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Early Film Culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Republican China

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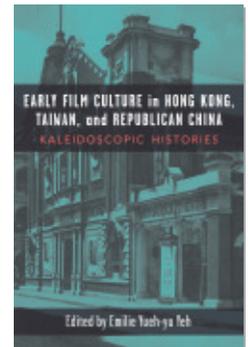
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CHAPTER 3

From an Imported Novelty to an Indigenized Practice

Hong Kong Cinema in the 1920s

Ting-yan Cheung and Pablo Sze-pang Tsoi

Hong Kong film history¹ began in 1897 when two motion picture machines were brought in from the West for the island's first-ever public screening.² Then in 1925, a strike that lasted for sixteen months paralyzed almost all commercial activities in Hong Kong, including the early film industry. In between, there is not much written. These first three decades of Hong Kong film history are normally dismissed as uneventful and insignificant in general. In such views, focus is always given to a few individuals who conducted preliminary trials involving film productions, distribution, and exhibition. Doubtless, owing to these essential narratives, early film activities can be reconstructed, and the early filmscape of Hong Kong sketched out. However, these somewhat crude historical accounts may sometimes lead to an impression that the early participants in Hong Kong film industry as well as events they were associated with were separated from and unrelated to the social, cultural, and economic circumstances of Hong Kong in that era. The historical context of these early pioneers is lacking.

While acknowledging the existing film literature, the current chapter explores how the early Hong Kong film industry contributed to the development in the three areas specified above, arguing that the dramatic evolution of this particular industry was rooted in increase of both economic growth and cultural awareness. The chapter further reveals that such an evolution reached its watershed in the 1920s, a period that is now seen to

have played a more significant role than some film critics may have believed. Indeed, this period indicates that film was transformed from an imported novelty into an indigenized commercial and cultural activity; and so the enormous growth of Hong Kong cinema in the subsequent decades can be seen as one of the important factors shaping the establishment of the local bourgeois public sphere.

The thesis of this chapter—indigenization of an imported novelty—will be presented through three sections. To set the scene, we give an overview of Hong Kong society at the time when film first arrived. Then the second section looks at how film became ever more popularized among local Chinese, resulting in the whole industry being widely seen as a profitable investment, leading soon to the emergence of Chinese proprietorship. Finally, the third section discusses the rise of an awareness of film being a cultural institution, which primarily generated a new kind of journalistic literature, prompting film to fulfill social and moral functions among Chinese communities. Drawing on materials from both the early Chinese and English newspapers, the goal of this chapter is to retouch the early Hong Kong filmscape, so as to restore and unveil its true and quite boisterous image.

EARLY HONG KONG: ONE ISLAND, TWO COMMUNITIES

The formation (and transformation) of the social structure in early Hong Kong was closely connected to its economic development since the Union Jack first flew over the island in 1841. The colony with its ideal geographical location was turned into a free port, which soon thrived on the transshipment trading industry. From the beginning, the British ruling class monopolized the political and financial sectors of Hong Kong in the capacity of officials, policymakers, capitalists, and bankers. Local Chinese, on the other hand, formed the laboring class comprising farmers, fishermen, and masons, and, as the economy gradually grew and diversified, became craftsmen, sedan-chair bearers, porters, coolies, servants, and hawkers. The colonial government implemented a segregation policy that restricted the local Chinese population to living apart from the Western community, which in addition to the British consisted mainly of Portuguese, Americans, French, German, and Spanish.³

Then in the 1850s, the influx of Chinese coming from the nearby Pearl River Delta and returning from overseas countries added a new dimension

to the colony's polarized social structure.⁴ These immigrants were no illiterate laborers—at the time common among the Chinese population in Hong Kong—but rich merchants and compradors. Having arrived at the entrepôt with considerable financial resources and substantial trading experience, this prominent group began to run businesses as import-export agents and by the 1870s had already emerged as an economic force to be reckoned with. These wealthy Chinese proprietors contributed significantly to the development of the local economy and hence grew into a particular social stratum for which the colonial authority had a high regard. The rise of the Chinese elites might have reconfigured the former social structure; still, with the colony's segregation practice and the majority of the local Chinese struggling to survive their poverty, inhabitants of early Hong Kong lived largely apart in two separated communities in terms of space, culture, and social status.

The two communities naturally differed in their favourite pastimes. For example, while all of the inhabitants, regardless of race and social class, evidently enjoyed stage shows, the exact forms of this universal entertainment were here obviously categorized by the islanders' different cultural backgrounds. Even before 1841, the local Chinese inhabitants had enjoyed Chinese operas, which were occasionally brought to the island by traveling troupes from the Mainland. Later, the colony with its economic development and population growth attracted more and more such troupes, which led eventually to the setting up of various opera theaters. The first one, Dai Loi (Dalai) Theatre, was built in 1865,⁵ which was followed by others with increasing scale that would accommodate an audience of as many as six hundred to seven hundred people.⁶ For the Western community, on the other hand, the first such activities took place as early as 1842, when a troupe of considerable scale from Australia brought a few lively and joyful nights to the Western inhabitants of this *undeveloped* island.⁷ In the same year, Western theaters were being set up. The Western community in early Hong Kong favored performances in the forms of drama, opera, concerts, variety shows, acrobatics, boxing, and circuses—which were held at clubhouses, hotels, and outdoor venues. In 1869, the first City Hall opened in the Central District, in which both St. Andrew's Hall and Theatre Royal became immediate favorites among the upper classes and the cultured. At the turn of the twentieth century, the onetime fishing village in Southeast China emerged as a dynamic entrepôt where the population rose from 7,450⁸ in 1841 to 368,987⁹ in 1901. Of the total population, 95 percent were Chinese.¹⁰

This was the time when the “greatest marvel of the age” hit the town.

FILM IN EARLY HONG KONG: TWO COMMUNITIES, ONE ENTERTAINMENT

Whereas retrospectively we see that film as an enthralling entertainment later developed quickly and successfully over the territories, the first activities relating to film viewing were indeed rooted only in the small local Western community. But the exact information about these early activities has never been clear in view of the fact that scholarly study focusing on this part of history has been rare. Therefore, to unveil these early scenes we have to look for firsthand materials by resorting to a close scrutiny at early local English and Chinese newspapers.

On April 24, 1897, the local English newspaper *China Mail* announced that a certain “Professor Maurice Charvet” would introduce the “twin marvels of the age,”¹¹ called the “Cinématograph” and the “Kinetoscope,” at the Music Room of City Hall (i.e., St. Andrew’s Hall). Of course, it should be noted that neither machine can be ascertained to be those two genuine apparatuses invented respectively by the Lumière brothers and Thomas Edison. In fact, according to L’Institut Lumière, after its first screening in Paris on December 28, 1895, the “Cinématograph” touring the globe was supposed to be brought along by representatives of the Lumière brothers.¹² As for the “Kinetoscope,” again, there is no evidence of whether Professor Charvet’s machine was authorized by Thomas Edison. It can be certain, however, that the two marvels had never been shown before in Hong Kong or the Far East—according to the news coverage and advertisements in the *China Mail*.

