. In the two-page advertisement of the film, it is labeled as Ming Gui Bei Qing Da Ying Pian, or long, precious, and sad love film. The

⁴⁶⁹ 1927 *China Cinema Yearbook*.

⁴⁷⁰ *Shen Bao*, May 19, 1923, 18.

advertisement even published a letter supposed to be written by the American director to the Chinese audience regarding his purpose of producing the Chinese theme film. Here is the translation of the letter:

Westerners are normally ignorant of the situation in East Asia and they have false ideas about (the Eastern culture). There was an invisible barrier. In view of this, I invited Lillian Gish and Richard Barthelmess to perform in *Broken Blossoms*, aiming to inculcate the Chinese culture into the American men and women, to let them know the real Chinese spirit, to strengthen relationship between the two countries, and to promote friendship for ever. Since the film's release, it has received both good and bad reviews. Since I grew up in the West, I am not so familiar with the customs in the East Asia. Therefore, it is inevitable that I might have made some mistakes in the film. I hope that you can correct my mistake while the film is showed in China. It will be shown at the Xinming Theater for four days, starting from July 31. I will be grateful that that you could come to see the film and give me your comment on it. Sincerely,
D.W.Griffith.⁴⁷¹

Obviously, D.W. Griffith would be shocked if he saw "his" letter to Chinese audience. The well-known director could never imagine that some Chinese advertiser published an apology in his name. In this fake letter, Griffith became a modest and pious worshipper of the Chinese culture. He claims that because of his background, unavoidably, he will make errors about Chinese culture, yet does not diminish his good intention. Instead of having, any commercial

⁴⁷¹ *Xinming Supplement*, China Film Archive, 32611-3218.

motives, he is portrayed as a cultural ambassador who produced this film mainly to promote the Chinese culture and foreign relations between the two countries. From the letter, 1920s Chinese audiences who did not know who D.W. Griffith was would have gotten at least this impression: *Broken Blossoms* is a controversial film made by a Western director who did not know the Chinese culture. However, he has well-intended meanings in his film—to let the Western world know the Chinese culture and to educate ignorant Americans. As a passionate fan of the Chinese culture, he welcomes any criticism from Chinese audience regarding the mistakes he made in this film. Interestingly, the film's selling points, in this ad, are both its educational function for the Westerners and patriotic emotions of Chinese audiences: the film aims to serve as a textbook of the Chinese culture for ignorant foreigners and the Chinese are the judges of the film's quality. This educational function coincides with one of the three major Chinese dramatic traditions, that is, a play is expected to deliver a social and moral message, else, it is not even worth seeing. Unlike most other advertisements, this ad tries to attract Chinese audiences by appropriating the Chinese dramatic tradition in a transnational sense: the American film is a means through which the Chinese can use to educate American audiences, or it is a means through which the Americans can learn from the Chinese. This educational function can also be seen from eight slogan-like reasons listed in the advertisement, "It is a show of noble and pure love; it aims to promote the Eastern culture; it spreads the Chinese spirit; it interprets abstract Buddhism; it has magnificent Chinese towns; it has a Chinese man acted by Richard Barthelmess; it has a sacred Buddhist temple; and it has a Chinatown across the Pacific Ocean."⁴⁷² In addition to the educational message, the above comment also appropriates the love-theme from both mandarin duck school literature and the Chinese dramatic tradition to

⁴⁷² Translated by Qian Zhang.

promote the film. In the midst of the comment is Lillian Gish's close-up of her melancholy and virgin-like image, which indicates that it is a love story with a virtuous young girl as its central character (Fig. 20). Interestingly, none of the eight catch phrases ever mention the tragic ending of the film. The absence of the word "tragedy" here might be intentional because Chinese audiences preferred a story with a happy ending to one without a hopeful ending. Although the film is labeled as a "sad love" film, it only indicates that the couple might have encountered hardship and difficulties in their love. However, it does not necessarily mean that their love ends in a tragic way.

Surprisingly, no advertisements and reviews of *Broken Blossoms* in 1920s China were found to mention Moon Kwan, a Chinese national hired as a technical advisor by D.W. Griffith when he directed the Chinese romance for seventy-five dollars a week.⁴⁷³ Moreover, even the advertisement in *Xinming Supplement* mentions Buddhism in the film, it does not mention Moon Kwan's role of the Monk in the romance, a selling-point that is more obvious and easier to publicize than the behind-scene job as a cultural advisor. Hired as a technical advisor in the film, Kwan was responsible for checking all the settings, props, and costumes regarding Chinese culture in the film. He went to the stores and shops in Chinatown to look for the things for the film with a list given by Griffith's assistant director. He either rented them, or if he could not, had them made by studio carpenters. Kwan's another responsibility was to give a book list of Chinese literature and poems to Richard Barthelmess, who played the role of the Yellow Man, so that this Caucasian actor could have a better understanding of the Chinese character in the film. Being a Chinese technical advisor among a white-dominated producing group was not an

⁴⁷³ D.W. Griffith's *Papers*, 1897-1954, University Publications of Frederick, Maryland, reel 4. According to contract signed on November 25, 1918 between Moon Kwan and the D.W. Griffith Studio, Kwan was paid 75 dollars a week for a period of three weeks.

easy job, it involved argument and contention. At one point, Kwan had to talk Griffith into changing his original plan as to the look of a contemporary Chinese.⁴⁷⁴ For example, the first question Kwan encountered was: what should Cheng Huan look like? In Griffith's mind, it is a young Chinese man in a cheongshan (traditional Chinese clothes for men), wearing a *Guapi* (melon-rind-like) cap, and a long queue. To him, the long queue is a crucial part of Cheng Huan's look because it is a distinct marker of a Chinese, at least in the eye of his audience. Moon Kwan felt so strong against it that he argued with Griffith about it. His argument is that after collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, no Chinese men grew long queue any more and it is ridiculous to see a Chinese man with a queue. The result of the argument is what we see in the film's today—Yellow Man without a queue.

The absence of such an important detail in the film advertisement, that is, a Chinese man was hired both as a cultural consultant and as an actor in D.W. Griffith's Chinese romance is not accidental, instead, it shows the actual reality of Chinese culture in the 1920s America, which was a far cry from what Chinese audiences expected. It is common that Chinese-language advertisements of American films sometimes borrowed a page from their American counterparts and then revised them in terms of the Chinese dramatic traditions. Therefore, without American media coverage of Moon Kwan's role in the film, it was impossible for Chinese media knew this detail. Actually, Moon Kwan was only referred to in *New York Times* on June 15, 1919 as an anonymous professor: "the man who takes impressively the part of the Buddhist priest in D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* is said to be a real Chinese professor holding a position in an American university."⁴⁷⁵ If Chinese film advertisers had known this detail, they would definitely

⁴⁷⁴ Wenqing Guan, *Zhongguo Yingtan Waishi* (Anecdotes of Chinese Cinema) (Hong Kong: Guangjiaojing Publishing House, 1976), 54.

⁴⁷⁵ *New York Times*, June 15, 1919, Picture Plays and People Section, 51.

mention it in the film ads as a way to promote the film, however, no details like this was ever found, it was very likely Moon Kwan's existence in the film was unknown to the Chinese at that time.

American melodrama is similar to Chinese dramatic tradition in terms of love theme, a happy ending, a moral message. As I discussed in this chapter, the advertising and review of American melodrama show that there was a tension between different values and social forces in 1920s Shanghai. First, as traditional Chinese drama could no longer describe and label American melodrama films, advertisers of American drama started to turn to the mandarin duck and butterfly school of literature for help; Second, on the one hand, advertising of American melodrama films used Chinese dramatic languages and terms to promote films, aiming to give a frame of references to Chinese moviegoers; on the other hand, however, they also promoted American films as a new type of entertainment that is different from the traditional Chinese operas. Also, because some Chinese-language film advertisement actually copied film advertisements in American media, we can see that the absence of Moon Kwan in American media regarding his role in the film *Broken Blossoms* led to the silence of the Chinese media in this issue as well.⁴⁷⁶

To sum up, advertising of American melodrama was more complicated than that of American comedy shows in that it was shaped by different social factors, influences, and

⁴⁷⁶ Another case in point to illustrate the influence of American media upon Chinese-language media on promoting American films is the advertising of *Way Down East* in *Shen Bao*, using quotations from the *Movie Weekly*, an American fan magazine. According to the ad, one of the film's selling point is its popularity in the United States as it was voted the No.1 film in 1922 by American movie goers.

Shen Bao, Nov. 9, 1923, 1.

traditions. It shows the transitional aspect of the Chinese society in 1920s, but on the same time, it proves that American melodrama was actually promoted and received in a different way from what their directors expected. In a transnational context the original American genre was promoted as a mixture of Chinese traditional drama, the mandarin duck and butterfly school, a new and hybrid form of entertainment. In addition, it also became a medium that reproduced and reinforced American bias and prejudice. It also shows that in 1920s Shanghai it was still common to promote and introduce American melodrama, a new genre in the local entertainment scenes using familiar stories and languages of Chinese traditional drama. Film was still to gain legitimacy as an art of entertainment in the city in the early 1920s.

8.0 CHAPTER SEVEN: FROM ANTONIO RAMOS TO THE CENTRALCOMPANY- A TALE OF EXHIBITORS

Of motion picture theatres the most pretentious is the Odeon, a new half-million dollar theatre located on the North Szechuen Road extension. It took approximately 14 months to build this theatre, and now that it is finished it makes an imposing addition to Shanghai's amusement places, and, indeed, is probably the best picture house in all China. No expense has been spared to make it modern in every respect, and the result embodies the latest in theatre architecture. It is being used for motion pictures, but is so constructed and fitted up that it may be utilized for stage performances also. This theatre has a seating capacity of 1,420. The seats on the lower floor are of modern theatre design, and those in the balcony heavily upholstered. (In Shanghai the best seats are always in the balcony and the cheaper seats on the ground floor).⁴⁷⁷

This is a report on American movie in 1920 Shanghai, written by the United States diplomats in China. Opened on October 9, 1925, the Odeon Theatre was among the nation's most modern movie theatres. It was located on the North Sichuan Road, a street in the Hongkew

⁴⁷⁷ C.J. North, "The Chinese Motion Picture Market," in *U.S. Commerce/Trade Information Bulletins* 467 (1925-1927): 431-75, 435.

District which saw the establishment of the country's earliest movie theatres.⁴⁷⁸ Aside from its expensive inner decoration mentioned in the report, the cinema was by far the biggest movie theatre in Shanghai, more than three times bigger than the Hongkew Theatre, the nation's first cinema. Moreover, the Odeon Theatre's proprietor was Chen Bozhao, a Chinese businessman who also owned the land of the cinema.⁴⁷⁹ By early 1927, Spanish businessman Antonio Ramos, who was the biggest movie distributor and exhibitor in Shanghai, had sold or rent all of his movie theatres in Shanghai, which means that his monopoly over film exhibition in the city came to an end.⁴⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the city also saw the opening of movies theatres owned by foreigners, Chinese, and jointly by both Chinese and foreigners. The Odeon Theatre was an example that shows the prosperity of new Chinese capitalists in the city. A general manager of a tobacco company, Chen raised fund to build the "sumptuous cinema," where "only the first class pictures are presented."⁴⁸¹ Certainly, the first-class pictures, in most cases, refer to American movies. As a matter of fact, the Odeon Theatre was a first-run theatre for Paramount pictures. This example also shows one phenomenon in Chinese-owned movie theatres after the Ramos era (after 1926): a Chinese exhibitor did not necessarily show Chinese films, instead, types of movies shown in a movie theatre were determined by the facilities, the function, and patronage of a cinema. Facilities included heating and ventilation systems, projectors, interior decoration, and seating. In some cases, a luxury movie theatre even had a bar and smoking rooms for both men and ladies. "The inside of the theatre (Odeon) is furnished in light blue and cram and prettily decorated, the decoration being furnished by an American concern. A smoking room has been provided for

⁴⁷⁸ The Victoria Theater (1909), the Apollo Theater (1910), and the Isis Theater were all located on the Sichuan Road.

⁴⁷⁹ North, 445, 15.

⁴⁸⁰ Based upon this fact, I will divide the 1920s into two era: pre-Ramos era and post-Ramos era. These two eras were divided by 1926, the year in which Ramos sold or rent most of his movie theatres in Shanghai.

⁴⁸¹ *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*.

ladies as well as for men. Both ladies and the men's smoking rooms and the bar are commodious and well furnished."⁴⁸² Considering the fact that the owner of the Odeon Theatre was a merchant of tobacco, it was not surprising that smoking rooms were well-furnished and well-lit. Of course, as one of the best movie theatres in the city or perhaps in the nation, the Odeon definitely had wealthy men, Chinese and foreign, as its patronage. The existence of smoking rooms for both men and women also shows that in the late 1920s, smoking might be regarded acceptable or even fashionable for people of both genders in the circle of the upper class.

Because of top-notch facilities, the admissions to the Odeon were also high. For a show of the film *Sea Hawk* (1924), ticket prices ranged from one dollar to two dollars.⁴⁸³ In contrast, to get into the Little World, a popular entertainment site which appealed to the low-income working class, one only had to pay ten cents to watch whatever films available.⁴⁸⁴ The five-floor entertainment building had two cinemas with a seating capacity of 400 people and several simple stages in the amusement site. With an admission of ten cents, one could spend whole day there, watching movies and listening to traditional Chinese operas. Certainly, seating and facilities in the two screening rooms in the Little World was few and far between being comfortable: people watched films on long benches in a room without heating, which meant that they watched films on cold and hard bench in their "extra padded coats" on freezing and wet winter Shanghai days.⁴⁸⁵ Eighty-five per cent of the movies shown in the two cinemas in the Little World were out-dated American films.⁴⁸⁶ However, it did not stop people from watching them. "The cinema

⁴⁸² North, 445, 15.

⁴⁸³ *Sea Hawk* was first released on June 14, 1924. *Sea Hawk*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0015310/>, last accessed September 3, 2008. It was shown at the Odeon Theatre in November 1925, *North China Daily News*, November 21, 1925, 16.

⁴⁸⁴ *Shen Bao*, January 28, 1925, 8.

⁴⁸⁵ North, 445.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

performances are usually crowded.”⁴⁸⁷ In these cheap screening sites, American movies became a popular entertainment regardless of their years-old release date.

The Odeon Theatre and the small cinemas in the Little World provide two typical examples of movie theatres in 1920s Shanghai: on one hand, it was the first-run movie theatres that showed the latest American films distributed by Hollywood agents in the city; on the other hand, it was those small and inexpensive exhibition sites that screened American movies of three or four years old. Despite the differences in release years of movies, facilities, and inner decoration in these two types of theatres, they shared one thing in common: Chinese inter-titles were hardly available in American films exhibited in the movie theatres. The main reason for lack of Chinese inter-titles was an economic one as explained by diplomats in Shanghai, “To splice the film and insert Chinese captions would entail a cost of \$100 to \$150 Mexican per feature picture, but as there are so few first-run theatres taking feature pictures it has not been considered worth while.”⁴⁸⁸ A first-run theatre means higher admissions, latest films, more feature films, and more frequent changes in the movie schedule, and naturally, more profit. If Hollywood agents did not provide a first-run theatre with movies with translated inter-titles, it was unlikely that they would translate inter-titles of movies into Chinese when the same films were shown in a second-run theatre, or a third-run theatre. It was not until in mid-1928, one year before the first sound film in Shanghai, that the Shanghai agent of the United Artists made several contracts that specified both Chinese and English inter-titles for its films shown in China including Shanghai.⁴⁸⁹ The fact that in silent era Chinese watched American films with English

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ North, 446.

⁴⁸⁹ Edmund Benson to Arthur Kelly, July 10, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

inter-titles was an important one as it affected the exhibition pattern, the viewing habits, and the reception of American films by the Chinese in movie theatres in 1920s Shanghai.

How could the film distribution business affect the exhibition business? And then how could the film exhibition affect local audiences' viewing habits, and eventually shape their perception of American film? In this chapter, using the *Shen Bao*, the *North China Daily News*, *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*, and other primary sources, I will reconstruct exhibition pattern of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai, such as the names and locations of the first-run, the second-run, and the third-run movie theaters as well as the changing ownership of these movie theaters over a decade.⁴⁹⁰ In so doing, I aim to examine how the exhibition pattern in movie theatres in 1920s Shanghai might have affected the viewing habits of the movie-goers in the city. Therefore, I will divide this chapter into three sections. First, I will give a brief introduction of the first-run, the second-run, and the third-run movies theatres in Shanghai throughout the 1920s including their names, location, and change of ownership. Then, I will analyze how the exhibiting practice in movie theatres shaped Shanghai audiences' viewing habits of American films. And finally, I will analyze the relationship of different movies theatres, especially in later 1920s when vertical integration in film industry started to happen in China.

⁴⁹⁰ *The Second Series of Shanghai Study Materials*, or *Shanghai Yanjiu Ziliao Xuji* (Shanghai: Shanghai Tongxun, 1985), 536.

8.1 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF MOVIE THEATERS IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Like the city's other new public entertainments such as horse racing and dog racing, movie theaters were also first introduced by foreign residents in Shanghai. In the 1910s and 1920s, opening a movie theater was just as easy as opening a food store, a drug store, or a restaurant. What was a prospective cinema owner required to do was to pay less than 100-yuan as a licensing fee; if he was a foreigner, he could even be exempted from the licensing fee by having a consul from his country act as a guarantor for his business.⁴⁹¹ Of the 10 earliest movie theaters built before 1920, almost all were owned by foreigners except the Isis Theater, which was opened by Chinese.⁴⁹² Antonio Ramos, a Sephardic Jew, owned half of the movie theatres in Shanghai;⁴⁹³ by 1927, he had sold at least six cinemas. If the 1910s saw a dominant number of foreign exhibitors in Shanghai, then starting from the mid-1920s, foreign monopoly in film exhibition business came to an end. Chinese started to build, buy, and rent movie theaters, and, moreover, companies started to invest in the film production business as well. For example, of the twenty-four movie theaters that were built between 1920 and 1929, more than half were owned by Chinese, five were owned by Chinese companies, one was even owned by a joint

⁴⁹¹ *Fundamental Regulations of the International Settlement*, May, 1926.

⁴⁹² The ten movie theaters are: Hongkew Cinema, Victoria Theater, Apollo Theater, New Helen Theater, Olympic Theater, Donghe Shadow-play Garden, Republic Theater, Isis Theater, China Theater, and Carter Theater.

The Isis Theater was owned by Zeng Huantang, a Chinese businessman.

⁴⁹³ The five movie theaters owned by Ramos are: Hongkew Theater, Victoria Theater, Olympic Theater, Carter Theater, and China Theater. The owners of the other five theaters are: S. G. Hertzberg owned Apollo Theater, A. Ruhnjahn owned New Helen Theater, a Japanese businessman owned Donghe Theater, Goldenberg owned the Republic Theater, and Zeng Huantang owned the Isis Theater. The identity of Ramos is from the *Overview of the Chinese Shadow-plays*, April, 1927. 中国影戏大观

venture.⁴⁹⁴ Also from the analysis, we can see that movie theaters opened after 1926 were almost all owned by Chinese individuals or companies. Actually by the end of January 1927, of the 39 movie theaters with known ownership listed in the *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*, only six had been owned by foreigners.⁴⁹⁵ They are Hongkew Cinema, Apollo Theater, St. George Garden, Olympic Theater, Isis Theater, and Carlton Theater. S. Hertzberg owned three of the six movie theaters. As an unstated rule, change of ownership indicated change of the name of a theater. For instance, when Hertzberg purchased Olympic Theater from Ramos in 1927, he changed its English name to the Embassy Theater, while keeping its Chinese name unchanged. Obviously, the new owner tried to publicize change of ownership by changing the name of the theater. The newly-opened Embassy Theater became one of the most upscale movie theaters in the late 1920s. Examples abound. After the Republic Cinema was sold in 1927 by Goldenberg to Chengbo Pan, a Chinese wealthy businessman, it was called the Republic Theater. In 1928, its name was changed to Fa's Republic Theater when Tingran He, another Chinese, bought it from Pan.⁴⁹⁶ In addition to showing change of ownership, changing the name of a theater can also indicate different management, different film schedule, and different interior decoration and facilities.

⁴⁹⁴ The 24 movie theaters are: National Cinema (1920), Empire Theater (1921), Carlton Theater (1923), Athena Theater (1925), Chapei Theater (1923), Zhongmei Theater (1923), Palace Theater (1924), Odeon Theater (1924), Shanghai Performance Club (1924), Baoxing Theater (1924), St. George's Open Air (1924), Majestic Lawn Cinema (1925), Palais Oriental Theater (1926), Pantheon Theater (1926), Peking Theater (1926), Verdum Cinema (1926), Guanglu Cinema (1928), Ao Fei Mu Theater (1928), the Grand Theater (1928), Donghai Cinema (1929), Dong Nan Theater (1929), Hollywood Cinema (1929), Jiuxing Theater (1929), Changjiang Theater (1929). The nine cinemas owned by the Chinese individuals are: Palace Theater, Odeon Theater, Majestic Lawn, Donghua Theater, Peking Theater, Guanglu Theater, Ao Fei Mu Theater, Hollywood Theater, Jiuxing Theater. The three movie theaters whose owners were unknown are: Athena Theater, Zhongmei Theater, and Changjiang Theater. The five theaters owned by companies are: Chapei Theater, Baoxing Theater, Pantheon Theater, Donghai Theater, and Dong Nan Theater. The six companies owned by foreigners are: National Cinema, Empire Theater, Carlton Theater, Shanghai Performance Club, St. George's Open Air, and Verdum Cinema. The one that was owned by joint venture is the Grand Theater.

⁴⁹⁵ Atsu Kann, Benjamin Cheng, & D.S. Chen, eds. *China Cinema Yearbook* (Dadong Printing House, 1927): 25-33.

⁴⁹⁶ 发记共和大戏院。

Aside from purchasing a cinema, another way of having a movie theater was renting the exhibition space. The year 1926 saw the biggest rent in the history of cinemas in Shanghai when news came that Ramos planned to return to Spain permanently. Fuchang Zhang and Shichuan Zhang decided to rent five cinemas owned by Ramos: the Olympic Theater, the Victoria Theater, the Empire Theater, the Carter Theater, and the China Theater.⁴⁹⁷ With six movie theaters in hand, they founded Zhong Yang Film Company, or Central Film Company, a movie exhibition group.⁴⁹⁸ Later it also managed two more theaters: the Capital Theater and Ping'an Theater, and formed an exhibition network for films from both home and abroad. Certainly, films from abroad mainly refer to American films. Up till 1936 when the company was dismissed, the Zhong Yang Film Company helped provide a screening place for the latest produced Chinese films. The year 1926 became a dividing line of two eras, before and after Ramos, because of the change of management, which later led to a change of ownership.

The pre-Ramos time was characterized by predominant screening of foreign films. Here is a narration from *The Overview of the Chinese Shadow Plays* by an anonymous author:

Anyone who knows Chinese film history knows that Ramos, a Jewish merchant of the Spanish descent. He has 7 or 8 movie theaters in Shanghai. Some especially screened foreign films, some screened Chinese domestic films. He made a lot of money by screening films. For example, if a film studio wants to screen a film in one of Ramos' movie theaters (those movie theaters that were not owned by Ramos such as Carlton and Apollo Theater don't normally screen Chinese movies), first it would be examined to see if it is worth screening, after Ramos company approved the film, the film studio has to wait for its screening schedule

⁴⁹⁷ Changfu Zhang was the manager of EMI and Shichuan Zhang was the manager of the Mingxing Film Studio.

⁴⁹⁸ The Zhangs owned Palace Theater, or Zhong Yang Da Xi Yuan.

as the film studio does not have the right to designate a date. As to the profit-share, Ramos has an absolute advantage. Before the Central Film Company was founded, Chinese film studios in Shanghai were all upset about Ramos' monopoly in screening films.⁴⁹⁹

From the above narration, it is not hard for us to see that as a shrewd businessman, before 1926, Ramos actually had an absolute monopoly of screening of any film, including motion pictures made in China. Moreover, he also had advantage over Chinese film studios in profit-sharing. Not only did he decide which Chinese films would be screened, but he also chose the time and place they would be screened. Furthermore, he also determined how much a Chinese film studio could make by screening a film in his movie theaters. Obviously, not one single Chinese film studio liked this privilege of Ramos. In addition to his monopoly, the quote also informs us of one fact, that is, Ramos did not exclude Chinese films. It was very probable that compared with other foreign exhibitors such as S.G. Hertzberg, Ramos was more accepting of Chinese films as long as they were promising in box office return. At least, in an age when American films dominated the Shanghai cinemas, Ramos' movie theaters provided a channel for Chinese film studios to show their films to a wider audience. That might be one main reason why Chinese movies produced in the 1920s had both English and Chinese inter-titles: the first-run and second-run movie theaters required Chinese films to have bi-lingual inter-titles so as to cater to their multi-cultural patrons. It also shows that there was a higher standard for a Chinese movie to be screened in a first-run or second-run movie theater than for an American one, at least, in terms of translated inter-titles. Interestingly, more often than not, the English translation of a Chinese

⁴⁹⁹ Jiqun Shi, ed., "The Founding of Zhong Yang Film Company," *The Overview of the Chinese Shadow Plays*, April, 1927.

movie was often Chinese-style English. For example, the poetic Chinese inter-titles describing human's feelings with metaphors of rainbow sounded awkward, simple, and even broken when translated to English, such as "Like a rainbow of tears and laughter reveals with ever changing colors, so are joys and sorrows of human emotions."⁵⁰⁰ Very likely, English-speaking audiences had to make sense out of the unfamiliar English translation in a short time before the next scene appeared on the screen.

