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

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Part I

Revising Historiography

Early Film Culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Guangzhou
CHAPTER I

Translating Yingxi
Chinese Film Genealogy and Early Cinema in Hong Kong

Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh

INTRODUCTION: TEAHOUSE, GARDEN, AND EARLY FILM SCHOLARSHIP

The probable earliest film screenings in China, according to Law and Bren, took place between April and July 1897, in a variety of venues, from the City Hall in Hong Kong to the Astor House (Pujiang Hotel) in Shanghai and foreign-owned theaters in Tianjin (Lyceum) and Beijing (Legation).¹ The date Law and Bren identify as the “first” screening was almost a year later than the date of August 1896 asserted by Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai, and Xing Zuwen, in their seminal volumes on Chinese cinema.² Immediately after the debut in Hong Kong in April 1897, subsequent screenings were held at a number of tea gardens and amusement parks in Shanghai, Tianjin, and Beijing. These new dates and venues proposed by Law and Bren are supported by another historian, Huang Dequan, in his studies on the arrival of cinema in China.³ Based on the research by Law and Bren and the subsequent endorsement by Huang, it is safe to say that our prior knowledge of early film exhibitions in China is equivocal, specifically, the dates and venues of the first screenings. Instead of traditional places like the tea garden or teahouse (chayuan)⁴ as venues for film’s debut to Chinese audiences, generic Western portals like public halls, a hotel ballroom, and theater stage were more likely to have housed the first film shows. A corol-
Early film culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Republican China

A central finding is that we need to revisit the existing scholarship of early Chinese film culture that has repeatedly asserted the teahouse and the garden as the inaugural sites of film exhibition and germination of movie spectatorship in China. The methods that scholars have employed in examining early Chinese film history, be they archival or sociocultural, require adjustment and a thorough reexamination. Furthermore, the conceptualizations of a native spectatorship hovering between the vernacular and the elite during the late Qing dynasty (circa 1900) may also need new calibration. With recent findings that alert us to gaps and flaws in early film scholarship, I intend to revisit some prevailing concepts and terms by presenting additional new evidence.

Central to these dominant historiographical discourses lies the yingxi concept and its literal English translation, “shadow play.” Scholars of Chinese film history, in both China and the West, have adopted the ideas of yingxi and its translated twin, “shadow play,” to frame the reception of cinema in late Qing and early Republican years. Almost without exception, they write that, given yingxi as the earliest Chinese term for motion pictures, there exists a tie between shadow puppetry, opera, and early cinema. This “umbilical cord,” in Zhang Zhen’s image, found its historical backup in the tea garden setting, where traditional performances were held for centuries in China. “Yingxi in the teahouse” thus depicts an early cinema scene as a synecdoche: viewing of moving pictures is better understood when we align it with the enjoyment of puppetry or opera within the teahouse backdrop. Does this picture help explain early film exhibition and reception? Is there an alternative to the yingxi-teahouse couplet? Considering the disparate nature of film projection and live performance, is yingxi (shadow play) an appropriate entry to the understanding of early cinema in Chinese communities? With the support of new research, I suggest we look at yinghua, the photo pictures, a term referring to motion pictures used in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, as an alternative genealogy of cinema in China. By superimposing the core image of early cinema—yingxi—with yinghua, I make note of the import of film experiences in lesser-known locales, such as Hong Kong and Guangzhou. Let me begin my itinerary with two sites—a teahouse and a Chinese garden, known as the first cinema locations in Shanghai. I wish to question the historiographic fitness of these places for an accurate understanding of movies’ Chinese root, and route.
THE TEAHOUSE

In her “Teahouse, Shadowplay, Bricolage: Laborer’s Love and the Question of Early Chinese Cinema” (1999) and An Amorous History of the Silver Screen (2005), Zhang Zhen seizes on the account by Cheng, Li, and Xing on the initial film screening in Shanghai’s Xu Garden (Xu Yuan) to set the stage for the application of vernacular modernism in early Republican China: “In a broad context, [the cinematic vernacular] stems from the fertile ground of a vibrant vernacular culture—including the teahouses, the theaters, storytelling, popular fiction, music, dance, painting, photography, and discourses of modern wonders and magic.”11 The teahouse setting, according to Zhang, represents a cogent “spatial trope”12 to encapsulate Chinese urbanites’ immersion in the emerging cinematic vernacular, conjuring a colloquial setting equipped with a modern form of mass entertainment:

Because the film experience is public and requires an architectural infrastructure, a history of film culture would be inadequate without considerations of the physical forms, geographical distributions, and social and aesthetic function of exhibition venues. Thus the vernacular also encompasses the urban architectural environment essential to the film experiences—the theaters, the amusement halls, teahouses, parks.13

The everydayness of the teahouse setting coupled with the projection of electric images transforms a traditional entertainment site into a “tension-driven”14 sight fraught with frictions and uncertainties, that is, the vernacular modern.

Guided by the vernacular modern, one may picture film viewing within the teahouse as an oscillating experience. Movie shows were interspersed with regular activities of the teahouse, such as music, opera, acrobats, gossip, loitering, and food and drink.15 Meanwhile, as Goldstein suggests, late-Qing teahouses offered more than just an array of entertainments; they were also a marketplace where other attractions besides opera were on sale, including the actors themselves.16 Precisely because of the interchangeability between the teahouse environment and an open market, the boundary between the stage and the audience space was more fluid and permeable.17 The relatively free and spontaneous ambience inside the teahouse, imaginably, was not en-
tirely compatible with a movie show wherein the audience’s vision had to focus on the screen. I believe this is the basis for Zhang Zheng’s depiction of the “tension-driven” movie shows in the early period. However, that tension embodied in the movie shows was somewhat alleviated, thanks to the teahouse setting. Charles Musser has made a key remark on the way cinema managed its foray into the public’s entertainment sphere:

During cinema’s first year of success, motion pictures enjoyed the status of a novelty. This very concept or category served to address the problem of managing change within a rapidly industrializing society: novelties typically introduced the public to important technological innovations within a reassuring context that permitted spectators to take pleasure in the discontinuities and dislocations. While technological change created uncertainty and anxiety, “novelty” always embodied significant elements of familiarity, including the very genre of novelty itself. In the case of cinema, greater verisimilitude was initially emphasized at the expense of narrative.18

Early movie shows brought a bizarre, yet exhilarating visual stimulus to audiences accustomed to the cozy, boisterous milieu of the teahouse opera. Illuminated by electricity, the screen projected a series of black-and-white events that were not just rare because of distance (e.g., Street Scenes in Madrid) and novelty (e.g., Lynching Scene in the Far West), but astonishing due to the verisimilitude and animation of the images (e.g., Passing of Cavalry).19 And the life on the screen vanished once the electricity was turned off: “All of a sudden, lights on, all images turned to ashes” (“Notes on Viewing American Cinema,” 1897). Imagine the patrons’ reaction—the exhilaration and thrill—when they witnessed these lifelike images in motion. As a viewer noted: “Watching the newly arrived motion picture show was fascinating—from small things like ducklings floating on water, rats jumping over the beam to shipwreck and houses on fire.” (“On a Movie Show at the Weichun Theater,” 1897). Perhaps the initial shock was somewhat mitigated by the immediate restitution (lights back on) of the raucous teahouse setting.

