

China Perspectives

THE HISTORY OF CHINESE ANIMATION

Edited by
Lijun Sun



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THE HISTORY OF CHINESE ANIMATION I

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The History of Chinese Animation

China has been one of the first countries to develop its own aesthetic for dynamic images and to create animation films with distinctive characteristics. In recent years, however, and subject to the influence of Western and Japanese animation, the Chinese animation industry has experienced several new stages of development, prompting the question as to where animation in China is heading in the future.

This book describes the history, present and future of China's animation industry. The author divides the business's 95-year history into six periods and analyses each of these from a historical, aesthetic, and artistic perspective. In addition, the book focuses on representative works, themes, directions, artistic styles, techniques, industrial development, government support policies, business models, the nurturing of education and talent, broadcasting systems, and animation.

Scholars and students who are interested in the history of Chinese animation will benefit from this book and it will appeal additionally to readers interested in Chinese film studies.

Sun Lijun, Professor, Vice President of Beijing Film Academy and President of China Animation Institute of BFA. He was appointed as the Vice President of BFA in 2012. Sun Lijun is one of the experts who receive State Council special allowance. He has directed several animated feature films, such as *The Little Solider*, *Happy Running*, *Legend of a Rabbit*, and *Harvest*, among others. Since 2005 his animated feature films have been screened internationally, including at the Berlin International Film Festival, Annecy Film Festival, Ukraine International Film Festival, Seoul International Film Festival, and more. His films have won many top awards both domestic and abroad, such as the Best Animated Film of 28th and 29th Golden Rooster Awards, which are the top awards given by Chinese government to the most outstanding and talented artists.

China Perspectives

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Edited by Sun Lijun

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TRANSLATED BY
SHI YI AND LI JUNTING

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Preface

As practitioners of animated film, we have the responsibility to grasp the cultural inheritance function of animation and film. And in this regard, what we should do first is to respect history.

Film and animation are a kind of art; therefore, we should first respect such art and realize and insist on their function of cultural inheritance and transmission. Animation creation also carries the function of cultural inheritance and transmission and animation acts as the nourishment for the mind that delivers our long history and national culture to younger generations.

Facts have proved that the power and achievements generated by any art form, such as film, animation or painting, in combination with its own national cultural tradition or national spirit, are so influential and meaningful that they cannot be ignored even in the western countries with their advanced animation technologies.

Acknowledgments

This book won't have been possible without the research and interviews done by editorial board members including Wang Hao, Liu Mengya, Ma Hua, Zhang Yu, Zhang Wenzheng, Yu Luo, Li Guyu and Tan Hui. I am immensely grateful to the book's associate editors Li Jianping and Wang Hao. The two led the editorial board members, mostly PhD candidates and professors, to untiringly search for archival materials and interview a number of longtime animation experts at Shanghai Animation Film Studio, including Yan Dingxian, Zhang Songlin, Duan Xiaoxuan, Hu Jinqing, Qian Yunda and Huang Yushan, among others. These experts created the first prosperity of Chinese animation industry and left us an enormous legacy in animation art. This book represents our heartfelt gratitude and tribute to them.

My thanks also go to Professor Joy Yuhua Zhu at the New York Film Academy, Professor Cao Xiaohui at the Beijing Film Academy and Taiwanese animation expert Yu Wai-ching, who did their utmost to make this book possible.

The book is selected in the program of 2019 "China Book International", and has attracted attention of people of all circles around the world. Here, we'd like to express our special thanks to the New York Film Academy for its huge support and contribution to the making of the book.

Sun Lijun

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Part I

The embryonic stage and birth of Chinese animation (1920s–1930s)



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1 Overview

Chinese people are born with a strong sense of dynamic images. But it takes thousands of years to bring their sense of animation from embryonic stage to birth till maturity. The origin of China's earliest sense of animation can be traced back to the Stone Age, even before the birth of writing. Those early paintings, such as the rock paintings of Yinshan Mountains in Inner Mongolia during the late Paleolithic Era, the rock paintings of Cangyuan county in Yunnan Province during the Neolithic Era, and the painted pottery basin of Majiayao Culture, reflect our ancestors' examination and primitive experiments towards "beauty of movement" in a variety of activities. Afterwards, the innovative combination of "image" and "movement" constantly pursued by people has brought us leather-silhouette play, puppetry, hand shadow play, and human shadow play, which were quite popular among the Chinese common people. Among them, the leather-silhouette play developed into an ethnic story telling form with chanting, singing, and dubbing, using stage and light to add atmosphere. It has greatly influenced later forms of animation art in China, and even bred the "paper-cut cartoon." While the Chinese were still enjoying a variety of visual tricks, daguerreotype, photography, and projection had been invented successively in the 19th-century Europe, leading to a photographic revolution. In 1895, the first public screening of the film clips by French Lumière brothers marked the birth of films. This was a time when capitalism expanded rapidly to the world. The movie, a novel invention in capitalist countries, spread all over the world along with colonial footprints, reaching China the second year (1896) after its birth. Movies were shown by foreigners who came to China. The door to Chinese film-making had not been opened until the shooting of Peking Opera *The Battle of Mount Dingjun* performed by Tan Xinpei as *laodan* (old woman) to celebrate his birthday in 1905. It was shot by the Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio. Soon afterwards, those early cinematographic work including the first narrative short film and feature-length film were all published consecutively. Modern cinemas were also built at that time. All these have provided necessary technical support and a favourable environment to the birth of animated movies. The Wan brothers loved dynamic imaging since they were children. It was the inspiration they obtained from films