In spring 1926, Zhang Changfu and Zhang Juchuan signed a five-year contract with Ramos to rent five of his movie theatres: the Olympic, the Victoria, the Empire, the Carter, and the China. The name of the Victoria Theatre was changed to the Central Theatre. With several major cinemas in their name, the Chinese film exhibitors initially aimed to promote Chinese films by giving Chinese film studios more favourable conditions of screening, as evidenced in the following text,

All Chinese films that are to be screened at the movie theatres managed by the Zhong Yang Company, should be first shown at the Central Theatre, then at the New Central, the Empire, the Carter, and the China within one week without stop. Guaranteed to be shown in these five movie theatres, Chinese films were protected from big loss even if movies did not sell. Comparing with the situation under Ramos' control, this was much better.⁵⁰¹

From the above narration, we can see the Zhong Yang Company did not set up a strict priority system in its movie theatres, except the Central Theatre that gave premiere screening to

⁵⁰⁰ *Movies Magazine*, July 1924, advertisement.

⁵⁰¹ Shi, "The Founding of Zhong Yang Film Company."

Chinese movies. Its marketing strategy for Chinese movies was mainly to show films as much as possible in a short time. This strategy made it easier for a Chinese film to be exhibited at movie theatres. Yet, without selective screening, audiences might have seen some Chinese films that were not of much entertainment or artistic value. The box office result turned out to be a loss for the company by early 1927. In order to prevent low-quality Chinese movies from being screened, the company came up with a new regulation—Chinese movies could only be shown with a deposit on a daily basis,

For the Central Theatre, the daily deposit is 150 dollars; for the New Central Theatre, the deposit is 120 dollars; for the Empire and Carter, it is 80 dollars; for the China Theatre, it was 60 dollars. If the box office income exceeds designated deposit amount, then theatre and producer will share the profit; if the box office did not reach the deposit amount, then the film's producer is responsible for the deposit. This kind of method aims to limit low-quality films. Only those film producers who are confident of their success will show their movies at the movie theatres...however, it hurt chances of developing Chinese films.⁵⁰²

The company's new regulation set up a new rule for screening Chinese films and protected the interests of movie theatres. As a matter of fact, the deposit amount was not hard to reach at the first few days. Take the Empire Theatre as an example, with a seating capacity of 800 and an average admission fee of 50 cents, a total of 160 tickets a day needed to be sold every

⁵⁰² Ibid.

day to pay the deposit.⁵⁰³ However, if a movie was not entertaining enough, it was hard to sell it after the initial curiosity. Bad word might spread out to discourage more people from going to see it. The new rule shifted the financial burden of screening a movie to a film studio. This regulation made box office return as the only criterion and thus the only aim of producing a film. In the long run, it was actually good for the Chinese film industry although initially fewer Chinese films might be exhibited than they used to be as it helped raise the quality of Chinese movies. From the above-mentioned account, we can also have a picture of the screening system of Chinese movies in late 1920s Shanghai.

Compared with Chinese film exhibition system, American films had a more sophisticated system in the city. First-run, second-run, and third-run theatres were well-established on agreement of both exhibitors and distributors. By 1928, at least six movie theatres in the city mainly exhibited American films, they were: the Carlton Theatre, the Isis Theatre, the Embassy Theatre, the Odeon Theatre, the New Helen Theatre, and the Peking Theatre, all of which were located in the International Settlement. Of the six movie theatres, the Carlton Theatre was the first-run theatre for the Fox, MGM, and the United Artists; the Odeon Theatre was the first-run theatre for the First National and Paramount; the Isis Theatre was the second-run theatre for the United Artists, and the New Helen and Peking Theatre were UA's third-run theatres.⁵⁰⁴ In late 1920s Shanghai, the concept of first-run, second-run, and third-run theatres were different from that of current time. Nowadays, a new release was usually shown at a first-run theatre before it is shown at a second-run or a third-run theatre a couple of months later. In 1920s Shanghai, the latest release of an American movie could only be seen at a first-run theatre. Going into a second-run movie theatre meant to see a movie that was two or three years old. And a third-run

⁵⁰³ North, 471.

⁵⁰⁴ Edmund H. Benson to Arthur Kelly, July 10, 1928, O'Brien, 95/4, UAC.

movie theatre normally exhibited movies that were nearly ten years old. For example, D.W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1919) was shown at the New Helen Theatre from June 1 to 3, 1928, while it was shown in Shanghai in 1922.⁵⁰⁵ This might prove the film's popularity, but it also confirms Kristin Thompson's study on the exhibition of American films in the Chinese market, that is, a large percentage of Hollywood films shown in China were old ones.⁵⁰⁶ The reason was obvious—due to a limited number of the first-run movie theatres that were able to exhibit the latest feature films and to charge a higher admission fees. In the report on American movies in 1920s China, C.J. North wrote about several obstacles that prevented distribution of American films in China, one of which was the low income of most Chinese families,

A final great obstacle to the spread American motion pictures in China is the low scale of living of most of the people. In the United States, the price of admission to the average motion-picture theatre is well within the reach of practically everyone, but many millions of Chinese have nothing beyond means for the bare necessities of life.⁵⁰⁷

Few Chinese in 1920s Shanghai could afford to go to first-run theatres such as the Odeon and the Carlton, whose admission for one show might cost them a week's wage. Only very wealthy people could buy the most expensive seats in a first-run theatre. Some Chinese moviegoers went to a second-run or third-run theatre to see vintage American movies with the original English inter-titles because few first-run cinemas were willing to pay for the production of

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Kristin Thompson, 143.

⁵⁰⁷ North, 432.

Chinese inter-titles.⁵⁰⁸ The low-income population in 1920s China made the country only a minor market for Hollywood distributors. In Ruth Vasey's book, she lists a table that shows the percentages of Hollywood's foreign income in 1927,⁵⁰⁹ in which we can see that in that year, the Chinese film market took 0.8 per cent of the whole, while the Great Britain topped the list with 30.5 per cent. Of the Asian countries listed in the table, China stood in the middle, while Japan 3.1 per cent ranked first, and the Philippines, 0.4 per cent stood last. Obviously, the 1927 Hollywood income in the Far East was still a small fraction (altogether around 5 per cent) of its total foreign income. With low revenue from the Chinese market, it was not hard to imagine that the Hollywood dumped more old movies in China. Even as late as September 1934, Alexander Krisel, the agent of United Artists in China responded to the company's Foreign Department, regarding its request of distributing and exhibiting old silent movies in the Asian country. By showing old silent films, the company was able to increase its revenue without putting more investment in new productions in the Chinese market.⁵¹⁰

With its forty million people, why was 1920s China only a relatively small market for Hollywood? In his report, C.J. North summarized five main obstacles that prevented American films from spreading all over China: political instability, inadequate transportation, lack of electricity in rural areas, preference for Chinese films, and low standard of living.⁵¹¹ Apparently, distribution and exhibition of films were in part affected by various factors such as politics, economy, and culture. To some extent, the low revenue in Hollywood films reflected the social situation in China: it was a relatively unstable and poor country with a long history. However,

⁵⁰⁸ North, 447.

⁵⁰⁹ Ruth Vasey, *the World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 85.

⁵¹⁰ Alexander Krisel to T.P. Mulrooney, September 2, 1934, O'Brien, 96/2, UAC.

⁵¹¹ North, 432.

films, as one of the most important media in the twentieth century, also greatly shaped Chinese' taste, viewpoints, and viewing habits. In the next part of this chapter, I will examine the influences of Hollywood films on Chinese audiences' viewpoints and viewing habits, with a specific focus on Shanghai.

8.2 INFLUENCE OF HOLLYWOOD FILMS ON CHINESE AUDIENCE

The distribution and exhibition of Hollywood films had both a long-term and short-term impact upon the Chinese audiences. As a new public entertainment site, a movie theatre was a mirror of the society that reflected and reinforced people's behaviors, emotions, viewpoints, and practices. As mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, cinemas in Shanghai had different admissions, varying with interior decoration, facilities, and location. The best movie theatre such as Odeon Theatre usually had a bar, which became a place for people to chat and relax before, between and after a show. Sometimes, a luxury movie theatre such as the Carlton Theatre even had a ballroom. People could spend whole night there engaged in various recreations. In contrast, some cheap cinemas only had minimum facilities such as benches and a screen. Certainly, movie viewing experiences in these two types of cinema were drastically different: in an expensive showing room, one does not have to worry about bad body odour of his/her neighbors because it had a good ventilation system; one does not have to go to a movie theater in heavy clothes in winter because it had a good heating system. As there was a bar in the lobby of a luxury cinema, no peddlers would be allowed to enter the cinema to offer tea, towel, or food. Also, unlike a

cheap cinema, a first-class one would more likely take preventive steps to countervene any fire hazard.⁵¹² To sum up, a fancy and modern movie theatre tended to be safer, cleaner and quieter.

Aside from their differences, there were several important similarities among expensive and cheaper movie theatres in Shanghai, the main of which included seats of mixed genders and film plot sheets. Movie theatres in both international settlement and the French Concession, regardless of an expensive one or a cheap one, had seats for mixed genders, which meant that both men and women could sit side by side. This practice was not allowed in movie theatres in the Chinese territory. The “Local and Police Regulation” section, which was published in *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*, showed a common practice at a movie theatre in a Chinese-governing region: it was illegal for men and women to sit together in a movie theatre, even if they were husband and wife except in one situation: they were allowed to sit if it was a box seat. A box, which was more expensive than a normal seat, could seat more than two people, generally it was for a relatively rich family. This practice showed the influence of Chinese values on film-viewing habits: the Chinese tradition attached prior importance to family, which made a family a legal entity in a movie theatre. A box seat also separated the rich couple from the poor one. A couple unable to afford a box seat had to sit in different sections of a cinema while their wealthier counterparts could sit comfortably together. This practice encouraged family values and at the same time, created a class difference in movie theaters.

Unlike movie theaters in the city’s Chinese territory, movie-goers in a foreign-administrated region were seated according to the numbers on their tickets instead of their gender. However, class difference was still obvious: audiences with more expensive admissions

⁵¹² In *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*, there was a local and police regulation, requiring that all movie theatres had fire-extinguishers and emergency exits. We can infer that in 1920s, not all the movie theaters in Shanghai and its neighboring areas had these facilities.

tend to have better seats than those with cheap ones. Naturally, a movie theatre can be divided into two areas: one for the rich and the other for the poor. “In Shanghai the best seats are always in the balcony and the cheaper seats on the ground floor.”⁵¹³ Regarding this seating arrangement, Lu Xun, a famous Chinese writer gave a good description of it. He felt humiliated by the stares of those pretentious audiences. Here is what Lu Xun writes about his experience in a movie theatre:

When I started to go to movie theatres in Shanghai, I already became ‘low-class’ Chinese. I saw that white people and wealthy people sitting in the upper-stairs box seats while middle-class and low-class audiences took the downstairs seat, on the screen appears a white soldier who is fighting a war, a white lord who is making a fortune, a white lady who is getting married, and a white hero who explores the world, all of which aroused feeling of admiration, respect, horror in the viewers. They believed that they themselves could not make such achievements. However, when the white hero goes to explore Africa, it is a coloured servant who leads way for him, serve him, die for him and help him return home safe and sound; when he gets ready to leave and explore for the second time, the servant already died. He looks sad when he thinks of the dead. The screen shows a black man’s face in his (the white man’s) memory. The yellow viewers also feel sad in the dim light; they are moved.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹³ North, 446.

⁵¹⁴ Shaobai Li, “The Position of Film in the World Culture: Speech at the Seminar on Asian Film Collection,” October 1996, <http://www.filmsea.com.cn/zhuanjia/article/200112072267.htm>, last accessed December 6, 2008.

Lu's comment gives a good account of differences in race and class in movie theatres in Shanghai. Only rich viewers could afford box or balcony seats in a first-run movie theatre. Not only are the balcony seats more expensive than those on the ground, they are much nicer. "The seats on the lower floor are of modern theatre design, and those in the balcony heavily upholstered."⁵¹⁵ More decorative seats in movie theatres seem to be made for this purpose: to satisfy those rich audiences' needs of both being comfortable and appearing superior. Going to a movie theatre is not only an experience of viewing a cultural product, but also of constructing a socially hierarchical environment: seating based upon a pricing scale created an invisible division line or barrier among audiences of various nationalities, classes, and sometimes, different genders. According to Lu, not only did the seating arrangement in movie theatres construct and reinforce a social hierarchy, foreign movies, mostly American films, helped reinforce differences among people of different races. The movie that Lu describes seems to describe a white man's exploration of Africa, or his experience of colonizing Africa. As a colonizer, he is competent, successful, and therefore superior, just like those white audiences who were sitting in good box seats in a nicely-decorated movie theatre. His African servant seems to be faithful, however, poor and unlucky, like those who were sitting in the downstairs seats. The white hero is superior to the black servant because he is capable of doing many things and he survives as well. In Lu's account, when in the film the white man thinks of his dead servant in sorrow, Chinese audiences feel sad. It seemed that they started to be identified with the white hero. However, we can imagine this situation: when the movie is over and the lights are on, the audiences started to realize that like the African, they are actually inferior to the white audiences in social structure unless they are like those wealthy Chinese who can sit side by side

⁵¹⁵ North, 446.

with the white. Experiences in movie theatres makes Chinese audiences more aware of their social status, like the author. “When I started to go to movie theatres in Shanghai, I already became “low-class” Chinese.” Race and class are re-played and reinforced both on screen and in movie theatres through a pricing and seating system.

As mentioned briefly in the earlier part of this chapter, American movies exhibited in 1920s Shanghai movie theaters did not have Chinese inter-titles due to the cost. Many movie-goers did not read English well, some even did not speak one single word of it. One case in point can show how much Chinese audiences know about the English language: when an American comedy was shown in a movie theatre in China, it was incorrectly put in the projector. The outcome was amusing as all the inter-titles were backward, however, no or few audiences seemed to notice that.⁵¹⁶ The language barrier in the exhibition of American films greatly affected people’s viewing and interpretation of these movies. Audiences were generally informed of a film’s plot right after or even before they entered a cinema. A film plot sheet usually has all the information audiences needed to understand a movie: characters in a movie, its detailed plot, and a program for the whole evening. As a plot sheet was mainly for convenience of Chinese-speaking audiences, most of it was written in Chinese, especially the description of the plot, or the synopsis. Sometimes, a plot sheet also has English words that introduce the date, cast, and name of a film. Printed by a movie theatre, a plot sheet usually had the name of a movie theatre on it. More often than not, a plot sheet functioned as a program with Chinese translation and changed one time or twice a week whenever a movie theatre had a new screening. By analyzing a film plot sheet in detail, we can have an idea of its role in audiences’ appreciation of American films. Take as an example of the plot sheet released by Beijing Theatre in Shanghai in 1928

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

regarding the exhibition of Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last!*. The two-page plot sheet is numbered 122, which means the 122nd issue. If the first issue was released on November 29, 1926 when the theatre was opened, then we can infer that, on average, it issued a new film plot sheet every three days. One fourth of the film plot sheet is in English and the rest of it is in Chinese. The name of the theatre is rendered in English and Chinese. The film's character, cast, and screening date are all in English. The one-page Chinese narration about the film describes every scene in detail. In the film's recount, the boy is named Luo Ke, Harold Lloyd's Chinese name while the girl is referred to as "man di," which is supposed to be Mildred Davis' translated Chinese name. The film describes a country boy's work experience in a department store in a big city. When his girl friend comes to visit him from the hometown, he decides to impress her with "the fortune" he makes. He comes up with a suggestion that he can climb the face of the store and attract customers. He arranges to have his friend for the stunt. However, things go completely out of his expectation. In this comedy, Harold's hilarious urban experiences are the focus of the story. However, in the Chinese plot description, in several cases, the love theme is emphasized, if not being brought fully to the foreground. Several references to classic Chinese literature were used to compare the American story to familiar Chinese operas. In describing the goodbye scene between the two lovers at the beginning of the film, Lu Shibai, the writer of the plot used several lines from *the Story of the West Chamber*, a classic love-themed opera. "While one can not stop sighing, one can not stop frowning, two different people share the same sorrow."⁵¹⁷ By appropriating a traditional Chinese love story in the narration of the American comedy, the writer tried to make an American cultural product easier to understand for Chinese audience who do not speak English. On the one hand, the use of traditional Chinese drama in the film plot sheet

⁵¹⁷ Film plot sheet 122 (Shanghai: Peking Theatre, February 22, 1928). I collected it from the China Film Archive.

can help the Chinese understand the American film that had no Chinese inter-titles. On the other hand, it could also shape Chinese audiences' perception of the American comedy film. Starting with a sorrowful parting scene like *the Story of the West Chamber*, it ends with a scene that the couple is finally together again. It fits the Chinese expectation of a good ending to a true love story. With the references to the Chinese classic love story in the film plot sheet, it was probable that some Chinese audience might perceive it as a love story with a comic touch.

Another major function of a film plot sheet is to advertise future films that will be exhibited at the cinema. The film plot sheet of Peking Theatre, for example, has several film advertisements for Chaplin's *Sunnyside* (1919), John Gilbert's *Big Parade* (1925), Douglas Fairbank's *The Three Musketeers* (1921), Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris* (1923), and Rex Ingram's *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1922). Interestingly, the advertisement of *Sunnyside* even has a picture with it. In the picture, Chaplin's tramp is represented as reading attentively while walking behind a cow, grabbing its tail. This hilarious image of Chaplin also fit the Chinese tradition of the lower-class diligent bookworm, who has to squeeze time to read while struggling with his full-time job to support himself.

Detailed narration scene-by-scene in a film plot sheet was a common way for most Chinese audiences to understand an American film in the silent era, either in Shanghai or other cities like Beijing. A film plot sheet of the Cheng Kwang Theatre in Beijing, which dated from May 25 to 29, 1926, recounted *The Phantom of the Opera* reel by reel, which is "Ben," or chapter of a book, in Chinese. Interestingly, even with the facilities for providing translated Chinese during a movie show, the Chen Kwang Theatre still provided long narration of the plot in print. Here are the facilities the theatre in Beijing provided for both its Chinese and English-speaking audiences:

Titles are handled at this theatre for the convenience of both Chinese and foreign audiences in a unique way, which is very ingenious and apparently quite satisfactory. Instead of inserting parallel Chinese captions in the film, which is relatively expensive, and in cases where first the English title is shown and then the Chinese, too long, at the Chen Kwang Theatre, a separate screen about 10 feet square is placed at the left of the picture screen, and through a separate projecting apparatus slides containing the Chinese equivalent of the English captions are thrown on this smaller screen at the same time they appear on the picture screen.⁵¹⁸

Obviously, Chinese still preferred to have a film plot sheet even when there was a Chinese translation accompanying the show of a film. In the silent era, Chinese viewers still relied heavily upon printed materials for understanding of an American film. Dependence upon or reference to detailed film plot sheets seemed to change greatly only with the coming of sound. In early 1929, the Olympic Theatre in Shanghai became the first sound-wired cinema in China. After that, cinemas in Shanghai started to become wired and show sound films.⁵¹⁹ In a two-page film plot sheet of the Odeon Theatre, dated September 9, 1931, the cinema promoted itself as “The House of Perfect Sound.”⁵²⁰ English and Chinese are both used to describe the film’s plot. However, compared to a film plot sheet in the 1920s, this one has much of Chinese narration of the film.

In summary, exhibition pattern in 1920s Shanghai varied from cinema to cinema. However, American movies were all shown without Chinese inter-titles because it saved costs

⁵¹⁸ North, 448.

⁵¹⁹ “*Singer Red Peony*--the First Sound Film in China,” September 22, 2007, <http://www.9tour.cn/info/321/8309.shtml>, last access December 7, 2008.

⁵²⁰ Film Plot Sheet (the Odeon Theater, on September 31, 1931). I collected from the China Film Archive.

for distributors.⁵²¹ Without Chinese translation on screen, Chinese movie viewers had to attach much importance to film plot sheet. Changguang Wang confirmed that it was difficult for Chinese audience to understand American film without the Chinese inter-titles. “It was through the Chinese translation and film plot sheet that the situation changed a little.”⁵²² He mentioned that with the aid of film plot sheets, Chinese viewers were able to appreciate American films better. Besides, film plot sheets could also serve as a literary version of the movie that was worth keeping as a souvenir. In some cases, sheets even had beautifully decorated covers and nicely-drawn illustrations.

8.3 VERTICAL INTEGRATION IN FILM INDUSTRY IN LATE 1920S CHINA

Vertical integration was a common practice in the American film industry from the early 1920s to the early 1950s. As part of the studio system, it meant conglomeration of film production, distribution, and exhibition, which allowed Hollywood major studios to control through movies or own movie theatres. In the United States, the vertical integration started with a year-around program offered by Paramount in 1914. “Exhibitors contracted for the entire Paramount program, a practice known as block booking. ..As an incentive to buy the Paramount line, theatres received protection from simultaneous showings in their area.”⁵²³ It was mainly through

⁵²¹ According to distributing practice of the United Artists in late 1929, it would pay the full expenses for translation fee. We could infer that it was the normal practice for a distributor to translate the inter-titles of a film. “Distribution of Charges for the Far East,” 1929, O’Brien, 157/10, UAC.

⁵²² Chaoguang Wang, “Rise and Fall of the Hollywood: Study of American Films in the Republic China,” *American Studies* 2 (1998):119.

⁵²³ Tino Balio, ed., *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 117.

block booking and the flagship cinema system that Hollywood controlled the film market. By contrast, China never really saw the vertical integration of production, distribution, and exhibition of Hollywood films. Hollywood majors controlled the Chinese market mainly through their agents in China. Despite the fact that there were around ten small foreign film production companies in Shanghai (four of them were American companies), they were neither productive in making films about China nor did they intend to sell them in China.⁵²⁴ The First National was the first Hollywood agent that merged with local movie theatres. Founded in 1922, this Sino-American joint venture was the sole agent for distribution of the First National pictures.⁵²⁵ It also had its own movie theatre—the Peacock-Orient Theatre, which was not upscale enough to be the first or second run theatre. By early 1926, it had initiated an ambitious program of distributing American films in movie theatres all over China. Obviously, such a large project seemed to be a mission impossible considering the unstable political situation in the country.⁵²⁶ However, in 1928, it managed to merge with two movies theatres that were owned by S. Hertzberg: the Embassy Theatre and the Apollo Theatre. After the merger, a new company was formed called the Hertzberg Enterprises, an American company. Starting on June 1, 1928, the new company started to operate the three theatres in the following manner: the Embassy Theatre served as the first-run theatre; the Apollo Theatre was the second-run, and the Peacock-Orient was the third run. In summer, the company also operated the Majestic Lawn Cinema, an open-air cinema on the roof of the Majestic Hotel.⁵²⁷ The founding of the Hertzberg Enterprises led a trend in the

⁵²⁴ *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*. The four American film production companies include: China Cinema Company, American-Oriental Pictures, International Newsreel Corporation, and the Motion Picture Department of the British-American Tobacco Company (joint-venture). The other four companies are British, one is Japanese, and one is Portuguese.

⁵²⁵ *1927 Yearbook of the Chinese Cinema*.

⁵²⁶ C.J. North to Mr. Gillen, February 27, 1926, O'Brien, File 281, UAC.

⁵²⁷ Edmund Benson to Arthur Kelly, July 10, 1928, 95/4, UAC. It also possible that the writer of the report confused the St. George Garden Theater, which was opened by S. Hertzberg with the Majestic Lawn Theatre, which was

exhibition of American films in Shanghai. “It may compel Universal, Fox or Paramount to merge with other theatres as well.”⁵²⁸

Differences existed between merged and contracted movie theatres. A merged company involved joint investment and capital. For example, in forming the Hertzberg Enterprises, Hertzberg put half of his investment in the Apollo Theatre and the Embassy Theatre into the Peacock Motion Picture Corporation.⁵²⁹ In contrast, a Hollywood agent could distribute films through different theatres, which was not part of its company. For example, Krisel and Krisel distributed United Artists films through several cinemas in Shanghai although none of them belonged to the company’s agent. Actually, even before the first formal merge of the Peacock and Hertzberg, there already existed same companies that dealt with both film distribution and exhibition. One case in point is the Odeon Theater and Company, who were the sole agent for distributing Paramount pictures in China. Obviously, it was a first-run theatre for the Paramount. Aside from that, it was also the first-run movie theatre for the pictures of the First National, the Universal, and those distributed by the Producers’ Distribution Corporation. All these pictures were first shown at the Odeon before they were shown at other theaters in the country.⁵³⁰ The example of the Odeon set another model for distributing and exhibiting American movie theatres in China: instead of merging, a company can expand its business both to distributing and exhibiting.

To sum up, vertical integration of film industry in 1920s Shanghai was still in its early stage. Most agents were busy distributing movies in other provinces or having more movie theaters

owned by Zeng Huantang, a Chinese businessman. Also, the Peacock-Orient Theater was also known as Palais Oriental Theatre, which was built in 1926. It was located on 554 Middle Huaihai Road within the French Concession.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Jiqun Shi, “Founding of the Zhong Yang Film Company,” Overview of the Chinese Shadow-plays, Shanghai, April, 1927.

under contract. Hollywood studios were not directly involved in the investment of building movie theatres in China until 1946. With the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it seemed that vertical integration was never fully established in China. Like any other business in 1920s Shanghai, film exhibition developed during the 1920s, especially with a more mature market for movie goers. While the first-run movie theatres expanded in the city's foreign concessions, the second and third-run movie theatres bringing in more and more Chinese viewers. Without translated Chinese inter-titles, film plot sheets published by movie theatres or film studios became an important aid for audiences to understand American movies. These sheets appropriated the Chinese traditional literature to help local people make sense of foreign films. Merging different movie theatres into one company helped maximize the revenues generated by movies with different release date. This development, taken together, shows that the Chinese film market was growing increasingly mature in the late 1920s.

