CHINESE NATIONAL CINEMA

Yingjin Zhang

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CHINESE NATIONAL CINEMA

What does it mean to be 'Chinese'? This controversial question has sparked off a never-ending process of image-making in Chinese and Chinese-speaking communities throughout the twentieth century. This introduction to Chinese national cinema, written for scholars and students by a leading critic, covers three 'Chinas': mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. It traces the formation, negotiation and problematization of the national on the Chinese screen over ninety years. Historical and comparative perspectives bring out the parallel developments in the three Chinas, while critical analysis explores thematic and stylistic changes over time.

As well as exploring artistic achievements and ideological debates, *Chinese National Cinema* also emphasizes industry research and market analysis. The author concludes that despite the rigid censorship systems and the pressures on filmmakers, Chinese national cinema has never succeeded in projecting a single unified picture, but rather portrays many Chinas.

Yingjin Zhang is Professor of Chinese, Comparative Literature, and Cultural Studies at the University of California-San Diego. His publications include *Screening China* (2002) and Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Chinese Film* (1998) which he co-authored and edited with Zhiwei Xiao.

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TO SU, MIMI AND ALEX

FOR LOVE, HOPE AND FUN WE
HAVE SHARED TOGETHER

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ABBREVIATIONS

b/w	black and white
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMPC	Central Motion Picture Company (Taiwan)
dir.	director
GIO	Government Information Office (Taiwan)
HKFA	Hong Kong Film Archive
HKIFF	Hong Kong International Film Festival
KMT	Kuomingtang (the Nationalist Party in China and Taiwan)
MP&GI	Motion Picture & General Investment (Hong Kong)
NFCC	National Film Censorship Committee (KMT, China)
PLA	People's Liberation Army (China)
PRC	People's Republic of China (mainland China)
RMB	Reminbi (PRC currency in yuan)
ROC	Republic of China (Taiwan)
ZDC	Zhongguo dianying chubanshe (China Film Press, Beijing)
ZDX	Zhongguo dianyingjia xiehui (China Film Association, Beijing)
ZDYYZ	Zhongguo dianying yishu yanjiu zhongxin (China Film Art Research Center, Beijing)
ZDZ	Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan (China Film Archive, Beijing)

1

INTRODUCTION

National cinema and China

'NATIONAL' CINEMA

At the start of the new millennium, the publication of another volume on national cinema may seem ironic for several reasons. First, in the age of globalization, operations of multinational corporations have increasingly criss-crossed and sometimes entirely obscured or bypassed national borders, while local, regional and transnational forces continue to undermine the legitimacy of any nation-state (Miyoshi 1993). Second, in response to the sweeping power of the 'global popular' (During 1997), media and cultural studies have looked to post-coloniality, postmodernity and transnationality for new conceptual frameworks, and any focus on a single national cinema appears rather narrow or even dated. Third, in the wake of new technological development, cinema itself is said to have entered its 'late' stage, and the current academic interest in early cinema and late cinema thus place in an unfavorable light a project that considers the entire history of a national cinema.

Admittedly, in regard to China, the national cinema paradigm seems utterly inadequate. China today consists of three territories: (1) The People's Republic of China (PRC) ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the mainland; (2) Hong Kong, formerly a British colony but since July 1997 a special administrative region of the PRC; (3) The Republic of China (ROC) controlled for decades by the Nationalists (KMT) but since 2000 ruled by the independence-minded Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan. The history of these territories further complicates the 'national' situation. The identification of mainland China as 'Communist' can only date back to 1949, the end of the KMT rule there. Similarly, the KMT control of Taiwan started only in 1945, at the end of half a century of Japanese occupation of the island (also known as 'Formosa', a term originated by Portuguese seafarers). For some, the history of the separation of film industries in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan 'has formed quite distinctive national cinemas within each territory' (Yeh 1998: 74). Such *territorial* concerns have occasioned a similar designation of national cinema status for Hong Kong and Taiwan. As Stephen Crofts notes, 'In Hong Kong, the national cinema outsells Hollywood by a factor of four to one' (1993: 55–6); Douglas Kellner

believes that 'the New Taiwan Cinema has produced an impressive succession of films comprising a distinctive national cinema' (1998: 101).

A closer scrutiny of Crofts' typology of national cinemas can help us locate its inadequacy vis-à-vis China. In 1993, he distinguished the following seven varieties (51–7). The first is European-model art cinema, characterized by art-house exhibition, state subsidy, a cultural mode of production, psychological characterization, narrational ambiguity and objective verisimilitude. The second is Third Cinema, distinct from the author's cinema and marked by its political oppositionality. The third is Third World and European commercial cinema, populist in nature and reliant on such genres as the thriller, comedy and soft-core pornography. The fourth are cinemas that ignore Hollywood, such as those in Hong Kong and India, with large domestic markets and stable export markets. The fifth are cinemas that imitate Hollywood, as in several Anglophone countries, but with limited success. The sixth are totalitarian cinemas, as in fascist Germany and Italy, Communist China and the former Soviet bloc. The seventh are regional or ethnic cinemas, produced by ethnic or linguistic minorities, as in Quebec, Canada. In 1998, Crofts revised his typology and offered eight varieties along with a chart to illustrate them by way of a vertical axis defined by such terms as 'industrial', 'cultural', 'political' and a horizontal axis reflecting the mode of production as regulated or controlled by the state. The newly added variety is United States cinema (including its medium-budget 'independent' films), and the list goes in a new sequence according to each cinema's relative place in relation to different modes of production: (1) United States cinema; (2) Asian commercial successes; (3) other entertainment cinemas in Europe and the Third World; (4) totalitarian cinemas; (5) art cinemas; (6) international co-productions; (7) Third Cinemas; and (8) sub-state cinemas (Crofts 1998: 389–90). Crofts' inclusion of the United States notwithstanding, his proposal – based on his conviction that nations and states have been drifting apart in recent decades – 'to write of states and nation-state cinemas rather than nations and national cinemas' (1998: 386) deserves careful evaluation in the case of Chinese cinema.

