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

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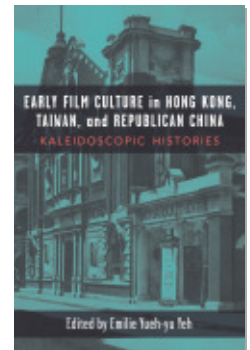
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## CHAPTER 8

### *Movie Matchmakers*

#### The Intermediaries between Hollywood and China in the Early Twentieth Century

*Yongchun Fu*

This chapter considers at length the perception and practices of intermediaries during the early twentieth century, with the focus on their contributions to the Chinese film industry. It is a cliché to say that Chinese filmmakers learned from Hollywood in the first half of the twentieth century. However, major executives and directors in the Chinese film industry such as Zhang Shichuan never visited Hollywood. Their perceptions of the American film industry were largely obtained through American filmmakers who came to China and through watching American movies, many of which were imported by Chinese distributors. Such an interesting phenomenon calls for light on a group of figures who have long since passed into oblivion or are misunderstood in the history of Chinese cinema: the intermediaries. Who are they? To what extent were they responsible for the expansion of Hollywood business in China? What did the intermediaries bring to the Chinese film industry? In the literature on Chinese film history fueled by nationalism, a number of intermediaries are either buried in the dust or labeled as “aggressors” or “traitors,” since they are regarded as helping the expansion of Hollywood’s business and thus oppressing the domestic film industry. In my view, this nationalistic film historiography reduces the complex role that the intermediaries played in Chinese film history. Employing extensive research in Chinese and American archives, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that the intermediaries served as “matchmakers” between Hollywood and

the Chinese film industry. I argue that the intermediaries bridged the film industries of Hollywood and China and made significant contributions to the evolution of the Chinese film industry.

*Intermediary* in this chapter refers to the figures and enterprises responsible for the intercommunication between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. Hao Yen-p'ing's seminal account on the compradors in modern China provides an excellent model for my study on the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry.<sup>1</sup> Hao articulates the significance of the comprador as a middleman to China's early industrialization. In contrast to the criticism that the compradors were the "spearheads of foreign colonialism and economic imperialism," Hao points out that the compradors in some extent "competed with foreign merchants in the management of modern enterprises, and thus in a way functioned to prevent the unchecked foreign incursion."<sup>2</sup> Xiao Zhiwei is one pioneer who notices the significance of the intermediaries in Chinese film studies. Xiao incisively introduces the notion of "in-between production" into the history of how distributors appropriated Hollywood content in the Chinese cultural context.<sup>3</sup> "In-between production" refers to a process of "repetitions, evocations, translations and reproductions" in areas like the introduction of English words into Chinese in linguistic studies.<sup>4</sup> In the vein of Hao and Xiao, I intend to address the functions of the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry in the early twentieth century. Two types of intermediaries are stressed here, that is, (1) American citizens who came to China for the film business, exemplified by William Henry Lynch; and (2) Chinese merchants who did business with American corporations, in particular, film distributors, exemplified by Lo Kan (Lu Gun, Lu Gen). It should be noted that the intermediaries between Hollywood and China are not limited to these two groups. The students who returned from an American study background, such as Hong Shen, marked themselves as prominent intermediaries in Chinese film history by introducing American film knowledge and importing sound film equipment to the Chinese film industry. In addition, it is necessary to point out that the functions of intermediaries are reciprocal. While this study focuses on the influence of the intermediaries from Hollywood on China, the opposite deserves critical attention as well.

To provide a background, I start with a brief introduction of the nationalistic approach to Chinese film studies and the attitudes of its proponents about intermediaries. The chapter then follows the contributions of American practitioners to the Chinese film industry, a group of intermedi-

aries who are labeled “aggressors” in nationalistic writings. I identify William Lynch, the cinematographer of the Asiatic Film Company, as someone who played a crucial role in developing the skills and careers of the first generation of Chinese directors. The chapter then investigates Chinese merchants distributing Hollywood films in China, as the other type of intermediary. On one hand, these intermediaries helped the exploration by Hollywood in China as a critical sector in Hollywood’s strategy of localization, while on the other hand they benefited the Chinese film industry in various ways. The chapter concludes by suggesting in broader terms that patriotic sentiment should not be the only criterion in the study of Chinese film history.

### NATIONALISM IN CHINESE FILM STUDIES

The nationalistic approach dominates the study of Chinese film history. Nationalism is defined as a concept that emphasizes “national identity as that aspect of individuals’ self-image that is tied to their nation.”<sup>5</sup> China’s nationalism emerged along with the rise of the nation-state in modern China from the late nineteenth century. Nationalism grew into a major ideology of the Nationalist Party in the first half of the twentieth century. The nationalistic approach in the history texts coincides with the broad social context. As early as the 1930s, Gu Jianchen, one of the first film historians, subscribed to nationalism in his research.<sup>6</sup> Gu’s nationalistic sentiment is well expressed in his statement on the cinema department of the British American Tobacco Company, which produced films with Chinese casts and purchased small cinemas in 1920s China. The commercial expansion of the cinema department, from Gu’s point of view, was an example of “economic oppression” of the Chinese film industry.<sup>7</sup>