9.0 CHAPTER EIGHT: STAR—A UNIVERSAL PERSONALITY

The reputation of Harold Lloyd has been widely known all over the world. Wherever there are films to be shown, there are his works; whoever sees him, they like him right away. In his movies, he speaks a universal language, that is, laughter. Laughter is something that everybody knows, therefore, no matter where he is, West or East, he always has the ability to make people happy. The more often he brings people joy, the more respect and love people have for him, and thus the more people want to know his past.⁵³¹

This brief introduction to Harold Lloyd's biography was written by Cheng Bugao in the first issue of *Movies Magazine* in June 1924. The original English biography was published in the *Photoplay*, one of America's earliest fan magazines. The Chinese magazine published not only the translated version of the comedian's biography, but also various photos related to the American star, including those of his on-screen personae, of him in daily life, of his parents, and even of his elder brother. The five-page-long translated article about Harold Lloyd, together with relevant photos indicated the American comedian's popularity in mid-1920s Shanghai. According to Cheng, laughter has no national boundary, instead; it is a universal language that appeals to audiences in both East and West. The more joy a comedian can bring to audiences, the

⁵³¹ Bugao Cheng, "Short Autobiography of Harold Lloyd," *Movies Magazine*, June 1924.

more popularity he will gain. From Cheng's preface, we can see that by 1924, Lloyd had been a byword of laughter and joy among Shanghai movie-goers, and, he was one of the most successful *Huaji* masters in the city because popularity had become one of the major criteria to measure a film star's success. In addition to the writer's comment on Lloyd, this *Movies Magazine* story also provides an example of how stardom and popularity could be circulated and constructed in a trans-national context—the Chinese fan magazine copied its American counterpart, re-printed its images, translated its words, reconstructed and reinforced the fandom, and finally recycled a version of the original American dream among Chinese movie-goers. Obviously, fan magazines extended the role of movie theatres in constructing stars. As a matter of fact, a popular fan magazine is as crucial as a film studio or a movie theatre in making a star because it helps provide a public discourse that shape viewers' opinion, which collectively form a consensus of a star's value in the society. As Marsha Orgeron's pointed out, "fan magazines..., serve as crucial repositories of information about celebrity making and unmaking in the 1920s."⁵³² A stars' value is determined by his/her popularity, a major measure of which is the box office return of a film in which the star performs. Therefore, a shared, widespread, and positive view about a star is crucial to his/her economic value. As a public figure, a movie star needs consumers to realize and prove his/her economic values; he/she also needs fans for publicity value. Here we can not equate fans with consumers; one can be a fan without buying many tickets; one can be a consumer who just goes to the movies to pass time and be committed to no stars. Fans are more emotionally attached to their stars. Fans need their stars to feel connected or identified with fantasy roles stars play, while consumers may only treat stars as any other performer without much preference. However, both fans and consumers helped to

⁵³² Marsha Orgeron, "Making 'It' in Hollywood: Clara Bow, Fandom, and Consumer Culture," *Cinema Journal* 42:4 (Summer 2003): 76.

contribute, directly or indirectly to stars' income. After all, a fan is a kind of a consumer in a consumer culture. This commodity-consumer relationship of stardom and fandom is summarized in 1927 by an analysis of Halsey, Stuart, and Company, a Chicago-based investment bank founded in 1911,

...the 'stars' are today an economic necessity to the motion picture industry.

In the 'star' your producer gets not only a 'production' value in the making of his picture, but a 'trademark' value and an 'insurance' value, which are very real and very potent in guaranteeing the sale of this product to the cash customers at a profit. It has been amply demonstrated that the actual salaries (not the mythical exaggeration) paid to motion picture actors, however famous, are determined by the law of supply and demand in exactly the same way as are the rewards of executives in the business world.⁵³³

According to the above analysis, a star is a commercial product in a market economy. Like any other product, it is subject to "the law of supply and demand." However, compared with an ordinary product, a star is more valuable in the sense that the profit of a movie with a star is almost guaranteed. Production value means whether a film is worth producing so that it can meet an aesthetical standard. A star can render the production of a movie worthwhile as he/she can be a main factor of the aesthetics and quality presentation of a film. The trademark value of a production refers to the concept that a producer can get the best return for the investment from the star's presence by branding. The insurance value refers to the value of the insured item upon

⁵³³ Halsey, Stuart & Co., "The Motion Picture Industry as a Basis for Bond Financing," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 204.

conclusion of the insurance contract.⁵³⁴ To a film's producer, a movie star guarantees that a film's insurance value won't decrease. Basically, the afore-mentioned comment indicates that a film with a star is not only a high-quality film, but a profitable one as well. Film producers, distributors, and advertisers were fully aware of a movie star's role in a film. From film advertising from both China and the United States in the 1920s, we can see that the name of a movie star was more often mentioned and emphasized than that of a director. In many cases, a director's name was not even mentioned. Similarly, in the Chinese theatrical tradition, an opera's main actor and actress is actually equivalent to a film star, who was called *ming jue*, or a famous role. A pillar of a theatrical troupe, a *ming jue* was a box office draw. Just like a star in a film, a *ming jue* in a stage performance, or performing troupe, is an economic necessity. Both a star and a *mingjue* can greatly affect a show's box office return. However, differences between the two are huge due to the different natures of movies and drama, as analyzed by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." As an industrial product, movies had far more reproducing power than that of a stage play, therefore, a star can reach far more people, and have far more influence than a *ming jue*. According to Walter Benjamin, a film actor, more subjected to camera, actually represents a role rather than himself while on stage, a performer identifies with the role he performs. In Benjamin's opinion, the relationship between a film viewer and a star is more of an impersonal and critical nature. That probably partly explains why fan magazines publish personal stories about stars—they aim to make film star look more personable. In addition to the fact that film is a powerful medium itself, fast development and distribution of the printed media in 1920s Shanghai such as film plot sheets, fan magazines, and newspapers, also helped to construct stardom. Movie stars could enjoy unprecedented popularity

⁵³⁴ *Reinsurance Jargon*, http://www.arig.com.bh/mc_re_jargon.asp, last accessed December 29, 2008.

overnight, faster than *ming jue* in any period of time in the Chinese dramatic history. Another advantage of American film over Chinese opera was that a traditional opera, performed in a dialect, could only be understood by audiences in a particular region where the dialect is spoken. In contrast, as a universal language, physical action and movement in imported silent film could be understood by viewers more easily, sometimes, even without aid of the Chinese inter-titles.

Closely related to stardom is fandom. Although they share some similarities, they are not identical. Like stardom, fandom is socially constructed. However, there are differences between stardom and fandom. Richard Koszarski gives a good example in his book *An Evening's Entertainment*, in which he lists two polls in 1924: one was a poll of fans on their favorite stars in the *Photoplay* magazine, the other was a poll of exhibitors on their top-grossing stars. "The results show an interesting discrepancy between stated performance and actual support."⁵³⁵ This situation might be caused by the factor that comedians were under-valued as favourite stars by fans. It also showed one important fact about film culture: fans gathered information about their stars through media other than movies. Fandom could even be constructed without actually seeing movies; however, stardom has to be constructed through the production of movies. Often, print culture helped to construct stardom and fandom as much as films themselves. In Gaylyn Studlar's words, fan magazines constructed "an extra-textual cinematic discourse," which was as important as films.⁵³⁶ By comparing the two polls, we can also see that a star is more than an "economic necessity," it is also a cultural necessity that constructs people's hopes and dreams. A star can transform ordinary movie-goers and make them become the extraordinary ones the common people want to be identified with. A star can also create fantasies for movie-goers and

⁵³⁵ Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: the Age of the Silent Feature, 1915-1928* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 262.

⁵³⁶ Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s," *Wide Angle* 13:1 (1991): 7.

at the same time, satisfy their fantasies. It is important to distinguish economic value and cultural value of a star because a top-grossing performer might not be most audiences' favourite one due to various reasons. There exists an invisible gap between a star's economic value his/her cultural value. In a trans-national context, factors that affect a star's reception might be due to different cultures and social customs. For example, although Charlie Chaplin was among top box-office draw in 1920s Shanghai, he was not critics' favorites in some Chinese media because of his multiple marriages and high-profile divorces, which might be commonly perceived as not being a morally responsible man in the Chinese culture.

Summoning fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai, this chapter aims to examine Hollywood fandom in Shanghai based upon Chinese fan magazines. Fan magazines I selected in this chapter include *Cinegraph* (*Di Ba Yi Shu*),⁵³⁷ *The Movie Guide* (*Yin Xing*),⁵³⁸ *The Movie Magazine* (*Dianying Zazhi*),⁵³⁹ *Movie Weekly* (*Ying Xi Chun Qiu*),⁵⁴⁰ *Photoplay Pictorial* (*Ying Xi Hua Bao*),⁵⁴¹ *Photoplay World* (*Ying Xi Shi Jie*),⁵⁴² *The Silver Light* (*Yin Guang*),⁵⁴³ *The Stage and*

⁵³⁷ *Di Ba Yi Shu*, or *Cinegraph*, was established on January 15, 1929 in Shanghai. Published by Di Ba Yi Shu Publishing House, it ceased publication after the first issue. Its editor was Lu Mengshu. "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=6, last accessed January 1, 2009.

⁵³⁸ *Yin Xing*, or *Movie Guide* was established in Shanghai on September 1, 1926. After changing its owner and titles several times, it existed until October 1931. From September 1926 to 1928, the editor-in-chief was Lu Mengshu; from August 1928 to March 1931, its name was changed to *Xin Yin Xing*, or *New Movie Guide*, published by the Young Companion Publishing House, "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=6, last accessed January 1, 2009.

⁵³⁹ *Dian Ying Za Zhi*, or *The Movie Magazine*, monthly was first published in May 1924 in Shanghai. After 13 issues, it ceased publication in 1925. Established by Ren Jinping, the magazine had famous film critics as its editors-in-chief including Gu Kenfu, Zhu Shouju and Cheng Bugao. The magazine was published by Chen She Publishing House, "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=1, last access on January 1, 2009.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ying Xi Chun Qiu*, or *Movie Weekly*, was established on March 1, 1925. After 12 issues in May 1925, it ceased publication. One of the editors was Cheng Bugao, "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=1, last accessed on January 1, 2009.

⁵⁴¹ *Ying Xi Hua Bao*, or *Photoplay Pictorial*, published every ten days, was first issued on June 27, 1927. After 22 issues, on January 23, 1928, it ceased publication, "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=5, last accessed on January 1, 2009.

Screen (Xiju Dianying Huabao).⁵⁴⁴ In selecting fan magazines, I mainly apply two criteria: their availability and relevance to my investigation in Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai. All published between the mid-1920s and the late 1920s in Shanghai by local publishers except *The Silver Light*,⁵⁴⁵ these fan magazines covered a wide range of film-related topics such as star stories and photos, synopsis, and film criticism. Some of them had a long life span such as *The Movie Guide*, while others existed only in one issue such as the *Cinegraph*; some focus upon long film criticism while others have more short essays. Nevertheless, all helped construct a film discourse mostly representing film critics in the 1920s, a group of middle-class intellectuals who shared similar interests with their middle-class film fans. Because film critics wrote for more than one fan magazine and some magazines even shared the same editor-in-chief, it was inevitable that film critical discourse had striking similarities in 1920s Shanghai. One case in point was that Lu Mengshu was editor-in-chief for both magazines *Cinegraph* and *The Movie Guide*. One important characteristic of film criticism was the active construction of fandom for Hollywood films while at the same time, it called for more production of domestic films. As argued by Gaylyn Studlar, fan magazine in 1920s American, as “an extra-textual cinematic discourse,” helped to position female fans “within a discourse specifically aimed at influencing women’s reception of Hollywood film.”⁵⁴⁶ In the same period in China, Chinese fans’ perception of Hollywood film was greatly constructed by the film critical discourse that sang high praises to

⁵⁴² *Ying Xi Shi Jie*, or *Photoplay World*, published every two weeks, was first issued on June 1, 1925. After the third issue on August 16, 1925, it stopped publication, “Shanghai Memory,”

http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=2, last accessed on January 1, 2009.

⁵⁴³ *Yin Guang*, or *The Silver Light*, was published on December 1, 1926 in Hong Kong. It ceased publication on April 1, 1927 after five issues. It was distributed in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Macau, “Shanghai Memory,” http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=4, last accessed January 1, 2009.

⁵⁴⁴ *Xiju Dianying Huabao*, or *The Stage and Screen*, was published in January 1926. After two issues, it ceased publication in February 1926, “Shanghai Memory,”

http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=3, last accessed January 1, 2009.

⁵⁴⁵ It was distributed in Shanghai.

⁵⁴⁶ Studlar, 7.

Hollywood to promote domestic films. In so doing, fan magazines attempted to promote images of Hollywood stars in terms of Chinese values such as respect of family. In terms of gender composition of the above-mentioned fan magazines, based upon available sources, it was not clear they showed a tendency of increasing female readership like those in 1920s United States as by such feminist scholars as Kathryn Fuller, Shelley Stamp, Adrienne McLean, Anne Morey, and Gaylyn Studlar.⁵⁴⁷ Therefore, using discourse analysis, this chapter mainly focuses upon the critical discourse in constructing stardom in 1920s Shanghai.

In so doing, this chapter will answer these questions: to what degree were American fans different from or the same as his/her Chinese fans?⁵⁴⁸ What did the different readings and perceptions indicate in a transnational context?⁵⁴⁹ Because many American movie stars were covered in fan magazines, I will study how three major stars were covered in magazines in 1920s Shanghai including Charlie Chaplin,⁵⁵⁰ Harold Lloyd,⁵⁵¹ and Mary Pickford.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Kathryn H. Fuller, "Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan," in *In the Eye of the Beholder: Critical Perspectives in Popular Film and Television*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton, Michael T. Marden, and Jack Nachbar (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), 97-113; Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Adrienne McLean, "'New Films in Story Form': Movie Story Magazines and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 42:3 (2003): 3-26; Anne Morey, "So Real As to Seem Like Life Itself," in *The Photoplay Fiction of Adela Rogers St. Johns*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Duke University Press, 2002), 333-346; Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure: Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s," *Wide Angle* 13:1 (1991): 6-33.

⁵⁴⁸ In *An Amorous History*, 354, Zhang mentions Xuan Jinglin, a Chinese actress' allusion to Lillian Gish. Xuan, formerly a prostitute, changed her name to Xuan Jinglin, alluding to Lillian Gish (Gan Lixu in Chinese transliteration). This example shows Lillian Gish's innocent image in the Chinese.

⁵⁴⁹ Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, *Transnational Cinema: the Film Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002); Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*; Charles Ponce de Leon, *Self-exposure: Human-interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jeremy Butler, ed., *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991); Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986); Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy, eds., *Stars: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁵⁰ Andre Bazin, *Essays on Chaplin* (New Haven, Conn.: University of New Haven Press, 1985); Charlie Chaplin, *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Wes D. Gehring, *Charlie Chaplin's World of Comedy* (Muncie Ind.: Ball State University, 1980); John Kimber, *The Art of Charlie Chaplin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Kenneth Lynn, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

I chose them for my analysis for three main reasons. First, while there was a discourse of under-ranking comedy stars in American society, it would be interesting to examine similar situation that existed in China. Second, it will shed light on the perception of Shanghai moviegoers when we compare fandom of Harold Lloyd who created middle-class “glass character,” a bespectacled character, with lower-class audiences of Charlie Chaplin, whose on-screen identity is a lower-class tramp. In some way, their different reception might indicate the majority’s taste of Shanghai moviegoers; Finally, as Mary Pickford’s joyful and upbeat image on screen is different from Chinese standard of a melancholy beauty, her stardom can be a good case to study how a model not common in the culture was constructed and received in another culture.

This chapter will be divided into four parts. First, I will give a general picture of fandom in 1920s Shanghai. Then I will examine how Harold Lloyd’s works was received by Shanghai moviegoers. Next, I will examine how Charlie Chaplin’s movies were received and will compare the popularity of these two comedians. And finally, I will examine Mary Pickford’s popularity in Shanghai in the 1920s.

⁵⁵¹ William Cahn, *Harold Lloyd’s World of Comedy* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1964); Annette D’Agostino, *Harold Lloyd: A Bio-bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994); Tom Dardis, *The Man on the Clock* (New York: Viking Press, 1983); Jeffrey Vance and Susan Lloyd, *Harold Lloyd: Master Comedian* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002).

⁵⁵² Charles Affron, *Lillian Gish: Her Legend, Her Life* (New York: Scribner, 2001); Lillian Gish and Ann Pinchot, *Lillian Gish: the Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

9.1 GENERAL PICTURE OF FANDOM IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Movie fans in 1920s Shanghai were familiar with names of silent movie stars as Hollywood majors provided new releases in the city's first-run theaters almost as fast as in their home country. As mentioned in the previous chapters, even the second-run and third-run theatres in Shanghai were filled with old American films. If in the early 1920s, Shanghai audiences were familiar with only a handful stars such as Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford, then by the mid-1920s, at least sixty American movie stars were part of the city's film culture. One issue of *Ying Xi Shi Jie*, or *Shadow-play World* in 1925 polled its fans on the most beautiful American movie stars, here is the explanation for the poll,

Of all the sixty American movie stars, who was the most beautiful one?

We asked you to cast your vote, whoever cast the right vote will be given a photo of the voted beauty. Obviously, the art of movie stars can hardly be known, however, we all know their appearance. Currently, female movie stars in our film industrial were too few to be voted for. Therefore, we have 60 beautiful American female movie stars for readers' appreciation. We may have different concept of art, however, love for beauty is universal, and without national boundary. Therefore, we are not asking who is better in acting, we only care who the most beautiful star is.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ "Voting for Movie Stars," *Ying Xi Shi Jie* or *Shadow-Play World*, September 1, 1925.

The anonymous writer tries to tell readers that while the art of acting has no standards, beauty does have a standard, and moreover, the standard of beauty is universal and transcends national and cultural boundaries. American beauty is voted for because of the large number of American stars and the lack of equally famous Chinese movie stars. Below the voting call is a list of the sixty stars under the headline “names of candidates that were published.” Apparently, these names once appeared in fan magazines in Shanghai over the past few years. The sixty candidates were not listed in alphabetical order of their surnames, instead, they appeared to be there at random, as if for the editors’ convenience. The first ten in the list were those high-profile figures in fan magazines including Lillian Gish, Corinne Griffith, Hope Hampton, and Alice Joyce.⁵⁵⁴ Interestingly, together with the voting call and name list, there is also a call for Chinese translation of the names of the female stars as they did not have standard translated names, a situation that sometimes could cause confusion. Besides the call for the standard translation, one word in the advertisement reveals the real purpose of the poll, that is, “Shang Wan,” or “appreciation and play.” The American female stars were listed “for Chinese readers’ appreciation and play.” In the Chinese language, *Shang Wan* usually refers to the behavior of looking and touching a small and treasured object such as a rare jade. Obviously, the use of the word *Shang Wan* here shows attitudes of both critics and fans towards female stars, that is, they are objects of fetishism for the viewers’ pleasure. The choice of this word shows the ambiguity towards Hollywood female stars: on the one hand, they are rare, and should be treasured; however, on the other hand, they are just for pleasure, and nothing more. The phrase also indicates conventional standards of judging a woman in the Chinese patriarchal society by her appearance. A good-looking woman appearance is for the appreciation of the others, basically

⁵⁵⁴ The other six are Constance Talmadge, Norma Talmadge, Alice Terry, Mary Thurman, Colleen Moore, and Mae Murray.

men. She can not be really good unless she is able to engage men's gaze with her good appearance.

This patriarchal view was widely present in fan magazines. For example, compared with female stars, male stars were much less examined or discussed in the critical discourse or public spotlight. One article titled "What Kind of Girls Can Have the Opportunity of Acting in Movies" in the *Movie Magazine* only focuses upon actresses instead of stars of both genders. Despite the fact that the two authors claim that good appearance is not a necessity for being a movie actress, they still insist that "an actress should have neat appearance, medium-height, big eyes, and good education."⁵⁵⁵ Obviously, neat appearance is just a substitute for good appearance. Good education does not mean high education; instead, it means that an actress should at least be literate so she could be able to read a script. This probably distinguishes a film actress from an opera actress who learned the lines of a play through oral instruction. Imaginably, this comment on pre-requisites of being an actress would discourage some young women from going into the new profession. From available sources, we can see that female stars' appearance was under stricter scrutiny than that of male stars. Articles on an actress's look, such as "New Outfit of a Female Movie Star," or "Qualifications Required of an Actress," were frequently published in fan magazines.⁵⁵⁶ Accompanied by images of female movie stars, these articles provide a forum for male film critics to express their personal views of female beauty and construct and reinforce patriarchal criteria of female beauty. Some critics argue that film brought a new concept and image to women in Shanghai. However, the new woman image was still strictly criticized in a patriarchal discourse. One case in point is that an actress' good appearance was a prior requirement for her profession,

⁵⁵⁵ "What Kind of Girls Can Have the Opportunity of Acting in Movies," *Movie Magazine*, June 1924.

⁵⁵⁶ *The China Film Pictorial*, June 1, 1927, 32-33, photos; Ms. Jingxia, "Qualifications Required of an Actress," *Movie Magazine*, March 1925.

while an actor's appearance is not publicly discussed as that of an actress. Several reasons could explain this phenomenon. First, as a male-dominant culture, China had a long history of discursive norms concerning criteria of being a good woman. Second, editors and film critics who contributed to fan magazines were mainly men, therefore, they were more likely to discuss an actress' beauty from their viewpoints. Finally, it is also because there were a larger number of female stars than male stars, therefore female stars had a wider presence.

By the late 1920s, fan magazines managed to publish more pictures of latest movie stars than early issues. For instance, in one issue of *Di Ba Yi Shu*, or *Cineograph*, pictures of movie stars made up almost half of the magazine. Furthermore, pictures of male stars appeared more frequently. Of the eight movies stars published in the above-mentioned *Di Ba Yi Shu*, two were male stars: one is Emil Janning, and the other is John Gilbert.⁵⁵⁷ Certainly, there was a change compared with fan magazines in the early 1920s when American film comedians such as Charlie Chaplin were in high profile. This phenomenon of media coverage over actors of different genres of films shows that towards the end of the 1920s a wide variety of films were shown in Shanghai. It also shows that fans' taste in stars began to be multifarious. Despite local people had diverse comments about Hollywood stars, American comedians had been popular among the movie-goers in the city throughout the 1920s. In the next subsection of this chapter, I am going to discuss perception and reception of Harold Lloyd's personae by movie fans in 1920s Shanghai.

⁵⁵⁷ *Cineograph*, or *Di Ba Yi Shu*, January, 1929, photos.

9.2 HAROLD LLOYD—A GLASS BOY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

In American film history, Harold Lloyd is commonly regarded as a star comedian in the silent era, together with Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. “Harold Lloyd was not only the most popular comedian of the 1920s but, by the close of silent era, the biggest box-office draw in motion pictures. He far out-grossed Buster Keaton and surpassed even Chaplin over the long run.”⁵⁵⁸ William Everson also proved Harold Lloyd’s box office draw in the 1920s, although not without reservation,⁵⁵⁹

There is no point in even exploring that oft-asked question of who was the best or the funniest of the silent comedians...If all-round artistry were taken into consideration, then Chaplin would undoubtedly occupy the first position. If box-office grosses provided the criterion, then Lloyd would be the leading the parade—but one should not forget that Lloyd got into feature comedies first, and made more of them than Chaplin and Keaton.

Nevertheless, Lloyd was a popular figure in 1920s Shanghai as his films including *Girl Shy*, *For Heaven’s Sake*, *Grandma’s Boy* were all exhibited at entertainment sites in the city. His popularity in the city can also be seen from a wide and intensive coverage of him in popular magazines such as *The Young Companion* and local newspapers including the *Shen Bao*. Like Charlie Chaplin, his name was a byword of laughter and comedy among the city’s film fans. Because of “lonesome Luke,” the earlier on-screen personae he created, he was referred to in 1920s Shanghai as *luo ke*, a Chinese translation for Luke. According to Richard Koszarski, Luke

⁵⁵⁸ Koszarski, 304.

⁵⁵⁹ William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 271.

was Harold Lloyd's on-screen character before 1917. It was "inverted Chaplin figure" that wears different shoes, clothes, and moustache from those of Charlie Chaplin.⁵⁶⁰ Because of popularity of his early comedy shorts in late 1910s and early 1920s in Shanghai, the city's movie-goers were quite familiar with the role of Luke. Even his character in later years changed greatly (one change was to add one pair of black-rimmed glasses) from that of earlier years, he was still remembered as *luo ke* by his fans in China.⁵⁶¹ This example shows the lasting perception of an actor's initial on-screen identity.