Meanwhile, a private exhibition of the Cinématograph was held on April 26 for an invited few from the press, followed by a public screening to be conducted on the day after, only to be postponed to April 28 because, as revealed by an advertisement posted in the *China Mail*, “the delicate and intricate mechanical arrangements combined with the elaborate and most modern electrical appliances of the machine require such perfect adjustment and manipulation”;¹³ it was later also noted by the *Hong Kong Daily Press* that “a rather irritating quiver” was being observed during the private screening on April 26.¹⁴ Such close and extensive reports from the press show how seminal the event was for the Western public at that moment, to such an extent that the machine itself was even given a meticulous technical introduction in a piece of news coverage:

A long strip of photographic film, containing very minute photographs, is wound from one cylinder to the other, the photographs passing the lenses, at rate of fifty per second. The photographs are projected on a screen by a very powerful electric lamp. The rapidity with which the pictures are projected on the screen gives the impression of like picture [sic], every motion being portrayed.¹⁵

Following this thrilling introduction of the greatest marvel, a number of similar short-term film exhibitions took place before the turn of the twentieth century, presenting various kinds of machines to the audiences in Hong Kong. They included the Animatoscope, which was branded by the advertisement as “Edison’s latest wonder,”¹⁶ the Kinematograph,¹⁷ and the Bioscope, claimed by the press to be “an improvement on the cinematograph.”¹⁸ None of these early film exhibitions, however, were mentioned in any local Chinese newspaper.

In 1900, in fact, there were indeed a number of “film advertisements” appearing in Chinese newspapers such as *Wah Tsz Yat Po* (or the *Chinese Mail*), the most commonly read local Chinese newspaper at the time. In February, June, and July, respectively, advertisements in that newspaper featured screenings of “amazing Western pictures” by various Chinese opera troupes. Later that year, in December, another advertisement showed that a screening of “imported scenery and amazing light magic” was presented by Hei Loi (Xilai) Theatre. However, although the above mentioned have been generally regarded by the existing literature as the “earliest” film advertisements in the local Chinese newspapers, there is no proof of whether these “pictures” and “light magic” were indeed film screenings. Rather, it may be more likely that they were magic lantern shows, that is, a form of slide show with pictures projected onto revolving screens.¹⁹ In fact, a later advertisement in 1902, also featuring a Hei Loi Theatre screening, may reveal the first true film screening in the local Chinese community. Unlike the focus on “light magic” in Hei Loi Theatre’s previous ad, the announcement this time emphasized “lively moving pictures from the United States,” which also highlighted the use of powerful electric light.²⁰ Thus, it can be seen that Chinese newspapers in early Hong Kong, at least in the case of the *Chinese Mail*, advertised no film until 1902.

Indeed, early news coverage on film in local Chinese newspapers was usually brief and simple, focusing first merely on basic technological traits like the clarity of pictures and later on trivial story-related matters such as

plot, setting, cast and acting, and so on. Other film industry concerns noticeably interesting to the English papers, such as the background, business nature, or simply the previous successes of those traveling film exhibitors, however, were not mentioned in either the news coverage or event advertisements in their Chinese counterpart. So like the Hong Kong communities themselves, there was some linguistic segregation in the newspaper coverage of the new import.

An Imported Novelty

Why is it that the English newspapers showed more interest in film as a commercial activity than their Chinese counterparts? The answer lies in the fact that these film enterprises were run by Westerners; to be precise, the early Hong Kong film scene was dominated by non-Chinese. Hence, before exploring how film industry eventually became indigenized in Hong Kong, it is important to further examine the role played by the non-Chinese agents in early Hong Kong film history. In doing so, clarification of some currently rooted problematic assumptions will be made.

Bijou and the First Cinemas in Hong Kong

The controversy over the question “Which was the first cinema in Hong Kong?” is perhaps a good example illustrating such shaky inferences concerning early film businesses. Using only the Chinese press as the source of information has led to some widely accepted “facts” about the early Hong Kong film industry that are not necessarily accurate and complete—because the information about the earliest film activities in Chinese newspapers is rather scant and partial. That is why in some existing study of Hong Kong film history, the “Bijou Theatre” is frequently claimed to be the first cinema in Hong Kong, and the cinema, which opened on September 4, 1907, on Wyndham Street, Central District, is believed to have been a joint venture by a Jewish proprietor named Ray and a local Chinese, Lo Gun (Lo Kan, Lo Gen).²¹

The commonly adopted evidence supporting this claim is an advertisement in the *Chinese Mail* on September 4, 1907, which announced a screening at Cafe Weismann.²² The site was indeed on Wyndham Street, but there was no mention of the name “Bijou,” let alone “cinema.” As advertised in the English paper *China Mail*, the screening was in fact only a cinematograph

show of Pathé pictures that took place in Weismann's large hall.²³ It was reported that "the company running the business hail from Paris and have five similar shows in Shanghai, two in Tientsin and others at Hankow and Peking and other places up north."²⁴ So instead of being the "first cinema in Hong Kong," the screening advertised by the Chinese press on September 4, 1907, was no more than a temporary film exhibition. Furthermore, the show had nothing to do with H. W. Ray and Lo Gun. The *China Mail* reported in 1908 that a certain "Mr. Dietrich," who was to become the new proprietor of Hong Kong Cinematograph, "previously controlled the cinematograph at Weismann's rooms."²⁵

"Bijou" was actually the name of another cinema that did not exist until 1910. In October 1910, the *South China Morning Post* advertised that Bijou Scenic Theatre would open on the Flower Street (a nickname of Wyndham Street) under the direction of Robert Stephenson, "lately the Stage Manager of the Dallas' and Bandmann's Opera Companies."²⁶ Bijou later announced its official opening on November 16, at the previous site of Salon-Cinema,²⁷ and Stephenson was the "Lessee & Manager."²⁸ Another English newspaper, the *Hong Kong Telegraph*, confirmed the role of Stephenson in the Bijou: "Mr. R. H. Stephenson is sparing no efforts to make his new enterprise a success in every way."²⁹ Later, in 1913, it was noted in both the Chinese and English presses that the Bijou would be closed for renovation, but the latter told us more: "The Bijou will be re-opened shortly under new management," undersigned "R. F. Barrat, Manager."³⁰