Although he does not mention Taiwan, it is worthwhile contemplating where Crofts may place Taiwan in his chart of national cinemas. The first possibility is to treat Taiwan as an example of 'Asian commercial successes'. This was indeed the case when Taiwan cinema did well domestically and in Southeast Asia in the 1960s (Lent 1990: 65; F. Lu 1998: 125–78). But this 'commercial mode' of production that ignores Hollywood is no longer in practice in Taiwan, for the sheer absence of a stable domestic market invalidates any attempt to construct a national cinema 'industry' in Taiwan nowadays. The second possibility is to treat Taiwan as an example of 'art cinema', which makes sense to a certain extent as Taiwan films have continued to win prestigious awards at international film festivals since the late 1980s. But a troubling question is that many such award-winning films are international co-productions and thus transnational in nature, and once again the national here becomes problematic. The third possibility is to

treat Taiwan cinema as a kind of 'totalitarian cinema', which is true for the majority of propaganda or 'policy films' (*zhengce pian*) from the state-run studios in the 1960s and 1970s (R. Huang 1994b). Yet, after the disintegration of the studio system, this 'political mode' of production is now a distant memory. The fourth possibility is to treat Taiwan films as an example of 'Third Cinema', distinguished by a radical oppositionality to the state on the one hand and to cultural and economic imperialism on the other. *Buddha Bless America* (Taiping tianguo, dir. Wu Nien-chen [Wu Nianzhen], 1996) is just one of very few such examples, which problematizes identity and identification in the era of postcoloniality (T. Lu 2002: 191–205).

Like Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China also challenge Crofts' paradigm. Although he explicitly qualifies Hong Kong as a 'nation-state cinema', how could Crofts ever explain that up to July 1997 Hong Kong remained a British colony and specifically lacked nation-state status? Further, how would he reconcile the fact that even after Hong Kong officially became a special administrative region of China in July 1997, the Taiwan government still classified Hong Kong films as 'guopian' (literally, 'national films')?[1] Similarly, Crofts solicits more questions when he twice mentions China's fifth generation in his 1993 typology. First, it is a kind of 'exile' filmmaking (included under Third Cinema) boosted by international funding but often 'banned' at home; second, it is 'political art cinema' peripheral to the core production of totalitarian cinema (1993: 54–7). Indeed, fifth generation films prove difficult to be pigeonholed in Crofts' typology because of a fundamental mutation. This group started as the state-subsidized production of an ideologically subversive 'art cinema' in the mid-1980s and has mutated to the internationally (or intra-nationally) funded co-production of 'ethnographic cinema' of 'authentic' Chinese culture and history since the early 1990s (Y. Zhang 2002: 220–51). Furthermore, where should we place the 'underground' filmmaking of China's sixth generation in the national cinema paradigm? Many of these films are not so much 'banned' in China as considered 'illegal' by the authorities because they did not wait for official approval for exhibition at international film festivals (Cui 2001). Ironically, the rumored 'banned' status often adds to the political capital of these films, which often win sympathy, prizes and future financial backing in the West and are acclaimed as 'truthful' depictions of contemporary Chinese life (Y. Zhang 2004).

Obviously, Chinese cinema does not sit easily in Crofts', or any national cinema paradigm, although I should clarify that the Chinese case as elaborated here is not meant to deny the validity of national cinema in many other countries. Here, I am tempted to follow Tom O'Regan and declare that Chinese cinema, like Australian cinema, 'is a messy affair', not the least because Chinese cinema is 'fundamentally dispersed' (1996: 2) – historically, politically, territorially, culturally, ethnically and linguistically. The messy state of Chinese cinema means that the question of the 'national' will not go away if we substitute 'national cinema' with 'nation-state cinema'. Indeed, the association with the nation-state is precisely what makes the term 'Chinese cinema' problematic.

'Chinese' cinema

Recently, the very term 'Chinese' has been put under intense interrogation, if not always 'under erasure' (Chow 1998: 24). Is 'Chinese' in 'Chinese cinema' meant as an ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political or territorial marker? If so, 'Chinese cinema' itself turns out to be a problematic designation. In ethnic terms, mainland China consists of the majority Han people and fifty-six officially classified national minorities, while Taiwan claims a long history of aboriginal peoples (*shandi ren*, literally 'mountain folks'), and Hong Kong has a multiracial, multi-ethnic population. In cultural terms, although most Chinese may choose to identify themselves with a civilization thousands of years old, in reality they are aware of regional differences such as those existing between northerners and southerners in the mainland, or mainlanders (*waisheng ren*) and islanders in Taiwan. Perhaps the most striking difference is the widespread, diverse, often mutually unintelligible dialects all over China. Thus, in linguistic terms, Mandarin cinema (*guoyu pian*) stands in opposition to Cantonese cinema in Hong Kong and to Taiwanese-dialect film (*Taiyu pian*) in Taiwan. In political terms, furthermore, ideological and institutional differences in the governments of mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan after 1949 have left indelible marks on film productions from what are often referred to as three Chinas.

The problematic nature of 'Chinese' as a signifier should suffice to demythify 'Chineseness' as a pre-given, monolithic and immutable essence. The question to be pursued further is whether we are content with speaking of Chineseness in the plural, as so many kinds of Chinese cinemas and their corresponding Chinesenesses. For Rey Chow, 'the problem of Chineseness is . . . not likely to be resolved simply by way of the act of pluralizing', and 'the poststructuralist theoretical move of splitting and multiplying a monolithic identity (such as *China* and *Chinese)* from within . . . is by itself inadequate as a method of reading' (1998: 24). Chow's warning of the theoretical inadequacy of pluralization notwithstanding, what we have seen since the mid-1990s is the apparent consensus that films from all three Chinas may be covered under the umbrella term 'Chinese cinema(s)', with or without the plural form.

The point at issue here is not that 'Chinese' will ever be an adequate marker. After all, critics like Yueh-yu Yeh (1998) can suggest no better term to replace 'Chinese cinema' than 'Chinese-language cinema' (*huayu dianying* or *Zhongwen dianying*). Anxiety about the equation of 'Chinese cinema' to 'Zhongguo dianying' (literally, 'cinema of the Chinese nation-state') finds a better articulation in Xiaobing Tang's explication of the term 'Chinese literature' (2000: 347):

> The history and vitality of Taiwan and Hong Kong literatures in the twentieth century . . . make an ever more compelling case that by 'modern Chinese literature' we understand not a narrow nation-state institution . . . nor just one geopolitically bounded literary production, but rather a vast literature written in modern Chinese and interacting with long and

> uneven literary and cultural traditions – regional as much as national . . . 'Chinese literature' should be usefully broadened to mean 'Zhongwen wenxue' (literature in Chinese) and replace a narrowing 'Zhongguo wenxue' (literature of China, or even, of the Chinese nation-state).

Ideally, like 'literature in Chinese', 'Chinese-language cinema' should be a broader term than 'Chinese cinema' as the former may include Chinese-language films directed by the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, West Europe and North America. However, 'Chinese-language cinema' may also be a *narrower* term because it is misleading to assume that what binds Chinese cinema together are its common linguistic features. A casual look at Chinese subtitles in many Hong Kong films since the 1980s would convince one that their intentionally *hybridized* linguistic practice – one that mixes standard written Chinese with invented characters to match spoken Cantonese – is meant precisely to highlight their regional difference and to subvert the myth of a unified, universal and unchanging Chinese script (Kam 1993). A new trend in the late 1990s also challenges an exclusively linguistic definition of Chinese cinema because several ethnic Chinese directors have made English-language films, sometimes with a separate soundtrack in Chinese.

