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SOUND IMAGES, ACOUSTIC CULTURE, AND TRANSMEDIALITY IN 1920S-1940S CHINESE CINEMA

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Table of Contents

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation, entitled *Sound Images, Acoustic Culture and Transmediality in 1920s-1940s Chinese Cinema*, explores film sound aesthetics and aural culture in 1920s-1940s China, and will contribute to Cinema and Media Studies, Chinese Studies, and Sound Studies. I provide a thorough account and theorization of soundscape in Chinese context with the aim of bringing into sharper focus the interdisciplinary potential of scholarship on film sound and acoustic culture, offering new insights that push beyond assumptions based solely on European and American examples. Through case studies of early Chinese film of diverse genres and modes (e.g., musicals, amateur travelogues, urban comedies, and opera films), I demonstrate how the heterogeneous cinematic soundscape engaged and resonated with other modern audiovisual media and art/mass cultural forms, including the phonograph, radio, modernist literature, popular music, oral storytelling, and traditional Chinese opera.

The first chapter, "Sound in Transition and Transmission: The Evocation and Mediation of Acoustic Experience in *Two Stars in the Milky Way* (1931)," investigates the evocation and transmission of sound and music mediated by modern sonic media such as the phonograph and radio in Chinese silent and partial sound films, particularly in *Two Stars in a Milky Way* (Shi Dongshan, 1931). I argue that the technological belatedness of film sound gave rise to a distinctive Chinese cinematic style and audiovisual culture permeating Shanghai urban space and popular consciousness.

In the second chapter, "Metaphoric Sound, Rhythmic Movement, and Transcultural Transmediality: Liu Na'ou and *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933)," I examine how the Taiwanese/Japanese/Shanghainese writer and filmmaker Liu Na'ou's silent amateur travel film and theoretical writings incorporate features of the "city symphony" film mode and "metaphoric sound." I investigate how camera movement and bodily movement, rhythm and musicality intermingle with the concept of transmediality, creating a vivid sense of "metaphorical sound." Furthermore, I explore how

these intertwined concepts and practices created new aesthetic possibilities in 1930s Shanghai and contributed to a distinctively cosmopolitan vision.

Chapter three examines Chinese filmmaker Yuan Muzhi's incorporation and reinvention of Hollywood and Soviet influence (in terms of film sound technique and musical concepts) in the musical-comedy *City Scenes* (1935). I consider how the experimental deployment of sound elements in *City Scenes* obscures and defies the conventionally conceived boundaries between the human voice, sound effects, and music, articulating a sort of "auditory grotesque." I also discuss how the interactions between the acoustic and the visual enhance the material heterogeneity in the film and create a sort of *cinematic fantasia*, which corresponds to the spontaneous film score and the implications of the musical form, *fantasia*, thereby strengthening the satirical social critique and unruly energy.

In the fourth chapter, I explore how the female voice-over in Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* (1948) draws inspiration from Beijing opera and traditional landscape painting, imbuing the film with a theatrical tinge and poetic atmosphere, accentuating a fluid female subjectivity and transmedial audiovisual aesthetic. It highlights how "audiovisual redundancy" and gender discourse draw parallels between the human body, landscape, and nation in the ruins during the 1940s Civil War.

Overall, my project traces the emergence of a modern audiovisual culture as it intersected with new understandings of the urban mediasphere and transmedial practice in Republican China. I explore the dynamic interplay between sound, visuality and sensuous experience, and between cinema's specificity as a medium and its circulation in the media ecology and global media culture.

INTRODUCTION

Under the blue sky, puzzled by an eternal Riddle
Stirs our thick closed body of twenty years;
Which, enkindled like the bird's chirping, made of the same clay,
Burns and finds nowhere to settle.
Ah, light, shade, sound and color, all stripped naked;
Pantingly wait, to merge into renewed combination.

Mu Dan (1918-1977), *Spring*

A vital aspect of human sensory experience, perception, and aesthetic expression, sound—its production, reproduction and mediation—has attracted much academic and popular interest. Scholars have perceptively traced acoustic media, cinematic sound aesthetics, and aural culture across the modern era in studies that extend across the fields of cinema and media studies, musicology, anthropology, and cultural studies. However, most have formulated their theories of sound based on observations and analyses of European-American cases and phenomena. In comparison to the extensive research on Euro-American film sound and sonic cultures, equivalent examinations of international counterparts appear limited and underdeveloped. Moreover, almost no academic work has addressed the impact of sound technology, media, and culture on film aesthetics and audiovisual experience specifically in the Chinese media environment. Studies of Chinese-language cinema, with the exception of a small body of scholarship on popular film music and cinematic soundscape, are largely preoccupied with the visual and narrative aspects of cinema and socio-cultural history. Yet film has always been an *audiovisual* medium as well as industrial/artistic/cultural form; adopting a sound-sensitive approach to early Chinese film history and culture will enrich our understanding of the technological nuances and cinematic style of early

Chinese cinema, remapping the contours of the field.[1] Sound studies can also provide a renewed conceptual framework and methodology for investigating early Chinese cinema through transmedial, transcultural, and trans-sensory perspectives. The discussion of alternative, experimental sound technologies and practices in early Chinese cinema will, I argue, yield a broader view and a more profound understanding of cinematic sound aesthetics and theory in world film history as well as in sound studies more generally.

Situated at the intersection of acoustic culture and Chinese studies, a fertile space to explore the interdisciplinary potential of scholarship on film sound, my dissertation investigates cinematic sound, aural culture, and their socio-political implications in 1920s-1940s semi-colonial metropolitan Shanghai. Tracing the emergence of a modern audiovisual culture interconnected with urban space and transmedial practice, I provide a detailed theoretical and historical account of the Chinese soundscape during this period and offer new insights that push beyond prevailing assumptions about cinematic sound theory and practice, which are based solely on European and American examples. Encompassing a range of case studies of early Chinese films from diverse genres and modes—film musicals, amateur travelogues, urban comedies, and opera films, among others—my dissertation demonstrates how the period's cinematic soundscape—composed of music, human voice and ambient sounds—interacted with other modern audiovisual media and mass cultural forms, including the phonograph, radio, popular music, oral storytelling, spoken drama, and Chinese opera. Interweaving theoretical explorations and close readings of cinematic works with meticulous examinations of previously untapped archival materials, my dissertation probes the neglected acoustic aspect of cinematic aesthetics. In doing so, it attempts to excavate

[1] The periodization of "early cinema" for Chinese film differs from the timeline of Western (especially American) film history for various reasons; in the Chinese context, I set the demarcation line in 1949, the founding of People's Republic of China, when there was a regime and ideological change that inevitably influenced the creation of film and its political-stylistic inclinations.

the dynamic interaction between sound and visuality during a time when early Chinese films were negotiating the appeals and limits of cinema's medium specificity and of its transmediality. To capture the complex realities of this particular climate, my project takes account of the transcultural and transmedial contexts circulating around cinematic productions, techniques, as well as theoretical debates and concepts in the global film industry and media culture of the early to mid-twentieth century.

In my dissertation, I investigate a set of intertwined historical and theoretical questions. For instance, how did modern sound technology, acoustic culture, and auditory experience intervene in and interact with the development of Chinese film aesthetics and theory, especially during the transitional period from the silent to the sound era?[2] How does the "city symphony" film mode, which emerged in Europe, the U.S., and the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, resonate with Chinese travel and fiction films of the 1930s, which integrate musical rhythm, urban space and the human body? How do sound gags, comic sound effects, and cacophonous soundscapes intermingle to produce unruly acoustic energy in urban comedies? How do influences from and references to American film musicals and traditional Chinese opera in Chinese films create polyglot soundscapes and hybrid audiovisual aesthetics in Chinese films? The transcultural and transmedial flow and exchange of film texts, criticism, and culture impel us to rethink the dimensions of the medium specificity of cinema and the shifting relations of interdependence between regional and global film cultures. Responding to this imperative, my dissertation presents a transcultural and transmedial vision that transcends the geographic, political, and medium-specific boundaries of cinema; its contributions will be significant to multiple fields, including cinema and media studies, sound studies, and Chinese studies.

[2] Roughly from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s.

In order to discuss cinematic sound within a transmedial environment, I integrate research methods culled from a diverse yet interconnected set of disciplines and subfields: 1) film sound and sound culture; 2) studies of urban space and sensory experience; 3) early Chinese film studies and cultural history of the Republican period; 4) classical film theory; and 5) transmedial practice and theory. Soundscape, cinematic sound aesthetics, and transmediality, understood here to be intertwined in complex ways, serve as the principal threads tying together these diverse perspectives. Their alignment or juxtaposition, will, I hope, open up new approaches to pertinent problems in contemporary film theory and criticism on sound as well as to illuminate new aspects of media ecology. In the field of cinema and media studies, my study builds upon major works on aural sensation, sound media (telephone, phonograph, radio), and the theory and history of film sound and intermediality[3] beginning in the early twentieth century, including both early and classical film criticism and theory by Béla Balázs, Sergei Eisenstein, Rudolf Arnheim, Siegfried Kracauer, André Bazin, Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht.[4] My research is also informed by later English and French studies on film sound and music from the 1990s onwards, particularly thoese that have made groundbreaking contributions to the to the theorization of sonic concepts and phenomena in cinema and other audiovisual media forms: works by Michel Chion, Rick Altman, James Lastra, Kaja Silverman, and Sarah Kozloff, among others.[5] In addition, I critically engage with the rich existing scholarship on soundscape, architectural acoustics, aural experience,

[3] For a definition and discussion of "intermediality", see Jens Schröter, "Discourses and Models of Intermediality." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.3 (2011): <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1790>

[4] For instance, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film* (Berghahn Books, 2010). Rudolf Arnheim, *Film Essays and Criticism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). *Kino-eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

[5] For instance, the concept of sound fidelity or intelligibility as discussed in James Lastra's work and the concept of sound perspective/point of audition, "acousmêtre," drawn in Michel Chion's work.

and auditory modernity.[6] These studies of film sound encompass technological, aesthetic, and sociocultural discussions about sound recording and mixing, the transformation of quotidian soundscapes, and the advent of sound media, tracking their impact on modern aural perception.

More recently, scholars of Chinese cinema and media have expanded upon theoretical works that had been limited to Western film sound cultures. Andrew Jones's, Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh's, and Jean Ma's work has considerably enriched our understanding of Chinese popular music and urban media culture in early to mid-twentieth-century China. Nevertheless, neither English nor Chinese language scholarship on early Chinese cinema has adequately addressed the profound impact of the development of sound technology and sound culture or its profound impact on Chinese cinematic aesthetics and conceptions of audiovisual experience, and sociopolitical popular sentiment. I focus primarily on early Chinese film studies, including film history, criticism, and aesthetics, setting these themes within the context of popular culture and studies of urban soundscapes as well as in relation to transcultural geopolitical and cinematic practice. I thus intend to enter into dialogue with scholarly work by Zhang Zhen, Andrew Jones, Weihong Bao, and Cheng Jihua, among others.[7] The bulk of current scholarship on early Chinese cinema, though certainly wide-ranging, tends to approach its subject as a principally visual and narrative medium. Many of these works provide perceptive political and ideological interpretations of 1930s Chinese left-wing cinema and nationalist sentiment, while others frame film culture as a significant component of modern urban entertainment in its relationship to "vernacular modernism;"[8] still others explore early Chinese cinema with regard to the growth of mass media and the historical

[6] For instance, Emily Thompson. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002.
[7] See Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Laikwan Pang. *Building a New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002, among others.
[8] A term coined by Miriam Hansen.

experience of colonial modernity. Although this body of work has greatly expanded and enriched our perception of early Chinese film history and media culture, the auditory dimensions of 1920s-40s Chinese cinema have yet to receive adequate scholarly attention.[9]

English and French scholarship has recently witnessed a steady increase in works on film sound theory, modern soundscapes, sound technologies, and acoustic culture;[10] however, these works deal almost exclusively with Western film sound cultures and their theorization.[11] In order to enrich the comparative potential of scholarship on sound in film and to offer new insights that might allow scholars to move beyond received assumptions that have been based on Western case studies alone, a thorough study and theorization of film sound in the Chinese context is necessary; indeed, it is long overdue. My research on sound and transmediality is thus informed by, whilst aspiring to move beyond, existing scholarship on early Chinese cinema. I attempt to deepen the study of Chinese film by developing a more interdisciplinary, transmedial, and transcultural approach. I engage both English and Chinese scholarship on early Chinese film history and theory, film and drama criticism from the period, as well as historical documents and personal accounts published in trade journals, newspapers, and pictorial magazines. I have also surveyed key memoirs and biographies of members of the film profession, as well as consulted other sources covering the period from the early 1920s to the late 1940s, all in order to acquire a panoramaic audio-vision of early Chinese film culture and to situate cinematic works within a broader mediasphere and sociohistorical context.

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[9] Andrew F. Jones's *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) is a pioneering study of popular music, media culture, and colonial modernity in Republican-era Shanghai; Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh's essay "Historiography and Sinification: Music in Chinese Cinema of the 1930s" (*Cinema Journal*, Vol.41, No.3, Spring 2002) and the Chinese study *Phantom of the Music: Song Narration and Chinese-language Cinema* (Taipei: Yuan-liou Publishing Co., 2000) are also significant contributions to this field.

[10] Including the work of Christian Metz, Rick Altman, Michel Chion, James Lastra, Douglas Kahn, and Jonathan Sterne.

[11] Michel Chion does analyze Japanese films such as Kenji Mizoguchi's *Legend of Bailiff Sansho* (1954) in his books on film sound.

I. Inaudible and Metaphorical Sound

When discussing sound in cinema, scholarly attention is often primarily focused on audible elements such as music, human voice, and sound effects in sound films or the musical accompaniment associated with silent films. The realm of inaudible and metaphorical sound in silent cinema has not been extensively explored, interrogated, or conceptualized. For instance, how can metaphorical sound, musicality, and sonorous space be evoked in silent films via non-aural means such as the visual and dynamic? Presenting a chronological film historiography, engaging with film discourse and criticism from the period, and performing close formal analysis, my first and second dissertation chapters focus on the ways in which Chinese silent and partial-sound films suggest sound and musicality by means of, for example, the visualization of sound sources, the performed action of listening, or the mediation of internal auditors and sound media instruments such as the radio and phonograph. Rhythmicity can likewise be intimated by the juxtaposition and interaction of camera movements and the movements of subjects within the frame, as well as by metrical editing. These stylistic techniques can enable audiences to reimagine and reconstruct an acoustic and trans-sensory experience while watching a film in which synchronized sound is not embedded.

Sound in modern culture and perception, outside as well as inside the cinema, is imbricated with the visual, the verbal, and other registers of experience. As Sam Halliday argues that, "To fully grasp the significance of sound in modern culture, it follows, we must consider visual cultures of sound and verbal cultures of sound, and see all of these in dialogue with 'sounded' cultures of sound, more self-evidently made out of sound itself."[12] A variety of disciplinary approaches, concepts, and debates will therefore inform and enrich my research on sound. These include

[12] Sam Halliday, 2013, p. 3.

literary studies, musicology, and history, as well as theater studies. Integrating an ethnographic perspective in my second chapter, I examine an amateur travel film/private home movie, a silent "city symphony," entitled *The Man Who Has A Movie Camera* (持攝影機的男人, 1933), made by Taiwan-born, Japan-educated, and Shanghai-based modernist "neo-sensationalist" writer, translator, critic, and filmmaker, Liu Na'ou (劉吶鷗, 1905-1940). Liu's fluid attachment to his complex cultural identity, his profound contribution to modern Chinese film theory, and his explicit homage to Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's city symphony film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) all suggest a dynamic synthesis of transcultural and transmedial practices in the modern cityscape of East Asia. My analysis of imagined sound in silent films and the city symphony film mode borrows from the methods of musicology, attending to pace, rhythm, speed, synesthesia, and multi-sensual experience in music and aural culture and underscoring of music's metaphorical and figurative dimensions.

II. Transitional Sound and Film Genres

If inaudible but imagined or metaphorical sound is typical of silent and partial-sound films, cinematic sound in the transitional period between the silent and sound eras is more complex, combining techniques and concepts from the styles of both periods. Here the human voice, sound effects, and both diegetic and extradiegetic music are integrated into the sound track itself, not merely played in the film theater, as was the case in silent films, nor synchronized by a sound disc, as was occasionally done for partial-sound films using "sound-on-disc" technology. Historicizing sound technology and the array of hearing experiences available at a given moment allows us to realize the effects of "newly possible (if not inevitable) forms of spatial, temporal, and sensual

restructuring."[13] Indeed, modern sound technology and media such as the phonograph, radio, and sound cinema enabled the temporal-spatial dislocation of reproduced sound and the separation of sound from its sources; for instance, a felt split arose between the human body and its uttered voice, between an on-set performance and its recordings. The new relation between the realistic and virtual/mediated could caused sensory disorientation, and even derangement, for the audience.[14]

Since the late nineteenth century, scientific, technological, musical, and architectural discourses on sound have been redefining the way auditory experience is conceived and represented—most broadly and pervasively, in its relationship to space.[15] In 1920s-1940s Shanghai and China, the urban soundscape along with other particular sounds and music were mediated by audiovisual means: the telephone, phonograph/gramophone, radio, and especially, sound cinema. The consequent juxtaposition and intermingling of direct and mediated sounds prompted a new acoustic experience for film audiences and music listeners, city inhabitants, and people more generally. During the transition from the silent to the sound-film period, early Chinese sound films were embedded, materially, within advancing sound technologies as well as effected by their facilitation of novel acoustic sensibilities—and after the 1920s, films were able to fully exhibit modern sound media independent of other channels.

However, unlike later more sophisticated sound films, early Chinese film sound and its remediation through the phonograph and radio broadcasts evoked an amorphous, heterogeneous space that drew the cinematic world into the streets of the city, the foyers of theaters and dance halls, and the private spaces of domestic living rooms. Chinese films made by Yuan Muzhi such

[13] James Lastra, 2000, p. 4.
[14] See Tom Gunning, "Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear," in Rick Altman and Richard Abel, eds. *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, pp. 13-31.
[15] Kata Gellen, "Hearing Spaces: Architecture and Acoustic Experience in Modernist German Literature." *Modernism/modernity*, Volume 17, Number 4, November 2010. p. 800.

as *City Scenes* (1935) and *Street Angel* (1937), which I discuss in my third dissertation chapter, are imbued with an unruly energy, experimentally integrating "illustrative songs," adapting stylistic traces from silent films, and responding creatively to the influence and idioms of both foreign and local mass cultural forms. Such temporal-geographic and technological "compression" in early Chinese cinema is accomplished by blending multiple sound techniques from diverse technologies and using media from different times and places. My investigation of the relationship between technological transformation, sound aesthetics, and film form is situated within an analysis of generic conventions and convergences in world film history, touching upon the film musical, city symphony, and urban comedy—all of which, to varying degrees, accentuate sound/music, body (audiovisual performance), and urban space. It also bears in consideration the historical context of an underdeveloped Chinese sound cinema and film industry in the mid-1930s, a period that provoked a sense of crisis for Chinese film professionals facing economic, cultural, and military encroachment from both the Western colonial inpingement and Japanese invasion. Developing domestic sound recording systems and making self-sufficient sound films were not only technological, economic, and stylistic necessities for Chinese filmmakers; they were also projects tinged with a nationalistic spirit and aimed toward edification, anti-imperialism, and national salvation.

III. Cinematic Sound and Transmediality

Since its inception, cinema has developed within a multifaceted mediasphere that constantly interacts with other media and mass cultural forms. Cinematic sound easily traverses various medial boundaries; transmedial inspirations on the other hand greatly enrich the cinematic soundscape and aesthetic. My study of early Chinese film sound aesthetics as they engage with the visual field and transmediality will contribute to both Chinese film history and theory and the more

established area of film sound studies. Taking a culturally specific perspective, my research tracks the interplay between the symbolic and conventionalized stage aesthetics of traditional Chinese theater (especially the Beijing Opera), those of spoken drama, and the audiovisual stylistics of 1940s Chinese cinema. For instance, the occasional use of audiovisual redundancy (the actor verbally describing her or his activity on stage) in conventional Chinese theatrical practice inspired the form and style of Chinese director Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* (1948) and his Beijing opera film, *Regrets of Life and Death* (1948). Both films made ingenious use of techniques such as the female voice-over, the long take, dissolve, and slow movement to create a poetic atmosphere and a culturally specific, sophisticated audiovisual style.

By shedding new light on the acoustic aspects of early Chinese cinema and by highlighting overlooked film theories, my research offers a compelling perspective on the dialogue between Chinese cinema and European-American intertexts. With acoustic sensitivity and nuanced attention to film modes, my project will speak to historical and contemporary debates in film and Asian studies on questions of transcultural and diasporic media practice, colonial modernity, and early twentieth-century globalization, thereby contributing to a growing body of research on cinematic soundscapes and modern Chinese audiovisual culture and history. Today, scholarly interest in sound in Asian films, from the early history of the medium up to its latest developments, is steadily increasing.[16] This dissertation attempts to add a much-needed depth and subtlety to contemporary understandings of the trajectory of early Chinese film history as well as to remap the contours of sound studies in general.

[16] For instance, Japanese film scholars such as Michael Raine and Chie Niita are preparing monographs on early Japanese cinema's interaction with the phonograph and radio. Jean Ma edited a special issue on "Sound and Music in Chinese-language Cinemas" for *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* and wrote the book *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015)

My dissertation explores urban soundscapes—composed of all variey of popular music, street clamors, and industrial noise—with regard to their interaction with cinema and other modern media, technology, art forms, and socio-cultural practices from the 1920s to 1940s that developed amid vernacular cosmopolitan cultures and vibrant transcultural networks: trains, telephones, telegraphs, phonographs, photography, radio, popular music, dance culture and the kinetics of the human body. Based on wide-ranging observations, research, and conceptualizations, my work probes the transnational and transmedial character of Shanghai's colonial mediascape and modern audiovisual media experience at an early stage of globalization. The interdisciplinary, transmedial, and transcultural character of my work will enhance both scholarly and general attention to, as well as awareness and understanding of, aural worlds and the acoustic dimensions and aesthetics of cinematic representation. It will stimulate sustained critical engagement with daily experiences of sound, not just historically but, importantly, in the current era of sound-immersive digital media.[17]

IV. Chapter Overview

My dissertation consists of four chapters that investigate modern soundscapes, sound media and culture, sound technology, and historical experience in early Chinese cinema belonging to the Republican-era urban mediasphere. The chapters are organized in a relatively chronological order; they discuss different yet interwoven historical and theoretical acoustic aspects of early Chinese cinema such as the evocation of sound in silent or partial-sound films, the relation of metaphorical sound to dance, rhythmicity, and the city symphony in film theory, the construction of sound in urban musical comedies, the female voice-over, and transmediality in 1940s Chinese cinema.

[17] For instance, the pervasiveness of portable sound media such as MP3, Ipod and Iphone (internet radios) establishes a more privatized and isolated soundscape for the auditors in a larger urban soundscape.

The first chapter, entitled "Sound in Transition and Transmission: The Evocation and Mediation of Acoustic Experience in *Two Stars in the Milky Way* (1931)," asks how the evocation and transmission of sound and music were mediated by sonic devices such as the phonograph and radio in Chinese silent and partial-sound films of the late 1920s and early 1930s, using *Two Stars in a Milky Way* (Shi Dongshan/Tomsie Sze, 1931) as a case study. I examine how the technological belatedness of film sound gave rise to a distinctive Chinese cinematic style and aural culture that permeated the Shanghai urban space. The chapter suggests some ways we might excavate and reconstruct this historical experience of partially mediated acoustic perception and, with it, the problem of sound and transmedial culture in 1930s China. *Two Stars in a Milky Way* self-consciously takes the representation of music-making and the process of film-making as its central themes; the film's love tragedy resonates with the one depicted in *Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*, the costume musical drama that is being shot within the cinematic diegesis of *Milky Way*, thereby creating a *mise en abîme* structure that, moreover, echoes the film's sophisticated employment of sound. The visualized actions of singing and hearing, occasionally mediated by as phonograph or radio broadcast, traverse diverse times and spaces within and beyond the cinematic world.

Two Stars in a Milky Way needs to be carefully situated within the context of the technological realities of the period, in which the exhibition of the film in a theater still required the manual synchronization of silent images and phonographic records. This meant that an audience's immersion in the sonic environment of the theater coexisted with their absorption of silent images that gestured towards sound. During the exhibition of a film in the silent era, there was generally an external, musical accompaniment to the silent visual universe of the film; occasionally, sound effects and oral narration were also provided. However, silent cinema also contains an acoustic

dimension that originates in the image and can be materialized through its plastic compositions.[18] Spectators can comprehend visualized sounds through their auditory imagination, experience and mental projection. A few essential questions emerge from this phenomenon: How is sound evoked from within the mute images of silent cinema? How does the "inaudible sound" of silent films inspire mental hearing and aural imagination? How did multi-layered "sound images" and diegetic and extradiegetic sound technologies interact and intertwine with visual culture and cinematic style? As I will show, sound is evoked through various narrative and stylistic means in these films, connecting different spaces within the diegesis. It can be conjured through the represented action of vocalization and listening, the choreographed, dynamic human body or camera movement, as well as through the technique of rhythmic editing. As Melinda Szaloky points out, "silent cinema was never silent because it was never meant to represent a mute world addressed to deaf spectators; nor did spectators understand it as such."[19] Physically absent, sound and hearing in *Two Stars* are instead foregrounded in the presence of spectators' minds, claiming and delineating an unruly acoustic space.

Turning from inaudible yet imaginable sound to metaphorical sound, my second chapter, "Metaphoric Sound, Rhythmic Movement, and Transcultural Transmediality: Liu Na'ou and *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933)," investigates how the silent amateur travel film *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933) and the theoretical writings of the Taiwanese/Japanese/Shanghainese writer and filmmaker Liu Na'ou reinvent features of the "city symphony" film mode. I investigate the ways in which camera movement and bodily movement, Neo-sensationalist literature, as well as rhythm and musicality communicate and intermingle—as theories of transmediality help reveal—

[18] Melinda Szaloky, "Sounding Images in Silent Film: Visual Acoustics in Murnau's 'Sunrise'," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Winter 2002), p.109.
[19] Ibid, p. 110.

to create a vivid sense of "metaphorical sound." Here, even in such an early, silent incarnation, the "city symphony" mode is imbued with a vibrant literal and metaphorical emphasis on sound aesthetics, perception, and soundscape. In this chapter, I explore how these intertwined concepts and practices created new aesthetic possibilities in 1930s Shanghai and contributed to a distinctively cosmopolitan vision.

I examine how Liu's film and theoretical writings adapt and reinvent the "city symphony" convention for a Chinese context, all while transcending fallacious topographical, national, racial, linguistic, and medial boundaries. The city is the central protagonist in this film mode, and the images used to represent the city continue to proliferate in modern media. The intense rhythm and speed of the modern metropolis, a spectacle of a "world in motion," are enhanced by a montage technique based on "visual rhythming."[20] The film's visual elements—the sense of intense rhythm and pace constructed by the alternation between stasis and movement (both camera movement and subject movement within the frame), variations in camera angles, intertitles, musical structure and rapid montage—powerfully suggests musicality and a dynamic acoustic urban environment.[21]

The city symphony film mode is located in the genealogy of the modernist avant-garde, imbricated with the arts of poetry, photography, music, dance, graphic design, modernist literature, and with the Constructivist and Futurist art movements of the 1920s. The collage-like synthesis of indexical photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation, induced by montage's radical, stylistically excessive, juxtapositions of time and space, is linked to radical shifts in subjectivity within the film.[22] The technique thus captures the perceptual disorientations

[20] Nora M. Alter, "*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927): City, Image, Sound," in Noah Isenberg ed. *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 199.
[21] For instance, the shape, size, length, and frequency of the intertitles will also influence the audience's perception of rhythm and speed.
[22] Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer 2001), p. 582-95.

of modern urban experience. The city symphony film is also self-reflexive in the way that it draws attention to the filmic medium itself. For instance, it shows different events (even in different cities) simultaneously, reconfiguring the big city as a palimpsest or a prism by employing montage, dissolve, and the canted shot.[23] Embedding his own artistic sensitivitiesand his struggle between being a Japanese colonial subject and a Chinese litterateur into the film, Liu attempts to transcend geological, national, ethnic, linguistic and medial boundaries, and to establish a depoliticized, cosmopolitan cinematic utopia, a pure cinema, and a fluid identity.

In a similar vein of thought, my third chapter, "When the Left Eye Meets the Right Ear: Cinematic *Fantasia* and Comic Soundscape in *City Scenes* (1935) and 1930s Chinese Film Sound," examines Chinese filmmaker Yuan Muzhi's reconfiguration of Shanghai as an audiovisual locale through an exaggeration of its soundscape that reinvents Hollywood and Soviet sound techniques and musical concepts. In this chapter, I consider how the experimental deployment of sound elements in *City Scenes*, "the first Chinese musical comedy," obscures and defies conventionally conceived boundaries between the human voice, sound effects, and music, articulating a sort of "auditory grotesque." I also discuss how the interactions between the acoustic and the visual enhance the material heterogeneity of the film to create a sort of *cinematic fantasia* that resonates both with the spontaneity of the film score and the implications of *fantasia* as a musical form, thereby strengthening the satirical social critique and unruly energy of the film.

The comic and disorderly soundscapes in films such as *City Scenes* and *Street Angel* correspond to the popular sound culture of the modern cityscape of Shanghai, saturated with popular songs, oral story-telling traditions, street performances, and industrial noise. The stylistically choreographed, rhythmic movement of human bodies acting in concert with the

[23] Derek Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity: The Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*." *Monatshefte*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Spring, 2004), p.88.

rhythmic, percussive music of the film highlights the sense of audiovisual humor and conveys a sense of the grotesque. As I suggest in the preceding chapter, these films can be characterized as city comedies; that is, they incorporate city symphony montage sequences and locate their narratives and atmospheres in the Shanghai cityscape. The soundscape they produce resonates with the quotidian life of the period. Moreover, their audiovisual representations of domestic versus public space are irregularly interspersed, manifesting a chaotic acoustic mixture of different operas, popular songs, and street clamor, an effect that in turn reflects the coexistence of and tension between distinct political powers and social classes in the urban space.

Furthermore, the narrative and audiovisual heterogeneity of these films underlines their self-reflexive quality. The films make explicit references to optical devices and entertainment apparatuses such as the peep show and the shadow play, which enclose or mimic the diegesis while ironically foregrounding cinema's illusionistic and fantastical nature. Unlike the case of most 1930s Hollywood film comedies, there are rarely happy endings in these films; persistent concerns with social issues are emphasized more often than heterosexual romance and foregrounded by aural attractions such as ironic sound effects and illustrative songs. These films deviate from and subvert typical Hollywood film comedies, even as certain influences can be discerned; I argue that they should be considered more as social satires containing ingenious, indigenous acoustic elements that encourage the audience to identify with the characters' predicaments, not as light escapist Hollywood-style entertainment. *City Scenes* and other 1930s Chinese musical comedies were constructed less for purposes of delight than for contemplation, indignation, and social critique. In the context of the vociferous urban space of Shanghai and the turbulent historical milieu of 1930s China, they can be productively read as an example of the period's negotiation of the power dynamics and possibilities inherent in the transcultural and transmedial.

The fourth chapter, "An Operatic and Poetic Atmosphere (*kongqi*): Sound Aesthetic and Transmediality in Fei Mu's *Xiqu* Films and *Spring in a Small Town* (1948)," considers sound aesthetics and transmediality from another pivotal perspective. Here I explore how the female voice-over in Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* (1948) and the audiovisual aesthetic of the Beijing opera film *Regrets of Life and Death* (1948) draw inspiration from Beijing opera and traditional landscape painting in order to create a theatrically tinged poetic atmosphere that epitomizes the intricate relations between cinematic sound and other audiovisual media. In his written works, Fei frequently asserted the significance of creating a certain kind of elusive "atmosphere/ambience" in cinema through the careful choice of subjects, camera movement, variations in lighting and composition, and especially through the composition of a sound environment that melded sound effects, human voice, and music.

Spring in a Small Town highlights the parallels that "audiovisual redundancy" and gender discourse drew between the human body, landscape, and nation amidst the ruins of the 1940s Civil War. The ostensible audiovisual redundancy—the female protagonist describing what is already present on screen via a voice-over/monologue—derives from Chinese operatic stage conventions, exemplified by the Beijing Opera, which generate tension between abstract, symbolic, and realistic registers of representation. In Chinese opera, particular environments are inspired and imagined through performers' descriptions; these orations both distance the spectator from the actor and defamiliarize the narrative itself. Encouraging a similar degree of self-reflexive contemplation and creating stange flows in psychical time and space, the stage-derived voice-over technique of the film constructs a fluid female subjectivity. The female voice-over in *Spring* is seemingly located in, but not limited to, the isolated, ruined space of the garden and the site of the male protagonist's

diseased body.[24] The film's unstable, figurative narrative and its construction of subjectivities that seem as much in flux as sound itself stand in curious tension with strategies that ostensibly indicate static temporality, like long take and slow movement. In his films and writings, Fei advocated for cinema's medium specificity—yet he also appropriated conventions from other art forms, a fruitful practice that allowed him to enrich the audiovisual style of his films.

Overall, my dissertation traces the emergence of a modern audiovisual culture as it intersected with new understandings and experiences of the urban mediasphere and transmedial practice in Republican China. I explore the dynamic interplay between sound and visuality, and between cinema's specificity as a medium and its circulation in the modern media ecology and a global media culture. I argue that cinema—an audiovisual medium since the silent period—has constantly redefined its medium specificity within a dynamic milieu facilitated by modern sound technology and a dynamic media ecology.

[24] The diseased male character Liyan.

Chapter One

Sound in Transition and Transmission: The Evocation and Mediation of Acoustic Experience in *Two Stars in the Milky Way* (1931)

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter

--John Keats (1795-1821), *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

Introduction

Music has formed an integral part of the cinematic experience since the medium's inception. During the exhibition of a silent film, external music generally accompanied the film's mute images; occasionally, sound effects and oral narration were provided.[1] Consequently, when discussing film sound, scholars usually treat the external musical and sonic accompaniments of the silent era and the sound elements of full talkie films as norms. However, sound was a far more varied (and occasionally intermittent) phenomenon in early film than has previously been supposed.[2] A few film scholars have pointed out that silent cinema's acoustic dimension originated in the image domain, since sound was conjured through plastic compositions, such as visualizing the sound sources or emphasizing the rhythmic movements. This cinematic appeal to the auditory imagination offers great possibility for poetic expression.[3] It prompts spectators to envision sounds and illustrate visual acoustics with their auditory imaginations, experience, and comprehension of the narrative. During the transitional period from silent to sound, audio practice in partial sound

[1] Live music was played by an orchestra or a pianist, depending on the film theater's economic and spatial capacity. In a later stage of the silent era phonographic records were played. See Rick Altman. *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Slide show lectures and illustrated songs also accompanied the silent films in the early era.
[2] Jonathan Auerbach, p. 64.
[3] Melinda Szaloky, "Sounding Images in Silent Film: Visual Acoustics in Murnau's 'Sunrise'," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Winter 2002), p. 109.

films varied across different film industries and cultures, borrowed and played with these aesthetics, obscuring the boundary between "silent" and "sound."[4]

Moreover, the deployment of sound (either absent sound or synchronized sound effects and music) and the mobilization of acoustic sensitivity in partial-sound films made during the transition from the silent to the sound era greatly invigorated film aesthetics and nurtured audiences' audiovisual experiences, which grew to differ from their auditory experience of the silent period. For instance, through an increase in technological and stylistic experimentation in cinematic sound in the move from silent to partial-sound films, the Chinese film industry and audiences of the early 1930s anticipated the advent of more technologically mature full talkies, even though these advances were met with opposition by some film critics, directors, and spectators who favored silent cinema for various reasons.[5] In comparison to American and European cinemas, Chinese cinema underwent a relatively long transition period from silent to full talkie—almost six years (1931-1937)—for technological, political, financial and cultural reasons.[6] While Hollywood and other cinemas reverberated with the urge to make sound films, the coexistence of various sound practices in early 1930s Chinese cinema instead indexed an unstandardized and unruly vitality, with both technological resonance and cultural specificity connecting the local and the global.

Of this robust and heterogeneous Chinese film sound practice, we can then ask: how was sound evoked by the mute images of silent cinema? How could the "inaudible sound" of silent films inspire mental hearing and aural imagination? How did multi-layered "sound images" and

[4] Films were not full talkies but did feature theme songs, sporadic dialogues or/and sound effects. See for instance, the American films *The Jazz Singer* (1927, Alan Crosland) and *The First Auto* (1927, Roy Del Ruth), the Chinese film *The Big Road* (1934, Sun Yu), and the Japanese film *Story of Floating Weeds* (1934, Yasujiro Ozu). For partial sound practice in Japan, see Michael Raine, "Adaptation as 'Transcultural Mimesis' in Japanese Cinema," pp. 101-123.
[5] I will elaborate on this point later.
[6] For an overview of Chinese film industry's transitional period, see Laikwan Pang, *Building A New Cinema in China: The Chinese Left-wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*, especially chapter 1.

diegetic and extradiegetic sound technologies and cultures intertwine with visual cultures and cinematic styles? How did the coexistence of sound-on-disc technology (synchronized music and songs enabled by phonographic records) and on-set musical accompaniment (or silence, according to different exhibition venues) in partial-sound films diversify the cinematic expressivity and the audiovisual experience of the historically situated audience? This chapter will respond to these questions by exploring the "imagined sound" as fundamental to the multifaceted acoustic experience of early 1930s China, focusing in particular on the evocation of sound and music by sonic media such as the phonograph and radio in silent and partial-sound films of the late 1920s and early 1930s China.[7] I take *Two Stars in the Milky Way* (1931, Shi Dongshan/ Tomsie Sze) as my primary case study, situating the film within a larger transcultural and transmedial context, in order to examine how the technological belatedness of film sound shaped China's extraordinary cinematic aesthetic and acoustic culture.[8]

Two Stars is the earliest Chinese partial-sound film still in (partial) existence—it employed "sound on disc" technology, which means its songs were recorded on phonographic records and manually synchronized during the exhibition of the film. However, the film's original sound discs have not been recovered.[9] While film historian Kristine Harris has provided a comprehensive historical overview and perceptive reading of *Two Stars*, highlighting it as an exemplary case of

[7] For instance, Sun Yu 孫瑜's *Wild Rose* (野玫瑰, 1932), *Loving Blood of the Volcano* (火山情血, 1932), *Daybreak* (天明, 1933), *The Little Toys* (小玩意, 1933), *Queen of Sports* (體育皇后, 1934), and *The Big Road* (大路, 1935). *The Big Road* features two songs and certain sound effects; the other films are silent.

[8] Shi Dongshan (史東山, 1902-1955, listed as Tomsie Sze in the credit) was one of the most prominent Chinese film directors and screenwriters from the 1920s to 1940s. He also worked on stage productions and documentaries during the war of resistance against the Japanese invasion (1937-45). His most notable film was *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (1947).

[9] Since the soundtrack record is lost, the current film print in the China Film Archive is silent. There are two sound versions on DVD available, in China and in the US respectively. I will elaborate on them in the following paragraphs.

metafilm and an epitome of cosmopolitan modernity,[10] this chapter focuses instead on the relationship in the film among different types of sound practices: the imagined/inaudible and the actually recorded. Because of certain historical contingencies (e.g., the loss of the original sound discs), the division between silent and partial sound practice in this case becomes blurred: what was recorded and meant to be audible to historical audiences can only be imagined by contemporary spectators. By reconstructing missing sound elements and audience's acoustic experience of this film – using archival materials and journalistic and critical descriptions from the period – this chapter aims to re-imagine and conceptualize the intricate interplay of imagined sound, music, space, technological remediation, and transmediality in this film and in early 1930s film sound discourse in China more largely.

Two Stars recounts the story of film stars Li Yueh-Ying and Yang Yee Yun, who develop a romantic affection while shooting a partial-sound film within the partial-sound film: a costume musical drama set in the Tang Dynasty [618-907] titled *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*, which unfolds the tragic love story between Mei Fee and Tang Minghuang. Li and Yang eventually part ways because Yang is already committed to a marriage that was arranged by his mother and is unable to break the commitment due to his filial obligations. The film self-consciously takes the representation of music-making and the process of film-making as its central themes. The love tragedy between Li and Yang resonates with the one between Mei Fee and Tang Minghuang, creating a *mise en abîme* structure. The star statuses and images of Li and Yang moreover mirror those of the real-life Cantonese song and dance star, Violet Wong (Ziluolan), who portrays Li, and the matinee idol, Jin Yan, who plays Yang.

[10] Kristine Harris, "Two Stars in the Silver Screen: The Metafilm as Chinese Modern" in *History in Images: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China*, Eds. Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), pp. 191-243.

The sound and musical experimentation in *Two Stars* also marks the transmedial communication between early Chinese sound cinema and popular literary culture. The film is adapted from the popular "Mandarin Duck and Butterfly" style writer Zhang Henshui's eponymous story, which was published in installments in 1929 in the *Northern China Daily*, where the film's screenwriter Zhu Shilin served as an editor. A keen cinephile himself, Zhang anticipated the novella would be made into a film as he was creating it.[11] While transferring the story from text to screen, a certain degree of self-reflexivity and technological remediation was foreseen. As Kristine Harris argues, if metafilms 'explain' the medium, putting the camera on display and rendering the technology part of the spectacle, then *Two Stars* enhanced these self-reflexive qualities by magnifying the doublings present in Zhang's original novel: employing a cast and crew whose experience often closely resembled that of real-life figures in the film world and introducing a plot for the film-within-the-film that mirrors the larger narrative.[12]

This self-reflexive structure and media convergence resonate with the sophisticated deployment of sound in the film. For instance, the audience's auditory perception is mediated by radio broadcast and remediated by auditors internal to the cinematic diegesis. This demystification of film production (revelation of the filmmaking process) within *Two Stars* is accomplished through the (silent) singing of popular Cantonese tunes and operatic excerpts and through dance performances by the Lianhua Film Studio's song-and-dance troupe.[13] The visualized actions of singing and hearing, occasionally mediated by sound media such as the phonograph and radio broadcast, traverse diverse times and spaces within and beyond the cinematic world (i.e., film

[11] See Zhu Shilin's preface for the publication of the novella, quoted in "Two Stars" 銀漢雙星, Zhang Henshui 張恨水(Beiyue wenyi chubanshe 北嶽文藝出版社, 1993), p. 1.
[12] Harris, pp. 192-3.
[13] Advertised by the film studio in English as "UPS Follies" or "United Photoplay Service Follies," the troupe included actresses who would subsequently renowned, such as Wang Renmei and Li Lili, who became big stars at the Lianhua studio in the next few years.

theatres, dance halls, living rooms, and an open field, among other sites), reflexively highlighting the paradoxes of presence of absence and absence of presence: the sound is physically absent but mentally present—partly because the original discs are lost and *Two Stars* is a silent film for contemporary audiences, and partly due to the earlier period's sound practice of showing sequences without synchronized sound. Consequently, this chapter asks how we might excavate and reconstruct this historical experience of mediated acoustic perception, and with it, the problem of sound and transmedial culture in 1930s China. Set in the contexts of both early Chinese sound cinema and world film history and aesthetics, such an investigation serves as a pivotal starting point for this dissertation on film sound, aural culture, and transmediality in 1920s-1940s Chinese cinema.

I. Gesturing towards Sound and Early Chinese Sound Films

In silent cinema, sound and musicality can be evoked through visualization of vocalizing and listening, through choreographed body movements, or through camera movement and the technique of rhythmic editing. The evocation of sound was not an unusual practice across European and American cinema of the silent era (from roughly 1895 to 1927). Jonathan Auerbach, while exploring body shots in early American cinema, argues that some silent films of the early twentieth century foregrounded the mouth and the kinetics of vocalization to produce striking audiovisual effects.[14] Michel Chion also claims that cinema can create intersensory reciprocity: the audience can inject a sense of the auditory into the image or infuse the soundtrack with visuality.[15] The correspondences between the visual and the aural in silent and partial-sound films encourage transsensorial perception in the audience. For instance, in *Two Stars*, when we as the audience see

[14] For instance, films such as *The May Irwin Kiss* (1896, William Heise) and *The Big Swallow* (1901, James Williamson), Jonathan Auerbach, p. 64.
[15] Michel Chion, 1994, pp. 134-5.

Yang Yee Yun knocking at the door of the Li house, a close-up of a doorbell at Yang's residence, or the reaction shots of the people hearing these sounds, we can imagine them resonating within the cinematic diegesis.

In the late 1920s, when stylistic experimentation in silent film had achieved a more mature and expressive status, implied film sound and musicality were compellingly articulated in films of different cultures. For instance, French impressionist film critic and director Jean Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) employed rhythmic apprehension of bodily motion, slow motion, camera movement, and editing to create a sense of visual rhythm and the "dreamlike life allure."[16] British filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lodger* (1927) and German filmmaker F. W. Murnau's partial-sound film *Sunrise* (1927) also demonstrated a strong desire to evoke sound within the silent or partial-sound diegesis. Moreover, in his account of Kinugasa Teinisuke's films and Japanese modernism, William O. Gardner argues that Kinugasa's silent "neo-sensationalist"[17] experimental film *A Page of Madness* (1926) made during the "pure film movement" in Japan repeatedly evokes sound. For instance, "from the opening montage consisting of images of pouring rain, to the shots of a dancer crosscut with more images of rain, to the hand-drawn images representing lighting, to the close-ups of brass instruments and a drum," the film works to suggest a strong aural quality. The emphasis on visualizing sound also expressed an aspiration to present information directly "to the senses of the viewer" rather than "for the sake of telling stories".[18]

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[16] Laurent Guido, "'The Supremacy of the Mathematical Poem': Jean Epstein's Conceptions of Rhythm," in Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul, eds. *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations* (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 151.

[17] *Shinkankakuha* was a prewar Japanese modernist literary group led by Riichi Yokomitsu and Yasunari Kawabata that focused on exploring "new impressions" or "new perceptions" in the writing of Japanese literature. "Neo-sensationalism" has a Chinese counterpart, in both literary works and film theory. I have a detailed explanation in chapter 2.

[18] William O. Gardner, pp.68-69.

Sound is also strongly suggested in various ways in American filmmaker D. W. Griffith's 1914 silent film *The Avenging Conscience*. Here, through the most direct means of visualizing sound sources, we see close-up shots of a dog barking, a cat meowing, and young people singing and dancing at a party; we can thus imagine these sounds within the diegetic space. The film also bonds different spaces by juxtaposing the visualization of sound sources and the representation of listening. For example, at different moments, the nephew hears an Italian man singing, a wolf howling, and an owl hooting, which are all suggested by the visual depiction of these actions occurring in an outdoor setting that is coupled with shots of the nephew's attentive hearing and restless facial expressions in interior space. Moreover, the evocation of rhythmic sound in *The Avenging Conscience* significantly reveals the character's psychology and strengthens dramatic tension, even suggesting an exaggerated or distorted subjective hearing space through the character's point of audition. For instance, when the detective continuously taps his pen on the table, this causes enormous trepidation in the nephew, who has to put his hand on the detective's to stop the action; when the detective then taps his foot on the carpet, the repetitive action instigates further consternation in the nephew, who perceives the repetitive swinging of the clock pendulum as similarly intimidating. With the intertitle commenting: "like the beating of the dead man's heart," the analogous rhythmic sounds of pen and foot tapping and pendulum swinging breakdown the nephew's safeguards and induce his confession of having strangled his uncle. Although the sounds are inaudible to the audience, the visualization of the recurring actions and the nephew's unnerved gestures and facial expressions encourage us to imagine the devastating effects these sounds exerted on the nephew's hearing experience—there is an illusion that these whispery, repeated sounds are becoming amplified and accelerated that is reinforced by faster intercuts between the action and response shots. Finally, the intertitles in *The Avenging Conscience*, quoting Edgar Allan

Poe's story, *The Tell-tale Heart*, on which the film is based, expressively stress the prominence of hearing. One intertitle card reads: "Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad?" Thus, *The Avenging Conscience* works on several fronts to highlight sound in its diegetic space and provoke the imagination of inaudible sound in the film audience.

Similarly, in the Chinese silent films *Wild Rose* (1932, Sun Yu) and *Pink Dream* (1932, Cai Chusheng) produced by the Lianhua Film Studio that made *Two Stars* and which came out one year after it,[19] characters' sound-producing actions like shouting, whistling, singing, dancing, and marching are also prominently accentuated and visualized. In *Pink Dream*, for instance, when the little girl Xiaoyun sings a song to her reunited parents, the musical notes and lyrics are displayed on screen, superimposed on the image of her singing—encouraging the audience to imagine the song and even sing along. In such films, the mixture of direct visualization of sound sources, description of sounds in written texts, and mediation of sound through characters' subjective listening inspires the audience to identify with the characters' listening and experience the action via their perception. The strong desire to evoke sound in these films points toward the comprehensive and multi-sensory spectatorial experience characterizing Chinese silent and partial-sound cinema during the period.

While being careful not to advance teleological arguments for technological determinism, we must nonetheless recognize the extent to which making sound films was considered a progressive activity by world film industries and a large portion of film audiences in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chinese film critic and screenwriter Xu Bibo provides a detailed account of this fact in his articles "Prospect of Chinese Sound Cinema" (1932) and "The Threshold of Chinese Sound

[19] Sun Yu and Cai Chusheng were also two of the most prominent filmmakers in the studio and contributed their cameo appearance in *Two Stars* in the dance hall sequence.

Cinema" (1957).[20] Several Chinese film studios during the period competed for attention and box office records by making sound films that employed different technologies in the early 1930s. For instance, the Star (Mingxing) Company released the alleged "first Chinese sound film," *Songstress Red Peony* (1930, Zhang Shichuan), on March 15, 1931. The film used sound-on-disc technology and collaborated with the Pathé record company. It unfolds the tragic story of a female opera performer (played by the renowned actress Hu Die/Butterfly Wu) and features four renowned Beijing opera excerpts, sung by the prominent Beijing opera performer Mei Lanfang (dubbed to the protagonist's lip movements). On May 24, 1931, *The Beauty* (1931, Xu Kengran, produced by Youlian/United Friends studio) was released, which employed sound-on-disc technology and showcased a few Cantonese operatic and folk tunes. On June 3rd, 1931, *Blue Sky After Raining* (1931, Xia Chifeng) came out, which used sound-on-film technology and had song and dance scenes recorded in Japan.[21] On October 29, 1931, *Spring Colors in the Music Hall* (*Gechang Chunse*, 1931, Li Pingqian, produced by the Tianyi studio) was released. It used sound-on-film technology that was rented from the U.S. and managed by the American and British sound

[20] See Xu Bibo 徐碧波, "Prospect of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影界的展望," 珊瑚, Vol. 1, I. 4-11, 1932; "The Threshold of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影的開端," *Chinese Cinema* 中國電影, Issue 4, 1957, p.58.

[21] The cameraman was the American K. Henry. A cast and crew were taken in March 1931 to Tokyo, where the film was made (with Minatoki sound equipment), cut, and tried out at the Chinese Embassy. Its Japanese origin was concealed behind publicity, but the truth leaked out as the Japanese army invaded Manchuria on September 18th, 1931, and the film was boycotted by patriotic citizens. Jay Leyda, *Dianying*, p. 66; Xu Bibo, "The Threshold of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影的開端," *Chinese Cinema* 中國電影, Issue 4, 1957.

technicians and cinematographer,[22] featuring song and dance numbers created and arranged by the popular music composer and music educator, Li Jinhui.[23]

As in early sound films in other cultures, song and dance were underscored as major attractions in these early Chinese (partial) sound films. As an effort to indigenize the sound film, these films greatly accentuated Chinese folk songs and indigenous operas; this was also the case in *Two Stars*, which highlights Cantonese operatic tunes. However, even prior to the emergence of sound films, the filmmaker Sun Yu[24] had already experimented with song accompaniment during the film exhibition. For instance, in his 1928 silent film *Xiaoxianglei*, when an intertitle indicated a particular melody should be heard, Sun had a musician play the song with a flageolet in the film theater. In his 1929 film *Spring Dream in the Old Capital* (gudu chunmeng), Sun employed excerpts of Mei Lanfang performing a sword dance and played a record of the Beijing opera as an accompaniment. Although the rhythm did not match well, the practice underscores how Sun always attempted to provide direct musical experience in the theater for the audience. In his 1930 film *Wild Grass* (yecao xianhua), Sun created the first Chinese film theme song, titled "Searching for older brother,"[25] which was sung by the film stars featured in the film, Ruan Lingyu and Jin Yan. Sun Yu himself manually synchronized the record in the film theater for the first three days after the film's release and then trained an assistant to play it at the correct moment. The

[22] The recording technicians were British Bryan Guerin and American Charles Hugo, and the American cameraman, Bert Cann. See Leyda, p. 67; Xu Bibo, "Prospect of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影界的展望," 珊瑚, Vol. 1, I. 4-11, 1932. Xu also notes that each phonographic disc has 40 marks, which means each disc could be played 40 times before the sound would be indistinct. The sound quality of these records was better than that in sound-on-film technology; the shortcoming was that if even a small part of the film was damaged, it would cause discrepancy between the sound and the image. Xu Bibo, "The Threshold of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影的開端," *Chinese Cinema* 中國電影, Issue 4, 1957, p.58.