Using the marketplace-like teahouse as a trope to construct early film spectatorship was crucial to implementing the theory of vernacular modernism in China. Miriam Hansen proposes that cinema carries a “sensorium” of urban stimulation in the new twentieth century, allegedly narrowing the gap between First World cosmopolitan sensation and regional, provincial,
and foreign horizons.20 That this was “mass mediated” by cinema21 and other modern apparatuses meant that the new technology not only pictured far-away people and places, but also introduced Chinese viewers to novel pleasures, coeval with those of modern capitals such as New York or Paris. Cinema thus brought distant peoples into view, while also bringing them into configurations of modernity.22 First screenings, or the primordial scenes of Chinese movies, were embedded in the context of traditional, “reassuring” Chinese amusements. This is a thesis arising from the economy of vernacular modernism in the case of China. Subsequently the vernacular teahouse trope was linked with the yingxi concept already propagated by native historians:

Until the early 1930s, cinema in Chinese was called “shadowplay” (yingxi) before the term gradually changed to “electric shadows” (dianying), indicating its umbilical tie to the puppet show and other . . . theatrical arts. The emphasis on “play” rather than “shadow”—in other words, the “play” as the end and “shadow” as means—has, according to the film historian Zhong Dafeng, been the kernel of Chinese cinematic experience.23

Here suffice it to say that vernacular modernism provides a rationale for the organic connection (“umbilical”) between cinema and endogenous Chinese art forms. Film historians located yingxi in constructing a film historiography nicely laced by vernacular modernism—vernacular because of the affiliations with shadow play and the teahouse; modernist because of the medium specificities. The connection between cinema and shadow play, however, begs support from empirical research. Does the xi (drama or play) in yingxi theory share the same provenance of the traditional theaters with puppet shadow play and opera? Furthermore, can the term yingxi be understood and translated as other than its literal Chinese meaning, “shadow play”? I will return to these questions later.

THE GARDEN

Following the previous literature on the teahouse as the primary locale initiating a brand-new visual experience, Pang Laikwan calls attention to what she considers a more precise account of early film spectatorship. Pang is interested in exploring “questions of film reception.”24 She avers that the new
visual apparatus of cinema interacted with “the spaces designated for screening movies,” and so film spectatorship “connected to the overall modern visual culture” and “the social class of the viewers.” Putting aside the substance of “modern visual culture” in this context, Pang’s revision has to do with her reservation toward the teahouse as the very first film scene where the earliest film spectatorship might have taken shape. Pang argues that though the first screening was staged in the Youyicun (Another Village) playhouse inside Xu Garden, historians have largely neglected the setting that encircled that playhouse—Xu Garden itself, a private garden converted to a public amusement venue.

The Chinese garden in early twentieth-century Shanghai, Pang says, allowed a unique viewing experience for its patrons, unique because the visitor’s engagement with the space inside the amusement arena could be both “public” and “private,” in that the visitor’s movement was guided between a regulated program (where to go and what to see) and spontaneous motion (at your leisure and at your own pace):

The new public garden was a venue simultaneously incorporating many different visual entertainments. This plurality of activities taking place within and around the screening sites renders the relationship between subject and spectacle more complex, and reveals the limitations of focusing solely on the teahouse to study early film reception in China. This “publicness” can be analysed by focusing on two aspects of the new garden culture: the connections between different forms of visual experience in the garden, and the mutual transformation of the viewer and the viewed.

Two problems arise from Pang’s argument. According to Law and Bren, there is no “hard evidence” to indicate that Xu Garden staged the earliest film screenings in China. Huang Dequan, who consulted new Chinese-language materials, also arrives at the same conclusion. And Huang goes further; he shows that the alleged “first” screenings held in Xu Garden in
August 1896 were most likely magic lantern shows, not motion pictures. Huang is not alone in his view. According to our survey, during the years between 1900 and 1903, concurrent with cinema’s entry to East Asia, magic lantern shows continued to dominate local screens in Hong Kong (see below). Based on the new evidence, it may not be correct to name Another Village and Xu Garden as the earliest film scene, rendering the garden viewership untenable.

The reason that historians confuse the lantern slide show with the first film screening, Huang argues, is the overlapping use of the term yingxi for both magic lantern and motion pictures between 1890 and the early 1920s. Magic lantern shows were called xiyang yingxi (Western shadow play) in Shanghai or qiqiao yanghua (marvelous and exquisite Western pictures) in Hong Kong (figure 1.1). They were regularly programmed in public amusements beginning in the 1870s. As yingxi was already a popular Western show known to Chinese audiences, when film exhibition arrived, exhibitors borrowed the existing term, yingxi, and coupled it with “electric light” (dian guang), or “moving” (huodong), to label motion pictures. Without taking stock of the overlap between magic lanterns and motion pictures, earlier historians such as Cheng Jihua and his colleagues came to an unverified date of film’s initial entry into Shanghai, announcing the premature beginning of film screening cinema in China. So, for more than half a century, historians believed that movies arrived in China just a few months after their Paris debut, dutifully following the trail blazed by Cheng and coauthors. In reality, however, cinema’s trip to China was more likely a slower journey, embarked from Hong Kong, at the margin of the country, instead of the film capital, Shanghai. This puts the focus on the Shanghai garden in doubt, making the subsequent claim of the garden as “primal scene” shaky.

To Pang, to behold the garden as a central location of early film is tactical. She attempts to distinguish early Chinese film spectatorship from its Western counterparts as detailed by the prevailing literature and argues that, unlike working-class audiences dazzled by “the cinema of attractions,” Chinese elites accustomed to garden pleasures would accept film images with equanimity. Pang concludes that Chinese viewers could literally walk the garden and move in and out of the cinematic spectacle as the garden path provided them immunity to screen illusions, and made them unlikely to be hoodwinked by the reality effects of motion pictures. This presumes that film exhibition is integral to the garden landscape and ignores the mechanism of projection as an attraction in itself. Mary Ann Doane writes
about the location of images and argues that the place to locate the image begins with where projection takes place. Projection hence transforms image to spectacle and activates spectatorship:

Projection of the illusion of motion collapses representation and exhibition and calls up the notion of *spectacle*. It magnifies the image whose scale is no longer dominated by the scale of a body but by that of an architecture, of the abstract authority of spectacle and a collective, public life.\(^{33}\)
Here a film event is enabled by the act of projection, which throws the image on the screen and turns it into a larger-than-life illusion, whose magic is enlarged by the enclosed, darkened space and the crowd inside that space. Doane's analysis of film projection and its by-product—the spectacle—calls our attention to the construction of film spectacle and its collective spectatorship in early cinematic exhibition. This is jouissance, a unique sensation not to be conflated with garden viewing routines. Early film shows indeed shared the space with other types of entertainments—acrobats, fireworks, live shows, lectures, and so on. However, the specific realm mapped by film projection superseded those constructed by preexisting forms of exhibition, such as magic lanterns and optical toys. Interchange of the exhibition space (venue sharing) was thus unlikely to lead to a transferrable spectatorship or crossover from garden viewing to cinema viewing. A film spectatorship rooted in the garden tends toward a romantic depiction of Chinese spectators. It projects a sophisticated ethnic spectatorship, distinct from Western counterparts. By suggesting an alternative to the cinema of attractions and vernacular modernism, Pang presents another fantasy of cinema origins in China.

