

"WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY: EXAMINING CHINA'S CINEMATIC HISTORY TILL 1949"

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Abstract: *It examines the linguistic nuances associated with the terms Cinema, film, movie or motion picture and how they relate to the aesthetics, entertainment value, and economic aspects of Chinese cinema. It also discusses the fascinating and tumultuous history of Chinese cinema from its inception in the late 19th century until the year 1949. Often considered in two distinct "golden ages," namely the 1930s and the late 1940s, this historical exploration seeks to analyze the critical junctures and opportunities that shaped the trajectory of Chinese cinema during this period. From its early days as a medium for recording daily events to its evolution into a complex and powerful art form, Chinese cinema mirrored the social, political, and cultural changes of its time.*

Keywords: *Chinese Cinema, Japanese Invasion, History of Cinema, Golden age, Guo Mindang*
Cinema, film, movie or motion picture, these names are alternative titles for the art of moving images a visual medium that tells stories and exposes reality. Which was came into existence in the dusk of the 19th century; cinema is the world's most recent art form. It is also, the world's most complex, collaborative, and costly artistic expression of feeling, sentiments and idea. In the early stage of this technology which can express your thought and sentiments are only use for record daily events with the first two version of the film camera the Kinetograph and cinematograph which was the European counterpart of American version.

The concept of film "movie" as a compound concept, there are roughly four translation in English as above mentioned , first one is the French first used cinema from the ancient Greek kinerna. For the meaning of "moving object." Now used to collectively call a movie or a cinema, cinema emphasizes the aesthetics and artistic connotation of the film when it is collectively called a movie. The second word is film originally refers to the film used to record moving images, which later evolved to be the most common for movies. The most neutral expression which are now being used for this industry. The third one is movie which emphasizes the popular traits and entertainment value of the film, sometimes involving the economic category of the media, emphasizing the production process of the film and the last or forth one is motion picture film industry closely related to the economy and the market. At present no one is using the motion picture except some production companies in their names who are investing their money in this multimillion dollar industry. In India now the people are commonly using the term film or movie and Chinese are using Movie or Cinema but their own term for both is 电影 (meaning movie or Cinema) .

The Chinese made their own domestic cinemas in 1905 and now has a history of more than 110 years. It has produced countless outstanding cinemas, created many typical artistic images, won

the favor of the audience, and has a wide impact. In the starting of May fourth movement in 1919 in china, the Chinese literature had seen new affirmed literary works. As far as Chinese cinemas are concerned in the same period it had appeared in reverse. This excusal of pre-1930s film shows the inclination towards Confucian for Art as education and abhorrence of mainstream society culture that incorporated well with the tasks of both the Kuomintang patriots and the Communists. Directors and studios favored the National democratic wings or communist wings films that started to develop during the 1930s.

However, holding up these leftist films in contrast to earlier productions erects a false barrier between them. Although the earlier films may not have directly encouraged political engagement, they did give agency to Chinese film-makers and present recognizable contemporary conditions to Chinese audiences (Zhu and Seio, 2010). The leftist films did not replace populist entertainments, but supplemented them, although this is often forgotten because the entertainment films have been written out of retrospectives of the period. Finally, the leftist films themselves shared more in common with pure entertainment films than is usually acknowledged, and they demonstrate that agitation and popular culture can be one and the same thing.

1930's is known in the history of Chinese cinema as the start of left wing cinemas. The earlier Chinese cinema was not engaged in directly promoting political view but film makers give importance to the contemporary conditions in their films. The leftist cinema supplemented to the main stream cinema and it is always forgotten due to having less entertainments. Later on leftist cinema also acknowledged the entertainment cinemas and they merge the entertainment and agitations in one. The seeds of the leftist cinemas were lain in the attack by Japanese on china. Japanese in beginning capture Manchuria in 1931 and within a year they attacked Shanghai and take the city into their control. The attack of Japan on China triggered the nationalist sentiments of Chinese common people and cinema makers. The communist Party's left wings writers set up cinema group in 1932 and this group established two studios the Mingxing and the Lianhua. The democratic government of china lead by Guomin dang (国民党KMT) policy which was not allowed cinema makers to direct portrayal of Japanese invasion. The leftist cinema makers take the advantage of democratic government policy and the nationalist sentiments of common people and added the entertainments in their cinemas with the agitation against Japanese by Chinese people which became a great success.