It should be clear by now that a principal source of the anxiety about *Zhongguo dianying* is the association of *guo* in Chinese with the 'nation-state' or simply 'state'. But this problem is not as serious in Chinese as in English because, contrary to Crofts' proposal to envision a 'state cinema', we can strategically approach the 'Chinese' in 'Chinese cinema' in predominantly *cultural* and *historical* terms. For this book I prefer to use 'Chinese national cinema' to cover all films produced in mainland China (including those prior to 1949), Hong Kong and Taiwan, and instruct the reader to keep in mind all problematics or messiness – theoretical as well as geopolitical – surrounding 'China' and 'Chineseness'. This general and potentially *comparative* framework of Chinese national cinema enables us to trace the interactions between Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong (all marked by distinctive dialect uses) in early cinema and transnational cinema throughout the twentieth century. It also directs our attention to the remarkable similarities between nationalist state policies (such as film censorship and state subsidy) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime in the mainland and the Kuomingtang (KMT) regime in Taiwan after 1949. Rather than being constantly apprehensive about the unsettling, multifaceted Chineseness in Chinese national cinema, I believe it is the 'national' as historically constructed, circulated and contested in Chinese cinema that demands our in-depth investigation.

THE 'NATIONAL' AS CINEMATIC PROJECTS

Here, we must confront another kind of messiness unique to Chinese cinema: the Chinese language does not possess an exact equivalent to the English word

'nation'. A nation can be translated as both *minzu* (nation-people) or *guojia* (nation-state) in Chinese (Y. Zhang 2002: 152–7), and a national cinema thus means more than a nation-state cinema, for it also implies a cinema of, by or for the nation-people. The construction of the national has consequently become an ongoing project of contestation whereby the state and the people compete for the right to speak in the name of the nation.

Historically, this tension between people and state has resulted in a cyclical or spiral pattern of development in Chinese cinema: from cinemas of the nation-people during the 1920s through to the 1940s (e.g., early cinema and leftist cinema) to cinemas of the nation-state during the 1950s to the 1970s (e.g., socialist realism in mainland China and healthy realism in Taiwan) and back to cinemas of the nation-people during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., New Chinese Cinema marked by its cultural reflection and New Taiwan Cinema marked by its rewriting of Taiwan history). The increasing interdependence of people and state in both mainland China and Taiwan at the turn of the new millennium thus lends legitimacy to *guo/zu* (nation/people), a shorthand new coinage originated from Taiwan. But even this new integrative term is built on an inherent split of the two fundamentally incompatible parts, thereby further foregrounding the messiness of the national in Chinese cinema.

I suggest that we take the messiness of Chinese cinema *positively*, as a sign that producers, filmmakers, exhibitors, state regulators, critics and audiences in different Chinese geopolitical regions and over different periods of time have aspired to different constructions of the national. Given the fundamentally messy and dispersed attributes of Chinese cinema, its enunciation of the national must be examined at multiple levels, historically, typologically and theoretically, all at once.

Theoretically, Chris Berry proposes that we study 'national agency' as a missing term in current scholarship on cinema and the national. For him, 'the nation is not merely an imagined textual object but a historically and socially contingent construction of a form of collective agency' (1998: 132). His source of inspiration is Judith Butler's theory of citation and iterability, 'a flexible conceptual framework that suggests any identity is infinitely plural because it exists only in its infinitely different citations' (Berry 1998: 146). From there he recommends 'recasting national cinema as a multiplicity of projects, authored by different individuals, groups, and institutions with various purposes, but bound together by the politics of national agency and collective subjectivity as constructed entities' (1998: 132).

Yet Berry's 'national agency' is itself an ambiguous term. How do we measure national agency – against regional or local agency, international or transnational forces? On what kind of the 'national' does national agency rely – the nation-state or the nation-people? And what is the relationship between individual subjectivity and national agency? Questions like these notwithstanding, I find Berry's reformulation of national cinema as multiple and heterogeneous projects particularly useful to a study of the national in Chinese cinema. Following Berry, we can entertain a vision of several distinct but equally valid Chinese national

cinemas as 'socially, politically, and historically specific projects contesting each other in the construction of Chinese national agency, which is itself defined in various ways' (Berry 1998: 132). This vision allows for the possibility that a particular cinematic project of constructing national, regional or other collective agency or identity may exceed the unitary nation-state model, but it does not disqualify the project as belonging to a national cinema at the same time. Films like *Yellow Earth* (Huang tudi, dir. Chen Kaige, 1984), *City of Sadness* (Beiqing chengshi, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien [Hou Xiaoxian], 1989) and *Centre Stage* (Ruan Lingyu, dir. Stanley Kwan [Guan Jinpeng], 1992) are just a few examples here. Moreover, the flexibility of this vision enables us not only to reformulate China (or Chineseness) as 'a discursively produced and socially and historically contingent collective entity' (Berry 1998: 131), but it also clears the way for strategic allegiance or permutation by means of boundary-crossing, *intra-national* and *intercultural* citations of images, themes, motifs, styles, genres and other cinematic or cultural conventions – strategies that historically characterize film production in all three Chinas.

FILM HISTORIOGRAPHY

A historical perspective is paramount to sorting out instances of allegiance and permutation as well as contestation and deconstruction in Chinese cinema. At the same time, we must remember that film history as a mode of inquiry has its own limits. 'The history of the cinema,' Gerald Mast asserts, 'will never be written; we shall simply have to be satisfied with histories of the cinema' (1976: 298). Histories of Chinese cinema were published as early as the 1920s and 1930s (ZDZ 1996a: 1320–5, 1355–80, 1385–1432), and the 1990s saw a proliferation of such writings in both Chinese and English. Rather than a full-fledged typology of Chinese film historiography (Y. Zhang 2000), I want to briefly differentiate several *types* of conventional historiography of national cinema here.

First, the *auteurist historiography* is dedicated to the study of a canon of masterpieces, and the historian's task is to locate outstanding careers, representative works and distinguished styles. As an early proponent of this approach, Mast thus justifies his practice: 'Just as the history of the novel is, to some extent, a catalogue of important novels, . . . the history of film as an art revolves around important films (1976: 298). For Mast, film is undoubtedly the most reliable textual source from which the historian can proceed to study the 'great film minds' in the history of cinema. In accordance with this model, Kwok-kan Tam and Wilmal Dissanayake's *New Chinese Cinema* (1998) stages a hit parade of six great recent Chinese film minds – Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang (Yang Dechang) and Stanley Kwan. One problem with the auteurist approach is that it inevitably situates cinema in 'the province of the high art rather than popular culture' (Hayward 1993: 7), and the outcome is generally more biographical than historical.