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that motivated them to develop Chinese animations. Early animations were often associated with commercials. The first animated advertisement produced by the Wan brothers was *Shuzhendong Chinese Typewriter* which was made in Shanghai in the 1920's. Its birth laid a foundation for the production of the first animated short. In 1924, Chinese Film Company produced the animation *Dog Treat*, while Shanghai Tobacco Company produced *New Year*. The two were the earliest animated shorts in China. But neither of them had much influence. Inspired by cartoons like *Popeye*, *Betty Boop*, and *Out of the Inkwell* shot by Max Fleischer brothers, the Wan brothers produced *Uproar in the Studio* which was the first non-commercial Chinese animated short. Since then, the Wan brothers produced *A Letter Sent Back* in 1927 and *Paperman Makes Trouble* in 1930. Both cartoons, along with *Uproar in the Studio*, were considered to be the first three animated films in China. Later, the Wan brothers was lauded as the "fathers of Chinese animation" both in China and in Asia as a whole because they served as the first generation of Chinese animation directors. They not only produced the first animation with sound, titled *The Camel's Dance*, after overcoming technical difficulties but also produced the first animated feature film, titled *Princess Iron Fan*. This ushered modern China into its history of animation.

China's early animation works draw on various forms of artistic expression and image language. On one hand, traditional Chinese fine-art drawings bring a lot of inspiration to animators on their techniques of expression; on the other hand, the film shooting technology introduced from the West allows animators to learn how to use lens for narration. In the 1920s, Chinese animation had conducted numerous experiments and explorations on its painting and shooting technology. Such explorations mainly focused on the transformation from traditional painting to film painting, forming an animation production system with originality, converging painting, line drawing, colouration, and shooting in one. The artistic style pursued the realism of action and the coherence of movement.

2 The embryonic stage and birth of Chinese animation consciousness

SECTION 1 THE THREE STAGES OF ANIMATION CONSCIOUSNESS

Animation emerges along with a long history of culture. From the view of animation history, animation consciousness comes into being even before animation itself, which germinates animation. Our ancestors had developed the animation consciousness long ago. During the archaeological excavations, it was discovered that they had begun to use a variety of paints in the form of painting to record their daily life of production and labour. All the images were drawn with varying degrees of dynamics. From this point, the emergence of animation consciousness could be divided into three stages: embryonic, emergence, and maturity, and ultimately leads to the birth of animation.

1. Embryonic

The first stage is the germination of consciousness, which is mainly embodied in prehistoric paintings and coloured pottery paintings. During this period, human beings had developed somewhat ignorant consciousness towards dynamic images. However, they did not know how to use images to express motion. Instead, they had drawn a few more legs to represent their running.

2. Emergence

The second stage is the emergence of consciousness, which is mainly reflected in the hand shadow performance. Using the simple scientific principles of light and shadow to project dynamic images, humans created illusions of animals, such as pigeons, horses, and dogs, in concert with the ventriloquist performance. A folk-art form thus took shape. The human shadow play appearing later also casted shadows through applying the same principles with lamp and people, along with musical instrument performance, to form various types of song and dance performances. This was one form of the palace performances of ancient China. Though animation consciousness had already appeared in the above-mentioned performances,

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there were neither characters nor a storyline. Leather-silhouette play and puppetry came into being at almost the same period, and were typical of the emergence of animation consciousness. They assembled elements of dynamic image performance including artificial light, shadow, stage, curtain, dialogue, lines, musical instruments, plot, and character movements. All the elements of a film or animation were ready at this period, but the traditional animation technology and equipment had not been applied yet. This is a detailed manifestation of animation consciousness.

3. Maturity

The third stage is the maturity of animation consciousness. In the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), movies used to be quite rare when introduced from the West to China. Early movies had been equipped with all the characteristics gained through the modern scientific exploration on image, as well as with much more matured technical means. At that time, people had developed a sense of movie watching and accepted that they should pay to watch movies. Therefore, under the conditions of relatively matured technology and awareness, animation began to step up from merely consciousness to real creation. Movie, such exotic goods, is the best practical inspiration for the Chinese to learn and study dynamic images, which has laid a scientific foundation for the development of animation. However, the maturity of animation consciousness is not equal to the birth of animation. A landmark event – the experiment and creation of the Wan brothers – is also indispensable.

SECTION 2 THE EMBRYONIC STAGE OF ANIMATION CONSCIOUSNESS

Animation originated from ancient paintings, which were the earliest manifestation of human life. Before the birth of writing, human beings had been using paintings to record important events. It is not rare to find the traces of our ancestors from many archaeological pictures. These paintings could throw light on their lives. The dynamics of those paintings at that time could well be considered the embryonic stage of animation consciousness.

1. Rock paintings of Yinshan Mountains in Inner Mongolia

In recent years, Paleolithic rock paintings have been discovered in Yinshan Mountains, Inner Mongolia, which pushes the origin of Chinese painting into the Paleolithic age. The painting is presumed to depict the religious or sorcery acts and images of people's working and sacrificing at that time. These images record shapes of the animals' standing and running, which is the earliest breakdown drawings of animal movements. At that time, people had formed some figurative symbolic features towards all kinds of natural and animal images. These symbolic features have subtle effects on future writing and art.