The impetus for the leftist cinema lay in the Japanese invasion of China. Beginning with the seizure of Manchuria in 1931, within a year the Japanese bombed Shanghai and come near to the city. These events stimulated nationalism amongst audiences and film-makers alike. The Communist Party's front organization, the League of Left-Wing Writers, set up a film group in 1932, and this body infiltrated two of the best-established studios of the period, the Mingxing and the Lianhua (Pickowicz, 1984). The Kuomintang government's appeasement policy limited direct expression of anti-Japanese sentiment. However, the leftist film makers were aided in their efforts by the progressive political sentiments of at least Some of the studio owners, and their coincident realization that the mood of the times made such productions profitable.

One of the earliest results of the leftist infiltration of the industry was Mingxing's adaptation of a Mao Dun short story, *Spring Silkworms*, released in 1933. The plot shows the inexorable destruction of a silk-farming family by fluctuations in international market prices and other machinations completely beyond their control. An almost documentary detailing of the back-breaking labor entailed in silk production makes the final tragedy.

Sun Yu Big Road (also known as *The Highway*), which came out at the beginning of 1935, is an excellent example of the merger of the pre-revolutionary and the post-colonial in one film (thatsmags.com). The plot involves a group of six unemployed workers who decide to join a road-gang building a strategic highway for the army. Censorship reasons made it impossible directly to name the Japanese as the enemy being fought, but the reference could hardly have been lost on any contemporary viewer. To this patriotism, the film adds class politics, with the inclusion of an evil landlord who sells out to the Japanese. What makes this film effective, the adoption and deployment of the very vulgar entertainment elements so disliked by later critics, Two of the workers form a comedic pairing that is a once modeled on Laurel and Hardy and the cross-talk, stand-up comedy teams of Chinese variety shows. The film has sound effects and music but no dialogue. In scenes where the pair indulge in slapstick, percussion enlivens their performance, and in another scene where the landlord's agent gets whirled around on one of the workmen's shoulders, a Little animated aero plane and dizziness stars buzz around his head. The workmen also encounter two women, one of whom sings for them in the little roadside restaurant they repair to when the day's work is done. Perched on a table, and given the soft focus treatment employed for the alluring starlets of the period, she attracts the men's attention, but the song she sings is of the woes of China beset by flood, famine, and war. Their desiring gaze upon her is not answered by shots of her, but by documentary footage of tanks, explosions, and refugees.

Other leftist films of the period also deployed comedy, song, and other elements of populist entertainment to similar ends. Notable titles include *The Goddess*, *Plunder of Peach and Plum*, *Crossroads*, *Street Angel*, *Little Toys*, *A Bible for Women*, *March of Youth*, *The Lianhua Symphony*, *Song of the Fisherman* and many others (factsanddetails.com). Made in 1937 just before the outbreak of full-scale war with Japan which brought this brief period of remarkable production to a close,

When the war with Japan in 1937 stated the glorious period of Chinese cinema come to an end. Before this they have made a good number of cinema which contained song, comedy and entertainments which was the trend of the this period. Some of the titles are *Crossroads*, *A bible for the woman*, *songs of the fisherman*, *March of the youth* and *symphony* etc.

When the Japanese started entering into China in 1930, the war broke out between Japanese and Chinese in 1937 which lasted till the end of world war- II, the 10 year long war cut china into half. Cinema production also faces the hard time it was almost closed. The Guomindang nationalist government has already placed restriction on Wuxia genre and now Japanese invaders also have taken control over it. After the end of the golden period of Chinese cinema, the period is known for introducing comedy, songs and entertainments with political agenda of the left in cinemas (economicinema.com). At the time when Japanese take over the charge of whole shanghai the

Chinese cinema industry got a halt. The personnel of the Chinese cinema fragmented, some choose to stay on orphan Island with concession until 1941 when they were also taken. Other fled to Honk Kong to add Chinese language cinema making and established Cantonese cinema industry, the Cantonese cinema was also taken into control by Japanese in late 1941 and this lead to the end of Cantonese cinema. Some of them gone with Guomintang dang first to Wuhan and then further move to Chongqing, due to the shortage of Cinema in war time they engaged themselves into other various type of cultural activities such as drama troupes etc. The cinema maker who was inclined towards left wing they went to Yen An, Shaanxi province and join communist party and they are only able to make some documentaries. While Chinese Cinema making came to halt during the war time, Japanese allows some local company as well shanghai industry to work under them and uses them as propaganda machinery.