[23] Li also wrote and arranged a song, "Strive (nuli)," for *Two Stars*, and the song and dance troupe he managed merged into the Lianhua studio when the film was made.

[24] Sun Yu (1900-90) was a major leftist film director active in the 1930s in Shanghai. One of the core filmmakers of the Lianhua Film Company. Sun studied literature, drama, and photography at the University of Wisconsin, in New York at a class conducted by David Belasco, and in an evening course at Columbia University. See Leyda, p. 68.

[25] Lyrics were by Sun Yu and the score was composed by his brother Sun Chengbi.

"Great China" and "Xinyue" record companies released two versions of records from the film, with Chinese and Western musical accompaniments respectively. Songbooks were also sold with the records when the film was released, and the film and record boosted each other's popularity[26]—an early case of media convergence in China.

Since sound-on-film technology was mostly controlled by American companies such as Western Electric Co. and RCA, Chinese film studios lacked the financial means to pay enormous patent fees, sound-on-disc technology became a more feasible option for making sound film. Since the early Chinese silent and partial-sound films mentioned above have not survived, *Two Stars*, made with sound-on-disc technology and released on December 13, 1931, becomes a unique and illuminating case that allows us to reconstruct the film sound aesthetic and acoustic experience of 1930s Chinese cinema.

II. "A Spectacular Musical": Song and Dance in Transformation

In the sound-on-disc technological context of early 1930s Chinese film theaters, *Two Stars* relied upon the manual synchronization of silent images and phonographic records. Hence, audiences' audiovisual experiences varied according to different exhibition venues.[27] This meant that an audience's immersion in a particular theater's sonic environment coexisted with the silent images it saw onscreen that gestured towards sound.[28] When it was released in 1931, *Two Stars* was promoted by Lianhua Film Studio as a "spectacular musical (gechang yousheng jupian)"; the film marks the filmic debut of popular Cantonese singer and dancer Violet Wong (Zi luo lan). It

[26] Wang Wenhe, p. 8-9, 90.
[27] For instance, filmmaker Sun Yu went to the theater in Shanghai for the film's premiere to supervise the synchronization of image and sound for particular sequences, but this practice was hardly feasible in remote regions.
[28] The sound environment during a film screening could be complicated, involving the juxtaposition of synchronized musical sequences with external musical accompaniment or the alternation between synchronized musical sequences and silence. Most contemporary film reviews did not describe the general sound situations in the film theater: more detailed accounts of the screening circumstances still need to be discovered.

was advertised in newspapers for its six prominent narrative and audiovisual attractions: enchanting romance, magnificent set design, sophisticated performances, elegant music, delicate songs, and exquisite dance.[29] In an interesting example of both marketing strategy and transmedial practice, even before the film's production took shape, the Lianhua Film Studio and Great China Record Company cooperated to release a phonographic record of Cantonese operatic excerpts that would be featured in the film, sung by Violet Wong.[30] The songs, recorded on phonographic disc, were synchronized during the film exhibition and are highlighted by radio broadcasting in the diegesis. The record became an effective publicizing tool for promulgating the film, thanks in part to the modern media of phonograph and radio.

In the symbiotic media environment of early 1930s semi-colonial metropolitan Shanghai, sound cinema, phonograph, and radio formed a prevailing triangle. More than 100 thousand radio sets in Shanghai transmitted both Chinese and English broadcasts to audiences in both domestic and public spaces, transmitting news programs, popular songs, and various vernacular operatic tunes. Radio changed people's listening habits, acoustic perceptions, and mentality,[31] opening up a new social space and constituting a new 'listening public' that was the implied subject of this new medium's intimate anonymity.[32] Jonathan Auerbach also argues that a new sensibility was nurtured by modern audiovisual technology and culture, both in daily life and through representation, establishing a degree of sensory convergence and perceptual integration: "from the very start, the phonograph immediately conjured up the prospect of the visual […] the illusion of

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[29] "奇情、偉景、表演、雅樂、清歌、妙舞." Advertisement in Shenbao《申报·本埠增刊》第七版, December 10, 1931.

[30] Lu Jie's Diary (陸潔日記摘抄), entry of June 6th, 1931. Beijing 北京: China Film Archive 中國電影資料館, 1962, p. 34.

[31] Wang Ying 汪英, "聲音傳播的社會生活—1927 - 1937 年的上海廣播演變軌跡," 社會科學家, No. 1, 2006, pp. 190-93. For an overview of the development of radio broadcasting in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai, see 上海研究資料續集 [Sequel to Research Materials on Shanghai], Shanghai Shudian 上海書店, 1939, pp. 565-718.

[32] Yeh, p. 388.

real presence."[33] The spatial proximity of the record store and film theater also made transmedial consumption and media convergence more convenient: in late 1920s Shanghai, a record store opened near the Nanking film theater, and the film audience usually rushed to buy records after watching a sound film. For example, they would buy the records of Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell after watching the American backstage film musical *Sunny Side Up* (1929, Donald Crisp) that they starred in.[34] Michael Denning's research notes that since the mid-1920s, there was a boom in vernacular music recording in colonial ports (like Shanghai) all over the world. The combination of electrical recording and vernacular music constituted a new sound formation: an electric era of microphone and loudspeaker that united phonograph, radio, and sound film but was based on the dissemination of vernacular musics. This combination created radically new configurations of world musical space—a new musical world system, both economically and symbolically.[35] Denning's optimistic interpretation of indigenous and popular music-making and of the polyphony of subaltern musical cultures as a form of decolonization, nationalism, and defiance of established musical hierarchies also helps explain *Two Stars*' prominent use of Cantonese operatic music: its combination of nationalist populism and commercial value.

Indeed, with music as just one of its acoustic attractions, *Two Star*'s soundtrack provides great musical variety, combining new and old, Western and traditional Chinese styles. The soundtrack was supervised by four "musical advisors": Xiao Youmei and Li Jinhui specialized in Western classical music and Chinese folk/popular music, Jin Qingyu was the expert on Cantonese music,

[33] Jonathan Auerbach, p. 66.
[34] Qian Guangren 錢廣仁, "From the influence of wireless broadcasting on the development of the record industry to the relationship between sound films and records 從無線電播音影響唱片事業的發達說到有聲電影與唱片的關係," *Xinyue ji* 2 (September 1930).
[35] Michael Denning, pp. 67-68.

and A. J. Richter the expert in orchestral and jazz music.[36] The music track for the film features two Cantonese songs: the ancient Cantonese ballad "Rain on the Plantain Leaves" and an excerpt from the Cantonese opera *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*.[37] Both were supervised by Cantonese music expert and dulcimer 揚琴 musician Gao Yupeng 高毓彭.[38] The film's songs for the Girl Scout dance, Egyptian dance, and tango dance were supervised by Li Jinhui, with A. J. Richter conducting the Carlton Orchestra.[39]

Two Stars has since become a "silent film" on film prints and DVDs and most of its soundtrack has not yet been rediscovered, since it was made with the technology of "sound-on-disc" instead of "sound-on-film." The extant film print in the China Film Archive is silent, and the two DVD versions, released in China and in the U.S., provide different forms of contemporary soundtracks for the film.[40] Therefore, the discussion of the original music track and sound aesthetic

[36] Referred to as Y. M. Siao (1884-1940) in the opening credit. He was a German-trained pianist, composer, and music educator, as well as the first head of the National Conservatory in Shanghai, specializing in Western classical music composition and theory.

[37] The Cantonese tune, sung by a female voice, is called "子喉曲". The lyrics of *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*: "柳葉雙眉久不描……掩畫屏卷珠簾，羞見檐前雙燕。最驚心，欄前新柳又青似當年。只是我到今春，不死前春心恨。任花殘惟掩淚，拼它瘦損金鈿。從今後，難望梅亭重賞宴。甚從前，品茶賜笛總總都是枉然。天闕沉沉，任他霓裳歌遠。碧雲驚破十三弦。人間好事只在長生殿。萬戶千門各自天。晨鐘動，簾外曉鶯啼，又是一宵望盡……獨踟躕，此樓東，抱恨綿綿……" quoted from Qin Tian 秦田, Liang Yanran and "Collecting the Remnants of Cantonese Tunes 梁儼然與《粵曲拾遺》," Nanguo Hongdou 南國紅豆, No.3, 2005, p. 44-6. Lv Wencheng 呂文成, known as "King of erhu 二胡", could sing Cantonese opera with a feminized voice. One of his popular repertoires was *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*. His disciple Ziluo Lan (Violet Wong) was also well known for singing this song.

[38] Gao also adapted "New Rainbow Raiment Song" from Tang Dynasty court music as the opening song of the film. Wang Wenhe, p. 13.

[39] Li Jinhui (1891-1967) was a Chinese pop-song composer and "national dialect movement" advocate. For a more detailed discussion of his career and the surrounding controversy, see Andrew Jones, *Yellow Music*, particularly chapter 3, "The Yellow Music of Li Jinhui."

[40] The exant film print in the China Film Archive is silent, and the two DVD versions, released in China and the U.S., provide different forms of contemporary soundtracks for the film. The U.S. version was released in 2007, with a new score composed by Toshiyuki Hiraoka; the Chinese version is accompanied by an anonymous score that was added later, most likely by the company that released the DVD. In this version, excerpts from the Cantonese opera *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber* are replaced, in an improbable and anachronistic discrepancy characterized by thematic and stylistic incongruity, by the song of another popular singer: Bai Guang's "Ten Sighs", which originated from the 1949 Hong Kong film *An Unfaithful Woman* (*Dangfu xin*, Yue Feng).

of *Two Stars* in this chapter has been reconstructed from contemporary publicity materials, film reviews, and later versions of phonograph records. When *Two Stars* was originally released in 1931, the female protagonist Li Yueh-Ying's (Violet Wong) singing of an excerpt from the Cantonese opera *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber* was featured as a novel aural attraction.[41] As Jean Ma notes, the discursive construction of the renowned songstress in Chinese cinema served to justify and naturalize the inclusion of song in the film, granting a diegetic pretext for scenes of lyrical performance.[42] The singing scene lasts about five minutes and is composed of static long takes and limited variations in camera angles and shot ranges. In the U.S. DVD version, accompanied by Toshiyuki Hiraoka's composition, these static long takes of the female character sitting still for five minutes are supplemented only by instrumental music and thus appear to be excessively lengthy, even unbearable. It becomes pure duration for a contemporary audience's auditory experience, which is a sharp contrast to the experience of the original 1931 film audience—since at that time, the musical attraction offered innovative and sensational audiovisual amusement, despite the technological deficiencies noticed by film critics. The hermeneutics of cross-era aural reception of the film, though not the focus of this chapter, help explain that the original audiovisual synchronization (the singing voice and the singing person) provided a smoother experience for the audience; different sound accompaniments to the same sequence can change the audience's perception of the visual, since audiovisual interplay helps to reconstruct and reimagine the soundscape of the partial-sound film.

However, a critic also criticized the singing voice he heard in the 1931 film theater for being

[41] The original record of *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber* is still yet to be discovered; there is another recorded version currently available, sung by Lin Yan (林豔), and issued by China Record Plan (中國唱片廠) in the 1960s, which lasts about 7 minutes. Another version sung by Zhang Yujing can be heard at: http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/5qNFv2eQNXY (access on May 25, 2016)

[42] Jean Ma, *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015). p. 6.

indistinct and "shrill," and the critic looked forward to the advent of a full talkie.[43] Such "shrillness" may have been due to the high-pitched voices characteristic of Cantonese opera singing; moreover, sound-on-disc technology compressed the 78 rps into 33 1/3 rps to match the 24 frames per second in sound film projection, which also made voices sound shriller than they originally were.[44] In this sense, the technical limitations of sound recording and reproduction equipment and loudspeaker systems likely contributed to the critic's unsatisfying auditory experience. The unpleasant sound he reported could also have been a result of his untutored state of listening or of the audience's psychological limits – the audience of the period had to learn to get used to the artificial sound emitted from film theater loudspeakers, which was distinct from what was heard in their daily lives and from their perception of silent film musical accompaniment.[45]

III. The Diegetic Auditor: Mediation and Remediation

Sound perception in partial-sound films is occasionally mediated by internal auditors within the cinematic diegesis, a feature that enhances the sense of "listening" promoted by a film and foregrounds both sound/musical attraction and the visualized interpretation of aural experience.[46] This is a recurring motif in opera and cinema: the external viewer/audience identifies with the internal spectator's/auditor's point of view and audition and usually shares their audiovisual perception, a feat accomplished via a certain degree of mediation. Through the imbrication of layers of auditory awareness, this temporal and spatial experience is gradually unfolded and revealed. In *Two Stars*, all six instances of song and dance performance are mediated by internal auditor/spectators or by technological means within certain architectural spaces.

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[43] Jibing, 寄病. *Brief Review on Two Stars* 新片小評: 銀漢雙星 (Issue 27, 1931).

[44] Xu Bibo, "The Threshold of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影的開端," *Chinese Cinema* 中國電影, Issue 4, 1957; Wang Wenhe, p. 11.

[45] Balazs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter. trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York & Oxford: Berghan Books, 2010), p. 187.

[46] Characters listening to a certain sort of sound within the diegetic space.

For instance, at the beginning of the film (05'00-08'00), a film crew is shooting on location. When two actors walk over a hill ready to begin the shot, they discover a group of passersby standing outside a lakeside villa listening attentively to something that for viewers is located off-screen. As the actors walk closer, they hear (their facial expressions suggest) a singing voice emanating from the villa that is truly enchanting, so they join the group of engrossed listeners. The director on the other side of the hill sees no trace of the actors after he has instructed them with a loudspeaker; he sends his assistant over to check on them, but of course the assistant is also mesmerized by the singing. The director and the script clerkhave no choice but to come as well and again are fascinated by the beautiful voice. After seeing her delicate appearance, they decide to invite the singer, Li Yueh-Ying, to perform in the studio's next film, the musical drama, *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*.

Yueh-Ying's singing voice is significantly intensified by editing that highlights the internal auditors' reactions and by the brief temporal suspension in the the narrative cause by the allure of her voice. This sequence also ingeniously stresses the splendor and enchantment of Yueh-Ying's singing through layers of revelation and exaggeration, as the camera moves from voice source to listeners' faces and from aural to visual. Visually cadenced movements within the frame resonate with the editing rhythm and imagined singing voice: the actors' rhythmic walking when joining the listening crowd; Li Xudong's (Yueh-Ying's father) rocking his chair, smoke emanating from his tobacco pipe; tree branches flowing in the breeze in the background, seen through the open window; and one listener's fingers metrically waggling. All these visual details seem to echo the musical beat of the song—since, as mentioned above, the original music track has been lost, we can only assume and imagine the rhythmic audiovisual rapport underwriting this scene. Still, it is possible to visually read the song as what weaves the scene together, especially when we see Li

Xudong and Yueh-Ying become suddenly aware of the crowd outside as they look out the window to discover people applauding. Just as there is a delayed revelation of the sound source motivating the crowd's fascination, there is also a delayed revelation of the resulting applause. The characters and the audience first hear the sound, and only later see the image. The song also creates a utopian musical world, exerting a unifying force on the crowd, and enrapturing the listening community it constitutes, which is composed of people of different social classes and vocations (including an intellectual looking man wearing a long gown and laborers in tatty clothing), in Michael Denning's words, "it transports its participants to another place and another time, an elsewhere and a not-yet."[47]

The next two dance scenes take place in an auditorium and appear in a presentational mode: direct frontal recording of stage performances. Both scenes reproduce the perspective and audiovisual experience of the audience in the theater and create continuity in time and space, image and sound. The Lianhua Song-and-Dance Troupe's Girl Scout dance scene (17'00-18'40) is featured as a single static long take lasting almost two minutes that is framed in a long shot, with a higher camera position, and gives the sense of immediacy of a live performance. The scene seems to showcase the costume, singing, and dancing capacities of the young girls in the troupe, which was recently merged into the Lianhua studio under the management of Li Jinhui, and included Li Lili and Wang Remei, who would become popular film stars of the studio. In this scene, Li Lili sings "Strive (nuli)," written by Li Jinhui, while performing a military-style march and dance. The song correspondingly encourages people to forge ahead and strengthen their national spirit.[48] The charity show being performed in the film resembles popular Western acts like the Ziegfeld Follies

[47] Michael Denning, p. 12.
[48] 影戲雜誌, Vol. 2, No.3, 1931.

of New York, filtered through imported Hollywood musicals, White Russian nightclub acts from Shanghai, and Japanese Takarazuka shows.[49] The next scene in this charity performance is Yueh-Ying's Egyptian dance (19'30-21'32). This dance scene is also result of a static camera with a tighter framing that focuses on her dexterous bodily movement, as she performs under the admiring gaze of director Wang, film star Yang Yee Yun, and other professionals from the Yen Han film studio—who consider inviting her to star in their next film, rendering the dance scene more like a "screen test." According to historical documents, the "Egyptian dance" was performed in film theaters in late 1920s Shanghai during the intermission of film screenings,[50] which means that the 1920s and 1930s Chinese audiences (like their U.S. counterparts) had experience perceiving both live performances and technologically mediated motion pictures in the same space of the film theater.

The Egyptian dance scene also lasts about two minutes and is similarly framed in terms of camera angle (slightly high), camera position (frontal), and shot range (long shots), but it is comprised of eight shots with more frequent editing—cutting alternatively between Yueh-Ying's performance on stage and reverse shots of the film crew's appreciative response. These cinematic techniques mediate Yueh-Ying's dance through the audiovisual perspective of the film crew, especially Yang Yee Yun and director Wang. This mediation demonstrates not only Yueh-Ying's qualifications as a potential film star, since her accomplished singing and dancing are so admired by the film crew, but also prefigures the burgeoning romance between Yueh-Ying and Yang. In these two sequences, exotic dances are featured more prominently than the songs, highlighting the cosmopolitan glamour of the film. However, the sense of sound and musicality are still strongly

[49] Harris, p. 205.
[50]"包婉兒女士跳埃及舞."上海研究資料續集 [Sequel to Research Materials on Shanghai], Shanghai Shudian 上海書店, 1939, p. 557.

conveyed by bodily movement.

The later Chui Wah Garden scene (24'10"-31'55") was originally featured as the audiovisual centerpiece of *Two Stars*. The scene not only showcases the spectacular set of a garden laboriously built and advertised by the Lianhua studio, but more importantly, it also highlights Violet Wong's singing voice and the studio's ability to make a sound film using the novel "film-within-a film" structure. The scene depicts the production of the costume musical drama *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*, recounting the tragic love story between Mei Fee and Minghuang, an Emperor of the Tang Dynasty. The story in *Chamber* foreshadows the tragic romance between the two actors, Yueh-Ying and Yee Yun, forming another layer of *mise-en-abyme*. This musical sequence lasts more than seven minutes and is composed of six shots, with mostly static framing (alternating between long and medium-long shots), limited variations of camera angle (cutting between three camera positions), and a relatively slow pace that echoes Mei's almost immobile sitting posture and the lingering Cantonese operatic melody. The pairing of visual stillness and fluidity of sound in this scene creates a remarkable tension and flexibility. The sense of hearing plays a significant role in constructing an acoustic environment in this scene: Mei sings facing the pond, which could refract and echo the voice and make it more mellow; Minghuang is attracted by Mei's sorrowful yet melodic song and approaches her, which the audience understands by means of the lateral panning shot that follows him. Later, when Mei and Minghuang are about to make up from a lover's tiff, they hear something announced by an eunuch and appear disconcerted—the next shot reveals that they have been alerted that Minghuang's favorite empress, Yang Guifei, is coming into the garden. To avoid arousing Yang's jealousy, Minghuang has to part from Mei, leaving her to lament her forlornness.

Yueh-Ying/Mei Fee's singing of the Cantonese opera excerpt in *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern*

Chamber is not only perceived and mediated by Yang Yee Yun/Tang Minghuang in the operatic diegesis of the film-within-the-film but also by that film's camera and crew, who are revealed in the studio only when the camera pulls back, exposing the *mise-en-abyme* structure. Since human perception of the acoustic is generally vococentric, voice is conceived to "have an immediate access to presence, to an origin of the subject," such that an "opera's essence lies in moments of pure voice."[51] The affinity of the operatic voice (in this case the Cantonese operatic tune) with early cinema has been much discussed by musicologists. Opera scholar Michal Grover-Friedlander, studying the peculiar silent operatic film *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), has asked: Does film represents a kind of visual takeover of the operatic voice? Can an image take over a voice or convey longing for that voice?[52] Silent films were silent only with regard to the human voice and speech, hence the loss of intimacy between sound and image. However, in the original exhibition spaces that showed *Two Stars*, Yueh-Ying's operatic voice accompanied the visual depiction of her singing and was not mute but a remarkable aural attraction for the 1930s Chinese film audience, creating the illusion of synchronization between voice and image, vocality and visuality. Indeed, because of the sound-on-disc technology *Two Stars* employed, Yueh-Ying's voice was simultaneously a detached object and an effective expression of subjectivity. In Jean Ma's words, Yueh-Ying's singing voice is hard to locate: "at once corporeally anchored and mechanically detachable."[53] However, since the original music track is unattainable, in current extant versions, this scene can almost be regarded as that of a silent film.

The media convergence and tango dance scene (57'40"-61'34") in *Two Stars* are also worth noting for their exotic and technological spectacles in *Two Stars*. The Yen Han sound film

[51] Michal Grover-Friedlander, pp. 184-85.
[52] Michal Grover-Friedlander. "'The Phantom of the Opera': The Lost Voice of Opera in Silent Film," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol.11, No. 2 (Jul., 1999), p. 179.
[53] Jean Ma, p. 28.

production, *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*, "meets with great success, highly praised by critics" (the intertitle says) and is welcomed by audiences (implied by the image of a crowd rushing to the film theater). The film studio thus holds a banquet in a lavish dance hall to celebrate their technological, artistic, and commercial achievements. Yueh-Ying and Yang perform a tango, accompanied by the Carlton Theatre Orchestra. In the soundtrack of the phonographic record, the music is conducted by A. Richter (according to the film's opening credits), but in the visual field, Chinese composer and musician Nie Er appears as the violinist and conductor.[54] In this scene, Yueh-Ying and Yang turn the dance floor into a stage, displaying their agility and skill in a tango demonstration that is mediated by their colleagues' gaze. They are also watched, in cameo appearances, by eminent Lianhua film directors such as Sun Yu, Cai Chusheng, and Wang Cilong, as well as by the actress Chen Yanyan.

In this way, the Lianhua Film Studio showcases its real-life talents and constructs an interesting intra-textual reference: the significance and centrality of sound. As a studio head announces (in intertitles): "the Chui Wah Garden scene is now on the screen. To prove what I say, let us turn on the radio and listen to the song of the imperial concubine, Mei Fee. The reproduction of this voice on the screen is what we must congratulate ourselves on our success." The character turns on a large wireless unit, and the audience listens to the song that Yueh-Ying sang for the film within the film, which is simultaneously being shown in a film theater.[55] The proliferation of media and spaces here is expressive: Yueh-Ying's singing is recorded by phonographic record and

[54] Nie Er (1912-1935) is a composer best known for *March of the Volunteer*, the national anthem of the People's Republic of China. He was then Li Jinhui's protégé and worked at the Lianhua Song-and-Dance Troupe. Later he turned left, and publicly renounced Li for his "decadent and pornographic" popular music, and worked with leftist intellectuals and filmmakers. For more detail, see Jones, *Yellow Music*, especially chapter 3 and 4.

[55] Shortwave and medium-wave wireless broadcasting were still a novelty, having developed in Shanghai's foreign concessions over the prior decade, and were concurrent with the emergence of China's recording industry. See Harris, p. 228.

synchronized with the film in the theater, transmitted via radio broadcasting, disseminated to the dance hall, and then remediated by the two actors and their colleagues—intensifying our awareness of the convergence of media within the film and its self-reflexive qualities.[56]

The final singing scene (83'21"-86'11") in the film resembles the audiovisual set-up of the first singing scene above, but with an utterly different tone and atmosphere. After becoming disillusioned with love and decadent city life, Yueh-Ying and her father have returned to their lakeside residence. While the first scene portrayed a jubilant group of listeners engrossed in Yueh-Ying's voice, here sorrow prevails. The scene opens with an older, fragile, and melancholic Yang Yee Yun descending from the hill with a cane and approaching Yueh-Ying's house. He hears the same song Yueh-Ying sang when they first met,[57] but judging from Yang's despairing facial expression, this time it is with a lamenting undertone. The film then cuts to the interior of her house, where Yueh-Ying is sitting beside the rocking chair, which is empty, suggesting the passage of time and the death of her father. As in the earlier scene, Yueh-Ying sings unaware of the attentive listener outside the villa; however, this time the listener does not applaud to make her aware of his presence. Separated by the door and social mores, their romance is doomed for despair. This atmosphere of despondency and emotional intensity is accentuated by the cadenced movement of the empty rocking chair and the fluttering white curtain, which make sound perceptible through the visual rhythm. Our acoustic imagination of the song is also filtered by Yang's aural perception and subjective emotional situation.

In these scenes, the "external" film spectators of *Two Stars* identify with the internal auditors'

[56] Ibid.

[57] This is assumed based on contemporary film reviews, which claimed that only two songs were audible in the film theater: "Rain on the Plantain Leaves" and an excerpt from the Cantonese opera *Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber*. It is very likely that Yueh-Ying sings the same song in the beginning and at the end of the film but with entirely distinct emotional nuances, in order to make the narrative more powerful and to put the opening and closing scenes act in dialogue with each other.

points of audition (POA) as they encounter the songs in the film theater. However, in *Two Stars* and other partial-sound films, the sound the "external" audience hears is the close-up sound recorded on either the phonographic disc (sound-on-disc technology) or the film strip (sound-on-film technology) and played back through the amplification sound system in the screening space, which eliminated the spatial signature of the sound and was without volume or reverberation modulations. It therefore did not mimic the layered auditory experience of the internal auditor, as a Chinese critic noted: sound mediated by mechanical apparatuses was indirect and lacking in variability.[58] However, early film audiences learned to cope with this discrepancy through their daily hearing experience, just as they adapted to silent images with musical accompaniment. In her discussion of visual acoustics in silent films like F. W. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), film scholar Melinda Szaloky argues that some forms of mental hearing are indirect and detached from the immediate temporality of viewing time, including aural pitch, loudness, edge, depth, motion, size, shape, color, and texture.[59] Mental hearing is a subjective experience relying on imagination. Such juxtaposition of mediation and simultaneity enriches the film's acoustic structure, which is then remediated through sonic technology and media and able to traverse different spaces. Reproduction and remediation of sound propel the expansion of the space of the diegetic world, which alternatively could be expanded simply by intra-narrative reference within the narrative or through the audience's experience of "space." Acoustic space is usually much larger than the physical space in which the sound object/subject is located, due to the centrifugal nature of sound and the imagination of the audience.

IV. **Sound, Space, and the Acoustic Imagination**

[58] Wang Yiliu 王一榴, "Sound Cinema and Theater 有聲電影與演劇," the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, p. 143.
[59] Szaloky, p. 115.

New spatial possibilities can be opened and mediated in silent films through the evocation and technological suggestion of inaudible sound, as for instance, by remediation of radio and phonograph in the diegesis. The imagination of "inaudible sound" in silent cinema considerably enriches the audience's perception of location and its experience of the spatial dynamics and fluid temporalities of film, since sound had not yet been materialized, reified, or located in the film theater; by comparison, the "fixed" quality of recorded sound could constrain the audience's acoustic imagination. While discussing architectural space and acoustic experience in modernist German literature, Kata Gellen points out that since the early twentieth century, people have experienced sound in radically new ways; indeed, this period marks a time when the scientific, musical, and architectural discourses of sound were redefining the way it was conceived—most broadly and pervasively in its relationship to space.[60] The emergence of new sound technologies and discourses reshaped people's design and perception of space and acoustics, both in daily life and in mediated audiovisual experience, such as cinema and sound reproductions. In Michael Denning's view, phonograph and radio enabled new forms of listening, particularly the simultaneous rise of individualized, private, mobile listening and of mass public listening through powerful sound systems; it also marked a new relation between the music industry and the interlinked culture industries of recording, film, and radio.[61]

Within such a media network, it is illuminating to explore how these reframed acoustic experiences influenced people's imaginations of the soundscape as distinct from the visual realm of early 1930s cinema, and how the suggestion of sound evoked and connected different locations within the diegesis. *Two Stars* provides an interesting demonstration of how a cinematic rendering

[60] Kata Gellen, "Hearing Spaces: Architecture and Acoustic Experience in Modernist German Literature." *Modernism/modernity*, Vol. 17 (Nov. 2010), p. 800.
[61] Michael Denning, pp. 71-72.

of sound media can create and remediate new associations through linkages between spaces. Unheard sound in silent cinema is usually suggested by visualized sound sources or actions, transposing the most expressive characteristics of an audible occurrence into something visual, for instance a close-up of a doorbell or the gesture of knocking at the door.[62] Almost all of the aforementioned techniques are deployed in *Two Stars*; the beginning of the film (02'46") depicts Li Xudong playing a special tune on the piano in the living room that sends a musical signal upstairs, which is answered when Yueh-Ying descends from the staircase. Sound thus connects different floors in the domestic space and provides a link to an implied offscreen space. Similarly, in Cai Chusheng's film *Pink Dream*, the distraught writer Luo Wen is disturbed by the reciting voices of children whom his wife teaches next door and calls his wife over to grumble at her. The children's and Luo's voices transmit through the walls and doors, connecting different spaces and activating the spectator's auditory perception of the diegetic world. The spatialization of sound and architecturally mediated listening work all directions. In addition to the lateral dimensions in *Pink Dream*, in Sun Yu's *Wild Rose*, they work vertically: the noises of the four young characters' romp and merriment cause nuisance to the neighbors downstairs. In addition to parallel editing and suggestions of sound linking adjacent locations, representations of modern sound and communication technologies (e.g., telephones and radio) work to reconfigure the spatial boundaries within cinematic narration. Telephones link the apartments of Yueh-Ying and Yee Yun, as well as Yee Yun's home and the dance hall. These locations are interconnected to form an intimate web in the cityscape of Shanghai. Not only do such connections constitute an extended and interlocking urban space, sound media in such films also inspires the spectator's aural

[62] For instance, in silent films such as *Little Toys* 小玩意 (Sun Yu 孫瑜, 1933), *Queen of Sports* 體育皇后 (Sun Yu 孫瑜, 1934), *National Customs* 國風 (Luo Mingyou 羅明佑 and Zhu Shilin 朱石麟, 1935), *Story of the South* 南國之春 (Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, 1932), and *Song of the Fishermen* 漁光曲 (Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, 1934).

perception, which is reinforced by the spectator's acoustic imagination.

Particularly in the context of constructed enclosures, sound can appear as a product of architectural space; it can also reveal or even generate that space. Dana Gellen argues that the early twentieth century saw the birth of an entire field of science, architectural acoustics, out of the realization that space fundamentally determines how and what we hear. In our daily acoustic experience, which has been reshaped by modern sound technology and architectural discourses, specific spatial features and the spatial signature of sound constitute our auditory experience: when we hear, we hear space. To ignore the space of hearing is to ignore the sounds themselves, since they are not only conditioned by, but also consist in, the space in which they are heard.[63] Indeed, in *Two Stars*, we can imagine the diegetic world as a reflection of the quotidian world and characters' acoustic experience as a reproduction of daily experience—even though we cannot perceive the sounds the audience or characters hear. For instance, in the opening scenes, Yueh-Ying's singing is filtered through the porous wall and window of her house and disseminates through the open field outside as ambient sound. If doors and portals can be considered boundaries between inner life and external circumstances, their permeability in the film suggests a certain degree of acoustic transparency without technological mediation.

However, in the dance hall sequence, Yueh-Ying's disembodied singing voice, as heard by the contemporary film audience, was never the same as her original voice, due to multiple layers of technological reproduction, architectural mediation, and acoustic encounters: the close-up voice of the phonographic record played in the film theater (within the diegesis) was mediated by the film theater's sound equipment and environment, then recorded by a microphone, broadcasted/transmitted via radio to the dance hall, and again mediated by the architectural

[63] Gellen, pp.799-801, 816.

material of the tremendous dance hall space. Therefore, the voice that Yueh-Ying and her colleagues hear is fundamentally different from her original voice—due to the technological deficiency of the early 1930s—raising questions and paradoxes about fidelity and intelligibility, authenticity and replication. In Michael Denning's words, recorded music was always an artifact of the recording process, and its sound was shaped by engineers and producers as well as musicians; it is easy to misread musical practice by assuming that recorded music represents that practice accurately.[64]

In the modern world, the spatial configuration of auditory experience is deeply informed by the technology, architecture, and physiology of hearing, and the cinematic space can be evoked through a spatialized discourse of sound. As Kata Gellen states, these diversified auditory experiences are not subject to the laws of physics, physiology, and architecture, but enabled by the constraints these impose upon the perceiving subject. The mental space of hearing is conditioned not by walls, floors, and building materials but by a need for knowledge that outstrips perceptual capacities. It operates according to a compensatory epistemology producing a kind of knowledge (in the form of imagined sensations, images, stories, and theories) through speculative acts inspired by a paucity of sensory experience.[65] The technologically mediated disembodied voice also acquires a certain pathos that may render it impersonal, or even ghostly, with oracular qualities that are not always appropriate to a given scene.[66] With the mediation of phonograph and radio broadcasting, Yueh-Ying's disembodied singing voice is transmitted to domestic spaces, film theaters, dance halls, and other interior or exterior locations in the cityscape of Shanghai. With the invention of numerous electroacoustic devices such as the loudspeaker (Siemens, 1874), the

[64] Michael Denning, p. 172.
[65] Gellen, pp. 801, 811.
[66] Balázs, p. 206.

telephone (Bell, 1876), the phonograph (Edison, 1877), and accompanied by the rise of radio broadcasting (c. 1920), sound film (mid-1920s), and electrical representation of acoustic phenomena and events, sound became space; sound without space is not only inaudible, it is unthinkable.[67]

Technologically recorded and mediated sounds coexists with the deployment of imagined sound in *Two Stars* and forms an interesting tension with it. Visualized and imaginary sounds suggest a new aesthetic of ambiguity, subjectivity, and variety that is dependent on different auditors' experiences. The mental hearing space is located both in the film theater and beyond this dim, secluded place, and is ultimately determined by acoustic ambience. Some spectators have found the melodious musical accompaniment of silent films more comforting than the shrill synchronized sound of early sound films. With architecturally mediated listening (whether through portals and windows, in an enormous dance hall, or, as is the case in *Two Stars*, by a pond in a film studio), the sound that is heard (in the synchronized singing scenes) or conjured up in the imagination (in other silent parts), can impel the film audience's subjective audiovisual perception and experience. As in most silent films, the "inaudible" sound of the most silent parts of *Two Stars* can be a perceptual constraint and yet still simultaneously inspire imaginative activity.

V. Debates on Early Sound Film and Transmediality

Two Stars is a product of a transitional period in film history and technology, situated at the crossroad between silent and sound. It also emerged concomitant with animated debates about film sound among critics and film professionals of different cultures. Writing optimistically about the newly invented sound films in 1930, film theorist Béla Balázs points out: "we *imagine* sound and image as the indissoluble unity of a single event. [What we perceive in a film is] not objective

[67] Gellen, pp. 800-01.

factual reality, but only the specific, immanent spiritual reality of the work of art. What matters is illusion."[68] Our internal mental associations of sound and image, as well as of sound montage, are reciprocal with our auditory impressions, emotions, and thoughts. Disagreeing with some other European and American film critics and filmmakers, who claimed sound film would destroy the poetry and subtlety of (silent) cinema, causing it to degenerate into primitive theatrical imitation,[69] Balázs argues that sound film has the capacity to give form in far richer and subtler ways to the psychic world of internal ideas than could silent film, for it is capable of representing a more complex set of associations that move in two different directions. A sound evokes an image and, at the same time, works to create another sound.[70]

In Balázs' perspective, sound film is imbued with the potential to enrich the stylistic and expressive means of cinema. However, Chinese film critic and director Huang Jiamo questions the issues of "realism" and authenticity in sound film in 1929, arguing that:

> Human beings have a deep appreciation for realistic representations; now the old two-dimensional screen emanates sound. How inane and unrealistic, and how artificial. It will definitely be hailed by curiosity seekers, but this cannot be the premise for its establishment. Cinema is comprised of moving images; it is a projection of flowing shadow, but now the shadow emits sound, and the sound is transmitted through machines (microphone, phonograph, and loudspeaker). It is only a simulacrum and replica, not the real sound. Won't this artificiality destroy cinematic realism?[71]

Huang delineated an interesting ontological tension and incongruity between the visual and aural in early sound cinema: he considered the visual a projected shadow, hence virtual, while the

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[68] Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter. trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York & Oxford: Berghan Books, 2010), p. 199.

[69] Some Chinese critics had similar argument, for instance, Zhu Xiuxia argued that the crisis of sound cinema was that it destroyed the "silent expression" on screen, as song and dance scenes impaired the emotional appeal of the whole film. In addition, the sound tone was crude and arrhythmic and could cause acoustic discomfort for the audience. Zhu Xiuxia 祝秀俠, "On Sound Cinema 對於有聲電影的意見,"the special issue on "sound cinema", *Yishu* 藝術, issue 1, 1930, pp. 149-50.

[70] Balázs, p. 200.

[71] Huang Jiamo 黃嘉謨, "On Sound Film 論有聲電影, " *Dianying yuebao* 電影月報(Issue 9, 1929).

acoustic sound mediated by various apparatuses and technologies, was equated with materiality and artificiality. In this way, the realism constructed by silent cinema can be easily undermined by technologically mediated audible sound and audiovisual discrepancy. In other words, the illusion of "realism" exists within the diegetic space in silent cinema; the sound of this reality was inaudible but compensated for by the audience's audiovisual imagination and vicarious life experience. In Huang's view, the audible sound in early sound cinema was too "real" (audible and material) and, at the same time, was not "real" enough—due to its artificial nature. Contemporary media scholar Malte Hagener's argument echoes Huang's, though it discusses 1920s European avant-garde cinema that straddled between silent and sound: "Not only does the film image originate at the back of the architectural space of the cinema while sound comes from behind the screen in front of the spectators, but sight and sound are also inscribed and worked upon with different technological processes on different apparatuses. The simultaneity and synchronicity between image and sound perceived by the spectator is therefore in technological terms an arbitrary relation and was seen as such from the very start."[72]

Michal Grover-Friedlander also argues that sound, music, voice, and speech in film do not create greater realism nor do they smooth the editing process; rather, they accentuate the medium's uneasiness and anxiety.[73] In early sound films, the intermittent songs, sound effects, and sporadic dialogues only made the silence more conspicuous, in Jean Ma's words, "bear[ing] the traces of technological disruption in their uneven textual surface and in the breaks between silence and sound."[74]

[72] Malte Hagener, p. 28.
[73] Michal Grover-Friedlander, p. 183.
[74] Jean Ma, p. 46.

In the 1930s, Chinese writer Jiang Guangci also noted that in early sound films the coexistence of intertitles, associated with silent cinema, and sound elements, undermined the unity of the film as a whole; sound interfered with the audience's emotions and left no space for them to contemplate. [75] Therefore, endeavoring to perfect the sound technology, audiovisual synchronization, and acoustic realism seemed to be imperative for the development of Chinese sound cinema. Until 1936, Chinese intellectual Du Hengzhi still lamented that Chinese sound cinema lacked a robust industrial foundation, financial strength, and musical talents; Chinese film industry in general did not have sufficient means to produce or purchase advanced sound equipment to build a sophisticated sound stage. Therefore, some sound techniques—such as mixing of various sound elements, controlling sound volume to create a sense of distance and spatial signature, fading sound in and out, the mobility of sound, as well as sound insulation—required more research and experiments, in order to reciprocally improve the use of music in cinema.[76] On the other hand, Ye Chen considered emphasizing indigenous talkies in order to popularize national culture.[77] *Two Stars*, although not a full talkie, did showcase Cantonese opera and can be regarded as part of that nationalizing effort. Malte Hagener also notes that in 1920s Europe, the introduction of sound destroyed cosmopolitanism and aroused nationalism.[78]

Two Stars is a partial-sound film that was promoted for "combining both silent and sound cinematic techniques, essence and merits."[79] It has extensive intertitles and features synchronized musical sequences recorded by phonographic records. *Two Stars* is undoubtedly a product of

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[75] Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈, the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, p. 142.

[76] Du Hengzhi 杜衡之(1913-1997), "Music and Cinema 音樂與電影", *Huangzhong* 黃鐘, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1936. Du got his MA in political science from the University of Michigan and his JD from the Sorbonne.

[77] Ye Chen 葉沉 (the filmmaker Shen Xiling who later directed *Crossroads* in 1937), the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, p. 142.

[78] Malte Hagener, p. 22.

[79] In Lianghua head Luo Mingyou's words: "撮有聲片之精華，兼無聲片之特長."

experimentation in the transitional period of silent to sound cinema and bears an unstandardized and lively "transitional aesthetic". It was publicized as "a synthesis and fruit of new and old music, Chinese and foreign song and dance, Southern and Northern drama, crystalized and under the concoction by artists, writers and composers/musicians."[80] However, the film's sound was still generated by extra-filmic sources during its exhibition. One critic comments that *Two Stars* is opportunistically advertised as a "sound film" but showcases only two tunes ("Love's Sorrow in the Eastern Chamber" and "Rain on the Plantain Leaves" by Violet Wong). In this sense, it was in fact not much different from an earlier silent film with a synchronized theme song, *Wild Grass* (Sun Yu, 1930); moreover, with the exception of the sound quality in the tango dance, which the critic found adequate, its other sound parts were fuzzy.[81] Similarly, film critic Xu Bibo severely criticized the film as "turning back the clock" with its immature technology and asynchronization of sound and image.[82]

Another film critic from that period, Fo Lang, argued that film musicals are a deviation from real sound film and primarily a commodity produced by opportunistic philistines to cater to, and provide sensory stimuli for, the audience's modern desire for sensual indulgence. This comment highlights an inherent paradox in early musicals. On the one hand, spectators felt that early sound destructed the sense of audiovisual unity in silent films and quotidian life; on the other hand, they were enthusiastic about the new audiovisual sensation. However, Fo Lang predicted that the new sound trend would be on the wane, since cinematic art is not limited to representing music spectacle but has a strong impulse to express emotions and thoughts. He claimed that current

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[80] Shenbao 申報, 12. 10. 1931.

[81] Which is the first partial-sound film produced by Lianhua Film Studio. Tan Bai 坦白, "After viewing *Two Stars* 看'銀漢雙星'后想到的話," *Screen Weekly* 銀幕週報 (Issue 15, 1931).

[82] Xu Bibo 徐碧波, "Prospect of Chinese Sound Cinema (8) 中國有聲電影界的展望 (八)," 珊瑚, Vol. 1, I. 12, 1932, pp. 3-4.

musicals were neither cinematic art nor cinematic drama but instead representations of music via the screen.[83] Another critic commented that musicals such as *Show Boat* (1929, Harry A. Pollard) focused too much on song and dance scenes, thus renouncing the independence and medium specificity of cinema.[84] Echoing Fo Lang's view that early sound film musicals were the product of philistine vulgarity, Chinese intellectual Feng Naichao likewise argued that talkies would limit its audience accessibility because of language barriers, "sound effect picture" could be a more promising form of strengthening cinematic expressivity by using sound effects.[85]

Besides such criticism based on aesthetic and technological means, Chinese leftist intellectuals, artists and critics considered the transition to sound film an intensified capitalization of the film industry and movement toward capitalist expansion, exploitation, and monopoly on a global scale. The production methods and industrial balance of power were shaken by the coming of sound, since many small film studios, record companies and film theaters could not afford the enormous capital that sound equipment required, and were annexed by hegemonic technological and media conglomerates, such as Fox, Warner Bros., and RKO.[86] The gigantic costs involved in wiring production facilities and cinemas in a relatively short time around 1930s caused a gigantic upheaval in economic terms.[87] Furthermore, from critic Chao Meng's perspective, sound cinema was only a trendy entertainment for the capitalist society; he expected sound cinema along with other art forms would transcend their entertainment functions and reach the masses as an edifying

[83] Fo Lang 佛郎, On Sound Film《有声电影论》,《微音月刊》(Volume 1, Issue 2, 1931).
[84] Peng Kang 彭康, "Losing Independence 失掉獨立性," the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, p. 146.
[85] Feng Naichao 馮乃超, the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, pp. 136-37.
[86] The special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, p. 135.
[87] This economic-institutional crisis was deepened by the first global depression following the US stock market crash of October 1929. Malte Hagener, p. 28.

tool in a new society.[88] If the full sound film led to a greater standardization and a shift in control from exhibitors to manufacturers of motion picture, the coming of synchronized recorded sound would complete the mechanization of the medium.[89] However, *Two Stars* was in between: not entirely synchronized, but with various possibilities for sound practices. Lianhua studio did not proceed with more full talkies after *Two Stars*, but made several more extremely popular silent and partial-sound films in next few years, since most Chinese audiences were discouraged by the language barrier presented by imported American talkies. Seizing this historical opportunity, Lianhua also worked with progressive intellectuals and filmmakers, capitalizing on and promoting the prevailing nationalist sentiment after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

VI. From Page to Screen: Transmedial Transference of *Two Stars*

In *Two Stars*, besides transmission of and transition to sound, the transmedial transference from the novella to the film marks the convergence of modern audiovisual media and popular literary culture. Therefore, comparing the literary text with the cinematic rendition, some omissions and alterations are suggestive. The fictional characters have real life references in the popular musical and cinematic world, constructing intricate self-reflexive relations between literary creation and historical reality. Kristine Harris and contemporary film critics contend that Li Yueh-Ying and Li Xudong in the novella are explicit reference to the famous real-life father-daughter musical team of 1920s China: Li Jinhui (1891-1967), a composer, and Li Minghui (1909-2003), a singer and actress. The duo collaborated on a popular dance drama *The Immortal Fairy Maiden of the Grapes*, which started a national craze for "fairy maiden" dances.[90] In the novella

[88] Chao Meng 超孟, "Where Is Sound Cinema Going 有聲電影到哪裡去," the special issue on "sound cinema", Yishu 藝術, issue 1, 1930, pp. 146-47.
[89] Malte Hagener, p. 24.
[90] Harris, pp. 196-7.

the dance is titled "The Immortal Fairy Maiden without Worries." Moreover, a minor character in the novella, the Cantonese film actress Zhang Jinxia who can speak Shanghai and Cantonese dialect but not Mandarin, is possibly a reference to the early film star Zhang Zhiyun.[91] In the film version of *Two Star*, these references are omitted or understated, but the participation of Li Jinhui and Li Minghui can be discerned from the performance of the "Bright Moon Song-and-Dance Troupe" managed by Li Jinhui.[92]

Zhang's novella highlights the profound influence of American cinema and popular culture and of the glamorous cinematic world on the daily life and psychology of the female protagonist Li Yueh-Ying, presenting a "vernacular modernism"[93] of fashion and entertainment. Yueh-Ying rushes to film theaters in Shanghai in order to view short-run American newsreels from which she can learn trendy hairstyles[94] and the Charleston dance. She is so enthralled by D. W. Griffith's *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) that she watches it four times in the Zhenguang film theater in Beijing and imitates Lillian Gish's performance in *Way Down East* (1920) in her classroom, moving herself and her classmates to tears. She aspires to act in a film and even expects to visit Hollywood someday as a film star. However, Yueh-Ying's captivation by American cinema and film culture was downplayed in the film *Two Stars*, for various reasons, including the desire to promote Yueh-Ying's innocence and purity (she has not yet been seduced by the "decadent" entertainment culture)

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[91] Zhang Zhiyun (1904－197？) was born in Canton and moved to Shanghai with her foster mother when she was young. She was popular in the mid-1920s and elected as the first "movie queen" in China in 1926. She stars in films such as *A Poor Heart* 人心 (Gu Kenfu 顧肯夫， Chen Shouyin 陳壽蔭 1924), *Suspects of Couple* 新人的家庭(Ren Jinping 任矜萍， 1925), *Love and Gold* 愛情與黃金(Zhang Shichuan 張石川, Hong Shen 洪深, 1926), *Why Not Her* 玉潔冰清(Bu Wancang 卜萬蒼, 1926), and *Disappointed Love* 失戀 (Zhang Shichuan 張石川,1932), among others.

[92] The troupe was invited to join the Lianhua Film Studio and was renamed Lianhua Song-and-Dance Troup ("UPS Follies or "United Photoplay Service Follies" in English) because the studio planned to make sound films. 世界画报, Issue 303, 1931, p1-1.

[93] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 6.2 (1999), pp. 59-77.

[94] Mostly the "flapper" style, which was popular both on screen and in daily life in the West the 1920s.

and to provide a positive image of film actors. This devision was also likely motivated by a subtle spirit of nationalistic advocacy for the Chinese film industry. As a result, the film omits Li Yueh-Ying's fascination with Hollywood cinema and portrays her as a delicate, innocent singer and dancer living in a suburban house with her composer father, instead of in urban area like Beijing as in the novella.

Similarly, the male protagonist, film star Yang Yee Yun is depicted in the novella as a decadent and sybaritic philanderer who fools around with prostitutes; however, he is purified and positively portrayed in the film, both in the progressive image the film star receives in the diegesis and in his impersonation by Jin Yan, the celebrated matinee idol and "movie king" of Shanghai. The film couple's love tragedy, which results from the repressiveness of feudal values and conflicts between honor and affection rather than interpersonal incompatibility, echoes the May Fourth (New Culture) Movement's defiance of traditional Chinese forms of feudal oppression (such as arranged marriage) in favor of individuality and free love. The film shares the progressive and didactic purposes of the May Fourth literature of enlightenment, only in a vaguer and more superfluous fashion. The purification of the film star character and the elevation of Chinese cinema suggest the film's ambition of competing with foreign, mainly Hollywood rivals. However, film critics could not help but make connections between *Two Stars* and Hollywood cinema: one critic considered *Two Stars* a Chinese version of the American backstage film musical *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928), because it showcased Lianhua directors and film stars, and in this sense was similar to this Hollywood film.[95]

[95] He Fu 和甫. "Chinese *Show People*: Lianhua's New Sound Musical *Two Stars* 中國的"銀星豔史"：聯華公司的有聲歌舞新片'銀漢雙星'," Screen Weekly 銀幕週報 (Issue 7, 1931).

The purified representations of the main characters in *Two Stars* aimed to rectify the notorious reputations of Chinese film stars and the film world—a negative image partially created by the mass media, especially the tabloid press. More significantly, the film is primarily concerned with the preservation of Chinese cultural identity and the promotion of a progressive image of the Chinese film industry—*Two Stars* was featured as part of the Chinese Film Revival Movement (CFRM), which was vigorously advocated by Luo Mingyou, head of the Lianhua Film Production Company and the film's producer. The CFRM was a nationalist program for elevating the stylistic and spiritual values of Chinese film production, in response to the "National Product Movement". This is reflected in Lianhua studio's manifesto, which states its motivation as "Advocating arts, promoting culture, enlightening the people, and preserving the Chinese film industry."[96] *Two Stars* exhibits this same message when Mr. Ho, a head of the Yen Han film studio, announces at a staff meeting (in the intertitles),

> Who says that there is no future prospect for Chinese films? We should always bear in mind the importance of our mission to the community at large and the necessity of perseverance in the study and perfection of this art; we must try to improve the standard of Chinese films and battle to the very end against evil powers...We must not follow the steps of some opportunists. We must build up a good name for our company and strive to win the confidence of the public. We must look beyond for bigger successes.