With "Bijou" clearly ruled out as the first cinema in Hong Kong, the Victoria Cinematograph, located at the intersection of Des Voeux Road Central and Pottinger Street (also in the Central District), is likely the earliest cinema in the territory. On November 1, 1907, the *China Mail* advertised the "Grand Opening" of the Victoria and introduced it as a "splendid and comfortable saloon."³¹ Antonio Ramos, a Spanish showman who is now well known as one of the key pioneers in the early film industry in places like Shanghai, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, was the owner of the Victoria. Soon afterward, in 1910, Ramos also erected "a theatre worthy of the Colony [by securing] the site on which stood the old Hongkong Cinematograph, opposite the market."³² That was the Empire Cinematograph, "designed by Messrs Palmer and Turner . . . a graceful hall capable of seating over 800 people," which was completed with six boxes, a dress circle, first-class and second-class stalls, and a spacious stage. Describing the interior decoration, the news report noted that the place was fireproof, with an "abundance of

ventilation” provided by electric fans.³³ In the same year, the Victoria was torn down and rebuilt, reopening at the same spot in May 1911. Ramos again engaged Messrs. Palmer and Turner as the architects. The newly built Victoria could accommodate the same size audience, with chairs of the “tip-up style” and electric lights and fans, and again was fireproof: the “machine room for the cinematograph apparatus [is] entirely shut off from the public by a thick concrete wall” and “wood work has been reduced to a minimum.”³⁴

Although Ray is not the founder of the first Bijou, he was in fact the proprietor of a later cinema that was built on or, to be more precise, “transformed” from, the exact premises of that first Bijou. On December 28, 1918, the *Hong Kong Daily Press* reported,

The old Bijou Theatre has been recently transformed in order to make it in every way a suitable hall for high class cinematograph entertainments. It has now blossomed out as the Coronet Theatre and under the personal management of Mr. Ray.³⁵

The Coronet Theatre was named the “New Bijou”³⁶ in the Chinese press—a probable explanation of why Ray was mistakenly thought to be the founder of the original Bijou Scenic Theatre. There is also evidence proving that Lo Gun was at a certain point a proprietor of the “New Bijou”; this will be discussed in greater detail in the next sections.

Until at least the mid-1910s, the Victoria Cinematograph, Empire Theatre, Bijou Scenic Theatre, and Coronet Theatre (or “New Bijou”) were the major cinemas in Hong Kong. And they were all founded by non-Chinese. But the indifference toward this marvellous new wizardry among the Chinese locals would not last for long.

First Film Screenings at the Chinese Opera Theaters

While introducing film to the colony and founding its earliest cinemas targeting only the local Western community as their patrons, those non-Chinese agents being seasoned businessmen also ventured into the local Chinese market. As previously mentioned, early film exhibitions that took place before the turn of the century were only held in the Westerner zones. But by 1903, this novelty was brought to the local Chinese’s major entertainment site, the Chinese opera theaters.

In January 1903, the *Chinese Mail* told readers that Ko Shing (Gaosheng) Theatre, one of the oldest Chinese opera theaters in Hong Kong, showed “Stevenson’s Pictures from London”³⁷ after an opera performance. It seems that these pictures enjoyed popularity; later that month the same newspaper revealed that the pictures were shown again at another Chinese opera theater, the Chung Hing (Chongqing) Theatre, and that this time the special screening sessions had no opera performances.³⁸ Furthermore, reruns were subsequently scheduled in February and March. As usual, however, the Chinese newspapers said rather little about “Stevenson’s Pictures,” leading to today’s speculation whether, for example, Robert Stephenson (i.e., the proprietor of the Bijou Scenic Theatre) was involved,³⁹ given the same Chinese characters transcribing the two names “Stevenson” and “Stephenson.” But if we also refer to the English newspapers, we can have a much clearer picture about the exact contents of these screenings. On January 9, 1903, the *Hong Kong Daily Press* revealed that at the time of the screenings at Ko Shing and Chung Hing, good shows were given at the Theatre Royal by the Imperial Bioscope and Animated Picture Co.:

The instrument is a first-class one and the pictures which it threw on the screen were clear and distinct, while at the same time of a most interesting character. Specially appreciated were the scenes descriptive of the Coronation festivities . . . the Bioscope carried the spectators [on] a voyage across the Atlantic on the *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, and a ride on the St. Gothard express through the famous Wassen. The comic pictures, of which these was [in] abundance, kept the audience greatly amused.⁴⁰

One special program consisted of “a number of local pictures illustrative of Chinese life” including “scenes in Canton and Hongkong” and “a view of a ride down the Peak Tramway.”⁴¹ The report highlighted that the proprietor of this successful venture was T. J. Stevenson, “a gentleman who has been associated with the business since its invention and who understands it from top to bottom,” whose enterprise was well received in North China⁴² and voted a great success in Shanghai.⁴³ A veteran like Stevenson would have had extensive experience in doing business with the Chinese, which resulted in the screenings at Ko Shing and Chung Hing. The above description of contents of the screenings offers a glimpse of what was being shown to the local Chinese moviegoers.

Just one year later, an account of Chinese participation in the local film industry appeared for the first time in the local press, which was almost seven years later than the first film screenings initiated by Westerners.

An Indigenized Practice

On March 8, 1904, an advertisement in the *Chinese Mail*, signed by Yu Fungshun (Yu Fengshun), announced that new pictures and devices were available for rent: reels that measured up to fourteen to sixteen feet in diameter, devices that enabled smooth screenings of lively movements with no quivering or risk of fire.⁴⁴ It was suggested that, for best viewing quality, the ideal venues for screenings were theaters or halls in large mansions. Subsequently, in 1905 and 1908, Yu's pictures were shown at some of the major Chinese opera theaters, including the Ko Shing, Chung Hing, and Tai Ping, and some of these pictures were from the United States.⁴⁵ As Yu seems to be the first Chinese tradesman involved in film businesses that we can identify from the local press, he is arguably the first Chinese participant in the film industry in early Hong Kong.

The next Chinese players in the industry came onto the scene in the mid-1910s, and their activities were reported equally by both the English and the Chinese press. In 1914, a Chinese named Lan Sum-ng was identified as the proprietor of the Bijou Scenic Theatre in the *South China Morning Post*.⁴⁶ In 1915, the *Chinese Mail* reported that a Chinese businessman, who was then the new manager of the Victoria Cinematograph, became also the joint proprietor (another partner was a Filipino) of the Empire Cinematograph.⁴⁷ In 1916, the same newspaper advertised an outdoor film exhibition highlighting the enterprise as a venture by Chinese.⁴⁸ The *South China Morning Post* reported in 1918 that the owner of the "Hongkong Cinema," Mr. Lai Wing-kee, was fined for an overcrowded theater.⁴⁹

If film-related activities involving Chinese were still not plentiful in the second decade of the twentieth century, the next five years saw a huge increase in such activities. Table 3.1 shows figures for advertisements and news coverage having appeared in the *Chinese Mail* during the first fifteen years

Table 3.1. Local Chinese Participation in the Hong Kong Film Industry, 1910–1925

Year	1910–19	1920–25
<i>Advertisement</i>	41	808
<i>News coverage</i>	4	169

of the twentieth century, related to local Chinese involvement in film businesses. Comparing the figures for the 1910s with those for the first half of the 1920s, we find a dramatic rise in the overall participation of the local Chinese in the film industry.