Luo Ke was never lonely in this Far Eastern city in that his name and photos, even those of his family, were frequently shown in fan magazines, more often than not, page after page. The second issue of the *Movies Magazine* in 1924 published Harold Lloyd' brief autobiography translated from *Photoplay*. The six-page narration about the comedian describes his childhood, his family, his viewpoints about the world. Together with the story were his photos and those of his family. These images represent Harold Lloyd as a successful and optimistic boy who comes from a traditional middle-class family, which is similar to "glass character" in his films.⁵⁶² Glass character refers to a common man role in Harold Lloyd's silent comedy films throughout the 1920s. In those films, Harold Lloyd created a middle-class bespectacled character who kept a good sense of humor although he had to scrape a living in an increasingly urbanized society. The *Movies Magazine* was not the only fan magazine that showed the sweet family life that Harold Lloyd had as an ordinary individual. In the *China Film Pictorial*, five photos of Harold Lloyd were published together on one page under the title "Luo Ke's Happy Family, which focuses

⁵⁶⁰ Koszarski, 306.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

upon what a great family life he has even in his private time.⁵⁶³ In the public discourse, Lloyd was constructed as being similar to his on-screen character, in Koszarski's words, he is "the quintessential achiever in the era of Harding normalcy and Coolidge prosperity."⁵⁶⁴ Although Chinese film critics did not necessarily know such Western names as "Harding" and "Coolidge," Chinese articles seem to convey similar optimistic message to his fans: as long as you keep up your hope and remain optimistic like Luo Ke, you will be able to achieve your goal in life. The reportage on the comedian was not only tied to the middle-class glass character in his films, but also to the content of a film to be shown in the city. For example, when his film *Grandma's Boy* was being screened in the fall of 1924, an eight-page story of his life was published, specifically on his childhood and teenager years. Interestingly, a photo of the house where he was born was published together (Fig. 21) with five pictures of Harold Lloyd at different ages of his life: 18-month-old (Fig. 22), four-year-old (Fig. 23), a nine-year-old (Fig. 24), and finally a sixteen-year-old (Fig. 25).⁵⁶⁵ All these photos portrayed him as a happy individual. Presenting images of Lloyd as a young boy not only helped sell *Grandma's Boy* by projecting the comedian's real life into his on-screen personae, but also helped cast him as an obedient grandson, an image that fits into Chinese cultural and social tradition.

In addition to personal information about the comedian, news and reviews about his latest films were also frequently published. Examples abound: the *Movie Magazine* published a

⁵⁶³ "Luo Ke's Happy Family," *China Film Pictorial*, Sept. 1, 1927. The magazine was established on January 1, 1927 by Lun De, Zhou Guan, and Zhou Youlin. It ceased publication in February 1929. Altogether the magazine released 15 issues. Starting as a bimonthly magazine, it became a monthly magazine after the fifth issue on May 1, 1927. The 9th issue of the magazine, very likely, was published on September 1, 1927.

⁵⁶⁴ Koszarski, 306.

⁵⁶⁵ Bugao Cheng, "Short Autobiography of Harold Lloyd, Part II," *The Movie Magazine*, July 1924.

scene from his film *Girl Shy*.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, pamphlets were issued especially to promote his movies. In February 1925, there was an advertisement in the *Movies Magazine*, which said that a pamphlet would be published soon that was especially devoted to Harold Lloyd's film *Girl Shy*. According to the advertisement, the pamphlet, which cost ten 10 cents, was a collection of previous publications of Harold Lloyd. It had photos and articles about the comedian and his family.⁵⁶⁷

While an overwhelmingly majority of articles in Chinese fan magazines gave Harold Lloyd and his films the highest praise, some articles questioned some details in his films. One case in point is a criticism of the tie in *Girl Shy*, which disappears and reappears “magically,” according to the author.

Many of you must have seen Harold Lloyd's film *Girl Shy*, you probably all remember one scene from the film. After Lloyd's book is refused by the editor, he goes back to his store, still doing his old sewing business....while he is gazing at a cardboard box, the tie on his neck is entangled under the sewing needle. His daydream is interrupted when his head is pulled forward by the tie. All of a sudden, the mailman comes. He tries hard to get rid of his tie and go to get the mail. At this time, he has no tie in his neck. Unexpectedly, after he tears the letter into pieces and sits back in front of the sewing-machine, there is a tie around his neck. Isn't it strange?⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ “Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy*,” *Movie Magazine*, November 1924, photo; “American *Huaji* Movie Star—Luo Ke,” *The Young Companion*, June 15, 1926, the magazine published one scene from Lloyd's *For Heaven's Sake*; *Cineograph* 1, September 1, 1929, advertisement.

⁵⁶⁷ “Please Buy Harold Lloyd's *Girl Shy* Supplement,” *Movies Magazine*, February 1925, advertisement.

⁵⁶⁸ Yu, “Luo Ke's Tie in *Girl Shy*,” *Movies Magazine*, March 1925.

The observing critic expresses his doubt about the scene. The confusion might result from the sub-standard projecting practice in the silent era when a projectionist sped up a scene which he thought might be unimportant. It might also result from the incomplete print of the film. It may have been a rupture in continuity that escaped the notice of the director. However, this incident did not affect Harold Lloyd's popularity as a comedian star in the city.

Harold Lloyd's films such as *Safety Last!* and *Why Worries* were so well received in early 1920s Shanghai that in 1925 the *Movie Magazine* claimed to write to the U.S. star directly on behalf of his Chinese fans. The idea of a collective fan letter started with a call translated from a U.S. fan magazine,

Audiences can vote for the best of Harold Lloyd's movies made between 1921 and 1924, and write their comment of these works. The vote was scheduled to be over by December 31, 1924. Comment should not exceed 200 words, 37 people can get a reward,...the above is the prize call, which was translated from a U.S. fan magazine. Only Americans have the right to vote. Soon after his film *Hot Water* arrives in Shanghai, our magazine will write to Harold Lloyd and ask him to add the Chinese audience in his reward.⁵⁶⁹

It was not clear whether the magazine wrote the letter of request for its readers. Most probably, the claimed letter from the Chinese-language magazine never reached Lloyd even it was sent out. It might also be a marketing strategy to promote *Hot Water*. At least, this notice expressed, or managed to utilize Chinese fans' wish to be involved in current events related to

⁵⁶⁹ Jingping Ren, "Luo Ke's Bounty," *Movies Magazine* 9, January 1925.

the American comedian. They were not just satisfied with watching his movies, reading articles about his life, or talking about him. They wanted to be part of a larger fandom of the star.

Certainly, as a comedian star, Harold Lloyd was popular among both male and female audiences. His “glass character” fit perfectly the image of a cute office boy in Shanghai who moved up social scale with his wit, diligence, and flexibility. A pair of black-rimmed glasses almost feminized him and represented him as unthreatening to Chinese male audiences. His smiling face indicated friendliness, joy, and reliability, which was a sought-after thing in a fast-expanding metropolis like Shanghai. As a matter of fact, advertisements of Harold Lloyd’s movies also used his happy glass-boy image to cater to the taste of Shanghai audiences. One case in point is an ad for *Speedy*, which was published in the *Cineograph*. The full-page ad showed the smiling comedian on a two-horse carriage, riding towards readers, which was consistent with the film’s Chinese name Kai Kuai Che, or “riding a fast carriage”; on the left top of the bigger image is a picture of Harold Lloyd’s pleasant and familiar “glass character” in hat. Together with the picture is a short paragraph that indicated his popularity among audiences of both genders,

With a big and wide smile, Harold Lloyd is coming to Shanghai in a carriage at a full speed. His purpose of coming to Shanghai is to make friends with men and becoming lovers with women. You see, on these cold wintry days, he is still wearing straw-hat. Yes, his enthusiasm is burning. Moreover, he is riding a fast carriage. His enthusiasm can even melt cold ice. The way he drives a carriage looks so stupid and awkward that it makes people laugh. Naturally, he comes to the city just to make you laugh, and to make you laugh to your heart’s content.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁷⁰ Harold Lloyd’s *Speedy*, *Cineograph*, January 1929, advertisement.

This advertisement indicated that Harold Lloyd had both male and female fans in 1920s Shanghai. Because of his passion and sense of humour, men found him a good friend and women regarded him as an entertaining lover. The ad also seemed to hint another unusual reason of his popularity in Shanghai—his apparently awkwardness and stupidity on screen. Shanghai sense of humor tends to deprecate or derogate people. By deprecating the star, the ad actually promoted him because in Shanghai culture, a show of awkwardness and stupidity is not a bad trait; on the contrary, it could disarm other people of their cautiousness and make them feel closer to the star.

9.3 CHARLIE CHAPLIN—A TRAMP WITH A BOWLER HAT

As a cultural icon in the silent film era, Charlie Chaplin was known in a different way from Harold Lloyd. First, they had different on-screen personae. While Lloyd's glass-boy was represented as a happy middle-class character, Chaplin's tramp was a combination of both comic and tragic elements. Second, they had different ways of producing films. While Harold Lloyd was one of the most productive comedians in the 1920s, Chaplin took more time to produce his works. It took Chaplin two years and a half to complete *The Gold Rush* (1925). Because of his limited productions every year compared with Harold Lloyd, Chaplin got less coverage in the fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai than that of Lloyd. However, Chaplin was no less famous, if not more. In his detailed report to the U.S. Department of State, Leroy Webber, an American diplomat confirmed the fact that both Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd were popular even in Amoy, a small island city in southeast

China.⁵⁷¹ In addition to highly entertaining comedy skits they provided, another reason for a comedian's popularity was due to frequent screening of their works: a night's regular program usually consists of one short newsreel, one or two short comedy shows, and a full-length feature film. Comedians were usually the stars that audiences saw at every show. In spite of the fact that Chaplin only produced three feature films in the mid and late 1920s, he was still popular in China because of regular exhibition of his early comedy films in public entertainment places.⁵⁷² Chaplin's attraction to Shanghai audiences started even before his long feature films, as evidenced by the fact that a pirated print of *Kid* (1920) was screened all over Shanghai by the Ramos Amusement Company in June 1921, first at the Victoria Theatre, then at the Olympic Theatre.⁵⁷³ Obviously, with his monopoly in the film exhibition and advantage in film pirating business, it was not a coincidence that Ramos screened Chaplin's *Kid*. One important factor was the comedian's popularity in the city. Chaplin's films in the later 1920s also proved a huge success in Shanghai. Take *The Circus* (1928) as an example. When it was released at the first-run Carlton Theatre in Shanghai on February 23, 1928, it had a record-high box office earning of the United Artists' films in Shanghai. In his monthly report to the United Artists headquarters in New York, Edmund Benson, the company's regional special representative expressed his excitement about the film's remarkably good reception in Shanghai, "Our percentage return in addition to the stipulation guarantee proved that our faith in Charlie Chaplin's drawing power in China was well founded."⁵⁷⁴ If the Carlton Theatre, a first-run theater, was arguably mainly patronized by foreign expatriate and wealthy Chinese audiences, then the film's huge success at the Isis Theater, a second-run theater attended with local Chinese

⁵⁷¹ Records of the Department of State relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910-1929, April 10, 1929, NARA, College Park, File 281, 0939-0944, RG-59.

⁵⁷² "Charlie Chaplin," <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000122/#actor1920>, last accessed on August 21, 2008. The three films are *The Gold Rush* (1925), *Camille* (1926), *The Circus* (1928).

⁵⁷³ Alexander Krisel to Dennis O'Brien, May 29, 1922, O'Brien, UAC, 58/4.

⁵⁷⁴ Edmund Benson to Arthur Kelly, April 15, 1928, O'Brien, UAC 95/4.

undoubtedly showed the comedian's attraction to the local audiences. *The Circus* was shown at the Isis Theater in early summer of 1928, a season when the greyhound racing started. Greyhound racing on Saturday night, normally the best night for a movie theatre, could draw around 10,000 people away from theaters. In his letter to Arthur Kelly, Edmund Benson explained one main reason for the unexpected poor box office return of the film *Sadie Thompson* (1928); "The new sport (greyhound racing) seems to have taken the city by storm and it will undoubtedly prove a thorn in the side of picture theaters."⁵⁷⁵ Nevertheless, even in this situation, Chaplin's drawing-power was peerless. Local audiences swarmed to the Isis Theatre to see his *The Circus* with such enthusiasm that they even broke the theatre's door when they elbowed their way into the theater. "On the opening day, the crowds were so immense that they broke down one of the theater doors," wrote Benson in his reports of May and June to UAC headquarters, "In Shanghai there are 34 nationalities, and Charlie Chaplin was the favorite of all of these, in addition to being placed first by the Chinese themselves."⁵⁷⁶ From Benson's report, we can see that Chaplin was welcome by both Shanghai audiences and the city's expatriate community. Aside from the comedian's popularity in the city, it was probable the audience's reception at the first-run theater greatly affected the box office of the second-run. Audiences must have heard or/and read news of the film's good reception at the Carlton Theatre before they all swarmed to see the movie. This case shows the economic factor of popularity: a group with a high income might affect reception of a star among a low-income group. In his essay on *Bibliothèque Bleue*, or Blue Books, Chartier mentioned the same phenomenon about the blue book in France.⁵⁷⁷ Chartier makes his argument over how publishing practices and popular

⁵⁷⁵ Edmund Benson to Arthur Kelly, July 10, 1928, O'Brien, UAC, 95/4.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). Blue book refers to "inexpensive books printed in large quantities and sold by peddler" for almost two centuries before the French Revolution.

books affected each other over time. Originally a book format for aristocrats, it later became cheap book for working class. Shanghai taste was strongly influenced by Western culture, of which English-speaking culture was supposed to be the strongest. Although the economic factor could partly explain why American movies were popular in 1920s Shanghai, it could not completely explain why Charlie Chaplin was one of the city's favorite stars. It would be helpful to examine comments on the U.S. comedian written by Chinese film critics so that we are able to know the reasons of Chaplin's popularity among the Shanghai audiences.

Let's start with Chaplin's on-screen personae—the tramp. A familiar figure in the silent era all over the world, the tramp was recognized by the Chinese audiences as a Western man with a short beard and big shoes. “Every time people see someone with a short beard and big shoes, they recognize him as Charlie Chaplin.”⁵⁷⁸ Some Chinese even believed that his attraction mainly resulted from his unusually comic appearance. However, other film reviewers argued that his success lied in his unique acting in his films as evidenced by film critic Ban Hou's comment upon *The Gold Rush*,

In *The Gold Rush*, there is a scene in which Charlie Chaplin crosses a barrier in his typical duck steps. At a corner, he stretches his right leg and then passes the corner. Audiences in the theater all applauded...People love his duck steps,...his popularity is because of his excellent performing.⁵⁷⁹

From Ban's narration, one can have a picture of Shanghai audiences' viewing habits: they clapped their hands in the midst of a show so as to express their appreciation and excitement, which was similar to viewing a Chinese opera in a theatre. Like an excellent Chinese opera, Chaplin's

⁵⁷⁸ Yihua Pan, “Trend of Audiences' Taste over the Past Few Years,” *Movie Magazine*, June 1924.

⁵⁷⁹ Ban Hou, “Danger of Monotony,” *Ying Xi Shi Jie*, March 1926, 7.

movie could bring out laughter, applause, cheers, and tears. While Ban Hou attributed Chaplin's popularity to his performance, Yi Hanru, a well-known Chinese literary critic, went further to argue that it was his sharp observation of society that made him a great comedian. He also refuted the belief that it was Charlie Chaplin's appearance that made his comedy film popular,

...Some people said that Charlie Chaplin depended entirely upon his 'shoes,' 'hat,' and 'stick,'...without these things, he would not be able to make people laugh. This opinion has some grain of truth in it, as a matter of fact, their (Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd) study of the current social conditions is the key to their success. If we put his 'shoes,' 'hat,' and 'stick' on someone else, can the other person make the same artistic achievement?⁵⁸⁰

The author believed that it was Chaplin's knowledge of social condition as well as his artistic way of expression that made him a comedy master. Yi also thought that without studying social conditions, a comedian could not be able to understand his audiences' mentality. Therefore, he could not eventually be successful. His belief was contrary to many other critics who held that comedy was only by and for the illiterate or less educated.

Unlike Harold Lloyd who had a standard Chinese name, Charlie Chaplin had different versions of Chinese translated names such as "cha li zhuo bie ling"⁵⁸¹ or "que li que po ling"⁵⁸² in fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai. The variations were due to the different pronunciations between the Shanghai dialect and the mandarin Chinese. While "cha li zhuo bie ling" was how Charlie

⁵⁸⁰ Hanru Yi, "Small Talk of *Huaji* Films," *Ying Xi Chun Qiu*, May 1925, 3

⁵⁸¹ "Cha Li Zhuo Bie Lin and His Two Sons," *China Film Pictorial*, June 1, 1927, photo, 19.

⁵⁸² *Movie Magazine*, March 1925, content.

Chaplin was pronounced in mandarin Chinese, a standard spoken Chinese, “que li que po ling” was how the U.S. comedian’s name sounded in the Shanghai dialect. As many editors of fan magazines in the 1920s were from Shanghai and its surrounding areas, the Shanghai version was widely used in popular magazines. One editor even complained of the difficulty of identifying Charlie Chaplin’s name in fan magazines for a non-native speaker of the Shanghainese.⁵⁸³

In addition to being a popular comedian, Chaplin was also known to Shanghai audiences as a man involved in multiple divorce cases. News indicating his past marriage and his current divorce frequently appeared in Chinese fan magazines in the 1920s. One issue of the *China Film Pictorial* published his stories of divorce and photos of his two sons.⁵⁸⁴ In another issue of *Movies Magazine*, his photo and Mildred Harris were published together, with the caption of her picture as “Charlie Chaplin’s ex-wife.”⁵⁸⁵ As a matter of fact, his divorce was regarded as the only imperfection he had as an individual. In a short essay on Chaplin’s life and career, Shu Tinghao, a film reviewer in Shanghai, concluded the comedian’s character with the following sentence, “He has a good personality except that he liked to marry again and again.”⁵⁸⁶ Obviously, multiple divorces or multiple marriages were not regarded as part of good personality according to the critic. It hurt the American *Huaji* master’s reputation as cautious man. However, neither did this only “shortcoming” of Chaplin seem to affect the box office return in the city nor did it stop discussion on his artistic achievement. He had been popular throughout the 1920s. In early 1930, he even visited Shanghai and was warmly welcome by local people. A master comedian, Chaplin was also considered a great director. According to film critic Ren Jinping, because of his good directing and perfectionist attitudes in *A Woman of Paris* (1923), Chaplin should be counted as one of the five greatest

⁵⁸³ Editor, “A Brutal Report,” *China Film Pictorial*, July 1, 1927, 46.

⁵⁸⁴ See note 499.

⁵⁸⁵ *Movie Magazine*, March 1925, photos.

⁵⁸⁶ Tinghao Shu, “Short Biography of Charlie Chaplin,” *Movies Magazine*, April 1925.

American directors, together with Rex Ingram, D.W. Griffith, Cecil B DeMille, and Ernst Lubitsch.⁵⁸⁷

In summary, both Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin were well-received by movie-goers in 1920s Shanghai. However, audiences seemed to have different reasons for liking them: Harold Lloyd was more of a good neighborhood boy type who generally had a good relationship with people around him; Charlie Chaplin seemed to have a more mature and profound personae on-screen although he might have a hard time handling his relationship with his wives. Popular media tended to construct both comedians in the sphere of family, a core value in the Chinese culture. In his movies, Harold Lloyd fits the role of a good man in Chinese dramatic tradition characterized by a love theme. “His (Harold Lloyd’s) basic motive was to prove himself worthy of his girl—who often remained quite aloof, unaware of (and uncaring about) his tremendous exertions on her behalf and concerned only with the end product.”⁵⁸⁸ The hero’s great effort to court his girl also reinforces Chinese moral that true love does not come easy. Lloyd’s genteel outfit and glasses made him look like thousands of middle-class intellectuals in 1920s Shanghai, who struggled to keep their ends meet every month. He was such a personable figure that a middle-class local could be easily identified with him.

Unlike Lloyd, Chaplin represented lower-class people with his tramp image. His comedy films were filled with pathetic beauty, making people both laugh and cry at the same time. In *Shen Bao* in the early 1920s, news about Chaplin was constantly reported, compared with that about Lloyd. News about Chaplin in *Shen Bao* included his latest film, his long-awaited visit to Shanghai, his photos, his film art, and naturally, his divorce and marriage. Between 1923 and 1924, nearly 30 news articles were written about Chaplin in *Shen Bao*, while less than five articles were on Harold

⁵⁸⁷ Jinping Ren, “Detailed Review of *A Woman of Paris*,” *Movies Magazine*, April 1925.

⁵⁸⁸ Everson, 199.

Lloyd in the same daily.⁵⁸⁹ However, in my collection of Chinese fan magazines in the 1920s, Lloyd seemed to get more coverage than Chaplin. Aside from limitations of available primary sources, it can prove that Chaplin actually appealed to lower-class audiences than Harold Lloyd because a fan magazine cost more than double than *Shen Bao*. For example, in the 1920s, one copy of *Shen Bao* sold at six cents a day while one copy of *The China Film Pictorial* cost 20 cents.⁵⁹⁰ This could further show that identification with an artistic role happened even in a transnational context. In this instance, class factor overcame national and cultural barriers and shortened the distance between people of different ages, genders, educational backgrounds, and nationalities. Such was a major appeal of Chaplin's films.

9.4 MARY PICKFORD—A ROLE MODEL

As one of the three best-known stars in the American silent era, Mary Pickford was famous for her angelic character of sweetness and naivety in film. However, in real life, she was not as a fragile and helpless character as she appeared in films. As the star with the highest salary in Paramount in the late 1910s, she worked both as an actress and a producer in her own films.⁵⁹¹ Later, as one of the founders of the United Artists, her annual salary hit as high as one million dollars. Her name and pictures frequently appeared in fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai both as Douglas Fairbanks' wife and as a successful actress coming from a lower-class background. Between 1923 and 1924, she was

⁵⁸⁹ *Shen Bao Index*, 1923-1924 (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1988), 271-274.

⁵⁹⁰ *China Film Pictorial*, February 1, 1927, cover.

⁵⁹¹ Koszarski, 266.

covered in *Shen Bao* around at least 27 times either in photo or in word.⁵⁹² In two of the reports, she was represented as Douglas Fairbanks' wife as well as a famous film star; 21 reports mainly focused upon her childhood.⁵⁹³ The extensive coverage of Mary Pickford's low-birth could partly be due to the fact that *Shen Bao*'s readership was mainly made up of ordinary local Chinese. Starting from a lower-income group, Pickford created a miracle and fulfilled a star dream for readers sharing a similar background as she. "The fan magazines offered their readers a superior, distanced awareness of the star-making process while simultaneously perpetuating an illusion of intimacy with the stars."⁵⁹⁴ The sweet-looking actress gave hope to ordinary Chinese who read her childhood stories and who dreamed of becoming as wealthy and beautiful as she some day.

Besides her financial success, she was also commonly regarded to be artistically successful in the Chinese media. Chinese film critical discourse divided film actors/actresses into three categories: an actor/actress, a star, and an artist. While an actor/actress was in the lowest rank of the profession, an artist ranked top. An actor/actress was no more than a jack-of-all-trades in the profession who ran errands in a studio and who earned a meagre salary, an artist was both financially and morally sound. In one article, an artist's virtue was even associated with progress of Chinese film industry.⁵⁹⁵ This Chinese notion of an artist differs greatly from the Western notion of an artist, who was commonly perceived as being morally irresponsible and sexually promiscuous. In the Chinese media, Mary Pickford was constructed as an artist in addition to being a star, a

⁵⁹² *Shen Bao Index*, 1923-1924 (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1988), 271-274. I use "at least" here because I only counted their news headlines with Mary Pickford's name in them.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ Studlar, 13-14.

⁵⁹⁵ Da Chi, "Rambling Talks on Film," *Shen Bao*, May 16, 1925, 7.

commodity of a studio.⁵⁹⁶ In these representations, she was set up a role model of morality and virtues for Chinese readers as well as Chinese actresses.

These articles and her role on screen made her popular in 1920s Shanghai. She was so well-liked by her fans that she got a wide publicity in the Chinese popular media. Many fans were anxious to know almost every aspect of her life including her age. For example, among the twenty movie stars whose age was reported in *Shen Bao* in the mid-1920s, she was the first one in the list, which indicated her popularity among Chinese readers.⁵⁹⁷ Her photo was frequently published in popular magazines. For instance, together with her signature on it, her photo was published on the cover of the nineteenth issue of the *Young Companion*, a popular magazine in Shanghai and the neighbouring regions (Fig.26).⁵⁹⁸ The photo was presented as a souvenir she gave to Wu Delian, editor-in-chief of the *Young Companion* who visited Hollywood and interviewed Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. In the photo, she wears a casual dress without showing much of her body line, unlike many other movie stars. The unpretentiousness is also shown in her simple wide-rim hat. In the photo, with her two hands resting on her waist, she almost looks like a tomboy, one American cultural type in the 1920s. In her analysis on how Adela Rogers St. Johns' fictions in *Photoplay* constructed womanhood in 1920s America, Anne Morey examined the role of a tomboy image at that period. "One of the ingredients of the sexual revolution of the 1920s was a new emphasis on a practical physique for women, which had the effect of maneuvering them closer to their male admirers in form."⁵⁹⁹ This photo downplays Mary Pickford's sexual appeal, instead, it gave viewers an impression that she was a woman of her own body and her own will. It distinguished her from the

⁵⁹⁶ "American Film Industry—Current and Past Situation," *Shen Bao*, April 13, 1925, 7.

⁵⁹⁷ "Investigation of Movie Stars' Date of Birth," *Shen Bao*, April 8, 1925, 7.

⁵⁹⁸ Zhao Jiabi, "Index to Reprints of a Completion Collection of Old Version *The Young Companion*," September 10, 1986. The magazine was the first comprehensive illustrated news magazine. It had a history of almost 20 years, from 1926 to 1945. At its prime time, it claimed to have readership of 40,000.