Director Wang concurs by adding: "We of the film industry have our mission to fulfill, that of propagation the virtues of our people and of imparting knowledge to the public through the screen." Indeed, because of the progressive underpinnings and refined quality of its productions, Lianhua studio was praised as "the most promising studio in Chinese film industry" by a critic in 1931, who also noted that films produced by Lianhua usually drew larger audiences than foreign

[96] "提倡藝術，宣揚文化，啟發民智，挽救影業."

films in Beijing and that audience appreciation of film as an art had been elevated.[97] In 1932, while there was news that Chinese registration had been made for an American sound film company, the first Chinese journal of film theory and criticism, *Film Art*, advised "how to break out of the present crisis provoked by an invasion of U.S. capial into Chinese film industry".[98] Lianhua directors and technicians also declared that they should unite in refusal to work for foreign film companies, because the Chinese film industry and market had been severely encroached upon by foreign films that frequently featured Chinese and Chinese-American characters in a stigmatized and biased way.[99]

Lianhua's collaboration with the Great China Record Company in releasing *Two Stars* records was also a nationalistic gesture, since Great China was supported and named in 1923 by Sun Yat-sen, the first president of Republic of China. It was originally a joint Chinese-Japanese venture, the Japanese capital withdrew in 1927 and the company was solely controlled by the Chinese; it subsequently promoted its records as "native products".[100] Other record companies in Shanghai— Angel, Pathé (acquired by the UK-based Columbia in 1928), Odeon, Beka, and RCA Victor, for instance—were all foreign owned. From the 1920s onward, the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial sentiment grew stronger in China, making these foreign record companies frequent targets of criticism. Great China also recorded music for Lianhua's earlier film *Wild Grass* (1930),

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[97] For instance, Lianhua productions such as *The Peach Girl* (1931, Bu Wancang) and *The Souls of Freedom* (1931, Wang Cilong) were exhibited in Beijing to a full house. Tan Bai 坦白, "After viewing *Two Stars* 看'銀漢雙星'后想到的話," *Screen Weekly* 銀幕週報 (Issue 15, 1931).

[98] Jay Leyda, p. 77.

[99] Muweitong 慕維通(Movietone), "中国第一有声电影公司聘史东山颇费周折," *Camer*a 开麦拉（Issue 80, 1932）.

[100] Ge Tao 葛濤, "聲音記錄下的社會變遷—20 世紀初葉至 1937 年的上海唱片業,"《史林》, Issue 6, 2004, pp. 53-60; Cheng Meibao 程美寶,"Transregionality of Modern Chinese Local Culture: Cantonese Opera and Music in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai 近代地方文化的跨地域性—20 世紀二三十年代粵劇、粵樂和粵曲在上海," *Modern Chinese History Studies* 近代史研究, No. 2, 2007, p. 15.

using a technique of "Paratone". The audiovisual synchronization was not ideal, but because it was marketed as a "sound film", the production met with commercial success.[101]

In order to stress the audiovisual representability of the film version of *Two Stars*, as opposed to the novella, Yueh-Ying's father Li Xudong was transformed from a poet and amateur composer (in the novella) to a professional composer. This set up provided not only a narrative pretext for the musical diversity in the film but also a cinematic reflection of the hybrid semi-colonial popular audiovisual culture of 1930s Shanghai. The traditional Chinese music Li Xudong composes in the novella in the film becomes Western music and popular songs that mix Chinese folk and Western styles, accentuating his musical versatility and the musical negotiation and cultural hybridity of the Euro-American and Chinese soundscapes. At the beginning of *Two Stars*, the intertitle indicates that Li Xudong is adept at both Occidental and Chinese music ("Li Kuk Tung, of Cantonese parentage, devoted to Occidental as well as to Chinese music"). The depiction of Chinese musical instruments such as the pipa, flute, and drum in the novella are changed in the film to the piano, with which Li Xudong composes and plays his work in the film, and a Beethoven statuette in his living room is highlighted by a close-up shot.

However, there is an interesting audiovisual and cultural tension in the film between the Chinese and the foreign, the visual and the aural. While Western music is represented visually (indicated by the piano and the Beethoven bust), Chinese music is heard aurally: Yueh-Ying sings traditional Cantonese tunes but performs an Egyptian dance and the tango. Aurally Chinese and regional but visually foreign and exotic, the audiovisual and sensory tension and fusion mark the vernacularized novelty of music and dance through the mediation of the film medium. This

[101] "Paratone" is a phonograph rotating at 78 revolutions per second, which did not match the film well, since its parity would have been 33 ½ rps. Xu Bibo 徐碧波, "Prospect of Chinese Sound Cinema 中國有聲電影界的展望," 珊瑚, Vol. 1, I. 4, 1932, p. 2.

audiovisual juxtaposition, or contestation, of Western classical and Cantonese music not only catered to the taste of the film's urban bourgeois audience, among whom Western classical music had become a fad, but was also an attempt to please the film audiences in Shanghai and South East Asia, in order to propel the film's transregional circulation—since Cantonese opera was popular among businesspeople of Cantonese origin in Shanghai and with overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia at that time.[102] Indeed, filmmaker Cheng Bugao recalled that from the early period of film, there were mostly Cantonese audiences in HongKew Cinema in Shanghai,[103] and that Cantonese businesspeople owned several prestigious film theaters in Shanghai at that time.[104]

Therefore, a social diaspora became a musical and cinematic diaspora,[105] in which regional tunes (Cantonese opera) served as a cultural location or typography, promoting communication and identification with, as well as the negotiation between, regional, national, and cosmopolitan cultures and sentiments. In *Two Stars*, negotiation of both defiance against foreign encroachment and recognition of the cultural influence of this phenomenon as emblematic of modernity suggests

[102] Cantonese music was enjoying a vogue throughout China during the 1920s and 1930s, including in Shanghai. See Virgil K. Y. Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Luo Mingyou, the head of Lianhua film studio, was from Canton and Hong Kong and had the ambition of expanding the Southeastern film market, where mainland Chinese stage performers (including the new star Violet Wong who acts the leading role and is presented as main attraction in the film) were highly popular with oversea Chinese audiences. See Harris, p. 203. Until the mid-1930s, more than 300 thousand Cantonese of all vocations resided in Shanghai and the period between 1917 to 1937 marked the peak of popularity for Cantonese opera in Shanghai. See Song Zuanyou 宋鉆友, "Cantonese Opera Performance in Old Shanghai 粵劇在舊上海的演出," *Shilin* 史林, No. 1, 1994, p. 65；Cheng Meibao 程美寶, "Transregionality of Modern Chinese Local Culture: Cantonese Opera and Music in 1920s and 1930s Shanghai 近代地方文化的跨地域性—20 世紀二三十年代粵劇、粵樂和粵曲在上海," *Modern Chinese History Studies* 近代史研究, No. 2, 2007, p. 2.

[103] Cheng Bugao 程步高, *Reminiscences of the Film Circles* 影壇憶舊, Beijing: China Film Press, 1983, p. 89.

[104] For instance, among Metropol Cinema 上海大戲院's shareholders were the Cantonese Deng Ziyi 鄧子義 and Zeng Huantang 曾煥堂, and the theater attracted a considerable Chinese audience. 上海研究資料續集 [Sequel to Research Materials on Shanghai], Shanghai Shudian 上海書店, 1939, p.534.

[105] Tianyi film company produced *Two Girls in the Battlefield* (1932) about the war of resistance, featured post-synchronized Cantonese dialects, and had the Guangdong, Hong Kong, and South East Asian markets in mind. Gan Ling 甘凌, "The Historical Development and Comparison of Chinese and American Films from Silent to Sound 中美無聲到有聲電影轉變時期的歷史沿革和比較," dissertation, Communication University of China, p. 50.

that the film's form and nationalist impulse drew inspiration from and reinvented musical urgency and agency in attempt to make Chinese sound films familiar to domestic audiences. However, with its elaborate Art Deco set design, delicate westernized costumes, and the fanciful film circle and leisure activities (mini-golf and dance halls) it depicts—not to mention the presence of English intertitles alongside the Chinese ones—the film and the Lianhua studio displayed a strong desire to make a "modern" film reach urban and even abroad audiences.

Both the novella and the film *Two Stars* foreground the narrative significance and sensory allure of song and dance: the female character Li Yueh-Ying's outstanding capacity for performance in the novella, cinematically embodied by the actress Violet Wong, is discovered as new talent by a film company of the early sound era. In this way, song and dance performances are represented as a main filmic attraction, both within and outside of the film. The location and occupation of certain characters is altered in the film, shifting the origin of the main character, Li Yueh-Ying, and her father, Li Xudong, from Beijing to Canton, in accordance with actress Violet Wong's Southeast Asian popularity and the Cantonese tunes she sings. Because *Two Stars* was not a full talkie that could showcase the human voice but a partial-sound film, which instead could highlight song and dance, the plot point in the novella of Yang Yee Yun becoming infatuated with Yueh-Ying's clear and crisp Beijing accent becomes in the film Yueh-Ying attracting the film studio's attention by singing a Cantonese song in her lakeside villa and by performing an Egyptian dance in a charity variety show. By transferring Violet Wong's singing and dancing skills to the screen and presenting them as a cinematic spectacle, *Two Stars* pioneers and prefigures the musical and dance trend of Chinese fiction films of the 1930s.[106]

[106] For instance, *Song of the Fishermen* 漁光曲 (Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, 1934), *Children of a Troubled Time* 風雲兒女(Xu Xingzhi 許幸之, 1935), *The Big Road* 大路 (Sun Yu 孫瑜, 1935), *New Women* 新女性 (Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生, 1935), *Street Angel* 馬路天使 (Yuan Muzhi 袁牧之, 1937), *Crossroads* 十字街頭 (Shen Xiling 沈西苓,

Conclusion

As Melinda Szaloky points out, "silent cinema was never silent because it was never meant to represent a mute world addressed to deaf spectators; nor did spectators understand it as such."[107] Underwritten with a metaphorical aspect of synesthesia, the medium forstered inner hearing: the perception of parallel sensations through the modality of a single sense, premised on the sight of sounds or the hearing of colors. The mental hearing of induced by visually perceptible sounds in silent film contributes to an aural comprehension and constitutes an aesthetics of ambiguity and subjectivity (since sounds are "heard" in accordance with different auditors' experiences). Physically absent but mentally present, sound and hearing in *Two Stars* claim and delineate an unruly acoustic space. In this way, the acoustic encounter and its fluid transformation in silent cinema challenges the conventional notions that space reveals itself to the eye and that the medium of sound, especially music, constitutes time—the prevailing idea that "fleeting sounds somehow correspond to 'things in motion,' as opposed to, say, stationary objects."[108] Neither of these assumptions is wrong, but they are limiting—in science and literature, as well as cinema.[109] As *Two Stars* highlights, sound becomes a function of space: it presents a musicality that is singularly elusive and undefinable, because it consists not of melodies or harmonies but instead resides in a certain configuration of architectural space.

The late 1920s was an opportune time to employ the glamour of song and dance to stimulate Chinese audiences' new-found curiosity for sound film and critics' vehement debates. Backstage dramas, musicals, and self-reflexivity were featured in both early Hollywood sound films and

1937), *New Year's Coin* 壓歲錢 (Zhang Shichuan 張石川, 1937), and *Song at Midnight* 夜半歌聲 (Maxuweibang 馬徐維邦, 1937), among others.

[107] Szaloky, p. 110.

[108] Jonathan Auerbach, p. 65.

[109] Gellen, p. 816.

1930s Chinese films.[110] For instance, *The Romance on the Screen* (Cheng Bugao, 1931) and *Film City* (Zhu Shilin, 1937) are both films about film production and the film circle. These works shaped and directed public fascination with cinema and drew attention to the film medium itself as an epitome of cosmopolitan modernity.[111] Like *Two Stars*, these films partially uncover and demystify the process of film production and exhibition, catering to audiences' curiosity and promoting a positive image of the Chinese film industry. The playback mode of musical sequences was more easily manipulated and seemed less dreary in early sound films' use of synchronization, despite its slower pace and relatively static framing. On the other hand, in addition to narrative convenience and economy, early sound films presented singing and dancing scenes as spectacular attractions (similar to how spectacles were used in early cinema, as Tom Gunning has noted), with bodily and camera movement, musical rhythm, and a sense of exhilaration echoing modern dance culture crazes—providing modern film audiences and mass culture consumers sensational sensory stimuli. In the acoustic realm, this visualized sound became the pictorial rendering of narratively significant acoustic phenomena: a crowd of rhythmically swaying bodies signifying the unifying and pacifying force of music.[112]

The term "silent film" came to denote early cinema only after the arrival of incorporated sound, which turned earlier films "silent" through retrospective taxonimizing. Yet early sound films provided acoustic sensations and reflected auditory experience in an overloaded modern soundscape. Béla Balázs argues that "sound differs from visual images in that the things we see in space are either contiguous or overlapping, optical impressions that do not necessarily merge into

[110] For instance, *The Broadway Melody* (Harry Beaumont, 1929), *Song of My Heart* (Frank Borzage, 1930), *Love Me Tonight* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932), *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933), *Footlight Parade* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933) and *Gold Diggers of 1933* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933), among others.
[111] Kristine Harris, p. 192.
[112] Szaloky, p. 113.

one. If, however, several sounds are heard simultaneously, they blend into one total, composite sound."[113] Modern sound technology and media registered and recorded heterogeneous auditory impressions for human subjects, overwhelming them with stimulation. Some modern film audiences will find melodious musical accompaniment more comforting than the early shrill sound films, as the aforementioned Chinese film critics pointed out. The aestheticized and extravagant visual style of *Two Stars*—its Art Deco set design, refined costumes, sophisticated camera movement, and editing—create a heterogeneous and dynamic aural tapestry. Indeed, *Two Stars* was a portal for early 1930s Chinese film audiences: a window into modern urban audiovisual experience and mass culture, into the enigmatic film world that created the film, and, thus, into the strength of Chinese cinema. *Two Stars* is the audiovisual epitome of 1930s Shanghai cinema's sound sensitivity and expressivity, deftly evoking self-reflexivity and transmediality in a manner that sheds lights on the complex ways that modernization and nationalism underwrote the production and promotion of Chinese sound film.

[113] Balázs, p. 187.

Chapter Two

Metaphoric Sound, Rhythmic Movement, and Transcultural Transmediality: Liu Na'ou and *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933)

> Rhythm is the most supreme and sacred law of the universe; the wave phenomenon is the primal and universal phenomenon.
>
> – Rudolph Lothar, *The Talking Machine: A Technical-Aesthetic Essay*, 1924.[1]

Introduction

In the early afternoon of September 3, 1940, in the 'isolated island' (孤島) of Japanese-occupied Shanghai, gun shots rang out on the staircase of the Cantonese restaurant Jinghua Jiujia 京華酒家, and a man was murdered.[2] The victim, Liu Canbo 劉璨波, who went by the pseudonym Liu Na'ou 劉吶鷗, was a mercurial and controversial cultural figure of ambiguous identity and distinctly transcultural and transmedial artistic aspirations. Claims, speculation and rumors explaining his murder have multiplied since his death.[3] But whatever the cause, Liu's demise brought a tragic end to his artistic vision amid the violent 1940s.

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[1] Rudolph Lothar, *Der Andere: Schauspiel in vier Aufzugen*, Leipzig. Quote from Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 71.

[2] Between 1937 and 1942, most parts of Shanghai were occupied by the Japanese army, except for the International Settlement and the French Concession. The Japanese did not interfere directly with military powers and various political and cultural groups participated in anti-Japanese activities in those areas. This period ended with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 (December 8 in Japan) and the declaration of war against the U.S. and the U.K. At that point, Japanese armed forces assumed total control of the city.

[3] Some assert he was liquidated by secret agents of the Nationalist Government in Chongqing for being a "cultural traitor," an assumption based on his collaboration with the Japanese invaders and association with the Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 government newspaper, *National News* 國民新聞. Liu's friend Mu Shiying 穆時英, a renowned Neo-Sensationalist writer, was murdered four months earlier in Shanghai, as the director of *National News*. See 燕, 短評 "劉吶鷗被刺", 新東方雜誌, 1940, 2 (1). Liu's friend – the writer, editor, and literary critic Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2013) –believed the act was one of retaliation by the notorious underworld Green Gang over financial disputes. A Japanese film professional also mentions in his memorial article that Liu had entangled himself in dubious and hazardous business dealings (probably gambling, which was considered gangster territory) to raise funds to make films and train actors.

In his brief yet prolific creative life, Liu Na'ou (1905-1940) worked in Shanghai as a Neo-Sensationalist (xinganjue pai 新感覺派) writer, translator, publisher, editor, film critic and theorist, screenwriter, and filmmaker.[4] Born into an affluent family in Taiwan, Liu attended high school and college in Japan and studied French at a Catholic university in Shanghai.[5] Liu was proficient in Chinese, Japanese, French, and English, which facilitated his intellectual exploration of multiple cultures and media.[6] Liu's linguistic aptitude and peripatetic experiences contributed to his utopian cosmopolitanism, in particular his view that art, especially cinema, could transcend national, linguistic, racial and ethnic boundaries. Raised in Taiwan while it was under Japanese colonial rule, and living in semi-colonial Shanghai, Liu embodied an urban cosmopolitanism that indexed the contradictions of colonial modernity; he was also a colonial subject caught between China and Japan, between East and West, and amid the calamity and atrocities of the Chinese resistance war against the Japanese invasion and the Second World War.[7]

In this chapter, I examine how Liu Na'ou's literary, cinematic, and theoretical work were enriched through the cross-fertilization of his transcultural and transmedial aspirations.

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[4] Neo-sensationalist literature is a modernist literary school that came into existence in Japan in the mid and late 1920s. As Yokomitsu Riichi, a representative neo-sensationalist writer, explained: "I believe that futurism, stereo-school, symbolism, structuralism, modernism and part of factualism—all of these belong to neo-sensationalism." The Japanese neo-sensationalist writers pursued "new sensations," new life modes, and new ways of perceiving objects. Their mental state, sentiment, nerve, and mood all boasted the most intense perceptibility. This form, introduced to China from Japan by Liu Na'ou, was influenced by French modernist writer Paul Morand (1888-1976). Represented by Liu Na'ou, Mu Shiying and Shi Zhecun, Chinese neo-sensationalist literature remained active in the history of Chinese modern literature for six years, from the launch of the literary journal *Trackless Train* by Liu Na'ou in September 1920 to Shi Zhecun's departure from *Modern Times* at the end of 1934. Around 1935, novelists in this school changed direction, fell into decline, or converted to realism. For more information, see David Der-wei Wang, "Chinese Literature from 1841-1937," Kang-I Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, eds. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Volume 2 from 1375*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 413-564.

[5] Liu received his bachelor's degree in English literature from Aoyama College in Tokyo in 1926 and soon thereafter registered for a French class at L'Universite L'Aurore in Shanghai, establishing friendships and forming a collaboration with later literary luminaries Dai Wangshu 戴望舒, Shi Zhecun, and Mu Shiying.

[6] In the "Chinese" category, he could converse in Mandarin, the Shanghai dialect and Cantonese, in addition to speaking his mother tongue, the Minnan dialect.

[7] Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895 by the Qing dynasty as a consequence of its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, according to the *Treaty of Shimonoseki*. It was returned to the government of the Republic of China government in 1945, with the unconditional surrender of Japan at the end of World War II.

Furthermore, I investigate how camera movement and bodily kinesis, rhythm and musicality, become intertwined with the means of transcultural transmediality, creating a vivid sense of "metaphoric sound."[8] By "metaphoric sound" in cinema, I refer to the sense of rhythm and musicality suggested by camera movement, bodily kinesis and editing. In this case, "sound" cannot be heard but can be imagined even through silence. In sound designer Walter Murch's words, "once you stray into metaphoric sound, which is simply sound that does not match what you are looking at, the human mind will look for deeper and deeper patterns […] at the geographic level, the natural level, the psychological level […] the ultimate metaphoric sound is silence."[9] Moreover, I outline how these intermingled concepts and practices created the possibility for a new audiovisual aesthetic with multi-layered remediations (across different media, art forms, and materials, and between life and art) in 1930s Shanghai and advanced—as well as constrained—a distinctively cosmopolitan vision.

I also demonstrate how Liu's theoretical, literary, and cinematic writings reconceive the city of Shanghai as a vibrant audiovisual locale full of sounds from daily life that migrate into film theatres and the cinematic screen. Set as it was in Shanghai, a contact zone and social space where "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—such as colonialism and slavery,"[10] Liu's transmedial and transcultural practice suggests the possibility of transgressing multi-layered boundaries (i.e., aesthetic, political, interpersonal, cultural, and medial) through artistic creation. In effect Liu was

[8] Walter Murch, "Touch of Silence," in Larry Side, Jerry Side and Diane Freeman, eds. *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures, 1998-2001*, Wallflower Press, 2003, 100.
[9] Walter Murch, "Touch of Silence," in Larry Side, Jerry Side and Diane Freeman, eds. *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures, 1998-2001*, Wallflower Press, 2003, 100.
[10] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledhe, 2008), 7.

able to redefine and re-territorialize the actual mediascape of Shanghai, where different media converged, to traverse new arenas of imagination.

Through a close reading of Liu's amateur film/home movie/travelogue/city film, *The Man Who Has a Camera* (持攝影機的男人, 46 min, 1933),[11] which pays explicit homage to Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's "city symphony" film, *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), I investigate how Liu's film embodies and encompasses the notions of reinvention and transculturation. *The Man Who Has a Camera* combines motifs of the city symphony, the amateur film/home movies, the travelogues, and the expedition films by drawing from other art forms, including neo-sensationalist literature of the late 1920s Shanghai. In this way, it skillfully mediates and structures Liu's autobiographical tourist experience. Brenda Hollweg argues that cine-travelogues are essentially transnational and multicultural in approach and subject matter: the form cross-references other art practices, disciplines, and media — film and photography, dance and performance, opera and painting.[12] Liu's vision of cinema as capable of transcending both aesthetic and political boundaries was increasingly challenged by social turmoil, military invasion, and ongoing atrocities. The latent utopian promise of his transcultural transmediality proved of no avail during his historical moment, although it has survived to be rediscovered in his creative work.

While cosmopolitanism and travel film (Liu's *The Man Who Has a Camera*) denote border crossing and transculturality, metaphoric sound is intimately linked to transmediality. When conceptualizing the complex status of cinema as "pure" or "impure" and accounting for its "interbreeding with other arts and media," film and media scholars have adopted the terms

[11] The title of the film appears in both Japanese (*kamera wo motsu otoko*) and English. The English title reads *The Man Who Has a Camera* instead of *The Man Who Holds a Camera*.
[12] Hollweg, 166.

"intermediality" and "transmediality."[13] These represent the peculiarly fluid methodologies, critical approaches, and perspectives entailed in consideration of any work on film. Intermediality and transmediality point to "the 'in-between' of the forms," and "processes leaving traces that have to be reconstructed."[14] Such highly interactive procedures could include transposition, combination, co-existence, integration, and transformation between and among two or more art forms and media. In Liu Na'ou's case, we find cross-pollination among literature, music, translation, screenwriting, film criticism, and filmmaking, as well as between his dramatic life experiences and everyday activities (such as travel and dance). The processes of "artistic creation and production are thus foregrounded,"[15] making the creator and audience/spectator become aware of both the specificity of a given medium and the mixing that occurs in intermedial/transmedial proceedings. In addition, the temporality and movement characterizing the fluid circuit between forms are "used in the sense of transfer and processuality in medial exchanges that resist closure."[16]

Under certain circumstances, intermediality and transmediality can be discussed almost interchangeably; however, in this chapter, I specifically underline the separate but intimately related dimensions of transmediality and transculturality in Liu Na'ou's work and life. By emphasizing "trans" rather than "inter," I focus on the elements of process and mobility

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[13] *Pure* refers to a medium specificity and is stressed by 1920s European, and especially French, *avant-garde* filmmakers and critics; *impure* refers to the cinematic hybridization accentuated by André Bazin in 1951. See André Bazin, 'In Defense of Mixed Cinema,' in *What Is Cinema* vol. 1, edited and translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley/Los Angles/London: University of California Press), 53-75. Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev, "Introduction," in *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film*, edited by Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), xix. For a brief history of the critical terms "intermediality" and "intermedia", see Stephanie A. Glaser, "Introduction," *Media inter Media: Essays in Honor of Claus Clüver*. edited by Stephanie A. Glaser (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2009), 12-28. For the conceptual history of "transmediality" and "transculturality," see Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, "Preface and Comparative Conceptual History," in *Transmediality and Transculturality*, edited by Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013), xii-xxiii.

[14] Jürgen E. Müller, "Media Encounters—An Introduction," in *Media Encounters and Media Theories*, ed. Jürgen E. Müller (Nodus Publikationen Munster, 2008), 10.

[15] Stephanie A. Glaser, "Introduction," *Media inter Media*, 21.

[16] Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez, *Transmediality and Transculturality*, xii.

characterizing transfer, transit, transposition, transformation, transgression, transcendence, and boundary traversing. As Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pisarz-Ramirez state, "The terms 'transmediality' and 'transculturality,' by the ambiguity of the prefix, denote transcendence as well as processuality and provisionality." Furthermore, they point to "the ambiguity of 'trans' as denoting processes as between media-bound and non-media specific, or, as both at the same time."[17] Compared to other contemporary Chinese literary luminaries engaged in similarly "trans" practices—Hong Shen 洪深[18] and Tian Han 田漢[19] —Liu was less accomplished at screenwriting and filmmaking, but his work is notable for its profound contribution to Chinese modernist literature and the understanding of film theory, rigorous attention to cinematic aesthetics, and ambiguous political and cultural position.[20] The complex networks and interactions among "art media and life media,"[21] and between "media identities and cultural identities,"[22] led to Liu's tragic death and notorious reputation from 1940 onwards.

[17] Ibid, xiii. The authors also assert that "since the mid-20th century, transmediality and transculturality have been launched into debates about cultural and medial sectionalism when competing terms such as inter- or multiculturality and transmediality and transculturality entrenched virulent distinctions for the organization of privilege and hierarchy…[We] seek to describe experience with more comprehensive realism and greater temporary adequacy."

[18] Hong Shen (洪深, 1894-1955) was a pioneering Chinese dramatist and filmmaker. Educated in Beijing and at Harvard University, Hong taught dramatic arts and Western literature at various universities after his return to China in 1922. He directed plays by both Chinese and Western writers (e.g., Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*) in the 1920s. Hong also worked as a film producer, screenwriter, and film director at Star Motion Picture Company 明星公司 in the 1930s. See Encyclopedia Britannica: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/276606/Hong-Shen

[19] Tian Han (田漢, 1898-1968) was a Chinese playwright and poet known for his expressive and powerful one-act plays. He studied for several years in Japan, where he developed a lasting interest in modern drama. Tian experimented in and popularized modern vernacular drama and films in the 1920s. He also wrote a few successful screenplays with progressive inclinations. He composed librettos for traditional Chinese opera and is the author of the national anthem of the People's Republic of China, "March of the Volunteers." See *Encyclopedia Britannica*: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/594812/Tian-Han. For a more comprehensive discussion of Tian Han's creative career and transmedial practice, see Luo Liang, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

[20] As previously mentioned (1.), his complicated identity as a colonial subject of Japan living in semi-colonial Shanghai.

[21] Glaser, *Media inter Media*, 13.

[22] Müller, *Media Encounters and Media Theories*, 7.

Building upon and pushing beyond the existing perceptive scholarship on Liu Na'ou's literary work, dandyish lifestyle, and complex cultural identity[23] in semi-colonial metropolitan Shanghai,[24] my research contributes to both cinema and East Asian studies in two respects: first, this chapter extensively discusses Liu's overlooked amateur travel film *The Man Who Has a Camera* (1933) and his kaleidoscopic film theories, to enrich our understanding of how early Chinese cinema and film history are in dialogue with European-American counterparts. It thus situates the film as a case study within the context of the development of world film history and aesthetics. Second, by linking "city symphony" film techniques, including camera and body movement, rhythm, and musicality, the chapter provides a nuanced treatise of "metaphoric sound" in relation to transmediality, thus complicating our perception of film sound and sound studies in general.

I. *The Man Who Has a Camera*: the amateur film, the travelogue, and the city symphony

[23] In the words of his writer friend Shi Zhecun, "1/3 Shanghainese, 1/3 Taiwanese, and 1/3 Japanese."

[24] Liu's film writings were largely neglected by official Chinese film historiography until the 1990s, due to their strong formalist tendencies (considered sign of the lack of a progressive social consciousness) and harsh criticism of 1930s Chinese left-wing films. There was also a stigma attached to Liu as a "cultural traitor." In recent years, a growing body of scholarship from mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and the U.S. has taken up his literary creations and cultural identity in relation to modernity, modernism, and Shanghai urban culture. See Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press. 2001); 劉吶鷗國際研討會論文集 (國家台灣文學館出版，國立中央大學中國文學系編印，2005); Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Face, Body, and the City: The Fiction of Liu Na'ou and Mu Shiying" and "Shanghai Modern: Reflection on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s," *Public Culture* 11:1 (1999): 75-107; Hsiao-yen Peng, *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity: The Dandy, the Flaneur, and the Translator in 1930s Shanghai, Tokyo, and Paris* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); 彭小妍，海上說情慾：從張資平到劉吶鷗. 2001; Yomi Braester, "Shanghai's Economy of the Spectacle: The Shanghai Race Club in Liu Na'ou and Mu Shiying's Stories," *Modern Chinese Literature*, 9:1 (Spring 1995): 39-57; 李今,《海派小說論》,《海派小說與現代都市文化》（安徽教育出版社， 2001）；"新感覺派和二三十年代好萊塢電影，"332 - 56. 許秦蓁，重讀台灣人劉吶鷗：歷史與文化的互動考察，1998; 許秦蓁、康來新合編，《劉吶鷗全集》(國立台灣文學館、台南縣文化局編印，2001);《劉吶鷗全集．增補集》(台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版，2010); 許秦蓁，《摩登．上海．新感覺：劉吶鷗》, 2008; 三澤真美惠 (Mamie Misawa)，《在「帝國」與「祖國」的夾縫間：日治時期台灣電影人的交涉與跨境》，李文卿、許時嘉譯(台北：臺大出版中心，2012).

In this section, I examine Liu Na'ou's amateur film *The Man Who Has a Camera* and explore how the "city symphony" as a modernist film mode intimately interacts with the multisensory experience of traversing urban space by conveying a strong sense of mobility and rhythmicity. *The Man Who Has a Camera* is primarily a venture in border crossing, as it traverses various film genres and modes and travels through different regions and across national borders. In this way, Liu creates a flowing transmedial aesthetic that embraces the transcultural circulation of film texts, criticism, and culture.[25]

The city symphony film is cited in the genealogy of the modernist avant-garde, imbricated with poetry, photography, music, dance, graphic design, modernist literature, as well as the Constructivist and Futurist art movements of the 1920s. As Bill Nichols argues, the collage-like synthesis of indexical photographic realism, narrative structure, and modernist fragmentation induced by the radical juxtapositions of time and space in montage is expressive of what could be considered stylistic excess. This totalization is linked to radical shifts in subjectivity,[26] capturing the perceptual disorientation of the modern urban experience.

The "city symphony" film mode possesses a vivid literal and metaphoric sound aesthetic (including movement, rhythm, and musicality) that incorporates sensory perceptions and urban soundscapes, even in its early silent incarnations.[27] Early European-American city symphony films were usually silent but presented alongside a musical accompaniment composed of a specifically

[25] See, for instance, works by Liu Na'ou and Mu Shiying, as well as by Japanese writer Yokomitsu Riichi's modernist installment fiction *Shanghai* (1928-1929).
[26] Bill Nichols, "Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry*. 27: 4 (Summer 2001): 582-95.
[27] Early city films or city symphony films include Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les Heures* (1926), Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Big City* (1927), Mikhail Kaufman and Ilja Kopalin's *Moskva/Moscow* (1928), Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1929), László Moholy-Nagy's *Impressionen vom alten Marseiller Hanfen* (*vieux port*) (1929), Corrado D'Erric's *Stramilano* (1929/1930), Jean Vigo's *Propos de Nice* (1930), Herman Weinberg's *City Symphony* (1930), as well as other early avant-garde films picturing New York City in the 1920s, such as Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand's *Manhatta* (1920), Jay Leyda's *A Bronx Morning* (1931), and so on.

commissioned score. Most of these films were screened with live musical accompaniment, which occasionally corresponded to the soundscape outside the exhibition space. For instance, the Austrian composer Edmund Meisel, who created the score for the prototypical city symphony film, *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, dir. Walter Ruttmann, 65min, 1927), conceived of his work as an assemblage of noises that characterized a cosmopolitan center. The expectation was that the urban spectator would recognize the "symphony" of sounds that emanated from, and resonated with, the sonic environment of quotidian life in the metropolis.[28] Moreover, the intense sensations produced by the rhythm and speed of the metropolis and the spectacle of a "world in motion" are enhanced by a montage technique based on "visual rhythm."[29] The visual elements – the intensive tempo underlined by alternation between stasis and movement (both camera movement and the movements of subjects within the frame), variations in camera angles, intertitles,[30] and rapid montage – powerfully evoke musicality and a dynamic acoustic environment.

Analogously, the travel film is a diverse and porous form.[31] It is embedded in and reflects modern capitalist networks of transportation, communication, and colonialist values. In the silent era, travelogue exhibitions were usually accompanied by live illustrated lectures and imbued with

[28] Nora M. Alter, "*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927): City, Image, Sound," in Noah Isenberg ed. *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 196. Interestingly, *Berlin* was categorized as a "pure film" or an "absolute film" in Liu Na'ou's writing, since it was not a plot-oriented fictional film with an artificial setting (although it contains a couple of constructed dramatic scenes, such as a woman jumping from a bridge to commit suicide), and has an overall cinematic rhythm uninterrupted by verbose explanatory intertitles. See Liu, "On Cinematic Art (影片藝術論)", in *The Complete Works of Liu Na'ou*: *On Cinema* （劉吶鷗全集．電影集), 2001, 274.

[29] Alter, 199.

[30] For instance, the shape, size, length, and frequency of the intertitles also influence the audience's perception of rhythm and speed. Liu, "On Cinematic Art," 276-280.

[31] Travel film dominated the early cinema period from 1895 to 1905 and is considered the "first chapter" in the history of the documentary by British documentary filmmaker John Grierson. The genre was later incorporated into mainstream Hollywood fiction films as spectacular attractions, showcasing exotic cultures and locales.

pedagogical significance.[32] The features of travel films are manifest in avant-garde cinema, home movies, ethnographic, and fiction films. As a sub-mode of travel film, the amateur travel film underwent technological and material transformations, shifting from the 9.5 mm format introduced in 1923 specifically for the amateur market to the popularization of the 16 mm in the post-World War II era. Amateur films usually record the shared experiences of family and friends as a souvenir of leisure excursions and combine family shots and tourist views captured for posterity with markedly phatic functions.

As rare case of an amateur travel film made in 1930s China, *The Man Who Has a Camera* was shot in a 9.5 mm "Pathé Baby" amateur film system. It not only combines various styles of film (e.g., city, essay, diary, amateur, travel, sketch, and experimental/avant-garde) but also transcends dogmatic topographical, national, racial, linguistic, and media boundaries. It adapts and reinvents the "city symphony" film convention in a Chinese (and East Asian) context. This work had fallen into oblivion for more than half a century before Liu's grandson, the documentary filmmaker Lin Jianxiang 林建享, rediscovered the film rolls in 1986, in a rusty tin box in their family's attic in Xinying, Tainan 台南新營.[33] The rediscovery and restoration of the film have

[32] For books on amateur cinema, see, Charles Tepperman, *Amateur Cinema: The Rise of North American Movie Making, 1923-1960* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015); Laura Rascaroli, Gwenda Young and Barry Monahan (eds), *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Patricia R. Zimmermann, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[33] This is now Xinying District, the location of a second administration center for the Tainan City Government. Sugar production was the most important industry in Xinying during the Japanese colonial period. The Liu family was prominent there, possessing large parcels of lands, and the family sent many of its descendants to study abroad, either in mainland China, Japan, or Germany. After format conversion and restoration by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), Liu's film was released on DVD in 2006 as part of the 15-film collection, "Moving Images in Contemporary Taiwan: From Documentary to Experimental Films" (台灣當代影像：從紀實到實驗). These details were gathered from my several interviews with Lin, in 2010 and on September 26, 2015 respectively.

inspired a few essays in Chinese, but a comprehensive, in-depth treatise on the work has yet to be produced.[34]

While most city films focus on a specific city, *The Man Who Has a Camera* presents the journey and experience of traveling as being as significant as the city itself.[35] Liu seems to have conceived a utopian cosmopolitan artistic vision that was located in, yet stretched far beyond, the contours of the city. The film documents Liu and his companions' peregrinations in and among four cities that traverse various political boundaries around 1933: Tainan, in colonial Taiwan; Canton (then under the control of the Nationalist government); Mukden (of ambiguous status); and Tokyo, Japan.[36] Like many travelogues that challenge the established and hegemonic causal narrative structures underwriting both documentary and fiction films of that period, the form of narration in *The Man Who Has A Camera* is episodic and fragmented, integrating views of natural wonders and urban scenery.[37] It contains impressionistic street spectacles, with images of quotidian life and family gatherings, as well as excursions by trains, automobiles, ships, airplanes, and other modes of modern transportation. The film essentially unfolds as a private visual journal and souvenir or diary film, with Liu as its privileged agent. It oscillates between observation and self-

[34] See Lee Daw-Ming 李道明, "劉吶鷗的電影美學觀—兼談他的紀錄電影《持攝影機的男人》" (Liu Na'ou's Concept of Film Aesthetic, and His Documentary *The Man Who Has a Camera*), 劉吶鷗國際研討會論文集, 2005: 145-159.

[35] Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* is an exception, with footage shot in five different Soviet cities including Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa.

[36] The area, located in northeast China, was known as Manchuria and designated by the Qing dynasty as the homeland of the ruling family's ethnic group, the Manchus. In 1931, Japan seized Fengtian/Mukden following the *Mukden Incident* and in 1932 installed a pro-Japanese puppet state, Manchukuo, with Puyi, the last Qing emperor, as its ruler. Puyi was forced to abdicate in 1912, in response to the Republican Revolution of the previous year, thus ending the 267 years of Qing rule in China. During the Manchukuo era (1932-1945), the city was called Fengtian in Chinese and Mukden in English. Manchukuo's government was abolished in 1945 after the defeat of Japan at the end of World War II. Since then, the city has been called Shenyang.

[37] In Jeffrey Ruoff's words, the travelogue is an open-form essay that often brings together scenes without regard for plot or narrative progression, combining exposition, narrative, and comment. During the hegemonic period of the studio system, the loose narrative aspects of the picaresque offered an alternative to the linear cause-and-effect structure of classical Hollywood cinema. Ruoff, "Introduction," 11.

stylized performance, with Liu's fellow travelers serving as mediating figures who guide the viewer through the cityscape.

The Man Who Has a Camera is comprised of five sections. The first is entitled "Human Life" (人間卷, 11 min) and was shot in the Liu family mansion in Xinying, Tainan. It has the explicit characteristics of a home movie, presenting Liu's family members and friends as they pose in front of the camera, strolling, tottering, smiling, and talking.[38] The second segment, "Tokyo" (東京卷, 10 min), unfolds as a travelogue about Liu and his companions' voyages, adopting certain patterns of the "city symphony" film. This is especially evident in the time-based structure (from dawn to night, as presented in *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera*), in the dynamic mobility of vehicles, and in the oblique camera movement and rhythmic editing. The third segment, "Scenery: Mukden" (風景卷. 奉天, 10 min), follows Liu's fellow travelers as they wander around Fengtian city. They visit tourist destinations such as the Northern Mausoleum 北陵 and Xinjing Park 新京公園.[39] The fourth section (10 min) is shot in Guangzhou (Canton), the only place among the four locations in which the Chinese Nationalist government had complete sovereignty in 1933.[40] The fifth and final segment (4 min) portrays a street pageant in Tainan, on some unspecified special occasion.

The first section of the film highlights the subjects' intense affection and their curiosity about the encounter with filming, a new experience for both adults and children. The subjects inquisitively and intensely look into the camera, a recently invented "bizarre" mechanical gadget. Some shots are close-ups or even extreme close-ups, suggesting that the camera/cameraman came

[38] For scholarship on "home movie", see Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann, eds. *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
[39] Northern Mausoleum Park was established in 1927 and located in the northern part of Fengtian. It includes Zhaoling, the tomb of the second Qing emperor, Huang Taiji, which was constructed between 1643 and 1651.
[40] In addition to Tokyo, Tainan and Fengtian were also under Japanese control.

very close to the subjects, creating a sense of proximity and intimacy. The adults and older children seem to be taking instructions from the man behind the camera, taking a few steps, pausing, resuming their walk, shaking hands, and so forth. They pose ritualistically, as if being photographed, confused about being filmed since the practices with which they are familiar have previously been limited to photographic experiences. The experiential aspects of this section, and its images, fall into the interstices between still photography and the moving image, strongly evoking a transmedial implication. These scenes echo Alexandra Schneider's argument that the family film intersects with the travelogue, oscillating between spontaneous observation, playful staging, and photographic posing.[41] We can assume that the film was exhibited in a private or semi-private setting for the viewing pleasure of family and friends, which could be partly derived from recognition of certain faces and landmarks on screen—as if flipping through a mobile family album. This private viewing is suggested by this section's thematic and stylistic intimacy, in addition to the fact that there is no record indicating the film was publicly screened. In this sense, *The Man Who Has a Camera* differs from travelogues intended for commercial public exhibitions, which tend to employ more medium and long shots to suggest a grander spaces and further distance between the camera and the land- and cityscape.

Moments of "looking back at the camera" strongly raise the spectator's awareness of the film medium and the mediation of the image. This technique not only frequently appears in home movies, but also constitutes the self-reflexive convention in city symphony films. It draws attention to the filmic medium itself by disclosing the process of film production – utilizing unusual camera positions and rapid montage or simultaneously presenting different events (even at different times

[41] Alexandra Schneider, "Homemade Travelogues: *Autosonntag*—A Film Safari in the Swiss Alps," in Jeffrey Ruoff, ed, *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 158.

and locations) to reconfigure the big city as a palimpsest.[42] Thus, the film medium and the self-exhibition of the filmmaker are foregrounded to create "a mise en abîme in which the cinema could talk to itself and about itself."[43] *The Man Who Has a Camera* takes such practices further by illuminating a dramatic and transparent form of revelation as a man points his still camera at Liu's moving camera on a ship while on an excursion to Canton (in Part 3): there is a moment of demystification and transmedial revelation as the two cameras and media encounter and grapple with each other, such that the ongoing manipulation and mediation of the photographic and cinematic apparatuses are suddenly illuminated for the viewer.

The spectator's view is further mediated through the embodiment of Liu and his companions' visual perspectives and somatic excursions through the urban landscape (especially in the sections on Tokyo and Mukden), with episodes that exude the kinetic energy of the journey. The film's visual imagery may then be filtered or distorted through Liu's highly subjective perspective. Liu Na'ou himself appears in a few shots (especially in part one of the film), sometimes in extreme close-up: sitting in a rickshaw, smiling, or waving through a train window. In these scenes, his family members or friends operate the camera—this is common in home movies, marking the work as a collaborative and improvisatory practice. Dimitris Eleftheriotis argues,

> While the traveler's vision is an essential component of views on the move, his or her body becomes a site of inscription of the materiality of the journey and provides a physical anchor for the spatial exploration of the films. This enables an embodiment of vision and a visual manifestation of the impact on the experience on the traveler, constructing the body as a powerful instrument of mediation between distant views of space as landscape and intimate experiences of it as land.[44]

[42] Derek Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity: The Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*," *Monatshefte*, 96: 1 (Spring, 2004): 88.
[43] Hagener, 73.
[44] Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 99-100.

The vigorous intensity of movement in the city symphony and travel film and the way these forms thematize the accelerated pace of the urban experience can be traced to the representation of dynamic machines like modern transportation vehicles, entertainment apparatuses (including the swing, the carousel, Ferris wheel, and roller coaster) and cinematic devices. Most of these machine elements are abundant in *The Man Who Has A Camera*, conspiring to highlight the movement, speed, and thrill of trains, steamships, automobiles, airplanes, and bicycles—and creating an extraordinary sensational audiovisual and visceral experience.[45] In Part One (01'25''-01'48''), for instance, the static shot and framing of a train approaching Xinying Station is reminiscent of Auguste and Louis Lumière's *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1896), and appears to pay tribute to the cinema's alleged origins. As a technological invention and industrial machine, the train embodies the novel attractions of mobility and speed.[46] It also epitomizes Liu's aspirations to travel far from the small town on the island of Taiwan, as an inquiring and intrepid cosmopolitan artist.

In the "Tokyo" segment, Liu and his companions go sightseeing in the city, visit a zoo, row boats on a river, play on a swing, and experience the thrill of speed in different modern vehicles: automobiles, trains and planes.[47] The exhilarating sensations afforded by these new forms of transport for the rider/camera (as well as the identifying spectator) are highlighted throughout the

[45] As Heiner Fruhauf points out, the large-scale steamship and its dense facsimile of modern society was a topic of universal interest during the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, it is a floating hotel equipped beyond the standard luxuries of its counterparts on land; to the beholder ashore, on the other hand, the ship moves from and to infinity, eventually merging with all-encompassing nature at the meeting point of sky and ocean. Most of all, this elaborate construction bears witness to the superhuman qualities of mankind. "Urban Exoticism and Its Sino-Japanese Scenery, 1910-1923," *Asian and African Studies*, 6, 1997, 2, 145.

[46] For trains and the cultural perception of speed and visuality, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986); Lynn Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

[47] In Liu's dairy entry (August 9th) in 1927, he recorded going to a popular entertainment and leisure destination, Tamagawa Gardens, to ride donkeys, go swimming, and ride airplanes. See "劉吶鷗全集. 日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編, 彭小妍、黃英哲編譯(台南縣文化局, 2001) (vol 2), 506. The film evokes this experience some five years later.

film. Here, double or triple movements are captured and intensified by the camera. By "double or triple movements", I mean (1) the camera movement; (2) the camera mounted on a moving vehicle of some kind; and (3) the movement of a subject within the frame. When all three appear simultaneously, the sense of mobility is both multiplied and intensified. For instance, the audience is treated to aerial views from a plane and a train blazing past a haze of trees.[48] This segment also presents the pleasures of traveling along busy streets in an automobile, watching the trams, bicycles, rickshaws, and various flows of pedestrians forming a kinetic urban network, an animated atlas. French filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein praised shots taken from horses, cars, trains and planes, calling this practice the "extreme" mobilization of cinema, fitting to the new rapid pace of everyday modern life.[49] In Tom Gunning's view, the moving camera in a travel film attempts to increase the power of representation, either by addressing more senses than a traditional painting (particularly the physical sensation of movement known as kinesthesia), or by making vision more intense (through illumination or stereoscopy).[50] Novel aerial views, mobile views, and oblique angles in travel films suggest a sense of visual omnipotence. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch contends, train travel has an uncanny resemblance to film.[51]

The parallels and tension between camera movement and the movement of a vehicle also complicate any straightforward sense of mobility and agility. For instance, the camera occasionally pans laterally or obliquely back and forth, sometimes in the same direction as the vehicle on which it is mounted, sometimes in the opposite direction. The built urban environment and landmarks of

[48] This view of a "phantom ride" strongly evokes Jean Epstein's *La Glace à Trois Faces* (1927), with its sense of mysterious and compelling excitement engendered by speed.
[49] Laurent Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies: Dance as Attraction in Early Film Culture," *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 150.
[50] Tom Gunning, "The Whole World Within Reach: Travel Images without Borders," ibid., 36.
[51] Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 23.

downtown Tokyo thus assume a kinetic presence within the film:[52] on one hand, the immobility of the buildings intensifies the sense of mobility by sharply contrasting the moving vehicles and cameras; on the other hand, the movements of the vehicle and the camera animate these stationary constructions. As in other 1920s and 1930s city symphony films, this section deploys a dawn-to-night temporal frame and ends with shimmering neon lights and late-night entertainments. The upbeat rhythm of urban daily life is externalized in this cinematic reconfiguration of urban space.

The fourth segment of *The Man Who Has a Camera* was motivated by Liu's filmed trip to Guangzhou (Canton). It is composed of three main scenes: Liu and his colleagues embarking for Guangzhou; Liu's fascination with female beauty and especially with facial expressions, exhibited in a series of intense close-ups of frontal or profile views; and the newsreel-style footage of a parade of Nationalist troops. These incongruous scenes are united by their location, Guangzhou, and are closely related to Liu Na'ou's aspirations to direct fiction films.[53] In the same year, Liu co-founded the film magazine *Modern Screen* 現代電影 with Huang Jiamo, and penned several significant articles on the cinematic aesthetic, including film form, pure cinema, auteurship, montage, and cinematic rhythm. Liu also planned to publish a new collection of short stories and film criticism but, due to the demands of his film career, that collection was never completed. This Guangzhou section of the film reinforces Liu's written aesthetic priorities, serving as evidence that he did not treat film shooting casually, but consciously executed some cinematic experiments (for

[52] Many urban landmarks in Tokyo appear in this film, including the Japan Theatre and the Imperial Theatre in Ginza. Thanks to Michael Raine for pointing this out.

[53] In 1933, Liu and his friend, Huang Jiamo 黃嘉謨, travelled to Guangzhou to shoot the feature film, *Children of the Nation* 民族兒女, which they co-wrote and co-directed with actors from both Shanghai and Guangzhou. The film was co-funded by "Yilian Film Studio" (藝聯影片公司) and "United Film Company" (聯合電影公司). The latter was managed by the Cantonese Luo Xuedian (羅學典). However, the project was abandoned, possibly due to financial disputes among the producers. See Xu Qinzhen (許秦蓁), 《摩登．上海．新感覺：劉吶鷗》 (秀威資訊, 2008), xv; Qin Xianci (秦賢次), "Liu Na'ou's Journey of Literature and Cinema in Shanghai (劉吶鷗的上海文學電影歷程)," in *2005 劉吶鷗國際研討會論文集* (*Collections of Papers at Liu Na'ou International Conference*), 297.

instance, some deliberate camera movement and "screen test" shots with his female colleagues) to prepare for his more serious fiction filmmaking and testing his film theory with practice.

The Man Who Has a Camera can be considered a work exemplary of the kinds of amateur and avant-garde filmmaking and documenting of private history and experience that took hold around the world.[54] In the 1920s and 1930s, with the advent of modern technology and entertainment, affluent people in Taiwan (as well as in other East Asian regions including Japan) started to deploy novel audio and visual devices like cameras, phonographs, and films (in 8 mm or 9.5 mm).[55] Taiwanese film scholar Lee Daw-Ming 李道明 considers Liu's *The Man Who Has a Camera* a home movie lacking thematic and artistic sophistication and coherence—a far cry from its model, Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera*.[56] While Lee's description draws attention to the composite nature and tentative experimentalism of Liu's aesthetic, his negative judgment of the work underestimates Liu's stylistic aspirations and the artistic sensitivities embedded in this film, as well as the film's historical significance within the context of 1930s East Asian amateur film practice and audiovisual culture.

As an amateur film with thoroughly stylistic ambitions, *The Man Who Has a Camera* should not to be compared with *Man with a Movie Camera* in terms of cinematic techniques like framing, camera movement, and rhythmic editing. Yet Liu's film is imbued with the vitality and spontaneity of amateur improvisation, playfully embracing and exploring the contingencies of the medium.

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[54] See Tepperman, 2015, and Jan-Christopher Horak, ed. *Lovers of Cinema: The First American Film Avant-garde, 1919-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). There were also numerous advertisements for 8 and 9.5 mm equipment in Chinese film magazines in the 1930s. More substantive research on this issue in 1930s China has yet to be conducted.