The nationalistic sentiment went further after the Communist Party takeover in 1949. According to Dirlik, Mao Zedong developed his ideas by “subsum[ing] Marxism with nationalism” and structured Chinese society with such a theory in mind.<sup>8</sup> In *History of the Development of Chinese Film*, Cheng Jihua and his colleagues consciously employ Mao Zedong’s thought in their study of Chinese film history. Cheng and his colleagues consider Chinese film history to be a struggle between “the progressive culture for socialism, national liberation and people’s democracy” and “imperialist and other reactive cultures.”<sup>9</sup> The contribution of the Chinese “national capitalists” prior to 1949 is only acknowledged due to their efforts to build a

national film industry and their patriotic sentiments. American merchants, together with Hollywood films, are regarded as a force of economic and cultural aggression against the national industry.

Within the theoretical framework of “national cinema,” the recent literature avoids the overideologization found in the previous literature; however, a focus on national building makes the role of foreigners a blind spot. In the wake of focusing on national cinema, Hu Jubin positions nationalism as a principal axis in Chinese films prior to 1949.<sup>10</sup> According to Hu, “What the Chinese cinema, as a national cinema, participated in and reflected, was a nationalism about politics.”<sup>11</sup> Hu divides the pre-1949 history of Chinese cinema into five periods and characterizes each period with a different type of nationalism. For instance, the 1920s saw the upsurge of industrial nationalism, which prioritized “the establishment of the film industry as the Chinese nation’s domestic industry.”<sup>12</sup> However, an exaggerated emphasis on nationalism in the Chinese film industry is liable to neglect the contribution of figures who had few connections with nation-building. For instance, American film merchants, in Hu’s account, are merely the rivals of the Chinese national industry, whose intention was to monopolize the film industry.<sup>13</sup> Apart from their stimulating the “advocacy of a national cinema” in China, Hu remains silent on the contributions of American merchants to the domestic film industry.<sup>14</sup>

#### AMERICAN FILM PRACTITIONERS IN CHINA

In Chinese film history, Zhang Shichuan is known as the investor in, founder of, and executive of Mingxing (Star Motion Picture Company) from its inception. In addition, Zhang, together with Zheng Zhengqiu, is regarded as the “Father of Chinese Cinema.” During his forty-year film career, Zhang Shichuan directed over 150 silent and sound films. However, prior to becoming involved in the film business, Zhang confessed that he seldom watched movies.<sup>15</sup> It was his experience as director of the Asiatic Film Company that inspired his interests in filmmaking and increased his film knowledge. The Asiatic Film Company was the first professional company in Chinese film history, but with staff from the United States and China. The following passage examines the contributions of the American film practitioners to the Chinese film industry, with special attention on William H. Lynch, the cinematographer and executive of the Asiatic Film Company.

Oddly enough, the Asiatic Film Company has received little attention in Chinese film studies. The name of the corporation is misspelled as “China Cinema Company” or “Asia Film Company” in the existing literature.<sup>16</sup> Early historical writings identified Benjamin Brodsky, the owner of China Cinema Company and the Variety Film Exchange, as the organizer of the Asiatic Film Company.<sup>17</sup> However, recent research suggests that Brodsky did not involve himself in the film business in China until the 1910s and his business had little connection with the Asiatic Film Company.<sup>18</sup> At this stage, it is safe to say that the Asiatic was in the hands of two American merchants in 1910s Shanghai: Thomas Henry Suffert (1869–1941) and Arthur Julius Israel (1875–1948). Like the mangling of its corporation name, these two names are mistakenly referred to as “Yashell” or “Elsser” and “Lehrmann.”<sup>19</sup> The Asiatic Film Company perhaps commenced its business in 1913 and was defunct after 1915.<sup>20</sup>

The contribution of Thomas H. Suffert to the Asiatic and Zhang Shichuan is very likely to remain in the financial and executive sections. Thomas Suffert was born in Cleveland, Ohio. He moved to Shanghai in 1895 for commercial exploration. The historical record shows that Suffert mainly served as a speculator in Shanghai.<sup>21</sup> In a 1916 passport application, Suffert is referred to as “the owner and manager of an American registered firm which engaged in the import and export trade with the United States and other countries,” the Central Trading Company in Shanghai.<sup>22</sup> With respect to the operation of the Asiatic, Suffert seems to have been its executive. A 1913 source shows that Suffert, representing the Asiatic Film Company, applied for permission to show films at the Little Street Theatre (*de la Rue Petit*) in Shanghai.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Suffert attended the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers under the name of the Asiatic Film Company in 1918.<sup>24</sup> As a friend of Zhang Shichuan, Suffert continued to participate in Zhang’s late film business, after the demise of the Asiatic. When Zhang Shichuan was organizing the Mutual Stock and Produce Company in 1921, the predecessor company of Mingxing, Suffert served as a consultant.<sup>25</sup> It was Suffert who introduced his friend Carl Louis Gregory to Zhang Shichuan. As a foremost cinematographer and a professor at Columbia University, Gregory favored Zhang Shichuan and his Mingxing in various ways, including film shooting, film printing, and script writing.<sup>26</sup> Suffert was also involved in the management of the Mingxing Film School in 1921. In addition, Mingxing’s affiliated cinema, Star, was registered under the name of Suffert in the United States for the sake of avoiding taxation.<sup>27</sup>