2. Rock paintings of Cangyuan County in Yunnan Province

Some Neolithic rock paintings were also discovered in Cangyuan County, Yunnan Province, and they reflected human activities, including hunting, dancing, sacrificing, and war. The composition of the rock paintings tends to be more complex, and the modelling is also very characteristic. Their content has also developed from individual objects to interrelated dynamic people. It is not difficult to find out in the images that human characters have movements. Even the relations among the characters, animals, and objects have been manifested as well. Although people did not have aesthetic consciousness at that time, painting still served as a means for them to record real life. For example, the lower part of a rock painting depicts a scene of ten people encircling birds and beasts to hunt them down. Some people use a shield, some use a bow, and others throw a stone, while on the left side a sturdy man with a mask is doing a witchcraft dance to lure the birds and beasts into the encirclement. The upper part of the painting depicts a sacrificial scene of cattle slaughtering: three men with feather crest headdress and feather clothing are driving five cattle to a slaughter place. One of the head cattle is tethered by two short men with ropes, while two men are looking nearby. On the upper left, a man, with feathers on the head and earrings, is dancing with his arms stretching out. He looks like a sorcerer who presides over the ceremony. Therefore, the primitive art reflects people's mysterious beliefs and ideas then. Even though the expression is simple, it uses a certain narrative image language to reflect the hierarchy and social division of labour among tribal leaders, chiefs, witches, and clan members. The existence of these remains reveals an important period of Chinese painting.

3. Painted pottery basin of Majiayao Culture

The dance-themed painted pottery basin of Majiayao Culture, discovered in Qinghai Province of China over 4,000 years ago, depicts a riverside crowd, dancing hand in hand. Two lines are drawn on the arm of the two people at each end of the group, which may be our ancestors' earliest attempt to manifest human sequential actions. The dance-themed painted pottery basin, belonging to the Neolithic Majiayao Culture (about 4,700–5,100 years ago), was excavated at Sunjiazhai, Datong County, Qinghai Province in 1973, and is at the Museum of Chinese History. Its rim, along with the upper part of the exterior, is decorated with some simple lines, while the dancing figures, hand in hand, as the main decoration are at the upper part of the interior. The dancing figures are divided into three groups. Each group has five dancers, dancing to the song and facing to the same direction. They have braid-like ornaments on their head and fluttering adornments down below. The character's headdress and the lower adornments drift to the right or left sides, adding a sense of motion to the dance. There are two lines drawn on the outer arm of a person at two ends of each group, as if it showed

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more evident movements or more frequent swings of the two arms. This is the earliest expression of continuous movement in Chinese primitive art. Although the Paleolithic rock painting still has a nature for records, people began to have a certain aesthetic consciousness in the Neolithic age. The aesthetic form was portrayed on a variety of daily necessities. The aesthetic form of this period had several characteristics: firstly, the aesthetic form is no longer a simple record. Symbolic graphics, integrated with a background of motion and life, can convey more specific and vivid information; secondly, patterns become a way of identification to be distinguished from other living appliances, which reveals their sense of privatization of the goods; thirdly, passing on certain information or belief through easy-to-carry artefacts shares some similarities with the recording of images through tapes in modern photography. From these aspects, we can see that the aesthetic consciousness of our ancestors is based on practical fine art, and the aesthetic form is in the original stage of visual expression, which is to express the apparent implication of image. And from another point of view, we can realize the progress of human civilization then. Humans at that time not only had entertainment but also developed some specific form of entertainment – dancing, which laid a foundation on human consciousness to explore new forms of entertainment, like leather-silhouette play and puppetry.



Figures 2.1–2.2 Paleolithic rock paintings of Yinshan Mountains in Inner Mongolia. The painting is presumed to depict the religious or sorcery acts and images of people's working and sacrificing at that time. These images record shapes of animals standing and running, which are the earliest breakdown drawings of animal movements.



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3 Neolithic rock paintings of Cangyuan County in Yunnan Province. They reflect human activities, including hunting, dancing, sacrificing, and war.



Figure 2.4 A dance-themed painted pottery basin of the Neolithic Majiayao Culture, discovered in Qinghai Province, China, over 4,000 or 5,000 years ago, depicts a riverside crowd, dancing hand in hand. Two lines are drawn on the arms of the two people at each end of the group, which may be our ancestors' earliest attempt to manifest human sequential actions.

SECTION 3 FOLK ART

1. Leather-silhouette play

According to historical records, leather-silhouette play originated from China's Shaanxi Province around the Western Han Dynasty (220 BC–AD 8) of 2,000 years ago and matured in the area of Shanxi and Henan provinces around the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties. It reached its peak in Hebei Province in the Qing Dynasty. According to the textual research of the late writer Mr Sun Kaidi, in the mid-to-late Tang Dynasty or later in the Five Dynasties period (7th century to 8th century), leather-silhouette play was used to advocate samsara and karma in Buddhism.