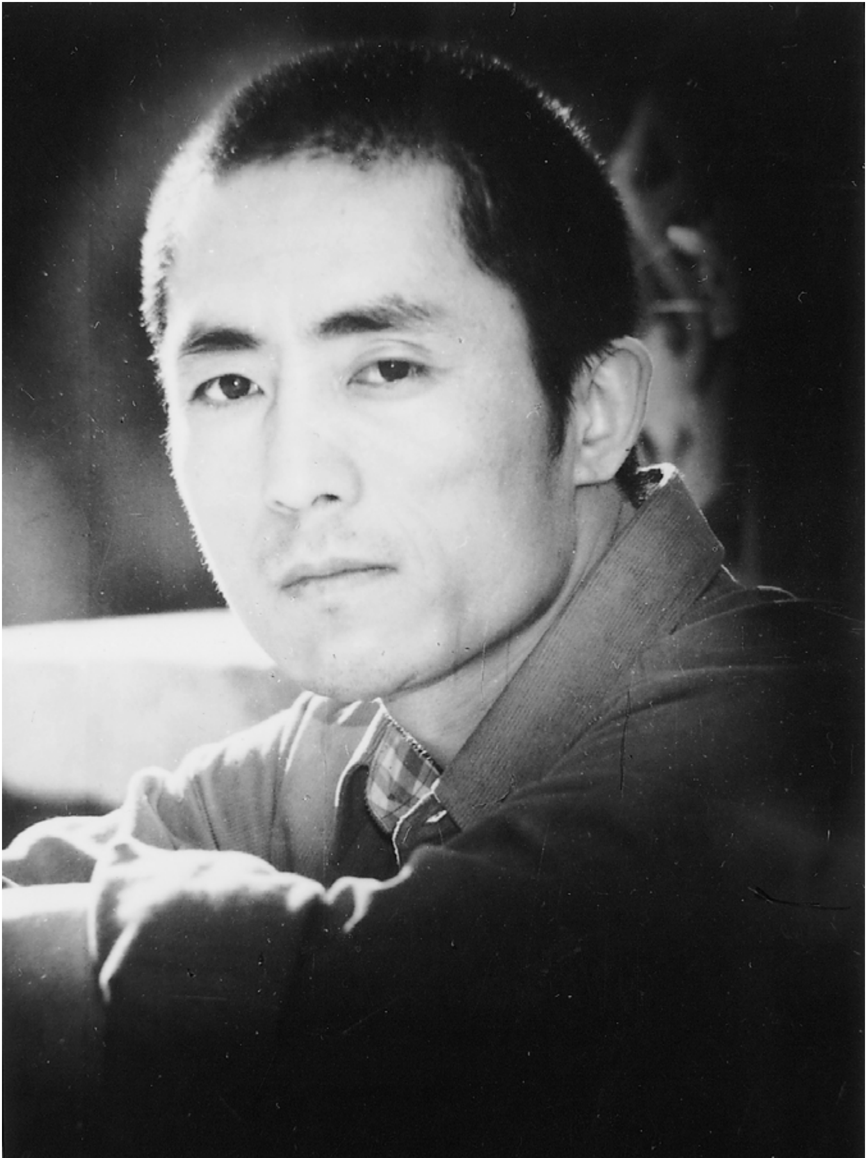

Figure 1.1 Zhang Yimou: an auteur from China's fifth generation

Second, the *movement approach* aims at a similarly 'monumental' history, foregrounding moments of exception at the expense of a more comprehensive picture. Typically, the complexity and heterogeneity of a national cinema is systematically reduced, and the priority is given to narrating 'a select series of relatively self-contained quality film movements [that] carry forward the banner

of national cinema' (Higson 1995: 22). Not surprisingly, the leftist film movement and the fifth generation have become virtually synonymous with pre-1949 and contemporary Chinese cinema in the mainland (J. Cheng *et al.* 1981; X. Zhang 1997), while New Taiwan Cinema stands for Taiwan film in general. What usually happens is that 'such cinema "movements" occupy a key position in conventional histories of world cinema, whose historiography is not only nationalist but also elitist in its search for the "best" films' (Crofts 1993: 62). One needs only to browse through the entries on China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in two recent film surveys to see the *reductive* nature of such a movement approach to film historiography (Hill and Gibson 1998: 543–81; Nowell-Smith 1996: 409–12, 693–713).

Third, the *theme-and-issues approach* concentrates on specific themes and genres in a national cinema (Elsaesser 1989: 1). The best recent example is perhaps Rey Chow's study of 'primitive passions' and auto-ethnography in contemporary Chinese cinema, albeit she intended it not so much as film history as a 'cultural history' of modern China (1995: x). A prominent advantage of this approach is its ability to diagnose 'symptoms' of an entire period by way of analyzing selected directors and films. An equally prominent disadvantage, however, is its narrow focus on textual evidence at the expense of film production, distribution, exhibition and reception.

In addition to the *text-based* and the *criticism-based* approaches (both exemplified by Chow), Andrew Higson mentions two other types of film historiography – the *industry* or *production-based analysis* and the *exhibition-led* or *consumption-based approach* (1989: 36–7). Higson advances 'an argument that the parameters of a national cinema should be drawn at the site of consumption as much as at the site of production of films; an argument, in other words, that focuses on the activity of national audiences and the conditions under which they make sense of and use the films they watch' (1989: 36). Chow's *Primitive Passions*, for instance, tells us little about how Chinese audiences make sense of the 'auto-ethnographic' films which they watch. For his study of the construction of a national cinema in Britain, Higson adopts a *case-study method* (1995: 272), using five films as a combined textual and contextual basis from which to unravel a fascinating history of film industry, filmmakers, film genres, film iconography, film audience and film criticism.

In Chinese film studies, production (industry) and consumption (audience) are two underdeveloped areas. Jay Leyda's chronology of film events and publications remains an isolated early attempt in English (1972), but there has been an increasing Chinese output in this area since the early 1990s, especially on Taiwan cinema (Chiao 1993; F. Lu 1998). A daunting problem facing the film historian has always been the lack of access to early films and film statistics. In the past decade, the publication of early film scripts and film reviews, together with the release of early films on VCDs (video compact disks) and extensive filmographies on mainland China and Hong Kong, have considerably eased the access problem. Such improvements of the research situation, admittedly still insufficient, should

encourage Chinese film scholars to consider Higson's following argument more seriously (1989: 45–6):

> To explore national cinema . . . means laying much greater stress on the point of consumption, and on the *use* of film (sounds, images, narratives, fantasies), than on the point of production. It involves a shift in emphasis away from the analysis of film texts as vehicles for the articulation of national sentiment and the interpellation of the implied national spectator, to an analysis of how actual audiences construct their identity in relation to the various products of the national and international film and television industries, and the condition under which this is achieved.