In comparison with Suffert, Arthur J. Israel appeared to have played a lesser role. The existing literature identifies Israel as the cameraman of the Asiatic.<sup>28</sup> However, no certain evidence has come to light so far to support this identification. Arthur Israel was born in San Francisco in 1875. In his twenties, Israel became a cigar dealer in California. His passport application records showed that Israel went to China as early as 1902.<sup>29</sup> In his thirty years in Shanghai, Israel mainly focused on the business in the Shanghai Life Insurance Company, a British Company with mostly American capital.<sup>30</sup> During the period from 1913 to 1915, Israel served as a director, the third highest position, in the company. In addition, he was occupied as the director of the Consolidated Rubber Estates Limited, a member of the board of directors of the Laou Kung Mow Cotton Spinning & Weaving Company, and an executive committee of the Shanghai Amateur Baseball League.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, during the period 1913–1915 when the Asiatic was active, Israel had to spend several months on a business trip to Vancouver and Hong Kong from November 1913 to March 1914.<sup>32</sup> Even if he did operate a camera, Israel could not have had enough time to produce more than a dozen films during this period. It seems that Israel was merely an investor in the Asiatic Film Company, given his abundant experience in finance and investment.<sup>33</sup> The credit of projecting films and the daily operation of the Asiatic should go to other figures.

I believe that an American citizen named William H. Lynch is owed the credit for this enterprise. Apart from English sources, one Chinese source supports my speculation.<sup>34</sup> Prior to becoming involved in the film business, William Lynch operated a photo studio named the North Beach Studio in Santa Monica (a city close to Hollywood) starting in 1905.<sup>35</sup> His experience in the photo studio facilitated his job in the motion picture industry as a cinematographer. In 1912, Lynch was hired to be a film cameraman by the Globe Motion Picture Company. Lynch, together with Rochefort Johns, initiated a three-month trip to Asia to film in locations including China.<sup>36</sup> This trip probably generated Lynch's interest in the Orient. Therefore, he agreed to join the Asiatic Film Company in Shanghai as early as January 27, 1913.<sup>37</sup>

The date when Lynch joined the Asiatic cannot be later than March 1913. The reason is that on that date, he wrote back from China to the *Daily Outlook*, a local newspaper issued in Santa Monica.<sup>38</sup> Lynch first described his experience in the Asiatic Film Company.

We have located a moving picture studio and complete plant for making and finishing moving pictures here. We are starting in a new field



Figure 8.1. Arthur Israel. Source: U.S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel 1918. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

and pictures made with Chinese actors are to be shown to the Chinese people. It is something that has not been done to this date and from reports we believe it will be a big success. We will also operate in connection with the production of the films, several theaters throughout China for the purpose of creating a greater demand and later on will put our entire time and efforts to the production of film only.<sup>39</sup>

According to this letter, it is clear that using Chinese actors was a deliberate production and marketing strategy for the Asiatic with the purpose of satisfying its target consumers: Chinese audiences. In addition, the letter demonstrates that even if the Asiatic Film Company was not originally organized by Israel and Suffert, their alleged predecessor, Benjamin Brodsky, might not have produced substantial movies, as is suggested in the existing literature.<sup>40</sup> To Lynch, a film-producing career seemed promising, and therefore he “decided to make [his] permanent home abroad (in China)” in 1913.<sup>41</sup>





Figure 8.2. Thomas Suffert. Source: U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert 1916. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration and [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

A 1914 report of *The Moving Picture World* provided a detailed illustration of the operation of the Asiatic.<sup>42</sup> The report is fairly reliable since the author, Clarke Irvine, wrote the report based on his meeting with William Lynch in China in 1913.<sup>43</sup> According to this report, William Lynch, the “Shanghai manager of the Asiatic Film Company,” was making films for the Asiatic, “which ha[d] many releases each month.”<sup>44</sup> In addition,

The Asiatic Film Company maintains a large studio in Shanghai, where sixteen star actors are daily posing before the camera. These men—no women are allowed to do this kind of work—are the first, and so far, the only Chinese to act before the camera. There are two directors and two interpreters who work under the supervision of Mr. Lynch. These stars are supported by a well-organized company of twenty-five actors. The laboratory and finishing plant is equipped to turn out 10,000 feet of finished film a day. The supply is for the entire country, and the releases are made just as in America and Europe. There are a number of theaters in Shanghai, two of which are operated by this company.<sup>45</sup>

The above passage clearly shows the significance of William Lynch to the Asiatic Film Company and by extension to the Chinese film industry in its initial stage. According to this passage, Lynch was in charge of not only projecting films, but also of all productions of the Asiatic Film Company. It was the most prominent position in the Asiatic, given that none of the other staff, foreigners or Chinese, had professional knowledge of how to produce motion pictures. Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu were arguably the two directors under the supervision of William Lynch. With respect to the division of labor in the Asiatic Film Company, Zhang Shichuan claimed that he was responsible for supervising camera movement, while Zheng was in charge of guiding the actors’ performance.<sup>46</sup> However, in the early 1910s, the perception and practice of director was not well developed within the Chinese film industry. In addition, the initial productions of Chinese films were close to a documentary of the original *wenmingxi* (civilized drama).<sup>47</sup> There were few jobs left for the directors once actors started to perform. Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier, Zhang’s directing knowledge was next to nothing at the beginning.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the position of Lynch in the productions of the Asiatic is likely to have been more significant than that of directors such as Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu.