⁵⁹⁹ Morey, 338.

perceived image of Chinese actresses who was supposed to use their feminine appearance to exchange for their screen career.

In the United States in the 1920s, it was not uncommon for fan magazines to represent a female star both with feminine beauty and boyishness, as argued by Gaylyn Studlar in her analysis of fan magazine discourse. “The fan magazine’s (*Photoplay*’s) ideal new woman, like that of women’s magazine, vacillated constantly between asserting her newly realized social and sexual freedoms and retreating from her autonomy.”⁶⁰⁰ Mary Pickford was portrayed in the Chinese popular media not only as a boyish girl, but also mainly an ideal woman in a traditional family setting. The conflicting portrayals of Mary Pickford could partly come from the limited sources that a Chinese editor could get about the star, it could also result from an increasing discourse of woman’s freedom in Shanghai society. However, in a conflict of a traditional woman discourse and a new woman discourse, fan magazine were more apt to represent the American actress in the light of Chinese traditional values.

Unlike Lillian Gish who was more often mentioned in the mid-1920s than in the late 1920s, Mary Pickford was one the favorite stars of fan magazines throughout the twenties, even in 1929, her full-page picture was published in the *Cineograph*, together with those of Dolores Del Rio, Lyn Mara, Dorothy Revier, and Maria Corda. In her photo in the *Cineograph*, with flowers in her arms, the smiling actress presented readers a delightful and upbeat image (Fig. 27), which struck a contrast with the images of sophisticated Dolores Del Rio (Fig. 28) and sentimental Dorothy Revier (Fig. 29).⁶⁰¹ Her outlook of girl-like happiness was greatly appreciated by the Shanghai audiences. Actually it could be one main reason for her popularity in 1920s Shanghai, as evidenced by an article in the *Young Companion*. Called “The Turning Point of the Lucky Ones in the American

⁶⁰⁰ Studlar, 17.

⁶⁰¹ *Cineograph*, January 1929, photos.

Film Industry in This Year,” the article listed her as one of the nine current U.S. movie stars, together with Harold Lloyd and Douglas Fairbanks. The article, together with her photo, gives the reason of her achievement; “Mary Pickford is the queen of the film, moreover, she is also the world’s lover. Although she was almost 40 years old, she still looks child-like and beautiful, just like a young girl. All her films were warmly welcome by audience all over the world, that is, why she should be counted as a lucky one.”⁶⁰² From the brief introduction, we can see that Mary Pickford was well received in Shanghai and that her young look could also have contributed to her popularity. Her young and upbeat school-girl-like appearance fit well into the popular image of feminine beauty and virtue in the 1920s. In analyzing the public discourse of film actresses in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, Michael Chang insightfully pointed out the low social and moral status associated with female actresses in that period. Chinese actresses were portrayed as being poor, greedy, unscrupulous and willing to have sex with anyone who could help to realize their star dream. It was not uncommon for ordinary people to associate female movie stars with prostitutes.⁶⁰³ In order to counterpoise the negative image of an actress, some film actresses were intentionally dressed up like young innocent girls as described by a popular story called “Movie Star,” which recounts how a currently movie star and once prostitute attempted to cover up her disgraceful past by wearing a female student’s clothes.⁶⁰⁴ However, Pickford’s innocence and femininity was portrayed in the Chinese media as natural and unpretending. Coming from a poor family, she was represented as a beautiful, virtuous, and successful movie star that made herself distinct from her Chinese counterparts. The different treatments of American and domestic female movie stars could partly

⁶⁰² “The Lucky Turning Point of American Silver Screen This Year,” *Young Companion* 2 (March 15, 1926), 14.

⁶⁰³ Michael Chang, “The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Movies Actresses and Public Discourse in Shanghai, 1920s-1930,” in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 139.

⁶⁰⁴ Chang, 140.

result from undeveloped stage of the Chinese film industry in the 1920s. As we all know, Hollywood star system rose with the studio system. As a star was a valuable asset of a studio, he/she was carefully protected or controlled by a studio. Normally a studio was cautious in releasing negative news related to a star. However, in 1920s China, film industry at its early stage had yet to realize a star's importance to a studio. It was not necessary to guard against a negative portrayal of a movie star because he/she was not an asset of a studio. Besides, China had a long tradition of looking down upon female performers. Naturally, there existed extensively unfavorable reportage of Chinese female stars in the media. This phenomenon also shows that a double standard was used to judge a film star in a trans-national context. Chinese film critics judged a domestic film actress in a different way from her American counterpart as they were more tolerant of American actresses. It could be caused by the fact that distributors of American films only gave positive publicity materials to the Chinese media. It could also be due to the fact that Chinese patriarchal discourse had a long tradition of controlling women around them, such as wives and concubines in a family surrounding. The tight supervision aimed to guarantee a pure blood heritage of a family's patriarch. Moral restrictions were imposed upon a woman in society such as faithfulness to her husband. A Chinese female star was under closer scrutiny of film critics because she was regarded as one member of the Chinese society, a bigger family. Therefore, she was judged more in terms of moral standards than of her professional performance. However, because an American film actress was outside the Chinese society, her perceived "loose" behaviours could easily be dismissed with such assumptions as part of American culture. This double standard actually helped construct and reinforce stereotypes of both Chinese and American female film stars.

With this double standard, it was not uncommon for Pickford to be represented as a supportive wife and a considerate daughter in the popular film discourse to represent Pickford as

supportive wife and a considerate daughter aside from being a successful movie star. Chinese film critics aimed to construct Pickford as a positive image using Chinese moral standards. By so doing, they could promote her films and at the same time, promote and re-enforce traditional Chinese values. Known as Douglas Fairbanks' wife, she was frequently mentioned in articles that mainly introduced Fairbanks.⁶⁰⁵ In an article in *Movie Magazine*, she was described as a hard-working girl who supported her family when at a young age.

In her childhood, Mary Pickford was very poor. She started to work on stage at the age of seven or eight. At that time, her wage was meagre. However, all her family relied upon her. Sometimes, when she went home with her wage, she saw some display of candies in the windows of a candy shop, she was thinking of buying them. However, at the thought of her mother and her brothers and sisters, she dismissed the idea of buying candies. When the first time she signed a contract with a film studio, she received a check of 1,000 dollars as payment. This was out of her expectation. When she cashed the check, the cash was full of her bag. When her mother saw that, the first thing she said was 'is it real?' Then everybody cried. Even today, Mary's mother is happy to talk about it again and again.⁶⁰⁶

This anecdote sounds like another version of Chinese filial piety—a child worked hard, suppressed her desire just for the consideration of her mother and siblings. In the traditional Chinese stories about sons with filial piety, the boys tried their best to please or support their parents, even at the cost of their own lives. However, these stories normally ended well, with the family living happily together. This anecdote represented Mary Pickford in several positive ways. First, she was a

⁶⁰⁵ See Note 520.

⁶⁰⁶ Shi He, "Anecdotes of Film Stars in Their Childhood," *Movies Magazine*, March 1925.

diligent worker. Second, she was a responsible daughter and sister. Third, she saved her money for a higher purpose. And finally, she did not hide anything from her family, even the money she earned. All these traits are regarded as good characters in the Chinese culture. It also fit the Chinese moral tradition that a hard-won success is a well-deserved one. Moreover, it appropriated the Chinese mentality that a successful person should go through initial difficulties. Through this story and other reportage in fan magazines, Mary Pickford was constructed as a lucky woman who, nevertheless, well deserved her success—after a rough childhood, she became a popular movie star and married another popular movie star. Moreover, she was represented as a good daughter, a good wife, and a good woman, a role model that all Chinese women should and would follow. This is a good example of how popular magazines employed Chinese values to construct the American movie star. These articles made Chinese fans easier to identify with the well-known actress.

To sum up, the reconstruction of a star in trans-national media was heavily influenced by reportage from the star's own nation because many articles in popular media were directly translated from American media such as *Photoplay*. Most of the time, it was a distributor's responsibility to prepare materials related to a star or a film. Because of this reason, some magazines such as *The China Film Pictorial* even used original English publicity materials to promote a star. However, Chinese media reconstructed movie stars by choosing which materials to use and which not to use. From the popular media coverage of the three movie stars, we can see that the value of family played an important role in constructing a positive public figure including a movie star. Fan magazines in the 1920s constructed the Hollywood stars in terms of the Chinese values and traditions and thus represented them as part of the Chinese culture. Fan magazine, as an integral part of film culture, re-constructs and reinforces the on-screen identity of a movie star. On the one hand, stars transform fans and transcend mundane life on the screen; on the other hand, fans also transform

stars and make them closer to their own life and culture. If screen is where a superstar is born, then a fan magazine is where a superstar turns into a close friend or family member. The transformation is two-way and two-directional. This is the power of popular culture and printed culture.

However, creation of American star also indicated an application of double standard in the Chinese film critical discourse, especially in judging a female star. As a whole, virtues of a male star were not so much discussed as that of a female star. As a matter of fact, most of the time, when it came to a film actor, his professional performance was more emphasized than his virtues. A good actor was a good film artist, however, in order to be a good film artist, a female star had to be a good woman as well. This shows Chinese patriarchal view of a woman with a career. The double standard was also reflected in the contrastive representations of Chinese and American film actresses. While Chinese female stars were represented negatively, their American counterparts got more positive coverage in media. However, aside from the different sources of publicity materials, it also showed the bias of the Chinese society against both Chinese and American actresses. Positive representations of an American actress could result from low expectations and unfamiliarity with American culture. Chinese female stars were more likely to be portrayed in a negative way partly because of Chinese long history of low opinion of female entertainer. Inevitably, in a trans-national context, a star was undergoing a process of re-cycle, re-construction, and re-creation, which was filtered with perception (misperception), interpretation (misinterpretation), and bias of people from another culture.

10.0 CHAPTER NINE: THE CULTURAL CONCEPT OF FILM

One can find out a region's customs by examining genres of film people like to watch in that area. Generally speaking, in big cities where there is more civilization, love films are more popular among young people; yet, people who want to know more about the past prefer to watch historical films; comedy is more suitable for children and optimistic people; and smart and belligerent people would prefer to watch them detective stories and martial arts films...in terms of film's educational function, comedy can make people laugh and put them in a good mood, however, melodrama can help educate them more, especially where formal education can not reach.⁶⁰⁷

---from the *Movies Magazine* 7, November 1924.

Written by Lu Chubing, a film critic in Shanghai, this comment tells us about Shanghai film-goers' knowledge and beliefs concerning film in the early and middle 1920s. First, audiences could tell the difference between film genres. Second, interests in different genres could serve as an indicator of different customs and personality. Next, the love film was more popular in a bigger city than in a smaller one, especially among younger viewers. Also, film had

⁶⁰⁷ Chubin Lu, "The Relationship of the Film and Us," *Movies Magazine (Dian Ying Za Zhi)* 7 (November 1927): zai 1.

a didactic function in society. And finally, a melodrama had a higher educational value than a comedy. This well-articulated criticism is consistent with Confucian viewpoint regarding the social function of art and culture.⁶⁰⁸ According to Lu, film's entertaining function was not as important as its educational one. A comedy could make people laugh and a melodrama could make people sad, however, a melodrama was in a higher rank of the artistic hierarchy than a comedy. In Lu's opinion, a melodrama was thought-provoking and intellectual while a comedy appealed only to "children and optimistic fools." In the old Chinese language, children's wisdom, together with that of women, has always been belittled and mocked. Phrases like "Fu Ru Jie Zhi" refer to a limited amount of wisdom and knowledge a child and a woman can have. The phrase hints that an event or a person is so easily known and comprehensible that even children and women can understand.⁶⁰⁹ Here, "children and optimistic fools" represent a group of ignorant people. Lu's viewpoints were common among film critics in 1920s Shanghai, who believed that film should take the social responsibilities of educating people, like many other art forms and media in China such as books, magazines, and drama. This belief in the didactic function of art and media can be traced back to the Confucian philosophy of art—the highest art is the one that can educate people while at the same time it entertains them;⁶¹⁰ however, its entertaining function is always less important than its educational function, or in other words, to make people think seriously is always regarded more important than just to make them laugh. This critical discourse doubtlessly influenced the reception of American film in 1920s Shanghai as it helped reflect as well as construct movie-goers' viewpoints of film in general. Therefore,

⁶⁰⁸ Kongyang Jiang, "Confucius' Thought of Aesthetics," *Xue Shu Yue Kan (Scholarly Monthly)* 6 (2000): 3-7, 14. According to Jiang Kongyang, Confucius was the first Chinese who proposed the relationship of Li and Yue, or social etiquettes and arts. Confucius believed that music as well as other arts should serve important affairs of the state, or the politics of the state.

⁶⁰⁹ The Chinese of "Fu Ru Jie Zhi" is 妇孺皆知。

⁶¹⁰ See footnote 2.

the study of the film critical discourse can further our understanding of reception of American film in 1920s China. For example, Chinese movie-goers preferred melodrama to tragedy as evidenced by U.S. diplomats' report on American films in China;

The American motion picture enjoys far greater popularity among the Chinese than do the films of any other country outside of China. Aside from the greater lavishness of American pictures and their superior direction and technique, the Chinese also prefer the 'lived happily ever after' and 'triumph of right over wrong' ending which concludes most of our films, as compared with the more tragic finales of many European pictures.⁶¹¹

The report confirmed the popularity of American film melodrama among Chinese audiences. It also gave three reasons for the genre's popularity. First, it had a higher presence in the movie theatres in China. Second, it was commonly regarded as being better made than Chinese movies. And finally, compared with a tragedy, it had a happy ending. According to the report, Chinese liked neither pure comedy nor pure tragedy, instead; they preferred a tragic story with a more light-hearted ending in which justice is done at the end. A comedy could be considered too shallow to be realistic. A tragedy might be too pathetic to be enjoyable. American melodrama seemed to serve the in-between purpose of balancing a tragedy and a comedy. In the film critical discourse in 1920s Shanghai, the two main criteria in judging quality of a movie in a film review were both its entertainment and educational value. A high-quality film was expected to instruct, educate, and enlighten audiences and at the same time, to move and entertain them.

⁶¹¹ Clarence J. North, "The Chinese Motion Picture Market," in the *U.S. Commerce/Trade Information Bulletins*, no. 467 (Washington D.C.: Washington U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927), 432.

As an extension and continuation of film viewing activity, fan magazines and popular magazines have provided a good source for studying film's critical discourse in the 1920s. By studying popular print culture, we can examine how film reviewers and critics shaped the critical discourse and constructed popular film reception. Despite the fact that articles and comment might not perfectly represent general readers' view, they were representative of film critics' viewpoints which, as Nina Baym has argued for criticism of American novels, partake in a common discourse shared by critics and non-critics alike. She calls the shared discourse the "cultural concept of novel" reviews,⁶¹² or "the general sense of the genre that guided writing and reading."⁶¹³ Apparently, in the United States, compared with literary criticism, film criticism was a relatively new phenomenon as it only appeared a little after the invention of film. Heavily influenced by film industry, film critical discourse changed with the film development. For example, while in the 1910s, American film critics were more enthusiastic about film as a democratic art that had a vast educational potential, in the 1920s, they were more concerned about the film's aesthetical value because by the mid-1920s, American silent film was more artistically mature and developed.⁶¹⁴ The situation in China differed from that in the United States because Chinese film industry was still at its early stage in the 1920s. Some Chinese films just imitated Hollywood. This naturally affected Chinese film critical discourse, which was characterized by adoration and infatuation of American films. However, like the early American film critics, Chinese counterparts emphasized film's educational function, moreover, they tended to equate production of national films with patriotism. Fan films and criticism provided a solid

⁶¹² Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Response to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 8.

⁶¹³ William L. Hedges, <http://www.jstor.org/view/00290564/dm994362/99p0473p/0>, last accessed November 7, 2006.

⁶¹⁴ Myron O. Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909-1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973): 1-149.

source for examination of film discourse and film, and furthermore, of social values and norms, as evidenced in the works of scholars such as Shelley Stamp,⁶¹⁵ Kathryn Fuller,⁶¹⁶ and Anne Morey,⁶¹⁷ and Gaylyn Studlar.⁶¹⁸ Their works show that fan magazines helped shape the public perception of the composition of movie-goers in 1920s America, expressed female desire of sexual liberation, and directed the public gaze towards both silver screen and film spectatorship. Unlike the film discourse in the United States, the 1920s Chinese film criticism followed a more nationalistic course, which aimed to promote Chinese modernity.

By using film comment and reviews in fan magazines, I will try to find out the “cultural concept of film reviews” and give a comprehensive picture of critical reviews of American films in Shanghai, which might affect (or reflect) their popular reception.⁶¹⁹ One case in point is the editorials in the first issues of fan magazines in Shanghai in the 1920s. In their opening editorials, almost all the Chinese fan magazines mentioned their ambitious goal of promoting the Chinese film and preventing the exhibition of harmful films. Some even equaled the improvement of the Chinese film with the nation’s honor and dignity. In the opening essay in the first issue of *Ying Xi Za Zhi*, or “Shadow Play Magazine,” one of the country’s earliest film

⁶¹⁵ Shelley Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶¹⁶ Kathryn Fuller, “Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan,” in *In the Eye of the Beholder*, ed. G.R. Edgerton, M.T. Marsdon and J. Nachbar (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University, Press 1997), 97-112.

⁶¹⁷ Anne Morey, “So Real as to Seem Like Life Itself: the Photoplay Fiction of Adela Rogers St. Johns,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. J.M. Bean and D. Neggra (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 333-346.

⁶¹⁸ Gaylyn Studlar, “The Perils of Pleasure: Fan Magazine Discourse as Women’s Commodified Culture in the 1920s,” *Wide Angle* 13:1 (1991): 6-33.

⁶¹⁹ Robert Darnton, “First Steps Toward a History of Reading,” in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2001): 160-79; Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); Linda Docherty, “Women as Readers: Visual Interpretations,” in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 107, pt. 2 (1997): 335-388; Steven Mailloux, *Interpretative Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, *Everyday Ideas: Socio-Literary Experience Among Antebellum New Englanders* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

magazine, Gu Kenfu, the magazine's editor-in-chief examined the four major goals of establishing the fan magazine, one of which was to "strive for the dignity and integrity of the Chinese people in the film industry."⁶²⁰ The 1920s fan magazines were filled with this patriotic discourse. However, on the other hand, because the Chinese film industry was still developing in the 1920s, fan magazines were paradoxically over-flowing with tributes to American film. Naturally, this phenomenon could shape audience perception of both American and Chinese films.

In this chapter, following the spirit of Nina Baym, I am going to discuss the critical reception of American films using the fan magazines, but other materials as well, like published memoirs, contemporary newspaper reviews, and what can be discerned from the corpus of Chinese-produced films reacting to American ones. I aim to answer these questions: who were film reviewers in 1920s print media in Shanghai? In film reviews, what were commonly regarded as good or bad films? What was regarded as the nature of a film? Was there a difference in preference of films between Shanghai movie-goers and those in other cities? In reviews, were there different discourses in terms of various genres? With the purpose of answering these questions, this chapter will be divided into three parts. First, I will give a brief introduction to the popular magazines to be used in this chapter. Second, I will introduce film reviewers and their readers in print culture in 1920s Shanghai. Then, using Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman from Paris*, I will discuss the discourse of film reviewing in 1920s Shanghai, and thus

⁶²⁰ The magazine was established on April 1, 1921, it ceased its publication after its third issue on May 25, 1922. The magazine's other three goals, as mentioned by Gu Kenfu are: 1) to introduce valuable films to the readers; 2) to prevent harmful films from being spread out; 3) spread the aesthetic value of film, "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=12605, last accessed September 8, 2008.

examine in detail the criteria of judging a film and their underlying reasons. In so doing, I will discuss the reception of American films, thus further analyze “cultural concept of film” in 1920s Shanghai.

10.1 POPULAR FILM MAGAZINES AND PERIODICALS IN 1920S SHANGHAI

China saw one of her earliest film publications in Shanghai in February of 1921—*Ying Xi Cong Bao*, or “shadow play news.” In this China’s pioneer, but short-lived, one-issue movie magazine, a total of sixteen American movie stars including Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd were covered, together with illustrations made by Dan Duyu, a famous Chinese illustrator.⁶²¹ In addition to Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing also saw the publication of two fan magazines in the early 1920s.⁶²² It was not until in the mid-1920s that there was a boom of movie periodicals despite the fact that some of them could not even last more than one month. According to the film-related periodicals listed by the Shanghai Library Database of the Chinese Modern Film Magazines, from 1924 to 1929, a total of 54 film magazines were published all over the country, 44 of which were published in Shanghai.⁶²³ Among the 44 Shanghai-based magazines, 19 were published in 1925, 11 were published in 1926, and 8 were published in 1927.⁶²⁴ Most magazines lived a short life. For example, founded in January 1926, *The Stage and Screen*, or *Xi Ju*

⁶²¹ *Shanghai Diyaning Shiliao* (Historical Materials of Shanghai Cinema) ed. (Shanghai Film Administration Office, October 1992), 222.

⁶²² *Diyaning Zazhi*, or *Film Magazine* was published one issue in Beijing on January 28, 1922; *Ming Zhu* Biweekly was first published in Guangzhou in 1921. It lasted until 1934, http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=1, last accessed on September 6, 2008.

⁶²³ The other Chinese cities that published fan magazines between 1924 and 1929 included Beijing (four magazines), Tianjin (two magazines), Guangzhou (one magazine), Hong Kong (two magazines), and Shen Yang (one magazine), http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶²⁴ http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp, last accessed September 6, 2008.

Dianying Huabao, a magazine that was published twice a month, only lasted for one month. In its only two issues, the magazine had film news, film stories, and movie stars.⁶²⁵ Examples abound. *Movie Weekly*, a film review magazine, was first published on March 1, 1925. Its last issue was on May 16, 1925 although it had a well-known editor Cheng Bugao.⁶²⁶ Nevertheless, there were exceptions. Of the 44 film-related periodicals published between 1924 and 1929 in Shanghai, only about 13 lasted more than 10 issues. The two film-related magazines with the highest life expectancy were film supplements of two art and entertainment periodicals. One was *Zi Luo Lan—Film Supplement*, China's longest-lived film-related magazine, which was published in Shanghai twice a month. First published on May 26, 1926, the magazine saw its last film supplement on June 15, 1930 with a total of 96 issues. The arts and culture magazine mainly published serial novels and essays. Its film supplement provided an important forum for film critics and script writers to discuss film-related issues such as the relationship of moral and film and anti-Chinese representation in foreign films.⁶²⁷ The other relatively long-lasting film magazine was the *Entertainment Magazine-Film Supplement*, which had 75 issues on film.⁶²⁸

Another type of film magazine was the supplements published by a film studio, which especially introduced new movies released by local studios. One case in point is the *Ming Xing Supplement*, or the *Star Supplement* that ran from May 1, 1925 to January 20, 1928. It was published by the Ming Xing Dianying Gongsi, or the *Ming Xing Film Studio*.⁶²⁹ From the

⁶²⁵ *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 228.

⁶²⁶ *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 224.

⁶²⁷ "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=17525, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶²⁸ "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=17668, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶²⁹ Founded in March 1922 by Chinese film industry pioneers including Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, the studio, which lasted fifteen years, was regarded as the longest-lived studio in the modern Chinese film history. In its productive prime years, it produced 142 silent films, 50 sound films, 13 animation shorts, and over 30 short documentaries. Over its history, it also published several film magazines including the *Ming Xing*, the *Ming Xing*

advertisement of the magazine in the *Shen Bao*, we can see that in its early issues, the *Ming Xing Supplement* had similar content as a popular fan magazine such as *The Movies Magazine*.⁶³⁰ Here were the titles of some of the articles in the second issue of the *Ming Xing Supplement*: “My Viewpoints on Film Script,” “The Issue of Choice of Materials in Domestic Film,” “Movements on the Silver Screen,” and “Dreamlike Cinematography.” Interestingly, in the same issue, the magazine also published scenes from American films including *Broken Blossoms* (1919).⁶³¹ The same issue introduced only two Chinese films the *Ming Xing Studio* produced—*Xiao Peng You*, or *Young Friend* and *Liang Xin*, or *Conscience*. Later, with a growing number of the film output of the studio, the supplement became an important medium especially devoted the studio’s own film production. Whenever the Star Film Studio had a new film, a nearly eighty-page supplement named after the film would be issued, which had reports on the film’s production, essays written by the film’s director, introduction of actors, and the film’s story.⁶³²

Aside from film supplements issued by a publishing house and a film studio, a movie theatre would also bring out its own film supplement. One case in point was *The Beijing Theatre Film Weekly*, which especially aimed to promote the movies that were to be exhibited at the Beijing Theatre, a well-decorated cinema in downtown Shanghai. Despite the fact that the magazine claimed to take the responsibility of serving as a film teacher for Chinese audiences and as a promoter of the Chinese film industry, the theatre mainly showed American films.⁶³³ This was similar to the dilemma the film critics faced in 1920s Shanghai. Apparently, this phenomenon was likely to shape ordinary movie-goers’ perception of film.

Supplement, the *Mingxing Monthly*, and the *Mingxing Biweekly* (once every two weeks), <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/RS/1238919.htm>, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶³⁰ *Shen Bao*, July 2, 1925, 3.

⁶³¹ *Broken Blossoms*, <http://www.imdb.com/find?s=tt&q=broken+blossoms&x=14&y=10>, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶³² *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 225.

⁶³³ http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=16259, last accessed September 6, 2008.