Called electric-light photoplay (dianguan yingxi) at the time by exhibitors, film was an electrifying visual experience, departing significantly from the magic lantern and optical toys such as zoetrope and thaumatrope, comprised of painted sequences or still photos. Those film shows held in a hotel ballroom, the hall of an amusement park (which was unlikely to be a traditional garden, as indicated in Pang's essay), and their subsequent reruns in the playhouses were not to be confused with entertainments available in standard venues. Advertisements of these events used sensational copy like “don’t make any mistake!!! see the cinematograph!!!”34 and “Special engagement”35 to promote motion pictures as powerful new attractions. This is quite different from the bland advertisements for magic lantern shows, which by the advent of the twentieth century had run out of novelty value. By the late 1890s slide shows had become routine in program schedules, along with other popular amusements like fireworks and opera performance. Some shows would provide detailed contents (e.g., floods in San Francisco), but most would not. We can safely assume that after motion pictures arrived, slide shows disappeared bit by bit.

From the teahouse to the amusement park, historians have been writing early history based on incomplete historical records. Subsequent postula-
tions have been made about the genealogy of Chinese cinema, including the various “origins” concerning exhibition, audience, reception and production. Next, I will focus on the yingxi concept, a commonly accepted provenance of Chinese film genealogy and its ubiquitous English translation “shadow play,” which links cinema with traditional art forms. My purpose in revisiting yingxi and its English translation is to call attention to the gap between empirical study and dominant theoretical models on early Chinese cinema. The discovery made by Law and Bren opens a new page in the study of Chinese film history, but they have not moved toward a renewed, compelling conceptual framework. Meanwhile, theory-driven historiography without primary research runs the risk of repeating erroneous claims and inferences. In revisiting yingxi, I am also concerned with the operative modes and politics in our cross-lingual practice. What discourse has driven our habitual use of “shadow play” in our practice as bilingual film scholars? Which context did we lean on in choosing the best term to unveil history? Do we need to pay more attention to the interstices between tradition and invention, between indigenous and the foreign in our historical excavation? This is where my second story begins.

**YINGXI, SHADOW PLAY: CHINESE FILM GENEALOGY AND TRANSLATION**

As we know, before the term dianying became the definitive name for movies, yingxi was circulating in the teens and 1920s, mostly in Shanghai newspapers and film magazines. In the 1930s, the term yingxi gave way to a supposedly more modern term, dianying, motion pictures. Ever since then, yingxi has receded to the background, risking becoming obsolete as a designator. It did not reappear in film studies until the 1980s, when historians revived it to build the genealogy of Chinese cinema. Zhong Dafeng and Chen Xihe used yingxi to reconstruct a film theory with a distinctly Chinese character and ownership. With the exception of Zhang Yingjin, who questioned the validity of the “shadowplay theory,” the yingxi proposition soon led scholars to connect the “origin” with traditional performing arts like puppet shadow play (piyingxi) and Peking opera (jingju).

Zhong and Chen identify yingxi as the root of indigenous Chinese film theory. In the first essay on yingxi, Zhong Dafeng writes:
As a film concept, “yingxi” reflected the basic view toward cinema among filmmakers at the time. “What is cinema?” This has been a major issue for filmmakers and theorists and has an effect on the aspects of film production. To early [Chinese] filmmakers, cinema was not a simple depiction of nature, nor was it a pure play irrespective of contents. To them, cinema is a kind of drama.37

By evoking yingxi as China’s take on motion pictures, Zhong suggests that cinema in China from its inception had a specific mission, which in many ways determined the pattern of its reception in China and the ethos of domestic production. By defining yingxi exclusively as drama, thus excluding cinema’s other properties, such as photography and movement, Zhong argues that storytelling is core to Chinese film practice and criticism.

Following Zhong’s introduction of yingxi as drama, Chen Xihe went on to elaborate on yingxi as a Chinese response to cinema: “Just as montage and long takes are core to Westerners’ understanding of cinema, I want to establish yingxi, a concept that emerged in early Chinese cinema, as central to the Chinese understanding of cinema.”38 To Zhong and Chen, Chinese cinema does not organize itself around the profilmic, an objective presence open to perception. Instead of privileging ying as photographic image, Chinese filmmakers focused on xi—fabrication, performance, narrative—and valorized cinema’s dramatic effects and their attending ethos.39 Emphasis on xi positions Chinese cinema as a plot-driven medium, mindful of its sociopolitical promise. This quality, according to Zhong and Chen, is the bedrock of Chinese film practice and criticism.40

With the compelling presentation made by Zhong and Chen, yingxi became a leitmotif and guiding light in Chinese film historiography. One very early record on the term yingxi appeared on Shiwu jiyuan (On the origin of things), published circa the eleventh century.41 There, yingxi referred to pijingxi—Chinese shadow puppetry—a type of folk performance prevalent in many parts of China. Note that Zhong and Chen never identify Peking opera and/or puppet shadow play as sources of the concept xi, the dramatic propensity of Chinese cinema, in their view. Though Zhong acknowledges the term is indeed related to the folk art,42 he avoids linking yingxi as motion pictures to any given traditional performing art. Apparently Zhong and Chen resurrect the term yingxi in order to invent a new theory for Chinese cinema, and therefore their use of yingxi was never meant to suggest there
Early film culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Republican China

existed a shared history between puppet shadow play and motion pictures. *Yingxi* in this context is intended as a Chinese *theory*, not history, of cinema. Hence we clearly see, in Chen Xihe’s subsequent article on *yingxi*, his emphatic distinction between Western and Chinese cinema in terms of their disparate orientations: “Chinese filmmakers took ‘drama’ as the fundamental of cinema; Westerners thought of ‘image’ as the fundamental of cinema.”

Following Chen, Chinese cinema that aligned itself with the ethos of moviemaking was divided from its Western counterpart, as the latter focused on the specificity of the film medium, such as movement and photographic verisimilitude.

It is difficult to verify the *yingxi* theory proposed by Zhong and Chen. We have yet to see strong evidence to show that Chinese cinema has a unique expression inherently different from any other cinema. The subsequent development of the *yingxi* theory has, however, codified *yingxi* as definitive, ethnic historiography. *Yingxi* as theory took a different turn when it was used in writing Chinese film history. Scholars began to assimilate *yingxi* with historiography, habitually associated the theoretical term *yingxi* (for cinema) with such generic fields as opera and puppet shadow play, without a rigorous examination of their historical (dis)connections. For instance, Hu Jubin repeats the information recorded in Cheng et al.’s statement on film’s arrival in China: “The term ‘shadow play’ appeared in the first advertisement for a film screening and the earliest film review traceable today. This usage clearly indicates that film was to a certain degree conceptually connected with the traditional Chinese artform of shadow play.”

In a different passage, Hu reiterates the affinity between “shadow play” and opera, again based on questionable documentation of teahouses as the site of the initial screenings:

> In Beijing and Hong Kong, films were also first screened in teahouses. I believe that a single factor accounts for this phenomenon. Because film was called “shadow play,” it was situated in a location appropriate for “play,” that is, in teahouses, one of the most important places of recreation in Chinese society, and the site where traditional Chinese operas were performed.\(^{45}\)

Granted, Hu’s assertion was published in 2003, when the field had yet to produce new evidence to correct previous errors. Film screening in Hong Kong was very different from that in Beijing and Shanghai (more details
to follow). And with new knowledge of yingxi’s multiple reference (ranging from puppetry to magic lantern shows and cinema), we need to move beyond the genealogical linkage between cinema and traditional arts and look at yingxi as motion pictures, instead of remnants of ancient puppetry or a continuation of Chinese opera.