Other more leftist artists made an effort to join the Communist Party in its wartime base at Yen'an in Shaanxi province. Among them was the ex-starlet Lan Ping, soon to enjoy a come-back as Mao's third wife, Jiang Qing. Also among them were the director Yuan Muzhi and his actress wife Chen Bo'er, who became Communist China's first Film Bureau head and Minister of Culture respectively in 1949. Film production only commenced at Yen'an in 1939 when Joris Ivens brought the gift of a camera, but even then, shortages of film stock limited production to a small number of documentaries.

While free Chinese film-making came to a halt during the war, a thriving local industry continued under the Japanese occupation (Cheng, li and Xing, 1998). For whatever reasons, Japanese had encouraged local film production from their invasion of Manchuria, and after 1937 they added a Shanghai based industry to their propaganda machine Unsurprisingly, Chinese historians have preferred to draw A veil over this period, but recent studies indicate that the Japanese in Shanghai ruled the film industry with less brutality than they used elsewhere, and that films with patriotic subtexts, such as the 1939 Huang Mulan Joins the Army, based on a traditional legend, still got through the Japanese censors.

As we know that Mingxing company was closed when Japanese entered Shanghai. The second well known company of 1930s Lianhua re-established itself in Shanghai at the end of war and once again started working on leftist thoughts. It is well known that cinema of this period focused on Civil war, corruption and social issues. The cinemas of the 1930s are known as the hybrid of entertainments and political thoughts where as cinemas of 1940s are considers as fine melodramas with smoother plots. The best example of the 1940s is first made by lianhua and Kunlun A Spring river flows east in two parts first part releases in 1947 and second was in 1948, the second cinema come into to the mind of Fei Mu's 1948 masterpiece Spring in a Small Town.

Where the films of the first "golden age" were exuberantly disjunctive and hybrid mixes of entertainment and exhortation, the films of the later 1940s were smoother melodramas with more seamless plots and unity of tone. Perhaps the best-known example is A Spring River Flows East, a two-part epic, made by Lianhua in association with the Kunlun studio, and released in 1947 and 1948. Known as China's Gone with the Wind, the film can still provoke floods of tears from older

Chinese audiences when shown today. The film opens with an ideal Couple and their son. However, they are separated by the war when the husband retreats with the Kuomintang to the interior. There he is gradually corrupted and becomes the lover of a rich society woman. His faithful wife suffers through the war in Shanghai, waiting patiently for his return, but he comes back as a Kuomintang carpet-bagger and the film climaxes when his wife discovers that he is husband of the woman for whom she is working as a maid. He disowns her and she drowns herself in the Yangtze river.

Disillusion with the Kuomintang and their hangers-on is even more pronounced in the films that depict post-war conditions. Films like *Myriads of Lights*, *Crows and Sparrows*, and *San Mao* (adapted from a newspaper cartoon about an orphan) were all enjoyable and humorous, but none attempted to hide the appalling social contradictions of these years and the resentment those who had suffered in Shanghai felt towards their compatriots who had managed to profit from the war. Stylistically, these films featured more subtle ensemble playing from actors seasoned by many years of stage work. Although less obviously pastiche than the films of the 1930s, they too represent post-colonial appropriation for pre-revolutionary ends, but this time drawing on the western spoken stage drama and its cinematic equivalents, rather than popular culture.

The second "golden age" ended China's pre-1949 cinematic history on fitting high note. In retrospect, it is remarkable that five years of film-making in the 1930s (1932-1937) and three years in the 1940s (1946-1949) should stand out so strongly in a total film-making history of forty years (1909-1949). However it would be wrong to suggest that these two "golden ages" appeared out of the blue. Rather, they represented windows of opportunity when talent that had been long developing was able to make itself visible. I can say such an opportunity was not to present itself again for another forty-five years, until one and Eight and Yellow Earth (both 1984) heralded the arrival of another golden age of Chinese cinema.

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