In addition to film supplements, in 1920s Shanghai one major type of fan magazine was the comprehensive movie magazine such as the *Movies Magazine*, which covered foreign films, film reviews, movie stars, news in the movie industry, and letters from readers. Compared with some film supplements, this genre of film magazines, regularly published, tended to cover a wide range of film topics with the aim of promoting domestic film. Of the 44 film-related periodicals, around 18 were comprehensive fan magazines. For example, published in May 1924, the monthly *Movies Magazine* was one of the most important movie magazines in the modern Chinese film history.⁶³⁴ In its first issue, the aim of the magazine was clearly stated, that is, to increase the interests of Chinese audiences in the domestic films, to improve the domestic film industry, to introduce the Western film for the reference of Chinese film workers, and to encourage the Chinese film producer, director, and script writer. It was also the earliest film magazine which organized voting in popularity contests among its readers.⁶³⁵

Another regular fan magazine to be examined in this chapter is the *Yin Xing*, or *The Movie Guide*. The magazine started on September 1, 1926 and ended in early 1930s until its 49 issues. It changed name several times during five years of its publication. Lu Mengshu and Chen Binghong were its editors and Zhou Shoujuan, Ouyang Yuqian, Wu Liande are among its main contributors.⁶³⁶ The fan magazine touched upon a wide range of topics, including film theory, film knowledge and technology, film reviews, current events, and film stars. It is also a good source for studying the film critical discourse in 1920s Shanghai.

While *The Movie Guide* focuses upon the reviews of foreign films in China, *Yingxi Huabao*, or the *Photoplay Pictorial* centers upon local product. The magazine was started on

⁶³⁴ *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 223. The magazine lasted 13 issues.

⁶³⁵ "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=11248, last accessed September 6, 2008.

⁶³⁶ *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 229.

June 27, 1927, three issues a month.⁶³⁷ It stopped publication in January 1928, after its twenty-second issue. In its articles on domestic films, comparisons between the Chinese film and Hollywood film were made, which provides a different perspective of analyzing foreign film in the film discourse.⁶³⁸

I will also add *di ba yi shu*, or *Cinegraph* to my list of fan magazines for analysis here because it provides a good case of the city's late 1920s fan magazines. The magazine was published only one issue on January 15, 1929. According its editorial, the magazine was called *Di Ba Yi Shu*, or *The Eight Art* because film was a late boomer, which ranked behind the traditional seven arts including "literature, music, painting, drama, architecture, sculpture, and dance."⁶³⁹ The title of the magazine confirmed the legitimacy of film as an established art in the city in the late 1920s.

For the purpose of this subsection, I will mostly focus upon the regular fan magazines published in 1920s Shanghai because of their availability. Aside from periodicals, movie publications such as books and pamphlets can also be a good source for the research on the critical discourse on Hollywood film. Pamphlets and books on film that I will use include *Thirty Film Stories*,⁶⁴⁰ *1927 China Cinema Yearbook*,⁶⁴¹ and *Overview of Chinese Shadow-plays*.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁷ The magazine was published once every ten days. It is a common Chinese way of marking time within a month.

⁶³⁸ *Shanghai Dianying Shiliao*, 232.

⁶³⁹ *Di Ba Yi Shu* or *Cinegraph* was published on January 15, 1929. It was published only one issue by the Cinemagraph Publishing House. "Shanghai Memory," http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_index.jsp?currentPage=6, last accessed September 12, 2008.

⁶⁴⁰ Die Lu, ed., *Thirty Kinds of Movie Stories*, or *Ying Xi Xiao Shuo San Shi Zhong*. Shanghai: Jingzhi Library Publishing House, 1925.

⁶⁴¹ It was published in January 1927, edited by Atsu Kann, Benjamin Cheng, and D.S. Chen. It was one of the most comprehensive books on film in 1920s China that was published in the 1920s.

⁶⁴² It was published in April 1927.

Also, articles and photos from *The Young Companion*, or *Liangyou Huabao*, China's first broad-sheet comprehensive news pictorial will also be examined in this following subsection.⁶⁴³

10.2 THE FILM CRITICS IN 1920S SHANGHAI

Together with a booming popular printing industry was a group of film critics and editors who worked for magazines. It was common for writers to contribute to several magazines. The same names appeared frequently in several fan magazines. For example, in addition to being one of the main contributors for the *Shanghai* magazine, Zhou Shoujuan was also editor-in-chief for *The Young Companion*, or *Liangyou Huabao* and editor for the *Movie Guide*.⁶⁴⁴ Another case in point is Cheng Bugao, who was both the editor-in-chief for the *Movie Guide* and an editor for the *Movie Weekly*. The practice of sharing same writers among popular fan magazines produced similar voices and tastes in different fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai. In terms of film reviews, an almost homogeneous, even uniform critical discourse was formed in the city's film culture. It was their contribution to the city's movie periodicals that helped influence, shape, and reflect readers' viewpoints and beliefs of American film, and furthermore, helped construct "cultural concept of film." Apparently, to have a better understanding of the film review discourse, it is important to know the tastes, interests, and the cultural background of film reviewers. Generally speaking, film reviewers in 1920s publications could be divided into two groups: old-style writers who were familiar with the traditional Chinese novels or drama; and new writers and scholars with overseas educational experience. Using their own talents, the two schools of

⁶⁴³ It was established in February 1926. Editors-in-Chief from 1926 to 1930 were Wu Liande, Zhou Shoujuan, and Liang Desuo.

⁶⁴⁴ Zhou Shoujuan was the editor-in-chief for *The Young Companion* from June 1926 to January 1927.

writers approached American films in their own way. While the old school applied the traditional Chinese literature theories and concepts to criticism of Hollywood film, the new school was more active in translating reviews from the U.S. fan magazines into Chinese and helped Chinese audiences keep up with the state-of-art practices in the film industry.

A representative of the traditional group was Zhou Shoujuan. Starting as a novelist of love stories, Zhou worked as an editor for such popular magazines as *Saturday* and *Bimonthly* before he wrote for fan magazines such as *Si Luolan*, or *Violet* and *Yingxi*, or *The Movie Guide* in the mid-1920s.⁶⁴⁵ *Saturday* was the best-selling weekly magazine for the mandarin and duck school, a literary genre of love stories popular in the 1910s and 1920s. In addition to writing novels and running successful popular love magazines, he also had another hobby—going to see movies of all genres. Zhou could also be regarded as one of China’s earliest movie-goers who appreciated Charlie Chaplin. His extensive film-watching experience made him one of the most productive film critics in 1920s China. From the description of his passion for movies published in *Shanghai*, we can see his exciting movie-centered, cinema-hopping life,⁶⁴⁶

I can be counted as No.1 movie buff among all buffs. Every day, except the time I spend on work, I spend the rest of my time almost all in movie theaters. I watch about five and six movies every week. When there are too many good movies, I often watch three movies a day. I will go a long way from the Olympic Theater to the Odeon Theater. I don’t find it hard work. I am really passionate about movies.

I never miss one first-class movie that has been shown in the major movie theaters

⁶⁴⁵ The special film supplement of the *Violet* magazine started in May 1926, edited by Zhou Shoujuan. It mainly had film photos and film stories. Its contributors were mainly screenwriters of film studios and old-style writers such as Zhou Jianyun, Zhu Shouju, and Xu Zhuodai. *Shanghai Diaying Shiliao*, 228.

⁶⁴⁶ The magazine *Shanghai* was first published by the Shanghai Film Studio in June, 1926. It stopped on April 1927 after its fourth issue. It was published irregularly. “Shanghai Memory,” http://memoire.digilib.sh.cn/SHNH/book/book_introduction.jsp?bookId=00691, last accessed September 9, 2008.

in Shanghai. I won't even miss those mediocre or not so famous ones as long as they have a good actor in them. However, it is a shame that I did not get a chance to watch *The Volga Boatman*. In its preview, I was unable to go because of my work. Later, when it was publicly shown, I still could not go. I had already had the idea that it was going to be shown at the Apollo Theater, therefore, I should not be in a hurry to watch the film. So I did not go to see it. However, somehow, the film was banned by the authority of the International Settlement. Finally I was still not able to see it. All of those who saw the film said good things about it, which made me feel bad. Since then, I learned a lesson, which is like the Western proverb: Tomorrow never comes. One should do things today.⁶⁴⁷

From the above statement, we can see that the International Settlement carried out censorship over American film. It was not clear why *The Volga Boatman* (1926) was banned by the authority. Obviously, Zhou watched films almost once a day, and sometimes, even more than once a day. His “cinema-hopping” habit kept him on top of current movie news and events. His life was mainly made up of two parts—watching movies and then writing about them. As China's No.1 movie fan, certainly, he watched films more than the majority of population in the city partly because of his interests and partly because of his work. Zhou's viewpoint about film was influenced by his experience as a novelist. He believes that as a formal art, a film as well as a novel should be both instructive and entertaining. Appreciation of art was more important than criticism of art. Also, art's aesthetic value was higher than its practical value.

⁶⁴⁷ *Overviews of Chinese Shadow-plays*, April 1927, 1-3. *The Volga Boatman* was directed by Cecil B. DeMille, it was released in 1926, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017519/>, last accessed September 2, 2008. Its Chinese name was 《伏尔加河舟子》(Fu Er Jia He Zhou Zi), or 《党人魂》(Dang Ren Hun).

Zhou's belief in art was regarded as being conservative and traditional compared with that of other critics, who held a more radical view of film, as evidenced from one editorial called "The Mission of Our Country's Film Industry" in *The Movie Guide*. In the article, after summarizing Nietzsche's *Twilight of Dionysus*, the author pen-named Shi Huan, observed that as both Chinese and Indian belong to the Apollonian culture, they are declining and even degenerate. In this situation, however, film was a powerful means to rescuing the Chinese culture from dying,

As a powerful textbook for citizens in society, it can slowly and steadily change social customs. As to what we need currently, we all know that imported goods can not satisfy our needs, our prior work is to change the nature of our nation. We need to invite Dionysus to solve our nation's crisis. Dionysus is our most urgent need. Therefore, the mission of our country's film circle is to invite Dionysus to rescue the whole Chinese nation. Whenever I see a foreign historical film or other films, I feel worried and terrified: watching foreign films with a patriotic theme, or those films that sing praises to soldiers, or those adventure films, I am worried about their rise and the downfall of the Chinese nation...In the near future, for both our ethnicity and our country, the film industry should have the spirit of Dionysus and carry out the mission of saving the whole Chinese nation.⁶⁴⁸

Like Zhou, Shi argued for film's social function. However, unlike Zhou, Shi Huan attached such great importance to the media that he believed film that was a weapon that could help China fight against foreign powers and save the country from being destroyed. Influenced

⁶⁴⁸ Shi Huan, "The Mission that the Domestic Film Should Undertake," *The Movie Guide* 9 (June 1, 1927): 28-30.

by Nietzsche's philosophy, Shi's more radical nationalistic views started to pose a challenge to the beliefs in art and culture held by old-style men of letters such as Zhou. While Zhou appreciated foreign film as an art, Shi regarded foreign film as being destructive to the Chinese tradition, ethnicity, and even the survival of the Chinese nation. He called for Chinese nationalistic film produced by the Chinese film industry for the Chinese audiences. To Shi, Zhou and his works only represented the "declining and degenerate" Chinese culture, which had no strength to fight back against the Western civilization. Zhou's attitude toward American film was a good case in point of the Apollonian culture, which lacks passion, power, and impact upon the current Chinese society. To change the social customs, The Dionysian spirit should be promoted and promulgated. Chinese society should see a dynamic, enthusiastic, and modern culture and civilization. In Shi's eyes, the only way to make the Chinese society keep up with the West society was to emulate it, in order to, add more creativity and spontaneity to the Chinese tradition. In terms of using film as a weapon, the Chinese film industry should produce more historical films, or films with a patriotic theme, or adventure films, therefore, the Chinese can show more dynamic aspect of their mentality and do away with the stale part of personality. Clearly, Zhou and Shi represented two different viewpoints about film and art. While Zhou leaned more towards the belief that films were made to entertain, Shi went to the extreme view that film was a cure-all for societal problems.

It was not clear whether Shi Huan had studied abroad. However, his viewpoint represented that of nationalistic film critics in 1920s Shanghai. Chinese critics, especially those with foreign education felt strongly about developing the domestic film industry. Japan, France, the Great Britain, the United States, and Germany were the countries in which overseas Chinese chose to study the new medium in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Naturally, the United States

was the first choice for those who intended to study the film and theatre of the West. By 1927, of the thirty-five Chinese majoring in film and theatre, nearly half of them studied in the United States.⁶⁴⁹ Some of them graduated from top U.S. universities such as the Harvard University and the Columbia University, and others had internship experience with American film studios.⁶⁵⁰ These Chinese with an overseas education were actively involved in the Chinese film industry when they came back home. They acted as film agents, producers, directors, and photographers. Aside from practices, they also wrote film reviews in popular periodicals. For example, Luther Jee, a Chinese graduate from the Harvard University published the article, “The Motion Picture Industry in China” in the *China Weekly Review* on September 26, 1925.⁶⁵¹ Also, because of their familiarity with other cultures, some Chinese even played a role in Hollywood films. One case in point is Moon Kwan who both worked as a cultural consultant and played the role of the monk in D.W. Griffith’s *The Broken Blossoms* (1919). Kwan decided to return to China after his humiliating experience at a party in Hollywood in the early 1920s.⁶⁵²

Because of their overseas experience, Chinese who learned the film art abroad felt strongly about developing the Chinese film industry and producing the state-of-art Chinese movies to compete with Hollywood productions. One statement in the front page of the 1927 *Cinema Yearbook* was reminiscent of a slogan used in a revolution that aimed to encourage cohort fighters and revolutionaries to hold on, “the (Chinese) film industry has not yet prospered,

⁶⁴⁹ Yazi Gan and Dingxiu Cheng, eds., *Zhonghua Ying Ye Nian Jian*, or *China Cinema Yearbook* (Shanghai, 1927). According to the book, 5 studied in Japan, 8 studied in France, 3 studied in Germany, 1 studied in Germany, and 17 studied in the United States.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Among the Chinese who studied film and theater in the States, Luther Jee and Hong Shen graduated from Harvard University and Benjamin graduated from Columbia University; Moon Kwan and Peng Nian worked as interns in a U.S. film studio.

⁶⁵¹ G.C. Howard, “Shanghai Is the Center of the Chinese Motion Picture Industry,” November 14, 1925, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), File 281.

⁶⁵² Wenqing Guan. *Zhongguo Yingtan Waishi* (Anecdotes of Chinese Cinema) (Hong Kong: Guangjiaojing Publishing House, 1976), 54.

comrades, continue to make a strong effort.”⁶⁵³ Obviously here, the standard of prosperity was that of the Hollywood. According to the slogan, the Chinese film industry should take the American industry as its role model. In the preface of the *1927 Cinema Yearbook*, Cheng Shuren, one of the year-book’s three editors-in-chief and also a graduate of Columbia University discussed his expectation of film,

The film industry is China’s No.1 new great industry. It can help educate the society, promote Chinese ancient cultures, and encourage high and noble entertainment. Moreover, it can also change the current situation and increase patriotism. Every day, thousands of film workers across the country are working hard towards prosperity of the film industry. They are undertaking an important mission.

In Cheng’s short passage, instead of being represented as a mass medium, film was described as a high art that would be used to educate the Chinese. Through the Chinese film, audiences were able to learn to be more patriotic. To Cheng, film was more than an industry or business, rather, it was a worthwhile mission that aimed to enlighten the Chinese and change their mentality and viewpoints. A good film was an open school through which Chinese can be educated. With Hollywood in his mind, Cheng believed that a large output and export of Chinese film was the key to the success of the Chinese film industry. The yearbook he edited had one section called “Reports of Chinese Pictures from the Overseas Market,” which was especially devoted to the republication of excerpts of encouraging news regarding the success of the Chinese film in other countries, mainly in Southeast Asia. One report by Zhang Qiliang,

⁶⁵³ Ying ye shang wei da sheng, tong shi ren xu nu li. 影业尚未大盛，同志任须努力。

originally published in the *Movie Weekly*, is about how Chinese film had been recently well received in Malaysia,

(In the past) Malaysians used to love European and American films, almost as much as they loved their lives. Whenever an American or European movie started, applause arose, whistles were blown, as loud as a thunder. The king in the country discouraged its subjects from watching movies because the land was still full of hungry people. However, people there would rather be starved to death than not watching movies. Malaysians did not like Chinese movies, and few would go to see a Chinese movie. On the contrary, more Western audiences went to see a Chinese movie in Malaysia than local people. However, in recent years, the situation changed greatly, whenever a Chinese film is about to be screened, the whole house is packed even before it starts at seven o'clock. Moreover, there are lots of people standing, which makes the theatre very crowded. I have never seen such packed houseful movie audiences in my life although I have been to movie theatres all the time.⁶⁵⁴

It was not clear whether it was true or not that the king of Malaysia discouraged his people from going to movie theatres because of food shortage in the country. In a sarcastic way, the author exaggerated the Malaysians' obsession with foreign movies; they would rather choose to watch Western movies than die of starvation. The high-blown statement only shows the passion of the Malaysians have for American and Europeans movies. Even if they used to love films more than their lives, they did not think that Chinese films were worth watching. The

⁶⁵⁴ Gan and Cheng, *China Cinema Yearbook*.

striking contrast of different attitudes of the Malaysians towards Chinese films sounded almost incredible, just like the other part of the report. Through the report, Cheng attempted to send the message that the Chinese film industry had been making a great progress. According to Cheng, Chinese film challenged the hegemony of American movies in countries other than China. Cheng's implicit message was that Chinese film should be distributed and exhibited all over the world including the West.

To sum up, film reviewers were actively involved in the Chinese film industry and film culture in the 1920s. They were either local popular writers or overseas Chinese graduates. Some of them were well-trained in film production and film theories. While local writers tended to comment upon Hollywood film in a more appreciative way, the school with an overseas background was more critical about American movies and they expressed more urgent need to develop Chinese film industry. Both schools had a similar goal regarding the Chinese film industry, that is, to educate and enlighten Chinese people. Through these reviewers, critical film discourse in the print culture of 1920s Shanghai constructed readers' viewpoints of the world, the concept of modernity, and the criteria of art. In the next subsection of this chapter, using film reviews on Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman from Paris* (1923) in *Movies Magazine*,⁶⁵⁵ I am going to discuss what the criteria for judging a good film were and what the underlying reasons were. One main reason for me to use the film as a case study is the availability and completeness of primary sources relating to the film. The twelfth issue of the *Movies Magazines* is a special publication for criticism of the movie, in which well-known film reviewers in 1920s Shanghai wrote their comment. In addition to studying reviews on this film, I will also examine film criticism in other

⁶⁵⁵ *Movies Magazine* 12 (April, 1925). This issue is devoted to Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman from Paris*; the film was first released in the United States on September 26, 1923, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0014624/releaseinfo>, last accessed on September 3, 2008.

issues of the magazine as well as other fan magazines. In so doing, I hope to examine further how the printed culture in the 1920s functioned as a major medium in shaping the critical discourse and thus, helped shape Chinese readers' perception of film and viewpoints of the other issues such as modernity and patriotism.

10.3 THE DISCOURSE OF FILM REVIEWS: CHARLIE CHAPLIN'S *A WOMAN FROM PARIS*

Charlie Chaplin's *A Woman from Paris* was first screened at the Isis Theatre in 1925, almost one year and half after it was first released in the United States. It was immediately critically acclaimed in this coastal city. Film reviewers were all impressed with Chaplin's excellent directing, brevity of the film's inter-titles, and its realistic view of life. However, in the midst of praises, there were some negative comments on the film. Some believed that the film was too serious for ordinary audience to understand or appreciate. One example Chen Shouyin's mixed comment on the film,

Since *A Woman from Paris* started to be screened at the Isis Theatre, it had been highly acclaimed by audiences...However, its box office is just so-so. Clearly, although some think highly of it, others badmouth it. It is probably because the film is such a high art that shallow audiences do not understand its artistic value...some people even regard it as boring. It can be compared neither with *Orphans of the Storm* nor with *Thief of Bagdad*. Therefore, we can see that *A Woman from Paris* is regarded a work of art in the circle intellectuals and artists, however, it is not a box office hit. Certainly, the film is a lesson for modern Chinese directors and

screenwriters. Imagine a Chinese film was made with the same artistic value as *A Woman from Paris*, but without any entertaining scenes for shallow audiences, what will be the result?⁶⁵⁶

In the comment, Chen separated a film's artistic value from its commercial value which was supposed to be measured by a box office return. In order to be a commercial success, a film had to be entertaining and easily understood. Chinese film makers should not produce film like *A Woman from Paris* because it would not be able to attract many "shallow" audiences who are neither well-educated nor well-trained in art. Obviously, Chen did not think that Chinese directors or screenwriters should produce works that only had a high artistic value. Actually, Chen seemed to attach more importance to a film's commercial value than to its artistic value.

In his criticism, Cheng Bugao further analyzed the reason why the film was regarded as an art film,

There is one thread that goes through the plot of the film. However, it is not a straight and smooth line. The story is built upon psychology, that is, the film's life is built upon change of mind, which ends in tragedy. Although it is Mary's own tragedy, it reflects the tragedy of whole Paris and that of women in whole Paris. It describes the evil of a city and pains of life. The film is a good lesson. The film is an entertaining piece as well as a work of literature. Moreover, at the

⁶⁵⁶ Shouyin Chen. "Writing after Watching *A Woman from Paris* (Guan Ba Li Yi Fu Ren Shu Hou)," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): guan 1-2.

end, it shows that those willing to help others will enjoy happiness eventually. It is a profound lesson as it is philosophical.⁶⁵⁷

Unlike Chen, Cheng believed that the film was both entertaining and artistic. Cheng's concept of art seemed to be closely connected to the Chinese dramatic tradition, in which audiences could learn a moral lesson. He also believed that a good film should have an optimistic ending in which the good was rewarded by happiness and the evil has bad outcome. Interestingly, Cheng regarded a film as a work of literature instead of a commercial product. Doubtlessly, the box office return was not a main criteria for a film's success.

In addition to didactic and moral function of the film, realism is another focus of the film's review. Critics considered the film being realistic because they believed what happened in the film was what was happening in the current Chinese society as well. According to Bo Chang, one case in point was a scene from the film in which Mary was in rage. "She throws the necklace out of the window. When she sees someone is picking it, she immediately runs after the person and asks for it. How realistic it is."⁶⁵⁸ By being realistic, the reviewer seemed to mean that the behaviours of the characters in a film should reflect their personality, mentality, situation, and thus the whole society. To make a realistic film, a director should be familiar with common people's mentality and emotion. Charlie Chaplin was regarded by the writer as someone who knows his characters very well. Shu Yu, another film reviewer uses one reunion scene in the film as an instance,

⁶⁵⁷ Bugao Cheng. "Discussion on *A Woman from Paris* (Tan Ba Li Yi Fu Ren Hou)," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): tan 1-2.

⁶⁵⁸ Bo Chang, "Criticism of *A Woman from Paris* (Guan Ba Li Yi Fu Ren Zhi Pi Ping)," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): guan 2.

The girl and the boy have been separated for long time. They meet again. Mary asks the boy to draw a picture of her. By doing this, she intends to find out if he still loves her. He also wants to use this opportunity to avoid talking about the past mistakes, so that they can resume their relationship again. The boy paints a picture of her when she was a poor country girl to show his love for her. And she suddenly realizes the situation. Feeling embarrassed, she finds an excuse and leaves...this scene shows Chaplin's sharp perception of ordinary people's mind.⁶⁵⁹

Shu regarded this scene to be realistic because it accurately presented an emotionally charged moment—the reunion of the lovers in an intimate setting. Despite the fact that in a real life this scenario hardly happened, it was still regarded by the critic as being true to life in that it accurately described the couple's mentality and behavior in that particular situation. From this example, we can see that the film reviewer's concept of realism is the compatibility of characters' emotions with the situation despite the fact that the situation might not be so realistic. However, not all critics consider the film to be a realistic one, especially in terms of its acting. Kai Zhi criticized the exaggerated acting in the film,

Everywhere in our society, one can easily see ordinary people's happiness, anger, sorrow, and joy, however, not one emotion is acted like those in the film. All the acting in the movie is not true to real life, for example, when one is angry, he/she raises two fists at others; when one is laughing, he/she raises the shoulders

⁶⁵⁹ Shu Yu, "Study of the Significance of the Plot regarding *A Woman from Paris* (Ba Li Yi Fu Ren Ju Qing Yu Yi Zhi Tan Suo)," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): ba 3.

frequently and cleans noses with napkins...where is truthfulness to reality in this kind of acting?⁶⁶⁰

In the above passage, Kai Zhi brought about the issue of verisimilitude in relation to realism. While verisimilitude is defined as the quality of seeming true or having the appearance of reality, realism refers to a way of thinking and acting based upon the facts of a situation and what appears to be possible.⁶⁶¹ Based upon their definitions, realism covers a wider range of meaning than verisimilitude. In a sense, verisimilitude indicates the appearance of realism. In terms of performing in a movie, verisimilitude can mean to have a close imitation of the appearance of reality. However, in a trans-national context, people from two different cultures can have different perceptions of realism. Therefore, verisimilitude, imitation of realism can also be interpreted differently. Kai Zhi's comment on American gestures is a good case in point. And also, Kai Zhi made sensible comment in the way that there was more than one representation of an emotion, however, to a great extent, his criticism had to do with different expressions of emotion in two different cultures. It was common for Americans to be more outspoken and expressive about their emotions. To the Chinese critic, laughing with raised shoulders and a napkin in hand was not a common mannerism in 1920s Chinese society. Kai Zhi's opinion might also represent that of some Chinese audience. What was regarded as a natural behaviour in one culture can be perceived as being exaggerated, or even unnatural in another culture. Even Chinese critics gave different reasoning for their argument about the film's realism. This example further proves that perceptions are culturally and socially constructed.