The leather-silhouette play, which was invented by our ancestors, is a combination of the performance of shadows, music, narrating, and singing. This reflects ethnic features of leather-silhouette play. Meanwhile, leather-silhouette play is also a forerunner of later invented film, as it is the earliest dynamic art form. Among contemporary film arts, leather-silhouette technology also provides a new technological means for animated production, creating a new film type for cartoons. Ever since *Piggy Eats Watermelon*, the

first paper-cut cartoon, used leather-silhouette techniques in 1958, the method of expression through leather-silhouette has been widely applied in cartoons. In the book *Chroniques du Cinéma Français* by Frenchman Georges Sadoul, leather-silhouette animation is explained as follows: “Leather-silhouette film (produced by Lotte Reiniger) is a variant of paper-cut cartoon. Against the background of grey monochrome painting, some white or black puppet characters are used to create this cartoon.” In the east, Noburo Ofuji introduced the real technology of a Chinese leather-silhouette play (which has been spread in the east for 1,000 years), by using a number of coloured plastic figures to form images from illuminated backgrounds.

2. Puppetry

Like the leather-silhouette play, Chinese puppetry is also a drama manipulated and performed by actors. It originated from the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) and flourished in the Tang and Song dynasties, with a history of around 2,000 years. According to puppets’ different physique and the manipulation means, there are four types of puppets, namely hand puppets, marionettes, rod puppets, and iron wire puppets. Each has its own artistic characteristics, known as puppet play in the past. Modern puppets usually are accompanied by traditional Chinese opera tunes, some with dialogue and singing and dancing. The repertoire is rich particularly in Longxi hand puppetry and Quanzhou marionette play of Fujian Province; rod puppetry of Hainan and Guangdong Province; as well as puppetry from Hunan, Shaanxi, Beijing and other places. Puppetry in these areas can be performed flexibly, operated freely, and accompanied by beautiful music, thus enjoying a long standing prestige. Puppetry, like leather-silhouette play, has preserved the Chinese national culture for thousands of years while laying a deep cultural foundation for the development of animation. With the development of modern civilization, folk production and performance of leather-silhouette play, puppetry, and other folk-art forms have become increasingly difficult to see.

3. Hand shadow play

In ancient China, the hand shadow play was one of the juggling performances of those street entertainers. It is quite simple and has a long history. A book entitled *The Famous Sights of the Capital* recalls the juggling performances and pastimes of the Hangzhou Juggling House, which includes the hand shadow play. The hand shadow play literally means the manifestation of a variety of images through hands. It can be the game-like performance of various animals made by hands through projection of light against wall; it can also be a small shadow performance on palms. It does not require any complex equipment. As long as there is a candle or a lamp, you can create ingenious images of various things by means of gestures. It is the earliest behavioural consciousness of film and animation, and a natural reflection of human desire to imitate and voluntarily manipulate.

4. Human shadow play

The human shadow play is also a popular form of performance among the common people. According to the written records of 5th century BC, Chinese philosopher Mo Di used “light arrives, and shadow dies” to depict his theory of light, which could be the earliest scientific contribution to “optical theory” in human history. A quote on Chinese Lantern Festival from Chapter 2 of the book *Reminiscence of Wulin* goes: “(people) put on some ‘big shadow play’ as entertainment in the house. Children thrilled to the performances, whooping all through the night.” The “big shadow play” clearly indicates that “people” are the performers. Judging from this record, we can infer that the shadow play performed by people themselves is called human shadow play or big shadow play.

In the 13th century, the human shadow play was introduced to the Middle East, Europe, Southeast Asia, and other places, resulting in the “slides,” “merry-go-round,” and other graphic and dynamic visual games. The movie derives right from these visual games.

These traditional folk shows, including hand and human shadow plays, are a way of Chinese people’s attempt to transform their dynamic consciousness into behavioural performances. After the leather-silhouette play and puppetry, this kind of performances began to have some specific characteristics of drama, such as stage, curtain, lighting, rap, accompaniment, lines, and storyline. The emergence of these types of drama proved that the Chinese dynamic image consciousness gradually matured and was later replaced by zoetrope and film.



Figure 2.5 Leather-silhouette play is also a forerunner of later invented film as it is the earliest dynamic art form. Among contemporary film arts, leather-silhouette technology also provides a new technological means for animated production, creating a new film type for cartoons.

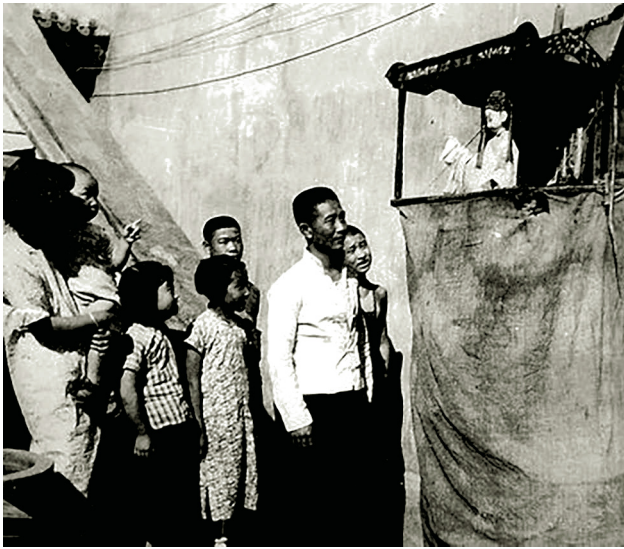


Figure 2.6 Puppetry show. Puppetry, like leather-silhouette play, has preserved the Chinese national culture for thousands of years while laying a deep cultural foundation for the development of animation.