William Lynch returned to the United States in June 1914. His initial

plan was to return to China as long as “the revolution in China subside[d] enough for operations to continue.”<sup>49</sup> However, why Lynch did not manage to travel back to China remains unclear. Lynch’s departure is one major reason why the Asiatic went into decline, apart from the shortage of film stock due to the outbreak of World War I.

Apart from the presence of Lynch, the Asiatic Film Company deserves notice because it is one of the first Chinese concerns that distributed films in overseas markets. In September 1913, Arthur R. Oberle, representing the Asiatic Film Company, passed by Honolulu when traveling back to the United States. Oberle stated that he secured “many thousand feet of pictures depicting actual scenes in the series of battles” in China.<sup>50</sup> Arguably, this is the documentary titled *Shanghai Battles* (1913) referred to in the Chinese records.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, I am unable to identify any exhibition information in the United States regarding the documentary. Nevertheless, the Asiatic Film Company successfully circulated its productions in Southeast Asia. An advertisement shows that *Khoojin Whatchay* (*A Poor Man Wins a Lottery*, 1913), a production of the Asiatic, was exhibited at the Empire Theatre in Singapore in 1917.<sup>52</sup> *Khoojin Whatchay* was arguably the first Chinese mainland film screened in Southeast Asia, the largest Chinese diasporic community. Chinese film companies then followed the pathway of the Asiatic and turned Southeast Asia into the largest overseas market for Chinese films in the first half of the twentieth century.

The contribution of the American intermediaries in many cases is not valued but attacked by Chinese historians blinded by nationalism. For instance, foreign figures in the Asiatic Film Company are described as imperialists who part of the economic and cultural aggression against China.<sup>53</sup> If we understand the political context in which these figures were denounced, the contribution of foreign figures in the Asiatic such as Lynch, I would argue, is greater than their potential threat to the Chinese film industry. In fact, the Asiatic can be seen as crucial to the emergence of the Chinese film industry. In addition, the films made by the company, as the first trial cooperation between foreign and Chinese practitioners, solicited the latter’s interest in filmmaking.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is not exaggerating to say that William Lynch was a “torchbearer” for Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, the so-called fathers of Chinese cinema, showing them how to handle the equipment, providing them knowledge in running the business. As a result, Zhang and Zheng set up Mingxing in 1922, which became the leader in the film industry for more than a decade.

William Lynch and his Asiatic Film Company are merely one example of numerous American practitioners who were active in modern China. American film practitioners facilitated the formation of Chinese film industry by systematically introducing filmmaking techniques and importing film equipment. With respect to the evaluation of the foreign intermediaries, Zheng Junli is balanced when he admits that much film knowledge of Chinese filmmakers was obtained from their working experiences with American intermediaries, apart from the “colonial aggression” supposedly perpetrated by these American merchants.<sup>55</sup>

#### CHINESE MERCHANTS STRADDLING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN HOLLYWOOD AND CHINA

We may now return to Zhang Shichuan. Apart from his early experience with the Asiatic, Zhang continuously updated his skills as a director through watching Hollywood films.<sup>56</sup> A large number of these Hollywood films were distributed by Chinese distributors, who constitute the second type of intermediary between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. In this section, I examine this type of intermediary and their contributions to the domestic film industry, with a focus on Lo Kan.

In the teens, American films were mainly brought to China by British and French film exchange corporations. The outbreak of World War I resulted in the upsurge of requests for American films due to the unavailability of French films. In 1921, Universal studio set up its distribution subsidiary in Shanghai. Fox, Paramount, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer followed suit in the 1930s. These Hollywood subsidiaries and some local distributors were the major players in the Chinese film market.<sup>57</sup> Powerful Chinese distributors often secured exclusive rights to exhibiting American films throughout China. A case in point is Lo Kan. Born in Canton in 1888, Lo became involved in the distribution business by establishing Hong Kong Amusements in 1921. In its heyday, from 1922 to 1923, Hong Kong Amusements almost monopolized the distribution of Hollywood films in China.<sup>58</sup> Even in the 1930s, when major Hollywood studios operated through their branch offices, Hong Kong Amusements maintained its close ties with Hollywood.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to Hong Kong Amusements, Lo operated and owned several large film firms involving equipment, distribution, and exhibition. These firms included China Theatre, Yangtze Amusements, Eastern Amusements,