Following Higson, I propose that we pay *sufficient* attention to archival material and historical evidence before or while committing ourselves to interpretations and speculations fashioned by theoretical or ideological positions. To say the least, a willing consideration of various issues at both production and consumption ends may compel us to re-examine lacunae, discrepancies and contradictions in film scholarship itself.

HISTORICAL PERIODIZATION

It is no surprise that different theoretical models hold sway at different times in film historiography in different geopolitical locales (Y. Zhang 1999a: 8–9). The ways in which ideological issues may alter our view of Chinese film history are illustrated by two examples from mainland China. First, based on the principles of 'Marxist' historiography, Li Shaobai divides Chinese film history into nine periods (1991: 43–63): (1) initial experiment, 1905–23, (2) early artistic exploration, 1923–6, (3) crisis and turning, 1927–32, (4) revolutionary change, 1932–7, (5) war time, 1937–45, (6) artistic enrichment, 1945–9, (7) socialist cinema, 1949–65, (8) prohibition, 1966–76, and (9) further exploration, 1976–89. Li's case is symptomatic of recent Chinese film historiography in general. In spite of his declared intention to write a history of Chinese *film art*, a project that would differ significantly from the heavily politicized history he collaborated with Cheng Jihua and Xing Zuwen in the early 1960s (J. Cheng *et al.* 1981), he cannot but subscribe to the officially sanctioned historical position. The labeling of his periods thus reflects a fundamental dilemma, which he manages to address by giving priority alternatively to artistic concerns and sociopolitical events, thereby striking at least a semblance of balance.

Paying little attention to balance, Ma Debo advances a revisionist scheme of periodization (1995: 1–32): (1) primitive commercial film, 1905–31, (2) leftist film, 1932–7, (3) realist film, 1947–9, (4) propagandist film, 1949–76, (5) social film, 1980–1, (6) film of life (*rensheng dianying*), 1982–6, (7) cultural film, 1984–7, and (8) modern commercial film, 1987 to present. Clearly,

Ma's scheme is not complete because it omits the war years (1938–46) and the immediate post-Mao years (1977–9). The imbalance of his scheme is evident in his preference for the 1980s, which includes four periods with overlapping years. Ma's scheme is designed to advance his argument in favor of a *cyclical model* of development in Chinese cinema, which recognizes an extraordinary coincidence of commercial film as the dominating mode at the beginning as well as the end of the twentieth century. In an uncanny way, Chinese cinema seems to have returned to its commercial basis (i.e., film as entertainment or *yule*) after sixty years of ideological battle and political control (i.e., film as vehicle of morality or *zaidao*).

Both Li's attempt to redress film art and Ma's attempt to reclaim commercial film signal new developments in Chinese film scholarship. Each periodization scheme necessarily fulfills a different objective in film historiography. For my part, since the focus of this book is the national in Chinese cinema, I have devised a larger scheme of periodization in order to accommodate parallel, divergent and diverse developments in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The labels of my broad periodization are therefore more *thematic* in nature. I start with early cinema and national traditions (1896–1929) in Chapter 2, and move from cinema and the nation-people (1930–49) in Chapter 3 to the cinematic reinvention of the national in Taiwan (1896–1978) in Chapter 4 and the cinematic revival of the regional in Hong Kong (1945–78) in Chapter 5. I return to examine socialist cinema and the nation-state in the PRC (1949–78) in Chapter 6 and investigate cinema and national/regional cultures in all three Chinas (1979–89) in Chapter 7. I conclude with a discussion of cinema and the transnational imaginary and update developments in the new millennium (1990–2002) in Chapter 8. In all, my scheme aims to provide a flexible framework for a *comparative study* of cinema and the national in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan in the twentieth century.

CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

Considering the fact that an up-to-date, comprehensive history of Chinese cinema in English is not yet available at the time of writing, I am convinced that a *chronological history* is the place to start in our endeavor to capture the richness of the national as cinematic projects in twentieth-century China. Such a history naturally follows the chronological order, and its approach is necessarily *synthetic* and interpretative, relying in turns on industry analysis, biographic sketch, stylistic consideration, textual criticism and audience study, among others. Given the fundamental diversity of Chinese cinema, I have devised a multi-layered, multi-focused scheme of presentation. In each chapter, I divide a period into phases, organizing information and offering analysis in regard to studios, producers, markets (distribution, exhibition, audience), genres, trends, artists (directors, screenwriters, stars), films, arts (aesthetics, style, technology), and sometimes also film publications and criticism.

My emphasis on a chronological history may depart from a new move in contemporary historiography: namely, the move from global history to sectorial or fragmentary history, from monumental history to diagrammatic history, from historicist history to structural history, and from documental history to conjectural history (Talens and Zunzunegui 1997). But my choice of a more conventional method in this book is conditioned by the current state of Chinese film scholarship in English. We must first of all explore a wide range of articulations of the national in Chinese cinema in order to appreciate, modify, challenge or subvert the conceptual frameworks of these articulations and the scholarship based on them. Simply put, we must be patient and willing to conduct primary research and complete the *constructive* phase of film historiography before we can proceed with deconstruction and reconstruction in any confident, meaningful way.

Ostensibly, this book does not attempt to embrace the totality of Chinese cinema, nor does it entertain the possibility of exploring all archival resources or exhausting all interpretive frameworks related to the national in Chinese cinematic projects. Similarly, this book does not dwell solely on the 'great film minds' or a body of canonized texts for an excavation of the essential Chineseness, nor does it privilege the marginal or the visionary merely for the sake of endorsing oppositional or alternative politics. Other caveats must follow. Given a limited space, this book concentrates primarily on feature films; documentary, animation and other types of film production – as valid articulations of the national themselves – regrettably have to await further investigation. The limited space also renders it unfeasible for me to cite all previous studies, although I appreciate their invaluable contributions, each in its own way, to our understanding of Chinese cinema in general. The access problem has prevented a more in-depth study of such topics as prewar Hong Kong cinema, the Japanese-sponsored Manchurian Motion Pictures, and wartime production in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. These imbalances, however, do not impact the overall picture of Chinese cinema narrated in the following chapters. As new archival material surfaces, a more comprehensive history will surely arrive to further our knowledge of Chinese cinema in all its diversity and complexity.

2

CINEMA AND NATIONAL TRADITIONS, 1896–1929

INTRODUCTION: EARLY CINEMA

This chapter covers the period of early cinema in China. The period started in 1896, a year in which film was first exhibited in China, and ended in 1929, a year in which the crisis-ridden film industry struggled to restructure itself and the premiere of American talkies in a major Shanghai venue signaled the impending technological change.