[55] Lee Daw-Ming 李道明, "劉吶鷗的電影美學觀—兼談他的紀錄電影《持攝影機的男人》" ("Liu Na'ou's Concept of Film Aesthetic, and his Documentary *the Man Who Has a Camera*")," in 2005 劉吶鷗國際研討會論文集, 152. Liu Na'ou's contemporary, Deng Nanguang 鄧南光, a Taiwanese photographer who also studied in Japan, likewise made a short amateur film in the 1930s: *Fishing Tour* (漁游, 1935, 8 mm).

[56] Ibid, 153.

For instance, two men mischievously make faces in front of the camera (Part 3) and children frolic in the film (especially in the first section) with a sense of dynamism and vigor reminiscent of the moving train. The significant difference is that the activities and movements of the children are uncontrollable and unpredictable, similar to the animals that involuntarily intrude in and then exit the frame. For instance, a dog makes an unexpected appearance, scampering toward the camera and then hastily trotting out of the frame. Such seemingly insignificant yet whimsical details are juxtaposed with a high-angle panoramic view of the cityscape. The editing in the first section seems haphazard, yet the recurrence of a few shots and jump cuts indicates that Liu deliberately manipulated rhythm and refrain to produce a sense of temporal and spatial disorientation, which is further enriched by the rhythmic patterns of recurrence and acceleration.

Liu's camera is fascinated by the flow of the crowd in a street parade (the final section), during which anonymous human faces metamorphose as they confront the mobile camera, turning the human face and body into a constantly changing landscape. This is the "noisiest" section in the silent film, which conveys a "silent musicality"[57] of movement and a sense of metaphoric sound within and between the frames. The carnivalesque and boisterous street spectacle[58] is intensified by the use of diverse camera angles and disjointed camera movement. Even though the street sounds are inaudible in the silent film, energy and clamor are strongly evoked by visual references to trumpets and other musical instruments being played, costumed performers dancing, the enthusiastic crowds streaming past, and firecrackers exploding. Like the archetypal city symphony films (e.g., *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera*), *The Man Who Has a Camera* connects urban masses, velocity, and technology with perceptual disorientation: "the crowd and speed of

[57] Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 81.
[58] It was possibly a temple fair procession, since it includes people walking on stilts, a lion dance, and figures of ghosts, demons and gods from local folklores.

modernization cause a constituent, profound uncertainty in perception that disrupts clear subject-object distinctions."[59]

Not only does Liu's cinema deploy the expressive capabilities of vertical montage and city symphony films to evoke speed, rhythm, and omnipotent views of the city through attention to the mechanization and routinization of the experience of urban space, it also draws on the modernist experimentations of Japanese and Chinese neo-sensationalist literature.[60] Those writings reveal an affinity with distinctly modernist desires to adumbrate new sensory and audiovisual experiences of the city, and they were shaped by larger developments in modern media culture. Liu's work is steeped in this transmedial interplay between forms of literary experimentation and the innovative aesthetic potential afforded by new media such as film. He not only interlaced Japanese, French, and Chinese literature with foreign and Chinese film theory, but also penned and translated film criticism and theory. Liu introduced Dziga Vertov's "Kino-Eye" and "Radio-Ear" concepts from French and Japanese into Chinese in the late 1920s; he praised the "mechanical eye," that is, a movie camera's ability to decompose, analyze, elucidate, and reassemble reality into a new form of existence. All these efforts reflect the dynamic way in which the cinematic medium came to expand the limits for modernist representations of the cityscape and experiences of urban life. Although Shanghai itself is absent from *The Man Who Has a Camera*, its imprint is omnipresent, since it was the film's backstage and provided the stimulating cultural milieu that Liu immersed in, conceptualized, and wrote about in his literary work, screenwriting, film criticism and production.[61]

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[59] Derek Hillard, "Walter Ruttmann's Janus-Faced View of Modernity: The Ambivalence of Description in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*," *Monatshefte*, 96: 1 (Spring, 2004): 88.
[60] For instance, Japanese writer Yokomitsu Riichi's (1898-1947) novel *Shanghai* [1928-1931]
[61] Shanghai was where Liu Na'ou worked and lived; the life and scenery there for him was probably quotidian, lacking the splendor and excitement of faraway places and requiring more artistic effort to be defamiliarized. Another

While travelogues about the American "Wild West" became the focus of scenic nationalism, a "monumental landscape that bolstered nationalistic pride,"[62] traveling and travel film for Liu Na'ou represented a means and practice of transcultural exploration: the film begins in Tainan, Liu's hometown, and winds up in the same location, forming a symbolic temporal-spatial circuit. The cinematic itinerary echoes Liu's life trajectory: his struggle with his status as a Japanese colonial subject and a Chinese litterateur. Meanwhile, being a Japanese citizen during the period granted Liu the privilege to relatively effortlessly traverse various locales under different political controls. *The Man Who Has a Camera* is a "city journey" film loaded with exuberant mobility and political implications, even though Liu presents a seemingly impartial and transcendent view of each place or culture in the film, without particular affection or condemnation for any of them. In his concern with formal issues, Liu attempted to transcend various boundaries and establish a depoliticized cosmopolitan cinematic utopia, a pure cinema, and a fluid cultural identity. For Hamid Naficy, such border-crossing films are eminently experimental, "since border subjectivity is cross-cultural and intercultural, border film-making tends to be accented…the best of border films are hybridized and experimental—characterized by multifocality, multilinguality, asynchronicity, critical distance, fragmented or multiple subjectivity, and transborder amphibolic characters."[63]

II. Rhythmicity, musicality and transmediality in Liu Na'ou's film theory

Academic interest in the kaleidoscopic urban cultures and cinema of Republican Shanghai has been revived since the late 1990s. The significance of Liu's status as a cosmopolitan figure

possibility is that Shanghai had endured severe Japanese bombardment in 1932 and the Chinese section outside of the International Settlement was nearly reduced to ruins. Thanks to Kristine Harris for pointing this out.

[62] Jennifer Lynn Peterson, "The Nation's First Playground: Travel Films and The American West, 1895-1920," in Jeffrey Ruoff, ed, *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 83.

[63] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton University Press, 2001), 32.

and the cultural value of his literary and film work have been rediscovered. Although Liu's film theories and criticism have also become more recognized by film scholars, his perceptive treatise on cinematic aesthetics and his contributions to Chinese (and world) film history and theory call for still more reflection and elaboration. Liu Na'ou extensively and insightfully discussed ontological and stylistic concepts of cinema, especially with regard to movement, rhythm, and sound. From the late 1920s to 1933, Liu Na'ou published more than ten critical essays that attempted to elucidate cinematic ontology and essentially related issues, including "On Cinematic Art" (影片藝術論),[64] "A Brief Discussion of Film Rhythm" (電影節奏簡論),[65] "On the Mechanism of the Camera—The Function of Camera Positions and Angles" (開麥拉機構—位置角度機能論),[66] "Pursuing a Formal Beauty in Cinema" (電影形式美的探求),[67] and "Light Tone and Acoustic Tone" (光調與音調).[68] Liu proposed that cinema should be differentiated from other media, cultivate its own aesthetics, and achieve what literature and theater cannot, by developing its own specific techniques, such as camera work, montage, fading in and out, and newfangled components like sound and color.

Liu's film theory and criticism were inspired by various international intellectual sources, including European and American directors and film theorists (e.g. Léon Moussinac, Rudolf Arnheim, Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, and Hugo Münsterberg). In terms of artistic achievement in early cinema, Liu highly valued the works of F. W. Murnau, G. W. Pabst, and Charlie Chaplin, among others. Liu also examined the works of French and German "pure

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[64] Published as installments in *電影週報* (*Film Weekly*), from July 1st to October 8, 1932.
[65] *現代電影* (*Modern Screen*), issue 6, December 1st, 1933.
[66] Ibid, Issue 7, June 15th, 1934.
[67] *Wanxiang* (*萬象*), issue 1, May, 1934.
[68] *Shidai dianying* (*時代電影/Cinema of the Epoch*), November 5th, 1934.

cinema" and "absolute cinema" auteurs, including Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Fernand Léger, Walter Ruttmann, René Clair, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Man Ray.[69] He praised their experimental works for relinquishing anything explicitly literary, theatrical, or painterly (such as plot, acting, and composition), in order to create a pure absolute for those visual and musical elements that are essentially cinematic.[70] Liu Na'ou's understanding of cinema as a modern combination of artistic sensibility and mechanical innovation, and his sophisticated deliberations about the substantial components of cinematic art (film technology [three-dimensional (3D), in particular] and the camera apparatus), produced a constructive comparison of Chinese and foreign films and engaged in fruitful dialogue with film criticism of the global 1930s. In this section, I will trace Liu's film theory in relation to movement, rhythmicity, and musicality, to delineate his theoretical and cultural contribution to studies of sound and transmediality.

2.1. The literary, the cinematic and the urban rhythm

As a forerunner of the Shanghai Neo-Sensationalist School (新感覺派), Liu Na'ou's literary works play with ideas originating from the French modernist writer and diplomat Paul Morand (1888-1976)[71] and Japanese Neo-Sensationalist (Shinkankakuha) writers.[72] Familiarity with the

[69] Liu introduces Eggeling's two seminal abstract films, *Horizontal-Vertitak Messe* (Horizontal-vertical Orchestra, 1921, now lost) and *Symphonie Diagonale* (Diagonal Symphony, 7 min, 1924), and mentions Richter's abstract films *Rhythmus 23* (1923) and *Rhythmus 25* (1925). He also introduces the use of close-ups on faces and objects as a means of constructing visual rhythms and psychological effects in his *Inflation* (1927). Liu assesses Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) in terms of its employing images of ordinary objects and use of skillful cinematography to create "significance of movement" without scenario. More importantly, the harmony of speed, force, and rhythm in this film strongly evokes cinematic attraction. Liu differentiates Ruttmann's attitude and method of filmmaking from that of Eggeling and Richter, stating that the latter two place more emphasis on cinema's scientific and mathematical base. Ruttmann, however, concentrates more on empathy, ornamental beauty, and psychological effects, through multiplying modes of movement and employing sensational techniques. Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924), Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (1926), and Man Ray's *Emak-Bakia* (1926) are also under discussion.

[70] "On Cinematic Art (影片藝術論)", *電影週報* (*Film Weekly*) , from July 1st to October 8, 1932.

[71] Liu was the first to introduce Paul Morand into China. In 1928, Morand visited China, and Liu published a special issue about him in *Trackless Train* (無軌列車), a literary journal Liu financed and co-edited. Li Jin, 2001, 63.

[72] The name *Shinkankakuha*, or Neo-Sensationist school, was applied by the critic Chiba Kameo to a group of young writers who founded the journal *Bungei jidai* (The Literary Age) in 1924, motivated by a general sense of rebellion against the literary establishment (comprising realist and naturalist styles), and influenced by the influx of European

work of these figures also brought him to European avant-garde movements including Symbolism, Futurism, and Imagism through the intermediation of Japan: a decided current flowed along the France-Japan-China transcultural transmedial circuit. The *Shinkankakuha* works were noted for their attention to modern urban phenomena—speed, technology, city space—as expressed through their use of unconventional grammatical structures and tropes, including fragmented sentences and cinematic montage constructions.[73]

From 1928 to 1934, Shanghai Neo-Sensationalist literature was at the height of its popularity in literary circles because of its innovative and mesmerizing literary techniques.[74] These writers' literary imagining of urban architectural space and rhythms was certainly informed by cinematic style and even suggests some affinity with the "city symphony" films.[75] Critic Tianlang 天狼 has noted that Neo-Sensationalist literature reifies metropolitan impulses and audiovisual sensual experiences by vigorously employing cinematic techniques, such as the close-up, and that this technique should be encouraged because of its efficiency and intensity.[76] The high angle view of the cityscape is analogous to a high angle shot, while the montage-style writing of fragmentary

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avant-garde movements, including Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dada-ism, Symbolism, and Constructivism. Yokomitsu later theorized this as "the direct stimulation of subjectivity leaping into the thing itself." See Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, 78.

[73] Including Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898-1947), Kataoka Teppei 片岡鐵兵 (1894-1944), Nakagawa Yoichi 中河與一 (1897-1994), and Iketani Shinsaburo 池谷信三郎 (1900-1933). Liu translated and published a collection of their works, titled *Erotic Culture* 色情文化 (1929).

[74] It was also partially because of Liu Na'ou's financial sponsorship of several literary journals and publishers, and because Shi Zhecun, Liu's Neo-Sensationalist friend, served as the editor of the journal *Les Contemporains* (現代). *Les Contemporains* published both Neo-Sensationalist and leftist works. Some were banned by the Nationalist government, allegedly disguising "Communist propaganda." Censorship was one motivation for Liu to divert his focus from literature to cinema. Although Nationalist government censorship of film production was not necessarily more lenient than that toward literary works and journals, the new medium of film seemed to offer Liu a fresh space with creative liberty.

[75] The book titles are highly suggestive: Liu Na'ou entitled his first short story collection *Scène* (*Scenes of the City* in English, 都市風景線) in 1930; another writer, Zhang Ruogu 張若谷, published a collection of essays titled *City Symphony* 都會交響曲 in 1929; leftist writer Lou Shiyi 樓適夷 published *The Wild Dance Song of Shanghai* 上海狂舞曲 in 1931.

[76] Tian Lang 天狼, "再論新感覺派", 新壘, Issue 2, Vol. 2, 1932.

urban episodes in Neo Sensationalist works also evoked the exhilaration of machines and speed. The rhythm and disorientation highlighted in city symphony films and Neo Sensationalist writing resonate with Laura Marcus's view that there is a pulse or heartbeat inherent to the city as well as to its inhabitants: the throb of the motorcar sounds like a pulse irregularly drumming through one's body. She considers modernist literary works[77] to be examples of the literary city symphony of the 1920s: one day in the life of a city, taking us from the beginning of the day to its end, narrating the overwhelming sensorial shock of the cityscape and the assault of its stimuli on the psyche.[78]

Shanghai Neo-Sensationalist literature combines aspects of proletarian literature and popular fiction with modernist formal experiments, forming an ambiguous relationship with high modernist writing. Such works teem with the materialist and sensational symbols of consumerism: the modern girl of the jazz age, the foxtrot, sports cars, cocktails, cigarettes, and so forth. With a kind of anthropomorphic pleasure, objects are personified and human beings objectified.[79] On the one hand, Liu and his fellow writers' works resentfully criticized capitalist consumerism and depravity; on the other hand, they indulged in sensual pleasures and extolled "material civilization and the enthralling urban life," thus presenting a fundamentally contradictory image of modern life.[80] Contemporary critic Yang Zhihua 楊之華 argues that Neo-Sensationalist-style literature emerged when capitalist society had reached the point of ripeness preceding an ensuing decline, and reflects the era's decadence and escape into hedonism. In other words, Neo-Sensationalism

[77] For instance, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922).
[78] Laura Marcus, "'A Hymn to Movement': The 'City Symphony' of the 1920s and 1930s," *Modernist Culture* 5. 1 (2010), 36.
[79] Li Jin (李今), *海派小說與現代都市文化* (合肥：安徽教育出版社, 2001), 22-25.
[80] Yang Zhihua (楊之華), "新感覺主義的文學," 眾論, Issue. 1, Vol. 1, 1944. Yang Zhihua (1900-1973) was an early Communist revolutionary, prominent CCP labor organizer in the 1920s, and high-ranking leader after 1949. She also wrote articles on women's issues in the 1920s. Yang was an early CCP leader and literary figure Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白, 1899-1935)'s second wife.

exhibited "the jarring juxtaposition of total devastation and technological progress,"[81] with technological optimism and humanist pessimism. Its failure to integrate fragmentary perceptions into a coherent analysis of socioeconomic conditions rendered it the target of the most sophisticated Marxist critiques of Neo-Sensationalist writings.[82]

Likewise, critics acknowledged that the main contribution of Neo-Sensationalist literature in Shanghai lay in its vivid and acutely synthesized depiction of sensorial experience, for instance, the juxtaposition of the visual, aural, tactile, and olfactory senses with concoctions of color, sound and taste evoked by words rather than paintings and music. Carnal intoxication based on the "scientific aroma" and "illusion of sound"[83] infused the "effects of musicality into literature,"[84] and aroused profound sensorial and psychological effects in readers. As Liu Na'ou wrote in a letter to his poet friend Dai Wangshu, who was studying in France at the time, "Tram cars are blaring; the blue sky is darkened by smoke emission from the factories; no skylarks sing anymore. Holding their zithers with broken strings, the Muses flew away…but we have thrill, carnal intoxication. This is what I call modernism."[85]

Stimulating sensory thrill and "carnal intoxication", cinema can be a more expressive and effective medium than literature. From Liu Na'ou's viewpoint, cinema was a revolutionary invention in the modern art world; it was the "art of motion, a synthesis of artistic sensibility and scientific rationality."[86] Liu's creative interest shifted from the literary to the film world in the

[81] Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, 80.
[82] Ibid, 99.
[83] Tian Lang 天狼," 再論新感覺派", 新壘, Issue 2, Vol. 2, 1932.
[84] Shen Qiyu 沈綺雨, "所謂 '新感覺派'者 ("The So-called 'Neo-Sensationalists'")," 北斗, No. 4, Vol. 1, 1931, 67-69.
[85] Words in italic are originally in English. Liu Na'ou, 11/10/1926. In *Letters of Modern Chinese Writers* (現代中國作家書簡)(上海生活書店, 1935).
[86] "Ecranesque," (original title) *Modern Screen* (*現代電影*), issue 2, April 1st, 1933.

early 1930s,[87] when he co-founded and co-edited the film journal *Modern Screen*,[88] penned and translated film articles, and produced, wrote, and directed several films.[89] Liu advocated cinema as an independent entertainment, a commodity, and more significantly, an art form. In these different guises, cinema provided audiences with refined beauty, pleasure, and illusion. This understanding of cinematic art and the film medium was the basis for his critique of Chinese leftist films made from the early to mid-1930s. Liu criticized most of these works as being too deeply committed to ideological messages and reliant on primitive cinematic techniques; they were more like a catalogue of terms related to social critique and class conflict, "a monstrous baby with an enormous head and weak body," than they were works of art[90]

As Liu reverted from proletarian inclinations to bourgeois modernism during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the tension between his coterie and the leftists took the form of the "hard films/soft films" debate.[91] Along with his *Modern Screen* colleagues Huang Jiamo, Du Heng 杜衡, and Mu Shiying, Liu was criticized for prioritizing the aesthetic and entertainment value of cinema and

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[87] Why did Liu shift his main focus from literature to cinema? I propose a few answers: 1) The shift was engendered by financial losses from sponsoring literary journals and publishing houses, the chaos caused by the "January 28 Incident", and the Nationalist government's severe censorship on publications, see footnote 73. 2) The Chinese film industry gradually matured in the early 1930s and the major studios actively approached literary talents to strengthen their screenwriting departments (for instance, leftist writers Xia Yan 夏衍, A Ying 阿英 and Zheng Boqi 鄭伯奇 were invited to join Star Film Studio 明星電影公司). 3) Having a sustained interest in cinema, Liu increasingly realized the new creative possibilities afforded by cinema and accumulated knowledge and insight on the medium in the late 1920s, developing closer collaborative relationships with people more involved in the film industry than in literature (for example, Huang Jiamo, Huang Tianshi 黃天始, Huang Tianzuo 黃天佐).

[88] The journal was published for seven issues, from March 1, 1933 to June 15, 1934.

[89] Liu wrote the screenplay for *Eternal Smile* 永遠的微笑 (1937), directed by Wu Cun 吳村, starring Hu Die 胡蝶, and produced by Star Film Studio. It was based on Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*. He also wrote and directed *First Love* 初戀 (1936), and co-wrote and co-directed a spy film, *Secret Code* 密電碼 (1937), with Huang Tianzuo. In 1940, Liu facilitated Jewish filmmaker Gertrude Wolfson's documentary *Under Exile*, about the lives of Jewish refugees in Shanghai. Filming was halted after the "Tripartite Pact" was signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on September 27, 1940. Liu had been assassinated three weeks earlier. See Mamie Misawa, 230. Although *Secret Code* is available at the China Film Archive, both *Eternal Smile* and *First Love* are believed to be lost.

[90] Liu Na'ou, "中國電影描寫的深度問題" ("Issues on the Depth of Expression in Chinese Cinema"), *Modern Screen 現代電影*, issue. 3, vol. 1, 1933.

[91] The leftist film critics involved include Tang Na 唐納, Wang Chenwu 王塵無, and Shi Linghe 石凌鶴.

deriding leftist films that championed social critique and political messages. The battle lasted more than a year and generated many penetrating essays.[92] The dispute further exacerbated tensions between Liu and the leftist film circle and partly resulted in his marginalization from and neglect by the official Chinese film historiography written after 1949.[93] In fact, Liu did not promote a strong right-leaning political agenda or particular ideological positions, despite the allegations that served as the basis for his condemnation. He was opportunistic enough to work with any political entity that could advance his filmmaking aspirations, whether it was the Nationalist government or the Japanese.[94] As a colonial and cosmopolitan, Liu possessed no strong patriotic consciousness or loyalty to any nation. His affluence and dandyish lifestyle, in combination with a quick business mind,[95] left little room for expressions of concern about social stratification, the destitution of the lower classes, or national crisis in the face of foreign incursion—either on screen or in his daily life.

2.2. Motion and rhythm: dance of body, landscape and image

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[92] For representative essays of the "soft film" criticism, see Huang Jiamo, "硬性影片與軟性影片" (*Modern Screen*, vol. 1, issue 6, 12/01/1933) and "軟性電影與說教電影" (晨報．每日電影, 06/28, 07/02-07/04, 1934); Mu Shiying, "電影批評底基礎問題" (晨報．每日電影, 02/07-03/03, 1935). For representative articles by the leftist film critics, see Tang Na (唐納), "清算軟性電影論" (晨報．每日電影, 06/15-06/27, 1934), Chen Wu (塵無), "清算劉吶鷗的理論" (晨報．每日電影, 08/21, 1934), Lu Si (魯思), "論電影批評底基準問題" (民報．影譚, 03/01-03/09, 1935). A detailed discussion of this debate is beyond the scope of this article. For a more thorough understanding, see Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896-1937* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 244-97; Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (Routledge, 2004), 106-109; Bao Weihong. *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915-1945* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[93] Liu's collaboration with the Japanese in the late 1930s certainly contributed to his notoriety. His works were neglected after 1949 by both the Nationalist government in Taiwan and the Communists in mainland China. Formalist and aestheticist ideas were discouraged by both regimes, which favored propagandist films during the Cold War period.

[94] Liu worked for the Nationalist government's "Central Film Studio" (中央電影攝影場) in Nanjing from 1936-1937, and worked for the Japanese-controlled "China Film Company Limited (中華電影股份有限公司)" from 1939 until his death on September 3, 1940.

[95] Liu built housing units in Shanghai and collected a large amount of rent from the mid-1930s on. See Huang Gang (黃鋼), "劉吶鷗之路（報告）—回憶一個「高貴」的人，他的低賤的殉身" (大公報, 01/27-02/07, 1941).

In his everyday life, literary writing, cinematic work, and film criticism, Liu Na'ou accentuated the significance of kinetic bodily movement (like dance) and the intoxicating corporeal experience of a rhythmic modernity in cinema. As studies on dance and intermediality in film history and culture suggest, early cinema emerged in a world where interest in bodily movement straddled aesthetic and scientific preoccupations. For the Symbolists, the art of motion evoked the harmonious rhythm of dance.[96] In the jazz age of the 1920s, the rationalized and refined objectification of the human (essentially female) body was already being praised in artistic milieus and would be officially linked to the Futurist and Dadaist avant-garde movements.[97] Dance made corporeality an expressive form through mastery of the rhythm of movement.[98] From Liu Na'ou's viewpoint, modern urban dwellers were eager for speed, movement, and thrills: the waltz was outdated and fevered jazz was considered the music of the modern era. Since city people had become accustomed to urban noise, harmonious symphonic music was no longer essential or popularly prized.[99] Liu also promoted action as the foremost element in cinematic art, since it is a suggestive universal language that can be comprehended by audiences from different classes and backgrounds.[100] In cinema as in dance, motion became a universal language and an emblem of modernity.

[96] See Tom Gunning, "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion," in *The Tenth Muse: Cinema and Other Arts*, eds. Leonardo Quaresima and Laura Vichi (Udine: Forum, 2001), 25-53; Laurent Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies: Dance as Attraction in Early Film Culture," *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 139-152.
[97] Guido, 146.
[98] Ibid, 151.
[99] "A Brief Discussion of Film Rhythm (電影節奏簡論)," *現代電影* (Modern Screen), issue 6, December 1st, 1933.
[100] Ibid.

Liu and his renowned Neo-Sensationalist writer friend, Mu Shiying, notoriously frequented dance halls and had liaisons with dance hostesses.[101] Liu was a devoted dancer and gained the nickname "the Dancing King," zealously studying manuals and perfecting his steps.[102] Mu, known as "the Chinese Yokomitsu Riichi"[103] among contemporaneous writers, danced a fine fox trot. For Mu, the dance hall was also a study and an object of observation: after a few rounds of dancing, he usually sat at a table in the corner and wrote stories, immersing himself and his writing in the sight, sound, rhythm, aroma, and sensual ambience of the dance halls and nightclubs.[104] Some of Liu and Mu's short stories are set in nightclubs and dance halls, exploring the multisensual imagery and synesthetic potentials, as well as the intensity of the sensorial stimulation.[105]

The experience of dancing not only inspired Neo-Sensationalist literature, it was also deeply embedded in Shanghai's social and cultural contexts. The "dance-craze" in Shanghai corresponded to the global dance fad in the 1920s and 1930s.[106] In Leo Lee's words, "[dance culture] became another famous—or infamous hallmark of Shanghai's urban milieu in the 1930s."[107] Commercial dance halls were launched in the 1920s; newspapers and pictorials introduced social dancing and

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[101] Mu married the dance hostess Qiu Peipei 仇佩佩 in 1934. Liu Na'ou's diaries in 1927, as well as Shanghai tableau newspapers, described his infatuation with dance girls, both Japanese and Chinese, in Shanghai, Tokyo, and Nanjing. See 《劉吶鷗全集. 日記集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編, 彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局出版, 2001).

[102] Peng, *Dandyism and Transcultural Modernity*, 27-35. 描豆,"作家與舞蹈：劉吶鷗是火山上的前輩, 黑嬰與梁氏姐妹有好感",《跳舞世界》(World of Dance),1937 年第 2 卷第 2 期(Vol.2,issue 2, 1937).

[103] Yokomitsu Riichi (1898-1947) was one of the mainstays of the Japanese Neo-Sensationalist writers; his representative works include *Spring Came on a Horse-Drawn Cart* (1926), *Machine* (1930), and *Shanghai* (1931).

[104] Xun Yi (迅俟), "穆時英," in 文壇史料, edited by Yang Zhihua (楊之華), 1945, 3rd edition. 231-2.

[105] For instance, Mu's famed short stories "Shanghai Foxtrot" (上海的狐步舞, 1932) and "Five People in the Nightclub" (夜總會里的五個人, 1932) and Liu's short story collection, *Urban Scenery* (都市風景線, 1930).

[106] The Soviet compilation/city film *Shanghai Document* (Yakov Bliokh, 1927) juxtaposes Western expatriates having a dance party in a lavish garden with impoverished Chinese children dragging heavy carts in the street, graphically matching the rotating phonograph with the cart's wheels, creating a trenchant social and racial critique. 1930s Chinese leftist films also portray characters' decadent dance hall lifestyles in a sarcastic tone, see for instance, *New Women* (Xinnüxing, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1935) and *City Scenes* (Dushi fengguang, dir. Yuan Muzhi, 1935), among others.

[107] Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Shanghai Modern: Reflections on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s," *Public Culture* 11:1 (1999): 88.

initiated exuberant discussions about the "craze."[108] Japanese writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892-1927) also kept an account of Shanghai's dance scene during his 1921 China tour.[109]

Physical performances such as dance (also sports and gymnastics) not only attracted early film spectators, they also served as the basis for public discourse about machine aesthetics, the synchronism of aural and visual rhythms, and the "dance of images" (the editing model for 1920s French avant-garde cinema).[110] French filmmaker and theorist Jean Epstein referred to dance as a general metaphor for the paradigm of mobility in *Bonjour Cinéma* (1921), where he qualified the "landscape's dance," taken from a train or from a car at full speed, as *photogénic*.[111] *Photogénie* was capable of multiplying and expanding movement, and this movement was what distinguished cinema from the plastic arts that were primarily considered a static means of expression.

This dance of landscape is widely highlighted in 1920s and 1930s city and travel films, including Liu Na'ou's *The Man Who Has a Camera*.[112] As a condition of cinema's true specificity, *photogénie*, or the "dance of images," as Jean Epstein noted, is organized in a manner analogous to the principles of musical composition. Dziga Vertov's theorization of film was also informed by music, most notably in the theory of intervals. He proclaimed that film was already a rhythmic

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[108] Many dance schools were founded by both Russian expatriates and the Chinese. They offered classes ranging from the tango, fox trot, and waltz to the Charleston. Instruction books on dancing were widely published and popularized among fashion-conscious business people and urbanites. In 1933, thirty-nine dance halls had official operating licenses. In 1946, there were 1,622 registered dance hostesses in Shanghai. Luo Suwen 羅蘇文 and Song Zuanyou 宋鉆友, "Republican Society 民國社會," in Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之 ed. *History of Shanghai 上海通史* (上海人民出版社, 1999), vol. 9, 177-8.

[109] He observed people (including a cross-racial couple: a Filipino girl in red and a young American man in a suit) dancing in a café named "Paris" and noticed that the level of orchestral performance was much higher there than in the Asakusa-area cafés and dance halls of Tokyo. 芥川龍之介, 《中国游记》/ *Travels in China*, 陈豪译/trans. Chen Hao (新世界出版社, 2011), 10; Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1997), "Travels in China," *Chinese Studies in History*, 30:4, 13, 30, 34.

[110] Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies," 139.

[111] Guido, 150.

[112] Liu's short story "Scenery" 風景 (1930) recounts the chance encounter and erotic adventures of a woman and a man on a train and in an open landscape. Liu describes the characters' experience in the train as "sitting on speed."

and musical art, one that structured time and strove to find its specific rhythm.[113] In an article entitled "Film Theories of the Soviet Union and France" 俄法的影戲理論, Liu Na'ou elaborated on the variations and rhythm of speed and energy espoused by "pure cinema," claiming that the films were "orchestral ensembles woven by light and shadow in connection with temporal duration."[114]

Liu Na'ou also summarized the interdependence of "interior" and "exterior" rhythm underlined by French film theorists and artists of the 1920s, including Fernand Divoire, René Clair, and Léon Moussinac. In Liu's discussion, the substance of cinema lies in movement, which epitomizes vitality and rhythm and whose qualities are determined by speed, direction, and force. He describes interior rhythm as the structuring principle within the cinematic frame, and it includes the movement of subjects and the camera; exterior rhythm instead is created by the succession of shots. On the one hand, film rhythm emanates from the actors' physical performances, for instance, the "serpentine dance" in early cinema; on the other hand, the cinematic rhythm enhanced by montage is an example of what sets cinema off from other arts. Thus, "the only dance possible in cinema, is one that results from assembled images."[115]

Liu Na'ou pointed out rhythmic components of film that escaped Clair and Moussinac's attention and delineated their multisensory impact on cinematic style. For instance, he argued that interior rhythm could be achieved by a variation of light hues within the frame (which suggested the passage of time) or alternations of camera angles or changes of background induced by a tracking shot; all these elements helped constitute the interior rhythm. Whereas the relation

[113] Jeremy Hicks, *Dizga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 79.
[114] Liu Na'ou, "俄法的影戲理論 (1930)," in《劉吶鷗全集. 增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編 (台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版, 2010), 179.
[115] Guido, 149.

between the camera position (the distance between the camera and the subject) and montage is closely associated with exterior rhythm. In Liu's view, exterior rhythm is more expressive than interior rhythm in developing a compelling cinematic style. If the number of shots in a certain sequence is limited and each shot is lengthy, the atmosphere of the section is serene and slow; if there are more shots (for instance, the deployment of "flash") in the same duration, the tone becomes kinetic and vigorous.[116]

Liu discussed Walter Ruttmann's city symphony film *Berlin, Symphony of a Metropolis* in the "pure/abstract cinema" category and praised it for four stylistic aspirations (First, orchestrating musical rhythm across the whole film through modern visual means; second, completely distinguishing itself from filmed theater; third, using no artificial settings; fourth, using no intertitles), particularly its "orchestrating musical rhythm across the whole film through modern visual means."[117] The French "pure cinema" advocates Léon Moussinac, Emile Vuillermoz, and Paul Ramain dreamt of an art based on mastering the rhythm of movement, purified of dramatic convention.[118] Liu claimed that the essence of cinema is a visual symphony (*symphonie visuelle*)[119] and a form of imaginary visual poetry generated by light and shadow, lines and angles; it is inseparable from musical rhythm but can be distant from plot.[120] In this sense, watching a film was analogous to attending a concert, with spectators perceiving the visual symphony as the mechanical dance of light.[121]

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[116] "A Brief Discussion of Film Rhythm" (電影節奏簡論), *現代電影* (*Modern Screen*), issue 6, December 1, 1933.
[117] Ibid.
[118] "A Brief Discussion of Film Rhythm" (電影節奏簡論), *現代電影* (*Modern Screen*), issue 6, December 1st, 1933.
[119] Originally in French in the text. "On Cinematic Art" (影片藝術論), *電影週報* (*Film Weekly*) from July 1st to October 8, 1932.
[120] Ibid. Originally in English.
[121] "俄法的影戲理論 (1930)," in《劉吶鷗全集. 增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編 (台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版, 2010), 180.

From Liu Na'ou's perspective, a scenic film without a plot can maintain its visual rhythms, since it is imbued with a sort of peculiarity that is autonomous from content. For instance, the montage sequence of the boat floating along the Volga River in the Cecil B. DeMille film *The Volga Boatman* (1926) stands independent of the narrative yet conveys a sense of poetry. Despite its silence, this sequence evokes a strong sense of rhythm, as if the audience were listening to music. However, Liu is cautious about the limits of "pure/absolute cinema," since these cinematic experiments "severed cinema entirely from reality and were therefore without social relevance and unproductive."[122] Even if the French avant-garde filmmaker Germaine Dulac was hostile towards narrative cinema, she considered rhythmic narrative movement as the epitome of technical progress. As she put it, narration is another way of structuring movement, a principle capable of building up dynamic structures.[123] Liu instead proposed that creative film artists should not renounce plot and that film theorists can have cinematic experiments in their laboratory. He writes,

> We only want organized movement, succession of illusion, and representation of pure visual impression. The appearance and situation of everyday life have no attraction to us. We should deploy new forms and mathematical and abstract shapes to invent new symbols.[124]

Although Liu can be considered a formalist with avant-garde propensities, what he craved most was involvement in fiction films made for aesthetic and entertainment purposes.

In his essay, "On Cinematic Art," Liu claimed that montage (織接/interweaving)[125] is the essential component of cinema, since it enlivens images from the *photographique* to the

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Guido, 147-148.
[124] "A Brief Discussion of Film Rhythm" (電影節奏簡論), *現代電影* (*Modern Screen*), issue 6, December 1st, 1933.
[125] A literal translation of the Chinese term *zhijie* 織接 would be "interweaving". To learn more about the theoretical permutations and cinematic practice of montage after it was translated and introduced to China in the early 1930s, see Chan, J. K. Y, "Translating 'montage': The discreet attractions of Soviet montage for Chinese revolutionary cinema", *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 5:3 (2011): 197-218.

cinegraphique[126] and organizes them into an orderly, unified rhythm; this recreates a new cinematic time-space that does not duplicate actual time-space and can be seen as "a framed reality." This type of effect is exemplified in Soviet filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926) and *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927).[127] In their still silent films, Soviet directors became increasingly skilled in rhythmic editing and the use of images to evoke aural associations.[128] Liu contended that such montage was cinema-specific because of its transmedial analogies: montage is at once the verses of a poet, the form of an article, and the visual expression of a filmmaker.[129] In this way, it is primarily related to movement and rhythm. After all, terminology for cinema/film in both the West and Japan prominently features the notion of movement.[130]

Liu described various rhythmic styles ("linear" or "curved" lines in his words) in films of different genres and narrative structures. He praised the concordance of rhythm/cadence and songs/melody in film musicals, which visualized rhythm and created films that had "symphonic orchestration." Liu identified the analogy between "direct cut" and "andante," between "fade" and "rest"; conversely, he argued that the "overlap" maintains rhythmic flow, creates melody, and connects thoughts. In a further distinction, he distinguished that "flash" is livelier than direct cut and creates a more compelling curve in the cadenced flow. As an example of a well-executed *interweaving/montage* in sound films, Liu acclaimed Viktor Tourjansky's *Le Chanteur Inconnu* (*The Unknown Singer*, 1931):

> The director Tourjansky is able to use silent images to emphasize musical effects. The unknown singer's enchanting voice is transmitted from a broadcast station, gliding over clouds and mountains, traversing various countries in Europe and

[126] Liu's original text used the French words. "On Cinematic Art" (影片藝術論), *電影週報* (*Film Weekly*) , from July 1st to October 8, 1932.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Jeremy Hicks, *Dizga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 71.
[129] "On Cinematic Art" (影片藝術論), *電影週報* (*Film Weekly*) from July 1st to October 8th, 1932.
[130] For instance, "movie," "motion picture," "kinematograph," "cinema," and in Japanese, "活動寫真（かつどうしゃしん）."

> entering different houses as well as the bosoms of affectionate lovebirds. This sequence is an exquisite example of montage that complements the musical score and imparts to the audience an intoxicating rhythm.[131]

Liu considered this film free of the trite "canned theater" conventions of early sound films. To him it introduced a truly innovative style that opened up a promising road for future sound films.

2.3. Sounds of the everyday, in the film theater, and on the screen

In 1939, the Japanese bookstore owner and publisher Uchiyama Kanzo (內山完造, 1885-1959) published an essay entitled "Shanghai Soundscape" (上海的聲音),[132] in which he vividly depicted a motley mix of mundane city noises, including environmental sounds (birds chirping and cicadas calling) and human voices (peddlers and vendors shouting). This lyrical portrayal of the urban soundscape runs in chronological order: flowing from morning to night on a summer day and resonating with the temporal construction of city symphony films, and with the movement and rhythm of Liu Na'ou's writing and *The Man Who Has a Camera*. The urban soundscape of Shanghai was pervaded by the noises of machines (trams and factories) and music emanating from such entertainment venues as nightclubs, dance halls, and film theaters. These tumultuous and unruly urban modern sounds also play a part in Liu's short stories, such as "Games" 遊戲.[133]

In addition to writing about metaphoric sound elements (e.g., movement, rhythm, and musicality) in short stories and film criticism, Liu Na'ou's acoustic sensitivity was equally

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[131] Ibid. The Chinese films *Between Tears and Laughter* 啼笑因緣 (dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1931) and *One Night Wealthy* 一夜豪華 (dir. Shao Zuiweng, 1932) were cited as negative examples for their primitive editing, which Liu Na'ou critiqued and compared to *The Volga Boatman* and *Le Chanteur Inconnu*. Ibid.

[132] Kanzo was the proprietor of the Uchiyama bookstore in Republican Shanghai and a close friend of Chinese writer Lu Xun. The article was translated from Japanese and published in 中國月刊, issue 1, 1935, 51.

[133] See "劉吶鷗全集. 文學集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編 (台南縣文化局, 2001), 31-43.

captivated by sound culture and the variations of the human voice characterizing daily life, Chinese operatic performance, the film theater, and on screen. He described how impressed he was by his grandmother's beautiful sonorous voice, which made her a potential opera singer.[134] During his three-month sojourn in Beijing with his poet friend Dai Wangshu in 1927, Liu frequented the Beijing opera and Kun opera performances[135] and learned opera singing from his friend, as he had earlier learned to play the *huqin*.[136] Liu's diary from 1927 indicates that he was deeply mesmerized by opera singers and built erotic fantasies around their voices;[137] it also documents his experience of listening to phonographs in Shanghai and Tokyo, where the Beijing opera occupied a considerable portion of his listening repertoire.[138] All of this suggests that listening to phonographic records was an important popular pastime and a method for cultural cultivation of urbanites in the 1920s and 1930s. Liu clearly had a strong penchant for music, whether in the form of live performance, personal practice, or mediated through the sound technology.

These acoustic experiences inspired Liu Na'ou to assume a more sophisticated approach to sound aesthetics when he wrote the screenplay of *Eternal Smile* 永遠的微笑 (1937), whose protagonist is a singsong girl, thus rendering music and singing essential features in the film.[139] Liu

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[134] Entry on Apri 18th, 1927, see "劉吶鷗全集．日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編，彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局，2001) (vol 1), 258.

[135] See "劉吶鷗全集．日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編，彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局，2001) (vol 2), 688, 702, 708, 734, 740.

[136] "跟老龐學了幾句馬連良的《珠簾寨》," Ibid, 662; (vol.1), 186. The *huqin* belongs to a family of bowed string instruments; *jinghu* (京胡) is used primarily for Beijing opera accompaniment.

[137] He wrote of the voice of the female opera singer Jin Youqin 金友琴: "Beijing women's voices are so attractive. In the northern land women are so lacking in natural beauty, that their voices are the only consolation men can have!" Ibid, 702. He also described the Beijing opera singer Guan Dayuan 貫大元: "His voice is resonant, clear, and enticing: I would be enchanted by him if I were a woman" (708).

[138] See "劉吶鷗全集．日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編，彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局，2001), 176, 186, 328, 346, 370, 476, 550, 594.

[139] For more information about this film, see footnote 111. For the complete screen script, see *The Complete Works of Liu Na'ou*: *On Cinema* 劉吶鷗全集．電影集, 2001, 46-219.

invokes various sound elements in abundant detail in his screenplay, including sound effects (the clatter of horse hooves, skylarks singing, dog barking, street clamor, and the sound of rain, wind, sirens, and bells), the human voice (peddlers shouting, the heroine singing, people laughing), and music (*huqin* performances and popular songs, both as diegetic and extradiegetic music). Through an elaborately interwoven acoustic texture and careful attention to sound scales,[140] Liu attempted to create acoustic realism and capture the urban aural atmosphere. When he expressed dissatisfaction after seeing the completed film, several of his criticisms were directed toward the film's sound techniques.[141] For instance, Liu wrote, "If 'laughter' appears in inappropriate occasions, it is like jazz mingled into Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; this is a bad screen-Americanism!"[142] He also argued that the "diction" (delivery of dialogues) is too slow and flat, making the film drag and lose its psychological tension.[143]

The chaotic soundscape in many Chinese film theaters[144] impelled Liu to write a section called "In Chinese Film Theaters" 中國影戲院裡 in a longer 1928 article titled "Random Thoughts on Cinema" 影戲漫想.[145] Liu sarcastically complained about the roar of the crowd, the vendors shouting, children clapping, people reading intertitles aloud or cracking sunflower seeds and chestnuts, and the incompatibility of musical accompaniment to the films being exhibited. All this discordance and disturbance made him dizzy and light-headed, he wrote that he had to leave before

[140] Sound in "close-up" or in "long shot"; the scale refers to the distance between the sound source and the camera.
[141] Liu Na'ou, "《永遠的微笑》看試片記錄—與吳村兄略為商討攝製上諸技術," in *The Complete Works of Liu Na'ou*: *On Cinema* 劉吶鷗全集. 電影集, 2001. 40-45.
[142] Ibid, 43. The words in italic are originally in English.
[143] Ibid, 44.
[144] In Republican Shanghai, the most luxurious first-run film theaters were mostly owned by foreign exhibitors and usually showed foreign films (mainly from Hollywood). Chinese films were primarily shown in the second- or third-tier film theaters, whose equipment was relatively humble and which catered to a lower-class demographic by offering more affordable ticket prices.
[145] Published in the journal *Trackless Train* (無軌列車), which was funded by Liu Na'ou, issue 5, November 10, 1928.

the film ended. Disciplining the audience and controlling the sound environment in theaters had been a concern for different cultures beginning in the early twentieth century.[146] In the Chinese case that concerned Liu, it was related to social class and cultural differences.[147] This unruly yet vivacious auditory energy in characterizing Chinese theaters corresponded to the similarly boisterous soundscape of some 1930s Chinese films; both were too crude to suit Liu's bourgeois aesthetic taste.

Liu Na'ou offered insightful reflections on sound film aesthetics and pertinent theory and criticism. He contended that the "motion"[148] of the endless flow of images organically intersecting with sounds is the precise fount of cinematic attraction. He found it absurd to oppose sound cinema, since that would be *anachronisme*[149] in the evolution of cinema.[150] In his article "Pursuing the Formal Beauty of Cinema" 電影形式美的探求,[151] Liu proclaimed that the two essential sensual factors creating cinematic beauty are the senses of vision and hearing. While he acknowledged that the audio form may still be perfected by the future development of radio,[152] he believed that once sound entered the film world, its impact was most profound and remarkable. When the three aural components of sound films (music, sound effects, and dialogue) intertwined to create a symphonic audio texture—described by principality, mixture, contrast, and gradation—they contributed to the formal attraction of cinema.[153] For Liu, silence, whether in silent or sound films,

[146] For audience discipline related to gender issues in early American film culture, see Shelly Stamp, *Movie-struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000). particularly chapter one, 1-40.
[147] Most Chinese theaters screened films in addition to presentingother kinds of performance, such as Chinese operas; in the latter, the audiences were used to eating, drinking, and chatting during the performance. This habit continued during film exhibitions.
[148] Originally in English.
[149] Originally in French.
[150] Liu, "Ecranesque," in 現代電影 (*Modern Screen*), issue 2, April 1, 1933.
[151] In《萬象》, issue 1, May 1934.
[152] Originally in English.
[153] Words in italics are originally in English.

was precious;[154] this notion echoed the musical concepts of cadence and interval. Liu derided early American all-talkies for resembling the typewriter: the action and the sound were synchronized, becoming more like exhibitions of sound technology than artistic creations, since Liu argued that the expressive effects of sounds did not just depend on synchronization[155] but on whether the coordination of image and sound was able to create cinematic significance. Liu urged Chinese film professionals to catch up with the sound film trend; otherwise they would not be able to resist the invasion of foreign films.[156]

In his 1932 article "On Cinematic Art" 影片藝術論, Liu introduced the Soviet avant-garde filmmaker Dziga Vertov's first sound film, *Enthusiasm: The Symphony of the Don Basin* (1931) to China. He identified the film as an embodiment of the transition between Vertov's cinematic concepts of "kino eye" and "radio ear."[157] Liu considered the "kino eye" a more sophisticated concept and practice than the montage; the "kino eye" was imbued with emotion, vitality, rhythm, and passion, as epitomized in *Man with a Movie Camera* and *Enthusiasm*. Liu applauded the natural sounds present in *Enthusiasm*, which were recorded in industrial locations, including coal mines and steel plants, without artificial manipulation or embellishment. Nonetheless, Vertov's conception and editing were able to render these mechanical sounds musical.[158] In this sense, the artificial boundary between "sound effects" and "music" was dissolved, rendering the soundscape a polyphonic, organic whole.

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[154] Liu Na'ou, "論取材—我們需要純粹的電影作者," *Modern Screen*, issue 4, July 1, 1933.
[155] Originally in English.
[156] Liu, "Ecranesque," in 現代電影 (Modern Screen), issue 2, April 1st, 1933.
[157] See Liu, "On Cinematic Art (影片藝術論)", in *The Complete Works of Liu Na'ou*: *On Cinema* 劉吶鷗全集. 電影集, 2001, 267-9.
[158] This is reminiscent of a note that Charlie Chaplin wrote Vertov after watching *Enthusiasm*: "Never had I known that these mechanical sounds could be arranged to sound so beautiful. I regard it as one of the most exhilarating symphonies I have heard. Mr. Dziga Vertov is a musician. The professor should learn from him, not quarrel with him. Congratulations." See Jeremy Hicks, *Dizga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 126.

In another article that directly addressed film sound, Liu Na'ou drew comparisons between "light tone" and "acoustic tone" in relation to various cinematic genres and styles.[159] He argued that variations of volume and pitch in acoustic tone are comparable to those of light and shadow in "light tone." Liu argued that sound reproduction can be employed to strengthen the sonic tone and artistic expressivity through the complex intermingling of dialogue, music, and sound effects in a cinematic soundscape. He outlined the affinities between different sound pitches (high, mid-register, and low) and the various film genres and styles. Higher pitched sounds should be employed for comedies, to match their faster dialogue and action and depict a brisk, jaunty atmosphere; high-pitch tone creates the sense of joviality, felicity, and brightness. In addition, high-pitched sound better pierces through the laughter and clamor made by the audiences in the theater. This sound, however, is not appropriate for serious dramas like tragedies or the German-style *Schauspiel*,[160] because it does not match the solemn emotion and atmosphere of such genres. A low-pitched tone is more suitable for expressing restraint and austerity, as well as the profound emotional force of dramas, whose audiences were inclined to be more serious and subdued. As an example, Liu praised Franklin H. Hansen for designing a low-pitch tone that was almost a whisper for *A Farewell to Arms* (dir. Frank Borzage, 80 min, 1932). Alternatively, the middle-pitch tone suits melodrama and its sentimental emotional fluctuations, since the flexibility of the mid-pitch tone can be employed to express and reinforce a sense of the vicissitudes of life and their alternation between joy and sorrow.

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[159] Liu, "Light Tone and Acoustic Tone" 色調與光調, *Shidai dianying 時代電影/Cinema of the Epoch*, November 5, 1934.

[160] Originally in German. *Schauspiel* refers to any spectacle or public performance. In late 18th-century German literature, the word took on the more specific meaning of a play with the characteristics of both tragedy and a comedy, meaning a serious play with a happy ending and in which the hero does not die. See Encyclopedia Britannica: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/527079/Schauspiel

Liu also cautioned that changes to a film's acoustic tone should be fluid and avoid rambling or abrupt shifts. Actors' voices at the time modeled the artificially high-pitched diction employed in Beijing opera performance and needed to be modified according to the aesthetic principles of cinema and the auditory conventions of film audiences. In Liu's view, a sound recordist needed to understand the technical complexities of transmission, circuit frequencies, acoustics, and sound systems[161] in order to be sufficiently competent to manipulate sound technology and techniques effectively; more significantly, they needed competency in adjusting acoustic tone to the demands of plot and mood, in order to enhance the emotional atmosphere of the film. In brief, sound work necessarily exceeded the skills of a mere technician and demanded that one becomes a creative sound artist and designer. In retrospect, Liu's insightful discussions about sound design are visionary and forward thinking, especially since sound would become a pivotal part of cinema's "medium specificity." His ideas seem especially prescient since "sound design" as a category and creative concept would not emerge in Hollywood until the 1970s.[162]

Conclusion

> "When I knew such a genius with languages, it was like seeing a person who had lost his nationality and social belonging, a human being deprived of his shadow: one must often feel emptiness and trepidation." — Keiji Matsuzaki[163]

By framing Liu Na'ou's life experience, film career, literary and cinematic writings, and his film *The Man Who Has a Camera*, as transcultural and transmedial, I have accentuated issues related to mobility and border crossing. In a larger historical context, as modern technology made

[161] Words in italics originally appeared in English.
[162] The term "sound designer" gained wider currency originally in connection with the work of film editor and sound designer Walter Murch (b. 1943), for his significant contributions to Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979).
[163] Refering to Liu Na'ou's death. Keiji Matsuzaki (松崎啟次), "劉瑯波槍擊," 《劉吶鷗全集．增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編 (台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版，2010), 258.

traveling across long distances and the resulting translation and transculturation increasingly possible, such boundary-traversing journeys gave rise to a meta-movement—an aesthetic cosmopolitanism born of the flow of technology, knowledge, film production, and cinematic discourse. The center of gravity in Liu Na'ou's versatile creative life was Shanghai, with its uncertain subjectivity at the extraterritorial borders of the nation-state and the intersection of Chinese, European, American, and Japanese interests.[164] Shanghai was the epicenter of conflicts and tensions around sovereignty, the expansion of global capital, and the flourishing of entertainment and consumption. Liu Na'ou himself embodied many of these same tensions; and yet, his works on sound, movement, rhythm, and musicality in the transcultural and transmedial milieu can yield profound insights for how we envision metaphoric sound in relation to proliferating transcultural and transmedial cinematic practice.