Figures 2.7–2.9 Hand shadow play performed by hands through projection of light. It is the earliest behavioural consciousness of film and animation, and a natural reflection of human desire to imitate and voluntarily manipulate.



Figure 2.8



Figure 2.9



Figure 2.10 Human shadow play that originated from the Han Dynasty and flourished in the Tang and Song dynasties (photo was shot in the China National Film Museum).

3 Modern Chinese animation

SECTION 1 WESTERN MOTION PICTURE TECHNIQUES

1. Zoetrope

Zoetrope, also known as raree show, is also one of the early folk juggling performances. The first volume of the author Gu Lu's book *Qing Jia Lu* (a book on the folklore of Jiangsu Province in Qing Dynasty) in the 10th year of Emperor Daoguang of the Qing Dynasty (1830) recorded:

People in Jiangning (now Nanjing City) has made round or rectangle wooden box painted with flowers, trees, birds, fishes, gods monsters, and other mysterious scenarios. An open round hole is carved on the outside covered with colorful tortoise shell (glass). People peep in the hole to get an amplified view of the scenario inside. This is how the zoetrope works.

(Lu Gu, ed, 1986)

The zoetrope was invented by Nanjing people in the mid-Qing Dynasty. It was a box with pictures inside and a magnifying glass on it to see the enlarged pictures. The early pictures usually were Western style. Therefore, it was called zoetrope (literally Western mirror). At the entrance of the alleys of Old Shanghai, there were often people putting on zoetrope. Children were surrounding a large box with several small holes on one side for people to peep in. Through this, we can learn that the Chinese people at that time not only understood the basic principles of motion pictures but also made use of the business value of these "animated pictures." This consciousness has motivated Chinese people to turn the motion pictures into a commercial recreational activity, and thus people have gradually begun to accept the consuming concept of movie watching.

The appearance of the zoetrope, to some extent, stimulated the interest of some people. This interest, like a spiritual treasure, lures these people to study and explore tirelessly. And most importantly, the scientific concept of the zoetrope and its principles of the structure become a living teaching material in front of everyone. People gradually grasped the principles of zoetrope from first contact to experiment, which laid the foundation for the future development of animation. At the same time, the Western motion picture techniques continued to progress, and fresh ideas and photographic

technology were introduced to China one after another. Zoetrope became a popular commercial product. It promoted the understanding of animation to more people, which facilitated the maturity of animation consciousness.

2. Photography and projection

Photography was born in Europe in the 19th century. In 1839, Frenchman Daguerre, based on the pin-hole imaging technique learned from Renaissance paintings, used chemical methods to permanently fixate the images, which was later regarded as “daguerreotype” (Daguerreotype uses steel plate coated with silver iodide to take exposure in the camera obscura. And then mercury vapour is used to develop an ordinary salt to fix the image. This method actually develops a negative metal image, but it is very clear and can be permanently preserved). Since the exposure takes about 20–30 minutes, early photography was mainly on still life and scenery. While taking portrait photography, the camera must be fixed on a stand.



Figures 3.1–3.2 People were watching the zoetrope in the late Qing Dynasty. The zoetrope laid the foundation for the future development of animation and became a popular commercial product at the same time. It promoted the understanding of animation to more people, which facilitated the maturity of animation consciousness.

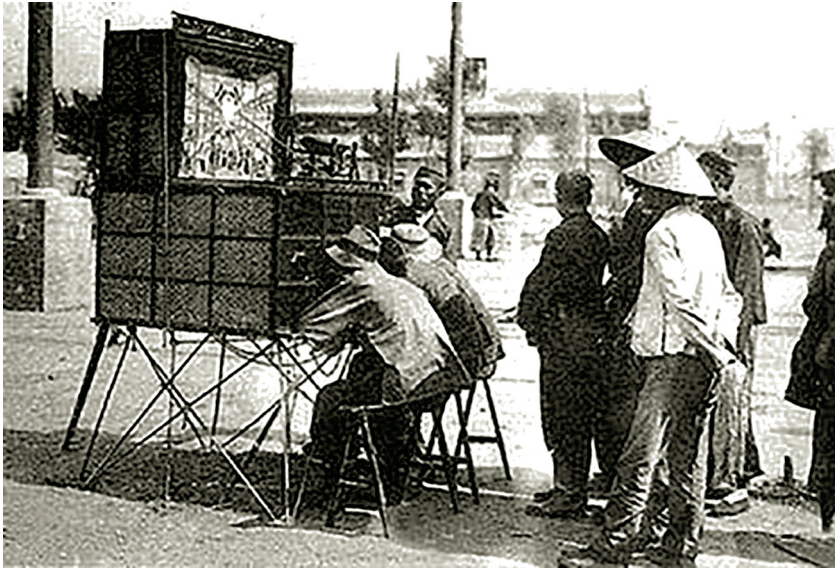


Figure 3.2

However, as the technology advanced, people were no longer satisfied with the shooting of still photos. Instead, they craved for recording motion pictures of images and actions of different objects. In 1872, the first person who used the photography on continuous shooting was photographer Edward Mugaridge. Within five years, he used multiple cameras to carry out experiment on continuous shooting of a running horse and succeeded in 1878. In 1882, Frenchman Étienne-Jules Marey applied the intermittent principle of the revolver to develop a “photographic gun” that could conduct continuous shooting. He then invented the “film continuous camera.” In Europe, scientists and inventors in many countries had developed different types of cameras at that time. Among them, Thomas Edison of the United States and his mechanic William Dickson invented the traction method of punching holes on both sides of the film in order to ensure the film in the camera moving at the same pace. This has solved the technical problem of the mechanical drive. This method of recording dynamic images by means of “motion photography” is an early photographic technique.