This period witnessed several events that would fundamentally change the history of modern China. The Republican Revolution of 1911 overthrew the Qing court and terminated the imperial system of government in China. The newly created Republic of China, however, did not achieve central control as provincial and regional warlords fought against each other and ruled most of the nation. On the cultural and political fronts, the famous May Fourth movement, which introduced new ideas such as enlightenment and modernity by denouncing age-old Chinese traditions like Confucianism, began in Beijing in 1919 and spread to major cities around the country, and the CCP was founded in Shanghai in 1921. But these two events did not immediately impact the film industry, which reveled in traditional narratives and conservative ideologies. The Northern Expedition launched by the first KMT–CCP united front conquered much of Southern China and brought optimism to the war-torn nation. Yet the bloody crackdown on the CCP engineered by Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) in 1927 and the ensuing years of autocratic rule made the issue of political allegiance precarious for those engaged in film production and criticism. Nonetheless, 1928 marked the beginning of institutional changes favorable to centralized governance and economic development after the KMT government relocated the nation's capital to Nanjing (literally, 'southern capital') from Beijing (literally, 'northern capital', hence renamed Beiping until Beijing was reinstated as the capital of the PRC in 1949).

In terms of film history, this period can be divided into three phases. First, in the phase of *cinema as attractions* (1896–1921), Chinese filmmakers treated film as a new technology possessing an enormous appeal to the audience and hence with potential financial as well as educational benefits. Early short films

were intimately wedded to traditional theater (*jiuju* or *xiqu*) and modern drama (*xinxi* or *xinju*), the latter widely known as the 'civilized play' (*wenmingxi*) from the late 1900s to the early 1920s. Second, in the phase of *cinema as narration* (1922–6), filmmakers began to treat film simultaneously as a business by organizing production companies with explicit objectives and investing in distribution and exhibition chains and as a profession by launching film magazines, establishing film schools and publishing film books. The success of feature-length films like *Orphan Rescues Grandfather* (Guer jiuzhu ji, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1923; 10 reels), some of them influenced by a kind of popular urban fiction known as 'mandarin ducks and butterflies' (*yuanyang hudie*; 'butterfly' hereafter), strengthened the status of film as a legitimate art form. Third, in the phase of *cinema and speculations* (1927–9), cheap primitive genre films and the ferocious competition among studios overwhelmed the market and resulted in financial ruin for innumerable companies in Shanghai. The immense popularity of martial arts films like *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple, I–XVIII* (Huoshao honglian si, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1928–31, 27 hours total) set a record for serial production and pushed this new genre to its market limits.

In general, early Chinese cinema did not establish itself as a full-fledged 'industry' because the security of a vertically integrated system was not in place and there was no concentrated ownership simultaneously coordinating the operations of investment, production, distribution and exhibition as a whole. Independent and under-funded in most cases, production companies rose and fell regardless of their ideological intentions, artistic visions or financial wellbeing, thus creating a chaotic film market not unlike that of France at the same time. In terms of film technology, especially camerawork and post-production, Chinese filmmakers relied heavily on foreign expertise at first but managed to learn the basics along the way. Similarly, exhibition venues changed from the teahouse through the opera theater to the modern cinema, as film itself evolved from a leisure attraction to a narrative art over these two decades.

Understandably, the period of early cinema in China is linked to its 'prehistory' as well. Generally, 28 December 1895 is regarded as the birthday of cinema, this being the day that the Lumière brothers showed their documentary shorts at the Grand Café in Paris. Shortly afterwards, on 11 August 1896, a French showman introduced 'Western shadowplays' (*xiyang yingxi*) amidst variety shows at the Xu Gardens (Xuyuan), an entertainment complex in Shanghai, thus marking cinema's first entrance in China. In July 1897 the American film made its debut in China when James Ricalton of New Jersey exhibited a program of Thomas Edison movies at the Tianhua Teahouse in Shanghai, charging tickets at four levels ranging from 0.1 to 0.5 yuan (Du 1988: 7) (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2).[1] In 1903 Spaniard Antonio Ramos took over the business started in 1899 by his countryman Galen Bocca and screened films at public venues in Shanghai such as a skating rink, teahouses and restaurants. Ramos' consistent effort

Table 2.1 Approximate value of Chinese currencies, 1920s–90s

General	*Item*	*Equivalent*
1927–9	1 yuan (silver coin)	US$0.38–0.45
Jan–Dec 1930	1 yuan (silver coin)	US$0.23–0.38
Jan 1931–Feb 1933	1 yuan (silver coin)	US$0.20–0.25
March 1933–May 1935	1 yuan (silver coin)	US$0.20–0.42
Nov 1935–July 1937	1 yuan (*fabi* or legal tender)	US$0.30
1960s–90s	HK$7.8	US$1
1980s–90s	RMB8.3	US$1
Specific	*Item*	*Equivalent*
1930	3 yuan	US$1
1934	2.4 yuan	US$1
1948	HK$4.5	US$1
1951–8	NT$32.28 (exchange to US$)	US$1
1951–8	NT$26.35 (exchange from US$)	US$1
1999	NT$32.27	US$1
2001	NT$33	US$1
1955–8	NT$7–8	HK$1

Sources: Y. Ding 1998: 105–24; GIO 2001: 154; J. Gong 1967: 479; R. Huang 2001: 40; Kubo 1986: 54; L. Lee 1999: 83; F. Lu 1998: 57; Z. Wang 1998: 64; Z. Zhang 1990: 303–4.

Note: After 1937, the unstable wartime situation and skyrocketing postwar inflation made it impossible to calculate exact equivalents between Chinese yuan and US dollars.

eventually made his programs at the Green Lotus Pavilion profitable (Leyda 1972: 2–3). Also in 1903 Lin Zhusan, who had studied in Germany, brought home a projector and reels of film and showed them at the Tianle Teahouse in Beijing (S. Cheng *et al.* 1927: chap. 2).