Liu Na'ou biography, his film *The Man Who Has a Camera*, and his literary and theoretical creation, all demonstrate his transcultural and transmedial aspirations, his life experiences as a cosmopolitan with a complex cultural identity traversing various borders and boundaries. Paula Amad argues that there is a difference between "travel" and "tourism," even though both connote movement and displacement.[165] Travel has been closely related to colonialist and imperialist expansion and expeditions of discovery since the sixteenth century, and significantly intensified in the nineteenth century. The class and gender of travelers changed as travel ultimately transformed into the more democratized, mass practice called tourism in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it long remained a racial and gendered class privilege: most travelers were Western,

[164] Lippit, 77.
[165] In Paula Amad's words, "The former is understood as the practice of a privileged subject undertaking a demanding voyage in search of active experiences, while the latter is viewed as the practice of democratized masses signed up for recreational tours in search of distracting experiences", in "Between the 'Familiar Text' and the 'Book of the World': Touring the Ambivalent Contexts of Travel Films," in Jeffrey Ruoff, ed, *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 100.

white, elite male missionaries, colonists, writers, and geographers. Although Liu Na'ou was a colonial subject from Taiwan, thanks to his wealth, education, and gender, he was privileged enough to be a traveler.[166] His masculine perspective is vividly conveyed by the camera's fetishizing approach to women subjects, and more significantly, made manifest in the film's Chinese title, *The Man* (nanren, 男人) *Who Has a Camera*. Specifically accentuating male agency rather than using the gender-neutral term "human being" (ren 人), Liu not only refers to himself as a male filmmaker embodying a masculine subjectivity but also underlines the authority of the gendered perceptions of the male observer.

While experiencing other places through the mediation of literature and cinema may function as "virtual travel," linguistic variety can serve as an imaginary acoustic space. Liu Na'ou's hybrid linguistic practice both reflects his fluid identity and enhances the sense of his transcultural legitimacy, as he steps across cultural and geographical boundaries and complicates the notion that "as a component of national identity, language can both affirm and deny certain national identification."[167] Liu's 1927 diaries are teeming with Japanese, English, and French words, which are also dispersed through his Neo-Sensationalist stories, creating a linguistically heterogeneous style with an exotic flavor. This "linguistic feature highlighting the transcultural characteristic of the Neo-Sensational mode of writing" was also an emblem of transcultural modernity.[168] Linguistic competence became a way of reconstructing the subject as nomadic, poly-vocal, and cosmopolitan.

Liu embodied the tension between different political and cultural powers, which sometimes left him with a sense of agony and desolation. In his 1927 diaries, Liu writes with contradictions

[166] His Japanese citizenship made it even easier to traverse Taiwan, Tokyo, and Mukden in 1933 than being a Chinese citizen, since these three locations were under the control of the Japanese empire.
[167] Ying Xiong, "Ethno Literary Identity and Geographical Displacement: Liu Na'ou's Chinese Modernist Writing in the East Asian Context," *Asian Culture and History*, Vol. 3, No. 1; January 2011, 10.
[168] Peng Hsiao-yen, 32.

of his ambivalence towards Shanghai, Japan, and Taiwan.[169] He expressed admiration for Chinese civilization and at times functioned as an insider, identifying with Chinese culture with a sense of pride.[170] He deliberately dressed in Chinese-style clothing to go dancing in Tokyo,[171] yet frequented the Japanese neighborhood in Beijing to purchase Japanese goods.[172] Memoirs by his Chinese friends also shed light on Liu's complex cultural identity. Sui Chu 隋初 writes:

> His way of thinking, personality, and behavior were Chinese […] As for the tension between China and Japan, he told me that he knew well both the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese and Japanese. The cultural circles of China and Japan should completely cooperate and build a new culture to lead the masses to eliminate the peril of war. His thoughts and actions were in conformity with his artistic conscience and spirit […] He was neither Chinese, nor Japanese, but a cosmopolite.[173]

Liu Na'ou made a seemingly naïve attempt to transcend the tensions surrounding his complex colonial and transcultural identity by devoting himself to the elusive values of itinerant cosmopolitanism; this was a privilege peculiar to elite male intellectuals in Republican Shanghai. Given the political and cultural struggles complicated by the contesting forces of the era,[174] and Liu's lack of national allegiance and ideological commitment, it seems logical that he aspired to find opportunities for "pure art" and "free" cinematic creation and condemned leftist writers' works as being "contaminated by politics."[175] However, according to a memoir by Huang Gang,

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[169] In one entry Liu writes, "I do not like the *Japanese Way*." Ibid, 386. (Words in italics appear originally in English.) In another he sighed, "Even though I don't have relatives and friends there, Shanghai is a place for my future! But what in Tokyo attracts me? Maybe those cultured eyes? I don't want to go back to Taiwan" (446).

[170] He recounts in his diary that once in Beijing, having been asked for directions in Chinese by a Japanese tourist, he responded in Chinese as well. At first, he thought this response seemed natural, then Liu realized the identity complication. Ibid, 658.

[171] Ibid. 506.

[172] Ibid, 624.

[173] Sui Chu (隋初), "我所認識的劉吶鷗先生" in《劉吶鷗全集. 增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編, (台南縣政府, 國立台灣文學館出版, 2010), 253-4.

[174] For example, the Western colonial powers, Japanese military invasion, the Nationalist regime, and the underground Communist activities.

[175] Huang Gang 黃鋼, "劉吶鷗之路（報告）—回憶一個「高貴」的人, 他的低賤的殉身" (大公報, 01/27-02/07, 1941).

Liu worked with the Japanese closely after the latter fully occupied Shanghai[176] and directly profited from the collaboration. Chongqing newspapers also reported how, backed by the Japanese, Liu threatened and plotted against progressive intellectuals and film professionals.[177] Consequently, Liu's claim to being apolitical may be challenged. As Leslie Pincus has observed, "Cosmopolitan concentration on values of an intangible and universal nature encouraged adherents to withdraw into an expanded and enriched realm of interiority while distancing themselves from more immediate and more material social realities."[178]

In Liu Na'ou's trajectory as a transcultural raconteur, Shanghai became a symbolic location, one with which he both identified and associated his "future."[179] Rather than in Tokyo or Taiwan, Liu chose to live and work in Shanghai, "a space of shifting struggles and alignments,"[180] where confrontations among various imperial powers both from the West and Japan were being negotiated. This "intertwined colonization" illuminates China's multi-layered colonial past and attends to the intersecting relationship of cosmopolitan Shanghai and colonial Taiwan.[181] There Liu's sense of alienation and rootlessness could be ameliorated or even alleviated; since Shanghai absorbed all sorts of homelessness and diasporas, he could reside there emancipated and anonymous and might easily assume any number of identities. By drifting among and immersing himself in different cultural identifications, Liu might be understood to have located himself in the

[176] After the outbreak of the Pacific War on December 7, 1941.
[177] See Huang Gang. Japanese film writer and producer Keiji Matsuzaki (松崎啟次, 1905–1974) also recalls that Liu worked as an "emissary" for the Japanese to approach Chinese film professionals and intellectuals. In "劉璨波槍擊," 《劉吶鷗全集．增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編, (台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版，2010), 273.
[178] Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shuzo and the Rise of National Aesthetics* (University of California Press, 1996), 39.
[179] "劉吶鷗全集．日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編，彭小妍、黃英哲編譯(台南縣文化局，2001), 446.
[180] Lippit, 86.
[181] Ying Xiong, "Ethno Literary Identity and Geographical Displacement: Liu Na'ou's Chinese Modernist Writing in the East Asian Context," *Asian Culture and History*, Vol. 3, No. 1; January 2011, 5.

dissolution of the essential self into "an endlessly fragmented subject in process," in an interstitial temporality, a "space-in-between."[182]

Liu Na'ou was fascinated by the transcultural hybridity of the human landscape in Shanghai[183] and considered it an "exhibition ground for various races, ethnicities and nationalities."[184] He eroticized and exoticized the city as a "hybrid woman with bobbed hair and short skirt,"[185] where he could revel in a decadent lifestyle and capitalist consumerism and enjoy the thrill of the urban rhythm. However, Shanghai was also full of racial tension and hostility. Although Liu admired French and German literature, cinema and music,[186] he was racially conscious and vented resentment toward the Europeans he encountered, documenting for example his sense of humiliation at being body-searched in the street by British soldiers.[187]

For Liu Na'ou, cinema was a significant emblem of utopianism and cosmopolitanism that blended modern technology, artistic creation, and entertainment. His own description, with its promiscuous undertone, was that "Cinema is the child of one mother and two fathers. The fathers are Lens and Microphone, and the mother is celluloid. Cinematic art is composed of the visual and aural, thus, its formal beauty can only be achieved through these two essential senses."[188]

Historically, the introduction of sound to film destroyed its cosmopolitanism, aroused nationalism,[189] and impeded the global avant-garde film movements. Still, Soviet filmmaker and

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[182] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.
[183] Peng Hsiao-yen, 55.
[184] "劉吶鷗全集. 日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編, 彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局, 2001), 628.
[185] Ibid, 52.
[186] In a letter to his poet friend Dai Wangshu, who was studying in France at that time, Liu extoled French painting and German music: "As the French, the Germans are artistically creative. If French art can be considered arts for the eyes, German art is for the ears." in《劉吶鷗全集. 增補集》, 康來新、許秦蓁合編, (台南縣政府、國立台灣文學館出版, 2010), 242-3.
[187] "劉吶鷗全集. 日記集", 康來新、許秦蓁合編, 彭小妍、黃英哲編譯 (台南縣文化局, 2001). 66, 98, 228.
[188] "Pursuing a Formal Beauty in Cinema" 電影形式美的探求, in *Wanxiang* (*萬象*), issue 1, May, 1934.
[189] Hagener, 22.

theorist Dziga Vertov believed that sound presented the documentary with an opportunity to enhance the international character of cinema, enabling "proletarians of all nations, all countries, to see, hear, and understand one another."[190] Vertov's utopian vision did not echo in 1930s China. However, the cinematic renditions of Shanghai's soundscape resonated with its literary description and historical context, and continued to play a pivotal role in mediating and shaping our perception of the urban soundscape—a point Liu Na'ou amply demonstrates in his writing. Although the "city symphony" film mode never became a genre of its own in early Chinese cinema,[191] the dynamic "city symphony" motif (montage sequences) was incorporated into, and became a significant component of, 1930s leftist popular narrative films.[192]

[190] Hicks, 124.
[191] Contemporary Chinese digital "city symphony" films provide a belated parallel to the earlier works, see for instance *San Yuan Li* (dir. Ou Ning and Cao Fei, 2003) and *Disorder* (dir. Huang Weikai, 2008), among others.
[192] Such as *City Scenes* (*dushi fengguang*, Yuan Muzhi, 1935), *The Boatman's Daughter* (*chuan jia nv*, Shen Xiling, 1935), *New and Old Shanghai* (*xinjiu shanghai*, Chen Bugao, 1935), *Street Angel* (*malu tianshi*, Yuan Muzhi, 1937) and *Crossroads* (*shizi jietou*, Shen Xiling, 1937). The phenomenon of the "city symphony" in early Chinese film history and aesthetic development still begs much examination. However, it is beyond the scope of this essay; I will explore this issue in another article.

Chapter Three

When the Left Eye Meets the Right Ear: Cinematic *Fantasia* and Comic Soundscape in *City Scenes* (1935) and 1930s Chinese Film Sound

Introduction

As mentioned in chapter two, Uchiyama Kanzo (1885-1959), the renowned Japanese bookstore owner in Shanghai and close friend of China's greatest modern writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), published an essay entitled "Sounds of Shanghai" in 1939.[1] In this article, Uchiyama vividly depicts a motley mixture of mundane sounds characterizing the semi-colonial metropolitan city, including ambient sounds and human voices. This literary rendition of the intermingling of euphony and cacophony is emblematic of the 1930s Shanghai sound culture and its cinematic soundscape. The cinematic portrayal of the city in *City Scenes* (Dushi fengguang, 1935) by Chinese actor, screenwriter, and filmmaker Yuan Muzhi (1909-1978) is an exemplary case study that reveals that ways in which the comingling of discordant and mellifluous sounds constituted the lived experience of the period's urban soundscape.[2]

City Scenes presents a comic version of the urban aural environment with acute social critique; it was even acclaimed as "the first Chinese musical comedy."[3] In terms of its contribution to 1930s Chinese cinematic sound and music, it was moreover the first Chinese film to commission composers to create musical scores and songs attentive to cinematic style and thematic concerns, thus offering a sophisticatedly designed comic soundscape that ingeniously employed sound

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[1] Uchiyama Kanzo 內山完造, "Sounds of Shanghai 上海的聲音," *China Monthly* 中國月刊, issue. 1, 1939, p. 51.

[2] Yuan was an accomplished spoken drama actor, nicknamed the "man with a thousand faces" before becoming a film actor, screenwriter, and director. He gained prominence for his striking performance in *Plunder of Peach and Plum* (Ying Yunwei, 1934) (which Yuan also wrote), *Children of Troubled Times* (Xu Xingzhi, 1935), and *Unchanged Heart in Life and Death* (Ying Yunwei, 1936). Yuan later directed two highly acclaimed films, *City Scenes* (1935) and *Street Angel* (1937), before going to Yanan, the communist base in 1939. He shot footage for the documentary *Yanan and the Eighth Route Army*, but the footage was lost in the Soviet Union during the war when Yuan was there doing post-production. After 1949, Yuan continued to be a major figure in the film industry, but as a leader and supervisor. He never directed films again.

[3] Wang Wenhe, 1995, p. 35.

effects and distorted human voices. *City Scenes*' innovative comic soundscape and audiovisual heterogeneity facilitate its blend of different film modes—musical, melodrama and comedy—to reinvent Euro-American-Soviet film conventions of sound techniques and genre reformation.[4] The film's audiovisual experimentations drew remarkable critical attentions and audience interest. However, *City Scenes* does not occupy such a prominent position in Chinese film history and popular memory as other films from the period like *Street Angel* (Yuan Muzhi, 1937) and *Cross Roads* (Shen Xiling, 1937). Reconsidering the film from a sound-sensitive perspective provides us with a refreshed and broader view of early Chinese film history, illuminating how sound technology and urban culture were imbricated with transcultural connections and semi-colonialism. Indeed, *City Scenes* vibrantly illustrates that film is not only a "visual" medium, but also an "audiovisual" one that should not be understood as merely an aesthetic entity or source of entertainment but as a potentially intensive engagement with socio-political conflicts.

By analyzing the sound aesthetic and audiovisual interactions of *City Scenes* and situating the film in the urban soundscape and socio-historical-political context of 1930s semi-colonial Shanghai, I explore a number of interconnected questions. How does an urban musical comedy like *City Scenes* incorporate sound elements from both the silent and sound eras to create an unruly and unusual "transitional sound aesthetic"? How did 1930s Chinese films with stylistic aspirations and social consciousness negotiate both their role as entertaining commodities and the edifying imperative to engage anti-imperialist mentalities as a form of national salvation? Furthermore, the transnational flow of music and film in 1930s Shanghai was facilitated on the one hand by a semi-colonialism that promoted capitalist cosmopolitanism; on the other, it strongly attested to the

[4] Other films combining romantic comedy, melodrama, film musical, and social critique would be Yuan Muzhi's other famed film *Street Angel* (1937) and Shen Xiling's *Crossroads* (1937), which also employ comic sound effects and songs.

economic, cultural, and military encroachment of different imperialist powers in China, thereby stimulating prevailing anti-colonial sentiment. How did films such as *City Scenes*, engage with these contradictions and complications?

The comical and boisterous soundscape in *City Scenes* reverberates with the popular sound culture characteristic of Shanghai's dynamic cityscape, which was flooded with popular songs, oral story-telling conventions, street processions, and ubiquitous urban noises. The film transmits these sounds either directly or through the mediation of modern audio media such as radio and phonograph. In this chapter, I explore how the experimental deployment of such sound elements in *City Scenes* obscures and defies the conventionally conceived boundaries between the human voice, sound effects, and music, articulating a sort of "auditory grotesque" closely correlated to comedy. I also trace how these convoluted sound techniques, especially Wagnerian leitmotif and Hollwyood "Mickey Mousing," interact with the film's narrative structure and character commentary. Moreover, I investigate how the interplay between acoustic and visual resisters enhances the film's material heterogeneity and constructs a sort of cinematic *fantasia* that resonates with the film score and extends the implications of *fantasia* as a musical form. By these means, *City Scenes*' playful yet rather bleak audiovisual rendition of urban life in 1930s Shanghai reinvents the popular commercial film genres of the Hollywood musical and the comedy with a leftist inclination. The film also highlights its own function as a satirical social critique of hegemonic consumerism, rampant capitalism, and the peril of foreign exploitations during a period in which Shanghai and China suffered from severe economic and financial depression.

I. Sound Technology and Aesthetics in 1930s Chinese Cinema

City Scenes emerged in the socio-cultural context of vehement debate about film sound and sound film. To provide a sense of this context, I will briefly summarize the range of ways in which

1930s Chinese film critics conceived of the narrative, stylistic, and socio-political functions and possibilities of film sound, especially in the transitional period between silent and sound film.[5] One pivotal first step in my argument is developing a nuanced understanding of how these critics considered the relationship between audiovisual and literary elements on and around the film screen: how did they imagine the interconnected relationships among sound (music, dialogue, and sound effects, both incorporated into the film production, and played in the film theatre as live accompaniment), image, and written words (for instance, intertitles and subtitles)?

In the 1930s, hundreds of Chinese films were produced every year (mainly in Shanghai, the center of Chinese film production and exhibition). In comparison to Hollywood and European industries, this number might seem insignificant; however, the corpus of Shanghai cinematic works addresses a wide range of themes and issues than did Hollywood production, expressing diverse political, commercial, social and stylistic proclivities. This thematic and stylistic heterogeneity is inseparable from the period's tumultuous semi-colonialism, civil wars, and various forms of foreign invasions. With the increasing popularity of leftist influence among Chinese intellectuals, writers, and film professionals beginning in the early 1930s, leftist intellectuals such as Xia Yan, A Ying, Shi Linghe, Wang Chenwu and Situ Huimin entered the film industry and media as screenwriters, film critics, and sound recordists.[6] These figures had a progressive impact on film production and criticism in 1930s China.[7] More than one hundred

[5] Roughly from the early 1930s to the mid-1930s in China.

[6] Mostly philosophical, sociological, literary, and cinematic works from the Soviet Union and other disadvantaged nations under the oppression of colonialism and capitalism.

[7] Official Chinese film history states that the "five-person film group" was under the leadership of Chinese Communist Party. Xia Yan 夏衍 and A Ying 阿英 produced progressive screenplays at Mingxing Film Company, and Linghe 凌鶴 and Chenwu 塵無 penned numerous sharply critical film reviews. Situ Huimin 司徒慧敏 established "Diantong Film Company" with two other colleagues to produce leftist films employing the Chinese sound recorder called "San you shi" (三友式/Three-friend Mode).

Chinese films with leftist messages and sentiments were made in the 1930s. Some of these films connected Chinese cinema with May Fourth enlightenment literary and intellectual discourse, thus elevating cinema's social and cultural status among educated Chinese urbanites.

The leftist involvement in the Chinese film industry brought on the early period of sound film experiments. Leftist filmmakers used this to their, advantage, striving to adapt film sound technology and techniques in Chinese cinema, in order to promote their messages more efficiently and establish a self-sufficient sound film industry. For instance, in 1933, Xia Yan adapted the novella "Spring Silkworms (Chuncan)," written by one of the most acclaimed modern Chinese realist novelists, Mao Dun, into an eponymous film depicting sericulture farmers' hardship and deprivation at the hands of usury and foreign economic invasion. Produced by Mingxing Studio and directed by Cheng Bugao, *Spring Silkworms* was highlighted in advertisements for its "full music track (全部音樂有聲片)" and was extolled by leftist film critics as "commencing a new film culture movement"[8] that echoed the May Fourth New Culture Movement's sense of social responsibility and intention of socio-political critique.[9] However, the random selection of the music in *Spring Silkworms* and the mismatch of emotional tone between sound and image intrigued critics. In a symposium on *Spring Silkworms*, the critic Xi Naifang noted the emotional discordance between the music track and the overall tone conveyed by image and narrative pace.[10] For instance, the atmosphere in the silkworm-rearing sequences should have been serene, but instead the music is of a fervent Southeast-Asian style. The director of the film, Cheng Bugao, admitted that the music track was not fulfilling, even though they had put in an arduous effort.

[8] "新的電影文化運動的一個發軔."

[9] Yi Ming 伊明, "Inheriting and Developing the Eximious Tradition of Chinese Film Criticism: Foreword of Selection of 1930s Chinese Film Criticism", Yi Ming, ed. *Selected Works of 1930s Chinese Film Criticism* (三十年代中國電影評論文選) (Beijing: China Film Press), 1993. p. 18.

[10] Xi Naifang is a pen name of the screenwriter, translator, and film critic Zheng Boqi (鄭伯奇).

While there were composers specifically designated to devise soundtracks in Hollywood or other larger film industries, Cheng himself had to produce the track with only two sound recordists.[11]

"Full music track"[12] and underscored "theme songs" in Chinese films became selling points and major attractions for Chinese audiences from the early to mid-1930s, a moment in which film sound technology was considered novel and appealing (although sound quality still needed to be improved). Through modern sound mediation and promotion channels such as cinema, phonograph/gramophone, and radio, film theme songs were widely popularized—even frequently outshining the films from which they came. Many of the songs featured euphonic or enthusiastic melodies with progressive socio-political messages. For instance, one slogan among progressive film professionals was the "three-antis": anti-feudalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-capitalism. This mantra was born out in the famous "Song of the Fishermen" (lyrics by An E, music composed by Ren Guang), a track from the eponymous film directed by Cai Chusheng in 1934. The enormous popularity of the song and the commercial success of the film—it played a box-office record of eighty-fours days in Shanghai—proved a form of reciprocal promotion. Propelled by such a successful example, a new trend emerged; theme songs quickly became indispensable for subsequent Chinese films. Most films would add one or more theme songs, which were sometimes not even related to the film's theme or plot, as an attraction. That is, filmmakers expected to turn song listeners into their film's audience.[13] This excessive exploitation of film songs attracted negative feedback from film critics, who argued that the over-use and irrelevance of such songs would bore or even outrage the audiences of corresponding films, consequently making Chinese

[11] He Zhaohuang 何兆璜 and He Zhaozhang 何兆璋. *Selected Works of 1930s Chinese Film Criticism*. pp. 251-57.
[12] The films first advertised as "full sound films," such as *Spring Silkworms* (春蠶, 1933) made by Star Company (明星), were not really "talkies." *Spring Silkworms* has only a full musical track, no audible dialogues.
[13] Xiao Luo, Ibid, p. 441.

films unpopular. However, the "theme song craze," which made full use of the sensational attractions of music, dance, and star vehicle (many actresses were also celebrated singers, including Wang Renmei, Zhou Xuan, among others), has persisted through Chinese film history into the present in mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong cinema.[14]

In this "theme song craze" context, the films produced by the short-lived Chinese left-wing Denton Motion Picture Company (March 1934-November 1935), such as *Plunder of Peach and Plum* (Ying Yunwei, 1934), *Children of Troubled Time* (Xu Xingzhi, 1935), and *City Scenes* (Yuan Muzhi, 1935), can be understood to make more audacious and inventive use of sound technology and techniques than other mainstream media. The achievements of Denton Motion Picture Company were facilitated by its chosen technological advancement, the Chinese-made "Three-Friend style" (三友式) sound-recording equipment developed by three Chinese engineers, Ma Dejian, Gong Yuke, and Situ Yimin in 1933. The studio was thus able to avoid dependence on imported sound-recording technology and thereby avoid paying enormous patent fees, which were an immense burden for most Chinese film studios struggling with precarious financial situations. The "Three-Friend style" sound system was also used to make many significant 1930s Chinese films by other studios (for instance, Mingxing and Lianhua), including the partial-sound films *Song of the Fishermen* (Cai Chusheng, 1934), *Big Road* (Sun Yu, 1934), and *New Woman* (Cai Chusheng, 1935), among others.

The Denton Motion Picture Company made its first full talkie, *Plunder of Peach and Plum*, in 1934. The film was highly praised for its innovative and imaginative use of sound effects and music, which embodied compelling character emotions and a tumultuous urban soundscape. Yuan

[14] For more discussion on the travel of Chinese film songs and songstress, see Jean Ma, *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015.

Muzhi, the screenwriter and main actor of the film, deliberately took the construction of the soundscape as a means of delivering full dialogues, prefiguring the ingenious employment of sound techniques in his later directorial works, *City Scenes* (1935) and *Street Angel* (1937). Denton studio went to make *Children of Troubled Times* (1935), also starring Yuan Muzhi, which depicts three young people in Shanghai who volunteer to fight the Japanese invaders on the battlefront of Northeastern China. The film features the theme song "March of the Volunteers," with lyrics written by famed poet and playwright Tian Han (1898-1968) and music composed by the talented "new music fighter," Nie Er (1912-1935).[15]

"March of the Volunteers" had a very vibrant "afterlife" via transmedial and transcultural circulation; it was published as sheet music in trade journals, released as a record by the Pathé label of EMI in 1935, and disseminated via radio broadcasting.[16] It became extremely popular and effective for disseminating political messages among the masses, and its international influence exceeded that of the national anthem of the Republic of China. Liu Liangmo, who spearheaded the national salvation song movement, introduced "March of the Volunteers" to Paul Robeson (1898-1976), the left-leaning African-American singer, actor, and social activist. Robeson recorded the song in Chinese and popularized it globally.[17] It is also featured in the Dutch leftist filmmaker Joris Ivens' (1898-1989) *400 Million* (1938), a documentary about the Chinese people's national cause against the Japanese military encroachment. The international reception accorded to the song was

[15] By Sun Shiyi 孫師毅, 電通畫報, 1935.

[16] See 青青電影, vol. 2, issue. 2, 1935.

[17] For more information about the transcultural circulation of the song, see also Luo, Liang, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2014.

yet another reason it became a symbol of Chinese nationalism and was ultimately chosen as the national anthem of People's Republic of China.[18]

In "March of the Volunteers," the patriotic and populist message of the lyrics and the marching, rhythmic grandeur of the melody ensured its mass appeal and capacity to mobilize audiences. Nie Er has been called the "people's musician" (人民音樂家);[19] at one point, he worked and lived with dockers in order to learn and collect their work songs and compose music that would express their emotional steadfastness in the face of daily hardship. Similarly, in order to create the "Song of New Women" (新女性歌), the theme song for the film *New Women* (Cai Chusheng, 1935), Nie drew inspiration from his experience of working with women laborers in cotton mills. Variously informed by contact with men or women workers, the songs Nie composed are generally imbued with martial and masculine qualities; their messages are straightforward and their melodies are easy to memorize, carrying a populist mass appeal. These songs also bear the influence of Russian and Japanese school and military songs designed to be sung collectively at public gatherings, for instance, in night school classes by workers (as presented in *New Women*) or during street demonstrations, in order to voice strength and solidarity. Nie Er was acutely aware of the power of the collective vocal expression and the distinction between "mass song" and "popular song" in terms of style, audience, and ideological objective; he was critical of the latter's decadence, vulgarity, private yearning sentiment or even sensuality, and its association with bourgeois entertainment venues like dance halls, nightclubs, and cafes. As a result, in *New Women*,

[18] Joshua H. Howard, "Introduction: Contesting China's New 'National' Music," *Twentieth-Century China*, 37. I, 2-4, January 2012, p.4. It was used as the provisional national anthem and later added to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 2004.

[19] Sun Yu 孫瑜, "Reminiscing the 1930s Cinema under the Influence of the 'May Fourth Movement' 回憶"五四"運動影響下的三十年代電影," *Film Art* 電影藝術, issue.3, 1979, p. 9.

Nie transformed the hedonic popular song "Peach Blossom River" into a progressive mass song with new lyrics and a chorus of women textile workers.

As I have demonstrated through the example of *New Women*, Left-wing cinema and music culture in 1930s China were closely linked by their shared aspirations of mass mobilization and anti-imperialism as well as their transmedial and transcultural innovations and implications. The heterogeneous soundscape of Yuan Muzhi's *City Scenes* offers a further, unique window into these stylistic and political overlaps.

II. Musical Aesthetic and Cinematic *Fantasia*

As the distinction between "popular" and "mass" songs began to show, leftist Chinese cinema's use of music at the time was highly unconventional. Most early to mid-1930s Chinese sound films were accompanied by randomly selected records of Western symphonic music, jazz, or foxtrot dance tunes. The music was usually unrelated to the film's content, a distraction from or even obverse to character psychology and emotional expressivity of the films; however, this practice drew criticism from musicians and critics alike.[20] The composer who conceived of the orchestral work for *City Scenes*, He Luting (1903-1999), panned the haphazard use of music in Chinese films as "still in a very primitive stage, appearing to be ludicrous at world film festivals. It is not only an embarrassment to the Chinese film industry, but also a humiliation in Chinese cultural history."[21] He's declared awareness of musical expressivity in cinema, rife with nationalist undertones, also manifests in the experimentality of his film music. *City Scenes* in particular exemplifies a transitional period of sound technology and aesthetics; both the close attention to soundscape and the use of commissioned music in the production were pioneering moves that

[20] The phenomenon was criticized by many film critics and intellectuals, including Yu Ling 于伶. See his "Sound in Chinese Films", *Lianhua Pictorial* (Lianhua huabao 聯華畫報), vol.5, issue 6. June, 1935.
[21] 電通半月畫報, Issue 11, October 16, 1935. (p.179)

carved out a new domain for Chinese sound film. Employing locally produced sound-recording technology and creating the first Chinese musical comedy with ardent social concerns, the creators of *City Scenes* aspired to combat the usual notion of Chinese films as "backward." Moreover, the film illustrates the involvement of leftist intellectuals in the film industry in the 1930s, highlighting their underlying critique of economic depression and the broader sense of national crisis accompanying the Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931 and ongoing invasion of China.

The narrative and stylistic heterogeneity of *City Scenes* highlights its self-reflexive quality. The film makes several explicit references to optical devices and entertainments apparatuses, including the peep show, which enframe or reassemble the diegesis while ironically revealing cinema's illusionist and fantastic nature. *City Scenes* unfolds in a small provincial train station as four country people (one older couple and one young couple) are lured to the "Western Mirror" (peep-show) by the song of a showman (played by Yuan Muzhi, the film director) while they wait for their train to Shanghai. At the peep show, these characters envision themselves in the seemingly glamorous and spectacular urban setting of Shanghai, struggling for material or carnal desires and gradually degenerating into decadence and desperation. Each character is victimized and exploited by "urban vice"—though without being entirely innocent. The four villagers' eventual disenchantment with the metropolitan allure provided by the peep show makes them hesitate to board the train to Shanghai. Instead, they circle around the train tracks, trapped in their dilemma.

This scenario can be read as an illusion, fantasy, allegory, or prophecy within the narrative structure. The word "xiyangjing" (Western Mirror) carried a negative connotation in media discourse and everyday rhetoric in 1930s Shanghai, usually associated with "tricks" and "deceptions" that needed to be exposed (拆穿西洋鏡). By means of a multi-layered narrative structure and sarcastic characterizations of descending bourgeois or lower class subjects, the film

"unmasks" the false dreams and hopes of prosperity and the realities of social unrest in the semi-colonial metropolis.

City Scenes features a three-layered meta-narrative structure: first, four country folks peep into the "Western Mirror"; second, the story of their degenerate urban lives unfold within the peep show; third, within this urban story, three of the main characters (the young woman Zhang Xiaoyun, the infatuated writer Li Menghua, and the womanizing tea company owner, Wang Junsan) watch a Chinese parody of a Mickey Mouse cartoon, a short film that mocks their existing love triangle.[22] While these characters have been acting towards each other with bourgeois decorum, this animated reenactment of their relationship reveals their behaviors to be deceptive and ludicrous. The process by which the cinematic apparatus and animated rendition are each created and deconstructed relies, importantly, on the imaginative employment of sound (including, for instance, the Mickey Mousing technique, upon which I will elaborate in subsequent sections).

Indeed, the entire soundscape of *City Scenes* resonates with the revelation of the potential or allegorical corruption of the characters' lives and the multi-layered narrative structure. Music frames the construction of the film through aural forms of organization and patterning. The filmmaker Yuan Muzhi spent a large portion of the film budget on music and worked with the best composers and musicians in China of the time. *City Scenes* adopted a soundtrack that, although predominantly of "Western style," nevertheless represents a mixture of Western symphonic, Chinese folk, and popular music genres, resounding with the elements characterizing the hodgepodge music scene of semi-colonial Shanghai. The deliberately designed and domestically created music track was so effective that, after the production of *City Scenes*, Chinese filmmakers

[22] It was also one of the earliest cartoons created by Chinese animation pioneers Wang Brothers (Wang Laiming, Wan Guchan, and Wan Chaochen), who made the first feature-length animation film in China, *Princess Iron Fan* (鐵扇公主, 1941).

began commissioning composers to write the whole soundtrack for a particular film, replacing the usual practice of randomly selecting a mélange of Western songs and tunes—a procedure that usually took little note of thematic or emotional correspondence between the narrative, the visual, and the aural realms.

The *City Scenes* music track was sourced from renowned composers and played by the symphony orchestra from the Shanghai Municipal Council (上海工部局樂隊). The soundtrack is framed by the "Song of the Western Mirror," introduced by the "City Scenes Fantasia," and interspersed by extra-diegetic orchestral works. "City Scenes Fantasia" by Huang Zi (1904-1938), for instance, reflects a kaleidoscopic of boisterous urban sights and sounds.[23] Huang was trained in composition at Oberlin College and Yale University and was a respected composer in the European classical music tradition; he was at the time a professor of composition and music theory at the National Music College in Shanghai.[24] "Song of the Western Mirror" (西洋鏡歌) was composed by Zhao Yuanren (1892-1982), one of the most important song writers of the 1920s and a pioneer of Chinese linguistics extremely well-versed in various local dialects and folk tunes. The remaining music was arranged by He Luting (1903-1999), a talented student of Huang Zi who had composed numerous theme songs for 1930s and 1940s Chinese films. He's music falls in-between the so-called classical and popular music conventions, doing so with a Russian tinge.[25] The film's

[23] Huang Zi 黃自 (1904-1938) studied musical composition at Yale University and was a well-respected composer teaching and working in China in the 1930s. Huang Zi composed the anti-Japanese military song "The Flag Is Fluttering 旗正飄飄," which was selected as the theme song for the film advocating the war of resistance, *Give Back My Land* (Wang Cilong, 1934). After this first contact with the film industry, Huang composed *City Scenes Fantasia*, which was the first symphonic music specifically created for a Chinese film.
[24] Liu Jingzhi, p. 138.
[25] The Russian influence can partly be attributed to the fact that when He studied at SCM, the English version of the textbook about harmony selected by Huang Zi was written by Russian composers Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) and (E. Prout). He even translated this book into Chinese. He also studied under Russian emigré musicians at SCM. Liu Xuean, "参考书籍是英文版里姆斯基·科萨科夫、普劳特等人《实用和声学》《和声学理论和实用》《高

music editor, Lu Ji (1909-2002), was a leftist composer and music critic active during the late 1930s in writing mass mobilization songs that bore national defense themes and a revolutionary spirit.[26]

He Luting, Nie Er, and other Chinese composers and musicians were deeply involved in the "new music movement (新音樂運動)." They promoted music that was composed through Chinese re-appropriations of European compositional techniques and that was concerned with formulating a new national culture through progressive music. From Joshua Howard's perspective, this new music was largely a product of semi-colonial, cosmopolitan Shanghai; Russian pedagogues constituted almost half of the full-time faculty at the National Music College in Shanghai and had influenced a generation of Chinese musicians, including He Luting. Therefore, as Howard observes, "a transculturation of the nation's musical practices occurred that facilitated China's musical modernity."[27] Left-wing composer Ren Guang (1900-1941) was hired as the Pathé Asia musical director in 1928, becoming instrumental to the release of almost fifty leftist theme songs and national salvation anthems from 1932 to 1937.[28] Leftist "new music" activists utilized the transnational musical industry apparatus and its facilities to disseminate anti-imperialist messages—encouraging, for instance, resistance to the Japanese military invasion and Euro-American economic and cultural encroachment—through mass songs, turning modern sound media like the phonograph and radio toward their political and aesthetic purposes.

级和声处理法》《和声分析法》《键盘和声》（Russian textbook），并非照本宣科，与中国民族音乐联系，强调"和声应该表现出民族的特色……也是我们这一代音乐家的使命."

[26] Lv Ji 呂驥 also studied composition at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1935, and later went to Yan'an, where he also became a music educator and administrator. He was appointed as Vice Director of Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing in 1949. It was also Lv who spent three hours teaching Yuan Muzhi to sing the "song of the peep-show" during the shooting of *City Scenes*.

[27] Howard, p. 2.

[28] Andrew Jones, pp. 69-111.

The music track in *City Scenes* embodies the musical concepts of the "new music movement." The narrative framing of the peep-show is facilitated by the theme "Song of the Western Mirror," which was sung by the filmmaker Yuan Muzhi and featured as "an auteur's voice"[29] accompanied by percussion instruments issuing from both diegetic and extradiegetic spaces. The song is strongly influenced by Chinese folk storytelling and performance forms such as ballad singing (唱曲). As the composer, Zhao Yuanren, stated, "the theme song is typically a peep showman's song, with its cymbals and little drums and its cries of, 'Hey! Come on take a look! Hey! Get a peep inside, Hey! See all the street lights shining bright!' But in spirit, the sweeping melodies dip into all the emotions of what takes place inside the scenes, and in the last of the three stanzas, the forte decisive ending gives the whole music and the story a turn that fits well with the New Life of today."[30] Ironically, since lyrics articulating any social critique of economic depression, social stratification, or unemployment were censored in the film but not on records,[31] Yuan Muzhi had to hum the film version of "Song of the Western Mirror" using a post-synchronization dubbing process.[32] His voice therefore does not match his lip movements, rendering the asynchronization and audiovisual discrepancy conspicuous. For audiences who had already heard the song on records and therefore noticed the excision of particular lyrics, this rendered the film's gesture of social critique and defiance even more provocative.

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[29] At certain moments, we see Yuan is singing the lyrics by reading his lips but hear him merely humming several of the verses (because those verses were banned by the censors). See Sue Tuohy, "Metropolitan Sounds: Music in Chinese Film of the 1930s," in Zhang Yingjin, ed. *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai 1922-1943*, p. 213.

[30] Zhao Yuanren, "On the Theme Song in *Metripolitan Scenes*," in *Denton Gazette*, special issue on *Metropolitan Scenes*, October 26, 1935.

[31] Some of the censored lyrics include, "Of ten miles of foreign concession lands, nine miles lay waste; of ten able-bodied young people, nine remain idle. The ones who want to sell their labors have nowhere to sell, workless people where is your way out? ... Of ten shops, nine slump. The rich have no place to store their wealth, the poor are drifting in the storm! 十里洋場有九里荒，十個年輕人有九個彷徨。賣力的有力無處賣，出門人看你向何方……十家的買賣有九家蕭條。有錢的有錢無處放，沒錢人在風雨裡正飄搖！"

[32] Zhao Rulan, "The Music Life of My Father" (我父親的音樂生活), in Zhao Yuanren, 趙元任音樂論文集, 中國文聯出版公司, 1994, p. 5.

While the folksy "Song of the Western Mirror" and a brief quotation from the finale part of French composer Camille Saint-Saëns's (1835-1921) fourteen-movement musical suite *Le carnaval des animaux* (The Carnival of the Animals, 1886) are heard in the film's opening credit sequence, the carnivalesque symphonic "City Scenes Fantasia" by Huang Zi is featured as a centerpiece of the film.[33] The musical form of *fantasia* (also fancy, fantasy) is an instrumental composition free in form and inspiration, equipped with an improvisatory character.[34] As Don Michael Randel claims, "The fantasia has often borrowed antithetical formal procedures and styles, and an inexact use of terminology sometimes compounds the problems in musical definition," and it has "nearly continuous transformation by means of rhythmic distortion, fragmentation, *inganno*, and changes of meter and tempo."[35] Many ensemble fancies (*fantasias*) contrast canons and other contrapuntal procedures with the "light humors" of dance rhythms and harmonic ostinatos, folk-like melodies, and chordal "echoes".[36] The musical repertoires of the 19th and early 20th centuries made full use of fantasias, capriccios, and rhapsodies that in turm quoted themes from familiar operas or drew upon popular songs and pseudo-folk melodies to evoke exotic landscapes.

As an instrumental Western classical piece, *City Scenes Fantasia* not only echoes the sense of humor and spontaneity in the film but also embodies cultural hierarchies among different musical modes in 1930s Shanghai. For instance, Western symphonic music such as *City Scenes Fantasia* was considered cosmopolitan and modern, favored by the urban middle classes and the expatriate communities in China, while the folksy, Chinese "Song of The Western Mirror"

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[33] For more discussion on Huang Zi, see Joys H. Y. Cheung, "Singing Ancient Piety and Modernity in 'Song of Familial Bliss' (1935): Musical Translation of Huang Zi (1904-1938) in Interwar China," *Asian Music*, vol 41, number 2, Summer/Fall 2010, pp. 4-58.

[34] See Encyclopedia Britannica, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/201586/fantasia (accessed March 16, 2015).

[35] Don Michael Randel, ed. *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 308.

[36] For more discussion on the form of *fantasia*, see *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 306-308.

occupies a humbler place in intellectual discourse and popular imagination. "City Scenes Fantasia" bears feature of its European-American musical heritage and reflects the vivacious cityscape and urban rhythm of Shanghai; caotured in the music, these rhythms are moreover enhanced by a rapid cinematic montage. The concept of *fantasia*, both as a musical mode in general and as a specific device functioning within *City Scenes*, indexes a phantasmagoric urban panorama, exemplified by flickering neon signs and city symphony montage sequences. The city night exists in the abyss between darkness and illumination, toxically dangerous and compellingly dazzling. Locating its narrative and atmosphere in the Shanghai cityscape and mediasphere, *City Scenes* is certainly characteristic of the genre of "city comedies" and cinematic *fantasia*; it partakes of the intimate connection between "musical comedy" and "cinematic fantasia" that evolved in the 1930s. According to contemporary film critics, cinematic operettas in the early sound period, such as Ernst Lubitsch's *The Love Parade* (1929), René Clair's *The Million* (1931), Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *The Three Penny Opera* (1931, Die 3 Groschen-Oper), and Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* (1932), were also termed "fantasy."[37] Similarly, in *City Scenes*, the concept of "cinematic fantasia" crystallizes the film's satirical thematic concerns and social commentary about the fantasy and deception of consumerism and the phantasmagoria of semi-colonial capitalist modernity in 1930s Shanghai.

In the *City Scenes Fantasia* sequence, the atmosphere in both the music and the city symphony montage sequence alternates between being playful, chaotic, and energetic, moods which are variously associated with street scenes, building facades, and entertainment venues. The sequence also touches upon the lyrical, a register affiliated with leisure activities and elevated

[37] 淺岡吉雄, Hou Feng 侯楓 trans, The Screenplay of Sound Film 有聲電影的劇本, Mingxing Monthly 明星月報, Vol.2, Issue 1 二卷一期, 1933.

public spaces such as a park that the high class urban residents frequent. Different musical modes and motifs converse, clash, or refrain, producing an unpredictable eruption of strong notes or chords that resemble urban excitement and sensation—a violent assault on the senses. The piece's exaggeration, spontaneity, and unpredictability correspond to the audiovisual innovations and unruly energy that animate *City Scenes* and rendering it a cinematic *fantasia*. Here the *Fantasia* becomes symbolic of transitional sound techniques and aesthetic in *City Scenes* and other Chinese films of this historical period.

III. Mickey Mousing, Gibberish, and Transitional Sound Aesthetic

The transition from silent to sound film took quite a few years in China, stretching from roughly 1931 to 1937. Made in 1935, *City Scenes* still carries energetic traces of late silent comedy, noticeable for instance in its employment of the "Mickey Mousing" technique and its borrowing from the conventions of Charlie Chaplin films. In Paul Warshow's words, filmmakers such as Rene Clair's (1898-1981) "use of voices and sound effects is highly selective, so that in the most important ways [Clair's work is] aesthetically closer to silent films than to sound films."[38] However, the employment of sound elements in *City Scenes* greatly accentuates the fact that it is a sound film; mimetic music occasionally evokes sound effects, sound effects imitate the human voice, and the human voice produces "comic noise" and rhythmic musicality. The imaginative circulation and redefinition of various acoustic categories greatly enriches the audiovisual expressivity of the film and our understanding of these artificial boundaries.

In film comedies, sound effects usually function as comic punctuation and crystallizations of the rhythmic audiovisual flow and unfolding narrative. As Robert Mott notes, "If brevity is the soul of comedy, sound effects are its exclamation marks."[39] These acoustic "exclamation marks"

[38] Warshow, p.45.
[39] Mott, p. 85.

are juxtaposed with the literally visible question marks formed by fireworks in the urbanscape in *City Scenes*, opening up more questions than resolutions about the main characters' predicament. The innovative use of "noise" and sound effects in cinema is particularly suggestive; as film theorist Béla Balázs argues, "we have interpreted the sounds of the bustle of life merely as confused noise, as a chaotic din […] the sound film will teach us to listen more attentively, 'art is salvation from chaos.'"[40] Sound films not only categorized and reorganized "chaotic" mundane sounds by mediated forms of representation, but also taught the early sound cinema audience how to "listen" to film sounds. This pertains to how noises are incorporated into musical form, creating "a symphony of noise."[41]

The sense of "order" and "musicality" amid "chaotic noise" in *City Scenes* is conspicuous. The film employs sound not just as a complementary element that merely enriches dramatic scenes but also as an event of central, decisive importance and as the basic motif of the action. For instance, in the beginning of *City Scenes*, amid the chaos created by the crowd pushing to buy tickets at the small train station, the lackadaisical ticket seller asks, "where are you going?" The crowd (especially the four main characters) rhythmically chant "Shanghai! Shanghai! Shanghai!" their shouts accompanied by a rapid and jerky panning shot and a series of quick cuts between close-ups of grotesque human faces that suggest the unruly energy of the crowd. Noise and musicality, silence and sound, chaos and order, and the visual and aural fields are thus not only juxtaposed, but intertwined to the end of creating comic effects.

The comic soundscape in *City Scenes* is largely composed of sound gags, whose comical and sarcastic impact is intensified by the confusion between dialogue and sound effects, as well as

[40] Balazs, p. 185.
[41] Balazs, p. 202.

mimetic diegetic and extradiegetic music. The film frequently employs a Mickey Mousing technique, in which the beat of the music closely matches the physical action and rhythm of the characters. Named for the cartoons in which it was initially developed, Mickey Mousing was a well-established practice in Hollywood by the mid-1930s.[42] Although Mickey Mousing is usually associated with silent film accompaniment,[43] it is considered a product of sound technology and often employed to strengthen comic effects of characters' actions and movements in sound comedies. For instance, Chinese critic Du Hengzhi calls Mickey Mousing "imitation sounds (moxieyin)," acknowledging the wide employment of the technique as a means of amplifying metrical and farcical expressivity in animations and comedies.[44] In *City Scenes*, comic sounds accompany characters sneezing, shouting, walking, and descending the staircase. In musicologist Sue Tuohy's words, "the filmmakers seem to have delighted in this musical-visual synchronization, the most obvious being the synchronization of movement up and down the musical (diatonic) scale as people walk up and down stairs."[45] Instrumental markers of multiple kinds are interspersed throughout *City Scenes*; not only do characters ascend and descend the stairs to the tune of musical scales, but when the female protagonist Zhang Xiaoyun's father sneezes, we hear the clash of gongs.

The Mickey Mousing technique persists in Yuan Muzhi's later film, *Street Angel* (1937). Much like *City Scenes*, *Street Angel* engages playfully with the traces of cinematic techniques from silent and early sound films—and even with the conventions of pre-cinema performance forms such as the pantomime, shadow play, and slapstick comedy. The window of Xiao Chen is sometimes transformed to a stage, when he teases Xiaohong with a magic show; at other times it

[42] Kalinak, p. 86.
[43] Kalinak, p. 85.
[44] Du Hengzhi 杜衡之, "Music and Cinema 音樂與電影," *Huangzhong* 黃鐘, vol. 8, issue. 2, 1936.
[45] Tuohy, p. 216.

becomes a screen, when Xiao Chen and his four "sworn brothers" perform a shadow play behind the curtain. The Mickey Mousing technique, usually associated with silent slapstick comedy, recurs when Xiao Chen mischievously hits his "sworn brothers"' on their heads or knocks Old Wang's head against the wall. In addition to producing farcical effects, the exaggeration of sound/music also highlights the artificiality of Xiao Chen's scheme and alleviates the sense of cruelty and pain for spectators. In this sense, Mickey Mousing also functions by allowing a "non-fidelity" of sound to content, a mismatch between a given sound and the image, as Kristin Thompson has pointed out.[46]

In *City Scenes*, this "Mickey Mousing" technique is interwoven with a Wagnerian *leitmotif*, in which particular recurrent musical motifs and instruments are associated with specific characters. For example, the clarinet melody frequently accompanies Xiaoyun, jaunty and lighthearted, as she indulges in materialist desires and pleasures; the tuba, with its low, sulky yet humorous tone, recurs when Xiaoyun's father appears, rushing about in desperate attempts to save his bankrupt pawnshop—his family's livelihood—during the 1930s Shanghai economic and financial crises. Finally, the self-indulgent writer who makes his meager living by publishing hackneyed love poems, Li Menghua, is accompanied by an extra-diegetic sentimental string nocturne.

In addition to diegetic and extradiegetic music, *City Scenes* makes ingenious use of comic sound gags. Since verbal jokes are scarce, the sound gags in *City Scenes* highlight the phonetic and material quality of the human voice rather than its semantic dimensions, stimulating more laughter and proliferating possibilities for social critique. This is apparent, for instance, when Xiaoyun's father, the pawnshop owner, sullenly enters his slack storefront in attempt to obtain money and talks with the clerks in gibberish. It is worth noting that the tubby boss and skeletal

[46] Thompson, p. 121-122.

accountant were also referred to as the Hollywood comedic duo, Laurel and Hardy, according to the script supervisor of the film, Bai Ke.[47] By both comically mocking and explicitly displaying the characters' pathos, the gibberish becomes a sonic critique of the clichéd ordinariness of the characters' predicament and calls attention to Shanghai's dire economic disparities and social stratification, a focus of most 1930s Chinese leftist films.

Instances of such "nonsense non-communication" arise four times in the film, additionally recurring during a scene in which two street peddlers selling clothes shout in gibberish. This use of "gibberish" is reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's film *City Lights* (1931), which opens with a few town officials and dignitaries pretentiously babbling in front of a crowd before unveiling a new statue. Upon this revelation, they discover a ragged tramp sleeping on the statue and make every effort to shoo him away. The whole scene then turns into a farce marked by the nonsense jabber. As they manipulate human voices and transform them into comic sound effects, both *City Scenes* and *City Lights* bear traces of late silent-film sound style. Chaplin was also one of the few comedians Chinese leftist filmmakers and critics admired, because of the sarcastic social criticism exhibited in films such as *City Lights* and *Modern Times*. In *City Lights*, this manipulation of sound, which renders speech meaningless and farcical, can be read as not only a rejection of the hypocritical abuse of language in politicians' hollow public speeches, but also as a self-reflexive joke—a parody of the distortion of sound reproduction that resulted from technological deficiencies in the early sound films of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Although parallels can be discerned, a thematic and stylistic disparity exists between the sound gags in *City Scenes* and *City Lights*. In the aforementioned sequences in *City Scenes*, "gibberish" suggests that such trivial conversations and dismaying scenarios constantly repeat,

[47] Bai Ke, 137.

even as the characters' financial frustration remains unresolved. According to Bai Ke, this exaggerated "nonsense non-communication" parody was also rooted in historical and social realities. Since pawn business people in 1930s Shanghai were mostly from Anhui Province and Chaozhou of Guangdong Province, they had distinct local dialects and jargons, which made mutual comprehension almost impossible.[48] The scriptwriter/director Yuan Muzhi observed this phenomenon and reinvented it in the form of witty vocal gags, which, even considering a certain level of manufactured comic distortion and exaggeration, enhance the film's social relevance.