⁶⁶⁰ Kai Zhi, "Discussion of *A Woman From Paris*," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): tan 1.

⁶⁶¹ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, & Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

Besides the film's style, plot is another focal point of discussion for the Chinese film reviewers. According to Huai Lin, the film's plot was so well-designed that every event happened naturally. He argued that one main criterion for plot was whether it was within reason and feelings, or *he qing he li*. In a good film, there should not be any awkward, irrelevant set-up. "Charlie Chaplin knows that although a far-fetched story can attract audiences for a while, it won't leave deep impression on people. Therefore, he only describes ordinary people's feelings and plain truth."⁶⁶² According to Huai Lin, a well-plotted story was the one that described a familiar situation in which every emotion and expression was comprehensible and reasonable. A story that was out of an individual's wildest imagination did not have a good plot because it did not describe normal feelings. Obviously, to Huai Lin, a plot functioned as a catalyst of emotions in a film, however, as a catalyst, a plot should not dominate emotions, and a film filled with suspense was not as good as the emotionally-charged one.

Another main topic for reviewers of this film was the brevity of its inter-titles. This was perhaps one of the few times that an American film was exhibited with Chinese inter-titles in Shanghai. More often than not, a Hollywood film was shown without the Chinese inter-titles. Lack of the Chinese inter-titles was even listed as one major shortcoming of American films in 1920s China by a U.S. diplomat. "A drawback to the foreign picture in China is that the captions are in English only and thus only the English-speaking Chinese, which is but a small portion of the population, are able to read them."⁶⁶³ To add inter-titles cost around 100-150 Mexico Dollars, which was equivalent to 40 to 60 US dollars in the 1920s, "but as there are so few first-

⁶⁶² Huai Lin, "Little Talk on A Woman from Paris (Ba Li Yi Fu Ren Xiao Yan)," *Movies Magazine* 12 (April 1925): ba 2.

⁶⁶³ North, 445.

run theatres taking feature pictures it has not been considered worth while.”⁶⁶⁴ By translating the film’s English inter-titles into Chinese, the UA Shanghai agent aimed to attract more Chinese audiences. Therefore, more people would be able to watch and appreciate it. “There is no word wasted in the film’s inter-titles, every word counts,” commented Huai Lin regarding the scene of reunion between the boy and the girl in *A Woman from Paris*.⁶⁶⁵ The film’s inter-titles were frequently compared with those of Chinese movies, which were regarded as redundant and awkward.

Comments on the film also touched upon the standards of obscenity. It was commonly agreed among the film critics in 1920s Shanghai that nudity itself was not a criterion for judging whether a scene was obscene or not; instead, if nudity was represented in a beautiful, or even an indirect way, it was even regarded as being artistic. “As to evils in the city such as young girls in nudity, they are described in an indirect way. Audiences will not see the scenes of naked women. Therefore, it is a work of art. Obscenity and art were only half a step apart, which can be seen from the film.”⁶⁶⁶ Obviously, Cheng Bugao believed that scenes without nudity that would make audiences imagine nudity was art, while blatant exhibition of nudity was obscenity. Chen’s more advanced view differed greatly from the prevailing self-censorship in the film industry in early 1920s America. Despite the fact that silent film still enjoyed more freedom than sound film in the United States, still, film writers and directors felt strongly about the restrictions. “It may well be that the restrictions of the 1920s seemed major ones to writers and directors of that time, since the whole art of movie-making was advancing and maturing so rapidly.”⁶⁶⁷ However, as a film critic, Chen’s liberal view was only representative of that of producers and directors in the

⁶⁶⁴ North, 446.

⁶⁶⁵ Huan Lin, ba 5.

⁶⁶⁶ Cheng Bugao, tan 2.

⁶⁶⁷ William K. Everson, *American Silent Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 270, 296-98.

Chinese film industry, in practice, censorship existed in the foreign concessions and Chinese territory in 1920s Shanghai.

As a whole, *A Woman from Paris* caused a heated discussion over criteria of a good feature film for several reasons. First, the film had English inter-titles, which made it more understandable to the Chinese-speaking population. Second, Charlie Chaplin was a household name for movie-goers in Shanghai; therefore, such a big production as *A Woman from Paris* attracted attention of both critics and ordinary movie audiences. And finally, as the film was categorized as a melodrama rather than as a comedy, Chinese film reviewers were more likely to criticize it following a Chinese dramatic tradition. After all, Chinese audiences preferred stories that described love feelings. Chinese taste was well summarized by the report in the *US Commerce/Trade Information Bulletin* in 1927, in which reception of Hollywood films was briefly described,

Of the modern type of feature picture those featuring social problems—"the eternal triangle" do not take well with the Chinese and tend to lower the prestige of the foreigner. Stories of the 'jazz' age have a like effect, particularly if it involves a clash between parents and children, for the Chinese, being an ancestor-worshipping people, have profound veneration for their elders and can understand no other attitudes. Historical pictures, on the other hand, always draw good crowds; and love stories, particularly of an idyllic nature, always take...it is the comedy and in a lesser degree the picture featuring children which takes in China. All the well-known comedians are very popular among the Chinese, and at least two of them are a byword the country over and in every walk of life.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁸ North, 434.

To the above description, comedy, love story, and historical films are among the favorite genres of the Chinese audiences. One main reason for the success of comedy in China might also be that as it was full of action and movements, Chinese audiences were able to understand them even without Chinese inter-titles. Very likely, “love stories with idyllic nature” refers to films with beautiful setting and good endings in which the lovers finally get married after initial difficulties. Preference for a good-ending love story is consistent with Chinese taste in traditional drama—Chinese audiences enjoyed plays that ended well, as confirmed in the report, “Chinese prefer the ‘lived happily ever after’” and ‘triumph of right over wrong ending.’”⁶⁶⁹

Chinese taste in a happy ending partly explained why American film could thrive in China including Shanghai. In addition to Hollywood films’ presence and their grand finale, the superior image of America to that of Europe was another important reason for Hollywood success in Shanghai. In 1928, S.E. Shahmoon wrote to *North China Daily News*, complaining about bad reception of European film in Shanghai, which started a discussion of local taste in film. He believed that Shanghai public’s taste fell below that of other cities: “I believe that first-class films that succeed at home would enjoy equal success here were they given adequate notices in the local press.”⁶⁷⁰ Two days later, in the same newspaper, he continued his comment, “The Shanghai public will gradually realize that battered Europe is gradually recovering in all branches of activity, and that there is no geographical boundary to the arts and sciences.”⁶⁷¹ Obviously, to Shahmoon, the Shanghai public was misled by snobbish film critics who paid attention to American film only because of America’s advanced technology and its victory in World War I. Shahmoon’s comment proved the influence of film critics in local Shanghai media

⁶⁶⁹ North, 432.

⁶⁷⁰ H.L. Cavendish to the editor of the *North China Daily News*, August 2, 1928, O’Brien, 95/4, UAC.

⁶⁷¹ S.E. Shahmoon to the editor of the *North China Daily News*, August 4, 1928, O’Brien, 95/4, UAC.

as they were the ones who shaped the public opinion and constructed the public taste in film. After World War I, as the United States became a world power, the country became a role model for China, especially among the intellectuals. Shanghai film critics used American film industry and Hollywood films as examples, gradually; local audiences started to understand and appreciate American films more. This also showed how a country's image could affect the perception and reception of its cultural and industrial products.

From published readers' letters to editors of the *Movies Magazine*, we can find that some of the readers held similar views of the magazine. Probably, the following is one of China's earliest comments that correlate violence with film. This criticism is reminiscent of those of film reviewers who attached much importance to film's social role. In the article, the reader named Lin Zichun discussed the importance of promoting films with social and educational significance,

Film certainly plays an important role in society. Its capacity can definitely change anything in society. In terms of its influence on such big crimes as robbery, murder, and kidnapping that are happening all over the country, I can say something quite sure, that those who committed the crimes, more often than not, have seen relevant films...therefore, I would like to tell editors of the *Movies Magazines*, that wrote more film review about patriotism, education, social warning, martial arts, and adventure movies, the rest such as sad love story and detective story should not be written at all.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷² Zicun Lin "Several Words to the *Movies Magazine*," *Movies Magazine* 3 (July 1924): hai 1.

In his response, the editor wrote that the “detective story might have something to do with new crimes these days, however, sad love story has its own artistic value, which can not be compared to detective story.”⁶⁷³ From their correspondences, we can see that there is a negotiation of meaning. The reader only partly agreed with what the critic wrote and vice versa. However, both of them agreed upon film’s social role.

To sum up, the film’s critical discourse in 1920s Shanghai helped to construct the local audiences’ perception of American and Chinese film. Film was more than an entertainment; it was also a means for advancing the betterment of the country and people. Like any mass medium in 1920s Shanghai, film criticism is a mixture of nationalism and modernism, filled with such ideas as using what had been learned from the Western world to advance the Chinese national cause, that is, to become a nation as advanced as a Western country. And film, both as an art and a new medium, was regarded as a modern symbol. However, because the Chinese domestic film industry lagged behind in the 1920s, the film critics paradoxically sang high praises to American films, which partly led to the phenomenon that American films were more popular than those of other countries. American films had a high presence in the country, which in return, inspired more criticism, which in return, caused a higher presence of Hollywood in China. This is a good example of showing how critical discourse shaped and reinforced the perception of film. It also shows that Chinese intellectuals and ordinary people in the 1920s were struggling with a clash of values and concepts, which puzzled them. In the public discourse, this conflict of modernism and nationalism was prevalent all through the twentieth century, some times with one dominating the

⁶⁷³ Editor, “A Response,” *Movies Magazine* 3 (July 1924): hai 2.

other. This conflict profoundly influenced Chinese's mentality for long period of time. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will elaborate more on this issue.

11.0 CONCLUSION

With the purpose of generating revenues, Hollywood studios started their distributing business in China in the late 1910s. Despite the fact that throughout the 1920s American films made up 95 percent of the Chinese film market, revenues gathered from China were relatively small compared with those of Japan and the European countries. However, Hollywood films had a profound impact upon 1920s Shanghai, China's center of politics, economics, finance, trade, culture and entertainment. American films were provident in this coastal city in both public exhibition sites and other public spheres such as daily newspapers and fan magazines. Both the textual and extra-textual film mechanisms helped to promote American lifestyles and merchandise and to construct Hollywood as an ideal model for the Chinese film industry.⁶⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the promotion and consumption of American films in 1920s Shanghai did not result in a homogeneous American culture as the Chinese re-deployed, re-invented, and appropriated American films for local political, cultural, and social discourses. During the turbulent years of the 1920s, Hollywood films played into the Chinese political discourse of nationalism and modernism, which consisted of a set of conflicting values and principles.⁶⁷⁵ This political discourse was greatly influenced by the New Culture Movement, an intellectual

⁶⁷⁴ I borrowed the word "extratextual" from Gaylyn Studlar. She refers to film as text and the fan or movie magazine as "extratextual cinematic discourse."

Gaylyn Studlar, "The Perils of Pleasure? Fan Magazine Discourse as Women's Commodified Culture in the 1920s," *Wide Angle* 13:1 (1991): 6-33.

⁶⁷⁵ Hung-Yok Ip, Tze-Ki Hon, and Chiu-Chun Lee, "The Plurality of Chinese Modernity: A Review of Recent Scholarship on the May Fourth Movement," *Modern China* 29:4 (Oct. 2003): 491.

movement that started from the mid-1910s, which aimed to re-examine and re-evaluate Chinese cultures and traditions. Blaming Confucian values for the country's backwardness, the movement leaders such as Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu actively promoted the Western ideas and values and severely criticized Chinese traditions. Frustrated with China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal situation, the New Cultural Movement intellectuals paradoxically called for individualism in order to rescue the country. "Although they yearned for individualism, the May Fourth radicals found the autonomy of the individual tremendously difficult to preserve when their pressing mission was to save the nation."⁶⁷⁶ Another example of the movement's conflicting missions was its attitudes toward the Western culture. While the nationalistic and anti-imperialistic sentiments dominated political discourse in China in the 1920s, and throughout the subsequent years, Western culture was much adored and closely imitated by Chinese intellectuals as they perceived Western civilization to be more advanced and therefore, more modern. The New Culture Movement discourse in 1920s China was heavily burdened with such catch phrases as using Western technology and democracy to save the nation from its backwardness. This modernity discourse was highly present in the filmic texts and extra-textual filmic spheres in the 1920s. They helped to shape the Chinese perception of modernity and to construct a national identity although many Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s were still confused with their identity. Hollywood's impact on China can be examined by the reaction of the Chinese film industry toward American films, the changing lifestyle of Chinese locals, and their perception of American people and values.

⁶⁷⁶ Ip, Kon, and Lee, "The Plurality of Chinese Modernity: A Review of Recent Scholarship on the May Fourth Movement," *Modern China* 29:4 (Oct. 2003), 491. The May Fourth Movement was anti-imperialistic and political movement launched by college students in Beijing on May 4, 1919. The May Fourth Movement was commonly regarded as a turning point for the New Culture Movement from an elite cultural campaign to a popular political movement. The May Fourth Movement was also interchangeably used with the New Culture Movement.

As the New Culture Movement aimed to promote Western civilization, film became one potent example of confirming the superiority of the West over China in technology and science. Articles and essays were written to sing high praises to imported films and the advanced technology in Hollywood movies. The film industry was generally considered to be representative of a country's technological level, which was an important criterion in evaluating its modernity. Zhang Shichuan, a well-known Chinese director in the 1920s summarized four reasons why Chinese films were not as good as American films, which included insufficient equipment and funding, expensive editing, and uncooperative relationship among film staff.⁶⁷⁷ From his analysis, we can see that two of the four major reasons were directly related to film technology. After all, producing a film was a high-technology, high-investment and high-risk business. It demanded funding, technology, and dedication. Chinese film producers and directors felt an urge to make more domestic films to compete with American ones, however, with limited experience and resources, they had to imitate and copy Hollywood, which resulted in productions mixing both American and Chinese elements. The nine-reel *Shanghai San Nu Zi*, or *Three Shanghai Girls* is a case in point. Produced by Shanghai the New Man Film Studio, the film recounted the story of a villain who flirted with three girls in Shanghai and cheated all of them.⁶⁷⁸ After a series of misunderstandings, the man realized his fault and married one of them.⁶⁷⁹ It sounds like a traditional Chinese story with a love and moral theme, and an all-is-well-that-ends-well ending. While the story's scenario was familiar to the Chinese audiences, the majority of the Chinese might have never seen the props such as American furniture and inner

⁶⁷⁷ Shichuan Zhang, "In the Microphone," in *Min Guo Dian Ying*, or *Films in the Republic Period*, ed. Shi Ying (Beijing: Tuan Jie Publishing House, 2004), 82.

⁶⁷⁸ Shaobin Li, *Min Guo Shi Qi De Xi Shi Feng Shu Wen Hua*, or *Western Customs and Culture in Republic China* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1994), 138.

⁶⁷⁹ C.J. North, ed., "The Chinese Motion Picture Market," in *The U.S. Commerce Trade Information Bulletin* 467 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), 436-8.

decorations in the film because in the mid-1920s those items were “modern American manufactured articles” only commonly used “in a relatively narrow circle of Chinese residents of Shanghai,” as observed by a U.S. diplomat who predicted that the film itself would greatly promote American products. “This is undoubtedly a feature which must have its eventual influence on the increase in the volume of imports of the foreign articles going to make up the ensemble of the picture.”⁶⁸⁰ This example shows that in its earlier stage, the Chinese film industry was still fumbling to find its own film language that catered to Chinese audiences. It also refutes the idea that consumption of a domestic product is a patriotic behavior because a domestically produced film does not necessarily promote domestic products or values. Most important of all, this example was a reflection of the New Culture Movement which equated “newness” with “being Western” and being advanced.⁶⁸¹ With this line of thought, Chinese culture was denied access into the realm of modernity in Chinese film although Chinese tradition, like any other tradition, had been undergoing changes and evolution in the course of history. The Chinese film industry did not find its own language for expression until in the middle and late 1930s when realistic films were produced such as *Shi Zi Jie Tou*, or *Crossroads* (1936) and *Ma Lu Tian Shi* or *Angels on the Road* (1937). They indicated that domestic film industry reached a new artistic and technological level.

If what was perceived as modernity in the film critical discourse only showed the dilemma or confusion of Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s, then Hollywood, in its popular discourse, provided a plurality of experiences for ordinary Chinese. During World War I, movie theatres became part of urban landscape in Shanghai. People in the city were able to go to movie theaters in accordance with their income levels. Cinemas such as Carlton Theater and Odeon Theater

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸¹ Hung-Yok Ip, Tze-Ki Hon, and Chiu-Chun Lee, “The Plurality of Chinese Modernity,” 490-509.

became the city's top entertainment centers. Initially located in the Hong Kong District, movie theaters were usually built in populated district which were easily accessible to public transportation. Naturally, it helped to build up nearby business.

With as little as ten cents, in a cheaper exhibition site, viewers were able to experience a world entirely different from their own. After all, what was shown on the silver screen gave them a glimpse of hope and promise. Here are some film-related sayings summarized by movie-goers in the late 1920s: "it is only in a movie theater that one can experience feeling of seeing a light in the dark world," "it is only in a movie theater that one can prove the principle of 'reward for the good' and 'retribution for the bad.'"⁶⁸² These widely-circulated lines in 1920s Shanghai showed that to some Chinese viewers, film became an escape from reality, despair and mundane matters. A cinema was a spiritual oasis where an individual could enjoy moments of emotional catharsis and enlightenment.

As Hollywood films dominated the Chinese film market throughout the 1920s, American movie stars enjoyed great popularity in Shanghai. One newsreel shows the frenzy over Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford in Shanghai, as they were warmly received by their fans in 1929 in the city.⁶⁸³ With its high presence, film gradually and naturally shaped Chinese people's way of thinking and living, especially the Chinese perception of a female actress. In a traditional Chinese society, an actress was categorized in the same group of a prostitute, who was at the bottom of the social ladder. In most cases, decent girls were not even allowed to perform in the public. Because of unavailability of actresses, it was common in Chinese operas to have a male actor to play a female role. In 1913, male dominance in show business was put to a stop with Yan Shanshan's appearance in the film *Zhuang Zi Shi Qi*, or *Zhuang Zi Testing His Wife*. With a

⁶⁸² *Da Gong Bao*, May 15, 1928, 10.

⁶⁸³ MGM International newsreel, vol.3, issue 43, INT 1740, UCLA Film and Television Archive.

Western-style education, she confronted bias and criticism of the society and became the first actress in modern Chinese film history.⁶⁸⁴ It is also possible that she was emulating American actresses like Lillian Gish in her choice of career and her challenge to the bias against woman in film business. Since then, it had been a trend for young Chinese girls to choose a career as film actresses. As the domestic film studio hired a large number untrained girls to perform in movies, Chen Dabei, a famous Chinese script writer complained about their poor performance that hurt the overall quality of Chinese films.⁶⁸⁵

The image of “flappers” as the New Woman in the 1920s rebelled against that the stereotype of the Victorian woman in America. According to Sumiko Higashi, the appearance of a flapper not only signified middle-class white-collar women as new consumers in the 1920s United States, but also showed their construction of a self-image as women with strong personalities. “Women’s access to fashion, home furnishings, and automobiles became essential now that self-making was defined in terms of personality,” according to one view.⁶⁸⁶ Like their counterparts in America, Chinese women also found it a strong personal statement of being a modern woman by behaving and appearing as a flapper. One newsreel shows that Shanghai flappers imitated American styles, which indicates the impact of Hollywood upon local Chinese girls.⁶⁸⁷ Influenced by the “flapper” image, Shanghai women started to grow short hair, enjoyed dancing at parties, and smoked in the public sphere as a statement of individual freedom and liberty. Deploying the flapper image in this way, these new women played into the social discourse of individualism and challenged the Chinese patriarchal values of a woman of virtues.

⁶⁸⁴ Li, 143-44.

⁶⁸⁵ Dabei Chen, “Zhong Guo Dian Ying Qi Ye Jia De San Ge E Meng,” or “The Three Nightmares of the Chinese Film Producers,” *Eastern Magazine (Dong Fang Za Zhi)*, 1926) 21:16: 94-96.

⁶⁸⁶ Sumiko Higashi, “The New Woman and Consumer Culture,” in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 322.

⁶⁸⁷ *International News*, vol. 8, issue 73, UCLA Film and Television Archive.

However, because of the influence of Chinese traditional values in judging what a good woman should look like, a “flapper” was not commonly considered a decent woman. In his article criticizing imitative factors in domestic film, Yu Dafu, a famous essayist wrote, “only when we try our best to avoid foreign films, can real Chinese films appear. It is not necessary that in films images of Western-style houses should show up, or a person should have to be in a car, or an indecent and seductive woman should have short hair or eyes with a heavy make-up.” In his calling for a wider variety of representations of degenerate girls on the silver screen, we can have an idea of stereotypical representations of a bad woman in 1920s Shanghai—short hair and strong make-up.⁶⁸⁸ Even in the 1930s, prostitutes in Chinese films were still depicted as growing short hair and smoking cigarettes. One example is *Shen Nu*, or *The Sainted Woman* (1934), in which the famous movie star Ruan Lingyu was cast as a kind-hearted prostitute who was struggling in the lower-class world. In the film, she grew short hair and smoked a cigarette in front of a gangster in Shanghai as a challenge to his male authority.⁶⁸⁹

In his essay, Yu also mentioned automobile as part of the modern lifestyle, which could be influenced by the car culture present in American films. Many movie stars started to drive a car. Possession of a car became a status symbol for wealthy Chinese. To attract more rich patrons, the Carlton Theatre even had a car as a lottery prize for its new year’s party. This was a good example of how American films could promote American merchandise in a transnational

⁶⁸⁸ Dafu Yu, “How to Save Chinese Films,” in *Min Guo Dian Ying*, or *Films in the Republic Period*, ed. Shi Ying (Beijing: Tuan Jie Publishing House, 2004), 93-96.

⁶⁸⁹ “Retrospective of Classic Chinese Film Over the Past One Century,” *Shen Nu*, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/2005-08-25/ba821081.shtml>, last accessed January 27, 2009.

context. China did not see the birth of its own cars until in the 1950s. Since the 1910s, mostly, it was American cars that ran on the Chinese road.⁶⁹⁰

An overwhelming number of Hollywood films in 1920s Shanghai spawned many Chinese fans and fan magazines. Starting from the mid-1920s, many such magazines were published. Articles, comments, and pictures of American movie stars made up a majority of fan magazines in 1920s Shanghai. Similar to the situation in the United States, writers of these magazines started to produce a fictionalized story of a film's synopsis, most of the time, with their own imagination and description. As the writers of these stories were educated in the traditional Chinese culture, they actually produced a film story version mixing both Chinese and Hollywood elements. As the Chinese dramatic tradition did not have a distinct line between a tragedy and a comedy, sometimes, a fictionalized synopsis could yield a new interpretation of an American film, especially if it was a comedy. After reading a Chinese synopsis of a comedy film, viewers might get the impression that the film was supposed to have a tragic element in it. However, when they watched the film, it turned out to be purely a comedy. This discrepancy between synopsis reading and actual viewing might have constructed and reinforced Chinese audiences' perception of Americans, who were commonly regarded by the Chinese to be simple-minded and happy-go-lucky.

Another issue emerges from movie was the language used in inter-titles. From my research, I find it uncommon for distributors or exhibitors to make Chinese inter-titles for an American film unless it proved to be a blockbuster such as *Way Down East*. Most of the time throughout the 1920s, American movies were exhibited in China with English inter-titles only. However, Chinese movies shown in cinemas had both English and Chinese inter-titles, which were written,

⁶⁹⁰ "Birth of China's First Car," April 20, 2003, <http://mypage.zhyww.cn/page1.asp?pgid=3588>, last accessed January 27, 2009.

most of the time, in *Xin Bai Hua*, or new vernacular Chinese.⁶⁹¹ Fan magazines had a mixture of readers who used both styles of Chinese, as evidenced by a call in a fan magazine for contribution of articles from readers. One goal of the New Culture Movement was to promote vernacular Chinese in order to increase the literacy rate in China as *Wenyan* was not easy to learn for ordinary people. Naturally, both filmic texts and extra-filmic texts, with their vivid images, helped promote the new version of vernacular Chinese. Most articles in fan magazines were written in the vernacular Chinese so that they could be more easily read and understood. Inter-titles in Chinese films were also mostly written in the vernacular Chinese. The vernacular Chinese campaign started in the late 1910s; however, by the end of the 1920s, it became the official national language. “Within less than a decade, *baihua* won out *wenyan* as the basis of a normal written language for Chinese in the practical sense of the word.”⁶⁹² Apparently, as a powerful medium, film, together with popular film culture, could make great contributions to the popularization and promulgation of the new Chinese written language.