Another problem is the constant use of yingxi as a pedigree of Chinese cinema. Zhong cautions against the use of the term yingxi. By yingxi he meant a “specific art field” in early Chinese film, rather than a term for cinema in general. Despite the disclaimer, scholars have broadly taken yingxi to be a term for early Chinese cinema, as shown in recent publications. Moreover, because of an affiliation presumed between cinema and China’s standing traditional arts, the scholarly community translated yingxi (literally “shadow” and “play”) as “shadow play” without taking stock of cinematic specificity, not to mention the incongruity between puppet shadow play and motion pictures. First there was Jay Leyda’s 1972 book entitled Dianying/Electric Shadows: An Account of Films and the Film Audience in China. Leyda wanted to emphasize cinema’s reception in China and used the Chinese term dianying and its literal translation, “electric shadows,” to title the first English volume on Chinese film. Thus begins the interpretation of ying as “shadows,” as if China’s cinematic past were filtered through a shadowy lens—beguiling, mysterious, exotic. The rendition of ying as shadow was almost intuitive and emphatically ethnic. Curiously scholars have not considered the possibility of rendering ying as “photograph,” as both verb (to take a picture as ying in Cantonese dialect) and noun (an image as yingxiant in Chinese language generally). So this “shadowy” trope remains, into the new century, as seen in many works. These renditions build bridges between cinema and shadow puppetry and opera; yet this assumed connection is seen as a given, not a hypothesis. Accordingly, in accounts of early film exhibition there is no discussion of cinema’s synchronic exhibition with shadow puppets. Film in the teahouse seems like a picture painted from secondary sources; to have a better understanding, we must seek additional evidence. Farquhar and Berry apply the “cinema of attractions” to yingxi and propose a new translation of yingxi as “shadow opera.” Such a translation, according to Farquhar and Berry, pinpoints the exact locus of the xi as a form of theatrical attraction: “Xi and its synonym, ju, more commonly mean opera or performance to ordinary Chinese rather than the Western-style realistic theater familiar to educated, urban elites. Hence, one valid translation of yingxi is shadow opera.” Shadow opera, they argue, is an entry point
to “a new archaeology of Chinese cinema” as it grounds the development of Chinese film production in the first half of the twentieth century. The basis for this idea of “shadow opera” comes from the source materials of two “first” native productions made in China proper, including *Dingjun Mountain* (*Dingjunshan*, dir. Ren Jingfeng, 1905) in Beijing, and *Zhuang Zi Tests His Wife* (*Zhuangzi shi qi*, dir. Li Beihai, 1913).

*Dingjun Mountain* is crucial in the “shadow opera” proposal, as it was believed to be the “first” Chinese motion picture, a film recording of an opera performance shot in a Beijing photo studio, Fengtai. The significance of the film is monumental in this historical narrative, for it not only inaugurated Chinese filmmaking, but also grounded Chinese cinema firmly in the national tradition. But research done by Huang Dequan (2008) suggests this legendary film may never have been made; it remains only a “legend” in film history and should be treated with great caution when commemorated as the inception of Chinese cinema. For decades historians relied on a photo of leading opera star Tan Xinpei dressed in the *Dingjun Mountain* costume as evidence for the production of the alleged first Chinese motion picture. According to Huang, there is no concrete evidence showing that Tan starred in a film around 1905. The only evidence Huang found that connected Tan to the Fengtai Studio was a commissioned audio recorded at Fengtai in 1913.52 Tan was an acclaimed *laosheng* (older male character) actor and the “greatest star of his generation.”53 Known for his soaring voice and thrilling heroic performances, Tan was a high-profile actor in his time because of imperial patronage. He enjoyed unprecedented fame in the capital city, Beijing, and achieved a nationwide celebrity beyond the opera field. Thus Tan was instrumental in leading Peking opera into a new phase of stardom and commercialization. Tan would utilize modern technologies of sound recording, photography, and possibly movies to sustain his career as opera’s “Big Boss” (*da laoguan*) in the new century.

Here I will not speculate on how and why an opera performance was linked to the beginning of indigenous filmmaking. One thing we are sure of is that the mystery surrounding the “first” picture(s) not only compels us to reconsider the entire shadow play proposition, including its spinoffs; it also reveals a problem in our study of film history—that there has not been enough primary research to corroborate claims made by a series of historians, including myself. In my own essay on the discourse of music in films of the 1930s, I argued that the Chinese early filmmakers were anxious to “sinify” cinema, and one way to do this was to adapt popular opera repertories to
the screen. I too used the alleged “first” Chinese picture *Dingjun Mountain* to make my case. But I was wrong, following the existing discourse instead of seeking evidence to verify the standard history. In retrospect, it is clear that we did not have enough material to show how early film arose and to see the possible gaps and loopholes in its genealogy. More importantly, we need to reexamine the prevailing discourse of Chinese film historiography by finding additional and reliable primary data. Translating *yingxi* as shadow play or other derivative of traditional performing arts is hasty, exposing our drift toward conformity and our lack of attention to details. The persistent literal translation of *yingxi* as shadow play reveals our unconscious anxiety, to salvage ethnic heritage in forging genealogy. Foucault once defined genealogy as “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.” Foucault went on to explain that documentary of genealogy “requires patience, and a knowledge of details, and depends on a vast accumulation of source materials.”

Taking Foucault’s cue on the difficult and slippery path in constructing genealogy, we ask just how motion pictures, as *yingxi*, inherited from or interacted or commingled with puppetry or opera. This remains an “entangled and confused parchment” of early cinema in China. While *yingxi* may explain the proclivity of film practice in China, as proposed by Zhong Dafeng and Chen Xihe, it has not been complete in telling us how films were screened, used, and received in the first few years after those initial screening events operated by foreign showmen. *Yingxi* leaves many shadowy, unrealized spots to which we need to attend. To know how early film was viewed, we need to move out of our comfort zone and begin to accumulate a vast source of historical materials. Only by a wider, deeper excavation of history can we arrive at a better definition of *yingxi* as a cogent genealogical term. And we must be open to jettisoning it if it is a stumbling block.

**NEWS FROM HONG KONG**

Zhang Zhen asserts that the cinema of attractions received by mass audiences in Shanghai of the 1910s was “distinctly concerned with contemporary subjects, ranging from current affairs, slapstick comedies, and scenic panoramas to educational materials.” She leaves this page of early film exhibition open for investigation. Given these holes in early film history, a research team
headed by me embarked on a project to investigate film exhibition, promotion, and reception at the turn of the twentieth century in China.\textsuperscript{59} Our team collected film advertisements and film news from newspapers in Hong Kong. We found that at the turn of the century, film exhibition in Hong Kong did not take place just in the tea/theater garden setting, nor did it fit the traditional \textit{yingxi} cluster. Movie consumption in Hong Kong, as a British colony and Chinese-speaking territory, was highly varied. It was Janus-faced, embodying numerous roles and multiple functions. Movies were used as a promotional tool for Cantonese operas and a handy illustration for Christian deputation and, at the same time, served charitable and educational aims for the local community. More importantly, film in Hong Kong rapidly evolved as a commodity, a social institution and a business of the new century. As we shall see, the early film scene in Hong Kong was too rich to be subsumed under an enchanting shadow play or “shadow opera” image, housed in the local tea gardens or opera venues. As the editors of \textit{Beyond the Screen: Institutions, Networks and Publics of Early Cinema} write, “Projecting mainstream moving pictures in churches, convincing educators of the benefits of using film in the classroom, and collaborating with charitable organizations . . . enlarged the role of cinema within the public sphere while also demonstrating its usefulness as a tool of instruction.”\textsuperscript{60} This collection of essays starkly shows the variety of social causes that early cinema served, before its eventual resolution into the show business of motion pictures.