Referred to as "speech undermined from within" by theorist Siegfried Kracauer,[49] such "gibberish" serves as a comic sound effect. In its specific context, it also functions similarly to traditional Chinese oral performances such as "clapper talks" (快板), which echo the rhythmic speech of the four main characters in chorus at the beginning of the film as they enthusiastically announce they can get whatever good food they desire in Shanghai ("we will go to Shanghai and eat good food there/dao shanghai quchi haodongxi qu"), imagining the world beyond the small provincial train station. In Kracauer's view, such a shift of emphasis from conventional dialogue to stylized "nonsense" "is cinematic because it alienates the words, thereby exposing their material characteristic." In such instances, the voice appears in a relatively pure state, opening up the material regions of the speech world for its own sake, becoming "a sort of word carpet, a coherent sound pattern,"[50] thereby challenging the usual hierarchy that grants words "cultural pre-eminence" and finds noise "meaningless."

In both *City Scenes* and *Street Angel*, the stylistically choreographed, rhythmic movement of the human body acting in concert with the rhythmic talk and percussive music accentuates the

[48] Bai Ke 白克, "《都市風光日記》,"電通半月畫報, September 1st, 1935.
[49] Kracauer, p. 107.
[50] Kracauer, p. 110.

sense of audiovisual humor in the film—as well as its elements of visual and aural grotesque. In the opening of *City Scenes*, the extreme close-ups of faces (for instance, the country people shouting "Shanghai!") and the single sinister eye of the one-eyed peep-show peddler heighten the film's striking ambiance of eeriness through stereotypes of physical difference. The eccentric stutter and splutter (for instance, the "gibberish" spoken between the pawnshop owner and the accountant) create an auditory grotesque, signifying social and cultural deviance at the aural level. From Béla Balázs' perspective, sounds are never fantastic or grotesque in themselves but only become so through implausible relation to their source.[51] In this case, when the gibberish nonsense is uttered by its source—the human characters—it becomes grotesque because it is different from what we usually expect from a human being with the capacity for oral communication, amounting to a transgression of the familiar and a resetting of acoustic boundaries. Thus, the rebellious spirit in the thematic of *City Scenes* finds resonance in its innovative cinematic soundscape.

IV. Genre Subversion, Cosmopolitanism, and (semi-)Colonialism

City Scenes ends with its four main characters, faced with the question of going to Shanghai or back to their home village, dragging themselves between two trains running in opposite directions. More precisely, the two young people still want to go to Shanghai, and the two old people, judging from their struggling gestures, seem to prefer the idea of returning home. Meanwhile, the "song of Western Mirror" recurs, enveloping the fable-like story at the most climactic point of its drama and echoing the promotional title of the song and the film, *Quo Vadis*—Latin for "where are you going?" 何去何從?). Significantly, this question was posed not only to the characters but, by way of music, also to the historically situated audience and the struggling Chinese nation at large.

[51] Balazs, p. 208.

In addition to the *mise en abîme* structure of *City Scenes*, the film's narrative flow is occasionally punctuated and suspended by moments of spectacle that are exemplified by illustrated drawings, animation sequences, musical-number parodies, and sound gags. These multi-medial and sensational moments prompt a certain degree of spectatorial pleasure. *City Scenes*, after all, was promoted as a "musical-comedy." As a product of the commercial entertainment industry, *City Scenes* had to cater to popular taste; yet as a social satire with critical intentions and a political message, it also wanted to exert some edifying impact on its viewers. *City Scenes* was determined to undermine the enchanting glamor and escapist diversion offered by most Hollywood musicals and comedies through its anti-illusionist self-reflexivity and sarcastic social criticism.

The film not only playfully works against the "canned theatre" cliché of early talkies by foregrounding the experimental employment of sound, but also strives to distance itself from Hollywood commercialism and the sensational entertainment of most film musicals and cartoons by parodying these genres and forms and exploring new political and aesthetic potential for fim. The progressive function and significance of cartoon sequences in some leftist films (i.e., *Spring Silkworm*) did not go unnoticed; rather, it was praised by contemporary critics. One critic argued that, although the cartoon was usually considered to be sheer entertainment, the form's aesthetic and political potential ought to be explored and renewed, as an anti-imperialist tool against economic and ideological invasion.[52] The mickey-mouse cartoon imitation and the animated question mark on the screen in *City Scenes* enact just such a renewal, making full use of the cartoon's critical possibility.

[52] Feng Wu 鳳吾, "*Spring Silkworm* and Chinese Film Culture Movement," "meiri dianying"每日電影, Chenbao 晨報, Novemeber, 1933.

Subverting typical Hollywood musical extravaganza and comedies in this way, *City Scenes* appropriates the Hollywood style for its own aesthetic and political purposes. For instance, the three musical numbers in the film are mockeries of the typical form of spectacular musical numbers, as is particularly evident in two scenes: one in which a bunch of tattered rickshaw pullers chant and fight for business, and another in which fanatic speculators jostle and shout in the crashing stock market. In the latter scene, the top shot of the speculators creates a floral pattern and roulette within the stock market, making an obvious spoof on the musical numbers in the American *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933).[53] Of course, in *42nd Street* there also exist musical numbers reflecting severe social issues such as economic depression and the tragic aftermath of WWI. The atmosphere of such musical numbers in *42nd Street* is solemn compared to the more playful and sarcastic musical numbers in *City Scenes*. Highlighting the social trends underwriting moments in both films, *City Scenes* offers a richer social satire that encourages the audience to identify with the characters' predicaments—the parodic scenes serve less for delight than for contemplation and indignation.

In *City Scenes*, the urban loafers such as Wang Junsan and his secretary Xiao Chen frequent leisure spots such as nightclubs, cafés and restaurants, which were permeated by American popular songs and jazz tunes like "Whistling in the Dark."[54] When Xiao Chen takes Zhang Xiaoyun to a café for lunch, and they go on to celebrate Christmas at a nightclub alongside with Wang Junsan and Li Menghua (58'33-60'06 into the film), these public spaces are replete with popular music, reflecting the way music permeated the soundscape of actual 1930s Shanghai. As Michael Denning's research on global vernacular music and colonialism observes, in 1930s global port colonies like Shanghai, "records simply inhabited modern daily life, an omnipresent soundtrack to

[53] Bai Ke, "Diary on Shooting *City Scenes*《都市風光日記》," Denton Gazette 電通半月畫報, September 1st, 1935.
[54] The 1931 song was written and arranged by the American Jazz bandleader Sam Lanin (Samuel Charles Lanin, 1891-1977).

household and neighborhood … [they were] musics one lived with rather than musics that separated themselves from daily life."[55] However, as is evident in *City Scenes*, not all these mysics were common; many of the extremely commercialized jazz-style popular songs in urban consumerist venues could only be enjoyed by members of the bourgeois leisure class (to which the characters Wang Junsan and Xiao Chen belong) who had the luxury to engage in a life style considered by the leftists to be debauched. Nevertheless, even the status of the upper social echelon was precarious under the terms of economic depression and political unrest in semi-colonial Shanghai and war-torn China. In the end, Wang and Chen are desperate to rob each other, exploit Zhang Xiaoyun and flee from Shanghai.

Proliferating commercial jazz tunes in Shanghai as a popular cultural form of entertainment, a form divorced from its cultural roots and original social context, was condemned by various progressive critics and musicians, because of its association with the exploiting classes, their debauched life style, and their perceived low morality and vulgar taste. The noted Chinese music educator and composer Xiao Youmei argued that because music had profound moral and aesthetic influence on young listeners, decadent and vulgar jazz and other popular songs would make young people loiter away their aspirations to the detriment of their vitality, character, and taste. Xiao suggested that young music lovers should avoid frequenting dance halls and amusement parks permeated by such music, advising them to purchase records of refined and gracious music.[56] Chinese critic Du Hengzhi also criticized the music in Hollywood films for catering to the low taste of mass audiences, thereby globally circulating and popularizing jazz tunes with limited musical value. These jazz songs in commercial films emphasized too much on rhythm rather than

[55] Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution*, London & New York: Verso, 2015, p. 127.
[56] 樂人之都—上海: 西洋音樂在近代中國的發軔, 榎本泰子著, 彭瑾譯, 上海音樂出版社, 2003, p. 253-54.

melody and relized too much on clichéd and obscene lyrics rather than on musical style.[57] Such criticism may appear elitist, but it was undoubtly shared by many leftist intellectuals and composers, including He Luting and the filmmaker Yuan Muzhi.

The sonic caricature of the clamor of Shanghai's streets throughout the film echoes the criticism voiced by academic composers (such as Huang Zi) and by leftist cultural critics (such as Nie Er) about the decadent and frivolous nature of the "yellow music" produced by Li Jinhui (1891-1967),[58] a critique elaborated in Andrew Jones's book *Yellow Music*.[59] Mocking the debauchery and vulgarity of such music, He Luting created an "unharmonious band" in *City Scenes* that parodied "yellow songs" like "Maiden, I Love You (妹妹，我愛你)," which was written by Li Jinhui and sung by Li Lili.[60] The "unharmonious band" functions as a further visual and aural gag (29'09-29'59 into the film) created by the contrast between the size and volume of the human figures and the musical instruments: a very short man plays an extremely long trombone, while a very tall man plays a very small cornet; a small fat man beats a very big drum, and a big fat man beats a small drum. These images evoke a strong sense of audiovisual disproportion. This scene is reminiscent of Russian composer Alexander Tcherepnine's account of Shanghai's cityscape after a visit: "you soon discover that rhythm is fundamentally related to the life and work of the Chinese people […] a native orchestra […] playing loud and strident native-tunes. The orchestra is there to attract the attention of the passers-by to the opening of a new shop."[61] In *City Scenes*, Xiao Chen and his brothers indeed play loud tunes outside of the barbershop where one of their brothers works,

[57] Du Hengzhi 杜衡之, "Music and Cinema 音乐与电影," *Bronze Bell*/黄钟, Vol. 8, Issue 2, 1936.
[58] For more information on Li Jinhui and his popular music creation, see my chapter 1.
[59] Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
[60] Bai Ke 白克, p. 149.
[61] Tcherepnine, p. 393.

in order to save it from bankruptcy; the mission fails miserably and comically, causing even more audiovisual chaos.

In this extremely tumultuous soundscape of the Shanghai streets, drums, gongs, and trumpets compete with one another and with the different kinds of music emerging from phonographs and radio. This atmosphere is signified by a close-up of a loudspeaker, the visualization of a sound source. This soundscape showcases a chaotic cacophony of different kinds of local operas, jazz tunes, and street dins, reflecting the coexistence and tension between distinct political powers and social classes—and providing an acoustic texture for the media culture of colonial modernity. This urban sequence and soundscape are displayed through Zhang Xiaoyun's and her father's vision and ears as they walk down the street, mediated through the channels of human audiovisual perception. At the same time, the characters are participants in the audiovisual pandemonium and guide the audience through the situations they confront. This renders the audience more likely to have a vivid, personal experience of the urban soundscape and the sound techniques that produce it.

Resonating with the boisterous street cacophony in *City Scenes*, Yuan Muzhi's *Street Angel* unfolds through an extensive sequence (about four and half minutes) in which a wedding march and a funeral procession, respectively played by a Chinese-style band and a Western band, coexist, compete, and intermingle. Chinese gongs, cymbals, *erhu*s, and *suona*s clash with Western-style drums and trumpets. The chaotic soundscape suggests the hybrid and semi-colonial nature of Shanghai, which was a vernacularized hodgepodge of different cultures and political powers, imbuing the scene to some extent with a grotesque quality symbolized by the cross-eyed bride in the sedan. Such exhibitionist audiovisual street spectacles were both part of semi-colonial

everyday life and comic gimmicks,[62] stimulating the viewers' and onlookers' fascination and sensory pleasure. The film sequence also dexterously introduces its main characters: Xiao Chen, the trumpeter in the procession, Lao Wang, the newspaper peddler hawking in the gawking crowd, and Xiaohong, the sing-song-girl on the balcony. Their vocal and verbal communication is overwhelmed by the clamorous noise of the street, so they address one another through gesticulation, reminding audiences of silent films. The "thematic match" intercut between close-ups of human feet and donkey hoofs creates a comic effect. The point-of-view shots and eye-line match also construct a three-dimensional audiovisual space with different camera angles, planes, and an occasional subjective soundscape that is filtered through different characters' points of audition.

Although these street-parade scenes are experienced with a certain degree of comic exaggeration in Yuan's films, they are to a certain extent realistic representations of the musical practice in semi-colonial cities like Shanghai. Studying music as a colonial weapon and vernacular music culture as a tool of decolonization, Michael Denning argues that the imperial conquest and colonization of territory was "accompanied" by the musical occupation of space, that the projection of a new colonial order was accomplished via sound. Two colonial legacies were particularly important to Denning: the worldwide spread of Protestant missionary hymns sung in chorus and choral singing and the worldwide spread of military brass bands. The building of colonial forces of order—colonial police and armies—depended on their musical "auxiliaries," the military brass and police bands that were developed around the globe.[63] With military bands and images of foreign cathedrals so conspicuous in semi-colonial Shanghai, the vernacular chaos of

[62] Cheng Bugao, p. 85.
[63] Michael Denning, p. 141.

City Scenes can be considered at once a violation of and resistance to the imposing colonial order and its musical codes.

City Scenes' sonic heterogeneity collects a mélange of comic sound effects, distorted speech, as well as musical sequences that draw inspiration from traditional Chinese folk tunes, city symphony films, and Hollywood musical numbers. Intertwined with the global sound aesthetic of world film history, the audiovisual experiments in *City Scenes* form a stylistic dialogue with a plethora of 1930s European, American, and Soviet films: Rene Clair's and Ernst Lubitsch's early sound musical comedies, Charlie Chaplin comedies, Disney cartoons, Hollywood film musicals, Sergei Eisenstein films, and the first Soviet-sound film *The Road to Life* (Nikolai Ekk, 1931), which was shown in Shanghai in 1933 and enthusiastically received by Chinese intellectuals and film critics. Jay Leyda notes these complex overlaps when he comments that, in *City Scenes*, "the artist [Yuan Muzhi] must have been acquainted with the work of Clair and Cavalcanti, and there are echoes on the soundtrack of *City Lights* and *Dreigroschenoper* (such as the singing showman)."[64]

In spite of these transcultural cinematic links, *City Scenes* strives to differentiate itself from sensational Hollywood commercialism and the kind of pure entertainment offered by most film musicals and comedies, which were severely criticized by 1930s Chinese leftist film critics as "narcotic toxicants" and "tools of imperialism." They also represented a form of economic and cultural invasion of the sub-colonial China, since, for instance, in the first half of 1933, 136 Hollywood films were shown in Shanghai (which were mostly about romance with a sense of hedonism, escapism and sentimentalism, viewed as "sex-mad" and purely for entertainment),

[64] Jay Leyda, 1972, p. 100.

while only 33 Chinese ones were exhibited.[65] Most first-run film theaters in Shanghai showed almost exclusively foreign films; only second and third-run theaters showed Chinese ones. Within this context, the Chinese film industry struggled for space to develop. By parodying existing film genres and exploring new political and aesthetic potentials, *City Scenes* attempted to carve out a new road—an alternative cinema and film culture that might counter the "decadent" capitalist one.

Conclusion

Recurring audiovisual elements in *Street Angel* are reminiscent of *City Scenes* and serve to develop Yuan Muzhi's authorial hallmark, setting up internal references from within his oeuvre and provoking audiovisual memories (and probably also reinterpretations) of his previous films. Attentive *Street Angel* audiences who had seen *City Scenes* (1935) would have observed that the city symphony montage sequence in the opening-credits sequence of *Street Angel* was taken directly from the earlier film. This two-and-half-minute segment, with rapid editing of urban imagery of Shanghai, was musically accompanied by "City Scenes Fantasia." The "recycled" sequence and the titles of Yuan's two films (*City Scenes* and *Street Angel*) speak to his emphasis on locality and the thematic concerns of these films: the semi-colonial city of Shanghai, and the lower-class people's difficult situation both inside and outside of the stratified public domain. This theme is clear, for instance, at the beginning of *Street Angel*, when the camera tilts from an imposing building called "heaven" by the dumbstruck Xiao Chen and Lao Wang down to the murky and grimy "lower depth" of the city inhabited by the impoverished main protagonists.[66]

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[65] Yao Sufeng 姚蘇鳳, "A General View of American and British Films Shown in Shanghai in the Fisrt Half of 1933/ 1933 年上半年在沪开映的英美影片概观," *Mingxing Monthly*, Vol. 2, Issue. 2,

[66] This technique could possibly relate to: 1. Hollywood films such as *Seventh Heaven*; or 2. Maxim Gorky's influential play *The Lower Depths*, which inspired the Chinese film, *Night Inn* (Zuolin, 1947), and was based on the eponymous stage production adapted from Gorky's play.

As I have suggested in my previous chapter on Liu Na'ou and city symphony films, Yuan's films incorporate city symphony montage sequences, locate their narratives and atmosphere in the Shanghai cityscape and mediasphere, and can be characterized as "city comedies." As a genre, film comedy usually represents the circumstances of everyday life as experienced by the middle and lower orders of society—those whose power is limited and local, and whose manners, behaviors, and values are considered by their 'betters' to be either trivial, or vulgar, or both.[67] These films feature descending bourgeois or lower-class subjects, and their soundscapes resonates with these living environments and quotidian lifestyles.

City Scenes, *Street Angel*, and some other 1930s left-leaning films resonate, too, with another important reality: the tension posed between distinct political powers and social classes in the contested zone of 1930s Shanghai and China. Believing in the power of "proper" music to strengthen the nation amid its deepening national crisis, the film and music makers of *City Scenes* endeavored to convey their leftist vision (Left eye) to the "Right ear." In other words, they wanted to stimulate audiences' proper acoustic perceptions and sentiments, as well as the desire to shoulder the pressing tasks of nation-building and anti-imperialist resistance. While discussing the making and remaking of the musical ear, Michael Denning quotes Karl Marx: "the *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world."[68] Denning argues that the musical ear has a history. New modes of music awaken a new sense of a new musical ear—and the forming and reforming of the musical ear is the fundamental labor of cultural revolutions.[69]

As a means of remaking the "new music" and "new musical ear" in China, the Chinese musical vernacular and mass songs afforded new spaces for fostering social solidarity under the

[67] Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy*. London & New York: Routledge, 1990. p. 11-2.
[68] Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", 1975, v. 3, pp. 301-2.
[69] Michael Denning, 2015, p. 171.

banner of a nationalist spirit and for generating the potential for mass mobilization. The emerging musical culture of resistance was part of the urban culture, inevitably exerting an influence on the creation, circulation, and perception of 1930s Chinese film music. Popular sound media and culture promoted songs and orchestral works via records, radio broadcasting, and published sheet music, all of which had become common practices in the urban sphere of Republican Shanghai.

Chapter Four

An Operatic and Poetic Atmosphere (*kongqi*): Sound Aesthetic and Transmediality in Fei Mu's *Xiqu* Films and *Spring in a Small Town* (1948)

"[…] The gesture becomes dance, the dance becomes a word, the word becomes an aria, then we see this theater's organic integrity."

— Alexander Tairov (1885-1950)[1]

Introduction

This chapter examines how stylistic conventions drawn from traditional Chinese theater (*xiqu*) and modern spoken drama (*huaju*) have inspired the audiovisual aesthetics of cinematic works by the eminent Chinese filmmaker Fei Mu (1906-1951), especially his later works such as the Beijing opera film *Regrets of Life and Death* (1948) and the acclaimed *Spring in a Small Town* (1948). Fei's earlier films, such as *Song of China* (1935), *Bloodshed on Wolf Mountain* (1936), *Murder in the Oratory* (1937), and *Confucius* (1940) presage his ingenuity in nuanced cinematic expressions epitomized by the elaborate employment of *mise-en-scène*, camera movement, and "dissolve." Fei's early silent films *Night in the City* (1933), *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* (1934), and *Life* (1934), highly regarded by contemporary critics,[2] already intimated the stylistic aspirations he would later cultivate in his sound films, particularly the conceptualization and creation of "atmosphere" (*kongqi*/air) in cinema. Combining meticulous film analysis, rigorous readings of contemporaneous film and drama criticism, and Fei Mu's own critical writing, this chapter engages Fei Mu's late cinema as a theoretical interrogation of the complex interplay between the visual and aural, as well as between cinema and other media and art forms in Republican China and beyond.

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[1] Quote from Haun Saussy, "Mei Lanfang in Moscow, 1935: Familiar, Unfamiliar, Defamiliar," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, Special Issue on Modernisms' Chinas (Spring, 2006), p. 11.

[2] These three silent films have been lost.

Using Fei Mu's films as examples, and foregrounding a sound-sensitive theoretical approach, the chapter investigates the medium and aesthetic specificity of cinema in a transmedial environment in 1930s and 1940s China; taken winthin this context, spoken drama, traditional Chinese theater, landscape painting, and music all take on key roles in producing cinema's audiovisual aesthetics.

Fei's cinematic achievements were rediscovered and reevaluated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when film circles in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan began to reenter into dialogue with each other.[3] Fei's most prominent film, *Spring in a Small Town*, has been lauded for its poetic atmosphere, nuanced depictions of character psychology, deliberate use of rhythm and *mise-en-scène*, and cadenced long takes and camera movements. These critically acclaimed stylistic features are enhanced by the film's employment of an idiosyncratic female voice-over, multi-layered narrative perspectives, and heterogeneous temporal-spatial constructions. Such characteristics distinguish *Spring* as a zenith of 1940s Chinese cinema. I argue that the omniscient female voice-over and narrative perspective not only draw inspiration from the Chinese operatic aesthetics, but also coincide with the trend of voice-over narration seen in 1940s American films noir and other cinematic genres such as the melodrama. These transmedial and transcultural connections enrich our understanding of the soundscape and audiovisual aesthetic of *Spring in a Small Town*,[4] updating our consideration of female subjectivity and gender discourse in cinema and calling for a reassessment of the intricate intertwinement of cinema and other traditional and modernist art forms and media.

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[3] Two books devoted to Fei Mu were published in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the mid-1990s: 《<小城之春>的電影美學—向費穆致敬》(台北國家電影資料館, 1996)；《詩人導演：費穆》,黃愛玲編 (香港電影評論學會, 1998). One monograph and anthology devoted to Fei Mu's cinema came out in mainland China a few year later: Chen Mo 陳墨, 流鶯春夢:費穆電影論稿 (中國電影出版社, 2000), and *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006). The latter is a collection of articles presented at a conference on Fei Mu's cinematic art organized by the China Film Archive in 1997.

[4] *Spring* is one of the very few Chinese films made before 1949 that features voice-over narration.

Fei Mu had been advocating for cinema's unique medium characteristics in both his films and writings since the 1930s. Even so, for Fei, the expressive "specificity" of cinema did not mean it was isolated from other cultural forms and media; rather, it was able to acquire inspirations and appropriate styles from a variety of forms and to articulate them in new ways. Informed by this view, his cinematic style was significantly enriched. Fei not only had profound knowledge of classical Chinese poetry, music, landscape painting, and traditional theater (especially Beijing opera), but was also a revered director, screenwriter and producer of spoken drama in early 1940s Shanghai. Additionally, he was well-versed in English and French, and had expertise with foreign films. His exposure to and theorization of these myriad froms facilitated the transmedial and transcultural nature of his cinematic experiments. In a 1934 essay entitled "A Brief Discussion on 'Atmosphere (*luelun kongqi*),'" Fei stressed the significance of creating an elusive and floating "atmosphere" (or "air/ambience"/*kongqi*) in cinema, by way of strategies including delicate *mise-en-scène*, montage within long takes, the utilization of variations in lighting and shot composition, and, above all, the production of a rich sound environment composed of sound effects, human voice, and music.[5]

As a later work in Fei's brief film career (1933-1951), *Spring in a Small Town* epitomizes how he envisioned and achieved audiovisual engagement. In *Spring*, the heroine Yuwen and her husband Liyan lead a monotonous life in a derelict mansion in an isolated small town, most of which was reduced to ruins by Japanese bombing during the eight-year War of Resistance (1937-1945). Increasingly to mirror his dilapidated house and garden, Liyan's health deteriorates; moreover, he grows eccentric, and his condition exacerbating his already strained relationship with

[5] According to Fei, "human voice" in cinema includes dialogue, monologue, and singing. Fei Mu, *luetan kongqi* 略談空氣 (A Brief Discussion on 'atmosphere'), *Contemporary Cinema* (shidai dianying 時代電影), 6 (November 1934). "Kongqi" here can also be translated as "air" or "ambience."

Yuwen. This state of things continues until Liyan's doctor and friend, Zhichen, comes to visit, bringing new vitality to the couple's suffocating domestic life. However, Liyan soon discovers that Zhichen is Yuwen's former lover and that their affection has been rekindled. The love triangle forces each of the characters to struggle with the competing claims of social ethics, passion, and compassion in order to find a resolution of their conflicts—and ultimately to rediscover themselves and their relationships with each other. The seemingly prosaic story in *Spring* is considerably complicated by its subtle depiction of mannerisms and its *mise-en-scène*, which, as it visible in its animation of the interaction between the movements of camera and of characters' bodies, draws inspiration from both traditional Chinese theater and spoken drama. The film was released in 1948, an historical moment of acute chaos and turbulence brought on by the Japanese surrender in 1945 and the ensuing civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists.[6]

Many Chinese scholars and critics consider the story, situation, and sentimentality in *Spring* as allegories for the sense of unrest and anguish that characterized the predicament of the period's Chinese intellectuals, who were then situated at a cultural and political crossroads of contending paradigms: that of the old Chinese lifestyle and its nearly-destroyed values (embodied by Liyan and his declining gentry family) and that of the new China that had yet to be fully embraced by the public (exemplified by Zhichen, the energetic doctor). Liberal intellectuals like Fei Mu were not adamant supporters of any of the political factions of 1948—the general sentiment was of simultaneous derision for the corrupt regime of the Nationalists and hesitance to wholeheartedly espouse the Communists. *Spring* was criticized by contemporary leftist film critics for its "hollow, nihilistic formalism," "petit-bourgeois sentimentality of despair and solitude," and lack of

[6] Which resulted in the Communist victory and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, as well as the Nationalists' retreat to the island of Taiwan.

revolutionary spirit.[7] Fei Mu left Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1949, before the city was liberated by the PLA, and was lukewarmly received in Beijing in 1950 when he attempted to return to mainland China to make more films.[8] He died of a heart attack in 1951 in Hong Kong at the age of 45.

The majority of Fei's cinematic and theatrical *oeuvre*, including *Spring*, present a woman as the central figure, the essential vehicle for unfolding the narrative and revealing the various dimensions of human emotions, social turmoil, and historical-political allegory.[9] Noting this tendency, scholars have connected *Spring* with classical Chinese "boudoir poetry" (*guiyuan shi*), which usually employs either a female or a pseudo-female persona crafted by a male poet (usually an official intellectual) to express grievances about the ravages of war, the departure or loss of

[7] Tianwen 天聞, *A Criticism of Criticisms: On Spring in a Small Town* (piping de piping 批評的批評:關於《小城之春》), *Drama and Film Chronicle* (ying ju chunqiu 影劇春秋) 1, 4 (1948).

[8] The People's Liberation Army. There are a few different accounts for why Fei left the mainland just before the liberation of Shanghai. One story is that he was about to be persecuted by the Nationalists in Shanghai because his brother had published an announcement in a Hong Kong newspaper excoriating the Nationalist rule. Another version suggesting there was discord between Fei and the leftists is provided by the film critic Shu Yan from the mainland and corroborated by Huang Ren from Taiwan. In these accounts, Fei maintained connections with both the underground Communists and Nationalists in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during the 1940s. After Japan surrendered in 1945, Fei was entrusted by the Nationalist government in Chongqing to take over the China Film Co., which was previously controlled by the Japanese. Yet Fei was snubbed and shunted aside when officials in Chongqing sent Xu Suling to take over. Because of this, the leftist film professionals did not gain access to a well-equipped studio and subsequently considered Fei pro-Nationalist. Fei also managed a small studio, "Shanghai Film Experimental Studio," supervised by the Shanghai Nationalist Party headquarters, so he was easily interpreted by the leftists as having sided with the Nationalist government by the leftists. However, Fei was alienated from and distrusted by both the Nationalists and Communists at the time; he was deeply distressed during the period he was making *Spring*. See Shu Yan 舒湮, "The Historical Period Fei Mu Lived and Fei Mu in that period 費穆的時代和時代的費穆," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006), p. 133; Huang Ren, 中外電影永遠的巨星, 1996, p. 44.

[9] For instance, Fei's silent films *Night in the City* (chengshi zhiye 城市之夜, 1933), *Life* (rensheng 人生, 1934) and *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* (xiang xue hai 香雪海, 1934) all highlight female suffering and star Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 (1910-1935), the most renowned Chinese silent film actress. She seemed to embody female victimization in Chinese society and committed suicide after experiencing marriage troubles and humiliations by Shanghai tabloid.s Fei's Beijing opera film *Regrets of Life and Death* (sheng si hen 生死恨, 1948), and early 1940s spoken drama productions such as *Yang Guifei* 楊貴妃 (1942), *Wang Zhaojun* 王昭君, *Four Sisters* (si jiemei 四姐妹), *Xiangfei* 湘妃 (1943) and *Xiao Fengxian* 小鳳仙 also dramatize the lives of women in classical Chinese literature or legend.

friends, political persecution, and personal loneliness.[10] Indeed, *Spring* unfolds from the female protagonist Yuwen's perspective. Her voice-over frequently reveals her psychological interiority—conveying pathos, boredom and inner conflicts— and occasionally describes her movements and actions, emphasizing or reframing what is already present on the screen. For instance (at 10'19 into the film), Yuwen's voice-over describes her movement: "I open the door of my room, I sit in my bed […] Taking up the embroidery frame, I go to Liyan's younger sister's room. It seems that the light is nicer in her room." In this example, we simultanrously see and hear the overlapping verbalization and the visualization of the action, experiencing at onece the images and auditory narration; the effect produces a doubled perspective that joins the subejective account of the reflecting, narrating-I to an encounter with the character as viewed from the outside. Its accomplishment is caputured in Sarah Kozloff's words: "Things must be twice-told in order to be safely redeemed from time and decay."[11]

This audiovisual redundancy is possibly inspired by the Chinese operatic conventions of "*zibao jiamen*" and "*beigong*."[12] On the traditional Beijing operatic stage, the backdrop is usually abstract and minimalistic; performers "carry" the space through their performances.[13] They evoke particular environments and spaces through pantomimic actions and oral descriptions that inspire the audience's imagination of the situation. *Zibao jiamen* is a form of self-introduction to the audience performed via speaking or singing when a character first appears on stage. Through this

[10] See Susan Daruvala, "The Aesthetics and Moral Politics of Fei Mu's *Spring in A Small Town*," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2007, p. 171-187.
[11] Sarah Kozloff, 1989, p. 21.
[12] For more information, see http://zgjingju.h.baike.com/article-231597.html
[13] There had been innovations in the Beijing opera since the late 19th and early 20th centuries in terms of employment of spectacular machine-operated scenery and novel lighting techniques, especially in Shanghai, but the trend did not become "mainstream." See Wan Qingrong 萬慶榮, "論資產階級戲曲改良運動的美學思想," in 中國藝術研究院首屆研究生碩士學位論文集（戲曲捲）, 文化藝術出版社, 1985.

technique, the character not only presents a basic account of him/herself but also sets up the circumstances and character relationships underwiritng the story. *Beigong* is a kind of spoken or sung monologue that occurs when a character wants to express something he/she does not intend to disclose to other characters in the diegesis but wants the audience to know about. It not only conveys the character's emotion or intention but also acts as a foil to the narrative development, carving out another narrative space on the same stage or within the cinematic diegesis. Functining much like these techniques, Yuwen's voice-over generates both intimacy with and distance from the audience. On the one hand, it induces empathy with the narrator/character and engages spectators with the narrative itself; on the other hand, it defamiliarizes both the visible action and audible voice, encouraging contemplation about the self-reflexive implications of an act as well as its temporal and perspectival instabilities. In this sense, the audiovisual interaction delineates a fluid, female agency.

Voice-over narration is also a widely practiced convention in literature and world cinema. *Spring* involuntarily echoes the 1940s "golden age" of the "voice-over" technique in Hollywood cinema, which is generally featured in four types of films: war films, semi-documentaries, literary adaptations, and films noir. All of these genres extensively employed voice-over narration and were connected to other media, such as novels and radio dramas.[14] The 1940s witnessed an upsurge in male voice-over narration in American fiction films, particularly films noir. This is usually discussed in relation to the trauma resulting from WWII and the Western cultural paranoia of the early Cold War period. It is also considered to be a metaphor for a crisis in masculinity that marks the emergence of a new type of modernist subjectivity.[15] In comparison to the dominant male

[14] Andrew Sarris ascribes the new popularity of voice-over to the growth of screenwriters' power and prestige during the 1940s. Kozloff, pp. 33-34.

[15] For instance, see *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945), among others. For a discussion of film noir in relation to sociopolitical circumstance and subjectivity, see

voice-over, the female voice-over, though growing more prominent, was still a minor practice in the 1940s. Sarah Kozloff and Kaja Silverman have argued that, in most classical melodramatic Hollywood films the archetypal voice of authority is male, while the female voice is generally depicted as neurotic and unreliable, representing a subject occasionally needing to be cured by the male character.[16] A few American and European films made in the 1940s feature female voice-over narration and cross genre lines, ranging from melodrama, horror, and noir to gothic and combat films; the exemplary ones include *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948), and *A Letter to Three Wives* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1949).[17] In these examples, female voice-overs either motivate a flashback narration or are themselves motivated by the reading of a letter. The female voice-over in *Spring*, however, is more intricate than its contemporary film counterpart in terms of its narrative perspectives, it temporal-spatial constructions, and its audiovisual expressivity.[18]

Michel Chion considers the voice-over in cinema as a form of "textual speech" distinct from "theatrical speech" and "emanation speech."[19] In Chion's view, "textual speech" acts upon the images to establish the film's narrative framework and setting; it "has the power to make visible the images that it evokes through sound—that is, to change the setting, to call up a thing, moment,

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Andrew Spicer, "Introduction," and Christophe Gelly, "Film Noir and Subjectivity," in Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson (eds)., *A Companion to Film Noir* (WILEY Blackwell, 2013), p, 1-13, 337-352.

[16] Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[17] Other examples that either preceded or coincided with *Spring* include *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943), *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), *The Enchanted Cottage* (John Cromwell, 1945), *The Locket* (John Brahm, 1946), *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1947), *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947), *Kiss of Death* (Henry Hathaway, 1947), and so forth. See Sarah Kozlof, 1989; Britta Sjogren, 2006.

[18] I will elaborate this point in the following pages.

[19] Chion, 1994, pp. 171-78. Chion delineates three modes of speech in film: theatrical speech, textual speech, and emanation speech. "Theatrical speech" refers to the dialogue, which has a dramatic, psychological, informative, and affective function. "Emanation speech" refers to utterances that are not necessarily heard and understood fully, such as in the films of Jacques Tati.

place, or characters at will."[20] This omnipotence is generally reserved for certain privileged characters and is only granted for a limited time.[21] In Chion's account of "textual speech," the voice-over makes a world and then "disappears, allowing us to enter the diegetic universe."[22] The intermittent recurrence of Yuwen's voice-over in *Spring*, however, expands these potentials of the voice-over and complicates our understanding of its expressivity and ability to foster a certain cinematic atmosphere.

I. "Atmosphere" and Fei Mu's Film Sound Aesthetic

Fei's use of the female voice-over to complicate the soundscape and aural-visual experience of *Spring in a Small Town* speaks to his broader cinematic theories and artistic tendencies—incorporating expressive music and ambient sounds to create a poetic and empathetic "atmosphere" had always been a priority for him. In his essay "A Brief Discussion on 'Atmosphere,'" Fei points out that creating a certain "atmosphere" in film is undeniably essential to draw the film audience into a sympathetic relation with characters and their environments. Fei delineates four cinematic elements or devices that have a role in the generation of a particular "atmosphere": the camera's photographic nature and function, the objects/subjects being filmed in the frame, cinematic evocations made by other techniques, and soundscape.[23] Not unlike contemporaneous experimental filmmakers and theorists such as Jean Epstein (*photogénie*), Dziga Vertov (*kino-eye*), and Liu Naou,[24] Fei believed the camera eye could reveal what the human eyes cannot access; its angles and photosensitivity can be attuned to ever-changing emotional tones and sentiments.

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[20] Chion, 1994, p. 172.
[21] Chion, 1994, p. 172.
[22] Chion, 1994, p. 173.
[23] Fei Mu, *luetan kongqi* 略談空氣 (A Brief Discussion on 'Atmosphere'), *Contemporary Cinema* (shidai dianying 時代電影), 6 (November 1934).
[24] For more discussion of Vertov's "kino-eye," Epstein's "photogenie," and Liu's film theories, see my second dissertation chapter.

Interaction between the mechanical eye and the profilmic objects/subjects could further stimulate "atmospheric" effects through, for instance, the camera's response to the fluctuation of natural light in exterior scenes against magnificent landscapes or the careful shot composition and dexterous use of backdrops and lighting in film studios.[25]

In terms of sound's contribution to "atmosphere," Fei admits that the horizon remains open. "Limited by the technology of silent cinema," he writes, "I haven't got chance to fully explore this aesthetic possibility, but I have experimented with some sound film techniques in my silent films."[26] Fei published this essay in 1934, two years before he made his first sound film, *Bloodshed on Wolf Mountain* (1936); it shows that his scrupulous attentiveness to music/sound dated back to his silent film period. In his acclaimed silent films such as *Night in the City* (1933), *Life* (1934), and *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* (1934), [27] Fei deliberately embedded a sensitivity to sound and drew attention to the intimation of imagined sound within a silent cinematic text. His work demonstrates that even in the absence of a musical accompaniment, sound and musicality could be visualized and accentuated in film through, for instance, the elaborate interplay among actors' cadenced performances, the chiaroscuro created by lighting and camerawork, and metrical editing.

Fei's stylistic experiments with imagined sounds in his silent cinema were esteemed by critics. Linghe and other film critics observed that Fei Mu's films, beginning with his silent directorial debut in *Night in the City* (1933), exhibited highly skilled techniques as well as humanistic

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[25] Fei Mu, *luetan kongqi* 略談空氣 (A Brief Discussion on 'Atmosphere'), *Contemporary Cinema* (shidai dianying 時代電影), 6 (November 1934).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Except for a re-edited version of *Song of China*, all three films have been lost; we can only reconstruct the musical style through scrutinizing contemporary film reviews and personal accounts. *Song of China* was imported by a Hollywood distributor in 1936 and released in the U.S. after being reedited and cut from 14 reels to 7 reels. The music and intertitles were also altered. This was the first Chinese film to have a general release in the U.S., though the excessive and indiscriminate editing makes its plot seem disconnected and confusing. See Li Suyuan (酈蘇元), "Fei Mu in Film History (dianyingshi shang de Fei Mu/電影史上的費穆)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006. P. 46.

commitments—they especially praised his restraint in using intertitle cards and his ingenious employment of rhythmic editing and slow pacing, strategies which subtly conveyed atmospheres and characters' emotions as the story unraveled.[28] As Linghe remarked, Fei Mu's use of sound film techniques such as "narratage" in his silent film *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* (1934) is remarkable.[29] "Narratage," a word used by Fei in 1934 in reference to the film, is the technique of positioning a single character in the role of storyteller to produce the illusion that the story itself is an expansion and illustration of his/her words; it often generates a "flashback" structure. Since *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* has been lost, we can only imagine how "narratage" was employed in the film. Fei's first sound film *Bloodshed* (1936), however, utilizes this technique on two related occasions. The first occurs when Xiaoyu's father, a fisherman, tells her about the death of her brother and mother who have been attacked by wolves (1'41)—his narrating voice precedes the image of him speaking, the voice moving from disembodied to embodied. The second takes place when Xiaoyu narrates the same story to the hunter Old Zhang, with whom she develops a romantic relation (26'32 into the film). The employment of voice-over narration is relatively straightforward here, as the voice is located in the body of a character within the diegesis. Nevertheless, it prefigures Fei's more complicated use of female voice-over in *Spring in the Small Town* more than a decade later.

Although the critically acclaimed "narratage" technique seems to have been too difficult and experimental for many 1930s Chinese spectators, especially the less educated and audiovisually literate, to digest, it stresses two of Fei's aesthetic focuses: atmosphere and the specificity of the

[28] Ling He 凌鶴《申報》,"電影專刊," February 4, 1934; 《中華圖畫雜誌》, Issue 46, September, 1936.

[29] The technique of having one character in the role of storyteller or the act of inserting bits of explanation into a narrative in plays and films.

cinematic medium.[30] In his 1934 essay "A Small Issue in *A Sea of Fragrant Snow*: The Functions of 'Flashback' and 'Suspense,'" Fei claimed that if theater could differentiate itself from literature and establish itself as an autonomous art form, cinematic art could avoid relying on the conventions of theater and explore its own expressive potentials. Hence, in *Sea*, he made an effort to evade strong "dramatic conflicts," a choice which rendered his cinematic narration anti-climactic and mundane, and which underscored the significance of character psychology and of atmosphere as instruments to evoke the audience's empathy.[31]

In addition to employing "narratage," rhythmicity, and musicality in his silent cinema, Fei used audible music and sounds to create an immersive cinematic "atmosphere" in his silent films with musical tracks, and later on in his sound films. Fei's musical expertise and intimate collaboration with Chinese musicians enabled him to cultivate distinctive musical accompaniments or embedded soundtracks. Huang Yijun, a composer, conductor and musician who composed music for *Spring in a Small Town* and who frequently collaborated with Fei Mu in both his films and stage productions, stated that there were two turning points in the history of Chinese film music. One is the soundtrack in Fei's *Song of China* (1935), the first Chinese silent film with a full-fledged Chinese music accompaniment that employed traditional Chinese musical instruments and orchestration. The other is the innovative soundtrack in Yuan Muzhi's (1909-1978) musical comedy *City Scenes* (1935), the first film to feature music from commissioned composers, which ingeniously interweaves music, street noise, and human voices into a cinematic symphony and sonic tapestry that is tightly linked to the film's satirical narrative and social critique.[32] In

[30] Therefore, in the re-released version with soundtrack in 1936, *A Sea of Fragrant Snow* was "straightened" to a linear narration structure. Ling He (凌鶴), 《中華圖畫雜誌》, Issue. 46, September 1936.

[31] Fei Mu, "The Functions of 'Flashback' Narrative and 'Theatrical Suspense'" (*daoxu fa yu xuanxiang zuoyong* "倒敘"法與 "懸想"作用), *Film Fan Weekly* (*yingmi zhoubao* 影迷週報) 1, 5 (October 24, 1934).

[32] For more discussion on soundscape in *City Scenes* and sound style of Yuan's films, see my third dissertation chapter.

contrast, many 1930s Chinese films were accompanied by randomly selected records of Western or Chinese tunes, which were usually unrelated to character psychology or the emotional expressivity of the films. Filmmakers like Fei Mu and Yuan Muzhi played a pivotal role in changing common cinematic sound practices and in designating the music and soundtrack as creative entities with both narrative and stylistic significance.[33] They also helped more broadly to pave the way to a more self-conscious Chinese film sound aesthetic.[34]

Song of China fully embraced Chinese-style music that was created collectively in an experimental way. Fei Mu and his small team of musicians[35] watched the rushes together and discussed appropriate musical styles. The musicians would then improvise various tunes that jibed with the advancement of the plot and with character emotions in particular scenes. For instance, Huang Yijun recounted that Wei Zhongle played the classical pipa tune "Ambush on All Sides" (*Shimian Maifu*) for the film's opening scene, in which the male protagonist Liting rushes back home on horseback to visit his ailing father; the melody creates a tense atmosphere and fosters dramatic suspense, guiding the audience into the story with the familiar pipa melody. Working from silent images under the guidance of a filmmaker with an acute musical expertise, the musicians were able to compose a few sections of the soundtrack each night after their day jobs, completing the soundtrack in just over two months. Fei Mu praised this audio-visual coordination

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[33] Which differ from silent films with popular theme songs such as *Song of Fishermen* (1934, Cai Chusheng) and *Big Road* (1934, Sun Yu).

[34] Zhu Tianwei 朱天緯, "An Interview with *Spring in a Small Town* screen writer Li Tianji and Composer Huang Yijun (dui 'xiaocheng zhichun' de juzuojia he zuoqujia de fangwen/對<小城之春>的劇作家和作曲家的訪問)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006, p. 227. Qin Pengzhang 秦鵬章, another musician who regularly collaborated with Fei Mu, also stated that this practice influenced film sound aesthetic in some later Chinese films such as *Lambs Astray* (1936, Cai Chusheng), for which he helped create the music track. See Qin Pengzhang, "Reminiscences of Fei Mu's Films and Plays 費穆影劇雜憶," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 158.

[35] Including Huang Yijun and other musicians like Wei Zhongle, Lin Zhiyin, Chen Zhong and Qin Pengzhang, who specialized in traditional Chinese musical instruments such as the pipa, erhu, *guqin* and *guzheng*.

as a major force strengthening the film's emotional and musical impact. It was the first time in Chinese film history that music was composed according to edited images and under the director's close supervision.[36]

Fei deliberately employed Chinese orchestration and folk music to contribute to the "national style" for which he advocated, and his efforts were met with positive responses. The film critic Shu Yan extolled *Song of China* as "the pinnacle of Chinese silent cinema under the [period's] technological restraints;" innovative in its own field, the film also cast a new light on traditional Chinese music, which in this case was inseparable from the film and, saturated in the structuring of the film's images. Shu lauded the film's ability to facilitate the emotional development of characters and to create a sophisticated atmosphere by means of, for instance, the *Yueqin*[37] solo that vividly corresponds to the melancholic sentiments in the diegesis, or the deployment of gongs and cymbals to enhance the sense of tension at appropriate moments.[38] The theme song in *Song of China*, "Song of Familial Bliss" (*tianlun ge*),[39] was extremely popular in schools and among musical professionals because it was not merely inserted into the film, but was a remarkable piece of art itself. The song reflects the Confucian belief that "pure and righteous" music can strengthen human character and society— an idea that served the sociopolitical discourse of Chinese modernity and imbued the didactic message with a sense of aesthetic pleasure.[40] Fei's employment

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[36] Zhu Tianwei (朱天緯), "An Interview with *Spring in a Small Town* screen writer Li Tianji and Composer Huang Yijun (dui 'xiaocheng zhichun' de juzuojia he zuoqujia de fangwen/對<小城之春>的劇作家和作曲家的訪問)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006. pp. 226-228.

[37] Yueqin, also called the moon guitar, or the Chinese lute, is a four-stringed, plucked instrument with a full-moon-shaped sound box. It is part of a family of flat, round-bodied lutes found in Central and East Asia. For more information, see: https://www.britannica.com/art/yueqin

[38] Shu Yan 舒湮, "Review of *Filial Piety* (its title in China)," 《晨报》"每日电影," December 1935.

[39] Lyrics by the screenwriter of the film, Zhong Shigen 鐘石根(another version says is by Fei Mu himself), and music composed by Huang Zi. I have a more detailed discussion of Huang's contribution to Chinese film music in chapter 3.

[40] Joys H. Y. Cheung, "Singing Ancient Piety and Modernity in 'Song of Familial Bliss' (1935): Musical Translation of Huang Zi (1904-1938) in Interwar China," *Asian Music*, Vol 41, number 2, Summer/Fall 2010, pp. 4-58.

of Chinese style music, particularly the theme of *Song of China*, not only suggested that music could be a means of aesthetic education and ethical cultivation, it also reflects his nationalistic commitments during a period of colonial encroachment from the West and Japan.

Following the example of *Song of China*, *Spring in a Small Town* also constitutes its atmosphere by way of musical track and songs. The film incorporates two songs that were already popular during the period into its diegesis, where they interact with the extradiegetic orchestral music. The two diegetic love songs performed by the main characters are "Duldal and Maria" and "A Place Far, Far Away" (1937), both of which were favored by young urbanites and students in the 1930s and 1940s.[41] "Duldal and Maria" is a Kazakh folk song from the Xinjiang area, while "A Place Far, Far Away" originates from the Qinghai province— each track would have been tinged with an exotic and romantic resonance for people in the Shanghai region where the main characters reside.

The two songs, seemingly coming from "faraway," either in the sense of geographical space or of cultural and ethnic origin, speak to the sophisticated modes of character interaction and rich emotional atmosphere in *Spring*. "A Place Far, Far Away" appears once, while "Duldal and Maria" is sung twice—all three performances resonate with nuance. For instance, "A Place Far, Far Away" is performed on the second day after Zhichen's arrival to the "small town," when the four main characters (Yuwen, Liyan, Zhichen, and Liyan's younger sister Dai Xiu) are out boating on a river. Dai Xiu sings and Liyan also croons about a young man's longing for a beautiful shepherdess, a

[41] Fei Mu asked Zhang Hongmei, the actress who plays Dai Xiu, to sing two songs in the film, Zhang picked these two, which she and her friends usually sang. Zhang Hongmei 張鴻眉, "Director Fei Mu Taught Me How to Act 費穆導演教我演電影" in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006), pp. 257 - 60. Both songs were collected and arranged by Wang Luobin 王洛賓(1913-1996), a Chinese songwriter and composer, who lived in western China for more than fifty years, collecting, transcribing, revising northwestern Chinese folk songs. Wang received the accolade of being named "father of Chinese folk song" and published Mandarin-language songs based on the music of various ethnic minorities of western China.

situation that echoes the adolescent romance between Yuwen and Zhichen ten years before--though neither join in the singing.[42] Yuwen and Zhichen's emotional turmoil can be inferred from their contemplative and plaintive facial expressions, which are emphasized by medium shots, which form a sharp contrast to the jubilant spirit of Dai Xiu's and Liyan's melodic voices and pleasant countenances.

In this scene and throughout the film, the effect of multifaceted sonic engagement is enhanced by visual layers produced by cadenced long-takes and a slow-moving camera style. This particulat song accompanies a 95-second sequence (33'40-35'15 into the film) composed of 14 shots. Here, through a variety of techniques, Yuwen's and Zhichen's repressed emotions and subdued exchange of glances are visually accentuated, interspersed with long shots of all four characters together that serve as punctuation. In some instances, Yuwen and Zhichen are each framed at a medium shot, the second shot featuring Zhichen affectionately gazing at Yuwen, and the eighth displaying Yuwen with a gloomy look. In others, psychological intimacy is heightened by symmetrical panning shots. Shot four, for example, shows Yuwen looking at Zhichen, before the camera pans left to reframe to Zhichen. Shot eleven works in a reverse direction—the camera moves right from Zhichen to Yuwen. The two panning shots situate the two characters in the same time and space within a single take and visually manifest their intimate rapport. Moreover, the composition of these shots and the character portrayls they enact also corresponds to the song lyrics, constructing an audiovisual counterpoint. For instance, when Dai Xiu sings "whenever people walk past her

[42] The lyrics are translated as: "In a faraway place, there is a lovely girl. Whenever people walk past her yurt, they all look back to gaze longingly. Her rosy face is like the red sun. Her lively and enticing eyes are like the bright moon. I would give up all my wealth to herd sheep with her. I would like to look at her rosy little face and her beautiful gold-trimmed clothes every day. I would willingly be a little sheep to follow her. I would like her to stroke me tenderly with her thin leather whip." English translation from http://www.herongyang.com/chinese/Music/1937-Zai-Na-Yao-Yuan-De-Di-Fang.html access February 24th, 2015 (with my modification).

yurt, they all look back to gaze longingly," a medium shot presents Yuwen looking back at Zhichen. On another occasion, when we hear Dai Xiu sing "her rosy face is like the red sun. Her lively and enticing eyes are like the bright moon," the camera first focuses on Yuwen's face—a personification and signifier of the "rosy face"—then pans left to focus on Zhichen's pensive expression, inviting us to wonder he is retrieving his memories of Yuwen's "rosy face" and "lively and enticing eyes."