With such an overwhelming increase in participation in film businesses in general, it is significant to note that during this period, the *Chinese Mail* began to cover much more extensively local Chinese investments in the film industry in relation to three major areas, exhibition, distribution, and production. While in the domain of exhibition and distribution, such investments and business operations were always centered on two names, which are Lo Gun and the Lai brothers, notable people in the field of production also include Pang Nin (Peng Nian), Lo Kok-fei (Lu Juefei), and Chan Kwan-chiu (Chen Junchao).

Exhibition

Lo Gun, mistakenly thought to be the owner of the first Bijou Theatre, indeed played a significant role in the early development of the Hong Kong film industry, leading to his being called the “king of cinema owners.” However, there was very little mention of Lo Gun’s participation in either the Chinese or the English press from 1920 until 1924; in fact, over 90 percent of the *Chinese Mail*’s film advertisements and news coverage between 1920 and 1925 related only to two cinemas: the Coronet Theatre (or “New Bijou” in Chinese) and the World Theatre. The Coronet, which opened in December 1918, as mentioned previously, was under the management of Ray. In 1924, Lo Gun’s name became also associated with the Coronet; it turned out that the Ming Tat (Mingda) Company, which was in charge of the management of the cinema, was owned by Lo Gun.⁵⁰ Lo, according to an account given by the *Chinese Mail*, was tycoon hosting a chain of cinemas in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. He was hence quite appropriately branded the king of cinema owners in China.⁵¹

Also prominent figures contributing to the indigenization of the film industry were the Lai brothers, who owned the World Theatre, which, opening on July 12, 1921, was the earliest cinema founded and fully funded by local Chinese. Proudly branded the “World Theatre by Chinese Merchants” in the Chinese advertisements, the cinema was built on Des Voeux Road Central and west of Central Market by the Lai brothers—Lai Hoi-shan (Li Haishan), Lai Dong-hoi (Li Donghai), Lai Buk-hoi (Li Beihai), and Lai Man-wai (Li Minwei)—who had to raise a fund of HK\$50,000 in opening

this enterprise.⁵² Descended from a local family of well-off merchants, Lai Hoi-shan, the eldest of the brothers, was the major shareholder with a share of HK\$40,000. Lai Buk-hoi and Lai Man-wai, the fourth and the sixth sons, were probably the earliest among the brothers (and indeed among the local Chinese) to have had experience in film production, having worked as actors, scriptwriters, and directors in early adulthood. Lai Man-wai, in particular, had nurtured an immense interest in filmmaking. He bought books about cinematography from the United States and became absorbed in the art of motion picture photography, together with his friend, Law Wing-cheung (Luo Yongxiang), who was to become Hong Kong's first professional cinematographer.⁵³ Such enthusiasm would result not only in the first cinema but also the first film production company run by local Chinese.

The significance of the World was that, apart from being the first cinema founded by local Chinese, it was probably the "first theatre in the territory to regularly program Western *and* Chinese films."⁵⁴ As seen from the advertisements, there were pictures from Europe and Hollywood by Pathé, Warner Bros., and Paramount, alongside those latest productions from Shanghai, then known as the "Hollywood of the East," by studios including Great China Liliun (Dazhonghua baihe) Pictures Co. and Commercial Press. Apart from offering various selections and coming up with new programs once every three days, the World also paid attention to improvements of the film-viewing experience. For example, in-house film narrators were employed, and a well-crafted screen costing HK\$3,000 was installed only one year after the cinema's opening.⁵⁵

In addition to having always done its utmost to guarantee the quality of film screening and viewing, the World also made great efforts to initiate new business strategies, making the enterprise an all-round entertainment industry. For example, the cinema demonstrated two marketing strategies commonly used today: offering value-added experience and targeting festive consumers. Before or after the screenings, audiences at the World could enjoy acrobatic shows or musical performances. During Christmas, and alternatively the birthday of Confucius, patrons were offered gifts⁵⁶ or a lucky draw.⁵⁷ Management of the World also made efforts to expand its business. Three months after its opening, the World called for advertising, offering advertisement space on screen and in the handbills and brochures.⁵⁸ And the efforts paid off. Evidence shows that the World was indeed well regarded at the time. During its first two years in business, the World was selected

twice by the Hong Kong government as the spot to entertain the visiting U.S. Navy.⁵⁹

Such efforts, however, did not protect the Lai's from financial pressure and eventually the fatal blow from the general strike in 1925. The brothers tried hard to remain proprietors by selling off shares but finally had to relinquish the World to its creditor, Lo Gun's Ming Tat Company.⁶⁰

Distribution

Founded by Lo Gun in the 1920s, the Ming Tat Company was the earliest film distributor in Hong Kong, which the World relied on for its supply of films. In 1924, the Coronet advertised in the *Chinese Mail* that the management, that is, Lo Gun, traveled to the United States to meet with Charlie Chaplin and secured the right to serve as China's exclusive agent for Chaplin's productions.⁶¹ Ming Tat, the owner of the Coronet, as mentioned in the previous section, was also involved in the film exhibition business even before it took over the World.

The company's business kept soaring in the 1930s. For instance, in 1932 the representatives of Ming Tat traveled to the United States to purchase productions from two Hollywood majors, that is, First National Pictures and Warner Bros.⁶² In addition to owning Coronet and the World, Ming Tat later took control of two more cinemas in Hong Kong: the Queen's Theatre and the Central Theatre. In 1935, Lo Gun also ventured into the film production business at a key moment, running the Chun Yip (Zhenye) Film Company.⁶³ The company's manager, Pang Nin, was one of Hong Kong's pioneers in film production.

Production

The Lai brothers, in particular Lai Man-wai, were celebrated as the pioneers of Hong Kong cinema. By setting up the China Sun (Minxin) Motion Picture Co. in 1923, the Lai's became the first in Hong Kong to have proprietorship over both film exhibition and production.

On December 13, 1922, Lai Man-wai, "a local entrepreneur," so called by the *Chinese Mail*, registered a film production company under the name "China Sun Motion Picture Co. Ltd." and raised capital of HK\$500,000 at HK\$5 per share.⁶⁴ The China Sun Co. was officially set up on July 14, 1923,

and released its first production in March 1924 at Lai's own cinema, the World. China Sun started out shooting newsreels and documentaries of local events, such as dragon boat races, a U.S. aviator arriving in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong governor inspecting a military parade during the celebration ceremony of the birthday of King George V, and so on.⁶⁵ In addition to local news, there were also rare records of Sun Yat-sen's military campaigns taking place in China.