Cathay Amusements, Puma Films, Theatre Equipment Company, and North China Amusements.<sup>60</sup> Film exhibition was one of his key businesses. In the 1930s, Lo Kan directed and controlled “more than thirty of the leading cinema-theaters in China and Hong Kong, several of which he owned.”<sup>61</sup> The highlight in Lo’s legend is his rebuilding Grand Theatre in Shanghai, updating it into a superior first-run cinema in the Far East. In 1932, Lo set up the United Theatres Corporation and registered it in the United States with 5 million Mexican dollars. It was probably the largest film business in China in the first half of the twentieth century in terms of registered capital. The United Theatres Corporation was designed to be a vertically integrated film enterprise including production, distribution, and exhibition. One intention of the company was to organize a theater chain that could monopolize the exhibition of Hollywood films in Shanghai. In its heyday, United Theatres encompassed nine movie houses, including the Grand, Cathay, Carlton, Isis, Paris, Crystal Palace, Ritz, Ward, and Pearl.<sup>62</sup>

As intermediaries, domestic film distributors such as Lo Kan benefited Hollywood’s expansion in unfamiliar markets like China. To Hollywood executives, the political, economic, and cultural situation in China was quite different from that in the United States. Domestic distributors could smooth the way for the business of Hollywood in China. For instance, the Isis theater served as the second-run theater for the United Artists in Shanghai. According to a resource in 1927, “The theater [was] located in Chinese territory and suffered very much from the strict Chinese martial law regulations.”<sup>63</sup> Under the management of Lo Kan, Isis changed its entrance to open into the International Settlement territory. Thereby, it successfully bypassed the Chinese military troubles. In addition, Lo’s expansion into the interior cities benefited the exhibition of United Artists movies. In 1928, Lo contemplated opening cinemas in interior cities including Ningbo, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Yantai, Jinan, and Wuxi. Lo’s plan brought an opportunity for the expansion of United Artists’ film business. United Artists noted in 1928 that “we [had] been able to negotiate for a number of our old pictures to play at these interior cities.”<sup>64</sup>

One prominent feature of the foreign film distributors was the position they straddled between America and China. Although the entire business of the distributors focused on the Chinese film market, most of the corporations owned and operated by the distributors were registered in the United States. There were several advantages in being an American corporation, one of which I want to stress. As an American corporation, Lo’s company could

seek support from the American authorities once conflicts happened. The American government was known for protecting its citizens and their economic interests in China. An instance is the opening of a theater in Changsha, an inner city of China. In 1923, Joseph Y. Tsau, an American citizen who opened the Lyceum theater within the walls of the city in Changsha, filed a complaint with American consuls against the Chinese government. The Chinese authorities requested Tsau move the theater outside the walls, since the inner city was not a commercial port. Such a move would jeopardize Tsau's business. With the help of the American vice consul and the Changsha Foreign Office, Tsau obtained permission to continue operating his theater within the city walls.<sup>65</sup> It is certain that Tsau would not have enjoyed such treatment if his theater were registered in China. The benefit Tsau obtained stands as one of the most important reasons to register a corporation in the United States. Similarly, for the sake of seeking protection from the British government, Lo Kan became a British citizen.

Nationalistic writings are hostile to foreign film distributors like Lo Kan. Radical nationalists labeled Lo a "traitor" or "imperialist" who betrayed China's economic rights while benefiting from Hollywood's exploration in China. Cheng Jihua and his colleagues equate Lo's United Theatre Company with American imperialism and treat its appearance as "a further development of American intention toward aggression against the Chinese film industry," because it was registered in the United States.<sup>66</sup> However, it is necessary to point out that such attacks on Sino-American companies were highly selective. As I mentioned previously, the Peacock Motion Pictures Company and the Star theater were all registered in the United States, yet were free from nationalistic attacks. Recent nationalist historians such as Hu Jubin, however, remain silent on Lo's company. Due to the distribution of films from Hollywood, an economic rival of the national industry, Lo's company, from Hu's point of view, did not benefit the national film industry, even if it did not hinder it.

The question here is the extent to which the distribution of Hollywood films threatened the development of the domestic film industry. The expansion of Hollywood and the development of the Chinese film industry are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In a rapidly growing market such as China in the 1920s, the output of the Chinese film industry and Hollywood could increase simultaneously. A gauge is the footage of film stock imported from the United States to China. The linear feet of exposed film stock for exhibition purposes in 1929 was more than twenty times larger than in 1913.

The expansion of unexposed films for producing Chinese films was more striking; this figure in 1925 was 220 times larger than in 1920.<sup>67</sup> Even if there may be something to Hollywood's threat, the other side of the coin should not be neglected. In some cases, the competition from Hollywood became an inspiration for the Chinese film industry. Additionally, Hollywood films circulated by Chinese distributors provided one of the few channels for Chinese practitioners to learn from Hollywood. In the first half of twentieth century, American films remained a vital resource for China to imitate in terms of camera movement, direction, performance, and industrial systems. Hollywood brought to China film equipment and production techniques during the period of China's transition to talkies. If nationalists intend to recognize the positive contribution of Hollywood films to China, the function of Chinese distributors as intermediaries introducing Hollywood films into China should not be neglected.