\textbf{Motion Pictures’ Arrival in Hong Kong}

As Law and Bren assert, the first report of public film screening in Hong Kong is dated April 27, 1897, about seventeen months after the first screening of moving pictures in Paris.\textsuperscript{61} Indeed, in our survey we located the source cited by Law and Bren: a news report in the \textit{China Mail} on April 24, 1897. The news announced: “Professor Maurice Charvet, who arrived today by the French mail steamer, has [come] to Hong Kong from Paris to exhibit ‘Cinematograph’ and the ‘Kinetoscope,’ the twin marvels of the age. These marvels have never been shown in Hongkong or the Far East before.”\textsuperscript{62} Two days afterward, a similar advertisement appeared in the \textit{Hong Kong Daily Press}, promoting “the Cinematograph” as “the latest and greatest success of London and Paris.”\textsuperscript{63} Further coverage of the event was also reported in the \textit{Hong Kong Daily Press} two days later: “Few people [were] privileged to wit-
The coverage described the contents of the screening: “[The] entry of the Czar into Paris and the march past of a regiment of French cavalry [was] so life-like”; it even mentioned the mechanical problem of the new invention from France: “an irritating quiver as the pictures are being displayed. . . . this fault is common with every cinematograph and a fortune awaits the man who will devise a means of escaping it.” An item in the China Mail provided details of cinematograph: “a long strip of film, containing very minute photographs, is wound from one cylinder to the photographs passing the lenses, at the rate of fifty per second. The photographs are projected on a screen by a very powerful electric lamp.”

Film was introduced to Hong Kong audiences with high expectations and curiosity, as evinced by this detailed coverage. Similar hype and enthusiasm were shown at every subsequent screening. At least six more exhibition events following the City Hall screening were announced in the Hong Kong Daily Press. Each of the exhibitions was coupled with accounts of the content screened, information on the venue, the owner or operator of the property, and reports of its reception, or reviews.

Following these events, motion pictures gradually entered into local Chinese entertainments. To better understand the process, our team surveyed a leading Chinese newspaper, the Chinese Mail (Wah Tsz Yat Po, literally “Chinese-language daily”) from 1896 to 1940 (figure 1.2). The Chinese Mail, along with Universal Circulating Herald (Hsun Huan Jih Pao, 1874–1963) were the earliest Chinese newspapers published in Hong Kong with a history of over seventy years. The Chinese Mail began as the Chinese edition of the leading English newspaper, China Mail, but soon became an independent press. It started publishing in 1872 and closed down in 1946. Because the microfilm of Universal Circulating Herald was unavailable locally for the period we wished to search, we could only work on the Chinese Mail, which had nearly a complete collection (save 1899) in Hong Kong libraries.

We went over the papers to collect reports and advertisements related to film. Our assumption was that press coverage of movies would yield information on details of exhibition, venues, and reception among Chinese viewers. The reason to use newspapers as the primary source for our data collection is twofold. One is that newspapers contain the most wide-ranging record of both the formal and informal film trade and screening activities. Chinese Mail was published daily and covered the commercial sectors, as it
Early film culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Republican China appeared in paid advertisements, and public screening announcements from the YMCA, for instance. The second reason is that we could not find any source materials that offered information on the period from 1895 to 1905, and that was as systematic and consistent as the news coverage of the local press. In order to fulfill our research objective, we had to rely on newspapers. Facing a plenitude of information, we adopted a comprehensive search method, wishing to collect as many items as possible. We believed by conducting such a carpet search we might come closer to uncovering the early film scene in Hong Kong. We found no coverage on film before 1900. So for the period between 1900 to the end of 1940, when Hong Kong was seized by the Japanese, we collected, scanned, and transcribed a total of 11,786 entries, including 4,231 news items and 7,555 advertisements. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the data collected from 1900, the year when film ads and news began to appear in the Chinese Mail, to 1924, the year when film exhibition became more organized and institutionalized. Below is a summary of our initial findings with respect to the yingxi thesis and Hong Kong’s early film scene.

Figure 1.2. Chinese Mail, circa 1902. Center: “Hei Loi Theatre Playing Lively American Photoplay.”
SURVEY SUMMARY: 1900–1924

1. Nearly a thousand entries were collected during the period between 1900 and 1924.

2. Different terms for motion pictures other than yingxi were used. They are yinghua (photo pictures) and dianhua (electric pictures), drawing our attention to hua, the “picture” quality of the shorts shown at the time. This concurs partly with the statement made by Zhou Chenguang and Li Yizhuang in their History of Early Hong Kong Film. Yingxi was not the only, or even dominant, term used in Hong Kong, indicating that early film exhibition was more heterogeneous than has been prescribed by the yingxi concept. I will tentatively translate yinghua and its equivalents as “photo pictures” in the following as a way to distinguish the term from its Shanghai cousin, yingxi, or “shadow play.”

3. The data were sorted and classified into five categories, according to the venue and purpose of screening: (1) advertisements for opera theaters; (2) YMCA illustrated lectures; (3) philanthropy, charity, and fund-raising; (4) hygiene, science, and current affairs; (5) film exhibition as a new business and institution. These categories indicate that actualities, travelogues, newsreels, and documentaries featured more prominently on Hong Kong screens in the early Republican period, similar to early film exhibition in the United States and Europe. The seven categories listed in the book Beyond the Screen, for instance, find their correspondence on Hong Kong screens between 1900 and 1920. These categories are: charity/religion; government/civics; education/advocacy; science/magic; art/aesthetics; exhibition/showmanship; community / public sphere. Based on the newspaper evidence, the early film scene was not at all drama centered. The period when the yingxi concept began to take hold was not until the late 1920s. Variety shows were displayed in theaters, and also in local Chinese playhouses, where movie shorts also found a place. Short films thus helped complete an assorted program of entertainment, information and inspiration. To some extent, cinema was marketed as a new commodity; further, it was utilized as a tool to advance social and religious agendas. Moving pictures carried the world to viewers, and were often mobilized to illustrate Christian doctrines.
4. The discovery above raises questions about the yingxi genealogy in the existing literature.
5. Additional data collected from three Chinese newspapers in Guangzhou also indicates a more prevalent use of the term yinghua (photo pictures) than yingxi (shadow play). We have enough evidence to suggest that the yingxi discourse is too singular and simplistic to explain the multitude of film culture in late Qing and the early Republican periods.

In what follows, I will provide an account for each of the five categories previously listed. Many of the ads contain more than one piece of information, ranging from the number of films packaged in the program, screening conditions, special features of the venue, promotion, and so on. To place these multiple pieces of information in proper categories, we end up using some ads or news more than once. Hence the number of ads and news items cited below is not meant to reflect the sum of our data.