The year 1924 witnessed the emergence of a number of Hong Kong's earliest film production companies, all founded by local Chinese. These companies included Dai Hon (Dahan), Leung Yee (Liangyi), Kwong Ah (Guangya), and Sei Si (Sishi). Dai Hon was set up by Pang Nin, who later worked as the manager for Lo Gun's film company, Chun Yip—as mentioned earlier. Pang was a cinematographer educated in the United States. Unlike China Sun, Dai Hon was less an enterprise that made films than a service provider. The company provided shooting services on demand for family events, advertisements, and other production-related services. It even declared that requests for shooting of narrative film genres with scripts involving themes like “rewarding the good and punishing the bad” would be welcomed.⁶⁶ In the spring of 1924, Dai Hon was engaged by a local merchant, Mok Kon-sang (Mo Gansheng), to film at a school that Mok was sponsoring in his China hometown.⁶⁷ The company was also appointed by the Coronet to shoot a newsreel of the British comedian Harry Lauder when he visited Hong Kong.⁶⁸ According to Yu Mo-wan, a Hong Kong film historian, Dai Hon was commissioned to shoot some of the earliest short narrative films in Hong Kong, including Leung Yee's *The Calamity of Money* (*Jinqian nie*, dir. Lo Kok-fei, 1924), Kwong Ah's *A Thief Comes Unstuck* (*Zuozei bucheng*, 1924), and *Army Dream* (*Congjun meng*, dir. Chan Kwan-chiu, 1926).

Leung Yee was founded by Lo Kok-fei with partners. Lo was an all-round practitioner in the early film industry. In 1923, Lo Kok-fei, then the manager of Macau's Victoria Theatre, was invited by the Coronet to be a special film narrator.⁶⁹ Starting in April 1924, Lo wrote regularly for Hong Kong's first newspaper film page, “Ying Hei Ho (Yingxihao),” or “Film Corner,” launched by the *Chinese Mail*. At the same time, he remained active in the Hong Kong film scene, assisting the management of the Coronet, translating synopses for the cinema's film handbills and brochures,⁷⁰ and founding at least two film production companies, while at the same time taking up directing and acting in film productions. *The Calamity of Money* (1924), the

only production by Leung Yee, was well received when it was released in late 1924. The film was a “short comedy of moral values, filmed on the Kowloon side of Hong Kong.”⁷¹

At about the same time, Dai Hon’s founder, Pang Nin, together with Lo Kok-fei and Chan Kwan-chiu (the latter being the manager of the Coronet), set up yet another film production company, Kwong Ah. In November 1924, the *Chinese Mail* reported that a number of cinemas competed for the theatrical right of Kwong Ah’s newly completed *Army Dream* (1926).⁷² However, due to the general strike, the film was not released until 1926.

Sei Si, being contemporary with Dai Hon, Leung Yee, and Kwong Ah, advertised a public call for cast and script in September 1924,⁷³ supposedly for the production of a film to be entitled *One True Love* (*Shui shi zhenai*). Soon afterward, by November, the shooting of the film was taking place at various spots across Hong Kong, including the Castle Peak in the New Territories, the Western district, and North Point on Hong Kong island.⁷⁴ This production, however, was never released, and whether or not it was completed remains unknown. Like Dai Hon, Sei Si also provided shooting services on demand.⁷⁵

These film production companies, while still taking shape, were already facing criticism from local movie lovers for their lack of accomplishment. The crowd was desperately eager to have a locally produced feature film, something that could measure up to two applauded Chinese productions, Shanghai Film Company’s *Revival of an Old Well* (*Gujing chongbo ji*, dir. Dan Duyu, 1923) and Mingxing Film Company’s *An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa* (*Gu’er jiu zu ji*, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1923). Leung Yee’s short comedy *The Calamity of Money* (1924) was literally too short to meet expectations. The anxious public did not have to wait long. For in February 1925, Hong Kong saw its first feature-length production (of eight reels), *Love Is Dangerous* (*Rouge, Yanzhi*, dir. Lai Buk-hoi, 1925),⁷⁶ by China Sun. The film was directed and written by Lai Buk-hoi, starring Lai Man-wai and Leung Siu-bo (Liang Shaopo). In the advertisements, *Love Is Dangerous* was recommended for its moral values, amusing plot, expressive acting, delicate setting, and lighting quality. Released at none other than the China Sun’s own exhibition outlet, the World Theatre, the production was a huge success, attracting full houses and having its period of showing extended.

With growing involvement in the film industry, from exhibition, to distribution, to production, local Chinese gradually moved up front in the early Hong Kong film scene during the 1920s. They transformed the early film-

scape of Hong Kong, changing the relationship between film, as a Western new marvel, and the local Hong Kong society: the meaning of film for the Hong Kong Chinese had changed from an imported novelty to an indigenized commercial activity, and this change laid a firm foundation for subsequent developments of the Hong Kong film industry. The determination to succeed in improving this new industry among Hong Kong locals had nourished a social tendency toward viewing film as a cultural institution.

Such changed perceptions toward film and the growing concerns over the development of film industry led directly to the emergence of Hong Kong's first film page appearing in the local Chinese newspapers.

CINEMA AS A CULTURAL INSTITUTION: FILM CULTURE IN EARLY HONG KONG

The Rise of Cultural Awareness

On February 19, 1924, the *Chinese Mail* launched a short film column, which marked the Chinese press's first attempt to give analytic and critical comments on film-related activities. Two months later, from April 19 onward, the column expanded into a weekly film page named "Ying Hei Ho" ("Film Corner"). It was published every Saturday until March 7, 1925, a total of thirty-eight issues. The launch of *Film Corner* in the 1920s was certainly no overnight sensation. Film had by that time become a regular form of entertainment and a more indigenous practice among the local Chinese.

First, we note that from the 1900s to 1920s, there was a dramatic increase in film exhibitions in Hong Kong (table 3.2) and a growing involvement of the local Chinese in the film industry.

Second, during this period the Chinese had evolved from passive receivers to active participants in the film industry. As observed in the *Chinese Mail*, the earliest films shown in Hong Kong were without exception imported productions with Western casts and crew. Starting in the mid-1910s, there were mentions of Chinese performances in Western productions. And 1920s saw a blooming industry where Chinese productions began to occupy more and more screen time locally. The Hong Kong film industry was becoming indigenous.

"Film Corner" occupied a full upper-half page of the newspaper, with articles about films produced both abroad and locally (table 3.3). Based on the

different purposes they distinctively served, these articles can be categorized into four domains (table 3.4): film review, which introduced and commented on new movies; industry news, which covered new business and technological developments in the film entertainment industry; movie star news, which followed the public exposure and private lives of movie stars; and film appreciation, which provided a wide variety of educational resources aiming to enhance the general public's overall ability to appreciate film—being, after all, an innovative art and entertainment form.

The figures in tables 3.3 and 3.4 reveal a vibrant film culture in formation in the early 1920s, reflecting that Western films were well appraised and Chinese films were equally important, while the Hong Kong film industry was still taking shape. The predominant stance of “Film Corner” can be summed up in the following four tendencies:

1. The column focused on Western productions, and news about the movie stars proved to be the most popular among readers.
2. Coverage of movie heartthrobs ranged from fact to rumor and gossip about their latest activities, personal details, and private life.
3. The Chinese film industry was positioned at center stage, and everything about Chinese productions, from script to acting to cinema-

Table 3.2. Film Advertisements and News Coverage in the *Chinese Mail*, 1900–1920s

Year	1900s	1910s	1920s
<i>Advertisement</i>	111	366	2,342
<i>News coverage</i>	30	104	387

Note: Articles from special issues on films not included.