While photography could provide static pictures, it is also necessary to use projection to play the pictures continuously to restore the dynamic images. In 1888, Frenchman Emile Reynaud invented “Théâtre Optique” to project dynamic images on the screen. He made use of photography to draw picture by picture and then projected them. *Le Clown et ses chiens* (The Clown and His Dogs) was his first animated cartoon, and later he painted

Un bon bock (A Good Beer), *Pauvre Pierrot! (Poor Pete)*, *Autour d'une cabine (Around a Cab)* and other cartoons. In 1895, the cartoon *Autour d'une cabine* could be played for 15 minutes, and it was able to tell a story through a combination of scenes. It was already equipped with all the characteristics of modern cartoons, such as a fixed show time, an ingenious plot, typical characters, gimmicks, special effects cinematography, a compact and lively storyline, synchronized music, beautiful scenery, and moving colours. In addition to the above features, in this cartoon, Reynaud had done something that his successors could not have achieved. He had created characters, which were completely the same as real people, rather than some comic book characters or fashion show lifeless mannequins. He gave those characters sarcasm and a sense of humour without exaggerating them too much. The application of projection serves as the basic principle of animation.

The "Cinématographe" invented by the Lumière brothers in 1895 was a machine that can be used to photograph, project, and develop.

In addition, the Frenchman Georges Méliès was a famous film master since the invention of film. He used many animated scenes in his cinematographic work, and he was the first to use the stop trick.



Figure 3.3 Portrait of Daguerre by Daguerreotype.



Figure 3.4 Daguerreotype was used in portrait photography.



Figure 3.5 The Lumière brothers, who invented film.



Figures 3.6–3.9 Fragment of *Autour d'une cabine* from 1895. This cartoon was already equipped with all the characteristics of modern cartoons, such as a fixed show time, an ingenious plot, typical characters, gimmicks, special effects cinematography, a compact and lively storyline, synchronized music, beautiful scenery, and moving colours.



Figure 3.7

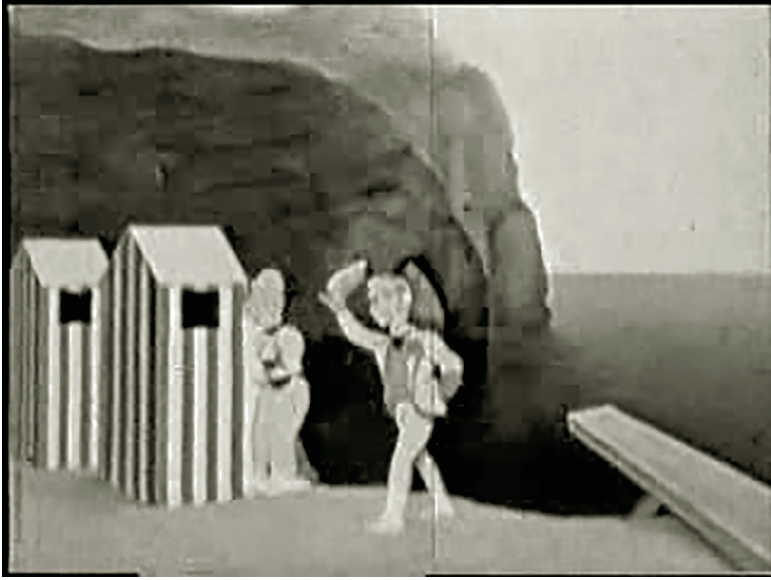


Figure 3.8

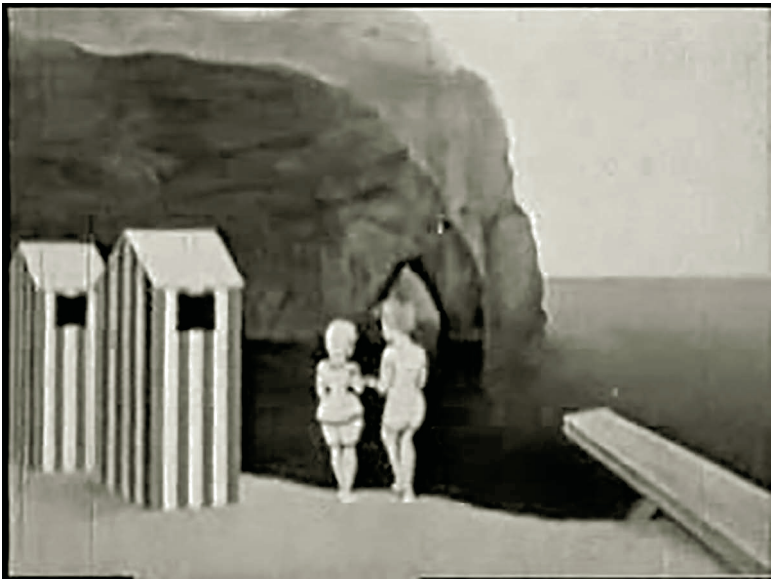


Figure 3.9



Figure 3.10 Famous film master Georges Méliès.