THE HONG KONG FILM SCENE, 1900–1924

The first category is advertisements for opera theaters. Between 1903 to 1909, eighty-two film ads were sponsored by opera theaters, forty of which advertised opera performance bundled with motion pictures. In addition to these forty ads, there were twenty or so ads (printed between February 1900 and October 1900) that could have been promoting either movies or magic lantern shows. Sponsored by Chung Hing (Chongqing) Theatre and Ko Shing (Gaosheng) Theatre, these ads used terms like qiqiao yanghua, “exquisite and marvelous Western pictures,” to attract potential customers. These were most probably either magic lantern or slide shows, based on previous findings. 

Here films were named variously, including yinghua (photo pictures), which appeared sixty-one times; and huatu yingxi or huaxi (picture photoplay), which appeared nine times. Yingxi appeared only ten times. These ads show the concurrence of opera and motion pictures, revealing traditional theaters’ intent to secure or to broaden their audience via film screenings. These ads also have something in common: they advertised a change of repertoire. With the new opening, a foreign picture would be added to the program as a bonus.
Before cinema houses like Victoria Cinematograph and Bijou Scenic Theatre began to operate around 1907, these opera theaters were the established venues for movie screening. Then, starting from 1905, motion pictures gradually moved from the edge to the center, as sometimes the theater would only screen films. And from 1904 on, the opera theaters listed film screening as the main attraction in their ads, indicating film’s increasing popularity and possibly dominance.

The second category is YMCA illustrated lectures. This category captures early film’s function as community outreach. Sugawara Yoshino writes about the robust film exhibition at Shanghai’s YMCA in the early twentieth century. Promoting “healthful entertainment,” film shows at the Shanghai YMCA not only formed an alternative screening culture, they also helped nourish the first generation of Chinese film entrepreneurs with business ambition and aspirations to social reform (see Sugawara’s chapter in this volume). Similarly, in the newspapers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong we found frequent reports on the YMCA’s film activities in treaty ports like Guangzhou and Xiamen (“Theaters in Xiamen,” April 19, 1929, Gongpingbao), demonstrating the use of cinema to advance the cause of evangelism, by introducing sights and scenes from the world to local populations.

In Hong Kong, there were fourteen local news stories printed between 1908 to 1913 featuring talks held at the YMCA by missionaries or travelers on their tours in various places like the UK, the Canadian Rockies, Korea, Beijing, Manchuria, America (including the story of Columbus), the Philippines, Turkey, and so on. These talks informed Hong Kong audiences about the culture, scenery, customs, and history of foreign countries or cities. To enhance the interest and the credibility of the lectures, screening of motion pictures of such places was included. It is worth noting that the news items used the term “projecting” (ying) to highlight the accompanying visual presentations, implying that the events were not just talks, but had additional attractions, extras, and amusement by moving images. The films shown at the YMCA were called either dianhua (electric pictures) or yinghua (photo pictures). Dianhua appears five times, while yinghua appears four times. Here too use of yingxi is nowhere to be seen.

Based on the opera ads and the illustrated lectures, we can see that in Hong Kong between 1903 and 1913 cinema was mainly understood as yinghua (photo pictures), not shadow play or some derivative of Chinese performing arts. Yinghua appear to be representations marketed as performance or show, mechanically mediated. They are not meant to be (mis)ta-
en for traditional amusements. Movies were not indebted to or extensions of shadow play or opera; they were utilized to sell traditional amusements, just as they were mobilized to illustrate lectures with religious and colonial messages. The practices of early cinema in Hong Kong exceeded the cultural boundaries of “shadow opera” as formerly purported by scholars.

The service-oriented film events at the YMCA culminated between 1925 and 1927 when the general strike in Hong Kong and Kowloon brought temporary closure of theaters, leaving local audiences with very few film activities they could attend. During this period, the YMCA held regular film screenings, including Chinese and American feature films.78

“Philanthropy, charity, and fund-raising” is the third category in our list. Between 1908 and 1924, we identified eight ads and eight news stories on fund-raising for disaster relief in South China or secondary school fund-raisers where either commercial pictures or newsreels of the disaster sites were the main attraction, or “hook,” to arouse audiences’ sympathy.

“Hygiene, science, and current affairs” also testifies to cinema’s social function. Films were used to promote scientific hygiene, and visualization of current affairs. Between 1904 and 1924, eleven news stories and ninety-five ads appeared. These movies projected ideals of public health, scientific and geographical knowledge, and views of public affairs, including the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War, the coronation of King George V in 1911, military exploits of the warlords Zhang Zuolin and Wu Peifu in the North, and footage of floods and other natural disasters. A film about the Russo-Japanese War was particularly popular, showing consecutively for over six weeks (from June 21 to August 5, 1905) at a temporary outdoor space near the Central Market. Organized by a Japanese distribution company, this documentary short was possibly the longest-running film show in the decade. Among these news stories we found an advertisement printed in 1908 selling a phantom ride to famous sites in France. Phantom rides, like amusement park rides, mounted the camera on locomotives, trams, or boats shooting rapids. Like the Hales Tours (simulated railroad trips), these were virtual journeys through real space and sometimes, creative geography. Tom Gunning comments on these rides: “Such phantom rides substitute sensation for contemplation, overcoming effects of distance in a rush of visual motion.”79

The information on phantom rides in Hong Kong opens a new research link on the early visual experience of Hong Kong audiences.

“Film exhibition as a new business and institution” is the last and the largest cluster of film-related news and ads. Some of the bigger ads are about
the “state of the art” theatrical experience. Film exhibition was noted as a novelty, with reports on theater fires, on public safety, and on film exhibition as a business and institution. There are five distinct subcategories within this one, given the huge amount of materials.

a. Screening conditions. We found at least nine news stories and thirty-one ads on movie-screening conditions between 1907 and 1924: stability of the pictures, crispness of the image, lighting, noise control, sound effects, and comforts of the viewing experience, such as seats, fans, air conditioners, fresh air, cleanliness.
b. Theater ads, with opening of new cinemas, opening of new pictures, financing, ownership, administration. Thirty-two news stories and 218 ads were printed on these matters between 1902 and 1924.
c. Public affairs at movie theaters. From 1905 to 1922, we found nineteen news stories on public safety, fire hazard, inspections, commotion, and the excitement of audiences incited by the images. An interesting one concerns a 1910 boxing film shown in the United States, with a white versus a black pugilist. The black fighter wins, and this caused a major ruckus. The British Parliament debated the pros and cons of allowing such incendiary screenings.
d. Film narrators and other guides to the programs. We found 270 ads between 1913 and 1924 featuring film narrators and 9 ads emphasizing the provision of a bilingual synopsis or handbill; one news item on film narrators; and one on the handbill. This subcategory collects the largest number of advertisements, indicating the importance of translation in receiving foreign silent pictures. As we can see, over 90 percent of the pictures screened in Hong Kong by the mid-1920s were foreign pictures. Despite being a British colony, the majority populations in Hong Kong were Chinese speakers. In order to boost attendance and ticket sales, it was necessary for the theaters to provide a bilingual synopsis of the pictures with English intertitles. The statement by historians Zhou Chengren and Li Yizhuan that in Hong Kong narrators (or interpreters) started to work in September 1916 is proven to be incorrect. We found that narrators accompanying foreign pictures operated as early as February 1916. Judging from the number of ads, film narrators were an important side of film exhibition for at least six years. But their importance began to decline in late 1922 when printed handbills or synopses were gaining importance as movie guides, to
reduce distraction from the screening. This information may change the standard view of the decline of film narrators in the late 1920s. Historians sometimes claim that the advent of sound pictures killed off the accompanying narration. But the stories we found in Hong Kong indicate that a handbill or a brochure made exclusively for the screening was more desirable to viewers than the interpreters. Note that this happened in the early 1920s, long before the introduction of sound films, calling our attention to possible apertures in the established historiography. Further investigation would be needed to see if indeed film narrators had already confronted competition from print publicity before the coming of the sound era.

e. Exhibition promotion and marketing. There were ways to add value with a ticket purchase: reimbursement of ferry fares between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon; extras such as Western musical performances and magic shows and acrobatics. Between 1905 and 1924, there are at least eight news stories and 246 ads on exhibition promotion and marketing, demonstrating the transformation of movie exhibition from erratic operations to an organized, capitalist enterprise competing for profits.