Table 3.3. Regions Mentioned in “Film Corner,” 1924–1925

Region	Foreign countries	China	Hong Kong	Others
<i>Number of appearances</i>	151	87	32	21

Table 3.4. Types of Article in “Film Corner,” 1924–1925

Region	Foreign countries	China	Hong Kong	Others
<i>Film review</i>	25	39	4	
<i>Industry news</i>	6	12	11	
<i>Movie star news</i>	83	8	0	
<i>Film appreciation</i>	28	36	11	21

tography, in particular technical and artistic aspects, attracted close attention.

4. The development of the Hong Kong film industry was under close scrutiny, and concerns were raised on how to improve local production values and the standard of appreciation within the local viewing community.

With these key orientations in mind, “Film Corner” can be seen to have closely witnessed and specifically evaluated the development of this new entertainment industry in the sense that it was clearly inclined to explore various kinds of cultural significance associated with film.

Such concerns, moreover, showed that the film page was also characterized by a new species of cultural awareness—as radically different from the traditional Chinese thinking—initiated by the cultured bourgeois elites. Through these endeavors undertaken by individual film critics, film industry was to become a culturally influential power for the local bourgeois public, instead of being just another supplementary business capitalizing on the rise of a new kind of entertainment. With the birth of film criticism (or film-related criticism—to be precise), indeed, the Hong Kong film industry developed into a quintessential element in what Jürgen Habermas calls the “bourgeois public sphere”—which is “conceived . . . as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, *to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour.*”⁷⁷ The role of film criticism, reflecting the transformation of private interests into public cultural concerns, can be further followed by looking at a set of rigorously institutionalized standards regulated by the film page.

Film Culture in Early Hong Kong and Its Emphases

In its first appearance, “Film Corner” made an outspoken statement, written by its chief contributor, Lo Kok-fei, declaring unequivocally the film page’s social and cultural vision:

Film is indisputably a classy form of entertainment with potential educational benefit and, in particular, moral values. It can be instrumental in supplementing the low educational and cultural level within the Chinese

community. There have been attempts to see improvements in these areas, yet due to the high illiteracy rate, little has been accomplished. Film can achieve much in this capacity since, first, as an art form it impresses; and, second, as the product of Western civilization it cultivates. Yet film is still being perceived as mere entertainment by many due to the fact that little of its cultural value has been explored. It is with such an impetus that the editor launched the weekly "Film Corner" and invited me to be one of the contributors.⁷⁸

Lo Kok-fei, as discussed previously, possessed extended experience in the film industry, ranging from cinema management, film production, and acting to film criticism. Among Hong Kong filmmakers at the time, there was no better spokesman than such an all-rounded practitioner to convey concerns and expectations regarding filmmaking. Lo's ideas can in fact be seen as reflecting four aesthetic inclinations. First, they show a deliberate gesture toward establishing a specialist field of film criticism. Second, they are concerned about the civic education function of film. Third, they are devoted to both film technologies and its artistic specialties. Last, they expect to establish a complete and consistent system of film theories and concepts. Characterized by these fundamentally teleological dispositions, "Film Corner" reflected film as a cultural institution in early Hong Kong, and its social and cultural concerns can be categorized into the following five domains: appreciation, education, art and science, concept and translation, and international aspiration.

Appreciation

The first domain was cinema etiquette. Critics made a list of practices that were considered inappropriate for any serious attempt at film appreciation. For example, they advised against reading through film handbills and brochures before the actual screening, since the practice would undermine the appreciation of the plot.⁷⁹ Also, since hawkers and noisy crowds greatly disturbed the viewing experience, sensible audiences were encouraged to attend well-managed cinemas with civilized patrons, comfortable seating, and good lighting.⁸⁰ As for choosing programs, cinemagoers were told to refrain from being casually won over by film advertisements. Instead, they should be adequately informed about, and be able to judge for themselves, the quality of particular productions based on, for example, directorship and perfor-

mances,⁸¹ and should frequently seek references from film reviews as well.⁸²

Concerns were raised about the way film reviews were composed. Two major shortcomings among film critics were identified: some failed to display substantial understanding about the cinematic arts,⁸³ while others were being too harsh about Chinese and local productions.⁸⁴ It was advised that film critics should be knowledgeable about both the art and the scientific aspects of cinema. Also, it was stressed that the tendency in only using Western productions as the sole standard in film reviews should be avoided, and that film critics should always take into account the difference in levels of technological development, financial investment, and cultural preference between the Chinese and Western film industries.⁸⁵ Prejudiced accounts would be unproductive in furthering the development of Chinese film industry, and so more recognition should be given to its achievements so far.⁸⁶

Education

In its inauguration, "Film Corner" emphasized cinema's role in education, making an argument that film should first and foremost be an educational tool, not just an entertainment. Some observers expressed relief on realizing that film was beginning to receive recognition from society solely because of its artistic and social functions, and it was this growing recognition that made critics optimistic about the prosperous future of the Chinese film industry, brought about by its functions of education.⁸⁷ Some columnists further pointed out that the Chinese film industry should produce more movies for moral education purposes, so as to replace prevailing genres of foreign movies, like the detective genre and romance, that were deemed to "hinder the development of civil education," merely due to differences between Chinese and Western culture.⁸⁸

"Film Corner" provided detailed recommendations on how to incorporate moral education into film. First, in view of moneymaking as the widely expected objective in Chinese film industry, the film page summoned concern for a serious and thorough review of the industry as a whole, particularly scriptwriting, for the sake of pursuing a mission of moral betterment and popularization of education.⁸⁹ As a means of social education, filmmakers were asked to adopt the vernacular—which was commonly used by the general public—in subtitles, instead of the classical Chinese conventionally used only by the educated elites.⁹⁰ Some columnists analyzed how animated

images as visual aids could assist children in more effectively understanding what they were learning. Furthermore, they reminded filmmakers that, in the process of film production, “the fundamental purpose of filmmaking cannot be forgotten and mistaken, the industry cannot go awry in terms of solely fulfilling entertainment purposes, [and] children should not be shaped to only enjoy the pleasure of visual satisfaction while neglecting intelligence building.”⁹¹

Art and Science

“Film Corner” also devoted itself to the enhancement of knowledge in cinematic arts, with articles that covered film history, aesthetic appreciation, and technical understanding. “The Evolution of Film,” a series of five articles written by Lo Kok-fei, for example, provided a comprehensive account of the principle of film and its evolution, dating from optical theories developed by the Greeks and Romans to the modern invention of the camera and its use in filmmaking, and introducing the different names of film in different countries.⁹² Some other articles, furthermore, proposed the idea of “five basic domains in film studies,” dividing film production into “script-writing, directing, performing, cinematography, and makeup,” and each of these domains was given extensive discussion.⁹³ Such in-depth examination and enthusiastic pursuit of film knowledge and culture undertaken by these early film critics constituted the framework of film studies.