Figures 3.11–3.14 Fragment of *Le Voyage à travers l'impossible*.



Figure 3.12

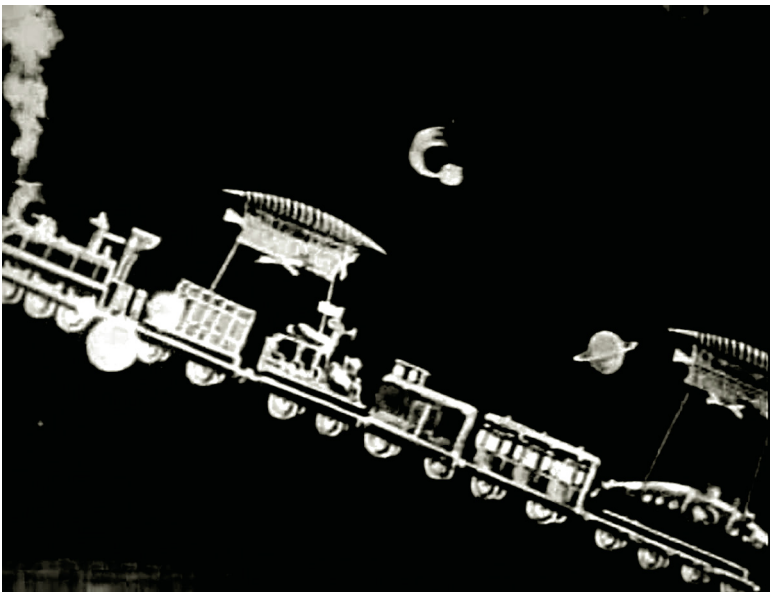


Figure 3.13



Figure 3.14

SECTION 2 MODERN CHINESE MOVIES

1. Everything starts from the movie

The development of Chinese movie began with foreign motion picture projection. In 1896, the Lumière brothers hired 20 assistants to conduct film projection in five continents, driven by the Western business strategy of expanding the market.

The milestone in the book *Shanghai Film Annals* (1960) states,

On July 3 of Chinese lunar calendar (August 11) in the 22nd year of the Reign of Emperor Guangxu of Qing Dynasty (1896), ‘You Yi Cun’¹ in the Xuyuan Garden of Tangjianong alley of Zhabei District, Shanghai put on Western shadow play. This is the first appearance of movie in China.

Since then, movie was introduced to China and prospered.

1. *The movie The Battle of Mount Dingjun*

1. *Creation background*

In 1903, Lin Zhusan, an overseas student in Germany, carried films and a projector back to China, and rented Tianle Theater in the Damochang area

of Qianmen, Beijing to put on movies. Ren Qingtai from Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio shot part of the Peking Opera *The Battle of Mount Dingjun* performed by Tan Xinpei as *laodan* (old woman) to celebrate his birthday in 1905. Since this Peking Opera movie, China has begun its independent creation of modern movies.

2. *Influence*

However, the Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio was only on a shoestring budget, let alone a film agency. The Chinese production industry did not truly begin until the emergence of “motion pictures department” of the Commercial Press. During this period, in addition to the Commercial Press, the successively emerging film production companies also included the US business people-invested “Asia Film Company,” “Magic Fairy,” “China,” “Shanghai,” and “New Asia.” As these companies were mostly theatre-turned, the subject matters and content of most movies derived from Chinese traditional opera and crude stage play. Moreover, they also began to take narrative shorts and long films. These were preliminary exploratory attempts on the art form – film.

2. *Narrative shorts The Difficult Couple and Zhuangzi Tests His Wife*

1. *Creation background*

In 1909, Shanghai Hongkou Theatre was set up. Thus, films were officially released in China. In 1913, China’s first narrative short *The Difficult Couple* was jointly made by Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, the first-generation filmmakers. The same year, Li Minwei from Hong Kong also completed his film *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife*.

2. *Theme and style*

The movie at that time was called “shadow play.” These movies were mostly preaching the promotion of virtues and the punishment of evils in society. Principally, their creation is based on dramatic conflicts, which often divide the characters into two types: the good and the evil. The movie temporal and spatial manifestations unfold a storyline in dramatic scenes, and the space and time of the film are used to show dramatic scenes. With regard to the characterization, it focuses more on reproducibility rather than expressiveness. The establishment of modern Chinese cinemas and the independent creation of movies are the cradle of animation. With movies in place, animation could thus gradually develop.



Figures 3.15–3.16 China's first movie was *The Battle of Mount Dingjun*, shot by Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio in 1905.



Figure 3.16

2. Characteristics of movies

At the early stage of Chinese modern filmmaking development, Chinese began to learn the film language. The achievements in technology and art have left valuable experience for the later animation (art film) creation. And the early filmmakers have the following characteristics in their film language exploration.