RETRANSLATING YINGXI AS PHOTOPLAY

Before 1924, most of the public information on movies concerned screening events, screening conditions, and their purposes. Movies were not just entertainment; they served multiple functions. Sometimes they might just be an adornment; other times they were tools for other aims, such as Christian deputation, as in illustrated lectures held in the YMCA, and fund-raising. Movie screenings facilitated social interactions and gathered people together to participate in a worthy cause.

Among these five categories, film exhibition as a new institution, commodity and business takes center stage from 1910 and onward. Over six hundred ads and news stories combined can be found under this rubric, more than the other four categories combined. Magic lantern ads and cinematic and proto-cinematic exhibition as business pursuit constituted the majority of the collected data on cinema during this period. Stories on film production, on the other hand, were virtually nonexistent at this stage, with the exception of a call for shareholding by the China Sun Motion Picture Company (Minxin) managed by Lai Man-wai (Li Minwei), the forerun-
Early film in Hong Kong thus is primarily an exhibitor’s cinema, a novelty for visual pleasure and a new medium for socialization and cultural uplift. Furthermore, in the early 1920s screening motion pictures was harnessed as a capitalist activity, whose surplus value was enhanced by adding physical comfort and aesthetic decoration. After 1920 we see the domination of Hollywood pictures and the emergence of professional film criticism (see Cheung and Tsoi’s chapter in this volume), which seems closely related to Hollywood’s popularity. Stars, genres, business operation, and the technology of American cinema occupy the center of movie reviews. There is ample evidence to chart the growing influence and maturation of movie screenings, with technical, aesthetic, and economic improvements. In Hong Kong, journalism of the time indicates the institutionalization of cinema as a growing business and entertainment enterprise.

Tom Gunning’s “cinema of attractions” includes a variety of moving pictures aimed at seizing viewers’ attention, not absorbing them into a narrative experience. In the West, narrative structures of character, settings, goals, cause and effect, and wish fulfillment were yet to come, after the nickelodeon boom around 1905. Meanwhile, moving picture attractions boldly grabbed people’s notice, with crashes, animal antics, contortionists, erotic views, biblical vignettes, trick shots, scenery, and famous events like coronations, funerals, and battles (often re-created). Charles Musser’s study on American showman Lyman Hakes Howe (1856–1923) provides another insight. Howe is known for his phonographic exhibition and curatorship that provided middle-class patrons the pleasure of cinema without attendant anxieties over sensual indulgence. Musser used the term “cinema of reassurance” for Howe’s soothing film programming. Musser’s idea allows a useful entry to tell the story of early film culture in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong and perhaps other cities in China, as evidenced in the YMCA’s “wholesome” film entertainment, film screening remained eclectic, accommodating a variety of interests and incentives, ranging from a “cinema of attractions” that provided sensual stimuli to a “cinema of reassurance” that balanced pleasure with civility.

The two cinemas of different appeals were evident on Hong Kong’s early screens, as there were plenty of news and ads on the visual presentation of warfare, current affairs, enlightenment, and instruction. For instance, the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War, the coronation of George V in 1911, the exploits of northern warlords, and footage of floods and other natural disasters prove that movie exhibitions were not limited to yingxi—dramatic features with fine performances and well-crafted storytelling. Instead, the cinematic experiences were varied and multivalent. Yinghua, photo pictures,
the Hong Kong term for cinema, testifies to the wider scope of movies’ local meaning. Via the lenses of photo pictures, we may reconsider the ways and means of movie screening as functions, that is, events with specific social and educational aims. Screenings were often a means to some further end, such as education/evangelism as in the YMCA talks, fund-raising, or building business synergies with a cognate enterprise, such as opera. If the cinema of attractions was a prenarrative exhibitionist “come-on,” similar to fairground barkers and ballyhoo, yinghua by way of its picture quality and visual appeal promoted community aims through illustration, showing, presentation. Yin-ghua, the idea of photo pictures, thus departs from the shadow play yingxi concept in its distance from a drama-based dogma that predefined the specific ethnic audience: Chinese audience’s preference for xi, dramatic effect.

In the 1980s historians found yingxi an entry to formulating an indigenous film theory and aesthetics. Yingxi’s emphasis on script and literature differentiates Chinese cinema and is a strategic enunciation. However, translating yingxi as “shadow play” opened an unlikely link from motion pictures to puppetry and opera. This improbable connection has led scholars to continuously return to the same sites and sources to reinforce cinema’s genealogy in China—the teahouse, traditional garden, shadow puppetry, and the opera. We have overlooked the materiality of yingxi—images, movements, projecting light beams—that might have transformed the theatrical experiences of the audience into a phantasmagoric adventure beyond a recurrence of live performance. Following yingxi’s earlier meaning as magic lantern, we could retranslate yingxi as photoplay, switching from our habitually literal translation of ying as shadow to ying as photography, image, or projection. Redirecting our attention to the first component of the yingxi pair, that is, the glow of ying, I suggest relocating ying in the cinema’s apparatus—shooting, processing, and projection. And by reregistering the photographic quality of ying as moving images, instead of its ethnic connotation, we widen the understanding of how cinema was received by Chinese audiences. Imagining yingxi as photoplay, we might reconsider the early audience’s view of the world, and further unleash its perceptual bonds in the first decade of cinema’s settlement in China. It may be true that yingxi represents Chinese filmmakers’ initial engagement with motion pictures in that the new medium’s dramatic proclivity presided over any other renderings. But yingxi’s translation has misrepresented the multiplicities of film exhibition and the rich cinematic culture comprising attractions and reassurance on Chinese screens, once upon a time. It is time for us to re-
consider *yingxi* as “photoplay,” lighting up a more lively, diverse screen(ing) culture of early cinema in China.

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**Notes**

17. Goldstein, *Drama Kings*, 73.
19. *Street Scenes in Madrid, Lynching Scene in the Far West, and Passing of Cavalry* are the shorts billed in the newspaper advertisement for the movie shows at Astor Hall. See Law and Bren, *Hong Kong Cinema*, 13–14.
42. Zhong, “Lun ‘yingxi’,” 75.
43. Chen, “Zhongguo dianying meixue de zairengshi,” 86.
44. Hu, Projecting a Nation, 30.
45. Hu, Projecting a Nation, 35.
50. Farquhar and Berry, “Shadow Opera.”
51. Farquhar and Berry, “Shadow Opera,” 27.
53. Goldstein, Drama Kings, 18.
55. Jason McGrath translates the “first” film magazine published in Shanghai as “Shadowplay Magazine,” despite its English title, “The Motion Picture Review,” printed on the cover. About this choice he explains: “I use the more literal translation of the journal title to underscore the connotations of the original” (McGrath, “Acting Real,” 402). The question here is what does the author imply when he mentions the “connotations” of the original Chinese title? Shadow puppetry?