The most commonly explored topics in such articles were those related to the art and technique of performance and cinematography. The discussion of art and techniques of performing mainly focused on methodological issues such as cast training, practicing facial expressions, makeup, characterization, and so on. Some articles noted that, in order to enhance empathy in performing, filmmakers employed an orchestra to play live music to stimulate the actors’ cultivation of sentiments;⁹⁴ others mentioned that detailed suggestions were made about how to perform fight scenes featuring kung fu;⁹⁵ some pointed out that costumes should not be created only to look lavish and grand but rather to fit particular film characters and plots.⁹⁶ Articles provided technological explorations of cinematography, introducing, for instance, technical issues like lighting, developing, retouching, coloring, and so on,⁹⁷ and they conducted detailed analyses of the popular tricks featured in the innovative special effects in Hollywood cinematography.⁹⁸ Substantial

attention was also devoted to topics relating to *mise-en-scène*, encompassing concerns over the number of cameras and their arrangements, lighting and setting design, and so on.

Concept and Translation

The problem of translation also aroused enormous attention from contributors to “Film Corner.” The chaotic and inconsistent translating of titles of foreign films and their actors’ names led very commonly to, for example, the same movie or actor having many different Chinese translations. A typical example of these confusions is that “film” was given a variety of Chinese translations: the term *dianying* prevailed in the Beijing-Tianjin regions, *yingxi* in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang districts, and *yinghua* in the Canton–Hong Kong areas.⁹⁹ Showing their concern over such inconsistencies in translation, some articles provided a glossary to identify these cross-regional discrepancies.¹⁰⁰ Certain visionary columnists became aware that this translation problem could well hinder the development of film exhibition, resulting in foreseeable ways, in distortion of the meaning of film as a whole. They hence suggested that matters relating to translation should be left to the film distributors who were bound to come up with a consistent set of terminology.

International Aspiration

“Film Corner” featured film developments in Hong Kong and the entire Chinese region, showing that even in the beginning the film industry already had ambitions of being an international player. The following anecdotes illustrate film practitioners’ determination. In the winter of 1923, on knowing that the president of a motion picture association in the United States, a certain Mr. Wood, was paying a visit to Shanghai, the local Coronet Theatre immediately grasped the opportunity to send its staff as tour guides to accompany Wood in order to learn from him about new developments in areas like film theories and facilities management.¹⁰¹ In the summer of 1924, some film scholars and journalists from Hong Kong and China visited Nikkatsu Production Company in Japan. They undertook a special journey to the company’s Kansai Studio in Kyoto. “Film Corner” reported the visit with a meticulous description of Nikkatsu’s facilities, the scale of its cast and studios, the leading movie stars of the studio, and so on.¹⁰²

Local filmmakers’ aspiration to be part of the global film market is indi-

cated by the English titles that popular Chinese films at that time, like *Women Skeletons* (*Hongfen kulou*, dir. Guan Haifeng, 1922) and *An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa* (1923), carried. Such an endeavor reflected the filmmakers' ambition that Chinese films be produced not only "for satisfying our nation-wide need" but for "striving for the international status" as well as "financial successes" like those enjoyed by popular foreign productions.¹⁰³ Having such high expectations, of course, they were also aware that the standards of Chinese films still needed improvement. Doubting the effectiveness of certain superficial marketing gimmicks meant to attract the foreign market, such as bilingual subtitling, they raised the point that Chinese filmmakers should first and foremost pay attention to the artistic aspects in film production, arguing that artistic advancement was the crucial element needed for winning recognition abroad.

To sum up, through close monitoring of the development of the film industry in early Hong Kong, "Film Corner" revealed the local society's ever-growing awareness of cinema as one of the major cultural discourses in the bourgeois public sphere. In other words, a film page that was supposed to express the private utterances of individual cultured elites had been transformed into a site for public cultural discourse, which, to use Miriam Hansen's words, "the dominant public sphere leaves out, privatizes, or acknowledges only in an abstract and fragmented form."¹⁰⁴ In fact, this unique kind of cultural discourse, characterized by strong social and political concerns, echoed what Leo Lee calls the "business of Enlightenment"—which for him had permeated the cultural scenes of Chinese modernity as a whole. Actually, early Hong Kong film culture can be seen as a particular mode of cultural enterprise in Chinese *qimeng* (enlightenment), "a term taken from the traditional educational practice in which a child received his first lesson from a teacher or tutor."¹⁰⁵ Through this cultural enterprise, we can see that while social critics tended to endow what was supposed to be no more than a certain kind of entertainment with social and moral functions, film entrepreneurs were also aware of their role and responsibilities as social reformers with a nationalist undertone. Indeed, a geographically small and politically "forsaken" island, early Hong Kong did nourish a film culture whose nature was in line with a broader historical context featured by a Republican nationalism that, to borrow Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh's incisive commentary on the Republican cinema as a whole, "was founded with a vision and ambition to rebuild China as a modern nation-state . . . [whose] ethos was uplifting, forward-looking and resolutely 'virtuous.'"¹⁰⁶

The early Hong Kong film development reached its summit in the 1920s,

but at that prosperous moment it suffered an outrageous challenge. On May 30, 1925, demonstrators in Shanghai fighting for labor rights against Japanese textile factory owners were attacked by the British police force, suffering deaths and casualties. This event, known as the May Thirtieth Incident, directly led to the general strike, which first broke out in Shanghai, then quickly swept through almost all Chinese regions. In June, over 250,000 workers in Hong Kong went on strike,¹⁰⁷ 40 percent of the Hong Kong population, and they left Hong Kong to bolster strike actions. The strike paralyzed the entire social life and economy of Hong Kong. Most local newspapers, Chinese and English alike, ceased to publish because of the strike—the *Chinese Mail* only resumed operation in late 1925.¹⁰⁸ The Hong Kong government imposed curfews and banned all public gatherings. All entertainment spots, including the cinemas, were closed for more than a month.¹⁰⁹ It was not until October 1926 that the general strike in Hong Kong finally ended.

The sixteen-month strike paralyzed Hong Kong and dealt a heavy blow to the early Hong Kong film industry. The *Chinese Mail* reported that out of the seventeen Hong Kong film production companies, only a very few survived the strike.¹¹⁰ Such an unproductive and poignant phase in Hong Kong history doubtlessly caused a destructive break, seriously hindering the once-anticipated growth of the film industry.

CONCLUSION

Aiming to trace the early development of Hong Kong film and to restore a currently incomplete and blurry image of the early Hong Kong filmscape, this chapter has scrutinized an array of personages and events by means of reading early Hong Kong English and Chinese newspaper coverage. This early period of evolution, or indeed grafting of the newly imported Western novelty onto an essentially Chinese cultural soil, was not without impediments due to a series of innate disadvantages, such as a “small local market, minimal capital, inadequate human resources, and sterile innovativeness.”¹¹¹ But films soon became favorably and auspiciously indigenized because of the vast economic and cultural resources that this new industry was able to provide. Following such a successful indigenization, Hong Kong film development reached its first important climax in the mid-1920s.