In addition, nationalistic accounts excluding foreign film distributors from their historiography ignore the multiple identifications of these distributors. In many cases, distributing Hollywood films was merely one part of a complex enterprise operated by these intermediaries. The intermediaries usually participated in other sectors of the film industry, and therefore blurred the boundary between national capitalists and intermediaries. Lo Kan, for instance, apart from distributing and exhibiting Hollywood films, was responsible for distributing domestic films in Hong Kong. In the 1920s, Lo's Hong Kong Amusements circulated *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple* (*Huoshao hongliansi*, dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1928) in Hong Kong.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Lo was one of key shareholders of Lianhua (the United Photoplay Service), a prominent force in the Chinese film industry in the 1930s.<sup>69</sup> There was even a chance that Lo would buy Lianhua in 1932.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes, intermediaries would even compete directly with Hollywood counterparts through involvement in domestic film productions. Possessing abundant capital, they turned out to be the most effective rival to foreign merchants. At the moment of China's conversion to talkies, Lo's United Theatres had "a definite project of establishing a modern sound studio and leasing it to Chinese producing companies."<sup>71</sup> An advertisement for United Theatres mentioned that Lo had already purchased modern sound equipment and had invited an expert from the Radio Corporation of America to supervise the construction of studios and installation of equipment.<sup>72</sup> If the plan bore fruit, through leasing the studios to Chinese filmmakers, United Theatres would not only "obtain a handsome return on its capital," but also "obtain a

first refusal on all pictures produced at the studios."<sup>73</sup> The number of sound pictures produced in China would increase from fifteen per annum to at least forty in the 1930s. As analysts for the American consul pointed out, such a substantial increase in the number of Chinese talkies would "curtail the demand for foreign pictures."<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, Lo's plan was aborted due to unexpected economic barriers. However, Lo did not terminate his investment in film production. In 1933, employing the sound equipment purchased for United Theatres, Lo released the box-office hit *The Fool Pays Respect* (*Dailao baishou*, dir. Hou Yao, 1933), and in 1935, Lo finally erected a sound studio in Hong Kong.<sup>75</sup> Here what I want to stress is the multifunction role of distributing merchants like Lo Kan. It is true that they assisted the expansion of Hollywood's business in China, serving as so-called traitors. Nevertheless, the multiple role these intermediaries played in the relationship between Hollywood and China should not be ignored. Some of them benefited the Chinese film industry in various ways.

## CONCLUSION

When one discusses China's response to Hollywood, the implied discourse is that China had already built relations with Hollywood. However, "building relations" is not an abstract process. Figures and enterprises were necessary to develop the relations between Hollywood and China. As this chapter has shown, these figures, that is, intermediaries, bridged the communication gap between Hollywood and Chinese cinema.

The study of the intermediaries between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry is linked to transnational Chinese cinemas studies. In the past two decades, transnationalism has become a key word in Chinese cinemas studies. With few exceptions, academic discussion has centered on the period after 1978, when Mainland China began to invite transnational capital and cooperation in the film industry.<sup>76</sup> Inviting transnationalism into film history can fill an intellectual void, noticing "phenomena that [not] only cross but straddle and defy borders."<sup>77</sup> Over the national cinema paradigm, the contribution of board-crossing figures like the intermediaries between Hollywood and China has been neglected. As this chapter demonstrates, intermediaries in the early twentieth century bridged relations between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry. The development of the domestic film industry would have been slower without the contributions of these



intermediaries. The complexity of history risks simplification in the shadow of nationalism.

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6. Gu Jianchen, "Zhongguo dianying fadashi" [The Development of Chinese Film], in *Zhongguo dianying nianjian 1934* [Chinese Film Yearbook 1934], ed. Zhongguo jiaoyu dianying xiehui (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 2008), 321–346.
7. Gu, "Zhongguo dianying fadashi," 15.
8. Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 129.
9. Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai, and Xing Zuwen, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi* [History of the Development of Chinese Cinema], vol. 1 (Beijing: China Film Press, 1980), 3.
10. Jubin Hu, *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema before 1949* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 25–27.

11. Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 19.
12. Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 48.
13. Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 20.
14. Hu, *Projecting a Nation*, 20.
15. Zhang Shichuan, "Zi wo daoyan yilai" [Since My Director Career Commenced], *Minxin* 3 (1935): 11.
16. Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao, *Encyclopaedia of Chinese Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998); Zhen Zhang, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Kar Law and Frank Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema: A Cross-Cultural View* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2004). I identify the English name of this company based on an English yellow page book published in Shanghai titled *1915 North China Desk-Hong List* (Shanghai: North China Daily News Publishing House, 1915).
17. Cheng, *Zhonghua yingye nianjian*; Cheng, Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*; Jay Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972).
18. Law Kar, "Jiekai Xianggang dianying qi yuan de mituan" [The Doubts and Suspicions about Hong Kong Movie's Origin], *Contemporary Cinema* 4 (2010): 78–85; Huang Dequan, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shishi kaozheng* [A Textual Critique of Early Chinese Film History] (Beijing: China Film Press, 2012). The relationship between Benjamin Brodsky and the Asiatic Film Company is still open to study. I note that one still picture that Brodsky provided to the *New York Tribune* (George Kaufman, "Bret Harte Said It: The Heathen Chinese Is Peculiar," *New York Tribune*, August 27, 1916) is the same as the picture (which appeared as a still picture named *La Ha Naung Middong*) in a report about the Asiatic Film Company in the *Moving Picture World* (Clarke Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays," *Moving Picture World* 19, no. 8 [1914]: 935.) Second, another still picture is labeled *The Three Thieves* in the report on Brodsky, which is believed to be a production of the Asiatic Film Company. See Huang, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shishi kaozheng*, 73. Third, William H. Lynch, the cinematographer of the Asiatic Film Company, claimed that he was one cinematographer for *A Trip through China*, a documentary by Brodsky's China Cinema Company (*Daily Outlook*, October 27, 1916). Fourth, the office and sales room of Brodsky's China Cinema Company was located at 2 Hongkong Road (1916 *North China Desk-Hong List*), while the same address appeared as the Asiatic Film Company in *Shanghai Street Directory*, another part of the same publication. See 1916 *North China Desk-Hong List* (Shanghai: North China Daily News Publishing House, 1916), 47, 200.
19. Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 19; Leyda, *Dianying/Electric Shadows*, 15.
20. Huang, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shishi kaozheng*, 62.
21. Charles Lobingier, "Toeg & Read v. Suffert, Sept. 3, 1907," in *Extraterritorial Cases*, ed. Charles Lobingier (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1920), 112–120.