59. This is a three-year research project entitled “Chinese Film Industry beyond Shanghai: 1900–1950” funded by the Research Grant Council of Hong Kong, 2010. The research team comprises Emilie Yeh, Poshek Fu, Feng Xiaocai, Liu Hui, Elizabeth Cheung, Luo Juan, Jeff Lai, Yan Wai Ka, So Hui Ying, and Sun Qi.


61. Law and Bren, Hong Kong Cinema, 20.

62. “Local and General,” China Mail, April 24, 1897, 3.

63. “City Hall–Music Room: For the First Time in Hongkong,” Hong Kong Daily Press, April 26, 1897, 1.

64. “Announcement,” Hong Kong Daily Press, April 28, 1897, 2.


66. “Local and General,” China Mail, April 27, 1897, 2.


68. Li Gucheng, Xianggang baoye bainian cangsang [One Hundred Years of Hong Kong Newspapers] (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Publications, 2000), 65.


71. Braun et al., Beyond the Screen.


73. Dean Rapp, “The British Salvation Army, the Early Film Industry and Urban
Translating Yingxi

49


74. Huang, “Dianying gujin ciyi kao”; Zhou and Li, Zaoqi xianggang dianying shi, 10.

75. It is widely accepted and cited in almost all existing studies that the first dedicated cinema in Hong Kong was the Bijou Theatre, according to the following sources: 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; Zhou and Li, Zaoqi xianggang dianying shi, 19; and Stephanie Po-yin Chung, Xianggang yingshiye bainian [One Hundred Years of Hong Kong Film and Television Industry] (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2011), 47. Here “dedicated” means a venue specifically used for film exhibition. But our research shows that the Victoria Cinematograph was the earliest movie theater in Hong Kong; see “To-night: Grand Opening of the Victoria Cinematograph,” China Mail, October 31, 1907, 8.

76. Between 1923 to 1947 research found twenty-eight news reports on film exhibitions held in Guangzhou’s YMCA, from three local papers, Guangzhou minguo ribao (November 9, 18, 19, December 27, 1926; April, July 1927; February 2, 6, 9, 1928; March, October 1929; 1930; 1931; 1933; 1934), Yuet Wa Po (July, September 1933; 1947), and Gongpingbao (April, October, November 1929; 1930; 1947). See “Ping Xinren de jia ting” [On The Newlyweds], Guangzhou minguo ribao, November 9, 1926, 4; “Wo ping ‘Kong gu lan’” [On Orchid of the Valley], Guangzhou minguo ribao, November 18, 1926, 4; “Wo ping ‘kong gu lan’ xu” [Second Take on Orchid of the Valley], Guangzhou minguo ribao, November 19, 1926, 4; “Guochan yingpian zhi jianglai” [The Future of Domestic Film], Guangzhou minguo ribao, December 20, 1926, 4; “Lou dong yuan yuxi ji” [Site Visit of Lou dong yuan], Guangzhou minguo ribao, April 15, 1927, 11; “Yingxi chang zhi mao” [Hat Off in the Cinema], Guangzhou minguo ribao, July 12, 1927, 11; “Jinnian dianying tan” [On Films of the Year], Guangzhou minguo ribao, February 2, 1928, 8; “Kan le ‘Huan jin ji’ yihou” [On Returning the Money], Guangzhou minguo ribao, February 6, 1928, 8; “Qingnianhui guan ju ji” [On a Film Show at the YMCA], Guangzhou minguo ribao, February 9, 1928, 8; “Qingnianhui fayin dianying gongkai yanjiu” [A Public Talk on Sound Film at the YMCA], Guangzhou minguo ribao, March 4, 1929, 6; “Jiaoyu ju jin ying ‘Wan wang zhi wang’ qingnianhui qing ming yingjia ju chui ren gian liang banli” [Education Bureau Banned The King of Kings; YMCA Pleading; Education Bureau Overruled], Guangzhou minguo ribao, October 28, 1929, 6; “Jin ying ru guo huapian fang zhi fenglue” [Racist Films Banned to Thwart Cultural Invasion], Guangzhou minguo ribao, May 2, 1930, 2,2; “Kong gu lan’ ye ye zhi ji qita” [Orchid of the Valley and Other Films], Guangzhou minguo ribao, August 22, 1931, 4,1; “Meigu dianying nu zi qingxin dianying de tongji” [Statistics on American Women’s Interest in Film Acting], Guangzhou minguo ribao, May 28, 1933, 3,1; “Gudu yi tan xin zuzhi” [New Art Organization], Guangzhou minguo ribao, February 1, 1934, 4,4; “Qingnianhui sheng pian ying chang que xun” [An
Exact Account on Sound Films at the YMCA, Yuet Wa Po, July 16, 1933, 1; “Qingnianhui shen pian ying chang jin xun” [Latest Sound Films at the YMCA], Yuet Wa Po, September 18, 1933, 1; “Fang lao yanjiang dianyinghui canguan hou zhongzhong ganxiang” [Film Screening for Tuberculosis Prevention at the YMCA], Yuet Wa Po, November 25, 1947, 8; “Xiamen zhi dianyingyuan” [Theaters in Xiamen], Gongpingbao, April 19, 1929, 8; “Yousheng yingpian suo ji” [On Sound Film], Gongpingbao, April 20, 1929, 8; “You ’Fushide’ shuo dao ‘Wan wang zhi wang’” [Review of Faust and The King of Kings], Gongpingbao, October 26, 1929, 8; “Shi nian qian zhi yousheng dianying” [A Decade of Sound Films], Gongpingbao, November 26, 1929, 8; “Guan kexue yingpian hou” [On Science Film], Gongpingbao, October 14, 1930, 2.3; “Xuanya zhi lian’ jijiang shangyan” [Cliff Love Coming Soon], Gongpingbao, October 9, 1947, 6.

77. The ads sponsored by Ko Shing Theatre used yinghua xi (photo picture play) to promote the coronation of King Edward VII (“Queshenyuan yinghua” [Kok San Yun Screening], Chinese Mail, December 3, 1902, 3). Another frequently used term was huatu yingxi (picture photoplay), emphasizing the pictographic quality of motion pictures. For example, a 1902 ad sponsored by New Hei Loi Theatre, featuring “a life-like picture photoplay” (“Xinxilai shengdong huaxi” [New Hei Loi Theatre Life-like Photoplay], Chinese Mail, December 27, 1902).

78. “Qingnianhui yinghua” [YMCA Film Screening], Chinese Mail, February 2, 1925, 2.3; “Yanying Zhongguo minghua (haishi)” [Showing a Famous Chinese Film, A Fisherman’s Honor], Chinese Mail, December 1, 1925, 2.3; “Yingmu xiaoxi” [Screen News], Chinese Mail, January 19, 1926, 2.3; “Yinghua xiaoxi” [Film News], Chinese Mail, May 16, 1927, 2.3.


80. Zhou and Li, Zaoqi xianggang dianying shi, 18.


83. “Xianggang min xin zhizao yinghua pian youxian gongsi” [Minxin Film Company], Chinese Mail, April 9, 1925, 2.3.