To sum up, based upon the primary sources I collected from the archives both in the United States and China, my dissertation mainly examines the impact of Hollywood films upon the Chinese society in the 1920s, with a specific focus in Shanghai. My primary sources include miscellaneous newspaper advertisements, popular magazines, film plot sheets, diplomatic correspondences, corporate records, and government papers. These sources helped me reconstruct a public discourse of film and film culture and how this discourse might construct the ordinary movie-goers’ perception of American films. However, each primary source also has its

⁶⁹¹ Ping Chen, “Modern Written Chinese in Development,” *Language in Society* 22:4 (December 1993): 505-10. *Baihua*, or written vernacular Chinese, as a reaction to *Wenyan*, or standard written Chinese, started to develop about the seventh century to promote low-culture such as scripts of folk stories and plays. Both traditional *Baihua* and *Wenyan* existed in China until the 1910s when modern *Baihua* appeared. While *Wenyan* served high-culture functions in the Chinese society, *Baihua* served low-culture functions.

⁶⁹² Chen, 510.

own advantages but also its own shortcomings. For example, while popular magazines give me a film's title, its screening time, and film critic's opinion of the film, they do not provide much information of the composition of the film's audiences. Another instance is the diplomatic correspondence as primary source. It offers a perspective upon how American diplomats perceived Chinese perception of American films. However, unless there was some other evidence to back them up, it could be totally different from the actual perception of the Chinese regarding American films. The United Artists' Corporation papers were good sources for studying one company; however, it obviously could not cover much of other Hollywood studios' activities in 1920s Shanghai.

Because of limitation of my primary sources, I used case study in several chapters to provide specific examples of Hollywood business in the city in the hope that one can get a picture of a forest through that of a tree. Also, as I do not have personal memoirs and interviews as my primary sources, I examined reception through the lens of how public discourse could construct ordinary people's reception. As I did not find many primary sources regarding the inter-titles of American silent films, I only constructed that part of my dissertation through advertising in newspapers. It would be better if I could have discovered the translation of the inter-titles in American silent films.

For my future investigations, I would like to dig into the personal memoirs, either published or unpublished, regarding the Hollywood silent films in the 1920s. In so doing, I intend to build up reception of American films from a more bottom-up approach. Also, considering the fact that Antonio Ramos dominated the Chinese film industry for almost twenty years, there is limited information about him. In 1926, he left China for Spain forever. As he had a wide connection in Europe, especially in Spain, it would be interesting to find out more about

him from resources in Europe. Also, I would like to track down Krisel and Krisel, United Artists's agent in China. Based upon the primary sources in the United Artists Archives, I found that led by Alexander Krisel, the office thrived in the 1930s and 1940s. I believe that correspondences of Alexander Krisel with the United Artists in those periods can provide me with Hollywood sound films in China before the Chinese Communist Party took the regime in 1949.

To conclude, since the defeat of the Opium War in 1842, China turned into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Different parts of the country developed unevenly, with the eastern port cities more susceptible to the Western influence. Imported films, especially American films, played an important role in shaping Chinese perception of Western culture and civilization, which was commonly regarded as more advanced and modern. This appreciation of American values and principles, in return, promoted the consumption of American products in China, such as cars, elevators, lamps, cigarettes, and matches. However, worshipping of imported products was also mixed with a sentiment of abhorrence, as evidenced by the May Fourth Movement itself. A flow of transnational products such as films also promoted a discourse of nationalism and modernity. Paradoxically, nationalism and modernity in the early 20th century in China had contrastive goals: while nationalism aims to revive traditional Chinese culture, modernity aims to catch up with the Western civilization. How to maintain a balance between modernity and nationalism has been a big challenge throughout the modern Chinese history since the late 19th century. In different eras, political discourse emphasized one of the two principles, depending upon the situation. Starting from the 1920s, the discourse of nationalism had been very much present since the May Fourth Movement. During the period of May 30 Movement in 1925, the

nationalist sentiment reached its height. However, Western products could not be done away with, nor could its values.

Chinese film historiography has yet to acknowledge the impact of Hollywood films on the Chinese society and Chinese film industry. Hollywood distribution in China is commonly regarded as a case of American cultural imperialism. It was true that Hollywood aimed to maximize its profits by exploring Asian market including China; however, it would be unfair to think of Chinese movie goers only as passive receivers. On the contrary, from my dissertation, we can see that Chinese audiences, shaped by Chinese media, re-employed American films to their likings and tastes and adapted Hollywood films to Chinese dramatic tradition.

Chinese film historians also believed that Chinese film industry did not reach its prime period until in the 1930s under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). However, one cannot deny the fact that film art, like any other art, has its own period of development. The Golden Age of Chinese domestic film industry did not happen overnight. It takes years for an art to grow, mature, and boom. And it also needs different nutrients to help it grow. Hollywood is an important factor in the development of Chinese film industry. We should do justice to the history of American films in 1920s China, giving it a more positive spin instead of simply refuting it as an imperialistic phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1. Logo of Peacock Motion Pictures

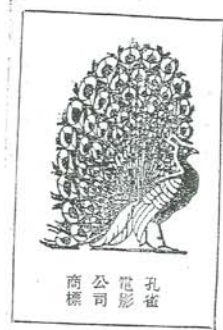



Figure 2. Logo of Universal Pictures



UNIVERSAL PICTURES
MILES AND MILES AHEAD OF ALL.

The worlds greatest and wisest theatre circuits have booked 100 % Universal JEWELS, STERN BROS. COMEDIES AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS ETC., against the pick of the whole world of productions.

BIGGER AND BETTER PICTURES FOR
BIGGER AND BETTER THEATRES.

Get in touch with the Universal man in Shanghai, Hongkong, Tientsin, Harbin and Hankow. He gives you pictures at a live and let-live rental.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES CORPORATION
217 Szechuen Road,
SHANGHAI.

Figure 3. Logo of Pathe

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片短種各牌本代百 片長種各牌本代百
片影種各司公弟兄納華
片新種各司公品出戲影國美
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WARNER BROTHERS PICTURES
PRODUCERS DISTRIBUTING PRODUCTIONS
ETC. ETC. ETC.
迎歡界各受尤片笑名著種各 克羅 靈別卓
CHARLIE CHARLIN, HAROLD LLOYD, MERMAID,
OUR GANG AND MACK SENNETT COMEDIES.
FELIX AND INKWELL CARTOONS.
ETC. ETC. ETC.
值價育教有均片聞新種各新最國各
PATHE'S BRITISH GAZETTES,
PATHE'S AMERICAN GAZETTES,
EDUCATIONAL FILMS.
洽接司公本臨駕請者業是營意滿客看包敢宜便價租

Figure 4. Fuzhou Road in 1920s Shanghai

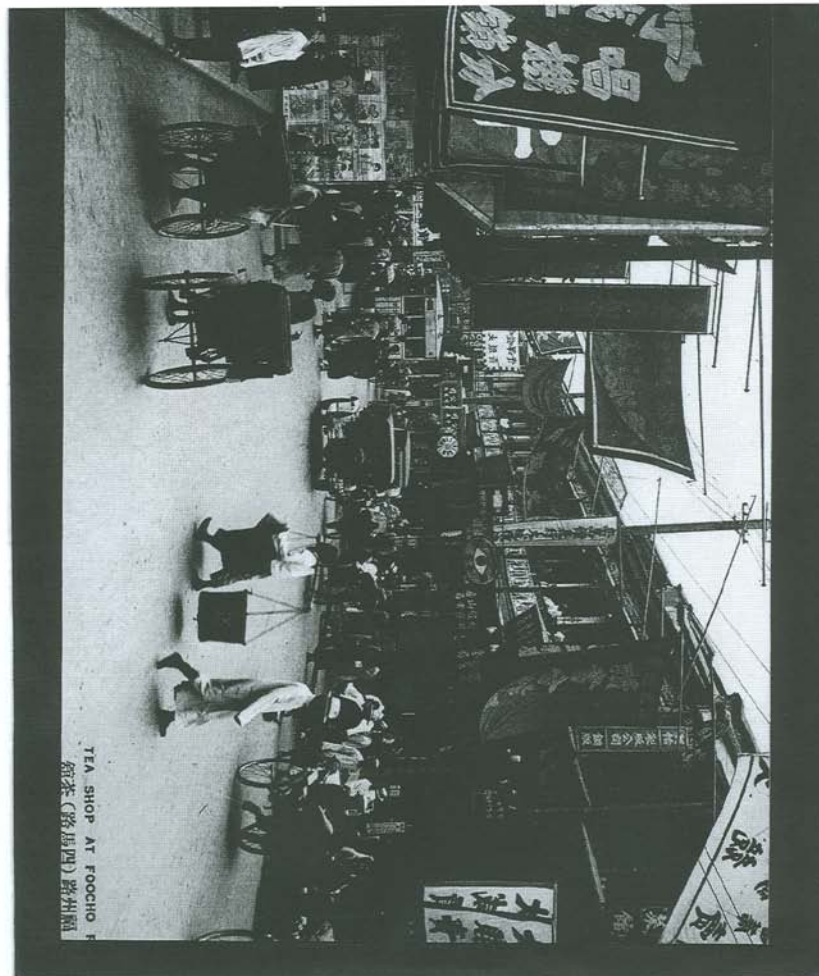


Figure 5. Automobile as the first prize

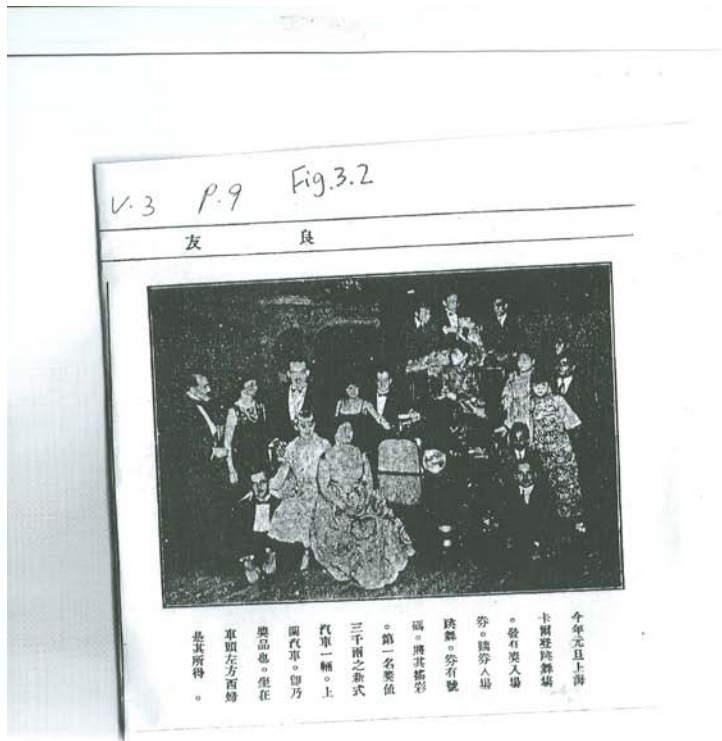


Figure 6. A cigarette advertisement in the Movie Magazine in 1925



Figure 7. A cigarette advertisement in Shen Bao

Figure 7 is a cigarette advertisement from the Shen Bao newspaper. The main advertisement is for "Golden Dragon Cigarettes" (金龍牌香烟). It features an illustration of two men sitting at a table, one smoking and the other holding a cigarette. Above them are two large tins of Golden Dragon cigarettes. The text "中國南洋兄弟煙草公司出品" (Produced by Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company, China) is on the left. The brand name "金龍牌香烟" is in the center, with "物禮等禮" (Gifts for various occasions) to its right. Below the brand name is a circular logo with "中國人" (Chinese people) and "吸煙中" (Smoking). To the right of the illustration, the text "良烟如益友 須臾不可離" (Good cigarettes are like good friends, you cannot be without them for a moment) is written vertically. Below the main advertisement, there are several smaller advertisements for various products, including "新到活動電氣燈" (New arrival of portable electric lamps), "科學三用鏡" (Scientific three-use mirror), and "華利洋行" (Huali Yanghang). The bottom right corner of the advertisement section says "告者精遺華" (Chinese refined products).

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Fig.4.2

Figure 8. A cigarette advertisement in Shen Bao

Fig. 4.3 (a)



Figure 9. A cigarette advertisement in Shen Bao

Fig.4.3(b)

(三十)日 三 十 二 月 二 十 五 乙 歷 舊 (張 四 第 報 申)
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華 成 煙 公 司

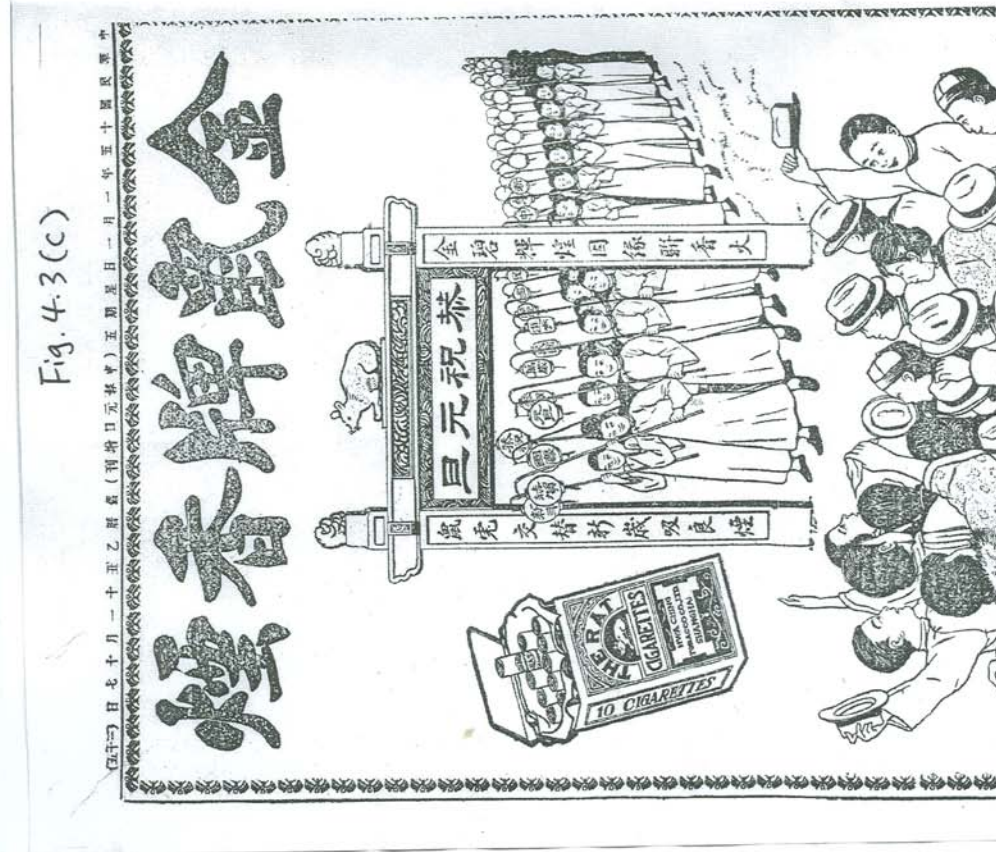
價 煙 錢 味 巧 好



牌 寶 香 煙



Figure 10. A cigarette advertisement in Shen Bao



氏白玉霜
敬品中第一精品
賦純淨細潔

後今
奇新美精
電備水

時雨藥房發行
生髮水
退面水
婦女衛生水
皮膚藥水
少年化癩散

Chesterfield

CIGARETTES

吉士之能... 英美煙路之增加... 中國各大城市均有出售

潤肺止咳
痰紅餅
總發行上海... 三種上等煙葉 調和配合

Figure 13. A scene from The Gold Rush

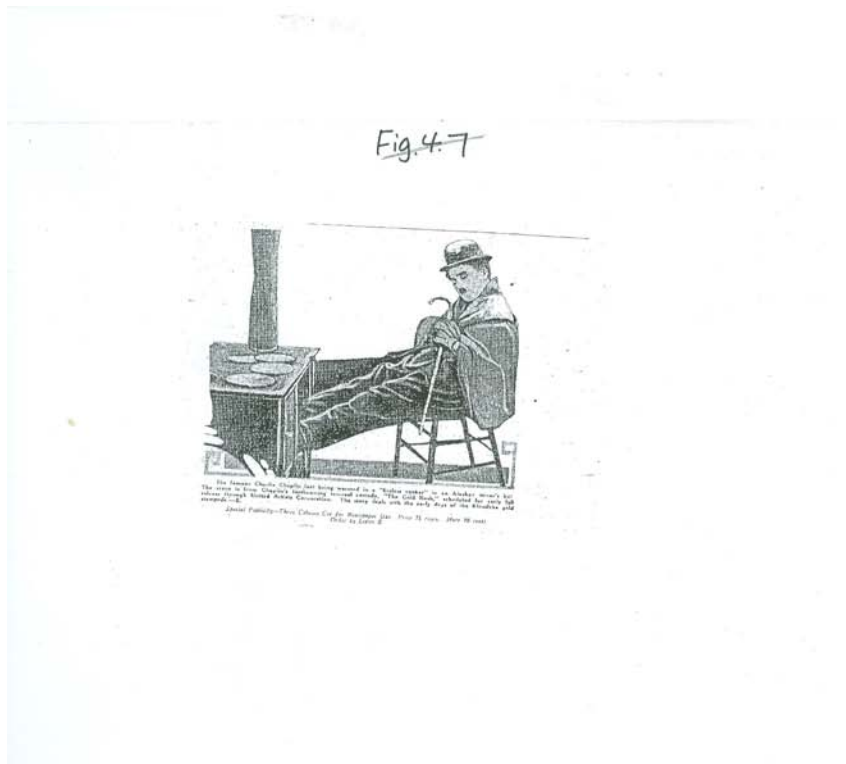


Figure 14. A scene from The Gold Rush



Charlie Chaplin, the Lone Stranger, is advised in dire trouble by his pal, Mary Swine, who had been hunger in their Klondike cabin in 'The Gold Rush'. Charlie's character comes at the them.

12-Two Col. Scene (Mar 20; Oct 20)

Figure 15. A scene from The Gold Rush



BBQ-4-You Cannot Expect Advertising Cut To Be Used For Any Other
Purpose. Price 10 cents. Must be used.

[illegible]

Fig. 5.2

THE PASSING SHOW

PROGRAMME FEATURES

To-morrow

- Jackie Cooper-Rose Lee 8.00
- "Molly Loo" 8.15
- Carlson-Thames-Rose Lee 8.30
- Opera in Company 8.45
- "In the Law" 9.00

Monday

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Figure 20. Lillian Gish's close-up in a film plot sheet in the 1920s



Figure 21. Picture of the house where Harold Lloyd was born



Figure 22. Picture of 18-month-old Harold Lloyd



Figure 23. Picture of four-year-old Harold Lloyd



Fig. 8.3.

四歲的時候



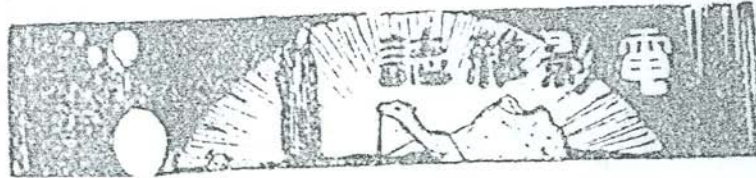
我對於游泳一技，歡喜得如醉如狂，年紀雖小，却還式，所以常自岸上，跳至游泳池中的極深部分，上岸，究以年小力弱，忽入水而不能起，下沉而生命發生緊握，拖我至岸上，小性命才得救出。

當我年紀長大一些，就在年紀相同的孩童隊中，佔着命的打架。我童年時，雖無許多可以驕傲的事蹟，但當是一位首領。我又能夠比諸別人，想出更多的花樣以力勝人，而不能維持首領地位時，我必回家想一

因為我面上一鎖，總是我對鏡自照怕，實為世誇張了。因伶惠司萊白則他的面我的雀斑，所以被

Figure 24. Picture of nine-year-old Harold Lloyd

Fig. 8.4



克羅的時歲九

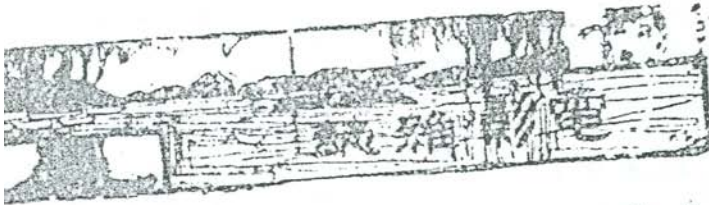


，教師就喊我立在全班學生的前面，隨後又吩咐我伸出手來，拿的一根戒尺舉起，舉至頭上而猛擲下來，我一時覺得吃不下，將手扯回，而教師就把戒尺打在自己的膝蓋上，當然怒如發生，見此奇狀，當然狂笑一場，而我亦破口大笑，可有一分

實在不能勝任，所以我對孩童說，你們如能幫助我工作，我就告訴你們罷。孩童很喜歡的來助我，我雖絕對不願意宣布，痛而踐言了。
在學校時我是頑劣出眾的，又是常常坐着默默無言。我從未作同的事物，但我的腦海中，對於注意教師的面貌及可以引起我總是胡想，所以當因而我相以為我且，然而想的忙，當我在起一件事，我在

Figure 25. Picture of sixteen-year-old Harold Lloyd

Fig. 8.5



克羅的歲六十



最出名的一位，所以她渴望入戲劇界。但是她的家庭，她就和家庭決裂了。不計家庭的反對，她就離家上

幾無人能想到的。大半青年，多具一種更可慶可賀的志願畜牧，或入五金店及馬車行工作。我在童年時，就有一種堅決濃熱去演劇的慾望，但此種慾不相吻合的。我母親說，這也許是一種先天的記號，有人

即非所以中，校演的故事從前茫然的亦不

Figure 26. Picture of Mary Pickford in the Young Companion in 1920s Shanghai

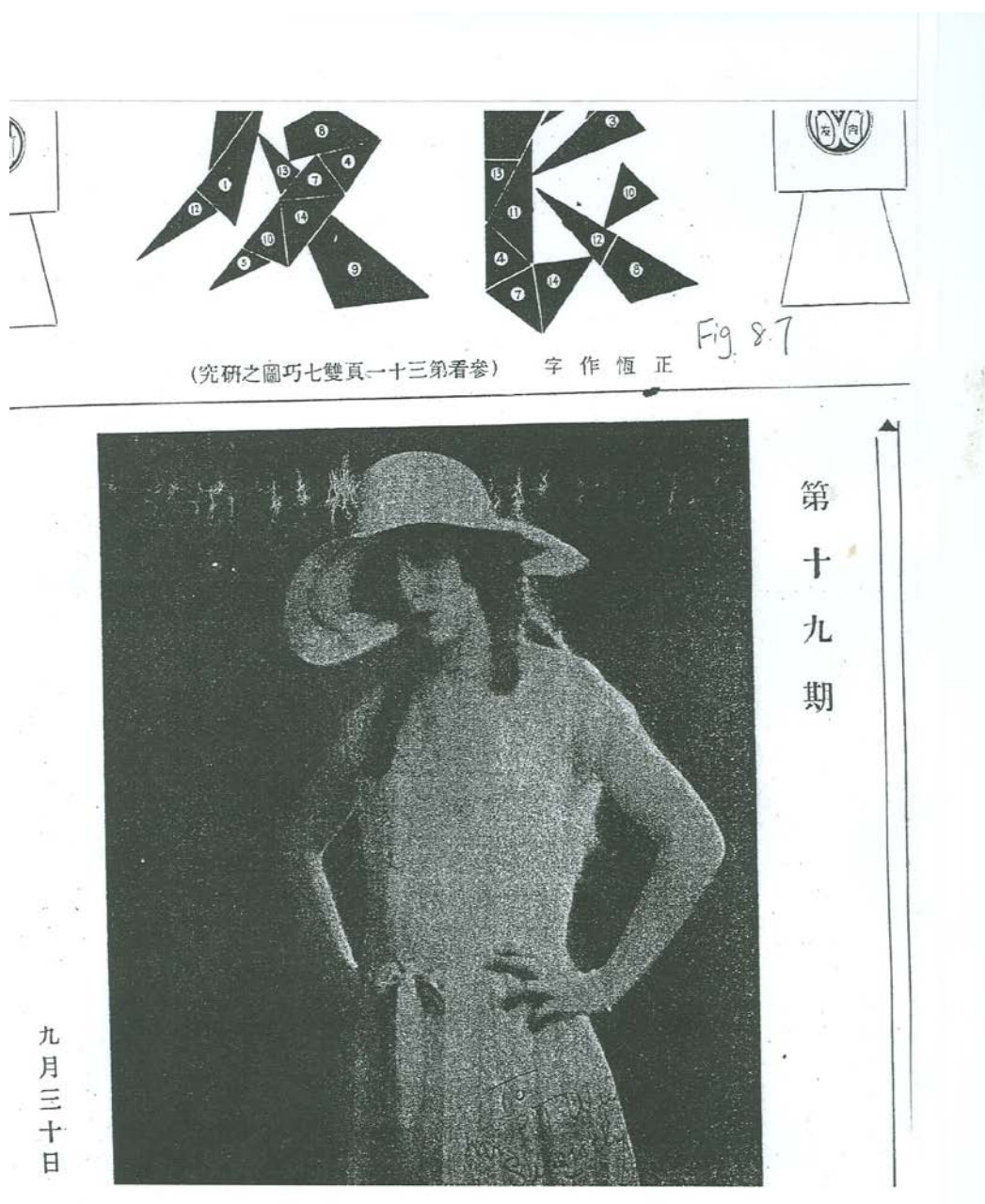


Figure 27. Picture of Mary Pickford in Cineograph in 1929

Fig. 8.8.



Figure 28. Picture of Dolores Del Rio in Cineograph in 1929

Fig. 8.9.



Figure 29. Picture of Dorothy Revier in Cineograph in 1929