22. "U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert (1916)," *Passport Applications for Travel to China, 1906–1925*, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, ARC Identifier 1244180/MLR Number A1540, NARA Series: M4419, vol. 7.

23. Municipal Administrative Council, *Compte rendu de la gestion pour l'exercice 1913* [Account Management of 1913] (Shanghai: Imprimerie Municipale, 1913), 65.

24. "The Municipal Gazette," *North-China Herald*, March 14, 1918, n. p.

25. "Datong jiaoyisuo chuangli huiji" [Minutes of the Commencement of the Mutual Stock & Produce Company], *Shenbao*, November 28, 1921, n. p.

26. Guan Ji'an, "Naimei nushi" [Miss Anna May Yang], *Dianying zazhi* 1, no. 1 (1924): 46.

27. Yoshino Sugawara, "Minkokuki Shanghai no eigakan ni tsuite: kokusan eiga jōeikan to eigakan no keiei jōkyō o chūshin ni" [Film Theaters in Shanghai in the Republic of China: Research on the Business Operations of Theaters Showing Chinese Films], *Yaso* 81 (2008): 94–111.

28. Cheng, *Zhonghua yingye nianjian*; Cheng, Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 1, 18; Zhang, *Amorous History*, 431–439. My identification of Arthur Israel as the mysterious Yishier in Chinese literature is based on three reasons: (1) Israel's employee record. Israel worked in the Shanghai Life Insurance Company ("U. S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel [1917]," *Emergency Passport Applications, Argentina thru Venezuela, 1906–1925*, ARC Identifier 1244183/MLR Number A1544, Box 4485, vol. 2, Washington, DC, National Archives and Records Administration), which is supported by a Chinese source (Gongsu, "Xinju tuibian ji" [A Record of New Play's Degradation], *Xinju zazhi* 1 (1922): 9. (2). Israel's visa application records. In his records, Israel identified his own Chinese name as Yisier ("U. S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel [1918]," *Passport Applications, January 2, 1906–March 31, 1925*, ARC Identifier 583830/MLR Number A1534, NARA Series: M1490, Roll 626, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration) and Yishuoer ("U. S. Consular Registration Certificates of Arthur Israel (1914)," *U. S. Consular Registration Certificates, 1907–1918, General Records of the Department of State, 1763–2002, Record Group 59, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration*), which are phonetically similar with the word *Yishier* in Chinese; and (3) the close relationship between Israel and Suffert. In Suffert's visa application record in 1916, Israel wrote the identification letter and claimed that Israel had known Suffert since 1902 ("U.S. Passport Application of Thomas Suffert [1916]"). I take this opportunity to thank Professor Ramona Curry at the University of Illinois, whose seminar account on Brodsky enlightened me to search passport application records.

29. "U. S. Passport Application of Arthur Israel (1917)."

30. The Chinese name of the corporation is Huayang renshou baoxian gongsi, not Shanghai Nanyang renshou baoxian gongsi (Shanghai Nanyang Life Insurance Company) as suggested in the existing literature; Zheng Junli, *Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shi lue* [Modern Chinese Film History] (Shanghai: Liangyou Book Store, 1936), 12; Cheng,

Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 16. As a matter of fact, there does not exist a company named Shanghai Nanyang renshou baoxian gongsi in China in the 1910s. In addition, I am unable to find evidence regarding Israel and the Asiatic attending the Panama Pacific International Exposition as suggested in the existing literature; Zhou Ji-anyun et al., *Dianying jiangyi* [Syllabus on Introduction to Motion Pictures] (Shanghai: Dadong Book Store, 1924); Cheng, *Zhonghua yingye nianjian*. Israel stayed in Shanghai at least up to 1922, while Suffert died in Shanghai in 1941.

31. "Consolidated Rubber Estates Limited," *North-China Herald*, December 13, 1913, n.p.; "Sport, Baseball," *North-China Herald*, March 21, 1914, n.p.; "Meeting, Shanghai Life Insurance Co.," *North-China Herald*, June 12, 1914, n.p.; "Laou Kung Mow Cotton S. & W. Co.," *North-China Herald*, February 19, 1915, n.p.