It is not solely the melodies and lyrics of folk song that work with the motion of the camera to convey atmosphere; ordinary ambient sounds play an important role. Dai Xiu's and Liyan's crooning harmonizes with the heard rhythm of oars striking the water, punctuated by distant sounds of dog barking, as the boat moves through the placid landscape: river, sky, and trees. The conjured atmosphere of tranquility and desolation, both in the small town and in the sentiments of the characters, resonates with Sergei Eisenstein's theorization of "nonindifferent nature." For Eisenstein, landscape is the freest element of film and the most flexible in conveying moods, emotional states, and spiritual experiences. He is interested not only in the emotional effect of landscape but especially in its musical effect, "that variety of 'nonindifferent nature' when the emotional effect is achieved not only by a set of *representational elements* of nature but especially and mainly by the *musical development and composition* of what is represented."[43] Eisenstein also states that his conceptualization of landscape was inspired by the musical rhythm in Chinese landscape painting, a rhythm which also stimulated his cinematic experiment with the renowned "Odessa Mist" scene in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)—a scene in which "the movement goes from hazy, almost ethereal moods of sorrow and mourning in general to a real victim […] from the trembling candle in the hands of the murdered fighter through the mourning of the grieving masses

[43] Eisenstein, 1987, pp. 217-26.

to the uprising, seizing the whole city."[44] Béla Balázs similarly argues that films show not just visual landscapes but also acoustic ones, providing a tonal *milieu*.[45]

Eisenstein's theory and practice help to highlight transmedial atmospheric affinities among representations of nature, film, music, and painting in terms of their emotional expressivity. This expressivity is at the heart of the other love song in *Spring*, "Duldal and Maria," whose two occurences even more acutely reveals character sentiments, strengthening dramatic effect and marking the trajectory of the relationship among the four main characters.[46] The song initially appears on the first night of Zhichen's arrival, when Dai Xiu sings it to Zhichen and the others in Liyan's room; it recurs on the last night before Zhichen's departure, when an inebriated Zhichen sings to Yuwen in her room. On the first occasion, when Dai Xiu sings the song, Zhichen pretends to listen but fastens his eyes on Yuwen, who is busy tending to Liyan, preparing his medicine and making his bed. Liyan walks to Zhichen and leads in the applause when Dai Xiu finishes.[47] The song serves as a veil to cover Zhichen's intense gaze at Yuwen, an outward sign of the suppressed but turbulent emotions underwriting their unexpected reencounter after a ten-year separation caused by war. Their attitudes towards each other at this point are still obscure, because they have to maintain decorum, their eyes express more than their words.

"Duldal and Maria" is performed by innocent Dai Xiu as well as by amorous Zhichen, registering not as a relatively objective auditory perception but, from the perspective of Yuwen, as

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[44] Eisenstein, 1987, p. 228.

[45] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 211.

[46] The English version of the lyrics: "Like a lovely rose you are, my Maria. Like a lovely rose you are, my Maria. That day I was hunting riding a horse on the top of a mountain, while you were singing on the bottom of the hill. The song was beautiful like rosy clouds. I was intoxcated by your song and fell down the slope. Your singing was beautiful like rosy clouds. Duldal, the brave and strong young Kazakh man, Duldal, the brave and strong young Kazakh man. Please cross the river to come to my house tonight, feed your horse and bring your tamboura. When the moon rises, pluck your strings, we sit and sing together in the shade of a tree."

[47] The subtlely choreographed mise-en-scene, lateral camera movement and expanded horizontal space in this long take will be discussed in section 5.

a highly subjective aural experience. Singing is transformed from being an art of entertainment to being one of enticement. For when the song recurs, the affection between Yuwen and Zhichen has been rekindled and their passion has grown intense after ten days of Zhichen's presence at the Dai house. On the night of Dai Xiu's birthday (61'33-63'11 into the film) after a few rounds of drinks, Liyan finally discovers the affection between Yuwen and Zhichen and dejectedly retreats to his room. The film then dissolves into a long shot of Yuwen lying drunk on her bed. From her point of audition, we hear Zhichen and Dai Xiu sing "Duldal and Maria" until Dai Xiu ceases, laughing and shouting "Brother Zhang is drunk!" off-screen. Zhichen's voice approaches Yuwen's room, and the camera tracks back to include Dai Xiu and Zhichen entering in the frame. Zhichen sings "Duldal, the brave and strong young Kazakh man," then notices Yuwen and says, "you are hiding here?" He holds her hand and resumes his singing, "please cross the river to come to my house tonight." Dai Xiu interrupts this inappropriate behavior and drags Zhichen, now embarrassed, out of the room. Reluctant to go, Zhichen continues to sing "when the moon rises, pluck your strings, we sit and sing together in the shade of a tree." As the scene closes, a siren signaling a power outage fills the soundscape.

In this way, the diegetic performance of songs in the film is replete with spontaneity and vitality. As Béla Balázs points out, singing is one particular mode of vocal production; too fine or too well-trained a voice, not "natural" enough, gives the impression of an artistic performance rather than a presentation of real life. A song sung by an untrained voice is therefore more intimate and human in its effect.[48] Sung by amateur singers with genuine passion, the songs in the film sound more realistic and expressive, particularly when, as in the second occasion of "Duldal and

[48] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 78.

Maria," they foreground (Yuwen's) diegetic listening and locate this listening within a specific narrative space.

In the aforementioned scenes, sound effects such as dogs barking and the wails of a siren (or the doorbell tinkling in other sequences) enrich an amorphous soundscape and intensify the "beat" or "pace" of the cinematic flow by marking scene transitions or enhancing sonic rhythms. R. Murray Schafer's formulation may help understand Fei's diverse use of sound; Schafer considers soundscapes to be composed of different sonic strata: keynote sounds, signal sounds, and soundmarks. In his view, some "signal sounds" are warning devices, for instance, bells, whistles, horns and sirens.[49] Such "signal sounds" in *Spring* are scarce yet remarkable, functioning like the howls of wolves or gun shots in Fei's *Bloodshed on Wolf Mountain* (1936); they are unpredictable and haunt the characters, the soundscape, and the overall cinematic atmosphere. If the gun-shots stimulate terror and anxiety, the siren in *Spring* disrupts the usual midnight soundscape, providing Yuwen and Zhichen the opportunity for a tryst in Zhichen's guestroom. The chiaroscuro sound echoes the chiaroscuro lighting in Zhichen's room, inspiring a moment of trans-sensory perception. During the four secret meetings between Yuwen and Zhichen, the alternative shifts between electric light, candle light and moonlight, the interplay of shadows and lines, and the vocal choreography all reflect the ambivalence of the lovers—their oscillation between passion, ethics and propriety. The explicit correlations between dramatic iconography (chiaroscuro lighting) and dramatic sonography (contrasting volume and pitch levels) situates sound within a larger audiovisual design and demonstrates an integrated approach to crafting atmosphere.[50]

[49] Schafer, 1994, pp.7-10.

[50] Helen Hanson, "The Ambience of Film Noir: Soundscapes, Design, and Mood," in Andrew Spicer and Helen Hanson, eds. *A Companion to Film Noir*, WILEY Blackwell, 2013, p. 287.

As the architect of such an approach, Fei Mu stresses that framing, the organization of planes, and lighting are most effective when they coordinate. Irrelevant props should be removed to avoid distraction, while significant objects should be highlighted.[51] Hence, close-ups of objects become conspicuous in *Spring*—the "beauty and expressivity of still life" was one reason for its critical acclaim.[52] The most evocative objects in Zhichen's room are a pot of orchids brought by the servant Old Huang sent by Yuwen, a miniature landscape by Dai Xiu, and a landscape painting entitled "Yu Boya Destroys His Zither in Memory of His Soul Mate" that hangs on the wall above his bed.[53] Echoing the rich cultural metaphor in the painting, the orchid symbolizes elegance, purity, and romantic affection in traditional Chinese literati culture—as a message between lovers after ten years of separation, the orchid is a kind of love token. Portrayed in several close-ups on various occasions, the flowers give off a distinctly poetic fragrance.

This framing strategy reverberates with the notion of the lyrical charm of the close-up observed by Béla Balázs: "good close-ups radiate a tender human attitude in the contemplation of hidden things, a delicate solicitude, a gentle bending over the intimacies of life-in-the-miniature, a warm sensibility. Good close-ups are lyrical; it is the heart, not the eye, that has perceived them."[54] In Balázs' view, close-ups show the faces of things and the expressions inscribed upon them, serving either as dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of

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[51] Fei Mu, *luetan kongqi* 略談空氣 (A Brief Discussion on 'Atmosphere'), *Contemporary Cinema* (shidai dianying 時代電影), 6 (November 1934).

[52] "談 '氣氛,'" 《小城之春》影片特刊, p. 3; 《影迷俱樂部》1948 年創刊號, p. 4.

[53] Although this painting is not featured in a close-up, its implications loom over the scenes in which Yuwen and Zhichen are together in the room. The painting "Yu Boya Destroys His Zither in Memory of His Soul Mate" refers to an ancient Chinese story that Yu plays zither to express his thoughts and emotions. A woodcutter, Zhong, comprehends the meaning behind his music. They become soul mates because of this mutual understanding. When Zhong dies, Yu destroys his zither, since he believes that no one will ever appreciate his music again. The title of the painting is named in the published script of *Spring*, see Li Tianji 李天濟, *Dianying xinzuo* 電影新作, issue. 6, 1988, pp. 2-18. Here the painting alludes to the profound affection between Yuwen and Zhichen.

[54] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 56.

appearances or as expressions of the poetic sensibility of the director.[55] In *Spring*, the recurring close-ups of the orchid reveal the ineffable affection between Yuwen and Zhichen; what makes the orchid expressive is the human expression projected on to it. The close-ups magnify the object and lift it out of its surroundings, becoming the creative instruments of a visual anthropomorphism. It is the subjective, individual, human that is manifested and rendered objective in the close-up.[56]

Fei Mu's conceptualization of "atmosphere" and transmediality are exemplified by the opening sequence of *Spring*, in which a broad rural landscape unfolds via a series of panning shots connected by dissolves. Eisenstein claims that emotion can be evoked not only by a musically structured landscape but often by the *concreteness* of the landscape; for instance, a desolate landscape of bare earth and a solitary tree can, on its own—given the right compositional arrangement of the objects—evoke a gloomy mood and emotions.[57] In addition, in *Springs*, the cinematic techniques (camera movement and dissolves) create a sense of revelation similar to that of a landscape painting scroll unfolding along a lateral axis, disclosing the illusionist of continuous time and space and evoking a poetic atmosphere associated with the traditional Chinese landscape painting viewing experience. The soundtrack is dominated by Western symphonic style music, composed by Fei Mu's longtime collaborator, Huang Yijun. As I will argue in the next section, this juxtaposition of visual and verbal/musical, Chinese and Western registers, is the culmination of a longer trajectory of Fei's career that can be traced back to 1940s Shanghai theater.

II. Cinema, Music and Spoken Drama: Transmedial Resonance on Stage

Although *Spring in a Small Town* has been canonized by scholars, critics and audiences since the 1980s as one of the most accomplished Chinese films, Fei's films had previously fallen into

[55] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 56.
[56] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 60.
[57] Eisenstein, 1987, p. 226.

oblivion in mainland China between the 1950s and 1970s due to the complex ideological and political circumstances of the Cold War/Socialist period. In the official account of Chinese film history, *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema* (Zhongguo dianying fazhanshi), Fei Mu's career is characterized as stylistically innovative and politically conservative: "Through Fei Mu's cinematic creation, we see a patriotic and talented filmmaker, yet a petit-bourgeois artist with vacillating political inclinations."[58] "Talented" indeed, Fei had been unanimously admired by film critics for his cinematic ingenuity since his directorial debut *Night in the City* (1933). "Patriotic" and brimming with a sense of righteousness, Fei made a number of films embedding vehement messages against Japanese aggression during the national crisis of the mid-1930s.[59] Refusing to work in the Japanese-controlled film industry, Fei immersed himself in the world of Shanghai spoken drama production from 1941 to 1945.[60] This experience greatly informed his transmedial experimentation: the cross-fertilization of cinematic technique, music, Chinese *xiqu*, and spoken drama in his work during these years prefigured the stylistic and transmedial hybridity of *Spring*.

An elaborate analysis of his drama productions is difficult, since no audiovisual records exist—only a handful of publicity stills and the play of his production *Red Dust* have been

[58] Cheng Jihua (程季華), Xing Zuwen (邢祖文), Li Shaobai (李少白), *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema 中國電影發展史* [*Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*] (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe [China Film Press], 1981), 275-6.

[59] E.g. *Blood on the Wolf Mountain* (langshan diexue ji 狼山喋血記, 1936) and the short film *An Interrupted Dream in the Spring Chamber* (chungui duanmeng 春閨斷夢, 18 min), part of the omnibus film *Symphony of Lianhua Studio* (lianhua jiaoxiangqu 聯華交響曲, 1937). Fei also made *Confucius* (kongfuzi 孔夫子) in 1940, before the Japanese took full occupation of Shanghai; in it, he advocates for Confucian integrity and cultural restoration.

[60] After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the Pacific War broke out and the Japanese army took over all the regions of Shanghai, including the French concession and the international settlement. Many progressive Chinese cultural figures, intellectuals, and artists fled to Chongqing and other Chinese areas not under Japanese control. For family reasons, Fei had to remain in Shanghai. Being uncooperative was his way of expressing passive resistance, just like the Beijing opera master Mei Lanfang, who grew a beard and refused to perform for the Japanese at the time and resumed his stage career only after the Japanese surrendered in 1945.

published.[61] The following discussions instead attempt to excavate and examine contemporaneous descriptions and criticism of his work, treating them as sources that might allow us to imagine the audiovisual aesthetic of Fei's theatrical works and reconstruct theatergoers' sensorial experiences. According to the account of Chinese writer and critic Ke Ling (1909-2000), who worked in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, Fei Mu was very influential in the drama world and successfully directed thirteen plays. Stylistically, Fei's penchant for delicately constructing an atmosphere on stage and for "de-dramatization" distinguished himself from other famed drama directors such as Huang Zuolin (1906-1994), who specialized in dramatic conflicts, tension, and stage effect, usually using only "one set".[62]

Fei Mu was additionally noted for inventively employing music as accompaniment in spoken drama, transcending a similar practice utilized by his predecessors (such as earlier "civilized play" and avant-garde directors Zheng Zhengqiu and Tian Han in the 1920s) by blending cinematic conventions with those of music and opera.[63] According to Shi Hui (1915-57), the renowned actor who played the male protagonist in the extremely popular drama *Begonia* (qiuhaitang), co-directed

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[61] See 伉儷月刊, the launch issue, 1946, pp. 81-90; vol. 1, issue. 2, pp. 84-90; vol. 1, issue. 3, pp. 106-08; vol. 1, issue. 4, pp. 73-80; vol. 1, issue. 5, pp. 81-84; vol. 1, issue. 6, pp. 79-84.

[62] Ke Ling 柯靈, "衣帶漸寬終不悔—上海淪陷期間戲劇文學管窺," 《柯靈文集》第三卷 (*The Collective Works of Ke Ling*, Vol.3), Shanghai 上海: 文汇出版社, 2001.pp. 339-43.

[63] For instance, Joshua Goldstein states that Zheng Zhengqiu, by far the most successful *wenmingxi* (civilized play) producer, included songs in most of his plays and encouraged new drama practitioners to study Peking opera and to use song for emotive force. 2007, p. 101. The dramatist Tian Han (1898-1968) and the progressive composer Nie Er also experimented with a dynamic "spoken drama plus songs" formula in the "two-scene new opera," *Storm over the Yangtze* (扬子江的暴风雨), which recounts the Chinese dockworkers' anti-imperialist struggle. It was first performed in June 1934 in Shanghai and was written up as a finished play in 1935. Echoing his keen interest in bringing sound to film, Tian inserted multiple songs into this "new opera," ranging from film songs to songs specifically written for the performance—both in the 1930s and again in the 1950s. See Luo Liang, *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in Modern China: Tian Han and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2014), p. 163; Cheng Jihua (程季華), Xing Zuwen (邢祖文), Li Shaobai (李少白), *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema 中國電影發展史* [*Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*] (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe [China Film Press], 1981), p. 357.

by Fei Mu,[64] Fei was the first director to employ cinematic techniques in spoken drama. This generic interplay was geared toward the continuous cultivation of beauty and poetry in his work—one could almost see the fluidity of cadence on stage, as if in a scene from a ballet.[65] In a review of Fei's drama production *Imperial Concubine Yang* (Yang Guifei), critic Meng Du likewise praises Fei's attempts to bring cinematic conventions, a poetic sensibility, and orchestral music to spoken drama. Such a practice, as Meng was well aware, represented a new style and method for experimentation on stage, especially in terms of historical and costume dramas. *Imperial Concubine Yang* is the first Chinese spoken drama production with a carefully designed musical track. In some scenes with scarce dialogue, music appropriately conveys the atmosphere of solemnity or terror through the "beauty of muteness"; in sequences without music, the drama maintains a flowing musical rhythm that enhances the lingering charm of the dialogue. Meng found that the most remarkable thing about the use of music in this case was that it did not overshadow the musicality of the drama itself; the drama did not solely rely on music to create atmosphere.[66] These trans-sensory, synaesthetic descriptions by contemporary critics suggest that Fei's theatrical work intimately interweaved the visual, the aural, the cinematic, and the dramatic and melodic.

This experimentation with drama and music, beginning with *Imperial Concubine Yang*, was well received and drew attention from the theater world in Shanghai. His achievement urged Fei to adopt orchestral music in subsequent drama productions and inaugurated a trend in the drama

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[64] *Begonia* was co-written and co-directed by Fei Mu, Huang Zuolin 黃佐臨, and Gu Zhongyi 顧仲彝. The 4-hour drama production stages the tragic romance between a Beijing opera performer and a warlord's concubine, adapted from Qin Shou'ou 秦瘦鷗's novel. It was performed more than two hundred times in Shanghai over the period of four months, from 1942 to 1943. See Qin Pengzhang, "Reminiscences of Fei Mu's Films and Plays 費穆影劇雜憶," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, pp. 164-65.

[65] Shi Hui 石揮, "Notes on the Performance of *Begonia* 《秋海棠》演出手記," 雜誌, Vol. 10. 1943. Issue 5, pp. 156-62; Issue. 6, pp. 170-83.

[66] Meng Du 孟度, "The Road of Fei Mu: On Spoken Drama Directors 费穆底路: 话剧导演论之一," 《杂志》, Vol. 13, Issue. 2, 1944, pp. 149-52.

world—soon afterwards, drama productions in eleven Shanghai theaters used the orchestra to attract theatergoers. The musician Qin Pengzhang recalls that Fei's drama troupe included a music division with an orchestra of six musicians playing wind and stringed instruments, piano, and Chinese instruments such as the pipa.[67] With regard to Fei Mu's conceptualization of music in theater, Fei's daughter, the professional singer Fei Mingyi recounts that Fei considered "music parallel with drama" and envisioned it as "the second actor." Whereas in cinema, Fei could use close-ups to accentuate and reveal characters' psychology, the stage offered no such possibility, a fact that led Fei to use music to highlight the interiority of the characters.[68] As Béla Balázs argues, on the stage background music always tinges a given scene a certain melodramatic, festive or lyrical character; background music is rarely used in the theatre save for specially stressing some prevalent mood.[69] One reviewer considered Fei's *Six Chapters in a Floating Life* (fusheng liuji) to be at once a "new musical drama"(*xin yueju*) and lyric poem. Combining imaginative scenery on stage and plaintive chorus in the pit, the performance received rounds of applause from the audience.[70] Others noted that *Six Chapters* was also experimental in its uses of color contrast to evoke vicissitudes in characters' situations and in the general atmosphere. For instance, the play opens with the featured newlyweds dressed in red in the bridal chamber, and ends with the ailing wife on her deathbed, tracking an emotional transformation from jubilation to despondency.[71] Enhanced by music corresponding to the actors' performances and the pace of the story, the

[67] Huang Yijun 黃貽鈞, Chen Hong 陳洪, and Qin Pengzhang 秦鵬章 were responsible for composing and conducting. See Qin Pengzhang 秦鵬章, "Reminiscences of Fei Mu's Films and Plays 費穆影劇雜憶," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 164.

[68] Tan Jianghong 谭江红, "A Study on the Transformation of Fei Mu's Concept of 'Shadowplay' 费穆'影戏'观嬗变之研究," MA Thesis, Shanghai Academy of Drama, 2007, p. 17.

[69] Balázs, 1970, p. 279.

[70] "「浮生六記」新樂劇形式演出,"《三六九畫報》, Vol. 23, Issue. 17, 1943.

[71] Yao Xian 姚絃, "*Six Chapters of a Floating Life*「浮生六記」這齣戲," *Sreen and Stage Weekly* 影劇周刊, Vol. 1, Issue. 2, 1946, p. 10.

production's evocation of atmosphere was so effective that many theatergoers were moved to tears.[72] Given this account, it is clear that music in Fei's theatrical works was functioning on multiple levels to heighten the rhythm, atmosphere, emotional appeal, and strength of the characterization.

Fei's expert integration and entwinement of cinema and music into drama production observed by the critic Meng Du is echoed in another review by Guofu, who speaks to another layer of the influence of cinematic techniques, such as editing, on Fei's theatrical work. The review notes that "From *Men and Women in the Lone Island* (gudao nannv, 1939) to *Six Chapters of a Floating Life*, Fei Mu draws inspiration from his filmmaking experience and focuses on pithy sequences, which are connected by his 'film editing' technique and incorporation of music, creating an expressive tone and atmosphere on stage. Exquisite and concise, these works embody the temperament of a poet and exemplify his mastery of directing and conceiving drama as a synthetic art. Fei usually only outlined scenes and laid out the structure in pre-production; the formal 'playscript' is developed during rehearsals, with a considerable amount of improvisations."[73]

As this account indicates, Fei believed that a more effective final performance was brought about through improvisation. He was attentive to actors' bodily and vocal training, often endorsing techniques from traditional Chinese theater such as Kunqu and Beijing opera. As Fei's collaborator Sun Qiying recounts, "There were no sound amplification systems in Shanghai theaters in the early 1940s, so Fei Mu required his actors to have the audience hear their breath, and have the backrow spectators catch their whispers. His actors had rigorous training in diction and vocal expression,

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[72] Ge Jialiang 葛家良, "The Floating Life is Like a Dream? —Six Chapters of a Floating Life on Stage 浮生若夢？—舞台上的「浮生六記」," 《天下》, the launch issue, 1943, pp.16-18.

[73] Guofu 果孚, "費穆小論," 太平洋週報, Vol.1, Issue. 89, 1943, p.1988.

and reputable Kunqu and Beijing opera performers were invited to teach techniques of vocal performance and bodily movement."[74] The critic Meng Du accordingly noticed that, in Fei's *Six Chapters*, the actors' bodily movements bore traces of Beijing opera performance conventions.[75] In *Begonia*, Fei likewise employs a "play within a play" structure by adding a prelude in which the protagonist "Begonia" (qiuhaitang), a Beijing opera singer, performs "Susan under Escort (*Susan qijie*)," part of the famous Beijing opera repertoire. Meanwhile, lighting and set changes imply the passage of time, bringing to mind cinematic devices such as "montage" and "fade".[76]

Interestingly, according to Weihong Bao's research on the use of theatrical conventions in 1940s Chinese cinema, the interplay between film and theater in Chongqing often led to mutual aesthetic transformations—in this sense, the period is an example of intermedial reference proliferation.[77] Films during the period would feature theater performances, as in *The Light of East Asia* (He Feiguang, 1940); in this case, in-theater film projection was also deployed to create a strong impression of film/stage superimposition. Meanwhile, the stage was also making conscious use of cinematic technologies and techniques. Lighting control was used to create a sense of filmic framing or to facilitate scene changes in the manner of the cinematic effect of fade-in and fade-out.[78] On a practical rather than aesthetical level, the political and material limitations (shortage of film stocks, for instance) imposed by the war forced many film professionals and actors in Shanghai and Chongqing to work in both film and theater, a necessity that stimulated the cross-

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[74] Sun Qiying 孫企英, "The Stage Art of Fei Mu 費穆的舞台藝術," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 187.

[75] Meng Du 孟度, 《费穆底路: 话剧导演论之一》, 《杂志》, Vol. 13, Issue. 2, 1944, pp. 149-52.

[76] Jin Tianyi 金天逸, "An Unwritten Historical Document 一段未成文的史料," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006), p. 276.

[77] The temporary capital city of the Nationalist government during the resistance war, after the capital of Nanjing fell into the Japanese.

[78] Bao, Weihong, "*Diary of a Homecoming*: (Dis-) Inhabiting the Theatrical in Postwar Shanghai Cinema," *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, edited by Yingjin Zhang, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 386.

fertilization of several different media and catalyzed aesthetic transformations in the late 1940s Chinese cinema.

For some critics, Fei's transmedial appropriations endowed his wartime theatrical works with a "Chinese style" and nationalist traditionalism. Fei directed a number of patriotic plays during the historical period of national crisis instigated by the Japanese invasion.[79] These historical and costume dramas used the stories from the past to allude to the present, advocating for the preservation and restoration of cultural identity and integrity. Drama critic Shi Dihua praised the music in Fei's *Imperial Concubine Yang* and *Six Chapters*, for instance, for creating a unique atmosphere on stage and establishing a Chinese style that corresponded to the subjects, themes, and style of the historical drama.[80] The critic Meng Du also acknowledged Fei's ingenious adoption of traditional Chinese literary and operatic techniques in his spoken drama repertoire, arguing that the particular heritage of traditional Chinese theater should be carried forward on the model of *Imperial Concubine Yang*.[81] Likewise, in Ke Ling's view, Fei's profound knowledge and appreciation of traditional Chinese literature and culture imbued his works with conspicuous national style; paradoxically, however, Ke found that although on the one hand domestic cultural conventions enriched Fei's work, and on the other they constrained his expressivity and rendered his mentality old-fashioned.[82]

In a similarly ambivanlent vein, some critics also questioned whether this "unique Fei Mu style incorporating cinematic and musical traits is really stage art."[83] The problem was that, unlike

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[79] For instance, *Dream of Plum Blossoms* (Meihua meng 梅花梦, 1941), *Resentment in the Qing Court* (Qinggongyuan 清宫怨, 1941), *Cai Songpo* (蔡松坡), and *Xiao Fengxian* (小鳳仙), among others.

[80] Shi Dihua 史蒂華, "On *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* 《浮生六記》,"太平洋週報, Vol. 1, Issue. 86, 1943.

[81] Meng Du 孟度, 《费穆底路: 话剧导演论之一》, 《杂志》, Vol. 13, Issue. 2, 1944, pp. 149-52.

[82] Ke Ling 柯靈, "衣帶漸寬終不悔—上海淪陷期間戲劇文學管窺," 《柯靈文集》第三卷 (*The Collective Works of Ke Ling*, Vol.3) , Shanghai 上海: 文汇出版社, 2001.pp. 339-43.

[83] Shi Dihua 史蒂華, 劇評《楊貴妃》, 太平洋週報, Vol. 1, Issue. 78, 1943.

the case of typical dramas, in Fei's stage practice "the plays are chronicles and the performance lyrical." Influenced by his cinematic experience and imagination, Fei's theatrical works differed from the more familiar narrative structures that organized drama, unfolding impressionistically, like lyric poetry, through obscure characterization, sparse dialogues, and an elliptical structure.[84] The "controversial" transmedial hybridity of Fei's theatrical works mirrors his consistent efforts to move freely through the boundaries of drama, opera, and cinema, enriching and redefining each medium in which he worked. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his opera film, *Regrets of Life and Death* (60 min, 1948), which I will discuss in my next section.

III. Chinese *Xiqu* Cinema, Operatic Cinema and Cinematic Opera

Fei Mu realized the significance of the cross-pollination between Chinese cinema and *xiqu* enabled by the fluid borders between different media and spheres of cultural production, and he acknowledged the potential for stylistic innovation and media fusion which "opera film (*xiqu* dianying)" brought to both time-honored *xiqu* and technology-propagated cinema. As Fei put it: "Opera film has commercial value since the Chinese fervently favor Peking Opera; meanwhile it has a certain cultural significance because it can transmit the quintessence of Chinese culture."[85] Fei had a keen interest in Beijing opera, thoroughly researching and pondering over its aesthetic conventions; from the 1930s on, he also maintained close relations with Beijing opera masters,

[84] Beike 貝殼, "Understanding Fei Mu from *Six Chapters of a Floating Life* 從「浮生六記」看到費穆," 《上海影坛》, Vol. 1, Issue. 2, p. 36, 1943; Shi Dihua 史蒂華, 劇評《楊貴妃》, 太平洋週報, Vol. 1, Issue. 78, 1943.

[85] Fei Mu, "The Issues of Cinematization of Chinese Opera" [*Zhongguo jiuju de dianying hua wenti*中國舊劇的電影化問題], *Qingqing Dianying* 青青電影, Special Issue on *Song of Ancient China* [Gu Zhongguo zhi ge 古中國之歌], 1941.

such as Mei Lanfang[86] and Zhou Xinfang.[87] These connections paved the way for his later opera films featuring opera performers.[88] With opera film's popular and cultural merits in mind, Fei wrote and directed several Peking opera films from 1937 to 1948. In the same year wrote and supervised the "backstage" opera film *Onstage and Backstage* (Zhou Yihua, 1937) and directed his first opera film experiment, *Murder in the Oratory* (Zhanjingtang, 1937), featuring famed Beijing opera performer Zhou Xinfang. After *Songs of Ancient China* (Guzhongguo zhige, 1941), Fei made the first Chinese feature film in color, the Beijing opera film *Regrets of Life and Death* (Shengsihen, 1948), in collaboration with the prominent master Mei Lanfang.[89]

The close interactions and overlaps between traditional theater (*xiqu*) and Chinese cinema gave rise to an essential aspect of early Chinese film history and aesthetics. *Dingjun Mountain* (Ren Jingfeng, 1905), arguably the first Chinese film, *Singsong Girl Red Peony* (Zhang Shichuan, 1930), allegedly the first Chinese sound film, *The Fourth Son of the Yang Family Visits His Mother*

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[86] Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961) was one of the most accomplished Chinese theater artists and an accomplished female impersonator. In Faye Chunfang Fei's words, he was "a bold and visionary innovator, among many of his contributions Mei was credited for upgrading the literary standards of the plays with strong women characters and for combining and developing technique for better showcasing the performers' versatility in singing, dancing, movement, speech, and acrobatic skills […] his visits to Japan, United States and the Soviet Union helped to establish Beijing opera's status as a relevant and distinctive theatrical form in the consciousness of the world literary and artistic community." Quote from Faye Chunfang Fei, trans and ed. *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 143.

[87] Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975) was also known as "Qilintong"(麒麟童) and was one of the most prominent Beijing opera performers in twentieth-century China, performing the male role type *laosheng* 老生. He was the representative of the Shanghai school of Beijing opera (*haipai/海派*) and the founder of "Qi" style (*qi pai/麒派*). According to *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*, it was the first of a series of opera films "qilin yuefu" (麒麟樂府), but the project was interrupted by the outbreak of the war of resistance of Japanese invasion.

[88] Fei Mingyi 費明儀, "Two Women in My Father's Life 父親生命中的兩位女性," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 132; Qin Pengzhang 秦鵬章, "Reminiscences of Fei Mu's Films and Plays 費穆影劇雜憶," in Wong Ain-Ling, ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 160.

[89] Unfortunately, *Regrets* was shot in 16mm Kodachrome and enlarged to 35mm print for theater exhibition, so the color faded severely; together with the unideal preservation situation, the film nowadays looks like a black and white film, we can only imagine the color design with the aid of film reviews, director and performer statements, and color stills.

(Yin Shengtao, 1933), the first Chinese sound documentary,[90] and *Regrets of Life and Death* (Fei Mu, 1948), the first Chinese color film, all feature Peking Opera performances and repertoire. Such works combined a popular traditional Chinese theatrical form with an imported, modern technological medium, suggesting that early Chinese film professionals strove to familiarize indigenous audiences with cinema and to elevate its cultural status by including distinctively traditional, well-repected Chinese cultural elements. Just as early European and American filmmakers transposed Shakespeare's works onto the screen, such "the engagements of the two media in the early years of the twentieth century were not unilateral but symbiotic."[91]

The decision to make *Regrets* in color had nationalistic implications insofar as it contested anxieties about the Chinese film industry being "backward." Hollywood color films inundated Shanghai after WWIII, filling theaters to the brim and leading Chinese film fans to hold prejudices against domestic films, since no color films were made in China. Restricted by material and technological limitations—there was a shortage even of black and white film stocks after the war—Chinese film professionals wishing to work in color had to seek advice from foreign technicians and develop and print color film in America. When the Chinese cinematographer Yan Heming, also the inventor of the "hemingtong" film sound recorder, first brought back a 16mm color camera from the U.S., he considered Beijing opera, replete with all its flamboyant costumes, vibrant props and backdrops, the ideal subject for a color film. Taking "beauty" as his animating principle, Yan expected that the color film would also highlight its star: Mei Lanfang, the "King of the Pear Orchard." Mei's nuanced facial expressions, dulcet singing, and enchanting postures would, Yan

[90] Cheng Jihua (程季華), Xing Zuwen (邢祖文), Li Shaobai (李少白), *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema 中國電影發展史* [*Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*] (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe [China Film Press], 1981), p. 285.

[91] Judith Buchanan, "In Mute Despair: Early Silent Films of *the Tempest* and Their Theatrical Referents," *Shakespeare*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, 2007, p. 332.

imagined, imprint an eternal artistic trace on the silver screen.[92] Mei shared the opinion that the costumes, paraphernalia, and props of Beijing opera—resplendent handicrafts, predominantly delicate embroidery on silk, that were closely connected to other traditional Chinese art forms such as painting, sculpture and porcelain—would look resplendent in a color film. Mei had two purposes when he agreed to participate in the film: to popularize and to perpetuate Beijing opera art through the novelty of color film. *Regrets* would be able to be screened in remote areas where he could not visit; moreover, the cinematic form could preserve the art he had studied for decades.[93]

Mei was no stranger to the cinematic world. He had made a few Beijing opera short films before *Regrets*, both silent and sound, in China, Japan, the U.S., and the Soviet Union.[94] In 1920, the "motion picture division" of the Commercial Press in Shanghai made two "costume films" with Mei: the Kun opera film *Chunxiang Disturbs Class* (two reels) and the costume musical drama (Beijing opera) *The Celestial Beauty Scattering Flowers*. In these films, the libretto was abridged for the intertitles; to compensate for any lost meaning and to foreground his actions and carefully choreographed postures in accordance with silent film conventions, Mei added more bodily movements, such as playing on a swing and catching butterflies, than he would have used in the stage performance. In *Chunxiang Disturbs* Class, the background consists of a combination of painted backdrops of interior scenes and real locations for exterior scenes. This was a

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[92] He Wei 何為, "Yan Heming on the purpose of making *Regrets of Life and Death* 顏鶴鳴談「生死恨」攝製動機," 青青電影, vol. 17, issue. 8, 1949, p. 1; Chu Ke 楚客, "The First Chinese Color Film: Fei Mu and Mei Lanfang Collaborating on *Regrets of Life and Death* 第一部国产五彩巨片: 费穆, 梅兰芳合作 '生死恨,'" *Film Weekly* 电影周报, issue.1, 1948.

[93] Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳, "Reflections on Making *Regrets of Life and Death* 拍了「生死恨」以後的感想," 電影, vol. 2, issue. 10, 1949, p.17.

[94] The Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein was so fascinated by Mei's performance that he made a short film featuring Mei out of an excerpt from *The Rainbow Pass* in 1935, during Mei's Soviet tour. It was shot at the Newsreel Studio (now the Kiev station). According to Ronald Bergan, this film has been lost; only some photographs and a few shots exist. See Ronald Bergan, *Eisenstein: A Life in Conflict*, Woodstock, N. Y.: Overlook Press, 1999, page number?

challenging balance. At one point an inexperienced cinematographer caught a modern house outside of the garden in the frame, which of course was incompatible with the film's operatic and cinematic style; both the costume and architecture should have been in ancient Chinese style. In *The Celestial Beauty Scattering Flowers*, Mei plays a divine maiden, creatively using long silk ribbons to evoke ethereal grace. Superimposed floating clouds enhance the film's heavenly atmosphere. Mei's costume and dance are visibly inspired by ancient Chinese paintings and murals; uniting ancient and modern with cinematic techniques such as close-ups and superimpositions, Mei's first films were both unprecedented and well-received.[95]

Other footage of Mei emerged in 1924, when Li Minwei of Minxin studio filmed excerpts of him dancing in Beijing and edited them into two-reel (about 20 minutes) opera films to be shown in theaters.[96] One excerpt, the "Sword Dance" section, was lated used in the first feature film produced by the Lianhua studio, *Spring Dream in the Old Capital* (Sun Yu, 1930). In terms of their cinematographic techniques, such short films were vast improvements on 1920 Commercial Press productions, in terms of cinematographic techniques.[97] In 1930, before any full talkies had been made in China and when color films seemed like an unreachable dream, Mei expressed his enthusiasm about acting in sound and color films and visited Hollywood studios to learn about the process of sound-color film production during his six-month tour of the United States;[98] it is clear

[95] Cheng Jihua (程季華), Xing Zuwen (邢祖文), Li Shaobai (李少白), *The History of the Development of Chinese Cinema 中國電影發展史* [*Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*] (Beijing: zhongguo dianying chubanshe [China Film Press], 1981), pp. 33-34.

[96] Including "feather dance 羽舞" in *Xishi* 西施, "Sword Dance 劍舞" in *Farewell My Concubine* 霸王別姬, "whisk dance 拂塵舞" in *Lady Shangyuan* 上元夫人, excerpts from *Mulan Joins the Army* 木蘭從軍, and *Daiyu Buries Fallen Flowers* 黛玉葬花. The first four were shot in the film studio, and last two were shot on location.

[97] Cheng Jihua, 1981, p. 104.

[98] Yanling 延陵, "Mei Lanfang and Sound Films 梅兰芳与有声电影," 影戏杂志, vol. 1, issue 7 and 8, 1930.

that Mei was one of the first in his field to realize the cultural and technological potentials of the film medium.

In the early films featuring Mei, his on stage bodily movements, hand gestures, and facial expressions were remediated and enhanced on screen through cinematic techniques like framing, editing, and audio-visual rhythm. Conventional Chinese theatrical symbolism and cinematic realism were reconciled as the Beijing opera's traditional minimalist backdrop, props, and stylized performing conventions migrated to the cinematic realm. As a principal conceptualizer of the aesthetics of "opera film," Fei Mu offered insights about how to best negotiate the medium-specific and stylistic differences between theater and cinema. From his perspective, the same play could be performed on stage numerous times and without failing to attract an audience, but a film could grip spectators a few times at most. The major distinction is that film, recorded and circulated on reels, is standardized in a way the theater is not. On the one hand, Fei could see this as a benefit, because representation on the screen is not confined by time or space—in contrast, most theatrical work was restricted by the rules of the "three unities": time, place, and action). On the other, cinematic editing techniques disrupt the continuity of actors' emotions, losing a key element of live performance.[99]

When Fei considered "theater," he was likely referring to spoken drama (based on his claim about "three unities"); it is important to note that traditional Chinese theater has different artistic conventions. Given that the fundamental principle of Chinese theater's stage setup is abstraction and symbolism without elaborate sets, it is the performer who creates the dramatic situation, physical environment, and atmosphere. Four of the most salient features of Chinese *xiqu* emerge when we consider its aesthetic conventions in light of international theories of theater. The work

[99] Fei Mu 費穆, "雜寫," *Lianhua Pictorial* (lianhua huabao 聯華畫報), vol. 5, issue. 6, 1935, p. 22.

of Mei Lanfang distinguished itself from that of Russian theater director Konstantin Stanislavsky, and German playwright Bertolt Brecht, as is summarized in the following ways by Huang Zuolin. First, *fluidity* is key to Chinese *xiqu*, in which scenes continue straight on, one after another, and in which tempo, rhythm, and montage are gracefully aligned. The Chinese stage is also highly *flexible*, making no limitations on either time or space. A third important feature is *sculpturality*; the actors on the traditional Chinese stage stand out in their three-dimensionality against a minimalist background. Finally, Huang mentions *conventionality*, the adherence to an elaborate system of commonly recognized conventions.[100] In Chinese cinema, however, another significant "protagonist", the camera, in thrown into the mix. Hence, the interplay between the performer and the camera opens traditional forms to a new interpretive context.

How can the mechanical standardization of cinema be reconciled with the nature of theater in "opera/theater films"? The French film critic André Bazin resorts to thinking through the problem in terms of mobility: "it is the camera that is responsible for the real unity of time and place […] the function of the cinema is to reveal, to bring to light certain details that the stage would have left untreated […] the pure rhythm of attention."[101] The camera can not only enliven the static nature of theatrical work through dynamic framing and rhythmicity, but can also amplify details using techniques such as close-ups and medium shots that are impossible on stage. In resonance with Bazin's comments, Chinese critic Ren Haixuan argues that there is no insuperable barrier between Chinese *xiqu* and cinema because both are essentially dynamic; *Xiqu* is fluid, and film is composed of edited moving images. Therefore, the movements of the "hands, eyes, body,

[100] Huang Zuolin 黃佐臨 (a leading director of Chinese modern theater), "On Mei Lanfang and Chinese Traditional Theater," in Faye Chunfang Fei, trans and ed. *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 156.
[101] André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 2005. p. 91.

and steps" of the *xiqu* performers can be endowed with cinematic allure by the kinetic character of the camera.[102] The mobile encounter between the *xiqu* performance and the movie camera, then, becomes the vital tie linking these two media.

Even so, Fei Mu was aware of other significant stylistic contradictions facing the production of "Beijing opera film." He claimed that transposing *xiqu* onto the screen was not just a technical issue but a case that demanded artistic creation and reinvention. The mere cinematic documentation of stage performance, Fei believed, could not do justice to either theater or cinema. On a similar note, although in reference to Western opera, Béla Balázs claims that even if a film intends to represent an operative performance seriously in all of its classical, original style, it nevertheless should do so in the language of the modern film.[103] Fei claims that, due to the indexical "cinematographic realism" of the medium, cinema's representational mode is absolute realism; when it encounters the expressionism of traditional Chinese theater, then, how can it be simply transplanted from stage to screen? Fei delineates a few principles to help manage this difficulty: 1. Understand traditional Chinese theater as a kind of musical drama and use methods derived from film musicals; 2. Inventively employ methods of expression from Beijing opera to enrich cinematic techniques; 3. Have an imaginative attitude, like that required to create a Chinese ink and brush painting. This final imperative is the most challenging and bears further unpacking here.[104]

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[102] Ren Haixuan 任海暄, "The Influence of Traditional Chinese Theater on Chinese Film Art: The Opera Films of Fei Mu as Experimental Films 戏曲对中国电影艺术形式的影响—作为实验电影的费穆戏曲影片创作," 戏曲艺术, issue. 4, 1996, p. 92.

[103] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 276.

[104] Fei Mu, "The Issues of Cinematizing Chinese Traditional Theater 中國舊劇的電影化問題," 青青電影, 1941 "Special Issue for *Songs of Ancient China* 古中國之歌影片特刊," pp. 2-3.

In Fei's view, traditional Chinese theater can be likened to impressionistic Chinese landscape painting because although neither is faithfully mimetic with regard to reality, both are psychologically realistic, conveying a true "essence" by depicting subjective impressions of the world beyond surface verisimilitude. In traditional Chinese theater, the singing, speaking, and movement of the performance are conventionally stylized—movements from real life that have been artistically refined. Characters on stage become aestheticized objects, figures in paintings, and artworks themselves; painted faces and symbolic long beards (drawn in make-up) for particular types of roles are treated as significant artistic manifestations. They are means of expression that foster an audience's awareness of the element of "sublimation" in a work of art; that is, viewers gain a sense of a piece's "realness" through imagining its relation to their own life experience. *Xiqu* is not, then, strictly a mimetic performance. For instance, according to Beijing opera director A Jia, a highly-stylized performance of *xiqu* should follow particular guidelines, "if you are climbing the stairs, the audience has to feel as if the stairs were there. If you are paddling a boat, the audience has to feel as if the water were actually there."[105] This calls for a very nuanced form of realism, in which the artistry of the performers and the psychology of the audience syncretize and emotionally resonate with each other. To this end, as Fei understood it, the subjective and objective must become blended, even harmonized, as the essence and dynamism of the action are articulated.[106]

The seemingly "unrealistic" and stylized *xiqu* performance is thus able to create a realistic illusion that arouses sentiment. The audience's appreciation for this effect can be seen in a review

[105] Ah Jia, "Truth in Life and Truth in Art," in Faye Chunfang Fei, trans and ed. *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 151.
[106] Fei Mu, "The Issues of Cinematizing Chinese Traditional Theater 中國舊劇的電影化問題," 青青電影, 1941 "Special Issue for *Songs of Ancient China* 古中國之歌影片特刊," pp. 2-3.

of *Regrets*, which comments that "the dream sequence is so moving and Mei's performance so empathetic that some spectators wept; when the film ends, it feels like awakening from a dream."[107] The transmedial connection between Chinese *xiqu* and painting is premised on the production of such "realness" through modes of stylization that enhance rather than exclude emotional resonance.

Although Fei advocated for applying the methods of film musical production to make Chinese opera films, he cautioned that the symbolic nature of traditional Chinese theater aesthetics needed to be taken into account. One cannot, for example, present real mountains, rivers, and horses in the manner of Western film musicals, which are too naturalistic to authentically express the dynamism of Chinese *xiqu*. André Bazin likewise considered the artificiality of theater film décor to be totally incompatible with the realism at the heart of cinema.[108] Addressing this incongruity in the opera film *Songs of Ancient China*, Fei employed painted backdrops with Chinese-style patterns and avoided realistic sets in an attempt to strike a balance between realism and abstraction.[109] Taking a different tack in the "night soliloquy" scene in *Regrets*, Fei borrowed an oversized loom from a textile mill on which the protagonist Han Yuniang (played by Mei Lanfang) could perform weaving on. Some reviewers criticized the spinning wheel as too bulky, realistic, and therefore destructive of the abstract and symbolic beauty in the Beijing opera version, in which the performer sits at a small wheel to sing and make hand gestures.

Yet the adoption of the realistic prop in *Regrets* was also an opportunity to discover new ways to enable the performer to express the character's interiority. Because of the large size of the loom, Fei and Mei decided to change Han Yuniang's "sitting and singing" posture in the scene, which

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[107] Yusi 禹思, "After Viewing *Regrets in Life and Death*「生死恨」觀後," 十日戲劇, vol. 1, issue. 22, 1948, p.13.
[108] André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1, essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, University of California Press, 2005. p. 86.
[109] Qiu 虬, "An Interview with Mr. Fei Mu: on *Songs of Ancient China* 访费穆先生：為「古中國之歌」," 青青電影, 1941, "Special Issue for *Songs of Ancient China*「古中國之歌影片特刊」, p. 3.

otherwise might have appeared too static on screen; to further avoid this risk of flatness, Mei designed a series of bodily movements and hand gestures around the loom that foregrounded kinesis. The large wheel and strings not only carved out additional space for Mei to showcase his exquisite performance techniques but also enriched the scene's spatial depth, as Mei and the machinery occupied alternating positions in the foreground and background. Moreover, since the size of the loom enabled Mei to perform in standing or walking postures rather than seated in the conventional still posture, his gestures and facial expressions could be framed in medium shots at a more natural eye-line level rather than in high angle long shots. This is especially relevant to traditional Chinese theater, whose actors are well trained to effectively use their "spirit of the eyes" (yanshen) to express emotions and lead the audience.[110] Mei's communicative eye and facial expressions and hand gestures are accentuated by the medium shots copiously employed in this sequence, and they delicately convey the desolate emotion of the character. According to Béla Balázs, in cinema a face devoid of its connection to space can speak a silent soliloquy, and "the poetic significance of the soliloquy is that it is a manifestation of mental, not physical, loneliness."[111] Mei's communicative eye and facial expressions as well as hand gestures are accentuated by the medium shots copiously employed in this sequence in such a way that they delicately convey the desolate emotion of the character.

Beijing opera is a synthetic art, as the famed Soviet theater director Alexander Tairov pointed out in a reference to Mei Lanfang's performance: "the gesture becomes dance, the dance becomes a word, the word becomes an aria, then we see this theater's organic integrity."[112] Soviet film

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[110] Jiao Juyin 焦菊隱, "Spoken Drama: Learning from the Traditional Theater," in Faye Chunfang Fei, trans and ed. *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, pp. 163-65.

[111] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 63.

[112] Quote from Haun Saussy, "Mei Lanfang in Moscow, 1935: Familiar, Unfamiliar, Defamiliar," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, Special Issue on Modernisms' Chinas (Spring, 2006), p. 11.

director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein similarly thought of Mei as a bold developer of the synthetic quality of the classical operatic arts, combining vivid movement, music, and antique costuming.[113] The "synthetic quality" and audio-visual-physical fluidity of Beijing opera conventions are readily apparent in *Regrets*, especially in the "temple" scene in which Han Yuniang is harassed by a rascal, attempts to shun him, and is finally rescued by an old nun. The scene has no spoken or singing parts; characters move and interact with one another rhythmically, as in a pantomime, according to the music. The spoken drama actor Shi Hui, in his review of the film, praised this scene as his favorite, citing its incredible coherence as the reason. He appreciated that the color tone of the set harmonized with that of the costuming, the mood of the music, and even with character actions, which expressed dramatic tension and emotions of the scene with a rhythmic cadence and elegance.[114] The art of Beijing opera involves the whole body and calls for long-term rigorous training in order to render the body expressive, to "attain 'musicalization' of the body required to execute the timing and rhythms demanded by the form."[115] In contrast with the "night soliloquy" scene, which mostly employs medium shots, the "temple" scene features characters mainly in long shots, occasionally with slightly high angles that more fully reveal their bodily movements and the physical interactions among characters and their environment.

In his transmedial experiments, Fei Mu underscored a synthetic cinematic aesthetic that drew inspiration from Chinese landscape painting, philosophy, lyric poetry, *xiqu*, and music. Chinese film critics and historians note that Fei's films are imbued with a "Chinese style" (Minzu fengge) that complements his attention to "transmediality" in filmmaking as well as in the sound aesthetic

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[113] Mei Lanfang, "Befriending Eisenstein on My First Trip to the Soviet Union." Trans. Anne Rebull. *The Opera Quarterly* 26, 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2010), p. 432.

[114] Shi Hui 石揮, "My View of *Regrets of Life and Death* 我看「生死恨」," 影劇雜誌, issue.4, p. 6.

[115] Georges Banu, Ella L. Wiswell and June V. Gibson, "Mei Lanfang: A Case against and a Model for the Occidental Stage." *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Autumn, 1986), p. 159.

of his works. Playwright and film critic Ke Ling compares Fei Mu's cinematic style to that of the "impressionistic ink and brush painting" (水墨寫意) and "gold and green landscape" (金碧山水) in traditional Chinese painting. Ke argues that Fei created a kind of elusive atmosphere and allure in his films, tingeing cinema—an imported novel art form and medium intimately associated with modern science, technology, and industry—with a "Chinese flavor."[116] Likewise, according to Chinese film historian Luo Yijun, "the cinematic aesthetic of Fei Mu mainly absorbs influences from Chinese lyric tradition such as poetry, rather than narrative tradition (for instance, various popular storytelling forms). Fei focused more on invigorating cinematic art with traditional Chinese aesthetic and less on catering to popular taste and sentiment."[117]

Fei Mu himself believed that only Chinese cinema could articulate its own national style (*minzu fengge*). One could not use the culture of ancient China to represent contemporary China; rather, living in modern China, one should contemplate how to develop a national style in the contemporary medium of Chinese cinema. Fei thought of cinema as a 'modern art' not because it utilized modern apparatuses, but because it was guided by the creative trends of modern art.[118] Fei had a modernist vision of cinema's stylistic potentials, while the attitude and themes implied in his films were regularly condemned as archaic and culturally and politically conservative by leftist film critics. Fei was not a revolutionary, but an intellectual with an elitist sense of social responsibility and Confucian ethics.[119] It is more accutate to say that he was a moderate reformist who struggled to position himself in the polarized social and political climate produced by the civil war in 1940s China. Regardless, the only thing that united Fei with leftist filmmakers and

[116] Ke Ling, "Glancing back at Fei Mu【the substituted Preface】回眸看費穆（代序）", ibid.
[117] Luo Yijun (羅藝軍), "New Perspective on Fei Mu/Fei Mu xinlun (費穆新論)," ibid. 21.
[118] Fei Mu(費穆), "On Style/Fengge mantan（風格漫談）", Ta Kung Pao/大公報(Hong Kong), May 6, 1950.
[119] Fei's knowledge and expertise were largely self-taught through diligent, incessant reading, which steadily deteriorated the vision of his left eye.

intellectuals was a kind of shared cultural nationalist spirit, as made manifest by his insistence that the cinematization of traditional Chinese theater bore the important role of "promoting the national cultural essence" (發揚國粹).[120] From Fei's perspective, a cultural nationalist spirit could also reconcile the "modern" and the "archaic"; he was paradoxically nicknamed "modern sage (摩登聖人)" because his works embodied the spirit of Confucius through an experimental modern film style.[121] Cultivating a refined, specific cinematic style with a "Chinese flavor" within a transmedial environment, Fei Mu's experimentation with sound and music in his silent and sound (including *xiqu*) films[122] would culminate in the intricate audiovisual aesthetic of his masterwork, *Spring in a Small Town* (1948).