The early Hong Kong film development that ended in the mid-1920s formed a quintessential foundation for the industry’s eventual bursting into

bloom in later decades, not only inaugurating the enormous commercial success of this particular entertainment industry, but also boosting a unique mode of cultural institution that fulfilled the local entrepreneurs' as well as cultural elites' social and ideological pursuits. This somewhat unexpected evolution led to a distinctively reciprocal relationship between film and society, revealing how the former constantly performed a variety of social functions while contributing greatly to the economic progress of the latter. Therefore, in a thorough account of the overall Hong Kong film development, the 1920s cannot be seen as a primitive period, but should rightly be regarded as a formative one that had far-reaching influences on the later, notable growth of the Hong Kong film industry, setting the stage for the golden age of Hong Kong cinema, that is, the 1930s.

Notes

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2. Kar Law and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 6–7.

3. Liu Shuyong, *Jianming xianggang shi* [A Brief History of Hong Kong] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2009), 91.

4. Liu, *Jianming xianggang shi*, 64, 94.

5. Cheng Po-hung, *Entertainment for the Chinese in Hong Kong over a Century* (Hong Kong: iGlobe Publishing, 2013), 8.

6. Kar Law and Frank Bren, *From Artform to Platform: Hong Kong Plays and Performances, 1900–1941* (Hong Kong: International Association of Theatre Critics, 1999), 15.

7. Law and Bren, *From Artform to Platform*, 4–5.

8. Yu Shengwu and Liu Cunkuan, *Shijiu shiji de xianggang* [Hong Kong in the Nineteenth Century] (Hong Kong: Qilun, 1994), 300.

9. Yu and Liu, *Shijiu shiji de xianggang*, 302.

10. Yu and Liu, *Shijiu shiji de xianggang*, 302.

11. "Local and General," *China Mail*, April 24, 1897, 3.

12. In the case of the "Hong Kong tour" of the Cinematograph—as confirmed by Law

Kar and Frank Bren after having verified it with L'Institut Lumière, there is no record of Professor Charvet being one of the representatives, nor is there any record of Professor Charvet having purchased a machine from the Lumière brothers. According to *Société Lumière*, the current owner of the brand, since 1896 there had been over six hundred copycat machines manufactured or patented in France alone. For more details, please refer to Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 5–6.

13. "Local and General," *China Mail*, April 27, 1897, 2.
14. "Announcement," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, April 28, 1897, 2.
15. "Local and General," *China Mail*, April 27, 1897, 2.
16. "H. Wellby-Cook's Animatoscope," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, August 19, 1897, 1.
17. "Xylophone & Kinematograph Entertainment," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, December 23, 1899, 1.
18. "Announcement," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, April 18, 1900, 2.
19. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, "Translating Yingxi: Chinese Film Genealogy and Early Cinema in Hong Kong," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 9, no. 1 (2015): 89–90.
20. "Xilai yuan yan huaqi shengdong huaxi" [Lively Moving Pictures from the United States at Hei Loi], Supplements of *Chinese Mail*, October 28, 1902, 1; emphasis added.
21. Yu Mo-wan, *Xianggang dianying shihua (juan yi)-mopian niandai: 1896–1929* [Notes on Hong Kong Film History I: The Silent Era, 1896–1929] (Hong Kong: Subculture Press, 1996), 37; Zhao Weifang, *Xianggang dianying shi (1897–2006)* [A History of Hong Kong Cinema (1897–2006)] (Beijing: China Broadcast Television Press, 2007), 15; Zhou Chengren and Li Yizhuang, *Zaoqi Xianggang dianying shi, 1897–1945* [A History of Early Hong Kong Cinema, 1897–1945] (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2009), 20; Stephanie Po-yin Chung, *Xianggang yingshiye bainian* [One Hundred Years Hong Kong Cinema and Television Industry] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2011), 47.
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27. "The Bijou Scenic Theatre," *South China Morning Post*, November 1, 1910, 10.
28. "Bijou Scenic Theatre," *South China Morning Post*, November 26, 1910, 10.
29. "Bijou Scenic Theatre," *Hong Kong Telegraph*, December 3, 1910, 16.
30. "Bijou," *Hong Kong Telegraph*, June 2, 1913, 11.
31. "To-night," *China Mail*, November 1, 1907, 1.
32. "The Empire—New Cinematograph Theatre," *South China Morning Post*, April 4, 1910, 11.
33. *Ibid.*
34. "The New Theatre—Opened Last Night," *South China Morning Post*, May 27, 1911, 8.

35. "Announcement," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, December 28, 1918, 6.
36. "Xin bizhao yinghua xiyuan" [Coronet Theatre], *Chinese Mail*, June 27, 1919, 3.
37. "Gaoxing yuan rongji yan hedingcai ban" [Performances by Ho Ting Choi Troupe at Ko Shing Theatre], Supplements of *Chinese Mail*, January 1, 1903, 1.
38. "Chongqing yuan huaji yan shidi fenchen yingxu" [Stevenson's Pictures at Chung Hing], Supplements of *Chinese Mail*, January 19, 1903, 1.
39. Wang Gang, *An Illustrated Story of Wyndham Street, Hong Kong 1840s-1960s* (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2008), 254.
40. "The Imperial Bioscope Co.," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, January 9, 1903, 2.
41. "The Imperial Bioscope," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, January 8, 1903, 2.
42. "The Imperial Bioscope Co.," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, January 9, 1903, 2.
43. "The Imperial Bioscope Co.," *Hong Kong Daily Press*, January 7, 1903, 2.
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48. "Huashang bu tai xi tebie tongtian yinghua chang" [Outdoor Film Screening by Chinese Merchants], *Chinese Mail*, August 25, 1916, 3.
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54. Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 47.
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57. "Xin shijie xiyuan shengdan ri teshe zengpin guanggao" [Advertisement by New World Theatre: Special Gifts on Birthday of Confucius], *Chinese Mail*, September 28, 1921, 3.
58. "Huashang Xin shijie yinghua xiyuan guangao" [Advertisement by Chinese Merchants' New World Theatre], Supplements of *Chinese Mail*, October 12, 1921, 3.
59. "Huashang Xin shijie yinghua xiyuan guangao"; "Ying haijun yan mei shuibing" [British Navy Receiving U.S. Navy], *Chinese Mail*, October 31, 1922, 2.
60. "Xin shijie yingxi yuan zhi jiu gudong," 3.

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63. "Zhenye zhipian chang canquan ji," 2.
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67. "Xiangshan mofan xiang zhi yingpian" [A Film about Xiangshan], *Chinese Mail*, May 24, 1924, 9.
68. "Yingxi xiaoshi" [Film News], *Chinese Mail*, February 17, 1925, 2.
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72. "Zuixin yingpian jiang chushi" [Latest Films to Be Released], *Chinese Mail*, November 12, 1924, 9.
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