Just as foreign businessmen had to rely on traditional entertainment venues to attract Chinese audiences to the newly imported Western shadowplays, the Chinese on their part insisted on claiming certain credit for the invention of cinema by tracing comparable shadowplays in their *national traditions.* The inverted picture shown in a black box was said to exist in China as early as 475–221 BC and around 140 BC the Chinese invented the 'lighted shadowplay', in which papercut human figures were projected onto a screen for enjoyment. The lighted shadowplay reportedly had traveled to the Middle East and Southeast Asia by the thirteenth century, and between 1767 and 1776 it reached France (as *ombres chinoises*) and England (J. Cheng *et al.* 1981: 1: 4–5). The term 'shadowplay' (*yingxi*) – as well as its derivative, 'Western shadowplay' (i.e., film or *dianying*, literally 'electric shadows') – thus foregrounds a conscientious effort of the Chinese to treat film as historically related to and conceptually indebted to some kind of Chinese tradition. As shall be clearer below, institutionally as well as theoretically, early Chinese filmmakers depended on their experience with

Table 2.2 Sample ticket prices in China, 1890s–1940s

Year	*Theater*	*Type of film*	*Prices (yuan)*
1897	Tianhua Teahouse	Edison movies	0.1–0.5
1910s–20s	YMCA	domestic comic shorts	0.1
1910s–20s	Great World	midnight show	0.1–0.2
early 1920s	Embassy	foreign and domestic	1–5
1920s	Pavilion, Beijing	foreign	up to 2
1920s	Zhenguang, Beijing	weekend foreign matinee at student discount	0.1
1932	first-run venues, e.g., Capitol, Lanxin, Majestic	foreign sound	1–2
1932	first-run venues, e.g., Cathay, Carlton, Grand, Strand	foreign and domestic	0.6
1932	second-run venues, e.g., Paris, Iris, Odeon, Peking, Palace, Embassy, Apollo, Wiley	foreign and domestic	0.4
1932	second-run venues, e.g., Star, Guanghua, New Palace	foreign and domestic	0.3
1932	third-run venues, e.g., Empire, Carter, China, Hongkew	foreign and domestic	0.2
1932	others, e.g., Zhabei	unknown	0.1
1936	cheapest to highest	foreign and domestic	0.2–2
1940	first-run venues	foreign and domestic	3.2
1941	average venues, Manchuria	Japanese and domestic	0.2–1.5
1941	teahouse-type venues, Beijing	domestic silent	0.1–0.2
1942	first-run venues	Japanese and domestic	8
1945	first-run venues	domestic	60
1948	cheapest to highest	foreign and domestic	0.2–1.2 million

Sources: Y. Ding 1998: 105–24; Du 1988: 7; Fu 1997: 72–7; Fu 1998: 91–9; Hou 1996: 199–218; Leyda 1972: 2–3; S. Li and Hu 1996: 104; Manzhou zazhi she, March–April 1941; ZDZ 1996a: 191–8, 1496, 1509, 1569.

Note: All theaters are in Shanghai unless otherwise indicated.

theater-drama and deliberately validated 'play' or 'theater' (*xi*) as foundational to Chinese film practice.

CINEMA AS ATTRACTIONS, 1896–1921

For foreign exhibitors and Chinese filmmakers alike, the primary concern in the initial phase was to *attract* the Chinese audience to Western shadowplays as an acceptable form of modern entertainment. Zhang Shichuan thus remembered his first reaction to filmmaking in 1913: 'since it is making shadow "plays", I naturally associated it with traditional "plays" in China' (ZDZ

1996a: 401). Immersed in national traditions, Chinese theater thus provided a focus both as an institutional base and as an artistic model for early cinema in China.

Early exhibition: teahouse, tent and theater

To attract audiences, early exhibitors relied solely on old-fashioned venues like teahouses and theaters. Parallels between watching a traditional stage performance and early cinema can be drawn here. Characteristically of a teahouse, viewers sat at tables, while tea, snacks and occasionally hot towels were served (ZDZ 1996a: 1381). Since patrons came to such occasions as much to meet friends as to enjoy movies as exotic spectacles, they tended to drink, chat, laugh, shout, applaud, cough and spit at any time (ZDZ 1996a: 182–3, 608). This means that during a show the theater was a noisy or even chaotic place, a situation which did *not* bother the early audience too much. As reminisced by the eminent butterfly writer Bao Tianxiao, a small theater inside the Shanghai Great World Amusement Park regularly featured stage plays from eight o'clock in the evening to midnight at 0.3–0.4 yuan per ticket and showed movies from midnight to one-thirty in the morning at 0.1–0.2 yuan (see Table 2.2, p. 16). The midnight shows did brisk business because this was the time when courtesans arrived to enjoy themselves (ZDZ 1996a: 1509). Indeed, such a combination of film exhibition and theater performance had existed in China for decades. After its renovation in 1906, Beijing's Grand Shadowplay Theater (Daguanlou, 400 seats) featured both plays and movies. These examples confirm that the traditional theater seemed to provide the most reliable place to attract the Chinese and familiarize them with early cinema.

In addition to featuring movies amidst variety shows, some theaters developed what were known as 'chained-sequence plays' (*lianhuanxi* or *liansuoju*), a program of alternate live theatrical performances and film screenings (normally with five to six transitions). Modeled after its Japanese counterpart, the chained-sequence play sought to doubly satisfy the audience's needs by making the film and the theater complement each other. Just as the film might extend the theater through location shootings, the theater would heighten the artistic impact by introducing singing and chanting at the right moment, something cinema could not deliver in the silent era. But the requirement that the same actors appear both on stage and on the screen proved logistically too difficult to manage and financially too expensive to produce. Consequently, chained-sequence plays went out of fashion (M. He 1956: 49–50).

Fairy Maiden (Lingbo xianzi; 9 reels) and *Red Rose* (Hong meigui) were two chained-sequence plays jointly produced in 1925 by the Shanghai New Stage (Xin wutai) and Xu Zhuodai's Kaixin Film Company. Although Xu admitted these productions were financial disasters (ZDZ 1996a: 377), film historian Gu Jianchen believed that they foreshadowed the full-scale 'costume drama' (*guzhuang pian*). Gu also noted that in 1925 the Shared Stage (Gong wutai),

another Shanghai theater, competed with the New Stage and produced a chained-sequence play, *Princess Lotus Flower* (Lianhua gongzhu; 9 reels) (ZDZ 1996a: 1365–6). Later that year, with some members from this production, Gu Wuwei established Great China (Da Zhongguo), which produced two sequels to *Princess Lotus Flower* (1926; 9 reels each). There is no indication whether these sequels were chained-sequence plays or entirely films. But what matters is that, in spite of its ephemeral existence, the chained-sequence play had served its function as a transitional, *hybrid* form of visual-performing arts that moved early Chinese audiences closer to a full screen experience.

As an alternative to the theater, an early exhibitor might rent an empty lot and set up a tent for screening, as an Italian expatriate A. E. Louros did in 1907. The audience paid a few coins to sit on rows of narrow benches placed on uneven, dirty and sometimes muddy ground. Ventilation was poor, and no heating or cooling system was installed inside the tent. As in a traditional theater, men and women were required to sit in separate seats, and the police was routinely invited inside to keep order (Hou 1996). In terms of creature comfort, these tents were worse than noisy theaters, and it was not long before enterprising businessmen started to invest in movie theaters in China.

In 1907 the first Chinese movie theater, the Pavilion Cinema (Ping'an), was built in Beijing.[2] As with most other cinemas to come, the venue was foreign-owned and served mostly foreign patrons (ZDZ 1996a: 177). A year later, buttressed by a steady income from teahouse screenings, Ramos completed the Hongkou Cinema in Shanghai, a simple sheet-iron structure of 250 hard seats, yet the first among dozens of modern theaters to be erected in the treaty port in the following decades (S. Li and Hu 1996: 19–20).