IV. Female Voice-over and Operatic Trace in *Spring in the Small Town*

Fei Mu's experiments with the interaction between traditional Chinese theater and cinema are epitomized in the audiovisual aesthetic of *Spring in a Small Town*, in which his ingenious deployment of female voice-over and seemingly idiosyncratic performance comes to the fore. In this section, I will explore the intricate relation between the female voice-over and Beijing opera techniques such as *zibao jiamen* and *beigong*, examining how transmediality enriches the stylistic possibilities of cinematic creation. More specifically, I will investigate the ways in which female voice-over interacts with cinematic temporality and space in *Spring*, situating the film within the context of modern film history and literary convention.

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[120] Fei Mu, "The Issues of Cinematization of Chinese Opera" [*Zhongguo jiuju de dianying hua wenti* 中國舊劇的電影化問題], *Qingqing Dianying* 青青電影, Special Issue on *Song of Ancient China* [Gu Zhongguo zhi ge 古中國之歌], 1941.

[121] Shu Yan 舒湮, 《晨报》"每日电影," December 1935.

[122] Beijing opera films *Murder in the Oratory* (斬經堂, 1937) and *Regrets of Life and Death* (生死恨, 1948).

Spring serves as a key example that shows how Fei achieves a "Chinese style" of cinematic specificity while intermingling inspirations from other audiovisual media and art forms. Chinese film critic Gao Xiaojian claims that the "dispersed perspective and spatial-temporal structure" in *Spring* is influenced by the traditions of the Chinese operatic stage and landscape painting.[123] Since in traditional Chinese theater, the setting is usually minimalistic and the location ambiguous, temporal and narrative causality can be fragmentary and elliptical.[124] When the performer enters the stage, she/he uses various skills (such as speaking, singing and pantomime) to transform the empty space into a vivid environment, conjuring the visible out of the invisible, the audible out of the inaudible; the Chinese *xiqu* form encourages the spectator to imagine a time and space beyond the immediate audiovisual boundary. However, stage and screen each have distinctive ways of engaging spatial imagination that depend upon medium-specific and perceptual differences.

As aforementioned, female voice-overs were not common in world cinema of the 1940s, *Spring* is one of the few examples in Chinese film history.[125] Sarah Kozloff argues that the technique of voice-over draws on two contradictory impulses: a hearkening back to oral

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[123] Gao Xiaojian (高小健), "Fei Mu's Films and Sinicization (Fei Mu dianying yu minzuhua/費穆電影與民族化)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* *費穆電影新論*, 2006. p. 154-6.

[124] Especially in "zhezixi" (highlighted operatic excerpts), in which only a single scene from the whole repertoire is performed; the audience is supposed to know the context or understand without necessarily knowing the whole story. Therefore, cultivating an appreciation for the performance itself is more important than the dramatic suspense.

[125] Before 1949, only vere few Chinese films used voice-over narration. Another case is *Spring Couldn't Be Locked* (關不住的春光, Wang Weiyi, Xu Tao), which came out the same year as *Spring in a Small Town* (1948). The film begins with the female protagonist's voice-over narration unfolding the plot as memory in a flashback structure. The narrative and stylistic expressions of the voice-over in this film are not as complicated as in *Spring in a Small Town*. After 1949, some other films with voice-over narration appeared; many were written or directed by people with spoken drama backgrounds, for instance, *This Life of Mine* (wo zhe yibeizi 我這一輩子, Shi Hui 石揮, 1950) features male voice-over. *Story of Wuxun* (wuxun zhuan 武訓傳, Sun Yu 孫瑜, 1951), *The Letter with Feathers* (jimao xin 雞毛信, Shi Hui, 1954), *For Peace* (*Weile Heping* 為了和平, Huang Zuolin 黃佐臨, 1956), and *A Revolutionary Family* (geming jiating 革命家庭, Shui Hua, 1961) all feature female voice-over narration. However, in these cases, the female voice-over functions as an omniscient storyteller narrating the plot, which unfolds in a relatively straightforward flashback structure.

storytelling and a modernist self-consciousness regarding narrative discourse.[126] Likewise in the case of Spring, the traditional (Chinese theater) and the modern (spoken drama) comingle. Yuwen's voice-over appears eighteen times in the 93-minute film: on nine occasions within the first twenty minutes, in order to establish the setting, characters, and dramatic situation; on five occasions between the 30th and the 40th minutes; and four times between the 60th and 80th minutes. The last ten minutes are devoid of voice-over. Over the course of the film Yuwen's voice oscillates between being disembodied and embodied, introducing the location and spatial arrangement, the characters, and their relations.

This particular use of female voice-over resonates with the first-person narration in modern Chinese literature. Jing Tsu argues that the abundance of first-person confessional narratives in modern Chinese literature of the May Fourth period, which began in 1919, attests to a broader cultural desire for intimacy and commiseration. The need for self-reflection, as forcefully called for by Lu Xun, was equated at the time with national salvation. The short story form, along with first-person narration and diary writing, became widely utilized to convey the interior conflicts and torments of individual writers. Tsu connects this heightened emphasis on individuals' interior lives and desires with the popularity of psychoanalysis and the broader discourses of nationalism, identity, and masculinity.[127] Tsu's reading of the rise of first-person narrative in modern Chinese literature is reminiscent of film scholars' and critics' association of *Spring* with traditional Chinese "boudoir poetry," political allegory, and an ethos of frustrated masculinity that figured the female

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[126] Ibid, p. 128.

[127] Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 15. The writers and intellectuals Jing Tsu discusses are dominantly male, for instance, Yu Dafu 郁達夫, Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Zong Baihua 宗白華, and Tian Han 田漢. One example bearing female first-person narration is the novella "Miss Sophie's Diary" (shafei nvshi riji 莎菲女士日記, 1927) written by woman writer Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986), which brought her to lasting fame.

voice-over as a channel for venting the concerns of the male auteur, Fei Mu.[128] On such a reading, Fei's metaphoric voice is articulated through the female protagonist Yuwen's literary one.[129] However, both the voice itself and the audience's interpretation of it certainly transcend the assumed "intention" of the author, taking on their own autonomy.

The way the characters appear in the film calls to mind another transmedial convention: *liangxiang* 亮相 in Beijing opera. In this tradition, when the actor enters the stage, he/she comes to a stop at center stage and strikes a pose—chosen to stress the character's spirit—that is then usually met with applause from the audience.[130] In *Spring*, the ways the characters *liangxiang* communicate their personalities, their association with different places, and their dramatic situations. The order of the appearance of characters can be likened to a string of pearls, each entrance or bead connecting and leading to another. Yuwen is the first to enter the diegesis, introducing her house in an alley and the servant Old Huang through her voice-over. Next, we see Old Huang in the alley pouring out the dregs of Chinese medicine taken by his "young master," whom he then goes to look for. The "young master," Yuwen's husband Liyan then appears, seated on a pile of rubbles in the ruined garden. He asks if his younger sister has gone to school, thus marking the entrance of Dai Xiu. The significant guest—Yuwen's former lover, Zhichen—is introduced last, once again by Yuwen's voice.

When Yuwen first appears, she is walking on the ruined city wall with a pensive countenance. She pauses, looks afar, and utters a sigh, framed with a slight lower angle medium shot. The title

[128] For *Spring* and "boudoir poetry," see footnote 7.

[129] According to Wei Wei, the actress who played Yuwen, Fei Mu gave her several pieces of paper and asked her to read in the sound-recording studio during the post-production of *Spring* to record the voice-over narration. My interview with Wei in Hong Kong, July 1, 2015.

[130] Xu Chengbei, *Peking Opera: The Performance behind the Painted Faces*, trans. Chen Gengtao, Beijing: China International Press, 2010, p. 58.

card shows the name of the character and actor, drawing out the *liangxiang* moment. Liyan, conspicuously despondent in his initial pose, becomes associated with the static and silent ruins; Dai Xiu is framed on a threshold, opening the door and window of her room and taking a deep breath in the crisp air of a sunny spring morning, eager to show her brother the miniature landscape she has made. The audience quickly understands she is innocent and vivacious, longing for a new life. Zhichen is introduced while walking to the Dai mansion; unable to open the door, so he jumps into the garden through a breach in the wall. Vigorous and passionate, ready to transgress boundaries literally and morally, in his affectionate involvement with his former lover and good friend's wife.

This trajectory enables us to discern the significance of Yuwen's voice-over in the first third of the film as a means of laying out the narrative and of establishing the emotional tonality and atmospheric of the film's poetics—not unlike the function of the voice-over practice in Hollywood melodramatic films such as *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949). Yet its use in *Spring* becomes much more complex. Britta Sjogren has observed the common "disappearance" or "shifts" of female voice-overs over the course of a given film: "The majority of 1940s films bearing female voice-off, in fact, are characterized by such 'shifts,' by multiple voices-off, or a female voice-off that 'disappears.'"[131] In comparison to this typical practice, we can understand the narrative and stylistic use of the voice-over in *Spring* as being more intricate and intentional than mere manifestations of the "disappearance/shifts" phenomenon. Indeed, the deep exploration of subjectivity facilitated by the voice-over in *Spring* is precisely what allows the film to be considered "the first modernist work in Chinese cinema."[132]

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[131] Britta Sjogren, *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 80. In this case, "voice off" and "voice over" are interchangeable.
[132] Li Cheuk-to, "Spring in a Small Town: Mastery and Restraint", *Cinemaya*, Vol. 49, 2000, p.63.

The female voice-over in *Spring* is part of the film's diffuse narrative perspective schema, which reconciles a modernist narrative device (the first-person narration of modernist literature) with traditional Chinese operatic techniques (such as *zibaojiamen* and *beigong*). The narraitve is generally omniscient, unfolding from the protagonist Yuwen's first-person perspective, even when she is physically absent from the scene. However, it sometimes shifts to an omniscient third-person perspective, producing a rhetorical fluctuation between subjective "stream of consciousness" and objective "narrating" methods and juxtaposing a contested and dialogic heterogeneity of perspectives. For instance, early into the film (16'16-18'42'), just when the boredom and desolation of the Dai family has been disturbed and revitalized by their new visitor, who embodies the hope for a cure (for Liyan's body? The relation between Yuwen and Liyan? The future of the nation?), Yuwen's voice-over acknowledges the important arrival of an unexpected guest even before her character realizes it has occurred. In this sense, her voice is omniscient; at the same time, her voice-over hesitates to confirm that the guest is Zhichen, her former lover, remaining somewhat limited by her private psychic world. In such ways the voice-over questions, comments on, and converses with the dialogue unfolding within the diegesis, further complicating the narrative structure, perspectival hierarchies, and audio-visual relations.

In this sequence, Yuwen's voice-over forfeits its privileged vantage point of omniscience and becomes more vulnerable and intimate; it is her most revealing, perturbed, and passionate moment in the film. Up until this point, her voice-over has been interspersed throughout conversations between Yuwen and Old Huang as well as between Yuwen and Zhichen. Only upon the occasion of encountering Zhichen, of whom Yuwen has had no news for ten years, does her voice-over suddenly transform into a strict first-person confessional mode of narration. It briefly becomes a second-person address, only to shift back to first-person. In this moment, Yuwen does not know

Zhichen is Liyan's best friend, just as Zhichen does not know that his beloved has become Liyan's wife. Her voice reveals this lack of knowledge: "When Old Huang first told me there was a guest, I could not imagine it was him. Now Huang says the guest's surname is Zhang, perhaps it is him, perhaps not. I am a little flustered, but keep calm. I don't think it could be him." After seeing Zhichen in the distance in the garden, we hear Yuwen's second-person address to him—unheard in the diegesis, and only overheard by the audience, it perfectly embodies the Chinese operatic *beigong* convention.[133] "Why did you have to come?" she asks, "Why should you come? How can I face you?" After Zhichen addresses her as "Ma'am" (*Dasao*, sister-in-law), her voice-over changes again to first-person as she laments: "I have become his 'sister-in-law.'" We do not *see* (she looks impassive at this moment), as much as *hear* her despair.

This example reveals how the vestiges of oral storytelling conventions in Beijing opera, especially the techniques of *zibaojiamen* and *beigong*, serve as narrative and stylistic inspirations for the female voice-over in *Spring*. Resembling *zibaojiamen* on the Peking opera stage, the female voice-over in *Spring* introduces the characters and narrative situation with a first-person monologue that simultaneously expresses her psychological state. In Beijing opera, when the actor is speaking directly to the audience to introduce his/her character and involve the audience in the character's situation, spectators are not expected to distinguish between the actor and the character being portrayed. That is, this self-conscious introduction does not destabilize the actor's identification with the illusion created by his/her performance."[134] For instance, in the Beijing opera repertoire *Meilongzhen* (aka "youlong xifeng"), when Li Fengjie, a young female innkeeper, appears on stage, she gives her name, family background, and vocation through singing—this is

[133] See footnote 9.

[134] Min Tian, "'Alienation-Effect' for Whom? Brecht's (Mis)interpretation of the Classical Chinese Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Autumn, 1997), p.205.

the convention of *zibao jiamen*. She also comments on the customer, the Zhengde Emperor who travels incognito, dressed as a soldier. The audience apprehends him by way of her eyes and words, but his character, also on stage, cannot hear—this is the *beigong* technique. As Huang Zuolin states, "a passage of *zibao jiamen* can be more concise and effective than an act of spoken drama, and one *beigong* can share a secret with the audience, and how much the character can reveal her interior activities!"[135] These conventions have longstanding esteem, as shown in Mei Shaowu's summary of theater reviews of Mei Lanfang's performance in the U.S. in the 1930s; one reviewer also claims *beigong* as a kind of voice-over on the Beijing opera stage that has been practiced for several hundred years.[136] The technique of *beigong* automatically carves out a singular narrative space separate from that which other characters inhabit, just as Yuwen's voice-over creates a narrative space apart from the rest of the film's diegetic world.

Throughout the film Yuwen's bodily movement, hand gestures, facial expressions, and interactions with other characters are all deliberately maneuvered and meticulously rehearsed to resonate with the meditative rhythm of her voice. During the making of *Spring*, when Fei invited Beijing opera performer Mei Lanfang to demonstrate operatic performance conventions to the actors, and instructed Wei Wei, the actress who portrays Yuwen, to use Chinese operatic gesticulations and body movements.[137] For instance, the way Yuwen walks in the film is inspired

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[135] Huang Zuolin 佐臨, "Comparing Views of Theater by Mei Lanfang, Stanislavsky, and Brecht 梅蘭芳、斯坦尼斯拉夫斯基、布萊希特戲劇觀比較," 梅兰芳研究学会与梅兰芳艺术馆编,《梅蘭芳藝術評論集》, Chinese Theater Press 中国戏剧出版社, 1990. p. 127.

[136] Mei Shaowu 梅紹武, "五十年前京劇藝術風靡美國," 梅兰芳研究学会与梅兰芳艺术馆编,《梅蘭芳藝術評論集》, Chinese Theater Press 中国戏剧出版社, 1990, p. 624.

[137] Wong Ain-Ling, "Interview with Wei Wei," in Wong Ain-Ling. Ed. *Poet Director Fei Mu* 詩人導演費穆, 香港電影評論學會, 1998, p. 200.

by the "cloud gait" (雲步) used by *huadan*[138] characters on the Beijing opera stage to evoke a form of restrained yet vivacious femininity and sexuality in young female characters. Such influences imbue the film with an operatic tinge.

The way Yuwen plays with her scarf and handkerchief at various occasions is further reminiscent of the Beijing opera convention associated with *huadan* roles. The *huadan* characters frequently play with handkerchiefs to appear seductive and coquettish or, on some occasions, to convey their lonesomeness and longing for romantic affection. Notable examples include the flirtatious and mischievous Madame Zhang in the Peking opera *Zhan Wancheng* (*The Battle of Wan City* 戰宛城)[139] and the affection-longing Madame Tian in Kun opera *Hu Die Meng* 蝴蝶夢.[140] These sensual women are portrayed in both enticing and derogatory ways, as befits traditional Chinese patriarchal culture; accordingly, a female leftist commentator criticized the representation of Yuwen and overall presentation of gender relations in *Spring* for being conservative and patriarchal.[141]

Spring depicts Yuwen wearing a scarf four times, each of which corresponds to a meeting with Zhichen, and playing with her handkerchief once, during a conversation with Liyan. During Yuwen and Zhichen's first rendezvous on the city wall (36'10-39'40), Yuwen wears a dark floral silk scarf that flutters in the wind; its gauzy, ethereal quality matches the feminine elegance of

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[138] *Huadan* 花旦 is a subcategory of *dan*, designating lively, vivacious young female characters from lower social classes (such as maids). Sometimes *huadan* characters are "wanton" widows, portrayed in a derogatory way; these women are usually severely punished at the end of the opera, not unlike the *femmes fatale* in film noir.

[139] Other representative Peking opera repertoire featuring flirtatious *huadan* roles playing with her handkerchiefs include Hongniang 紅娘, impersonated by famed *dan* performer Xun Huisheng 荀慧生 in *Hongniang* 紅娘 and the character Li Fengjie 李鳳姐 in *Youlong xifeng* 遊龍戲鳳.

[140] In Kun opera, it would be *liudan* 六旦, similar to the role type of *huadan* in Peking opera;these too are usually vivacious young female characters, mostly maids or servants.

[141] An E 安娥, "After Watching *Springtime in a Small Town* 看了「小城之春」," 《遠風》, vol. 3, issue.1, 1948, pp. 29-30.

Yuwen's posture, the lighthearted atmosphere, and the renewed tender sentiment between Yuwen and Zhichen. The second time (41'42-43'23) is in Zhichen's room, when Yuwen wears a dark solid scarf, a reflection of the gloomy air and their felt anguish as they discover that no way out of their entanglement can yield positive results. When Yuwen has a slip of the tongue and says "unless he [Liyan] is dead," she covers her mouth with her scarf in horror and astonishment while the voice-over explains, "I feel deep regret; I have never thought of this, how can I say this?" The third time (48'08-50'40), again in Zhichen's room, Yuwen wears the same floral silk scarf she did on the wall. After learning that Zhichen and Dai Xiu have gone out together, she teasingly seeks to determine if Zhichen likes Dai Xiu, exhibiting jealousy and playfulness. She occasionally mischievously covers her mouth and face with the translucent scarf in a flirtatious manner resembling a *huadan* performance. The different textures, colors, and physical uses of Yuwen's scarves in all these moements reflect her fluctuating mentalities during a variety of dramatic situations.

Similarly, the single use of the handkerchief in the film is quite revealing (51'50-54'30). When Liyan asks Yuwen to be a matchmaker for Zhichen and Dai Xiu, Yuwen crumples the handkerchief between her palms in an outward revelation of suppressed nervousness, calling upon yet another convention of traditional Chinese theatrical performance. According to Wei Wei, Fei Mu was skilled at observing actors' everyday life behaviors and encouraging them to build their personal traits into the characters they played, another form of improvisation. Wei's own penchant for wearing a scarf, for playing with it with her hands, and for using it to playfully covering her face gradually became one of Yuwen's marked characteristics.[142]

[142] Wei Wei 韋偉, "The Mr. Fei Mu I know 我所认识的费穆先生," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006. p. 255. Wei also played a *huadan* character in Fei's spoken drama production *Begonia*, see Mai Ye 麥耶, 劇評《秋海棠》, 《太平洋週報》1943 年 1 卷 51 期, pp. 982 - 983.

Yuwen's voice-over, in Michel Chion's term, can be considered as an example of "textual speech;"[143] because she speaks from a first-person perspective, it can also be regarded as a subjective voice—an "I-voice." As Chion argues, one technical criteria essential for the I-voice to function is "close miking," a technique which creates a feeling of intimacy with the voice in order to solicit identification from the spectator. A second key feature is "dryness," or the absence of reverberation in the voice, an effect that prevents the voice from being inscribed in a concrete identifiable space and leaves it devoid of a "spatial signature."[144] In *Spring*, the "I-voice" is possessed of both superior knowledge and this sort of diegetic detachment. Its multiple perspectives obscure and transcend the subjective-objective dichotomy, exteriorizing interiors by audiovisual means as the internal monologue transforms the private into the public. In the visual realm Yuwen appears disimpassioned and distant, yet the texture and the content of her voice-over evoke a strong sense of emotional proximity or "acoustic close-up" with the audience. As David Wang states, Yuwen's voice "[…] is haunting because it comes across as both intimate and remote, like an uncanny sound from another time, another world—a poetic sound that pierces through the 'wall' of time and mind."[145]

In this way, Yuwen's voice-over is immediate yet elusive and intangible, at once "dry" and imbued with rich texture and rhythm. Its performative quality is finely grained, deprived of the ambient sounds of the diegesis, only rarely juxtaposed with the white noise of an inadequately equipped sound recording studio. For production purposes the ambient sounds in the cinematic

[143] Chion delineates three modes of speech in sound film: textual speech, theatrical speech, and emanation speech. In Chion's definition, theatrical speech refers to dialogue; emanation speech denotes dialogue not necessarily heard or totally intelligible; and textual speech means voiceover commentaries. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 171.
[144] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). p. 51.
[145] Wang, 2015, p. 301.

diegesis have to be eliminated whenever the voice-over appears, causing a certain level of artificial disjuncture in the soundscape. With this in mind one may wonder: does this technological limitation foreground the fact of technical manipulation and alienate the audience, or does it make the voice even more intimate? For the audience can easily discern the difference in the quality of Yuwen's voice when it appears as "theatrical speech" or as "textual speech." In Britta Sjogren's view, female voices-overs in Hollywood cinema are overtly musical, both in terms of their interwoven relationship to the score and their carefully modulated, expressive tonality. The male counterpart voice-over tends to be matte, dry, ironic—the "grain" receding into the words uttered. In contrast, the melodious quality of the female voice-over moves it away from the register of ordinary speech—from "the voice-as-discursive-agent," to "the voice-as-being."[146] Upending the gendered and hierarchical representations in many Hollywood films of the period, *Spring* portrays Liyan, the male protagonist and the patriarch of the Dai family, Liyan, is portrayed as a neurotic with tuberculosis, a weak heart, and a fragile mind. In a similarly atypical manner, Yuwen's vitality and repressed but lively sexuality are emphasized by the subdued yet vibrant tone and materiality of her voice.

Yuwen's description of her action and movement creates a discrepancy between the visual and aural, as we simultaneously see her image from the third-person perspective and hear first-person narration. Yuwen's disembodied voice is often concurrent or overlapping with her physical movement, which is anchored to the most immediately visible source—her body. This fact produces a slight temporal and spatial dislocation or divergence in which the bodiless voice and the voiceless body can be seen as two disjointed halves of a single elusive entity.[147] The relation

[146] Britta Sjogren, *Into the Vortex: Female Voice and Paradox in Film*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 65.
[147] Chion, p. 101

between her voice-over and her visually present body is made precarious as her voice moves autonomously and fluidly in and out of synchronization with the visual realm, enacting a tension between interiority and exteriority. In Kaja Silverman's words, "[the voice-over] inverts the usual sound/image hierarchy; it becomes a 'voice on high'…a voice which speaks from a position of superior knowledge, and which superimposes itself 'on top' of the diegesis."[148] The voice-over thus attains a sense of detachment from the diegesis and visual sphere.

In *Spring*, the aural realm of the voice-over "overarches" the diegesis, as if corresponding to the recurrent image of Yuwen perched high atop the city wall—a symbolic analogy for the relation between the visual and the aural in the film. The image echoes the audiovisual contrast; the usual low angle of the camera frame gazes up at the characters, occasionally featuring them against the sky. We might attribute the construction of these shots to a number of reasons. Perhaps, since Yuwen often pensively lowers her head when she walks, the low angle was employed to better capture her facial expressions. It is also possible that the low angle shot, influenced by Soviet films (called "the Soviet shot"),[149] was adapted because it was popular at that time in Chinese cinema.

In this historical and theoretical context, the female voice-over in *Spring* has broader implications, located in but not limited to the isolated, ruined spaces of garden and body in the small town as well as in the unstable, figurative narrative and psychic spaces subject to as constant a state of flux as the sound itself. The ambiguous switching between omnipresent, first-person, and third-person perspectives intervenes with standard narrative temporalities to create a fluid, fractured female subjectivity. The voice is "recollecting, projecting, commenting, fantasizing,

[148] Silverman, p. 48.

[149] "Interview with the Director of *Songs of Ancient China*, Mr. Fei Mu　訪「古中國之歌」導演人費穆先生," Yinluandian 銀鑾殿電影月刊, vol. 1, 1941, pp. 8-9.

murmuring to herself, or conversing."[150] Sometimes it sounds like a flashback, other times like a flash-forward or a reversal and reconstruction. The lack of explicit verbal tenses in the Chinese language, combined with the "tenseless" (or permanently present) visual images, enhance this sense of temporal ambiguity and disorientation. The voice-over variously precedes, coincides with, or succeeds the visible action, generating a precarious relationship between the visual and the aural. It also interposes multiple layers of mediation within the film: image, words, voice, sound effects (the siren, door bell, dog barking), and diegetic and extradiegetic music. As I will shoe in the final section of this chapter, this rich audiovisual rhythmicity is further enlivened and enriched by other cinematic techniques such as the long take and slow movement in *Spring*.

V. Lateral Long Take, Slow Movement, and Audiovisual Rhythmicity

Fei Mu admitted that in an effort to express a melancholy, "grey" mood in *Spring*, he made "a presumptuous and audacious cinematic experiment" that extensively employed the techniques of "long take" and "slow movement."[151] "Slow movement" is different from "slow motion," which is a mechanical manipulation achieved by capturing each film frame at a rate faster than the film will be played back; when replayed at normal speed, images appear to be moving more slowly.[152] "Slow movement" is instead produced by a combination of camera panning or tracking, the deliberate bodily movements of characters, and the slow pace created by long takes and dissolves (as opposed to direct cuts). Its effect is further enhanced by the *lento* oratory of the characters, whether in monologue, dialogue or voice-over, which creates a poetic audiovisual cadence. The

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[150] David Der-wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2015, p, 301.

[151] Fei Mu 費穆,"Director/Screenwriter—To Yang Ji (Daoyan.Juzuozhe—xiegei Yang Ji/導演．劇作者—寫給楊紀)," Ta Kung Pao 大公報, Hong Kong, October 9, 1951.

[152] A way to achieve this in early cinema is over-cranking, which refers to hand cranking an early camera at a rate faster than the normal 16 or 24 frames per second; it can also be achieved by playing normally recorded footage at a slower speed. More recently, it is also possible to use digital manipulation to control speed and create "slow motion" effects.

pace and tonality of characters' speech in *Spring* appropriately suggests their ages, social statuses, dispositions and sentiments. Yuwen and Liyan deliver their dialogue at a deliberate and contemplative pace, while Zhichen and Dai Xiu articulate their lines at a more vigorous and crisp tempo. Although Yuwen is younger than Zhichen, she has to perform the role of the demure young hostess of the household, her orations of hospitality and authority and bounded by social etiquette. Only when she is alone with Zhichen or slightly drunk is her mischievous and seductive side revealed; it is the ensuing radiance in her speech that allows Liyan to tell Yuwen: "I realize that your youth is still with you." Indeed, the speed of the characters' diction consistently changes when their emotions and circumstances alter.

Such vocal contrasts complicate the aural rhythms of the film; the "long take" and "slow movement" aesthetics Fei Mu used in the film can be understood as visual correlates. The stylization of vocal performance is a common practice in opera, spoken drama, and cinema. Béla Balázs points out that Wagner, directing his operas, created a "stylized slowing-down" by making his singers perform much more slowly than would have been natural. Wagner deemed this drawn-out and somber manner suitable for the operatic staging of ancient tragedy; the singing of the recitative seemed an appropriate place to slow the action.[153] The audiovisual correspondence of "slow movement" in *Spring* echoes Balázs's comments; it not only contains traces of Beijing opera but is also matches the doleful and poetic atmosphere of the film. "Slow movement" can also be understood through the lens of Michel Chion's argument that many filmmakers sought to relativize speech and to inscribe it in visual, rhythmic, gestural, and sensory registers, thus creating a sort of *verbal chiaroscuro*,[154] a trans-sensory and transmedial metaphor.

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[153] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 281.

[154] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound in Screen*, edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 178.

"Deep focus" and "long take" were widely utilized cinematic techniques and predominant aesthetic concepts in late 1930s and 1940s world film history. To a certain extent, they fashioned a sense of cinematic realism by maintaining the continuity of ordinary time and space within one single take.[155] Chinese film historian Chen Shan acclaims *Spring* as "the first Chinese film to ingeniously, systematically and dexterously employ the cinematic techniques of deep focus, long take, extensive and expressive camera movement, as well as sound montage."[156] While most of Chen's statement holds true, the "deep focus" remark needs reconsideration. Although featuring some deep-focused shots, the visual space in *Spring* has a relatively shallow field, a flat quality, and wide dimensions; it is oriented toward horizontal expansion rather than deep focus and vertical/inward exploration. This practice and aesthetic in *Spring* can be read as having an affinity with Peking opera and spoken drama, in which horizontal orientation is utilized in stage composition. In other films, such as *Bloodshed on Wolf Mountain* (1936) and *Regrets of Life and Death* (1948), Fei extensively employs the lateral panning shot to create an expansive interior space that could display the distinctive facial and gestural expressions of multiple characters.

Due to technological constraints of the period, lateral camera movements (panning or tracking) were easier to achieve than inward tracking shots, in which subjects on different planes of depth had to be kept in focus. Posing yet another difficulty, the low photo sensitivity of the film stock and stuffy lighting only allowed for only a larger aperture and a small depth of field. When subjects in a single spatial plane were held in focus, it was much more feasible to move within the plane on a lateral level than to move inward, since the aperture and lighting would have to be adjusted

[155] For instance, works by filmmakers such as Jean Renoir, Orson Welles, Kenji Mizoguchi, among others. For theoretical accounts of long take and realism, see André Bazin (1918 –1958), *What Is Cinema*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[156] Chen Shan (陳山), "The New Landscape of Humanistic Films (人文電影的新景觀 Renwen dianying de xin jingguan)," *Contemporary Cinema* 當代電影, 1996.2.

within the continuous take. In *Spring*, shallow focus and lateral movement are usually identifiable in nocturnal interior scenes, for instance in the scene in which Dai Xiu sings "Duldal and Maria" or in the celebration scene for Dai Xiu's birthday, where the lighting is dim and the camera could only have worked in spatial proximity to the action in the cramped room. Shots taken under the bright sunlight, like the impressive tracking-in shot that approaches Liyan atop a pile of rubbles in the garden (3'55-4'15 into the film), were easier to manage.

Spring sutures individual long-takes with thoughtful "dissolves" rather than direct cuts and reveals a predilection for medium and long shots over close-ups—together these choices slow down the overall rhythm of the film. This visual tone is first established by a series of leftward panning shots in the beginning of the film. The 90-second opening sequence is composed of five shots that serve as a prelude, a panorama of the spring landscape in a small town: the sky, trees, grass, the ruined city wall, the moat, sporadic farmhouses, and the silhouette of the female protagonist Yuwen in an extreme long shot. Constant dissolves make this sequence feel like a continuously unfolding horizontal landscape painting scroll, tutoring the audience's eyes in the traditional Chinese way of viewing, guiding them from the right to the left. The juxtaposition, contrast, and interplay of light and darkness—of the solid, immobile city wall, the soft meadow, and the flowing river—emphasize temporality and produce a rhythmic and melodic structure. Sergei Eisenstein links cinematic panorama in his works with Chinese landscape scroll painting and highlights the musical character of this form of painting, claiming that it is "a temporal art, not according to a type of epic narration, but according to the principles of music. The unwinding sequence of elements of the landscape became a symphonic sketch."[157] Both Fei Mu's *Regrets* and *Spring* make extensive use of dissolve rather than direct cut. Besides suggesting elapsed time, the

[157] Eisenstein, 1987, p. 231.

technique of dissolve "permits the placing of lyrical and intellectual emphasis where required in the film."[158] In *Spring*, the scene of the second meeting (56'14-57'48) between Yuwen and Zhichen on the city wall does both of these things by employing three dissolves in succession. Each is a low angle medium long shot with similar composition; only the posture of the two characters varies. This "jump dissolve" indicates the passage of time and, more importantly, creates a sort of subjective experience of the characters' dilated interior conflicts, entanglements, and bewilderment, rendering measurable time and space illusory.

Complemeting the painterly quality of the lateral camera movement and continuous dissolves, the audiovisual aesthetic of horizontal expansion and persistent reframing in *Spring*'s long takes reflects the influence of Fei's experience as a director of spoken drama. Fei directed more than ten spoken drama productions in Shanghai between 1941 and 1945, acclaimed by contemporary critics as a "poet-director" who could create a poetic ambience by featuring classical subjects and employing cinematic techniques such as the "dream sequence" and "flashback" on stage. Spoken drama methods of narrative structure, *mise-en-scene*, acting, diction and rhythm further enriched his cinematic experiments and enhanced the spectator's experience. For instance, during Zhichen's first dinner at the Dai household (19'56''-21'16''), the complex vocals, gesticulation, and choreography of the four main characters all occur in the same horizontal plane, the camera laterally panning left or right. According to the memories of the actors, such long takes, which in this case comprise more than half of the film reel (about five minutes), were very rare in Chinese cinema at that time. The maneuver constructs a flexible and elastic "wide screen" by constant

[158] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 146.

reframing, following the characters' lateral movement while keeping balance[159] and symmetry in the composition. The camera in this sense serves as a guide, navigating the spectator through the characters' subtle emotional relationships and visualized interests, especially between Yuwen and Zhichen [the former lovers], Yuwen and Liyan [the wife and husband], and Zhichen and Dai Xiu [the innocent pals]. The continuous soundtrack (Dai Xiu's singing) seamlessly bridges and stabilizes the constant changes in characters' positions and the dynamic camera movement, forming an interesting "vertical montage" within the horizontal visual plane.

Lateral panning

[159] Wei Wei 韋偉, "The Mr. Fei Mu I know 我所认识的费穆先生," p. 255; Zhang Hongmei 張鴻眉, "Director Fei Mu Taught Me How to Act 費穆導演教我演電影" in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006), pp. 257 - 60.

In the sequence discussed above and in other parts of the film with similar audiovisual presentations, two features influenced by spoken drama stand out: the frontal framing of the spatial *mise-en-scene* of the characters and the "block editing" (danyuan jianjie) technique. In most scenes in *Spring* (especially interior sequences), characters face the camera/theatre audience as if on stage, even when involved in conversations with one another. The film avoids Hollywood-style "shot/reverse shot" structure and continuity editing, using "block editing" to ensure the continuity of time-space, acting, and emotional tenor. This editing method may have been chosen as a more authentic way to convey the intensity of the characters' emotions, given that they were otherwise artificially turned away from each other when conversing. However, I would argue that the "not-facing-each-other" adroitly intimates the subtle interactions between the characters, accentuating moments of concealment and revelation, of passion and restraint, between couples and lovers. It also foregrounds the nuanced potential meanings and misunderstanding of aural communication—unable to see the facial expressions of their interlocutors, the characters can only speculate about the implications and subtexts of their conversations. The slightly low angle of the camera suggests that the theater audience's perspective is combined with the characters' movement to fulfill the function of montage within a long take. Without recourse to the shot/reverse shot construction and the continuity editing or parallel editing, one long take usually encompasses one entire sequence of "slow movement." This method has been termed "section editing" or "block editing" by Chen Shan. By "block editing," Chen refers to the *mise-en-scene* and the purposeful rearrangement of spatial relationships and visual panels in a single long take; more simply, it means editing within the single take. The frontal framing and production of continuous time-space, then, were at once

innovative and bore the stamp of traditional Chinese opera and spoken drama—two forms of which Fei Mu had deep knowledge and expertise.[160]

Frontal framing

The theatrical trace in *Spring* not only bears Fei Mu's directorial imprint—it was also the brainchild of Li Tianji, a screenwriter involved in stage production in Chongqing long before he wrote the film script.[161] The screenplay was initially conceptualized as a stage play with three acts set in one location and subsequently went through multiple revisions at Fei Mu's request, most of which were aimed at underlining cinema's medium specificity. This process transformed the script's original theatricality until it grew into a cinematic masterwork with only a few characters,

[160] Chen Shan (陳山), "The New Landscape of Humanistic Films (人文電影的新景觀 Renwen dianying de xin jingguan)," *Contemporary Cinema* 當代電影, 1996.2. take.

[161] Li was taught and helped by renowned playwrights such as Chen Baichen (陳白塵) and Wu Zuguang (吳祖光).

highly concentrated scenarios, and a more concise structure that limited the narrative to a two-week temporal frame and a confined setting. The derelict Dai house and garden and the invisible "small town" became an isolated world/stage set against a larger, abstract, and highly symbolic backdrop: the larger world beyond the city wall, and the Chinese nation anguishing in Civil War. Fei Mu asked Li Tianji to avoid cutting and making leaps in time and space too frequently, as well as to extend the duration of individual scenes. He also instructed Li to expunge one character from the original play and to reduce the length of a few scenes featuring Zhichen and Dai Xiu in order to better focalize the entanglement of Yuwen and Zhichen.[162]

Some contemporary critics compare *Spring* with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) plays like *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* that similarly express the declining petit bourgeois world through figures lagging behind their time and incapable of real action.[163] Fei's stage drama experience enhanced his capacity to portray psychological depth and subtlety through succinctly but delicately employed dialogues and gestures. Wei Wei recalls that Fei Mu called for repeated, meticulous rehearsals to help actors master the precise performative expression of emotion before shooting. As aforementioned, he also encouraged improvisations, thus, the blend of rehearsed precision and improvised spontaneity.[164] Because of their rigorous rehearsal schedule, a sort of tacit rapport developed among the actors, who together "[overcame] the contradiction

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[162] The character omitted is an old traditional Chinese doctor, since another of the male protagonists, Zhang Zhichen, is a doctor. Li Tianji, "weile fanwan ganshang dianying 為了飯碗干上電影," *Film Art* (dianying yishu 電影藝術), Issue 4, 1992; Zhu Tianwei (朱天緯), "An Interview with *Spring in a Small Town* screen writer Li Tianji and Composer Huang Yijun (dui 'xiaocheng zhichun' de juzuojia he zuoqujia de fangwen/對<小城之春>的劇作家和作曲家的訪問)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006. p. 230-232.

[163] Rong 容, "*Discussing the Mentality of Spring in a Small Town* 淺談「小城之春」的意識," Takungpao daily 香港《大公報》, February 22, 1951.

[164] Wei Wei 韋偉, "The Mr. Fei Mu I know 我所认识的费穆先生," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論*, 2006. p. 255.

between naturalism and stylization so frequently found in China cinema."[165] The stylized dilation of time via long takes with shallow fields, fused with cinematic techniques such as voice-over and dissolve, transformed the stylistic restraints of spoken drama into hallmarks of a distinctive cinematic style enlivened by transmedial inspirations.

The exacting choreography of characters' bodily movements and the motions of camera foster a pace, rhythm, and musicality that corresponds to various elements in the acoustic realm. The camera's meticulous interplay with the actors in single long takes generates a rhythmic, spatial fluidity and poetic atmosphere characterized by the alternation between stillness and movement, speeding up and slowing down. For instance, the meandering walks of the characters energize the desolate, still ruins of the city wall much like their singing on a boat animates the tranquil lake. Their subtle and repressed emotions are conveyed by nuanced hand gestures and eye communications, transcending the limits of voiced language. As Béla Balázs states, "the spoken word contains only a fragment of human expression. People talk not only with their mouths. The glance, a twitching of a muscle in the face, movements of the hands speak at the same time and only all of them together add up to the exact shade of meaning intended."[166] Comparably, Zhichen's visit and the singing and laughing he inspires invigorate the Dai family's dreary, even suffocating, mansion and daily living. Long takes and slow movement simultaneously spatialize time and temporalize space, all while reflecting on the historical reality of 1940s China.

Conclusion:

Engaging with meticulous film analysis, close reading of contemporary drama and film reviews, and the work of critics and theorists such as Sergei Eisenstein, Béla Balázs and Michel

[165] Li Cheuk-to, "*Spring in a Small Town*: Mastery and Restraint", *Cinemaya*, Vol. 49, 2000, p. 64.
[166] Béla Balázs, 1970, p. 204.

Chion, this chapter has discussed how "atmosphere" is created and enhanced by various cinematic techniques (voice-over, long take, slow movement, and dissolve) in Fei Mu's films. It elaborated on the ways that stylistic conventions drawn from spoken drama, landscape painting, and traditional Chinese theater facilitated the evolution of a sophisticated cinematic style within a transmedial circuit. The audiovisual and theater-cinema interactions in Fei Mu's work not only develop a long take aesthetics and cinematic rhythm, but also shed light on theoretical debates about the possibilities of establishing cinema's medium specificity via transmediality. Likewise, the employment of "voice-over" in *Spring in a Small Town*, interpreted alongside its use of the *zibao jiamen* and *beigong* conventions from Beijing opera, further enriches our understanding of voice-over's narrative function and aesthetic expressivity, which is usually considered only from the perspectives of Hollywood and European film practice and theory. The human voice and the intelligibility of dialogue are privileged in most Western films; in turn, the voice is often critically assumed to dominate other sonic elements in the soundscape. This practice, which informs both human listening habits and sound design in talking cinema, has been identified by Michel Chion as *vococentrism*.[167] On a vococentric reading, the voice-over in cinema embodies the stylized externalization of inner emotions and creates a disjointed temporal structure. As I have shown, Fei Mu's cinema challenges *vococentrism* by conceiving of voice as one integrated element in a synthetic art form. In Yesi's words, the characters' movements and voice are abstracted into pure dance and music in Fei's films, which assert that nuanced emotions cannot be fully expressed by words, only suggested by gestures, *mise-en-scène*, and music.[168]

[167] Michel Chion, 1999, p. 6.
[168] Yesi 也斯, "抒情、現代與歷史—從《小城之春》到《阮玲玉》," 《文學與表演藝術》, 1994, p. 90.

Fei acknowledged the didactic function of cinema, like "a professor teaching a course, or a monk illuminating a Buddhist sutra."[169] As Li Suyuan states, "Fei Mu was averse to exaggerating cinema's social function and explicitly exploiting it as a propagandist tool, but stressed that films could exert a subtle influence on the audience."[170] Fei believed in the power of non-violent social progress and of reform within Confucian cultural and moral conventions, not in drastic social and political transformation and revolution. Developed under the rubric of his "Confucian humanism,"[171] Fei's political orientation and stylistic experiments were considered conservative, outmoded, and too "meek" by radical leftist film critics and revolutionaries. These critics regarded cinema as a propagandist tool to awaken and mobilize the masses, especially during a moment rife with calls for "national salvation" to confront the Japanese invasion and the social and political tribulations of life under the Nationalist regime. In comparison to such populist yet radical understandings of the political and social functions of cinema, Fei's view was more elitist; while he wished to cultivate the morality and ethics of Chinese people through the edification of film, he was also pessimistic about the result.

In the late 1940s, most Chinese films made by Fei Mu's peers in Shanghai were social realist films underwritten by severe critiques of corruption, injustice, and inequality: for example, *Dream in Paradise* (Tang Xiaodan, 1947), *Eight Thousand Li of Cloud and Moon* (Shi Dongshan, 1947) *The Spring River Flows East* (Zheng Junli, Cai Chusheng, 1947), and *Myriad of Lights* (Shen Fu, 1948). Fei's *Spring in a Small Town* seemed malapropos within this context, viewed as an outlier

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[169] Fei Mu, "Miscellaneous Writing" (*zaxie* 雜寫) , *Lianhua Pictorial* (*Lianhua huabao* 聯華畫報), Vol. 5, No. 1, 1935.

[170] Li Suyuan 酈蘇元, "Fei Mu in Film History (dianyingshi shang de Fei Mu/電影史上的費穆)," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films 費穆電影新論* (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006). P. 37.

[171] Susan Daruvala's term, in "The Aesthetics and Moral Politics of Fei Mu's *Spring in A Small Town*," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2007, p. 184.

for its characters' superfluous indulgence in "obsolete sentiments, self-pity, and narcissism in this era with new possibilities and direction." The critic Xiangqian claimed, against Fei, that the filmmaker and characters should "fuse individual sentiment into feelings of the masses and follow the time spirit, otherwise they would be abandoned by the relentless history."[172] Another critic also disapproved of the ideological individualism of intellectuals that emitted from the film, and declaring that "the spring is in the crowd."[173]

The gloomy sentiments in *Spring* are indeed dissonant with the social and political circumstances of 1948 China, and can be mainly attributed to Fei Mu's personal situation and mindset. Suffering from "vacillating political inclinations," Fei cautiously kept his distance from, and maintained an uneasy relationship with, both the Nationalist government and leftist/Communist intellectuals and film professionals. Fei was discontented with the corrupt social system and had compassion for oppressed lower class people; however, as a liberal intellectual, he did not entirely approve of leftist social and political opinions. Hence, preferring a middle course in a turbulent period of political struggle and military strife between the Nationalists and Communists, Fei became an outcast. While making *Spring*, he was in a situation of anguish; his mentality matched the despondent tone in the film."[174] Cinematically experimental, culturally "conservative", and politically reformist, Fei's position epitomizes the experience of many liberal thinkers and artists of his generation, bourgeois intellectuals who suffered a general post-war exhaustion, full of pathos and fear of the future. To them, the victory of the eight-year war of

[172] Xiang Qian 向前, "Review of *Spring in a Small Town* 评'小城之春,'"《剧影春秋》, vol. 1, issue. 3, 1948.
[173] Haiqing 海情, "Where is the Spring in *Spring in a Small Town*?「小城之春」春在哪裡？"《影劇叢刊》, issues. 2, 1948, pp. 34-35.
[174] Shu Yan 舒湮, "The Historical Period Fei Mu Lived and Fei Mu in that period 費穆的時代和時代的費穆," in *New Views on Fei Mu Films* 費穆電影新論 (中國廣播電視出版社, 2006), p. 133.

resistance felt like a defeat.[175] Importantly, they were reacting not only to political schism between the left and the right but also to the tension between tradition and modernity. Carolyn Fitzgerald argues that Fei Mu represents a cultural impasse: the result of a lack of faith in Westernized modernity and an inability to return to a past that had been reduced to ruins. He longed for harmony between tradition and modernity, as evidenced by his portrayals of "modern sages" and his theorization of the relation between traditional aesthetics and modern film.[176] In the interstices between the political and the aesthetic, the audiovisual and the transsensory, the cinematic and the transmedial, Fei masterfully composed an operatic and poetic atmospherics of sound tapestry and transmediality.

[175] Susan Daruvala, "The aesthetics and moral politics of Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town*," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, Vol. 1, no. 3, p. 181.
[176] Carolyn Fitzgerald, *Fragmenting Modernisms: Chinese Wartime Literature, Art, and Film, 1937-49*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013, p. 215.

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Dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz

A Page of Madness (1926)
Dir. Kinugasa Teinisuke

Berlin, Symphony of a Great City (*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, 1927)
Dir. Walter Ruttmann

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Dir. David Lean

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Dir. Liu Na'ou 劉吶鷗

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Dir. Liu Na'ou 劉吶鷗

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Dir. Cheng Bugao 程步高

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Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

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Dir. Yuan Muzhi 袁牧之

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Dir. Jean Epstein

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Dir. Xu Xingzhi 許幸之

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Dir. Max Ophüls

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Dir. Alfred Hitchcock

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Dir. Rouben Mamoulian

The Love Parade (1929)
Dir. Ernst Lubitsch

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Dir. Yuan Muzhi 袁牧之

Midianma 密電碼 (Secret Code, 1937)
Dir. Huang Tianzuo 黃天佐 and Liu Na'ou 劉吶鷗

The Million (1931)
Dir. René Clair

Nanguo zhichun 南國之春 (Story of the South, 1932)
Dir. Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生

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Dir. D. W. Griffith

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Dir. Nikolai Ekk

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Shengsi Tongxin 生死同心 (*Unchanged Heart in Life and Death*, 1936)
Dir. Ying Yunwei, 應云衛

Shizi jietou 十字街頭 (Crossroads, 1937, Mingxing Studio)
Dir. Shen Xiling 沈西苓

Show Boat (1929)
Dir. Harry A. Pollard

Show People (1928)
Dir. King Vidor

Silang tanmu 四郎探母 (The Fourth Son of the Yang Family Visits His Mother, 1930)
Dir. Yin Shengtao 尹声涛

Sunny Side Up (1929)
Dir. Donald Crisp

Sunrise (1927)
Dir. F. W. Murnau

Taohua qixieji 桃花泣血記 (The Peach Girl, 1931)
Dir. Bu Wancang 卜萬蒼

Taolijie 桃李劫 (Plunder of Peach and Plum, 1934, Denton Film Studio)
Dir. Ying Yunwei 應云衛

The Three Penny Opera (Die 3 Groschen-Oper, 1931)
Dir. Georg Wilhelm Pabst

Tianming 天明 (Daybreak, 1933)
Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

Tixiao yinyuan 啼笑因緣 (Between Tears and Laighter, 1931)
Dir. Zhang Shichuan 張石川

Tiyu Huanghou 體育皇后 (Queen of Sports, 1934)
Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

Tianlun 天伦 (*Song of China*, 1935)
Dir. Fei Mu 费穆

The Volga Boatman (1926)
Dir. Cecil B. DeMille

Way Down East (1920)
Dir. D. W. Griffith

Weile heping 為了和平 (For Peace, 1956)
Dir. Huang Zuolin 黃佐臨

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Dir. Shi Hui 石揮

Wuxun zhuan 武訓傳 (Story of Wu Xun, 1951)
Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

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Dir. Fei Mu

Xiaocheng zhichun 小城之春 (Spring in a Small Town, 1948, Wenhua Studio)
Dir. Fei Mu 費穆

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Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

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Xin nüxing 新女性 (New Women, 1935, Lianhua Studio)
Dir. Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生

Yasuiqian 壓歲錢 (New Year's Coin, 1937)
Dir. Zhang Shichuan 張石川

Yeban gesheng 夜半歌聲 (Song at Mignight, 1937)
Dir. Maxu Weibang 馬徐維邦

Yecao xianhua 野草閒花 (Wild Grass, 1930, Lianhua Studio)
Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

Yemeigui 野玫瑰 (Wild Rose, 1932, Lianhua Studio)
Dir. Sun Yu 孫瑜

Yinhan shuangxing 銀漢雙星 (Two Stars in the Milky Way, 1931, Lianhua Studio)
Dir. Shi Dongshan 史東山

Yinmu Yanshi 銀幕艷史 (The Romance on the Screen, 1931)
Dir. Cheng Bugao 程步高

Yiye Haohua 一夜豪華 (One Night Wealthy, 1932)
Dir. Shao Zuiweng 邵醉翁

Yongyuan de weixiao 永遠的微笑(Eternal Smile, 1937, Mingxing Studio)
Dir. Wu Cun 吳村

Yuguangqu 漁光曲 (Song of the Fishermen, 1934, Lianhua Studio)
Dir. Cai Chusheng 蔡楚生

Yuguotianqing 雨過天青 (Blue Sky After Raining, 1931)
Dir. Xia Chifeng 夏赤風

Yumeiren 虞美人(The Beauty, 1931)
Dir. Xu Kengran 徐鏗然

Zhanjingtang 斬經堂 (Murder in the Oratory, 1937)
Dir. Fei Mu 費穆

Ziyou hun 自由魂 (The Souls of Freedom, 1931)
Dir. Wang Cilong 王次龍

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