1. Language for camera scenes

Modern Chinese films have begun exploration and experimentation in terms of shooting scenes and camera movements. For example, the silent film *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* (directed by Li Beihai and written by Li Minwei) in 1913 was the first feature film produced in Hong Kong, which was shot in the open by using sunlight for the first time. Moreover, the director not only tried to use more than one shooting scene, but also used photographic special effects to make the ghost of Zhuangzi flickering in and out to enhance dramatic effects. In the film *An Overnight Fidget* (1913) and *Romance of the Western Chamber* (1927), close-up shots and animation special effects are used; moving long shots are used in the film *Dear Brother* (1924); and *Victims of Opium* (1916) tries the camera position switching. These artistic explorations provide experience for later animation photography and lens use.

2. Editing, splicing, and photographing

In regard to film editing and splicing, movies of this period also have their own characteristics. For example, *Women Skeletons* (1921) and *Little Lover* (1926) use spatiotemporal relationship in editing; *Returned Suddenly* (1920), *The Poor Children* (1924), and others use flashbacks; those using narrative montage include *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* (1923). The movie *Rampage* even uses the multi-camera editing and splicing technique, which was very advanced at that time. The use of special effects photography is particularly important for film creation. In the movie *Fairy Gives Flowers to the Earth* (1920), clouds have been overprinted on the negatives to make a special effect shot, producing the magical effects of fairies flying in the clouds. *Laborer's Love* (1922) made some good attempts at the picture switching, the use of cameras, and special effects photography.

3. Narrative techniques

In regard to film narration, along with the opening of Hollywood cinema chain in Shanghai, Shanghai has come into contact with and learned the narrative techniques from Hollywood in the first place. And the world film was transforming from silent to sound era. In the 1920s, the Chinese film industry was out of touch with the world's outstanding movies. After creators carried out a large number of experiments, the movie theatre has provided them with a chance to leapfrog. According to recollections of the then filmmakers, with the help of flashlights and notebooks, they all learned the camera language and narrative structure from Hollywood films in theatres.

4. Film theory of the Soviet Union

In the 1930s, in pace with the left-wing film campaign, film theory, especially that of the Soviet Union, entered China. Xia Yan, Zheng Boqi, and others have translated *On Film Directing*, *On Film Scripts*, and many other articles by the Soviet film master Vsevolod Pudovkin. The montage concept of the silent-film era of the Soviet Union has exerted a very strong influence on the Chinese film, which can be summed up as the contradictory conflict in the narration and the “metaphor” in the visual montage. These have brought a far-reaching influence on the later movie and animation creation. For example, the two movies *Twin Sisters* and *Song of the Fisherman* represented a turning point of Chinese film (the latter won the Moscow Film Festival honorary award in 1935, and this was the first time for a Chinese movie to gain an international reputation). The movies *Street Angel* (directed by Yuan Muzhi) and *Crossroads* (directed by Shen Xilin), which were completed in 1937 on the eve of China’s war of resistance against Japan, served as a perfect ending to this period of film making. From this point of view, China began to step on the road of learning from former Soviet Union movies, especially in terms of the key stage for animations done by the Wan brothers, fathers of Chinese animation.

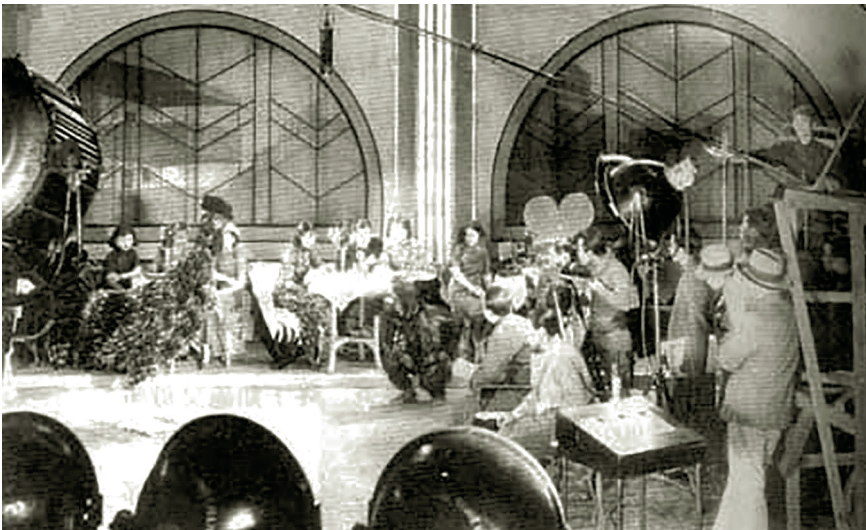


Figure 3.17 A film shoot in Shanghai during the 1930s. Shanghai was the birthplace of China’s films. *The Difficult Couple*, shot in 1913 by the Xinmin Company organized by Zhang Shichuan, Zheng Zhengqiu, and Jing Yingsan, was China’s first narrative short. Shanghai’s film industry experienced development amid troubles in the 1920s, and movie types were also enriched, including action film and romance. By the 1930s, Shanghai had already become another Hollywood of the world’s film industry, with an annual production of 400 to 500 feature films, which were not only loved by domestic audiences but also popular in South-east Asia.



Figure 3.18 Stage photo of *Zhuangzi Tests His Wife* in 1913. This was the first feature film produced by Hong Kong, which also initiated the Cantonese opera film.



Figure 3.19 Stage photo of *Song of the Fisherman* in 1935. This film won the Moscow Film Festival honorary award in 1935. This was the first time a Chinese movie gained an international reputation.