Early audience: class, gender and motivation

Corresponding to the changes taking place in theaters, Chinese audiences of early cinema had also transformed themselves. In the early years, traditional theater fans might venture side trips into the exotic spectacles offered by Western shadowplays. Typically, these early shorts featured smiling female dancers, a woman bathing in a tub, passengers on a giant steamship, a bicycle race involving a head-on collision, and the police and passers-by chasing a troublemaker on the street (Leyda 1972: 2; Y. Zheng 1982: 1–2). As time went by, students, clerks and other educated urbanites were no longer content with action-filled slapstick. Instead, they would join the gentry and other urban leisure classes in appreciating the screen equivalents of butterfly stories in the 1920s. The adaptation of traditional narratives of legendary heroes and historical figures further accustomed an audience of the literate and the illiterate alike to watching films as a satisfactory experience. More satisfied perhaps were those upper-class ladies who brought their tailors to a show and ordered them to custom-make any screen fashions that happened to catch their fancy (Cambon 1995: 34). In

sum, from the turn of the century to the 1920s, the shadowplay evolved from an occasional visual treat to a staple in entertainment.

In 1927 Chen Dabei divided Beijing audiences into four groups: (1) the majority liked exciting stories with convoluted plots; (2) women liked sentimental tales and tear-jerkers; (3) more senior, experienced audiences liked characterization in depth; (4) a minority of intellectuals liked to study meaning in a film (ZDZ 1996a: 606). But even the last group might watch films simply for entertainment. A 1930 poll of eighty-five college sophomores demonstrated that seventy of them watched films for fun, compared to fifteen for learning English or for a taste of history (ZDZ 1996b: iv). The pressure of entertainment had engendered widespread opportunism in the film industry of the time, and even serious filmmakers had to concede to the market demand. Yang Xiaozhong admitted in 1926 that the most crucial thing was to cater to the taste of audiences of the middle and lower social strata. Zheng Zhengqiu was cognizant in 1925 of the necessity to adjust his goal of social education by adopting a pragmatic policy of 'commercialism with a dose of conscience' (ZDZ 1996b: v).

Early production: Yaxiya, Huanxian and Zhang Shichuan

As with early exhibition, it was a foreigner who established the first production company in China. Benjamin Brodsky (aka Brasky), a Jewish-American of Russian descent, founded Yaxiya (China Cinema Company, aka Asia Film) in Shanghai in 1909 and produced shorts in Shanghai and Hong Kong (Law 2000: 45–6). Nothing substantial came out until 1912, when Brodsky transferred his business to two compatriots, T. H. Suffert and a Mr Yashell. As manager of a life insurance company in Shanghai, Yashell knew little of the film business in China, so he entrusted production to his associate Jing Yingsan's nephew, Zhang Shichuan. At age 21 and speaking Pidgin English, Zhang recruited his playwright friend Zheng Zhengqiu to form Xinmin (literally, 'new people'), a film company based on Minming, a theater troupe organized by Zhang and Zheng and devoted to civilized plays. Since the stage performance took place in the evening and their employees had little to do during the day, Zhang and Zheng were particularly receptive to the film project, as their contract with Yaxiya had shifted the burden of their salaries to Yashell.

With Yaxiya responsible for funding (US$30,000) and technology, and Xinmin for screenplay, directing and acting, an example of *film co-production* was set in Chinese film history. Yashell first wanted to adapt *Wronged Ghosts in Opium Den* (Heiji yuanhun), a popular civilized play from the New Stage, but gave up the idea when he found out about its anti-drug theme and the theater owners' asking price (5,000 yuan). Instead, *The Difficult Couple* (Nanfu nanqi, dir. Zhang and Zheng; 4 reels), a comedy poking fun at traditional wedding rituals in Zheng's hometown in Guangdong province, became Yaxiya's first feature, which premiered at the New New Stage (Xinxin wutai) in September 1913.

Despite this successful cooperation, Zheng left Yaxiya to devote his energy to the civilized play and became known as a leading playwright and drama critic who would revive the genre in the mid-1910s (ZDZ 1996a: 398; Tan 1992: 1–216). Meanwhile, Zhang knew little about his work as film 'director' or *daoyan*, a Chinese term Lu Jie would invent in 1922. With Yashell standing behind a fixed camera, Zhang enjoyed directing his actors against a simple painted backdrop. In lieu of a full-scripted screenplay, early directors like Zhang used *mubiao*, something Zheng had adopted from the practice in the Beijing opera and the civilized play. A *mubiao* is divided in four parts: (1) number of acts; (2) indoor and outdoor settings in each act; (3) appearance of characters; and (4) main plots. Further details might be added to the plot section, such as gestures, facial expressions and main dialogue, but most actors *improvised* in the middle of shooting (ZDZ 1996a: 1574). Intertitles (*zimu*), sometimes *bilingual* in semi-literary Chinese and English, were added after the film was completed. Indeed, as Yaxiya's other American boss, Suffert was responsible for writing English intertitles and synopses (*benshi*).

Normally, Zhang shot a comic short in four to five days. Modeled after American slapsticks in style but drawn from funny acts preceding the feature civilized plays, these shorts were never welcomed by major theaters and had to be scheduled after the shows of civilized plays or at the YMCA at 0.1 yuan a ticket (ZDZ 1996a: 1569). A more reliable source of income came from the sales to Southeast Asia, where comedies were popular among the less educated Chinese diaspora. Yaxiya's fortune ran out as the outbreak of World War I in 1914 interrupted the supply of German film stock (ZDZ 1996a: 1388–91).

Zhang returned to manage Minming in addition to his uncle's amusement park, but he resumed film activities when American film stock arrived in 1916. With a few friends, he raised 6,000 yuan and established Huanxian. Since *Wronged Ghosts in Opium Den* continued to play to a capacity audience in Shanghai, Zhang rented equipment from Louros and directed a 5-reeler of the same title. This time, Zhang varied the position of the camera between takes, employing long, medium, close and extreme close-up shots. Although the picture had a decent theater run, Huanxian went out of business and became the first of innumerable 'one-picture companies' in China.

Commercial Press: popular education and national culture

A more prominent player in early cinema was the all-powerful Commercial Press based in Shanghai. In 1917 the company had acquired a Pathé camera, a printing machine and other equipment from an American for less than 3,000 yuan and installed them in its photography studio. In 1918 Commercial Press formally instituted the Motion Picture Department. Having obtained the recently invented lamps in 1919 after aiding the location shooting of a Universal picture in China, the board of trustees approved the funding for new equipment, set