32. "Passengers," *North-China Herald*, November 15, 1913; "Passengers," *North-China Herald*, March 28, 1914, n.p.

33. The claimed studio manager of the Asiatic Film Company was E. M. Gross, according to 1915 *North China Desk-Hong List*. The detail of E. M. Gross is open to study.

34. Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays"; Zhou et al., *Dianying jiangyi*.

35. "Advertisement," *Daily Outlook*, August 30, 1905, n.p.

36. "Start on Trip," *Daily Outlook*, September 5, 1912, n.p. Another report showed that Lynch would "stop first at Honolulu, then to Guam, Manila and the countries of the Orient" ("Moving Pictures of the Fire," *Daily Outlook*, September 5, 1912, n.p.). The "countries of the Orient" here should include China. The passenger list shows that William Lynch departed Shanghai to Kobe on October 26, 1912. See "Women's World," *Daily Outlook*, January 27, 1913, n.p.; "Passengers," *North-China Herald*, October 26, 1912, n.p.

37. "Women's World."

38. I found Lynch's name in the published hotel register of Kalee Hotel in Shanghai from June 23, 1913, to March 14, 1914. See *North China Daily News*.

39. "Lynch Writes to the Outlook," *Daily Outlook*, April 9, 1913, n.p.

40. Some scholars argued that before Israel and Suffert took over the Asiatic, Benjamin Brodsky had produced at least two films. See Cheng, *Zhonghua yingye nianjian*; and Cheng, Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*.

41. *Daily Outlook*, October 27, 1916, n.p.

42. Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays."

43. Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays."

44. Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays."

45. Irvine, "Chinese Photoplays."

46. Zhang, "Zi wo daoyan yilai," 11.

47. Law, "Jiekai Xianggang dianying qi yuan de mituan," 81.

48. Zhang, "Zi wo daoyan yilai," 11.

49. "Home from Orient," *Daily Outlook*, June 29, 1914, n.p.; Clarke Irvine, "Doings at

Los Angeles," *Moving Picture World* 21, no. 10 (1914): 1360. Lynch quit the film industry after returning to the United States and became an agent in a real estate company (see "10 Lots Sold in Topanga," *Daily Outlook*, July 19, 1915, n.p.) and later a farmer. It seems that Lynch has no descendant.

50. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 15, 1913, n. p.

51. Huang, *Zhongguo zaoqi dianying shishi kaozheng*, 56.

52. "Advertisement," *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, July 11, 1917, n. p.

53. Cheng, Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 1.

54. Law, "Jiekai Xianggang dianying qiyuan de mituan," 84.

55. Zheng, *Xiandai Zhongguo dianying shi lue*, 18.

56. He Xiujun, "Zhang Shichuan he Mingxing yingpian gongsi" [Zhang Shichuan and His Star Motion Picture Company], in *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* [Anthology of Literature and History Materials], vol. 67, ed. Quanguo zhengxie wenshi he xuexi weiyuanhui (Beijing: China Literature and History Press, 1980), 194.

57. Richard P. Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China," 893.4061/69, Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, China, Internal Affairs, 1930–1939, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1932.

58. Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 121.

59. "General Ledgers and Producers Account," Series 5C: Foreign General Ledgers and Journals, Reel 3, China, United Artists Corporation Archive, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

60. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao" [On the Theater Houses Industries, a Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial & Saving Bank], n.d., Q275-1-2041, Shanghai Municipal Archive.

61. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao."

62. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao."

63. Qian Zhang, "From Hollywood to Shanghai, American Silent Films in China" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2009), 48.

64. "General Report for Two Months Ending 20 June 1928," Series 2A: O'Brien Legal File, 1919–1951, Folder 95, Box 4, United Artists Corporation Archive, Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society.

65. "Motion Picture Theatre Permitted within the Walls of Changsha, Letter from C. D. Meinhardt to American Consulate, January 30, 1923," Record of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of China, 1910–1929, Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Service, 1923.

66. Cheng, Li, and Xing, *Zhongguo dianying fazhan shi*, 188.

67. Butrick, "The Motion Picture Industry in China," 101.

68. 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: Sub-Culture Press, 1996), 102.

69. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao" [On the Theater Houses Industries, a Survey Conducted by the Shanghai Commercial & Saving Bank], n.d., Q275-1-1949, Shanghai Municipal Archive.

70. Lu Jie, *Lu Jie riji zhaicun* [The Dairy of Lu Jie Diaries] (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying ziliao guan, 1962), March 28, 1932.

71. Butrick, "Motion Picture Industry in China," 49.

72. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao," Q275-1-2041.

73. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao."

74. "Shanghai shangye chuxu yinhang youguan yingxiyuan de diaocha baogao."

75. Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 121.

76. Cf. Chris Berry, "Sino-Korean Screen Connections: Towards a History of Fragments," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 10, no. 3 (2016): 247-264; Jeremy Taylor, *Rethinking Transnational Chinese Cinemas: The Amoy-Dialect Film Industry in Cold War Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

77. Chris Berry, "Transnational Chinese Cinema Studies," in *The Chinese Cinema Book*, ed. Song Hwee Lim and Julian Ward (London: British Film Institute, 2011), 11.